RONALD REAGAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN CENTRAL AMERICA

by Lindsay J. Davis.

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This thesis aimed to demonstrate that the Reagan administration's Central American policy has shown neither innovation nor initiative, instead it merely continued ideals first expressed by James Monroe; that is a policy of containment in which the threat that Ronald Reagan imagined was communism.

Because of the immediacy of my topic I have largely been confined to current newspaper reports and official documents for my information, rather than historical analysis. Although where possible I have drawn upon such sources.

This thesis holds no pretense at being able to offer an absolute truth about the Reagan years as it deals only with events up to March 1988. Yet because it is being written at the time of events its analysis and conclusions are not coloured by the knowledge of an events outcome.

Yet it is precisely in the current nature of this topic that its appeal lies. This topic has enabled my conclusions to be drawn from the nature of particular events and actions themselves, as well as the surrounding circumstances, and not by considering what may result from Reagan's foreign policy actions in Central America beyond 1988.
INTRODUCTION

The Reagan administration's fear of forfeiting its hegemonic influence in Central America to the emergence of new political orders was well known. It was out of this desperate conviction that the status quo must not be threatened in Central America that one dominant technique had arisen in Ronald Reagan's foreign policy: that of the 'stick' and the 'carrot'. The reasons for United States interference in the region over the decades were wide ranging. Yet all were motivated by two intertwined factors: concern over the internal stability of individual nations and a fear that United States influence in the region might be undermined. Reagan's foreign policy motivation remained unchanged from these two original threats. For Reagan the menace was clearly 'communism'. Reagan's obsession with 'communist conspiracies' was a result of his own misguided political ideology; in turn a culmination of Reagan's childhood and working life experiences. Only after introducing the necessary background of the United States protecting its backyard interests and, secondly, examining the development development of Ronald Reagan, can the thesis then go on to examine the policies themselves at work on the countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

The thesis begins its case studies with El Salvador because at the time of Reagan's inauguration El Salvador was regarded as the most internally torn of all Central American nations. An examination of Reagan's policies on El Salvador reveals that his only concern was to prevent further communist revolution in Central America rather than to
solve the internal problems facing them. A discussion of Honduras and the contras follows. For the sake of clarity the two topics are separated. Honduras of all Central American countries, was so controlled by the United States of America that it can be deemed 'occupied'. The contras are a vital element in this occupation. Finally the thesis investigates Nicaragua; El Salvador’s replacement as the focus of Reagan’s Central American policy.

The fundamental point is Reagan’s own personal paranoia toward communism and how his administration has used this fear as the base for Central American foreign policy. This is clearly reflected in the President’s public statements; for example in his televised address to the nation, May 9 1984, Reagan declared:

"Central America; its at our doorstep. And it has become the stage for a bold attempt by the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Nicaragua to install communism by force throughout the hemisphere."

The notion that Central America was in the United States 'backyard' lays the foundation for the picture of United States superciliousness that views Central America as a piece of property, not just a neighbour but a part of the United States and such it certainly cannot come under any outside influences which 'threaten' it.

United States policy toward Central America provides a unique opportunity to observe the practice of pure Reaganism. A doctrine dedicated to continuing the ideals expressed by James Monroe. Foreign policy directed toward Central America is distinguished from that concerning such issues as the Middle East or Soviet arms control negotiations by the fact that in the latter areas the global implications of United States actions are recognised and the stakes are visibly far higher. As a result United States foreign policy in these areas was inhibited by world pressure. The Reagan administration thus does not enjoy the 'free hand' there in implementing Reaganism that it enjoyed
in its own 'backyard', where its policies operated without fear of serious international repercussion.  

During the 1830's North American merchants expanded into Mexico and Central America in search of a new trade route which would link the Atlantic with the Pacific and allow them to avoid both the dangerous voyage around Cape Horn and the long haul overland across North America.  By the beginning of the twentieth century the United States had become heavily involved in the Central American market having realised the potential gain to be achieved there. The United States encouraged a condition of economic dependence which resulted in Central American reliance on the United States market as the major buyer of its produce.  As Mark Twain observed in his own version of the "Battle Hymn Of The Republic":

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the launching of the Sword.  
He is searching out the boardings where the stranger's wealth is stored. 
He hath loosed his fateful lightnings, and with woe and death has scored.  
His lust is marching on."  

United States foreign policy likewise reflected its ambitions in the region. The Monroe boldly declared that:

"The American continents...are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers."

The doctrine was doublesided in that it also declared its isolationist intentions to distance itself from European troubles:

"In wars of European powers in matters relating to themselves we have never taken any part, nor does it comport with our policy so to do."

It was in essence a declaration to European colonial powers that the Western hemisphere wanted to sever ties. The doctrine also contained a clear warning to Europe to cease interfering in the 'Americas'. Although Monroe's principles were initially not adhered to,
because of the size and might of the British navy, by the twentieth century beginning Monroe doctrine had become a principle for future United States foreign policy in the region.

The twentieth century saw Central American land ownership become concentrated in the hands of a powerful minority. These landowners valued the support of the local military establishments as the means of safeguarding their way of life from the continual threat of peasant rebellion. With their dominance thus secured, ruling oligarchs were in a position to supply North Americans with the goods they desired at the prices they expected. In order to ensure the stability of their Central American market, the United States provided economic and military aid; aid which meant that the local military and land owning groups were able to dominate their governments, while at the same time, controlling the peasantry and middleclasses. Hence during the twentieth century it became blatantly obvious that the United States was the source of military backing for Central American armies who would enforce the status quo.

In 1905 Theodore Roosevelt's Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine ironically warped the doctrine's original meaning. Once intended to protect Central and Latin American revolutionaries from 'outside' interference, the doctrine itself shifted direction to allow North American intervention. Roosevelt's successor, William Howard Taft, initially attempted to replace his predecessors 'big stick' approach with 'dollar diplomacy'. Taft, unable to find a suitable balance between the two theories, likewise found himself relying more on the 'stick' than the 'carrot'. A problem that also troubled Woodrow Wilson who, in addition to stationing Marines in Haiti, Nicaragua, Santo Domingo, and Honduras by 1917, added his own Corollary to Monroe's doctrine. Whilst Monroe had curbed political and military intervention,
Wilson added his own Corollary thereby extending the original Doctrine to its logical conclusion by excluding European financial intervention.

World War I’s conclusion saw the end of European influence in Central America as the multitude of problems facing Europe served only to accelerate the De-Europeanising process begun during the 1890’s. The Monroe Doctrine took another turn as the Clark Memorandum of 1928 redefined United States right of intervention in Central America. Reuben Clark choose to downplay the original doctrine and corollaries as the problem of European penetration had made way for a new threat: that of protecting North American interests from internal as well as external dangers. Franklin Roosevelt’s ‘Good Neighbour’ policy, whilst continuing the trend of intervention in Central America, also tightened up the ‘system’ in three ways. Firstly, Washington required Central American dictators of Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to go through the motions of holding democratic elections. The obvious outcome of the elections was not as important to Washington as the facade. Elections were a tool to convince the United States government of a policies success. As long as Central American dictators maintained order and protected United States economic interests American leaders were happy. Secondly, Roosevelt increased his political leverage by having private bankers replaced as the source of funds. In 1934 the Export-Import Bank began providing credit to not only United States exporters but also to Nicaragua — and eventually other Central American nations — thereby tightly moulding the Nicaraguan economy within that of North America. Thirdly, the New Deal consummated relationships between North and Central American military officers. By 1940 the United States was not just the sole supplier of military equipment to Central American armies, but also the only source of
instruction for military/navy officers and army/navy training."

The precedent for United States policy in Central America was set by events concerning Nicaragua in the 1930's. In 1932 after over twenty years of marine occupation, the last United States troops withdrew from Nicaragua due to the growing strength of public and congressional opposition, within the United States, to their escalating commitment in the region. Suddenly the United States was forced to rethink its Central American policy. Out of this reformation the institution of the National Guard emerged. The National Guard was United States trained, armed and financed but composed of Nicaraguan citizens; thereby allowing the United States to disguise the degree of its involvement in Nicaragua. Thus the United States invented for itself an efficient means of maintaining indirect control. The success of this tactic of funding Central American nationals to pursue and protect United States interests was to cause it to be widely implemented in the following years.10

With the onset of the Cold War foreign policy makers let loose with a prolific outpouring of protective treaties. The formation of the Inter-American (Rio) Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance of 1947 and the 1948 Bogota Charter of the Organisation of the American States (OAS) enabled the United States to successfully move all Central American policy decisions away from the United Nations where Soviet bloc vetoes could prove a nuisance. The Rio treaty and the OAS Charter provided the mechanism for upholding the Monroe Doctrine in an age when it was being directly challenged by communism. The Rio pact established "an armed attack by any State against an American State" as the basis for collective action. Joint action also included two other very open-ended clauses that not only focused attention on "communist subversion" but also urged the OAS states to take steps against foreign
sponsored propaganda and threats:

in the event of "an aggression which is not an armed attack", including "any other fact or situation that might endanger the peace of America."

With the loopholes firmly in place the United States reserved the right to intervene.†

Soon after the 1950 Miller Doctrine reiterated the necessities of hemispheric collective security the OAS was put to the test in Guatemala. The 1954 OAS meeting in Caracas narrowly passed a resolution condemning "dangers originating outside the hemisphere", specifically, communism. John Foster Dulles aim was to obtain a legal excuse for United States intervention in Guatemala where the governmental reforms of Jacobo Arbenz were causing the United States a great deal of concern. Here the 'danger' was not so much from the 'outside' but from within, as Arbenz's economic reforms sought to break away from the United States strangle-hold over the country, Guatemala's actions served only to prove the United States - in particular the CIA - into backing counterrevolutionaries to bring down Arbenz. Power was quickly transferred to Castillo Armas whose firing squads subsequently killed more people than during the revolution. United States companies, meanwhile, moved back into Guatemala, quickly, reestablishing their retention over the country.‡

The loss of Cuba (1959) to Castroites and the subsequent Bay of Pig's failure (1961) forced the United States to re-evaluate its Central American policies. John Kennedy's solution rested within his Alliance For Progress; launched in Punta del Este, August 1961. Viewed as a radical document, by Eisenhower standards, it sought to alleviate problems of poverty and declining standards of living by investing $100 billion in a ten year Latin American redevelopment program. The Kennedy-Johnson years saw economic penetration being specifically used
as a strategic weapon. Their approach to curbing the encroaching 'internal' communist menace was twofold: expand economic aid and vigorously promote the expansion of privatisation in the region; combined with shifting military assistance emphasis onto internal defense, thereby strengthening Latin armies' capability of counterinsurgency.\textsuperscript{13}

President Johnson, while continuing Kennedy's rhetoric, became more concerned with the military needs of Central America, thereby resembling the Eisenhower approach to the region. Johnson's director of the Alliance, Thomas Mann, announced his priorities as "economic growth, protection of United States interests, non-intervention, and anticommunism.\textsuperscript{15}" Clearly, maintaining the sociopolitical status quo was the policies priority; reflected in the way Mann candidly admitted that military regimes that overthrew civilian governments would be quickly recognized. Democratization and structural change had thus been dropped from the Alliance's original goals. Johnson's policy culminated in the 1965 Dominican Republic intervention. In this instance United States troops intervened to bolster up the then United States backed government against leftist insurgenst. In violating the 1948 OAS Charter Johnson declared:

"The American nations...will not permit the establishment of another Communist government in the Western hemisphere."

By the 1960's end the Alliance had all but disappeared, whilst the threat of revolution had steadily grown.\textsuperscript{16}

The Latin American 'active volcano' that Nikita Khrushchev referred to in 1960 was not to erupt until the end of the 1970's, by which time the classic conditions for revolution had come of age. By the 1970's the polarization of the rich and the poor in Central America had reached extreme proportions, as the concept of wealth 'trick-
lying down' had not worked. Due to the prolific labour supply a small
group of landowners, in whose hands the wealth firmly remained, were
able to keep wages depressed. As the New Republic eloquently observed:

"In Central America...society is generally divided
into a mass of peasants marooned in poverty and a mean
and mighty oligarchy that controls the tills, and the
tools of terror."\textsuperscript{15}

The early seventies was a period of rising expectations as edu-
cation standards rose and people became more politically aware of
their situation. In the cities new industry gave birth to an urban
proletariat, and an ever expanding middleclass began demanding politi-
cal representation. However the traditional political systems ruling
Central America in the 1970’s refused to accommodate the ambitions and
aspirations of these newly emerging social forces. Events in El Salva-
dor, Guatemala and Nicaragua in the early seventies provide examples
of situations where United States sponsored military dictatorships
prevailed in the face of opposition from their people. In El Salvador
a broad coalition of Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and Commu-
nists legally won the 1972 election’s but were prevented from assuming
power by intervention from the armed forces. In 1974 a broad centrist
coalition led by General Efra\'n Rios Montt and Social Democrat Alberto
Fuentes Mohr won the Guatemalan election’s but were refused access to
government by the military establishment. In Nicaragua after Anastasio
Somoza’s first term ended in 1972 he refused to step down and instead
amended the constitution to allow his re-election.\textsuperscript{16} Thus, the expect-
tations that ran so high among Central American people in the early
1970’s were thwarted by sustained military rule. By the mid to late
1970’s the bubble had completely burst as "globally induced inflation
reduced wages throughout the region."\textsuperscript{17}

As the 1970’s drew to an end Central America began to erupt,
finally proving it was no longer the plump land for purging it once
was. The beginnings of a wave of political consciousness swept across the region, climaxing in the expulsion of one of the largest family dictatorships to rule there, that of the Somoza’s, in July 1979. Edelberto Torres-Rivas described what the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua signified for the millions of peasants throughout Central America:

"The political crisis being expressed in state terrorism and revolutionary struggle represents a total confrontation that each day comes more and more to resemble that contradiction between the state, in the hands of the armed minority, and the nation, represented by millions of workers, peasants, and other social sectors."

Change in Central America was no longer merely a matter of replacing dictators or particular governments. The entire region was involved in a process of challenging the actual social and political systems of domination. The revolutionaries demanded the permanent removal of traditional elites from power. The changes they pursued sought to transform societies, to introduce state control over national resources and to redistribute wealth and income.

Ronald Reagan’s early life and rise to prominence so clearly shaped the character of today’s President. Reagan, himself, was an example of the spirit of free enterprise and of the endless possibilities that the United States could offer the ‘common man’. Therefore, to Reagan communism was the natural antithesis of capitalist free enterprising democracies, like that of the United States. The example of Reagan’s own life and his pledge to fight the communist menace was why he was so convinced and convincing in his obsession with protecting the status quo that fostered the sort of person he is.

Reagan’s childhood memories, living in small mid-western towns in which traditional values of hard work, thrift, liberty and independence — ‘in short the credo of individualism’ — shaped the young mind of Ronald Reagan.19 Robert Dallek believes that Reagan’s father’s
alcoholism drove him to strive for personal independence and financial self-reliance at a very early age. The manner in which Reagan gained his college degree is testimony to this drive. With Reagan's father's alcoholism rendering him unable to assist Ronald financially, it is to Reagan's credit that he managed to gain an athletic scholarship that would support him through college during the Great Depression. Reagan graduated in 1932 from Eureka College. That Reagan is convinced that the road to such success is unique to western democracies like that of the United States can help to explain his chronic fear of communism. Reagan's blinding faith in the United States of America standing tall and his hatred of those who stand in the way of individualism is summed up in the way he uses the word 'communist'. The communist is always the enemy, always the threat to the United States and Ronald Reagan's way of life.

Reagan did not appear in national politics until 1966, by which time he had already turned fifty-five. In his earlier life Reagan had been far from apolitical, casting his first ballot in 1932 for Franklin Roosevelt; whose particular parental protectiveness and homeliness were later to be major contributing influences in the formulation of Reagan's own political image. Reagan's ballot was absolutely ironic in light of what we understand about him today. Like most Americans of the time, Reagan was attracted by the hope that Roosevelt offered without actually understanding the individual policy details of the New Deal. Had he realised what Roosevelt was advocating it is most unlikely Reagan would have lent support. Since then Reagan has been an enthusiastic political partisan, both politically active and politically involved.

Reagan spent his immediate post college years struggling as a sports announcer for radio M.H.A. in Des Moines, Iowa, waiting for the
break that finally came in the late 1930's. It was ambition and initiative, so typical of the young Reagan, that were to gain him his entry into the film industry. Finding himself in California, covering the Chicago Cub's spring training for W.H.O., Reagan made the most of the situation and old acquaintances by getting himself a screen test, later to be approved by Jack Warner himself.252

Shortly after establishing himself in Hollywood, Reagan became an official of the Screen Actor's Guild, and began to participate in its political position-taking and jurisdictional politics, as well as in its negotiations with the film studio's. Reagan was popular among his peers and in 1947 was elected President of the Screen Actor's Guild, a post he held for six terms.253 Although Reagan's name would never be honoured with an Oscar nomination, the mild success he did achieve was something he had worked hard for and of which he was proud.

Reagan left the world of films to enter the industry of television. He began working for General Electric filling the position of weekly host for "General Electric Theatre" which held a prime time Sunday spot for seven year's only to be replaced by, what was ironically, Reagan's own favourite programme, Bonanza. During this period Reagan began making public appearances across the United States on behalf of G.E. in which he endorsed the codes of business and private enterprise.254

These year's as a circuit-riding speaker marked the culmination of Reagan's transformation from youthful New Deal enthusiast to middle-aged conservative. During this period Reagan also became outstandingly successful as a political communicator, learning to convey his views in a persuasive manner that was very smooth and honest in appearances.255
Reagan's year's in G.E. led in 1960 to his official transfer of loyalties to the Republican party. Reagan's first political adventure was the production of a film to assist Barry Goldwater in his 1964 Presidential bid. Even though Goldwater was soundly rejected at the polls, Reagan's pitch had won the hearts of conservatives throughout the country. Reagan's impressive 1964 campaign performance persuaded a group of Californian businessmen to back his successful 1966 campaign for governor of California, against Edmund G. "Pat" Brown.

Reagan's campaign, like those of 1980 and 1984, promised to eliminate government restraint on the free market, devolve power from federal to lower jurisdictions, decrease taxes, slow down the growth of government spending, clean up the problems in welfare, and maintain a tough stance toward the spread of communism. Reagan's anti-Soviet comments had long been unsurpassed; in a 1972 press conference Reagan stated:

"When it suits the communists to have a confrontation with the U.S. ... they will have it, whether we do any provoking or not. It won't depend on anything we may choose to do."

In 1973 Reagan spoke of the North Vietnamese as Moscow controlled:

"hard-core, hard-nosed, vicious Communists who had a goal and who are going to judge, cheat and steal every chance they get."

While Reagan's promises never materialized during his eight year's as governor, he nevertheless did formulate his pragmatic approach as administrative leader. Reagan became the master of delegating responsibility, becoming totally reliant on his staff, many of whom would follow him to the White House. Reagan's staff only ever gave the governor one-page summaries to read as his aversion to 'reading books' was already well known.

Reagan was interested in general issues not specific proposals and as such Reagan could easily become sold on policies without
exploring their implications. Yet Reagan's personality and style of political management worked well for him as he won both his Californian elections by million-vote margins.

While it is usually considered politically foolish to challenge the incumbent president of one's own party, in 1976 Reagan decided to contest Gerald Ford's presidential re-nomination with his own. By running against a conservative president, Reagan realised he would have to appear 'superconservative'. He did so by ridiculing the detente elements in the Ford-Kissinger foreign policy; stating that:

"Under Kissinger and Ford this nation has become Number Two in a world where it is dangerous - if not fatal - to be second best. All I can see is what other nations the world over see: collapse of the American will and the retreat of American power."

Reagan also opposed the Panama canal sovereign treaty on nationalistic grounds, declaring:

"We bought it, we paid for it, it's ours, and we're going to keep it."

This insistence that the United States must assume absolute political and military domination of the globe; that this supremacy must be supported by an assertive and aggressive stance in international relations, was to become an overriding characteristic of Reagan's doctrine in the 1980's.

After Reagan lost the 1976 nomination, to Ford, he feared his political career was over. However, it was to be just the beginning as Reagan found himself to be the right person with the right background at the right time to accept the 1980 nomination.

Ronald Reagan's election in 1980 was the culmination of three factors. Firstly, the successful candidacy of Reagan was aided by the emergence of the 'New Right' as a political force. Secondly, the importance Carter played in Reagan's victory must be considered. The
support that the American public gave Reagan in 1980 was inspired, not only by Reagan himself, but by their enormous dissatisfaction with Jimmy Carter and their disillusionment with the image of the United States and its international potency that Carter's administration had given them. This is closely tied to the third theme, that of foreign policy as an election issue. The warm and enthusiastic manner in which Reagan's twin ideals of American military dominance and a confident-active foreign policy were crucial in winning the support of the United States public.

During the 1970's conservative evangelical churches grew into popular movements. Suddenly the attitudes of these 'fundamentalist' churches were representative, not of small extremist congregations, but, of millions of Americans. That such enormous numbers of Americans chose to seek refuge in excessive right-wing morality is a direct result of the counter-culture, so strong in the 1960's and early 1970's. Followers of the New Right 'philosophies' felt that the American way of life was threatened by such by-products of sixties modernity as increasing divorce rates, rising crime, rapid growth in the percentage of illegitimate children born, widespread use and availability of recreational drugs, the increased visibility of homosexuality, the legalisation of abortion, and the practically unrestricted availability of pornography. All these symptoms of social decay were seen by the New Right as embodied by the philosophy of 'secular humanism' which, they believed, dominated United States schools, universities, government and media.

People associated with the New Right embarked on a 'cleansing of America' and a turning away from the evils of the 1960's. The formation of groups such as Moral Majority and Christian Voice as well as the activities of individuals such as Jerry Falwell and James Robinson
were directed towards the election of a Congress purged of the politicians who were lenient towards homosexuals, tolerated abortion and pornography, and approved of such developments as women's liberation and sex education in schools.\textsuperscript{36}

The New Right emerged as a movement of conservative politicians backed by a massive following across the United States. Then, television evangelist Pat Robertson believed the New Right's strength to be so great he announced:

"We have enough votes to run this country", and many believed him.\textsuperscript{37} Jerry Falwell proclaimed before the 1980 election:

"The Godless minority of treacherous individuals who have been permitted to formulate national policy, must now realise they do not represent the majority...The movement made up of conservative Americans can no longer be ignored and silenced. America's destiny awaits action."\textsuperscript{30}

These varying groups united in their support of Reagan under four basic principles: pro-life, pro-traditional family, pro-morality, and pro-America.\textsuperscript{39}

James Wilson compares the 1990 election with the 1896 one, in which Democrats united under William Jennings Bryan, a well known conservative christian of the period who would later make his mark in an attempt to refute Charles Darwin's evolutionary theories, at the famous Scopes Trial. Wilson states:

"Bryans appeal was as much cultural and moral as economic and political. Fundamentalist Protestants were outraged over the moral decay of urban life, the product, they supposed, of whiskey-swilling immigrants who had flocked into the tenements; Bryan called for the purification of society."\textsuperscript{40}

The comparison with Reagan is obvious.

Reagan was accompanied to power by the first Republican majority in the Senate since 1953 with 53 seats to 47, and a conservative
majority in the House of Representatives, even though the Democrats had 243 seats to the Republicans 192.** Impressive though this seems it is important to note that the 1980 voter turnout was the third lowest in American history. William Leuchtenburg points out that:

"Reagan, far from having won a landslide not little more than a bare majority of the popular vote and only 28% of the potential electorate."

The question to broach next is whether Reagan's victory was testimony to a sudden and energetic mobilization of the conservatives and the moral right toward Reagan, or was it representative of the movement of American people away from Jimmy Carter. Nevertheless when Ronald Reagan accepted the nomination in 1980 he did so as the leader of a political movement, rather than as a great politician whose personal characteristics would be forever remembered like those of Washington or Lincoln. The problem to examine now is to distinguish whether Republicans voted in the presidential elections for 'Mr Conservative', focal point of the New Right, or 'Mr Alternative'. Neither Carter nor Reagan had prior international experience with regard foreign policy until their presidencies. The two men were poles apart in ideas and actions. Carter wanted to hear a variety of views and immerse himself in detail in an attempt to reconcile them. By contrast, Reagan's interest in foreign affairs was confined to areas that touched his ideological principles.***

President Carter received a great deal of criticism directed largely at his foreign policy failures, thereby enabling Reagan to score valuable points in this area. Accused of lacking force, momentum and efficacy, Carter's foreign policy inspired a dissatisfaction that focused on three areas. Firstly Carter sought to reduce the emphasis on the 'Cold War' and East-West issues; stating in an address delivered at Notre Dame University in May 1977, that United States foreign
policies should not be governed by "an inordinate fear of communism". As a consequence of the S.A.L.T. (Strategic Arms Limitations Talks) talks between the United States and the Soviet Union, the build-up of arms in the United States slowed down, while the Soviet Union ventured into Africa (Ethiopia and South Yemen) and Afghanistan. Secondly, Carter's Human Rights policy saw the cessation of many of the traditional relationships the United States had held, especially in Latin and South America. The termination of the United States long standing amicable relationship with the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua was a particular cause of contention. Left-wing revolution had been facilitated by Carter’s withdrawal of traditional United States military and economic aid to Somoza’s government on the grounds that his regime was not fulfilling Carter’s Human Rights policy demands. Thirdly, the humiliating seizure of the United States Embassy in Tehran, November 1979, is probably what would have branded the Carter administration, in the minds of many Americans, as weak and impotent. That Carter neglected to comprehend the extent of upheaval in Iran, rendered him unable to anticipate Khomeini’s rise to power and the subsequent hostage crisis. Any doubts the United States public had about Carter’s competence were reinforced by the abortive rescue attempt staged unsuccessfully in April of the election year. Thus the advantage Reagan was to take from these three areas would win him the 1980 election.

Realising that Carter’s Human Rights policy had led to a concentration of energy into North-South issues, Reagan chose to revitalise the latent fear of communist expansion. Reagan frightened the voters by pointing out that Carter’s neglect of East-West issues and his emphasis on Human Rights had, not only allowed the Soviet Union to enter Afghanistan and Africa, but had allowed the left to gain a
stronghold in neighbouring Latin and South America. Reagan harangued
the American public convincing them finally that their military posi-
tion had declined to second in the world and that this demise resulted
mainly from the lack of strong political leadership and a coherent
national purpose."

Reagan also cultivated the notion that he practiced "realistic
diplomacy". On July 17, 1980 in his acceptance speech before the
Republican National Convention, Reagan asserted that Carter's adminis-
tration lived "in a world of make-believe", meanwhile "you and I live
in a real world, where disasters are overtaking our nation without any
real response from Washington." 47

Carter made Reagan out to be a trigger-happy war monger who did
not understand the role of diplomacy in the nuclear age. Carter gave
the voters a clear choice - one side for peace, the other for war.

The American people who voted for Ronald Reagan were the people
whose confidence in themselves as a nation was seriously undermined by
Carter's non-aggressive diplomacy. They saw in Reagan, not a candidate
whose conservatism they necessarily supported but an alternative, to
Carter, who might restore their national self-esteem. As William
Schneider concludes, the 1980 elections were essentially a referendum
on the Carter administration, not on conservatism:

"The voters were voting for a change, and they were
certainly aware that the type of change Reagan was
offering was going to take the country in a more con-
servative direction. They were willing to go along
with that, not because they were convinced of the
essential merits of the conservative program, but
because they were willing to give conservatism a
chance". 48

Polls taken at the time of the 1980 election support this
assumption that Reagan's particular policies and his conservatism were
incidental in the voters decision making process and that he was
elected more because he was not Carter than because he was Ronald Rea-
Nevertheless, conservatism and those policies would govern the United States and for this reason it is important to review them in detail.

To Reagan, the global situation in 1980 was both dangerous and potentially useful to the United States. The problem lay not with the complexity of world events and the inter-relations of countries but with the stance the United States had adopted under Carter. Instead of conducting a foreign policy that adjusted itself to the outside world, Reagan aimed to be less versatile:

"Washington's policies should not have to adjust to the world - a strong, reassertive America could make the world adjust to Washington."

Reagan saw the world as something malleable, something an aggressive and active policy on behalf of the United States could mould and shape to serve its own interests. Reagan promised that if America's "spirit and strength" were restored she could reverse "the adverse growth of Soviet military power over the past decade" and the United States could experience pride equal to that of the post-war years.

Consequently the key to Reagan's foreign policy became an increased defence budget and a strong anti-communist stance. Reagan believed that Soviet leaders had a master plan to impose communism throughout the democratic world. Reagan accused Carter of facilitating the realisation of their plan, and of standing by while Soviet-backed Cuba promoted revolution in Central America. To Reagan, the expanding socialism and communism in Central America did not represent the popular response to decades of poverty and totalitarian rule, instead he saw it as evidence of the machinations of the Soviet Union and its "vassal states" Cuba and Nicaragua.

Reagan and the Republican Party decried the Sandinista takeover and the subsequent United States aid
to Nicaragua, they opposed what they called:

"Marxist attempts to destabilize El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras."

and supported the contras in what they described as:

"the efforts of the Nicaraguan people to establish a free and independent government."

Reagan saw the United States as having a moral responsibility to help noncommunist governments to resist Soviet and Soviet-backed aggression, especially in Central America where the United States resistance to communist expansion was to take the form of frenzied panic. Reagan thus presented the United States with a clear mission, one that would serve the interests of their own anti-communist ideals as well as the interests of Central America. Reagan focused his containment policies on Central America for two major reasons. Firstly its proximity to the United States allowed Reagan to reassert the Monroe Doctrine, but unlike Monroe whose warning was directed towards European colonial powers Reagan implied that communist expansion threatened not only small nations in the area, but the United States itself. Secondly, the conditions in Central America promised to be more favourable to a United States victory than any East-West confrontations in the Middle East, Africa, or Asia. Thus Central America represented to the Republicans an excellent opportunity for a strong demonstration of United States strength, democratic conviction, and the will to the entire Third World.

Reagan attempted to revive United States hegemony in Central America; urging the United States public to feel responsible for what occurred there. This attitude is expressed in a campaign address before the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, when he stated:

"Totalitarian Marxists have control of Grenada in the Caribbean, where Cuban advisors are currently training guerrillas for subversive action against other countries like Trinidad and Tobago, its democratic neigh-
Anti-Soviet sentiment increased throughout this period, along with opposition to S.A.I.T. all because of the Republican inspired belief that the United States was falling behind the Soviets in military strength and that the accompanying terror would have unpleasant results on the American way of life. The Republican tactic was to convince the United States that its democracy, the very source of its identity and uniqueness, was in severe peril; that they themselves as a nation were vulnerable to the threat of extinction. Reagan warned that if Democratic policies continued, the:

"American experiment would come strangely, needlessly, tragically to a dismal end in our Third Century."595

Reagan gave the people both the problem and the answer. The solution to rising Soviet ambition, Reagan said, was obviously an increased defense budget.597 Reagan’s first budget was $36 billion higher than Carter had planned, while the military budget as a percentage of the national budget increased from 22.6% in 1981 to 26.8% in 1984. An increase which represented a substantial reallocation of resources from domestic programs to defense.598 Reagan’s conception was simple; he saw military strength as the basis for effective foreign policy. His mandate was to project a tough-line approach and attitude in all foreign dealings. Reagan insisted that the United States should not aim at being liked but at being respected. Reagan saw the way to world wide respect as lying in the possession of military capability that was at least equal of that of the U.S.S.R.
...25...

The ambition to restore United States pre-eminence and confidence to the level it had been prior to Vietnam was the underlying aspiration in Reagan's policies. He was to inject the fear of communism into the American public and at the same time offer them a place in which they might conquer it, that was Central America.
FOOTNOTES

(1) "United States Interests In Central America", Ronald Reagan’s televised address to the Nation, May 9, 1984, Department Of State Bulletin, June 1984, p.72.


(3) Trouble In Our Backyard ; Central America And The U.S. In The Eighties, edited by R. Diskin, p.x.

(4) Guatemala for coffee, bananas and cotton; Honduras for bananas and coffee; Nicaragua for coffee, sugar and cotton; and Costa Rica for coffee, sugar and bananas.


(9) Ibid, p.77-82.

(10) Ibid.

(11) The United States Against The Third World ; Antinationalism And Intervention, Melvin Gurtov, New York, Praeger, 1974, Chapter 4.

(12) Inevitable Revolutions, W. La Feber, p.93, 120-125.
Michael Deaver, Lyn Nofzinger.


(32) Strategies Of Containment : A Critical Appraisal of Postwar Amer-
ican National Security Policy, John Lewis Gaddis, New York, Oxford


(34) "Right Wing Religion : Christian Conservatism As A Political
Movement", Michael Liebesch, Political Science Quarterly, Volume 97
no.3, pp.403-405. In size alone, the New Christian Right has claimed
to number as many as 50 million conservative Protestants, 30 million
"morally conservative" Catholics, along with millions of conservative allies among Mormons, Orthodox Jews, and numerous other sectarian
churches, these figures are also supplemented by the power of the
"electronic church", a network of television and radio preachers that
claimed control of some 1,300 radio and television stations, with
audiences of up to 130 million, and profits estimated at $300 million
upwards. Yet in retrospect it has been discovered that listeners number around 10 million, not 130 million, with audiences steadily declining in the 1980’s.

(35) "Religion And The Future Of American Politics", A. James Reich-
ley, Political Science Quarterly, Volume 101 no.4, p.25. Secular
Humanism is supposedly motivated by a series of Supreme Court deci-
sions; specifically the 1962 decision which prohibited organised prayer in public schools; and the 1973 decision which established a
woman’s constitutional right to have an abortion. Both decisions struck at the heart of traditional moral values.

(36) Revival And Reaction : The Right In Contemporary America, Gillian

(37) "Right Wing Religion : Christian Conservatism As A Political Move-


(40) "Reagan And The Republican Revival" James Q. Wilson, Commentary, Volume 70 no. 4.


(42) Turning The Tide, N. Chomsky, p. 240.


(49) Turning The Tide, N. Chomsky, p. 240.

(51) Ibid, pp.469-470.
(54) Trouble in Our Backyard, edited by M. Diskin, p.42.
(55) Ibid, p.43.
(57) Possibly this was in response to the growing support for increased defense spending which had been growing steadily during the 1970's, from an average of 14% in 1974 polls to 60% in 1980; although Americans continued to be most reluctant to employ these forces they favoured strengthening. See "Don't Tread On Me : Public Opinion And Foreign Policy In The Eighties", Bruce Russett and Donald K. O'Driscoll, Political Science Quarterly, Volume 96 no.3, p.383. The National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago also monitors public support on defense and public spending. Their figures show that support for higher defense spending also increased between 1973 and 1978, from 11% to 27%. The 1980 poll took a sudden leap and for the first time over a majority of Americans (56%) felt the U.S. should spend more on its national defense. When President Reagan took office, January 1981, a CBS News/New York Times poll believed this figure had reached 65%. During this same period polls indicated support for various domestic spending programs were tending to decline. See "Conservatism, Not Interventionism : Trends In Foreign Policy Opinion, 1974-1982", William Schneider, Eagle Defiant, Oye, Lieber, Rothchild, pp.35-36.
(58) The Election Of 1984, B. Pomper, p.54.
CHAPTER ONE: AN OVERVIEW OF THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION’S FOREIGN POLICY IN CENTRAL AMERICA.

This chapter discusses how Ronald Reagan’s foreign policy proposed to alleviate the problems facing Central America. By examining the economic and military programmes of the Reagan administration it is possible to ascertain whether such policies, emphasising the freezing of the status quo and the extermination of communism in the American backyard, were justified.

The only Twentieth century American President who perceived the true cause of Central American instability was Jimmy Carter. During his one term as President, Carter attempted to revise the Latin and Central American feudal system where a handful of wealthy landlords ruled over millions of impoverished peasants. It was unacceptable to Carter that a favoured few could bathe in excessive comfort while the multitudes toiled. However, within weeks of Reagan’s inauguration Carter’s Human Rights policy was amended. Reagan gave the issue of human rights in Central America a much lower priority especially in nations whose governments were friendly to the United States. Under Reagan human rights would be promoted through “quiet diplomacy”, “behind the scenes rather than through public denunciations and cut offs.”¹ This emphasis would allow the Reagan administration to concentrate more on abuses in communist countries and less on those in friendly authoritarian regimes.

The Reagan administration came to office committed to restoring United States prestige in the world. To achieve this end it attempted to recreate the bipolar world of the 1950’s and
1960's, thereby viewing developing countries primarily as an arena for East-West competition. The adoption of bipolycentrism in the 1980's however, has led to an unrealistic position as a result of the Third World's assertion of economic and political independence in the international system.

Thus competition for influence in the Third World became important and integral part of the Cold War. The Reagan administration continued the post-war tradition of viewing United States security in terms of maintaining a global balance of power. Within which the Soviets are viewed as the major threat to United States security.

Arthur Schlesinger is correct in his belief that the notions guiding the Reagan administration's foreign policy are twofold:

"That the United States is infinitely virtuous and that the Soviet Union is infinitely wicked." With such clear divisions, each superpower believes they must have their own sphere of domination, without interference. For the United States this sphere was clearly Central America, the blemishes were Nicaragua and Cuba, and the solution lied in military superiority.

That the United States was firmly locked into a war in Central America was obvious. The reasoning behind such a war was equally obvious: the United States, as the leading capitalist nation in the world—and hegemonic power in the Caribbean Basin—is totally committed to sustaining governments and political systems—in 'our backyard'—that preserve the capitalist domination in everyday life and society, be they authoritarian, totalitarian or democratic.

While the United States was under the administration of
Ronald Reagan it would remain committed to defending the status quo and continuing its role as war overlord in which it trained, armed, and directed the established armies of the region. The United States fear was of new governments establishing alternative political, social and economic projects which would bring a new social and political order into power. Thus while temporary truces may occur, war in Central America had no immediate end in sight.

In supporting the individual authoritarian governments of Central America, the Reagan administration had engaged itself in more armed intervention and political interference in the region than any United States administration since that of Woodrow Wilson. To justify the extent and nature of its involvement in Central America, Reagan's administration relied on three basic arguments for interference.

The 'economic argument' relied on two precepts. Firstly, that United States military influence in Central America was necessary for the protection of United States economic interests. Secondly, that the isthmus of Panama, so important to the United States, was made vulnerable to takeover by the alleged possibility of Marxist states spring up. The credibility of the economic argument is shaken by challenges to these two bases. An answer to the first precept is the fact that at the end of 1982, direct United States investment measured only 0.37 of one percent. It is clear that this figure hardly justifies the amount of United States dollars spent supposedly to safeguard it. As regard to the second precept it can be said that although two thirds of all United States foreign trade and oil shipments passed through the Panama canal and Caribbean Sea, the chance of United States
right of passage being jeopardised by a Marxist revolution was hardly likely. From the example of Libya was obvious to the tiny nations of Central America that to fire upon the might of the United States would be suicidal.\textsuperscript{9} Furthermore, the Soviet Union had had a strong military and naval presence in Cuba for over two and a half decades without any major disruptions to shipping occurring.\textsuperscript{10}

Critics of Reagan charged his Central American policies with confining themselves to perceiving solutions to the regions problems in only military terms. In response to this accusation, Reagan, in 1982, proposed the Caribbean Basin Initiative (C.B.I.) which called for tax incentives, trade concessions and emergency economic aid. One year later the Kissinger Commission was asked to report on Central America in an attempt to develop short and long-term recommendations for the region.

The C.B.I. was created as a response to the alleged communist threat to the Caribbean and Central American regions. Reagan feared that the economic deprivation in the Central American region would further facilitate conditions for revolution. Even Costa Rica, Central America's only democracy, edged toward bankruptcy as it suffered a 60% devaluation of its currency.\textsuperscript{11} Reagan attempted to remedy his concern by injecting three hundred and fifty million dollars of United States aid into the region. In the throws of a leftist revolution El Salvador received one hundred and twenty-eight million dollars of this aid.

In calling for the establishment of C.B.I. in February 1982, Reagan stated:

"The record is clear. Nowhere in its whole sordid history have the promises of communism been redeemed. Everywhere it has exploited and aggravated temporary economic suffering to seize power and then to institu-
tionalise economic suffering and suppress human rights. Right now, 6 million people worldwide are refugees from communist systems. 12

and:

"Our Caribbean neighbours peaceful attempts to develop are feared by the foes of freedom because their success will make the radical message a hollow one. Cuba and its Soviet backers know this. Since 1978 Havana has trained armed and directed extremists in guerrilla warfare and economic sabotage as part of a campaign to exploit troubles in Central America and the Caribbean. Their goal is to establish Cuban-styled Marxist-Leninist dictatorships. 13

New York Times columnist, Bernard Gwertzman, was surprised by the fact that although Reagan did announce what would amount to a 70% rise in Caribbean aid, 14 for one quarter of his speech, Reagan concentrated on the apparently unrelated topic of security in the area, and on issuing warnings to Cuba. Reagan pledged that the United States would do whatever was prudent and necessary to prevent further communist infiltration in the area. 15 Bernard Gwertzman's observation lends validity to the supposition that Reagan's major interest in Central America was security rather than economic development and that the C.B.I. was designed to ensure the former rather than to promote the later.

In 1983 the Reagan administration boldly stated that the C.B.I. was interested in aiding economic reform of both the far left and far right wing governments. Reagan's Deputy Secretary of State, Kenneth W. Dam, was quoted from a Reagan address before a joint session of Congress (April 27, 1983) when he stated that the United States policy towards Central America and its Caribbean neighbours had four interlocking objectives:

"To actively support democracy, reform and human freedom against dictators and would be dictators of both left and right."

"To promote economic recovery within a framework of sound growth and equitable development."
"To foster dialogue and negotiations - a dialogue of democracy within countries, a diplomacy of negotiations among nations willing to live at peace."

"To provide a security shield against those who use violence against democratisation, development and diplomacy."16

The C.B.I. did nothing to "promote and support" democracy. The fulfilment of the C.B.I.'s promises to foster the democratic ideal was frustrated by the United States' stubborn refusal to enter into negotiations with Cuba and by the fact that Congress persistently "amended, whittled down and delayed" the initiative.17 Walter La Feber comments that intense lobbying by United States business and labour groups persuaded the House of Representatives to discard the C.B.I.'s free trade provisions for footwear and leather goods imported from Latin America. Reagan further crumbled under domestic pressure and imposed import quotas on sugar. Thus C.B.I.'s effect on other Central American exports (coffee and bananas) was virtually nonexistent as these products did not compete with United States products and therefore already entered under favourable tariff laws.18

Reagan believed that the United States could best ensure the existence of democracies in Central America by awarding large grants to the militaries and governments of Central American nations. Reagan supposed that United States military and economic aid to existing Central America regimes would discourage and negate any opposition they met from their people. Consequently Reagan refused to recognise armies of guerrillas waging war against their own governments. This was a mistaken policy. Revolutionary armies tended to have more determination and popular support than Reagan credited them with; at the same time United States aid only artificially prolonged the life of the old
regimes and extended the length of wars. Hence, due largely to
United States interference, the revolution which erupted in El
Salvador in 1980 continued eight years later.

The National Bipartisan Commission on Central America was
created in 1983 by the late Senator Henry Jackson and Henry A.
Kissinger. They appointed a bipartisan commission to go into
Central America to chart both a short-term and a long-term course
for which United States policy on the alleviation of economic,
social, political and military problems in the region, could fol-
low. Despite its promising aims the resulting report was disap-
pointing in that it concentrated largely on Central American
security issues rather than on solutions to a wider range of dif-
ficulties. Even in the opening statements about the sources of
the present crises, Soviet "Internationalism" threatened to domi-
nate all reasoning. The report claimed that Central American
troubles were due to:

"The soaring costs of imported energy, the drop in world
coffee, sugar and other commodity prices, recession in
the developed world, the explosion of international
interests rates have undermined economic progress.
International terrorism, imported revolutionary ideol-
gies, the ambitions of the Soviet Union and the example
and engagement of a Marxist Cuba are threatening the
hopes for political progress."

As a consequence of the extreme anti-communist stance, the eco-
nomic aid proposals that the Commission did recommend were almost
lost in the mass of rhetoric devoted to military solutions.

As expected, the Reagan administration adhered to the
Commission's findings; using them as a point of focus for its Cen-
constantly pushed Congress to act on the Commissions proposals,
otherwise, the 'rising tide of communism' would flow over Central
America:
"As the National Bipartisan Commission On Central America...agreed, if we do nothing or if we continue to provide too little help, our choice will be a communist Central America with additional communist military bases on the mainland of this hemisphere and communist subversion spreading southward and northward. This communist subversion poses a threat that 100 million people from Panama to the open border on our south could come under control of the pro-Soviet regimes."\(^{21}\)

In a May 1984 news conference Reagan expressed one of his major fears: that a communist takeover in Central America would mean thousands of refugees trying to gain entry into the United States of America. He insisted that recommendations made by the Kissinger Commission:

"can succeed if the Congress provides the resources for all elements of that policy. But if the Congress offers too little support, it'll be worse than doing nothing at all. The success of communism in Central America poses a threat that 100 million people from Panama to the open border of the south could come under the control of pro-Soviet regimes. We could face a massive exodus of refugees to the U.S."\(^{22}\)

Reagan heeded the Commission's suggestions to pledge a five year commitment to substantially increasing the level of economic assistance given to Central America. Kissinger's Commission called for an almost doubling of the amount of economic aid to an incredible eight million dollars to be spent by 1990, and a possible twenty-four million dollars to be spent long term. However, included in this increase of economic aid was a provision for a substantial rise in military aid. As Reagan officials reiterated:

"Without security the best economic programs and the wisest diplomacy will be unable to stop the opponents of democracy."\(^{23}\)

The report's main weakness lay in its obsession with the claims of Soviet-Cuban destabilisation and refusal to acknowledge that the problems affecting Central America were North-South related rather than East-West. The Commission's report included a
commentary of Soviet expansionism in the 1970's into Indo China, Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia and South Yemen. All of this evoked the lamenting of a mother over offspring who, having been left to their own devices had come under disruptive influences and gone astray. El Salvador was the Commission's favourite example of a once well-behaved country turned bad as outside interference had transformed a controllable insurgency into a "severe threat to the government." The Commission alluded to a "direct national security interest" that the United States supposedly held in preventing conflict in Central America. Four supports were given for this line of argument by the Commission:

A Central American conflict might require the relocation of "large resources to defend the southern approaches to the United States, thus reducing our capacity to defend our interests elsewhere."

A local conflict would be "a potentially serious threat to our shipping lanes through the Caribbean."

Conflict would encourage "a proliferation of Marxist-Leninist states that would increase violence, dislocation and political repression in the region".

A confrontation would see "the erosion of our power to influence events world wide that would flow from the perception that we were unable to influence events closer to home."

No new insight was expressed in these four points. Instead they only echo notions and ideas that Reagan had been drawing upon to defend his initiatives in Central America for the last four years. Once again the United States was staking its credibility on a favourable outcome in Nicaragua and El Salvador. For the United States to fail, according to the Commission, would lead to the projection of the weaker picture of the United States lacking the capability and efficacy to control happenings in its own backyard. The Commission supposed that this image would then
have serious global ramifications, affecting the world's power hierarchy in which the United States would be relegated to second place. Reality purports no evidence that Central America contained any military threat to the United States, and acting so dramatically on such a vague suspicion could only be called irresponsible. As the leader of the British Labour Party observed:

"The foreign policy of a super-power should not be prompted by such paranoia." 27

The 'credibility argument' projects the traditional picture of the United States as the force which, alone ensured the survival of the spirits of democracy and justice in the third World. Ronald Reagan quotes Harry Truman as stating:

"The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms. If we falter...we may endanger the peace of the world, and we shall surely endanger the welfare of this nation." 28

The Reagan administration saw the volatile nature of Central America in the 1980's as an opportunity to prove the intensity of its commitment to the preservation of capitalism throughout the world. For Reagan, Central America represented a threat not just to the United States itself but to the American self-image as guardian of third world governments.

"If the United States cannot respond to a threat near our own borders, why should Europeans or Asians believe we are seriously concerned about threats to them? If we cannot defend ourselves there, we cannot expect to prevail elsewhere. Our credibility would collapse, our alliances would crumble and the safety of our homeland would be in jeopardy." 29

Critics of the United States involvement in the Central American war tend to often draw parallels between the United States in Central America and United States interference in Vietnam. The credibility argument especially lends itself to such a comparison. For example when President Johnson insisted that:
"To leave Vietnam to its fate would be to shake the confidence...in the American commitment, the value of America's word. The result would be increased unrest and instability and even wider war."30

These words could easily have been spoken by Ronald Reagan, claiming his only objective in Central America was to assert the rights of self-determination of its people.

While Reagan was correct in his assumption that a response to unrest in Central America was necessary in order to safeguard the reputation of the United States, the impact of his actions in that region had often been unexpected. The United States Central American policies were widely criticised in Europe, not for their failure to achieve their prescribed ends but, for their military nature. As Phillip Berryman observed:

"No one doubts that the United States is technologically capable of turning Central America into a smoking wasteland."31

One would hope that as a super-power the United States would have the wisdom to seek peaceful solutions to Central American problems; as this is what gives a nation favourable credibility and respect. Instead the United States felt that its honour depended on its ability to prevail in countless small countries a thousand miles from their border. Being able to take over another nation commands fear, not respect, and this was the lesson that the Reagan administration had yet to learn.32

'Preventive interference' was Reagan's strongest justification for United States involvement in Central America. It was founded on the premise that a strong United States presence was necessary to ward off the possibility of Soviet meddling, to foster democracy, and to protect vital United States interests. The argument for preventative interference relies on the assumption that a failure by the United States to permeate the governments
and militaries of the Central American nations would inevitably result in the Soviet Union expanding dramatically in this area.\textsuperscript{33}

Thus preventive interference tends to reduce the complex conflict in Central America into one between East and West. Reagan justifies United States activity in the area by saying:

"Peace can only be achieved in Central America if the forces of democracy are strong."\textsuperscript{34}

In pursuit of this argument, Reagan calls for defensive action rather than appeasement. The supposition being that one can only negotiate from a position of strength. In the words of Secretary Shultz:

"We use our power not to dominate the world but to prevent others from dominating it. No diplomatic strategy ever succeeded from weakness."\textsuperscript{35}

Preventive interference requires that the United States not only be militarily strong but that she must also display her power to the world by awarding economic and military aid. In this manner she can hope to discourage adversaries from interfering in her 'backyard'.

Reagan was adamant that preventive interference was an effective policy:

"The past five years have shown that American strength is once again the sheltering arm for freedom in a dangerous world."\textsuperscript{36}

Despite Reagan's confidence in the strategy and his claims regarding its success, essentially meaningless statements such as the following show preventive interference to be nothing more than a clever rhetorical device:

"To be prepared for war is one of the most effective means of preserving peace."\textsuperscript{37}

In fact, Reagan's preventive interference did not facilitate the realisation of peace in Central America. It served only
to contribute to the escalation of the war. Since Reagan gained power he formed and funded the rebel contra army in Nicaragua, snowballed a once smoldering insurgency in Guatemala and El Salvador into flaming wars, and turned Honduras into a puppet as United States arms base in the region.

United States military action centred around the particular manner in which the Soviet Union was conceptualised by the Reagan administration. Ronald Reagan believed that United States involvement in Central America — indeed in world affairs — was merely a response to the danger represented by the Soviet imperial power and communist global ideology in the postwar world. To counter the alleged Soviet threat, the Reagan administration sought to build up local military forces within Central American countries and to ensure they were in a position to resist the encroachment of communism.  

Reagan insisted to Congress on numerous occasions that the use of foreign aid was important to assist in the strengthening of the economies and armies of those countries which were friendly to the United States. In his 1985 State of the Union address Reagan said that:

"dollar for dollar, our security assistance contributes as much to global security as our own defence budget."

Between 1981 and 1985 Reagan's total foreign aid budget increased by one third, from 10.6 billion dollars to 14.3 billion dollars; spending in the area of direct military aid accounted for almost all of this growth. El Salvador provided the most dramatic example of a growing United States aid recipient. During the Carter administration El Salvador received no aid; within weeks of Reagan's inauguration she received twenty million dollars in emergency military aid. This was money which enabled the
military-civilian junta to crush a leftist insurgency. By 1983 United States military and economic assistance to El Salvador had grown to 368.9 million dollars - of which only 87.1 million was for economic development.

Priorities which had guided previous administrations in their decisions regarding foreign aid were reversed by Reagan. Money which had funded long term development programs like schools, hospitals, and bridges was withdrawn and used to provide economic and military support for floundering rightist governments in an effort to discourage Soviet, Cuban and Nicaraguan expansionism in the region. By the time of Reagan's 1985 State of the Union address, his doctrine had become very specific:

"American support for anticommunist revolution as the centrepiece of a revived and revised policy of containment."

Thus, only ten years after Vietnam, Reagan had effectively announced the return of an active interventionist policy in the world.

In the April 1983 publication of the New York Times was printed the text of a leaked National Security Council document entitled: "U.S. Policy In Central America And Cuba Through The Fiscal Year 1984". This document gave an extraordinary insight into the Reagan administrations true objectives and strategy concerning Central America. The documents ultimate goal was to prevent a "proliferation of Cuban model states" in Central America which could possibly threaten the United States economic and military security. The goal was to be achieved by the implementation of covert and public programs. Under the first chapter heading "Interests and Objectives" the text read:

"We have an interest in creating and supporting democratic states in Central America capable of conducting
their political and economic affairs free from outside interference. Strategically, we have a vital interest in not allowing the proliferation of Cuban-model states which would provide platforms of subversion, compromise vital sea lanes and pose a direct military threat at our near borders. This would undercut us globally and create economic dislocation and a resultant influx to the United States of illegal immigrants. In the short run we must work to eliminate Cuban-Soviet influence in the region, and in the long run we must build politically stable governments able to withstand such influences."

The document not only made new policy proposals but spoke of the triumphs and failures of present policy. This analysis drew four conclusions. Firstly, that the United States current approach to the Sandinista government of applying military pressure covertly and of politically isolating Nicaragua had been a success. Secondly, that the C.I.A. should receive a further 2.5 million dollars in order to expand its Guatemalan program aimed at buttressing the United States approved military overthrow of the elected government. Thirdly, that the Reagan administrations current Central American foreign policies faced not only public and Congressional opposition within the United States but also international hostility, especially from Europe and Mexico. Finally, that greater public and economic pressure should be applied to Cuba. Public pressure through "the international Cuban community to carry the message" and economic pressure by a "quantum tightening of economic embargo".530

The document proposed a threefold strategy for achieving the objectives of a democratically operating Central America:

Improve "the military capabilities of the democratic states to counter subversion by the extreme left."

Improve "the economic situation through direct economic assistance and the Caribbean Basin Initiative package."

Step-up "the pressure on Nicaragua and Cuba to increase for them the costs of interventionism."531

Thus the Reagan administration aimed its strategy at
achieving the containment of the Central American nations within
the United States sphere of influence. In pursuit of this end,
Reagan believed that the United States must reassert its power
over others. Statements made by Secretary Shultz express this:

"restoring the peoples confidence in American leadership
has been perhaps the Presidents most important goal in
foreign policy."

Additionally, Shultz believed, Reagan had brought about:

"a new patriotism, a new pride in our country a new
faith in its capacity to do good."\(^{52}\)

The conviction held by Reagan was that his foreign policy
goals would be realised through the execution of a program of
interference in ‘friendly' Central American nations. This inter-
ference focused on the local militaries. Building them up to a
standard which would enable them to resist any revolutionary
efforts made by dissatisfied groups within their communities. As
Reagan claimed in April 1984:

"Peace through strength is not a slogan, its a fact of
life".\(^{53}\)

Reagan’s attitude toward Central America was part of a
post-war tradition in which administrations have worked toward
containment in the region. Curbing Soviet expansion was always
the aim, the means was direct American assistance for counterin-
surgency and military and economic support for local governments.
Charles Krauthammer described Reagan’s "neo-internationalist
vision of America" as "simple":

"Anticommunist revolution as a tactic. Containment as a
strategy. And freedom as the rationale."\(^{54}\)

The solution achieved through such a policy could only be
superficial for the problem it sought to remedy did not lie
within the external threat of communism but within decades of
authoritarian and totalitarian rule, and within the support such rule received from powerful nations like the United States.

The United States habit of stockpiling economic and military resources in certain Central American countries (Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica) was motivated by a desire to retain control of the region rather than by a concern for the welfare of its people. The Reagan administrations foreign policy approach had retracted to the extent that it remarkably resembled the traditional balance of power diplomacy. By assuming a militant stance in Central America, Reagan hoped to promote a North American democratic-ideological ethos that would supposedly bring prosperity to all. The likelihood of this dream being fulfilled was as much a fantasy as the black and white world picture in Reagan's old films.

The Contadora negotiations promised to be a means by which the conflicts raging in Central America in the early 1980's might be resolved. In January 1983 Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela met on the Panamanian Island of Contadora for the first of what was going to be a series of talks on collective diplomacy. These negotiations soon extended their quorum to include representatives from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Costa Rica. In September, 1983, the Contadora countries agreed to a twenty-one point "Document of Objectives" which outlined "principles for a peaceful settlement of Central American disputes". Although this document contained few specifics, its objectives can briefly be summed up in four points. Firstly, the demilitarization of Central America. Secondly, an increase in economic aid from outside countries. Thirdly, a general movement toward active democracy, stressing the need for economic development of the
region, protection of human rights, and the establishment of democratic representative elections. Finally, the reduction and eventually rejection of outside military aid. This included the phasing out of foreign arms shipments, the removal of military advisers, the closing of foreign military bases and the setting of limits to the size of the military any one nation might support.\textsuperscript{93}

The agreement which the Contadora nations formulated received varying responses from countries which were engaged in military interference in Central America and from those countries which at the time were the objects of that interference. After Contadora’s plan was announced Fidel Castro wrote to the Contadora governments stating that he could be counted upon for "negotiable solutions". A few days later Castro publicly declared that Cuba would stop all military aid to Nicaragua if an agreement was reached for "all countries not to send arms to Central America":

"If there were to be an agreement among all parties involved about withdrawing all advisers we would be willing to support such a settlement. If an agreement were reached on the basis of a cessation of sending weapons to any state of Central America we would be willing to abide by it."\textsuperscript{94}

On the eve of the revolutions fourth anniversary Nicaragua also affirmed its commitment to the resolution of conflicts in Central America, proclaiming its willingness to participate in international talks about achieving peace in the region. Nicaragua called for "an absolute end to all arms supplies by any countries to the parties in El Salvador."\textsuperscript{95}

The Reagan administration was initially hostile to the Contadora group. Reagan had wished for the inclusion of those Latin American nations that were not so hostile to Washington’s tendency to favour a military answer to the question of conflict
in Central America. However, as James Chace notes:

"By the fall of 1983 Washington had rhetorically embraced Contadora in order to demonstrate its willingness to consider peaceful solutions to both the continuing war in El Salvador and Nicaragua’s support for leftist guerrilla movements."

In July 1983 Reagan wrote to each of the Contadora Presidents stating his interpretation of Central America’s troubles and offered a remedy which was consistent with the ideas outlined by the Contadora nations. He used four principles to express his support for Contadora’s conclusions:

"Firstly, it is essential that democratic institutions be established and strengthened as a means to resolve political differences within the Central American states. namely by ensuring free and open participation in the democratic process can the peoples of Central America achieve reconciliation within their societies."

"Secondly, there must be respect for the principle of nonintervention including a ban on support for subversive elements that seek to destabilise other countries."

"Thirdly, the conflict in Central America must be removed from the context of an East-West confrontation, through such measures as the withdrawal of all foreign military and security advisers and a certifiable freeze on the acquisition of offensive armaments."

"Finally, the countries of Central America must work among themselves and with their neighbours to achieve and sustain a level of economic growth that will guarantee the basic needs of their people."

Although the Reagan administration appeared to be endorsing such activities, they were never acted upon. At the end of 1983 the Sandinistas proposed four draft peace treaties. These included nonaggression pacts between Nicaragua and Honduras, Nicaragua and the United States, and a broader nonaggression pact signed by all Central American governments. Washington’s reaction to these proposals was to ignore them.

As the United States entered into its election year it became clear that the Reagan administration would settle for
nothing less than the ousting of the Sandinista government. The months building up to Reagan's re-election saw officials not only reaffirming their hostility toward the Sandinistas, but also encouraging their Central American allies to raise objections to the Contadora peace treaty draft. While the Sandinistas gave a firm commitment to the Contadora groups proposal, in October 1984, the Reagan administration continued to reject it on the grounds that it did not provide adequate mechanisms to verify and control Nicaraguan compliance with its precepts. Ironically, Reagan continued his "formal public support of the Contadora process" throughout this period.

In 1985, enthusiasm for the notions expressed in the Contadora negotiations came once again from Nicaragua. In that year the Sandinista government expelled Salvadoran rebels, eased up on press censorship, began preparations for democratic elections and requested that the one-thousand Cuban teachers and technicians leave Nicaragua. The Reagan administration remained disinclined to respond seriously to these approaches. Instead Nicaragua's measures toward the realisation of the Contadora ideal were regarded by the United States as purely tactical, designed solely to gain time in which the revolution could be consolidated. The United States refused to drop its public pretence of supporting the negotiation process. In 1985 Secretary Shultz declared:

"We have in fact given strong support to the Contadora nations that we are attempting to negotiate a comprehensive solution to the crises. Indeed this country has made a major effort to cooperate with Nicaragua from the onset."

The Reagan administration also avoided assuming any responsibility for the failure of the Contadora countries to ful-
fil their objectives. Instead Washington attacked Nicaragua, accusing the Sandinista government of noncooperation. Secretary Shultz made several such allegations, notably:

"In September 1986 the Nicaraguan government joined with all the other Contadora countries in support of 21 objectives designed to bring peace to the region. The political and economic inducement for the commandantes to implement such a policy were there from the beginning; but they have spurned every effort to reconcile the real differences with their neighbours and with their own people".64

The Reagan administration must be largely to blame for Contadora's inability to make progress towards the realisation of its goals. The United States appeared unwilling to support or even acknowledge Nicaragua's efforts to move toward peace in Central America as long as Reagan held office. As one United States diplomat admitted:

"We panic at the thought of a Central American agreement with the Sandinistas".65

While peace was the aim shared by all the negotiators, exactly how it was to be achieved inspired much argument. On the subject of Central America Reagan's suggestion's were dictated to and confined by his own conviction that communism was at the root of all problems in the region. An example of the extent that Reagan's obsession with hindering the forward movement of the Contadora talks can be seen in the Guatemala meeting scheduled for June 25 and 26 in 1987. This meeting was to specifically discuss Costa Rican president, Oscar Arias Sanchez, proposal to end the guerrilla wars in Central America. The proposal devised by Arias was one which demanded:

"national reconciliation and dialogue between regional governments and unarmed opposition groups, an immediate cease fire in all regional conflicts, internal democratization and the suspension of all military aid to insurgents".66
It was Arias insistence that the United States forego sending any further aid to the contra armies that caused the United States to initially stall further discussion of the Arias proposal. The negotiation set for June was postponed until August by which time Philip Habib, a United States special envoy, had completed tours of Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Guatemala. Costa Rica's Foreign Minister Roderigo Madrigal Nieto divulged that the postponement was due to the fact:

"that the United States opposed a provision in the Arias plan to suspend all foreign aid to the insurgent groups".  

Habib himself has since been quoted as saying that Washington feared that the Arias peace accord would not sufficiently guarantee the protection of the United States security interests.  

Reagan's objection to the demand that he no longer fund the rebel armies of Nicaragua, led him to devise his own proposal. The motion the United States brought to the meeting in August 1987 demanded an immediate cease-fire between the Sandinistas and the contras, followed by elections in Nicaragua. It asked that these two objectives be meet by September 30th of that year. The United States promised to withhold aid to the contras until then.  

Reagan's alternative to the Arias plan only served to consolidate the fragile unity shared by the Central American nations. Daniel Ortega's response to Reagan's request was to refuse to negotiate with the contras. He declared that he wished "to talk to the owners of the circus" and "not the clowns".  

On August the 8th the Central American nations reached a tentative agreement without any interference from the United States. The signatories were Presidents Ortega, Arias, Cerezo,
Duarte and Azcona. The agreement extracted from Ortega a pledge to allow freedom of the press, to repeal all states of emergency and to hold further elections. Other provisions contained within the treaty included cease-fires throughout the region, an end to receiving and donating military aid and all aid to insurgencies, and a prohibition on the habit of using the territory of one nation to attack another, all to take effect within ninety days. Additionally, the Arias program provided for a Central American Parliament whose members would be elected by citizens of the five nations. Local and Presidential elections would be held according to each country's individual timetable. In Nicaragua these elections were scheduled for 1990. November the fifth was named as the deadline when countries involved would reassemble for the purpose of announcing specifically how they intended to honour their commitments. Two months after that meeting, the five Central American Presidents proposed to consult once more. This time in order to evaluate the success of Contadora. Arias, in a late October interview, declared that Contadora's success depended upon Honduras' obligation to keep the contras from using its territory and the Sandinistas' willingness to offer full political amnesty and to negotiate with the rebels. 71

The cease-fire, which still required further negotiation, was due to begin on November the seventh. It was to involve consultations between the Sandinista government and the contra rebels. The Sandinistas had previously refused to enter into talks with the contras. 72 Cardinal Obando y Bravo was appointed by the Sandinistas to mediate in the cease-fire talks with the contras. In this capacity he served as chairman of the four-member National Reconciliation Commission which monitored the degree
to which individual parties complied with the terms of Contadora. The Cardinal had a reputation for being severely critical of the Sandinista government. His appointment by the Sandinistas was astute in that it denied the contras the option of refusing to negotiate on the grounds that the mediator was biased. That the Sandinistas went so far as to nominate Bravo and to initiate negotiations with the contras marks a major concession on their behalf and can be seen to indicate the magnitude of their commitment to achieving peace in the region.78

Initially Reagan was sceptical, doubting the sincerity of the Sandinista motives. Administration officials implied that before direct United States-Nicaraguan talks could occur, dialogue between the Sandinistas and the contras must be seen to be serious.79 However, by early November the Reagan administration announced its willingness to negotiate security issues with Nicaragua but only in the presence of the four other Central American nations.78

Peace talks continued at an O.A.S. General Assembly on November the ninth, in which Daniel Ortega vented his frustration. He expressed concern that Sandinista willingness to communicate with the contras was being misinterpreted as an acknowledgement of the contras as a genuine military and political strength. Ortega made it clear that negotiations would concentrate on implementing a cease-fire and would not involve consultation on political matters.76

On November the thirteenth Ortega announced his own 11 point peace proposal stipulating that a one month cease-fire would take effect on the fifth of December. During this period Ortega declared that three cease-fire zones would be created
within Nicaragua where contra forces could live. While all military shipments would stop for this period, non lethal aid could be delivered by neutral international agencies. After the one month cease-fire had been completed the contras would be granted amnesty by the Sandinista government on condition that they lay down their arms. The amnesty invited the contras to participate in the domestic politics of Nicaragua. Cardinal Obando y Bravo delivered Ortega's proposal to the contras who regarded it fairly tenebrously but, nevertheless, promised to reply with a counter proposal. Meanwhile the White House ignored Ortega's efforts to reach an agreement with the contras and proceeded to accuse the Sandinistas of "dragging their feet" in the peace negotiations.

Within days of the November seventh cease-fire taking effect the terms of the Arias agreement were violated by the contras. Contra spokesman admitted to going ahead with resupplying operations in four war zones. The contras launched further attacks on Nicaragua following the failure of a second round of peace talks in the Dominican Republic capital of Santo Domingo to reach any conclusions. While the Sandinistas and the contras eventually conceded to a two day Christmas truce, the Sandinistas have since accused the contras of numerous violations. Meanwhile Reagan's success in persuading Congress to approve 8.1 million dollars in humanitarian aid for the contra rebels had rendered the need for successful peace negotiations all the more urgent. Especially as he was attempting to convert this into a stop-gap allocation to last until the end of January when he planned to request fresh military assistance.

Prospects in 1988 cannot be described as hopeful. The contras were formed at Reagan's insistence for the purpose of
to expect that the United States would ever enact a broad economic policy as it is unable to progress beyond its narrow prerogative of isolating and crushing Nicaragua’s Sandinista government. Thirdly, the United States did not, in truth, wish the nations of Central America to achieving self-determining democracies. Minority rule in Central America relies on United States economic and military aid to maintain its power. Middle and working class leadership in Central America could operate, with the support of its people, and more independently of the United States. Thus in order to sustain itself as the benefactor and overlord of Central American governments the United States must ensure that these governments are in a position of dependence to the United States for their survival. The subordination of Central American governments to the United States awards the Reagan administration the lever it required to work towards its policy of containment.

While the Reagan administrations claim of having no territorial ambitions or desires to interfere in the internal events of other countries are numerous; it was not possible to accept these statements as sincere in the light of United States recent involvement in Central America. Although no Central American nation was directly under United States control many are, nevertheless, merely used as puppets; to be toyed with as their master required. In the past seven years Central America had been transformed into an arena where the United States had attempted to display the might of its own strength and secure control in its own ‘backyard’. Initially Reagan was able to quell scepticism about becoming involved in another indigenous revolution and to circumvent Vietnam comparisons. This was achieved by transforming
the Vietnam veteran into a hero, and by insisting that Central American problems were not indigenous but rather the result of Soviet and Cuban meddling. Although these excuses have since worn thin they were effective long enough to allow the process of United States intervention to gain such momentum that it seemed near impossible to reverse it.

From this analysis of United States activity in Central America it can be deduced that military action is most definitely the preferred method of facing difficulties in Central America. Meanwhile, such paths as negotiation or the implementation of economic reforms can almost be said to be last resorts. When economic assistance is practiced by the United States it is used only as an incentive to force Central American nations into complying with United States policy. Reagan deliberately encouraged dependence on United States aid so that he could use threats of withdrawing this aid as a lever with which to persuade individual countries to cooperate with the United States demands. What the United States failed to acknowledge was that this line of action did not serve its own interests. Instead it inspired Central American countries to seek alternative sources of aid, often from communist quarters which consequently turned many towards the left.
FOOTNOTES

(1) "Latin America : Change Or Continuity?" Paul E. Sigmund, Foreign Affairs Volume 60 no.3, p.629.

(2) Bipolar in that all nations are grouped into two bloc's : the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, led by the United States, and the Warsaw Pact, led by the Soviet Union. Actually, the Charles Kegley and Eugene Wittkopf term "bipolycentrism" is more appropriate for the Reagan administration as "it implies continued military superiority on the part of the United States and the Soviet Union and the continued reliance, at least ultimately, of each superpower's weaker alliance partners on their respective patrons for security". In "External Sources Of American Foreign Policy", C.W. Kegley and E.R. Wittkopf, Perspectives On American Foreign Policy, edited by C.W. Kegley and E.R. Wittkopf, New York, St. Martins Press, 1983, p.100.


(5) "Foreign Policy And The American Character", Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Foreign Affairs, Volume 62 no.1, p.5.

(6) "Security : The Extracontinental Dimension", Cole Blasier, The United States And Central America In The 1980's, edited by
J.K. Middlebrook and C. Rico, Pittsburg, Hamish Hamilton Ltd.,
1986, p.548.

(7) "Deeper Into The Mire", James Chace, The New York Review Of

(8) U.S. Foreign Policy : The Reagan Imprint, The Editors of
Congressional Quarterly, Washington D.C. Congressional Quarterly

(9) For Libya’s role in the April 4, 1986, bombing of La Belle
disco in West Berlin, which killed one United States serviceman,
Reagan amassed United States forces on the Gulf of Sidra’s edge.
On April 14, 1986, 150 United States aircraft bombed Libya. Their
targets included Gaddafi’s command centre at the Bab al Azizia
army compound, Tripoli International Airport, Benghazi army bar-
racks, Sidi Bilal barracks, Benina airfield, and the "accidental"
bombing of a residential area one mile south of Tripoli Harbour.
"In The Dead Of The Night", William R. Doerner, Time, April 28,
1986, pp.20-23.

(10) Inside Central America : U.S. Policy In Its New Vietnam,

(11) Inevitable Revolutions : The United States In Central Amer-
ica, Walter La Feber, New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1984,
p.280.

(12) "C.B.I., Ronald Reagan’s address before the O.A.S.

(13) Quoted from Reagan’s O.A.S. speech February 24, 1982, in The

(14) "Reagan To Unveil A 70% Rise In Caribbean Aid", Bernard

(15) "Reagan Announces Aid For Caribbean And Assails Cuba", Ber-


(19) It is ironic that Kissinger was picked to head a Latin American Commission as one of the two things he was remembered for in the region was the overthrow of Salvador Allendes elected government in Chile in 1973, by the Chilean military. At that time Kissinger was Richard Nixon’s Secretary of State and as such ensured Pinochet’s regime had all the support it needed in imposing totalitarian rule. Kissinger is equally remembered for his contempt of Latin America. Kissinger’s statement to Chile’s Foreign Minister, Gabriel Valdes, is well known:

"Nothing important came from the south...the axis of history starts in Moscow, goes to Bonn, crosses over to Washington and goes to Tokyo. What happens in the south is of no importance”.


(23) "Central America : Democracy, Peace and Development Initia
Ambassador Longhorn A. Motely, statement before House Foreign Affairs Committee, February 21, 1984, Department Of State Bulletin, April, 1984, p.73.


(26) Ibid, p.93.


(32) Ibid.


(37) Ibid.

(38) "Realism And Vision, In American Foreign Policy", James H. Billington, Foreign Affairs, Volume 65 no.3, p.623.

(39) U.S. Foreign Policy, the Editors of Congressional Quarterly, p.6.

(40) Ibid.

(41) Ibid, p.11.

(42) Inside Central America, P. Berryman, p.62.

(43) U.S. Foreign Policy, Editors of Congressional Quarterly, p.51.


(45) Ibid.


(47) The document was compiled by a policy making group comprising the President, Vice-President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defence, Director of C.I.A., N.S.C. Chief, and Edwin Meese III, Michael K. Deaver, James A. Baker III.

(48) Covert activities would be carried out under National Security Decision Directive 17 which was approved in November 1981.


(52) "A Forward Look At Foreign Policy", Secretary Shultz address before Los Angeles World Affairs Council, October 19, 1984,
(53) "American Foreign Policy Challenges in the 1980's" President Reagan's address before the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, April 6, 1984, Department Of State Bulletin, May 1984, p.2.


(55) U.S. Foreign Policy, Editors of Congressional Quarterly, p.75.


(61) The United States And Latin America In the 1980's, edited by K.J. Middlebrook and C Rico, p.25.


(63) "Restoring Bipartisanship In Foreign Affairs", Secretary Shultz address to the America Bar Association, May 23, 1985, Department Of State Bulletin, July 1985, p.41.

(64) "No Delay For Democracy", Secretary Shultz address before the National Foreign Policy Conference for Young Political Lead-


(68) Ibid.


(77) "Ortega Proposes Truce But Rebels Object To Terms", Neil A.

(78) "Reagan Accuses Sandinistas Of Lukewarm Peace Efforts", Joel

(79) "Eying A Dialogue", Jill Smolowe, Time, November 16, 1987,
pp.17-18.

(80) "Battles Of Bullets And Dollars", John Greenwald, Time,

(81) U.S. Foreign Policy, Editors of Congressional Quarterly,
pp.51-52.

(82) Reagan’s State of the Union address January 25, 1984,

stated:

"We have no territorial ambitions. We occupy no
countries. We Build no walls to lock people in".


stated at an address before the Los Angeles World Affairs Coun-
cil, November 22, 1983, that:

"The purpose of foreign policy is not to provide an
outlet for our own sentiments of hope or indignation..."

"Human Rights Implications For U.S. Actions In Grenada", E.

CHAPTER TWO: EL SALVADOR, THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION'S TESTING GROUND.

A study of current events in El Salvador over the past seven years offers many clues to understanding how Reagan's foreign policy worked. What occurred in El Salvador can be interpreted largely as an answer to the successful Sandinista revolution in neighbouring Nicaragua. Thus this chapter deals with the influence Sandinista revolutionaries had on the fate of El Salvador in terms of the reaction of El Salvadorian people and the United States response to their actions. The victory of a people's army over an established United States backed totalitarian ruler in Nicaragua gave a glimmer of hope to those similarly oppressed in El Salvador. However, Sandinista success also propelled Central America back into the Cold War. It revived the whole question of Soviet and Cuban expansionism, and also provided the Reagan administration with the perfect excuse for increasing military aid in the hope that El Salvador would become the new administration's first foreign policy triumph. Despite the unresolved civil war which afflicted El Salvador, United States interference managed to convince the American public and the U.S.S.R. that United States pride and strength had returned after momentarily lapsing under President Carter.

El Salvador is a specific example of how the Reagan administration turned problems related only to North and South issues into a confrontation between East and West. Study of Reagan's usage of Cold War rhetoric, the issuing of the White Paper,
and United States meddling in both the March 1982 and March 1984 Salvadorean elections, presents unquestionable evidence that Reagan's personal fear of the possibility of communist/socialist rule in Central America dominated United States foreign policy.

El Salvador is a country whose problems of inequality, poverty and brutal repression could have more simply been met by efforts to negotiate a solution with revolutionaries or by holding legitimate elections. Instead, United States paranoia has persuaded her to fight an intensive and enduring seven year civil war. Whilst funding and feeding this war the Reagan administration was obliged to reassure its own populace that increases in military aid were necessary in order to prevent further human rights abuses by the Salvadorean military, and to enable 'free' elections to be held in El Salvador. This campaign to lend respectability to United States intervention in El Salvador produced a backlash from the American public for whom increased involvement only invoked terrible memories of Vietnam. Opinion polls taken within the United States revealed that an overwhelming majority of people within the United States wanted a deescalation of United States interference in Central America, communist takeover or not.

Inevitably Reagan has failed to achieve any short or long term solutions to the conflicts ravaging El Salvador and, instead has only aggravated the instability and violence there.

Shortly after the Sandinistas victory in Nicaragua, El Salvador was catapulted into the headlines in the United States. July 1979 marked a juncture in United States attitude toward the Central American region as Nicaragua successfully utilized the lessons learnt from other anti-imperialist struggles throughout
the world since World War II. Prior to the Nicaraguan revolution, Central America had aroused little political analysis. The Sandinistas rise to power, however, meant that this would change. Not only was the question of Cuba revived, but the strategic importance of the whole region became highlighted, as Central America assumed the number one priority in United States foreign policy.¹

El Salvador was destined to be the 'next Nicaragua'. The Sandinistas triumph had an immediate influence upon El Salvador. Slogans appeared on banners in the streets of San Salvador declaring "Somoza Today - Romero Tomorrow". However, discontent and the accompanying ingredients of the revolution had been brewing in the country prior to 1987.² In 1912, over a decade before the United States created an equivalent force in Nicaragua, an El Salvadoran National Guard was formed, with United States assistance, for the purpose of maintaining order in the Salvadoran countryside. Along with that of their urban counterparts: the National Police, the infamous brutality and corruption of the National Guard had spanned three quarters of a century.³ The polarity between rich and poor in El Salvador was most extreme. In 1963 Burt Quint of the New York Herald Tribune wrote that seventy-five individuals in twenty-five interrelated families controlled ninety percent of El Salvador's wealth. By 1980 the number of families was estimated to have grown to a mere eighty. This inequity was emphasised by the fact that most Salvadoran peasants still owned no land and were thus obliged to work only as sharecroppers.⁴

While historical comparisons between events in El Salvador and Nicaragua are numerous, four similarities stand out.
Firstly, the dominant role the Roman Catholic church played in both revolutions; especially since the early 1960's when the Christian grass roots communities were established. From the biblical studies, which priests in these communities offered, peasants gained the realisation that poverty and hunger were not the will of God, but the will of the wealthy oligarchy. The 1970's saw the influence of the church heightened as it began denouncing the human rights violations exercised by the powerful landowning minority, and at the same time demanded a more equitable distribution of land and wealth. Secondly, El Salvador and Nicaragua both draw on mythical heroes from their pasts to represent the hopes for their futures: Augustus Cesar Sandino in Nicaragua, and Farabundo Marti in El Salvador. Thirdly, the majority of El Salvadorans and Nicaraguans perceive the history of their countries as dominated by repression, poverty and sickness. Finally, the established nature of the then current regimes in both countries - the third generation of Somoza’s and General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez - threatened to make the bleakness of these pasts eternal. Thus the revolution in El Salvador cannot be interpreted as resulting solely from communist expansion but, instead, can only be understood as the necessary and inevitable response of a people to decades of oppression by chilling totalitarian rule.

The first evidence that the Sandinista victory had lent confidence to the Salvadorean people was seen in the overthrow of General Humberto Romero on October 15, 1979, by a group of young and apparently liberal army officers. Romero had replaced Colonel Armando Molina as President following his fraudulent elections in January 1977. Romero’s period in office was well
remembered for its excessive brutality as attacks by 'death squads' on the general populace and on members of the Catholic clergy reached a new peak. One special death squad, the White Warriors Union launched a harsh campaign against the Salvadoran Catholic church, accusing it of promoting communism. They threatened to systematically purge the nation of its priests, distributing leaflets urging violence against the church with the slogan: "be a patriot, kill a priest". Jimmy Carter’s efforts to halt Romero’s human rights abuses were unsuccessful. That the general paid no heed to Carter’s threats to withhold United States aid to El Salvador can be seen in the way that a draconian law for the Defence and Guarantee of Public Order was introduced in December 1977, which made "active, written and even verbal opposition to the government a crime".

The coup which disposed of Romero in 1979 suited the Carter administration well since Romero was proving to be a serious embarrassment, questioning as he did the integrity and strength of Carter’s human rights policy. The El Salvadoran military understood this and consequently issued a proclamation indicting Romero’s regime for the violation of basic human rights and for corruption which, they believed, had sown the seeds for economic and social disaster. The military promised that it would engage in an emergency programme to end violence and corruption, guarantee human rights, and hold free elections. Amnesty was declared quickly, negotiations began with trade unions and free speech was permitted.

In fact, United States rejection of Colonel Adolfo Majano and Colonel Guerra y Guerra as the military representatives of the coup officers on the junta meant that such optimism was short
lived. The United States favoured Guillermo Garcia and Jamie Abdul Gurierrez, men representative of the unreconstructed old guard military. Significantly, they were closely linked with General Medrano, the founder of the National Democratic Organisation of El Salvador (O.R.D.E.N.). Gutieriez, taking advantage of United States support, immediately appointed Garcia Minister of Defence. Gutieriez and Garcia strengthened their position by installing other hard line officers as heads of the National Guard and the National Police. Civilian members of the junta were not consulted. In effect, a counter coup had been staged. The balance of power had dramatically swung away from those supporting reforms and returned to the hands of the hard line controllers of the security forces and their United States backers. Thus the attempt to create a peoples government in El Salvador was thwarted. In the face of opposition from El Salvadorans the survival of the ruling junta and the security forces now hinged upon military and economic aid from the United States. Conversely the United States was dependent on the existence of the military to enforce its wishes and protect its interests. Evidence for the United States reliance upon the El Salvadoran military can be drawn from observing the manner in which death squads were able to embark on a reinvigorated campaign of terror while only encountering muted criticism from the United States. Eventually, under the Reagan administration, this opposition would totally disappear.

Two representatives from the United States Congress, William Bowdler and William Rogers who had been Assistant Secretary of State under Nixon and Ford, were sent on an investigative mission by the United States government. This followed the rape and
murder of three United States nuns and one lay social worker, on December 4, 1980. Bowdle and Rogers drew no conclusions concerning the December killings, but a second motive for their presence in El Salvador emerged. It was their task to reshuffle the junta; to smarten and clean up its image so as to allow Reagan to restore United States aid to El Salvador, while maintaining his credibility, immediately after his inauguration. Bowdle and Rogers achieved their aim by reorganising the government so as to focus power on the Presidency. They replaced Najano with the democratically inclined Jose Napoleon Duarte.9

Like Carter, Reagan felt obliged to work toward countering opposition from his own public and continued aid to El Salvador. However Reagan was saved some effort in this direction when the so called ‘final offensive’, staged by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (F.M.L.N.) on January 10, 1981, provided the Reagan administration with an acceptable justification for its proposed involvement in El Salvador. The F.M.L.N. had been formed only two months earlier, in November 1980. It had emerged out of the decision made in Havana by the five major Salvadoran guerrilla groups to follow the Sandinista initiative to join in a united front.9

The F.M.L.N. had hoped to gain full control of El Salvador before Reagan’s administration had begun to function. Unfortunately the revolutionaries had not agreed upon a unified war plan and consequently this offensive failed to inspire the mass uprising upon which a F.M.L.N. victory was dependent. After one weeks fighting the revolutionaries were forced to retreat into the ‘controlled zones’ in the north and the east of El Salvador. Despite this failure it cannot be said that the F.M.L.N. were
defeated. Their retreat was an effort to reorganise. The revolutionaries realised that they lacked the capacity to defeat the Salvadorean military in open war and so they sought to take this opportunity to reformulate their plans of action.\textsuperscript{10} Philip Berryman comments:

"Although the 1981 general offensive failed to spark a Nicaraguan like insurrection the F.M.L.N. did extend its control over a significant amount of territory and was able to continue its attacks."\textsuperscript{11}

When Reagan entered the White House the revolutionaries 'final offensive' had just failed and the possibilities for a successful negotiated settlement to end the civil war could not have appeared more favourable. Within days of his inauguration Reagan was presented with a memo dated November 1980 which proposed a more pragmatic approach toward El Salvador, namely, what it termed the "Zimbabwe option".\textsuperscript{12} Despite such opportunities Reagan chose to remain true to his own ideology and consequently ignored the chance for a negotiated solution. Instead both the President and Secretary Haig singled out El Salvador to be the new administrations first foreign policy victory.\textsuperscript{13} El Salvador would represent the beginning of the Reagan administrations new containment policy. It would be a policy which would emphasise the prevention, at all costs, of the rise or sharing of power by revolutionary forces in El Salvador. In keeping with this aim Reagan greatly increased aid to his internal allies in El Salvador. Hoping that all internal opposition would be eliminated within months thus rendering it safe to hold elections which would legitimize the new Salvadorean government.\textsuperscript{14}

The Reagan administration announced its first aid package five weeks after assuming power.\textsuperscript{15} This included twenty-five million dollars worth of military equipment and sixty-three million
dollars in economic aid; the amount of United States aid allocated to El Salvador reached a staggering five hundred and twenty-three million dollars. When compared with the modest figures of previous years, one hundred and eighty three point nine million in 1980 and a mere seventy-nine point three million in 1979, the 1981 figure seems astounding.\textsuperscript{16}

Following the rebel offensive in early 1981 Jimmy Carter had approved the sending of thirty-five military advisers. The Reagan administration promptly increased this number to fifty-four and loaned a further four Huey helicopters as part of its emergency aid package to El Salvador.\textsuperscript{17} Reagan found himself faced with a Congressional limitation on the number of military advisers he could commit to El Salvador. Initially Reagan was able to circumvent this limitation by sending in twenty-six United States military personal described as "medics". Whilst these advisers did have medical training this was a secondary speciality. They were all members of an elite combat training force. Reagan's next action was to construct a multi-million dollar military camp on the northern Caribbean coast of Honduras at Puerta Costilla. Here one hundred and twenty-five Green Berets from Fort Bragg (of which most were Vietnam veterans) were dispatched to train an initial group of one thousand and forty Salvadoreans.\textsuperscript{18} As well as modernising the army equipment, United States advisers managed to change dramatically the attitude of Salvadorean army personnel toward their profession. Previously the Salvadoreans had fostered a nine-to-five mentality toward combat, but under United States influence they were encouraged to operate in small patrols and to undertake night missions.\textsuperscript{19} Contrary to United States hopes, the war remained a stalemate. A
Pentagon study concluded that despite United States efforts the Salvadoran army "looked more like a constabulary" and harboured "no hope" of fighting any war - conventional or guerrilla.  

The Carter administration had perceived the war in El Salvador as primarily a civil war resulting from generations of intense poverty and extreme military repression. The conflict was viewed as a revolution so desperate that it would accept arms indiscriminately from wherever they were offered - in this case Cuba and Nicaragua. The Reagan administration seized upon this idea, viewing war in El Salvador firstly in global terms: as a confrontation between the East and the West. Secretary Haig focused on Cuba and Nicaragua as major influences for the wars eruption, and only secondly did he acknowledge internal poverty and repression as contributing factors. This interpretation of El Salvador's situation supported Reagan's belief that the greatest threat came from the leftist insurgents and not from the rightist military forces within El Salvador. The notion that El Salvador represented a battleground for an East versus West philosophy rendered an intensification of United States military and economic aid and involvement to the region both logically and necessary.  

Interestingly, President Duarte himself warned Washington that more military aid was not needed as the guerrillas were contained. Duarte:

"professed awareness of too large a U.S. presence here (in El Salvador), saying it would only lead to unnecessary escalation of the conflict". Instead Duarte requested a massive infusion of economic aid, declaring:

"there is no point in having the best army in the world if people are dying from hunger".  

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The United States had no intention of heeding pleas from her allies to replace military intervention with economic aid. Instead Reagan continued to escalate the civil war in El Salvador into a conflict of global significance. His perception of El Salvador as part of the geopolitical Cold War served to lessen opposition from his own public for the increase in military aid his administration was pouring into the country. Carter had consciously avoided imbuing El Salvador's struggle with East-West connotations. For the Reagan administration the tiny nation represented the opportunity for the United States to make a symbolic gesture illustrating to the U.S.S.R. and to the world that it was ready to once again reassert its role as world super-power.

The Reagan administration's tactic of defining all issues as related to the East-West struggle was opened by an intensive campaign accusing Nicaragua, Cuba and the Soviet Union of interference in El Salvador. Soon after Reagan's inauguration Secretary Haig told a group of Nato Commanders that:

"We consider what is happening (in El Salvador) is part of the global communist campaign coordination by Havana and Moscow to support the Marxist insurgency."

While Haig spoke of military equipment entering El Salvador via Nicaragua, he also referred in his briefing to the need "to deal with the immediate source of the problem - and that is Cuba."

On February 23, 1981, the administration published a series of documents entitled: Communist Interference In El Salvador, often referred to as the White Paper. The White Paper was a useful piece of propaganda which further exaggerated United States allegations that the Soviet Union, Cuba and Nicaragua were
aiding El Salvador’s revolutionaries. It was a well timed device which proved effective in gaining support for Reagan’s campaign of stepped up military aid and involvement in El Salvador. Congress during this period was expressing concern about the apparent willingness of the administration to send troops into El Salvador. To counter the threat of a noncooperative Congress Reagan presented the White Paper, which he imagined to be a perfect piece of public relations designed to reassure Congress and the American public that United States involvement in El Salvador was necessary.  

The White Paper was absolutely consistent with Reagan ideology and managed perfectly to tie Central American regional conflicts into Cold War philosophy. Nicaragua was named as the principle bridge for the transfer and disposal of 800 tons of armaments destined presumably for Salvadoran revolutionaries. Meanwhile the Salvadoran junta was portrayed as a victim of international communist aggression "coordinated" by Cuba.  

The White Paper aimed to substantiate three basic claims:  

"The central role played by Cuba and other Communist countries...in the political unification and arming of insurgent forces in El Salvador".  

that "the insurgency in El Salvador had been progressively transformed into another case of indirect aggression against a small Third world country by communist powers acting through Cuba".  

"Cuba, the Soviet Union and other Communist states...are carrying out what is clearly shown to be a well coordinated, covert effort to bring about the overthrow of El Salvador’s established government and to impose in its place a communist regime with no popular support".  

The engineers of the White Paper claimed that it carried proof of its charges in the form of reproductions of nineteen of the eighty alleged "captured documents" which were supposedly
uncovered by Jon Glassman on a visit to El Salvador. Glassman declared:

"This special report presents definite evidence of the clandestine military support given by the Soviet Union, Cuba and their Communist allies to Marxist-Leninist guerrillas now fighting to overthrow the established governments of El Salvador."29

However, the authenticity of these documents can be challenged on three counts. Firstly the White Paper only contained short and highly selected quotes and condensed summaries; nowhere was a complete document cited. Secondly, the reproductions in the White Paper singled out Fidel Castro and well-known Cuban and Nicaraguan figures to be mentioned by name while it refers to all other figures only by code names. Thirdly, all the reproductions had their accents marked in by hand suggesting that a Spanish typewriter was unavailable; all of which makes it unlikely that they were taken from actual documents originating in Central America. The sum of this evidence suggests that the "captured documents" were entirely concocted and that no such documents existed. The strongest response to the White Paper and its claims came from the Wall Street Journal which took the initiative in denouncing the 'document'. In the same issue Jon Glassman admitted that the White Paper contained "mistakes" and had involved "guessing" on the part of the State Department.30

Thus, while virtually all impact the administration had gained from publishing the White Paper was now discredited, it had proved effective in justifying considerable increases in military aid and the appropriation of additional advisers. Yet the forged documents failed to convince Reagan's European allies that they should support a 'tough-line' approach toward El Salvador's revolutionaries. Reagan's recent dispatched emissary to Europe,
Lawrence Eagleburger, received a very lukewarm response. European leaders, while doubting the authenticity of the documents, primarily feared an escalation of United States involvement and instead urged a political settlement.\footnote{31}

The mass of publicity devoted to El Salvador now produced a backlash in United States public opinion as, like the Europeans, most Americans felt that the Reagan administration's diagnosis of the sources of unrest was faulty and the action taken disproportionate to the threat. Both Congress and the United States public continued to worry about plunging into a new Vietnam.\footnote{32} The Washington Post and the New York Times both ran opinion polls in early March 1981 which showed public opinion opposed the President's current policy toward El Salvador.\footnote{33} As a result of public distaste for the administration's Salvadoran policy, government spokesmen abruptly lowered the volume of rhetoric. Central America, in particular El Salvador, suddenly moved off the front pages.\footnote{34}

It was an ironic situation as journalists "had merely responded to the administration's own attempt to create a crisis atmosphere by relating the Salvadoran problem to the East-West conflict".\footnote{35} Unfortunately for Reagan once journalists began researching the problems within El Salvador they could not be selective in the focus of their attentions. There was a public backlash as stories of death squad atrocities and increasing United States military involvement proliferated.

Reagan's critics attacked his El Salvador policy at its weakest point: the administration's reluctance to admit that successive governments in El Salvador were unwilling or unable to control human rights abuses by military and paramilitary
forces". Instead Pentagon "gift packages" were continuously seen by the Salvadorean military as a "green light" for lawlessness and political murder. In an effort to curb this amass of human rights abuses and in response to the United States public outcry of their administration's support for the status quo in El Salvador, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, on April 29, 1981, voted to impose restrictions on United States military aid to El Salvador. These restrictions required President Reagan to certify every six months that El Salvador was keeping its armed forces under control so as "to bring an end to the indiscriminate torture and murder of Salvadorean citizens by the armed forces."

The Bill's final version, adopted by the Senate in September, also required that the United States must be willing to negotiate only with groups "which renounce and refrain from further military or paramilitary opposition activity". This was clearly aimed at excluding the present military regime, whose human rights violations were well recorded. House of Representatives Leader, Gerry Studds, argued that the level of violence by the regime's security forces fell within section 502B of the Foreign Assistance Act, which provides a "cutoff" point for the ending of aid in "a consistent pattern of gross violation of internationally recognised human rights". Studds also maintained that a cut-off of aid would force the junta to seriously negotiate a cease fire and form a coalition government with the different groups comprising the F.M.L.N.

Despite these restrictions, and the continuing reports by Amnesty International and America's Watch that there had been no improvements in the human rights situation in El Salvador, the Reagan administration continued to certify that the Salvadorean
government was making a serious effort to rectify human rights. Reagan used a variety of arguments to corroborate his actions. In support of his second certification (July 1982) he cited that the rate of indiscriminate killings by government forces had declined. The churches legal aid office figures for the first six months of 1982 estimated 2829 people dead, which was almost half the 1981 figure. Reagan believed this showed great progress, but in reality the figure failed to take into account the Salvadorean military’s intensified campaign of terror in rural villages where the facilities for reporting and recording killings was almost nonexistent. For Reagan’s third certification (January 1983) he sited the creation of a government human rights commission set up at the insistence of Reagan’s own administration. Included on the commission was Colonel Lopez Nuila, commander of the National Police, who Elliot Abrams described at the time as having "a strong commitment to human rights". Obviously the commission was just a public relations effort.

The beginning of 1982 saw no change in the Salvadorean situation. In response the Reagan administration proposed a political solution centreing around ‘free’ elections which had been called for March 1982. In the lead up to elections the United States began an intensified campaign against the revolutionaries. Once again, this precipitated a negative reaction from the United States public who had only months before seen Daniel Ortega reading, at the United Nations General Assembly, the F.D.R.-F.M.L.N.’s peace proposal. The flippant manner in which Reagan rejected this precondition free proposal further sparked fears of spiraling United States military involvement in El Salvador. The negative United States public reaction to Reagan’s
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continuing rejection of negotiating a solution was clearly recorded in two February 1982 polls.

Newsweek's poll, entitled "Stay Out", revealed that 54% of those polled thought the United States should "stay completely out of the situation"; while 60% were against sending military aid, 89% opposes committing any United States troops, and an astounding 74% believed that United States involvement in El Salvador would turn into the Vietnam of the 1980's.43

A similar survey conducted between March 11-15 by C.B.S. news and the New York Times revealed parallel results. When asked specifically what Washington should do in El Salvador 63% said "stay out". The New York Times qualified this by stating:

"A majority of Americans fear that the U.S. will become involved in El Salvador as it was in Vietnam and want the Reagan administration to stay out of the guerrilla war".

As a result of this attitude only 10% of those polled approved sending economic aid while scarcely 6% endorsed military aid. The poll confirmed Newsweek's findings and added two disturbing features. Firstly, 50% of those polled thought Soviet and Cuban troops were fighting in El Salvador. Secondly, 41% thought whatever happened the Marines were likely to be sent in.44 Therefore not only did large sections of the United States public remain ignorant of the situation in El Salvador and of Central America in general; but the poll's showed how effective the Reagan administration's propaganda campaign was working as opposition to interference was based not on informed opinions but on the fundamental fear of costly and dangerous foreign adventures. Obviously the memory of Vietnam had reawakened everyone's isolationist reflexes.

A third poll conducted one month later by A.B.C. news and
the Washington Post reaffirmed the public's analogy between El Salvador and Vietnam, and at the same time confirmed that the Reagan propaganda machine was performing excellently. For example, by 46 to 44% respondents felt the war in El Salvador was "important to the security interests of the United States"; by 64 to 27% people felt the security interests of the United States would be endangered if a pro-communist government was set up in El Salvador. But interviewees disapproved of sending in troops to fight by 79% to 18% when the stipulation was added:

"what if sending American soldiers seemed to be the only way of saving the current government in El Salvador from being defeated?"

the public distaste for United States troop involvement remained virtually unchanged: 71% to 22% disapproval. Interestingly enough the public was evenly split - 42% to 42% - over whether the administration was telling the truth when it claimed to have no intention of sending United States troop's to El Salvador.45

None of the polls showed evidence of any resurgence in crusading interventionism on the part of the United States public; in fact, quite the reverse was true. There is substantial evidence that the public feared Reagan's policy regarding El Salvador and did not trust the administration to seek a peaceful solution. The result of both fears is seen in the way Reagan was constantly forced to reassure Congress and the American public that not only was the human rights situation improving in El Salvador, but also that United States troops would not be committed to the region.

As hope for a quick military victory diminished Reagan steadily focused his energies on a second more attainable objective: that of national elections for a constituent assembly.
In El Salvador individuals were not able to criticise leaders or raise questions. Basic issues were not debatable as a state of siege had been in effect since the sixth of March 1980. Therefore the challenging of any authority was treated as subversion and dealt with severely. This is clearly reflected in the number of civilian murders by security forces -1,500 unarmed civilians were killed in the three months leading up to the election. Decree number 507, enacted on December 3, 1980, essentially destroyed the judicial system as it permitted military forces to hold citizens without charges for one hundred and eighty days. Thus the risks involved in speaking out were immensely high.

By 1982 the El Salvadoran government controlled all radio transmissions as the National Telecommunications Administration (A.N.T.E.L.) had been under military control since August 1980. The only independent radio station, which was run by the church, suffered five bombings after the 1979 coup and finally shut down in 1980 after its transmitter was destroyed. Independent newspapers had all been closed down. Those that survived did so only by toeing the line drawn by government policy. By the late 1970’s the only three newspapers in San Salvador had all been forced to close: the Church paper was bombed in 1977 and after repeated attacks by government forces it folded; *La Cronica* suddenly stopped in 1980 when its editor-in-chief and two employees were kidnapped and brutally killed; *El Independiente* closed in 1981 after the army arrested its personnel and destroyed all printing machinery. Two weeks before the election a death list of thirty-five Salvadoran and foreign journalists appeared, signed by the General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez Brigade. It read:
"This is the first list of pseudo-journalists at the service of the international press who have been condemned to death by the patriots of our organisation. We are investigating others who come and go to find out to whom they are of service."

The goal was obviously to inhibit news coverage and to hold journalists personally accountable for what they wrote."

A characteristic of totalitarian states is to seek to destroy all independent organisations, thus leaving the individual isolated, powerless and manipulable. Prior to the election, El Salvador had already witnessed the demise of popular and private organisations such groups are essential to a democracy as they protect individuals and political activity and restrain state power. In El Salvador the right of assembly and organising of Trade Unions was eliminated after the October coup. Decree 507 prohibited collective bargaining and the right to strike. Teachers were another group singled out for rough treatment. A July 1982 report by the banned Salvadorean Teachers' Union stated that two hundred and ninety-two teachers had been murdered, sixteen had disappeared, fifty-two had been arrested and one thousand two hundred schools had been closed by the government - all since the 1979 coup. The third major group to fall victim to government discrimination was the Church. Included in the many religious killings was the assassination of Archbishop Romero by government forces in March 1980.30

With the evolution of totalitarian societies there is always a steady increase of state-sponsored terror. "In El Salvador the official instruments of state coercion - the Army, the National Guard, the Treasury Police, and the National Police - have increased in size, resources and training". Killings of unarmed citizens by 'death squads' and the outlawed terrorist
organisation ORDEN, which was sponsored by the army and the security forces occurred at the rate of over eight hundred people per month between the October coup and the elections.\footnote{51}

Maintaining political parties has not been possible in El Salvador. The Democratic Revolutionary Front (F.D.R.) has been unable to announce any of its candidates for fear of right-wing retaliation; even Duarte's Christian Democratic Party (P.D.C.) had suffered numerous casualties from the army and the death squads. Only parties whose ideology was center-right, or further to that extreme, escaped political decimation.\footnote{52}

Ironically little attention was paid to the ways in which the elections were clearly intended to exclude the left. Notably the Provisional Law for the Formation and Registration of Political Parties which required all new parties to submit the names and addresses of at least three thousand of its members, all of which would serve as a convenient death list. Reagan was able to demobilize critics of his Salvadoran policy by pointing to El Salvador's "freely elected government" and how the F.D.R.-F.M.L.N. refused to participate in the elections.\footnote{53}

It became obvious that the aim of these 'circus' elections was to allay the mounting criticism against Reagan by the United States Congress and public. To ensure a superior government for the Salvadoran people was never a priority. To achieve such an end the administration sent an unprecedented amount of journalists and aid to El Salvador. Over seven hundred journalists flocked to cover the election. United States television networks focused a massive amount of attention on the election, thereby giving it the aura of having significant importance for the United States of America. The State Department also realised
that the presence and cooperation of international observers was
a key factor in propaganda terms. By December 1981 El Salvador
had invited sixty countries to send official delegations to
observe the election. Despite intensive lobbying by the United
States few countries were inclined to send an observer delega-
tion. No Western European nation, except Great Britain, took
part; Japan and Canada also declined El Salvador’s offer. Aside
from Great Britain this left a generally right-wing and nondemo-
cratic group of countries taking part.\textsuperscript{54} The United States also
contributed the necessary aid for the observers expenses:
$220,000 in an aid grant, and $150,000 from four private founda-
tions which Elliot Abrams persuaded to contribute — all contribu-
tors had well known associations with right wing causes.\textsuperscript{55}

The international observers arrived on Friday, March 26,
two days after campaigning officially ended, and were back home
by the Monday or Tuesday after Sunday’s voting. Fooled by the
number of voters, reports to the press reflected a scant under-
standing of the situation in El Salvador. The election day turn-
out thus silenced both administration critics in Congress and
F.D.R.-F.M.L.N. backers in Europe. It was the perfect public
relations triumph as all focus was shifted away from human rights
violations as journalists were forced to accept the Reagan admin-
istration’s conclusions that the elections were a defeat for the
guerrillas. On reflection this outlook is superficial and clearly
does not stand up to any close examination. In the light of
deepen historical analysis observers’ comments provide amusing,
if not sickening, reading. For example, Howard Penniman, a member
of the conservative American Enterprise Institute, was quoted
extensively by Newsweek about guerrilla disruption of the elec-
"In Apopa, Salvadoreans "waited in line to vote in the schoolyard. Suddenly leftist guerrillas opened fire...voters ran for cover or hit the dirt. When the shooting died down, the people strode right back into line".

Or:

"Leftists burned ninety buses to halt transportation to the polls, but stretches of the Pan American highway...were closed with thousands of voters who said they had hiked up to twelve miles to cast their ballots".56

Freedom House, a well known organisation controlled by the White House, also offered some dubious comments on the guerrilla disruptions of the elections, but preferred to concentrate its survey on the way Salvadoreans were fulfilling their "civic obligation" by "participating positively" in the election. The Freedom House report termed the election:

"a referendum on itself, a test of political party strength, and a mandate for peace".57

The Reagan administration was able to considerably exploit the situation during the following years to its best advantage. Reagan declared that the election proved that El Salvadorans had "clearly repudiated violence" and instead "voiced their commitment to a democratic future".58 The administration quickly followed suit in an attempt - so it seemed - to exceed one another in their praise for the democratic stand El Salvador had taken:

"There is now a government in El Salvador that has come to power as the result of a fair, honest national election...The people frequently voted under tremendously difficult conditions. The leadership of the Marxist guerrillas decided to conduct a concerted and bloody campaign to prevent the exercise of the popular will". Elliot Abrams, Assistant Secretary For Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs.59

"Ordinary Salvadorean men and women, in unprece-
dented numbers, yesterday displayed the courage and civic responsibility (to vote. The Salvadorean peoples' stunning personal commitment to the power of the democratic vision is an unanswerable repudiation of the advocates of force and violence". Alexander Haig, Secretary of State.60

"On March 28 1982, more than 1.5 million Salvadorans turned out to vote on the nation's first free election ever. They believed their vote was important, and they were not disappointed. Power passed peacefully to a government of National Unity headed by independent Alvaro Magana". Langborne A. Motley, Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs.61

Although the desired result was guaranteed, trickery and fraud were, nevertheless, important on election day. A massive voter turnout was crucial in order for the media to interpret the result as a triumph for democracy and as a repudiation of the revolutionaries. This was achieved by three basic methods.

Firstly long queues were a powerful media image used to evoke feelings of the positive meaning and significance of the election. While the Reagan administration quoted many Salvadorans with positive messages while exercising their right to vote Lynda Schuster, of the Wall Street Journal, quoted one voter, Maria Amanda Parada, as stating:

"I'll vote because they're forcing me to vote, but don't have the slightest idea what it means".62

In reality the long lines were the result of the small number of polling places established by the authorities. For example in San Salvador there was only thirteen polling places for a voting population of five hundred thousand - compared with the twenty to twenty-five polling places used in previous elections.63 The official line on the distinct lack of polling places was so as to lighten the load of the security forces guarding the polls to ensure fairplay.64

Legal obligation made voting a requirement. The Junta's
Electoral Law stated that:

"voting is a right and a duty of all citizens and its exercise is nontransferable and compulsory...[ten days after the elections] the state authorities shall demand evidence from the people that they voted and report anyone without such evidence to the town mayor".

As already mentioned the Junta stamped voters' national identity cards, and marked the finger of each person with invisible ink.

The official reason for such actions was to prevent multiple voting. In reality people voted out of fear of reprisal, despite mass media and official observers being told that reprisal would only come from the left. Blank Ballots accounted for roughly 12%. These were cast at grave risk as ballots were on thin pieces of paper marked with thick black pens, the ballot was then folded and placed into a transparent box, thereby making a person's ballot easily identifiable as they cast it.65

An inflated vote count was used. Interestingly, voter turnout rapidly reached then exceeded the one hundred percent mark for pre-election eligible voter limits. The New York Times quoted unnamed United States officials as hoping for at least five hundred thousand voters - out of an estimated one million three hundred thousand voters. However final returns claimed more than one million five hundred thousand El Salvadorans voted.66 Although no official census had been conducted since 1971, conservative estimates of the Central American University produced a figure no higher than one million eight hundred thousand eligible voters, therefore indicating a turnout of greater the eighty percent. What discredits this theory is that the Jose Simeon Canas University of Central America conducted two studies, one of which concluded that it was only possible for seven hundred and seventy-seven thousand ballots to be cast, the other estimated the
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figure at one million two hundred and eighty-one thousand and six hundred. The Universities figures were obtained by taking into account the time it took to vote, the number of polling places and the number of hours they were open.67

Further evidence of inflated vote totals could be connected to the fact that the Junta had three million ballots printed. The government justified this action claiming that the guerrillas were likely to attack polling places and destroy ballots. Furthermore, the reporting and tabulating of the votes was significantly delayed, the final count not being completed until one week after the election.68 The C.I.A. shares responsibility for the inflated vote total. While the C.I.A.'s pre-election preparations were well known, a secret operations unit connected with the Pentagon was also on the spot during the election. All voting tallies were done on computers brought by the United States and programmed by the C.I.A. Surely, this seriously raises the possibility of C.I.A. meddling.69 Robert E. White, President Carter's former Ambassador to El Salvador, provided further evidence of C.I.A. involvement in the election when he stated:

"William J. Casey...in obedience to God-knows-what imperative and with his customary sense of timing, publicly bragged that the C.I.A. had muddled in the election."

Originally reported in the Wall Street Journal July 16, 1982, in which Casey announced that:

"the C.I.A. was now again active in clandestine activities albeit in post-Watergate style",

adding,

"for instance, we helped out in the El Salvador election."70

The electoral outcome would initially provide the Reagan administration with some cause for anxiety as Jose Napoleon
Duarte won only twenty-four of the sixty seats in the Constituent Assembly. It quickly became evident that Roberto D'Aubuisson, head of the National Republican Alliance Party, would head the Assembly as leader of a conservative coalition. While American diplomats tried to persuade rightist forces that their exclusion of the Christian Democrats could jeopardize future United States aid. By mid-April D'Aubuisson was installed as President of the Assembly, from which all Christian Democrats were excluded.

The Reagan administration in an all out effort to prevent D'Aubuisson gaining the Presidency, influenced the Assembly to choose Alvaro Magana. Although Magana had close ties to the military he could be presented to the media as a "centrist", thus continuing the centrist tradition formerly personified by Duarte. To an outsider it appears ironic that Reagan, having made the elections the centerpiece of his policy, now sought to alter their result by continually interfering. In reality what did the elections actually achieve? While they may have provided a symbolic act to pacify the United States population the election certainly did not change the regimes character; Tommie Sue Montgomery notes:

"The same army that had been running the country since 1931 was still in control."

At the same time the terror inflicted by the death squads and security forces was vigorously renewed; within four months after the elections many Christian Democrat leaders, including six Mayors, had been murdered. All witnesses blamed the death squads. Both the United States and Salvadorean leadership regarded the human rights abuses by the military as primarily a public relations problem. Secretary Haig became particularly concerned about the Salvadorean militaries "no prisoners" policy
because the International Red Cross was threatening to pull out unless human rights improved. Red Cross departure, according to Haig, "would be a severe blow to our efforts to maintain Congressional support." Haig's public relations effort was primarily in response to the F.M.L.N.'s new tactic of taking prisoners and treating them according to the dictates of the Geneva Convention by turning them over to the International Red Cross. The handing over of Prisoners of War to the Red Cross constituted not only a recognition of the revolutionaries as a legitimate power under the international rules of war, but, internationally, it gave the F.M.L.N. a great deal of political credit. Furthermore the F.M.L.N. tactic of taking prisoners influenced many soldiers of government forces that it was better to surrender than risk being killed."

1983 saw several alternatives available to the Reagan administration with regards policy in El Salvador. Obviously with the present situation the United States could withdraw all support and allow the revolution to take its course. Secondly, negotiations were still an option that was being strongly suggested by Thomas Enders and Ambassador Hinton. Instead, at the insistence of Jeane Kirkpatrick and N.S.C. adviser William Clark, Reagan refused to compromise with the leftist forces and instead began to further commit the United States to a hard line approach. Thus, Reagan chose to basically continue United States traditionally policy in the region - an approach based on United States military aid and advisers, that had already failed."

While there was never any doubt that the United States could ultimately win the war in El Salvador. The question remained at what price would victory be extracted as a continuing
blood bath further polarized the area, turning people on both sides further toward extremism. Looking further ahead, a conservative victory would mean a continuation of repressive policies, while the remnants of the revolutionaries regrouped to challenge the rightist rulers. Thus Salvadoran conditions would simply be frozen at those of 1981.79

Further evidence of increasing United States involvement was supplied by Lieutenant General Wallace H. Nutting, head of the United States Southern Command in Panama, who publicly expressed what everyone in the Reagan administration had suspected for a long time: that Central America is at war and that the United States "is engaged in that war". Nutting believed that "the guerrillas are winning the psychological war" and that the United States as a whole must rally behind the President to prove to the guerrillas that "they can't win"; otherwise Nutting warned, "a Marxist government [will] take office in San Salvador".80

Taking their cues from Reagan his administration quickly picked up on their usage of Cold war rhetoric:

"The people of El Salvador have proved they want democracy. But if guerrilla violence succeeds, they won’t get it. El Salvador will join Cuba and Nicaragua as a base for spreading fresh violence to Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica...The Communist agenda...is to exploit human suffering in Central America to stroke at the heart of the Western Hemisphere".81

"There is a war in Central America that is being fuelled by the Soviets and the Cubans. They are arming, training, supplying, and encouraging a war to subjugate another nation to communism, and that nation is El Salvador. The Soviets and the Cubans are operating from a base called Nicaragua..."82

The announcement of the Kissinger Commission in 1984 also added fuel to the fire. In a barrage of rhetoric the report
recommended an additional four hundred million dollars in military funds over 1984-1985; warning that:

"The worst possible policy for El Salvador is to provide just enough aid to keep the war going, but too little to wage it successfully".03

The Commissions report spent most of its time denouncing "Marxist-Leninist violence",04 instead of offering sensible solutions to end the troubles of El Salvador. Instead, Kissinger's solution was essentially military and can be directly paralleled with United States strategy in Vietnam, that is, to intensify local military training, increasing its size, supplies and means of mobility, all through massive injections of United States aid. This policy had previously been tested and rejected in Vietnam. Yet this did not deter the Reagan administration from reimplementing it. In response to the Commissions recommendations Stuart Holland and Donald Anderson warned:

"If it once was said that history repeats itself first as tragedy and then as farce, we regret to say that in the case of the Kissinger Commission, after all the transparent lessons of Vietnam, it is set to repeat itself again as tragedy".05

The Commission's second main recommendation was to hold another election, this time to elect a President. This totally ignored the fact that elections held two years ago had failed to bring a peaceful solution further into sight.

The Reagan administration paid no heed to the lessons of history and instead went on charging ahead with further appropriations of military aid and planning for Presidential elections. On February 17, 1984, President Reagan, in the interests of "advancing peace and democracy" and on the Kissinger Commissions "recommendations", requested one hundred and seventy-eight million dollars in military aid for El Salvador for fiscal year
1984; of which ninety-three million would be appropriated immediately. Unfortunately Reagan’s hopes for a stepped up military program in El Salvador were momentarily dashed in the aftermath of the United States setback in Lebanon. While Secretary Shultz accused Congress of forcing the United States to “walk away” from the crisis many Congressmen were behind William Lehman when he told Shultz:

“We’re in a real swamp down there and we ought to get the hell out”.

While Shultz continued to speak of the “moderates” ruling El Salvador Reagan attempted to gain public support by emphasizing how El Salvador’s “democracy” was “plagued by a communist insurgency”, one which has “pledged an all-out effort to disrupt the elections”; thus it became an “emergency situation” requiring “military assistance”. In an extraordinary show of strength Congress refused to falter from its stand and it was Reagan himself who, had to compromise, this time asking for sixty-two million to be passed immediately. This was quickly approved by the Senate but stalled in the House of Representatives before Easter recess. On April 13, 1984, Reagan exercised his authority in providing the necessary funds to “initially help” El Salvador.

The deliberate stalling of Salvadoran military aid proved that United States public pressure, exerted on government representatives, clearly indicated to the Reagan administration that they wanted to deescalate the conflict rather than to find themselves, once again, backing the wrong side. The United States public did not believe that a solution could be found through increased military aid or by holding Presidential elections. As time would show, there was no decline in death squad activity during or after the Presidential election. In fact quite the
reverse occurred as one death squad blatantly published a death threat in the conservative daily, Diario de Hoy, stating:

"We inform radio, television and newspaper journalists who collaborate with the enemy of our republic that they will be executed". 99

As in previous elections the United States was not completely exonerated from the charge of interference, despite Secretary Shultz telling the world that:

"the choices are real, and the balloting...fair. The outcome is not a foregone conclusion". 91

Roberto D'Aubuisson's vice-president Hugo Barrera described the elections as a "farce" stating:

"It is the C.I.A. who was won the election, and not the Christian Democrats".

Washington did admit that the C.I.A. had provided two million one hundred thousand dollars in an effort to prevent D'Aubuisson's victory. Out this one million four hundred thousand dollars was given to two parties: nine hundred and sixty thousand to the Christian Democrats under Duarte, and four hundred and thirty-seven thousand dollars to the National Conciliation Party under Francisco Jose Guerrero. Once again it was an outstanding voter turn out - eighty percent of the total voting population - of which Duarte won fifty-four percent of the vote. 92

For the Reagan administration - fearful of Sandinista-type revolution - President Duarte supplied political relief. In Congress he was seen as a courageous reformer who had made peace with the business classes and forged an alliance with the militaries more moderate leaders. In reality Duarte found himself a prisoner of his own triumph, accepted by the military as the governments head only because he was the key to continued Congres-
sional support. Meanwhile business leaders had to give up their support for D'Aubuisson in favour of Duarte. In return the United States embassy assured them that their interests would be protected from all demands for land reform or from political organisations against them. Thus President Duarte had, ironically, become the glue in the patched up alliance between the military and the business classes and as such he could not investigate any possibilities of land reform for fear of alienating those whose help he needed to rebuild the economy. Nor could he prosecute the military for human rights abuses for fear of alienating the military high command.93

What the United States refused to acknowledge was that for all Duarte's good intentions he has had to back away from them all. His presence had merely ratified the status quo, leaving little room for the kind of political and social reforms that had been urgent since the mid-1970's. Whereas Duarte once spoke of alienating both the left and the right, now he spoke of unifying the right and the center for an all out war on the left. Duarte sold himself to United States Congressmen as the embodiment of the American ideal of peaceful change. Regrettably, as Duarte continued to lose power his ideal lost power and for many in the United States this was very difficult to face. In 1988 Duarte's popularity was at an all time high in the United States, a great deal of sympathy being gained for him after the October 1986 earthquake that devastated the capital city of San Salvador. But within El Salvador discontent remained as strong as ever.94

By early 1988 El Salvador no longer made front-page news every second day; this did not mean the conflict was resolved. Instead it is more of an indication on how the news media "dis-
like routine" and since the situation in El Salvador remained at a "stalemate" the "ambitious freelances now head for Managua instead". Yet El Salvador ought to have remained a compelling story in the United States press as it then had the strongest guerrilla insurgency in Central America. United States aid and presence was still very high, and although figures were considerably lower than they were at the conflicts height, El Salvador was still the second largest recipient of United States aid after Israel, receiving over five hundred million dollars in 1987. 95

When the United States initially committed itself in El Salvador it was thought to be an easy show of strength; a way the United States could finally expiate all remaining haunting Vietnam memories. El Salvador was certainly not another Vietnam, not in size, topography, or militarization, there was no North Vietnam waiting on El Salvador's borders, no country to supply troops, no Cambodia or Laos to serve as border sanctuaries. But, victory had not come as swiftly or easily as United States policy makers thought. This was because the Reagan administration refused to accept the level of popular support attached to the revolutionaries and at the same time was blind to the weakness of the Salvadoran armed forces who, while brutally competent in the repression of unarmed civilians, could not fight a war even with all the hardware and training the United States provided them with. At the same time the revolutionary forces showed an ability to adapt to continual isolation, learning from and improving on the guerrilla tactics of previous Latin revolutionaries.

Meanwhile, as time progressed and the war remained unresolved, what little Duarte once had continued to dwindle. Traditional elites all joined the far right after the President pro-
posed new tax regulations aimed at "making the rich pay their fair share of the war". Parliamentary boycotts and National Business Association strikes, while effective, did not stop Duarte from raising an additional twenty-four million dollars for the war effort. At the same time a fresh wave of trade union based protest directed by the National Unity of Salvadorean Workers swept support away from Duarte's ruling Christian Democrats. These people, after seven bloody years of disruptive civil war, felt Duarte's 'economic austerity package', launched in January 1986, which raised consumer taxes, food prices, fuel and transport costs by forty to fifty percent, to be the final insult. Trade union members immediately embarked on a series of strikes. All of which had the effect of further crippling an already polarized economy.

Duarte's response to this was two-fold; firstly he initiated a sudden crackdown against human rights violators throughout 1986 and 1987; after one thousand seven hundred and twenty-five civilians died at the hands of the security forces in 1986 alone. Secondly, Duarte felt the renewed pressure on him to resume peace talks with the F.D.R.-F.M.L.N. compelling. On June 1, 1986, negotiations with the opposition resumed. As yet no solution was any closer than it was seven years ago.

By early 1988 Duarte's support had completely eroded. Four years after his election he had not only failed to deliver any of his economic promises but the violence continued as civil war raged ahead. Duarte's unpopularity was clearly reflected in the March 1988 elections in which his Christian Democrats won only thirty-five percent of the vote, thereby losing eleven of its thirty-three Assembly seats. The elections showed a disturb-
ing swing toward the right as D'Aubuisson's A.R.E.N.A. party captured fifty-five percent of the vote and thirty-one seats of the sixty seat Assembly. A.R.E.N.A. also resoundly won the mayoralty races by taking thirteen of the fourteen provincial capitals. For the F.M.L.N. an A.R.E.N.A. victory was viewed as helping their cause by further increasing polarization within El Salvador. 100

What the United States did was to postpone the inevitable revolutionary process by continually providing the military backing which the ruling Salvadorean oligarchy needed. This preservation of the status quo satisfied only the insatiably insecure needs of the Reagan administration whose dedication to repression in the name of "democracy" was unequalled. What Reagan failed to realise was that by continually aiding the El Salvadorean government he was forcing her rulers to become more and more dependent on him. Obviously this reliance was subject to the continuation of Reagan's administration or one which shared his ideology.

The only possible conclusion one can draw from this is that the Salvadorean regime was being maintained by the United States government, without whose aid it would collapse. The reasoning behind such fervent backing was to prevent a communist takeover, be it apparent or not. The F.D.R.-F.M.L.N. realised that with a change in United States government they will have another opportunity to bring about a "final offensive", perhaps with the backing of Nicaragua, Cuha and ultimately the Soviet Union. The threat of a communist El Salvador that Reagan imagined was nonexistent, the people of El Salvador were only interested in having a comparable standard of living to the United States not in controlling or overtaking the United States or any other Central American nation. While it is true that a peoples govern-
ment would cause considerable discomfort to El Salvador’s wealthy minority and their United States backers, it is only realistic if not inevitable that such a government should evolve. El Salvador’s days as a utopian paradise for exploitation by the rich are definitely numbered. Reagan, rather than providing any short or long-term solutions, has exacerbated the situation by his own personal paranoia.
FOOTNOTES


(2) Ibid, p.126.


(12) Ibid, p.45. The Zimbabwe Option sought a negotiated settlement to the problem in El Salvador just as Thatcher’s government in Britain had achieved in Zimbabwe – Rhodesia; all of which led to the election of the Marxist, but independent, government of Robert Mugabe.


(14) "Reagan In Central America", Luis Maria, Trouble In Our Own Backyard: Central America And The United States In The Eighties, edited by Martin Diskin, New York, Pantheon Books, 1984, pp.45-46.

(15) The previous administration had suspended military aid after the murder of four American nuns and a lay person in December, 1981. However, Carter had resumed military aid during January 1981 after accusing the F.M.L.N. of receiving arms from Cuba. Under The Eagle, J. Pearce, p.238.


(18) Weakness And Deceit, R. Bonner, p.278.

(19) Inside Central America, P. Berryman, p.83.


(21) Weakness And Deceit, R. Bonner, p.236.

(22) "Duarte Asserts More Urgent Requirement Is Economic Assistance", Edward Schumacher, New York Times, February 21,


(26) "Reagan And Central America", L.Maria, Trouble In Our Own Backyard, edited by M. Diskin, p.53.


(30) Ibid.


(39) "Latin America: Change Or Continuity?" Paul E. Sigmund, Foreign Affairs, Volume 60 no.3, pp.634-635.

(40) Americas Watch, July 1983 report outlined several well known cases of human rights violations by Salvadorean military forces. It concluded that not a single case of criminal punishment had befallen on any member of the Salvadorean armed forces for human rights violations; in Weakness And Deceit, R. Bonner, pp.349-355.

(41) Ibid.


(47) Weakness And Deceit, R. Bonner, pp.297-298.

(48) Demonstration Elections, E.S. Herman and F. Brodhead, pp.11-12, 120.

(49) Ibid, pp.12, 120-121.


(51) Ibid, pp.13, 124. The figure of 800 per month is a conservative estimate based on figures of the Legal Aid office of the Archdiocese of El Salvador; for a breakdown of figures see

(53) Ibid, pp.118-119.


(55) Ibid; the four Foundations are : The Scaife Foundation, the Olin Foundation, the Smith Richardson Foundation, and the Grace Foundation


(62) "Politics Of Fear : Having A Free Election In The Midst Of A

(63) Demonstration Elections, E.S. Herman and F. Brodhead, pp.126-127.


(65) Demonstration Elections, E.S. Herman and F. Brodhead, pp.127-129.


(68) Ibid.


(71) Robert White described D'Aubuisson as a "pathological killer", a term he well deserved after many years organising the death squads. Locally he was referred to as "Blowtorch Bob" because of his love of torture. D'Aubuisson stated he could "eliminate" all leftist guerrillas in three months - by indiscriminate napalming. Interestingly, D'Aubuisson's election campaign was devised by the largest U.S. public relations agency operating abroad: McCann Erickson. A Miami based group of businessmen paid McCann-Erickson $200,000 to devise an advertising campaign to sell the right wing; the businessmen obviously counted on
D'Aubuisson to restore order for their companies to continue exploitation; see "The Selling Of D'Aubuisson", The Nation, July 24-31, 1982, pp.72-73.


(73) Demonstration Elections, E.S. Herman and F. Brodhead, p.140.

"Tankrum Politics In El Salvador", Editorial, New York Times, April 24, 1982; this describes Magana as "an independent centrist" and D'Aubuisson as "violence prone", A22.


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(77) "El Salvador : The Roots Of Revolution", T.S. Montgomery, Central America : Crisis And Adaption, edited by S. Ropp and J. Morris, p.109. Montgomery notes that in 1982 for every 100 casualties among government troops there were 8 P.O.W.'s, by January 1983 this had increased to 44 P.O.W.'s.
(80) "General Urges Aid To Central America", Karen De Young, Washington Post, May 22, 1983. Nuttins comments unfortunately came soon after the Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously voted an additional $20 million in military aid for El Salvador - see New York Times, May 11, 1983, "Senate Panel Votes $20 Million In Aid To El Salvador", Martin Tokhin, A10 -and as a consequence General Edward C. Meyer, Army's Chief Of Staff, found himself publicly stating that U.S. combat troops would not be committed to El Salvador because "Americans would not support them"; see "U.S. Army Chief Opposes Sending Combat Forces To Aid El Salvador", Richard Halloran, New York Times, June 10, 1983, Al, A9. Yet General Meyers statement about noninvolvement of U.S. troops in combat had already been proved false as a number of instances of armed Americans spotted in combat areas had already been seen - a trend that would continue, much to the administra-


(84) Ibid., p.85.


(86) "A National Response To A Crisis In Central America", Ambas-
sador L.A. Motley, statement before Subcommittee on Foreign Operations to the House appropriations Committee, March 27, 1984,


(88) Reagan’s radio address to the Nation, March 24, 1984,

(89) "A National Response To The Crisis In Central America",

(90) "Death Squad In El Salvador Threatens To Kill Journalists",


(94) Estimates of those made homeless by the earthquake are around 300,000, yet the United States seemed more concerned with rebuilding its devastated Embassy in San Salvador. United States officials requested $70 million to rebuild, a total the exceeded the sum total of United States emergency aid granted by Congress for El Salvador’s relief effort by $20 million. "Wars Earthquake", Central American Report, January-February, 1987, p.4.

(95) "Remember El Salvador?" Columbia Journalism Review,
The amount of United States military aid to El Salvador from 1980-1984 exceeds $2 billion; a bipartisan Congressional group, the Arms Control and Foreign Policy Caucus, accused the Reagan administration of supplying "insufficient, misleading and in some cases false information" concerning aid to El Salvador. The caucus traced actual expenditures rather than accepting budget classifications at face value and found that since 1980 85% ($1.445 billion) of all aid to El Salvador was for the military as opposed to the 25% claimed by the administration. "Lawmakers Say U.S. Is Misusing Aid To El Salvador", Joel Brinkley, New York Times, February 12, 1985, Al, A7.


(98) Figures from Tutel Legal, the Human Rights office of the Catholic church; in "Proping Up The President", Ibid, p.10.

(99) "Backdown And Concessions", Central American Report, July/August, 1986, p.3.

CHAPTER THREE: HONDURAS, A MILITARIZED STATE AND LAUNCHING PAD FOR UNITED STATES CENTRAL AMERICAN OPERATIONS

The underlying purpose of this chapter is to determine how Reagan's current foreign policy has pushed Honduras toward not only a war with Nicaragua but also an internal civil war in which the Honduran people fight a regime of renewed military repression. Firstly, briefly backgrounding Honduras' past will show how the Reagan administration in the 1980's has assumed the role left by the United States banana companies of the first half of the twentieth century, and has transformed Honduras from an oppressed but neutral United States proxy into the Central American military base for United States operations. Secondly, by discussing Honduran 'democracy' the thesis shows how, with typical Reagan showmanship, the United States forced elections to be held for its own politico-propaganda reasons. The United States then undercut the very democratic institutions it was supposedly trying to advance by injecting such mammoth amounts of military aid into the country that the elected government became a rubber-stamp for United States and Honduran military needs. Thirdly, as a direct result of this military buildup an increasing trend of human rights violations occurred, not only by the Honduran military but also by contra forces which were allowed to operate out of Honduran border towns. Thus the intensification of violence in Honduras was a direct result of the Reagan administration's foreign policy.

The Reagan administration wanted Honduras to be seen as the forerunner of things to come in Central America; representing a "democratic alternative" to the Soviet-backed communism of Nicaragua.
was seen as the key United States ally for containing expanding revolutionary movements. Chosen because of her relative stability and geographical position, Honduras was the perfect buffer between Nicaragua and the revolutionary forces in El Salvador and Guatemala. President Carter’s Assistant Secretary of States, Viron P. Vaky, noted after the Sandinista revolution that:

"geography gives Honduras a central role in the prevention of regional conflict between Nicaragua and its conservative northern neighbours".

Vaky concluded:

"Honduras is thus central to the 'bridge building' process we hope will emerge in Central America".2

Honduras assumed her role as a dependable satellite - bought and paid for by United States military and economic aid - replacing Somoza’s Nicaragua as the United States most reliable ally in the region.

Initially, Honduras seemed to comply with all United States demands, but with Reagan’s inauguration Washington insisted that an elected democratic government take over from the military in the running of Honduras. Elections held in November 1981 and 1982 provided the appearance of power naturally passing from the Honduran military to an elected President and his civilian government. This ‘democratic appearance’ however, was merely an illusionary tactic covering a United States backed Honduran military.3

Honduran elections held in 1981 were the first in over twenty-five years intended to directly select a Congress. Although the elections offered no choice of candidates they were recognised as clean and fair with eighty-one percent of all registered voters participating. Under the Honduran system of proportional representation the Liberals won thirty-five seats to
the Nationalists thirty-three, while the Innovation and Unity Party took the remaining three seats. The Presidential elections of November 1982 saw an even greater victory for the Liberals, led by Dr. Roberto Suazo Cordova, who took office with a clear one hundred thousand majority.

The Liberal victory had been a massive repudiation of the military as the Liberals reputation for antimilitarism was well known. However, the Honduran constitutional government was merely a facade for the powerful armed forces. President Cordova and Gustavo Alvarez Martinez - head of the military (C.O.S.U.F.A.) - had developed a close working relationship over the years, and before the elections they had agreed that in return for military cooperation Suazo would not instigate investigations into military corruption. Nor would there be any civilian interference into military affairs - including national security and matters relating to the Honduran borders. In addition, the military would retain a veto over cabinet appointments. Alvarez and Suazo further cemented their relationship in April 1982 when, at Alvarez’s insistence, President Cordova amended the constitution and made Alvarez a Brigadier General.

Immediately after the November 1981 elections the United States upgraded its Honduran embassy from grade four to grade two, and replaced Ambassador Jack Binns with John Dimitri Negroponte - a skilled diplomat known for his work in the Saigon embassy at the height of the Vietnam war. Over the next few years the Alvarez-Negroponte-Suazo triumvirate ruled Honduras. President Cordova’s role being to turn the Assembly into a rubber stamp for executive policy. Meanwhile Negroponte and Alvarez not only shared ‘real’ power over Honduras, but they also had the
same beliefs and goal: an intensive hatred of communism and a
desire to destroy the Sandinista government.6 A quarter of a cen-
tury earlier John Foster Dulles had orchestrated the downfall of
Jacobo Arbenz’s reformist government of Guatemala, now, the Rea-
gan administration chose to make Honduras its base for the sub-
version and destabilization of Nicaragua.7

The Reagan administration made no pretense of continuing
Carter’s human rights program, and instead gave priority to the
defeat of communism over human rights programs by injecting fresh
amounts of military and economic aid into her Central American
allies. This policy drew Honduras into a state of war where pov-
erity and military repression dramatically increased. The Honduran
economy remained unchanged from previous decades as the business
community retained its dominance by inflicting Reaganomics—preference for private business, incentives for foreign investment,
reduction in state corporations, cutbacks in social welfare pro-
grams, removal of price controls—onto an increasingly impover-
ished country: where twenty-five percent of the population were
unemployed and sixty percent of families in rural areas were mal-
nourished.8

Inevitably, the effect of this policy further echoed the
Honduran democratic process. Reagan’s strategy of combining a
recently elected civilian government with an overpowering mili-
tary and then choosing to deal almost exclusively with that same
military, in effect, turned back the clock to a previous decade
of corruption under Colonel Policarpo Paz Garcia. The Reagan
administration’s only concern for Honduras was how it could be
used as a “counterrevolutionary trampoline”.9

Honduran ‘democracy’ was, therefore doomed from the begin-
ning; not only because of the economic crisis that seemed beyond solution but because of United States government policies propelling Honduran involvement deeper into the widening Central American conflict. The Reagan administration’s dualistic actions were seen in the way she praised Honduran elections as a step in the right direction, and yet United States policy then undercut all democratic advances by supplying the Honduran military with new weapons, logistical and communications equipment. Reagan’s administration appeared unable to grasp the reality that the goals of the Honduran military conflicted with the Honduran government. By supporting the military, as opposed to the elected government, the United States supported the continuation of authoritarian rule.¹⁰

Although Reagan continued Carter’s Honduran policy until the end of 1981 he, nevertheless, had a very different conception of the root cause of Honduran problems. From the beginning Reagan’s vision of Central America was that of a battleground between East and West. Reagan came to believe that the Nicaraguan-Honduran border was the ‘fourth border’ of the United States and as such it would not only serve as a spring-board for the destabilization of Nicaragua but also as a base for United States military operations in the region. To this end Reagan’s policy was reminiscent of ‘big stick’ diplomacy during the early twentieth century when the United States Marines occupied Cuba, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, all in order to protect United States property, maintain order and the status quo.¹¹

Under Álvarez, the army was willing to enter battle against “communists” in both El Salvador and Nicaragua, but the Pentagon realised that a massive modernization program was needed to over-
The escalation in United States military aid began in 1982 when thirty-two million three hundred thousand dollars was allocated; prior to this military aid for 1980 was only three million and five million five hundred thousand dollars for 1981. By 1986 military aid had increased over ten fold reaching a staggering eighty-eight million two hundred thousand dollars with Honduras becoming the largest recipient of United States military aid in Latin America.\(^{12}\)

The aid was easily gained as the Reagan administration had long since mastered the art of promoting 'regional' causes. Congress was merely told how Honduras was experiencing an economic crisis "caused by the Sandinista revolution" and that unless massive infusions of United States aid were provided civil war, like that of El Salvador's, could not be averted.\(^ {13}\) General Alvarez's well timed pleas for increases in military aid in order to avoid "internal subversion" "sponsored by Nicaragua" were also helpful. Alvarez, in a brilliant coup declared:

"It is important that the American people and Congress know that if the United States helps us economically and militarily right now in Central American countries that are fighting for democracy, there won't be any need to send American troops".\(^ {14}\)

Militarizing Honduras was a brilliant ploy by the United States to move all training facilities into someone else's territory, away from the eyes and ears of the United States public.\(^ {15}\) The plan was to create in Honduras a highly mobile counterinsurgency force that could be rapidly deployed to any of its borders. Starting in 1981 United States Special Forces mobile training teams rotated in and out of Honduras advising and training Honduran soldiers. In the following two years one-third of the entire Honduran army was retrained in this manner.\(^ {16}\) In 1982 at least
one squad of United States Green Berets were flown into Honduras to help with training; one correspondent for the Washington Post wrote in September 1983:

"If it were not for the Spanish that floats from the tents, this could be Vietnam", 17

Special emphasis was placed on upgrading the Honduran airforce, which was already the most sophisticated in the region consisting of Super-Mystere jets acquired from Israel in the mid-1970's and A-37 'dragonfly' bombers provided by the United States. The United States provided further reconnaissance planes and set up a pilot training school near Tegucigalpa. 18 Improvements in the Honduran military infrastructure were also necessary and after an amendment to the 1954 military agreement between the two countries was signed, in May 1982, United States Congress approved twenty-one million dollars for the upgrading of Palmerola, Goloson and La Mesa airports, and the construction of Puerto Lempira airport - near the Nicaraguan border. Three years later the United States had constructed a further nine air bases, and by 1984 two radar stations, a military hospital, additional roads, and modernised port facilities had also been completed. 19

The holding of joint training exercises was the brainchild of General Paul Gorman, the then head of the United States Southern Command. Initially the joint United States-Honduran exercises were similar to those traditionally practiced in Central America, designed to help develop a closer cooperation between friendly countries and improve the combat readiness of local armies. 20

These joint exercises have developed through three basic stages. Phase One took place along the Caribbean coastal areas near the Nicaraguan border, between October 1981 and February 1983. These exercises allowed President Reagan to bypass Congres-
sional limits on military aid to Honduras by leaving behind equipment necessary to supply, train and organise the C.I.A.-backed operations against Nicaragua. Phase Two began in August 1983 with Big Pine II, a series of exercises which ran for six months involving over five thousand United States troops in Honduras and an additional sixteen thousand United States troops closely stationed on nearby ships and planes. These exercises allowed the United States to develop a sophisticated "permanent combat infrastructure and presence in Central America." Phase Three began early 1984 and was less clear-cut as a result of General Alvarez's downfall and the resistance of certain factions of the Honduran military who opposed further military escalation. The original idea was to further intimidate Nicaragua and Salvadoran leftists by poising United States forces on the very brink of the battlefield. After Big Pine III, February-May 1985 - which brought thirty-three thousand troops to the region - Grenadero I began in April 1986 with further construction and exercises taking place close to both the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan borders.21

The purpose of holding such exercises was because the Reagan administration felt Honduras was threatened by Nicaragua. The United States must therefore build up the local military to ensure communism did not take over. Reagan stated that:

"joint training exercises in the Caribbean and Central America [were] a way to provide a shield for democracy and development." 22

This concept was backed up by the official Honduran justification for the exercises; an example of which was seen in General Alvarez's statement to La Tribuna:

"By disposition and tradition Honduras is a pacifist nation, but must prepare itself because the 110,000 armed Nicaraguans are not there for a parade...We do not know what Nicaragua will do with
these people, and if the U.S. is helping us to get trained and thus be in better condition to confront this threat, we must be pragmatic about the situation... Don't you think it would be foolish to waste time when Soviet ships are arriving everyday in Nicaragua?"  

United States-Honduran joint military exercises served several purposes. On a practical level joint manoeuvres were a simple way to provide more military assistance as hardware and supplies used during the operations were never withdrawn; therefore allowing massive infrastructure transformations to take place that would have otherwise been difficult to finance. A 1985 study by the United States based National Action and Research on the Military Industrial Complex pointed out:

"The exercises in Honduras differ from United States military manoeuvres in other parts of the world in that they involve construction which has permanently improved Honduran military facilities; they have left huge qualities of military equipment behind; they have paralleled the growth of the C.I.A.-sponsored covert war against the Sandinistas; and some of the United States built facilities and United States equipment has been used for the covert war".

Further study into joint manoeuvres reveals that they have opened the door for belligerence as Honduras has been gradually converted into an occupied country prepared for not only war in the region but also war against its own people. The true purpose of such exercises was to intimidate the Sandinistas and prepare for a possible invasion. For the United States Honduras provided a perfect base for its Central American covert operations against possible 'outside' threats. Joint exercises were just an extension of the policeman role, a pretext, a "politicomilitary camouflage for United States intervention and war preparation" against Nicaragua. Senator James Sasser after a 1984 fact finding mission to Honduras termed the joint exercises:
"nothing less than a backdoor military buildup... a military buildup which far exceeds what is necessary for the successful completion of military exercises."29

These "military exercises" have, therefore, provided a 'legitimate' way for the United States military forces to intervene in Central America. At the same time a permanent United States military presence was allowed to develop in Honduras with, initially, minimal publicity and Congressional debate. The major drawback being that Honduran militarization pushed her into a situation where a war with Nicaragua seemed inevitable.

Although Honduras criticised the Sandinista government, it worried just as much about the contras existence on her borders. Firstly because contra forces had displaced thousands of Hondurans from the border zone, leaving resentment in their wake. Contras operating out of these areas had terrorized the locals; here reports of rape, robbery, extortion and vandalism were common. Coffee growers and cattle ranchers wanted the contras out for economic reasons, meanwhile Marxist labour movements effectively used the contras as a focus for worker discontentment.29

Secondly, there was growing concern among Honduran officials that because a contra victory appeared unlikely, "future governments will face a well-equipped and experienced fighting force larger than the Honduran army on Honduran territory". Such pressures, along with the 'Irangate' crisis, led the Honduran government to request that the United States remove the contras from Honduras as soon as possible. Honduras had already, unsuccessfully, pressured Washington to accept contra refugees after the war finished. This was just one more problem for the Reagan administration - enmeshed in the wake of Irangate - that, privately, the United States had hoped to solve with contra infil-
etration into Nicaragua. Yet as with previous “setdates” of contra victory this would inevitably be deferred.30

Thirdly, many Hondurans were worried that the contra presence was pushing Honduras into a direct war with Nicaragua.31 While contra raids into Nicaragua were well known, 1986 saw the beginning of Nicaraguan raids into Honduras in search of contra rebels. The first raid occurred in March and within forty-eight hours the United States had provided Honduras with twenty million dollars in “emergency” assistance to repel the Sandinistas.32 By December another escalation of fighting occurred on Honduran soil between contras and Sandinistas. This time President Jose Azcona took direct military action — with United States help — and while United States helicopter crews ferried Honduran troops to “secure” the border, Honduran Air Force fighter jets bombed two villages in northern Nicaragua. Despite this exaggerated use of force Nicaraguan Defense Minister, General Humberto Ortega, said that:

“Nicaragua will continue to pursue U.S.-backed rebels into border territories inside Honduras,”

but at the same time Humberto Ortega reassured Honduras that:

“Nicaragua has no interest in engaging in battle with Honduran forces.”33

March 10, 1988, witnessed a repeat performance of Sandinista forces crossing into Honduras to destroy contra supplies. The White House responded by sending two battalions from the 82nd Airborne division and two from the 7th Infantry Division into Honduras on a “readiness exercise”. Days later Honduran Airforce pilots bombed targets on the Nicaraguan border; but by this stage the Sandinistas had already withdrawn.34

Despite Nicaraguan reassurances that their war was only
with the contras the Reagan administration had been able to use Nicaragua's encroachment as a rally cry for not only continuing, but increasing military aid to Honduras and the contras.\textsuperscript{335}

What the United States failed to realise was that under the tremendous pressure she was exerting on Honduras, Honduras was beginning to 'crack' and for the first time in recent history politicians and labour leaders were beginning to 'disappear' or were being found murdered. While the actual figures were minor compared to El Salvador or Guatemala it, nevertheless, signified a disturbing trend of escalating repression and political violence.\textsuperscript{336} This campaign of official repression mixed with death squad tactics was headed by Alvarez who effectively stepped up all 'state security' to silence urban opposition, and force the country's radio stations and four daily newspapers to accept the military point of view.\textsuperscript{337}

Like Reagan, Alvarez had a definite plan for Honduras and the United States had given him the backing to implement it. Alvarez believed, as did most Latin American military rulers, that the world could be simply divided into two distinct groups. According to this "western Christendom" was "in a state of permanent war" against the "subversion" of "communism". By this reasoning the "subversives" category included any people opposed to the present government.\textsuperscript{338}

As the United States poured in military aid General Alvarez Martinez grew stronger, bolder and more repressive, ignoring the countries Congress and its President, Suazo Cordova. The extent of Alvarez's control over the Honduran government was seen in the way he proposed an anti-terrorist law to the National Assembly. Aimed at legitimizing his security forces repression, who
passed it into law the next day. The National Assembly also refused to set up a commission to investigate allegations against the security forces.\[389\]

Even the Catholic churches traditional alignment with the authorities had been broken because of the growing repression, economic disorders and continued harassment of Priests. The Pastoral Letter of October 1982 officially saw the distancing of the Catholic Church from the military-liberal `alliance' after the Unification Church began establishing itself in Honduras.\[40\]

The end result of this internal repression had created a great deal of uncertainty in Honduras as all hopes for building a democracy faded with the lack of public trust and faith. Instead the systematic destruction of pluralist organisations continued, as did the polarization of violence. Initially these policies obstruct and finally eliminate all mechanisms for peace, so that ultimately the only alternative left is violence. Therefore, Reagan was neither "promoting" nor "protecting" Honduran democracy, instead he was undermining it. The United States, by aligning itself with Alvarez and Suazo, had found two people who, literally, pawned their own nation for personal gain. The result of which must produce a backlash, not only against excessive dependence on the United States but against the Honduran military rule.\[41\]

March 31, 1984, saw General Alvarez's reign brought to an end as his fellow officers dispatched him into exile. Alvarez's overthrow had long been coming. Beginning in late 1982 when Colonel Leonides Torres Arias denounced Alvarez, stating:

"His extremism, radical and repressive ideas will only lead the people of Honduras along the road of blood and fratricidal struggle as well as towards costly and irreparable international confrontations
that will bring death, pain, destruction and mourning to the noble Honduran nation".42

By 1984 Honduras suffered its worst economic crisis in fifty years. Alvarez’s corruption and greed, rumoured to have exceeded thirty million dollars, was definitely out of hand.43

General Walter Lopez Reyes took over military command and immediately began negotiating for better aid terms from the United States. Shepherd terms it as a “raising of the rent”.44 Many people in Honduras began to realise that they were doing Reagan’s ‘dirty work’ in Central America and felt they deserved more money for their labour. Bargaining mainly centred on four issues: the continued presence and future of the contras, the terms of the 1954 military pact, the training of Salvadoreans in Honduras, and towards resolving a settlement of the border dispute with El Salvador. Honduran efforts to gain a better deal had minimal results: the contras remained in Honduras and whilst the United States did raise military and economic aid it was definitely no where near the one billion seven hundred million dollars Honduras demanded by the end of the 1980’s; two Salvadoreans to every one Honduran continued to be trained at Puerto Castilla; finally, there was no settlement to the border dispute with El Salvador.45

Honduran efforts at reworking their relationship with the United States failed because they refused to use their most powerful bargaining point: that of their strategic position in the region. As a result the militarisation of Honduras continued unabated. Therefore, while General Reyes coup changed the form, the substance and direction of developments in Honduras, that is, United States policy and military dominance of the political system, remained unchanged.46
November 24, 1985, saw the Presidential victory of the Liberal Party, now headed by Jose Azcona Hoyos. Yet these elections, failed to make an issue out of the serious problems facing Honduras; that was the economic crisis, contra presence, human rights violations, United States troop presence, and Honduran relationship with El Salvador.47 Secondly, the election, like that of 1981, merely continued the facade of civilian rule while power remained firmly in the United States embassy and Honduran military barracks.

By early 1988 the future for Honduras and President Azcona remained uncertain, what was certain was that the present United States policy toward Honduras continued unchecked and threatened to turn a difficult situation into a disaster.48 Already Azcona was forced to keep up continued contra presence as Honduras had become totally dependent on the United States for economic aid, the amount of which was clearly not enough given that 1987 saw thirty percent of the rural population landless and unemployment peaking at forty percent. Still the United States continued to give disproportionately larger amounts of military aid to Honduras, preferring to concentrate on joint military manoeuvres.

"Operation Cabanas 86" was thought to have been the most visible manoeuvre ever held in Honduras, with mock battles of United States paratroopers raging along the Patuca river - only nine miles from the Nicaraguan border. 1987 brought-forth "Blazing Trails 87" employing four thousand five hundred United States troops, and "Big Pine 87" which swelled United States troop presence in Honduras to seven thousand by May, 1987.49

In using Honduras as a training ground the Reagan administration was risking a Honduran-Nicaraguan war. While Nicaragua
had made open and honest attempts toward negotiating a peaceful and amicable solution toward the problem, United States policy makers forced Honduras to reject such proposals. Thus, further illustrating the disruptive influence the United States has had over the internal affairs of another country. Yet the Reagan administration appears unaware as to the limits of its control over Honduras. Instead Reagan preferred to exaggerate his positive influence on Honduras toward promoting peace, democracy and stability.

For Honduras to regain its once neutral status will mean the United States must stop using it as a proxy for its Central American military strategies. The further militarization of Honduras exacerbated not only the depressed economy of Honduras, but intensified the internal repression of the Honduran people. Honduras in the 1980s resembled Nicaragua in the early seventies, the next step for the oppressed in Honduras is obvious. With the Reagan administration in 'control' the threat of civil war in Honduras appeared very real as Reagan had no alternative policy for Central America as a whole, except for stopping the spread of communism. What Reagan failed to realise was that his foreign policy did nothing to stop the the flow, instead it contributed to it.
FOOTNOTES


(5) Ibid, R. Lapper and J. Painter, pp.82-83.

(6) Ibid.

(7) "Honduras On The Edge", Lorren Jenkins, The Atlantic, August, 1982, p.20

(8) "Honduras As A U.S. Base Against Nicaragua", Honduras Information Center, reprinted in Nicaragua Under Siege, edited by Mar-


(18) "The U.S. At War In Central America: Unable To Win Unwilling-
"Losing To Love", P. Flynn, Politics Of Intervention, edited by P. Flynn and R. Burbach, p.111.

(20) Ibid.


(28) Ibid, p.133.

(29) "Revolution In Central America", Clifford Krauss, Foreign Affairs, Volume 65 no.3, p.574.

(30) Ibid, pp.574-575.


(32) "Honduras Receives U.S. Assistance To Repel Sandinista Attacks", Department Statement, March 23, 1986, Department Of...


(35) "Border Crossing" Fred Barnes, The New Republic, April 21, 1986, pp.11-12; this contains an interesting discussion of Washington's propaganda usage of Nicaragua's border crossing into Honduras.

(36) 1983 saw 24 political assassinations, 20 disappearances, 43 political prisoners, 28 tortured; see "Honduras", P. Shepherd, Confronting Revolution, edited by M. Blachman, W. Leo Grande, K. Sharpe, p.137.

(37) "The U.S. At War In Central America : Unable To Win Unwilling To Lose", P. Flynn, Politics Of Intervention, edited by R. Burbach and P. Flynn, p.114.


(40) Ibid, "Honduras As A U.S. Base Against Nicaragua", pp.74-75. The Unification or Hoonie church is well known for its political
activism and anticommunism; its arrival in Honduras was supported by the military.


(43) "Honduras", P. Shepherd, Confronting Revolution, M. Blachman, W. LeoGrande, K. Sharpe, p.146.


(46) Ibid.


(50) December 1986, Daniel Ortega wrote to Jose Azcona outlining tensions between the two countries. Ortega proposed a three-point program whereby :

(i) Nicaragua would accept all contras of Nicaraguan nationality, who voluntarily lay down their arms, to return home - since 1983 6,000 contras have returned unharmed.

(ii) Nicaragua would collaborate with Honduras to find third party countries that would accept those Nicaraguan contras not wanting to return to their country.

(iii) Nicaragua would collaborate with Honduras and the United Nations High Commission on Refugees to repatriate all Nicaraguans in Honduras who wanted to return home - already around 10,300 Nicaraguans have returned from Honduran refugee camps.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONTRAS, A LITMUS TEST OF REAGAN'S POLICY.

The contras origin, their activities and their existence are testimony to the extent of Ronald Reagan’s commitment to eradicating the Sandinista government. They provide the Reagan administration with a perfect outlet to vent its frustrations, initially away from the eyes of the United States public, and with an ideal excuse to avoid making any possible concessions to the Sandinistas.

This chapter will concentrate on two issues. Firstly looking at contra beginnings, in order to determine the extent to which the United States influenced their formation. Secondly, contra funding, asking to what extent the contras themselves are dependent upon this foreign aid. This includes discussing the recently revealed Iran-Contra affair, an undercover administration action primarily motivated not only to release hostages but to create a new source of contra funding at a time when Congress refused to grant further aid to these ‘rebels’. Only by dealing with the subsequent redirecting of monies, after United States “trading” with Iran, is it possible to gain a clear picture of the lengths that individuals close to the President were willing to stoop in order to ensure that their anti-communist picture of the world was preserved.

The official line on the contras formation is that after the Sandinistas “betrayed the revolution” many who had fought Somocistia then took to the hills and began fighting the communists attempt at imposing another dictatorship. Reagan believed
that:

"The true heroes of the Nicaraguan struggle - noncommunist, democracy-loving revolutionaries - saw their revolution betrayed and took up arms against the betrayer. These men and women are today the democratic resistance fighters some call the Contras. We should call them 'freedom fighters'. The freedom fighters are led by those who opposes Somoza, and their soldiers are peasants, farmers, shopkeepers, and students - the people of Nicaragua."

Historically and factually this is false. Firstly, there was no concentrated armed opposition to the Sandinistas until Reagan took office. Secondly, the contras were made up almost exclusively of ex-members of Somoza's National Guard who would have certainly merged into the Caribbean underworld, just as the defeated army of Fulgencio Batista had done twenty years before, had it not been for Reagan's arrival. Thirdly, when Reagan launched his war in November 1981, after authorizing nineteen million dollars to the Central Intelligence Agency to recruit and train an effective guerrilla force, the C.I.A. went not to the border regions of Nicaragua but to Miami, where the exiled allies of Somoza were living.

Approximately "900 ex-National Guard members" trained in California and Florida during 1981, in what intelligence officials described as:

"the most ambitious paramilitary and political action operation mounted by the Central Intelligence Agency in nearly a decade."

Honduras was the logical staging area, not only for reasons previously mentioned, but because as many as five thousand ex-National Guard members had made Honduras their new home after the Sandinistas took control. Secondly, Honduras was already the training ground for Argentine military intelligence (G.2.), who were running an anti-communist, counter-Marxist indoctrination
program there. The purpose of which was to destabilize the Sandinistas who, Argentina believed, were training and backing Montoneros - guerrillas opposed to Argentina's dictatorship.\(^9\) For the Reagan administration a covert war against the Sandinistas, pursued from Honduras, provided a sufficient smoke-screen to shield Reagan from criticism and accountability.\(^10\) Thus while Honduras provided the setting, the C.I.A. provided all the equipment and training. The C.I.A. was clearly the brains behind all contra operations.\(^11\)

The contras began as the Fuerza Democratica Nicaraguense (F.D.N.), which is today still the largest and most prominent of all the contra groups. Although its leadership has undergone several changes, it has always consisted of former National Guard officers and guardsmen forming the bulk of its soldiers. F.D.N. origins are vague as after the Sandinista takeover the National Guard was scattered throughout Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Florida. Their formation began after Colonel Enrique Bermudez formed a group of ex-guardsmen into the September 15 Legion after receiving three hundred thousand dollars from Somoza's cousin, Luis Pallais Debayle. The Legion's headquarters soon moved from training camps in Florida to Guatemala where Bermudez negotiated an agreement with the Argentine military to pursue Argentine Montoneros who had fled to Central America in return for money, arms and training.\(^12\)

It was during 1980 that Bermudez not only met future members of the Reagan administration, but he also made contacts with the first of what would become a succession of former anti-Somocistas who had become disenchanted with the Sandinistas. Jose Francisco ("Chicano") Cardenal left Nicaragua in May 1980 to form
the Nicaraguan Revolutionary Democratic Alliance (A.R.D.E.N.) which quickly entered into a short-lived alliance with Bermudez - the first of many unsuccessful attempts to merge Somocistas with ex-Sandinistas.13

After the two groups separated in October 1980 Cardenal joined with Fernando and Edmundo Chamorro and a distant relative Edgar Chamorro. Together they formed the Union Demacratica Nicaraguense (U.D.N.). In October 1981 the U.D.N. - minus Fernando Chamorro - joined forces with the September 15 Legion to form the F.D.N. Although the U.D.N. was hesitant about such a uniting they realised that in order to gain wide support it was necessary.

Edgar Chamorro reasoned that:

"The Americans told us that we must unite to get their backing. It was a marriage of convenience. We needed to build an army, and we saw Bermudez as a professional military man. The military types needed moderate, democratic credentials and contacts. We thought the Americans would help us subordinate them [the military] to us [the civilians]."14

The second wave of former anti-Somocistas left Nicaragua in 1981, led by Eden Pastora, the infamous 'Comandante Cero'. Pastora's departure marked the first major break in Sandinista unity. By 1982 Pastora had emerged in Mexico where he met with Duane Claridge, the C.I.A. agent charged with organising the contras. The C.I.A. began financing Pastora's organisation, the Frente Revolucionario Sandino (F.R.S.), in 1982. The following year the C.I.A. gave more money to Pastora than the F.D.N. as Claridge considered the charismatic ex-Sandinista more likely to win Nicaraguan and international support.15

Pastora then united his group with Alfonso Robelo's Nicaraguan Democratic Movement (M.D.N.) - a social democratic movement - during the summer of 1982. Together they formed the Alianza
Revolucionaria Democrática Nicaragüense (A.R.D.E.) which, despite Duane Claridge’s insistence, refused to merge with the F.D.N. throughout 1982 and early 1983. By April 1983 Pastora’s forces, now numbering over a thousand men, left their Costa Rican base and entered Nicaragua; thereby forcing the Sandinistas to guard both their southern and northern borders.  

By 1984 Pastora’s A.R.D.E. had grown to as many as six thousand members; but to the surprise of the C.I.A. Bermúdez’s F.D.N. had grown from six hundred in 1982 to twelve thousand by early 1985. Pastora would eventually prove to be a disappointment to the United States and his followers as he began to view subordinates as potential rivals for power - especially Commandante Luis Rivas, whom Pastora dismissed after he completed several successful attacks.  

Associates of Pastora believe that during 1983 and 1984 he received around six hundred and fifty thousand dollars a month from the C.I.A., along with nine air-drops of arms and equipment. Yet Pastora failed to seriously challenge the Sandinistas. Instead he wasted the aid he received with most of the arms turning up on the Costa Rican black market. The C.I.A. eventually cut off his funds in 1984; since then several attempts have been made to assassinate him - by the F.D.N., the C.I.A. and the F.S.L.N. After the F.S.L.N.’s successful offensive against his troops, in June 1985, Alfonso Robelo left to join the F.D.N. and Pastora’s troops slowly disbanded.  

Eden Pastora, while he was in favour, epitomised the contra criteria for leadership. As Arturo Cruz points out:  

"The contras have always been dominated by personalities rather than ideology".

What the C.I.A. could never understand was Pastora’s motivation,
believing that he wanted to defeat communism; instead:

"Pastora wanted to show his countrymen that he was more intelligent than Humberto Ortega, Daniels brother, and the current Minister of Defense".

Pastora was also seeking the approval of Fidel Castro, Cruz believes Pastora was "obsessed" with Castro and believed that one day Castro would want Pastora to rule Nicaragua. Ironically Castro privately called Pastora "Guaiiro" -- the peasant. Pastora's other problem was that he could not delegate responsibility, viewing it as giving away power. Today Pastora spends his days fishing in Barra de Colorado, in northern Costa Rica.

Meanwhile within the F.D.N.'s political directorate the relationship between Bermudez and Cardenal soured as Bermudez tried to assassinate Cardenal. The reasoning for this attempt on Cardenal's life was his consistent clash with military commanders over his nationalist stance, his obvious great dislike of the National Guard, and his belief in civilian rule. The end result saw Bermudez expelling Cardenal from Honduras in September 1982.

After Cardenal's expulsion the C.I.A. realised that for the sake of democratic appearances they should expand the contra leadership. Under the aliases of Steve Davis and Tony Feldman two C.I.A. agents began interviewing candidates for contra leadership in Miami. Edgar Chamorro, one of the first chosen because of his anti-Somocista background, remembers the pressure put on the C.I.A. to band together a group of non-Somocistas before Congress voted on the Boland amendment. Chamorro, reflecting upon the seven person directorates first press conference held in Fort Lauderdale, remembering it as an orchestrated event requiring days of intense C.I.A. briefing on the Nationality Act, sources
of financial backing, and the aims of the contra movement. The C.I.A. even employed a script writer from Washington - "George" - whose task was to rewrite all statements making them more "socialistic". Chamorro concludes that:

"The Americans, I began to realise, liked to make all the crucial decisions".\(^{22}\)

Adolfo Calero was installed as President of the National Directorate and Commander in Chief of the F.D.N. in January 1983. Calero, during 1983 and 1984, quickly removed several ex-National Guard officers because of corruption and their abuse of authority. This same period also witnessed the C.I.A.'s, now notorious, field manual. Entitled *Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare* it was formulated as a "code of conduct" especially for the F.D.N.\(^{23}\) This manual punctured the official United States balloon which had been floating about for years telling the world how the United States was not interested in overthrowing the Sandinista government. The manual explained "how to kidnap and kill officials, blow up public buildings and blackmail ordinary citizens". Absurdly enough the manual told "guerrillas" to explain to the local population that "our struggle is not against the nationals but rather against Russian imperialists", all of which would, supposedly, "foster the sympathy of the peasants, and they will immediately become one of us".\(^{24}\)

Reagan, surprisingly enough, denied all knowledge of the manual and immediately ordered an investigation into the manuals authenticity and sources.\(^{25}\) The ensuing inquiry promptly came up with the excuse that the manual was only in the drafting stages. This was quickly refuted by Edgar Chamorro who stated that the manual was the finished product and not the first draft.\(^{26}\) Four days later the *New York Times* reported that the C.I.A. manual had
been used by the contras for almost a year, with no attempts being made to revise it. 27

Edgar Chamorro was the next ex-Sandinista to leave the F.D.N. with bad feelings. In June Chamorro quit and promptly denounced the F.D.N. for concealing its human rights abuses, for its servile dependence on the C.I.A., and for its authoritarian mentality. The gap left by Chamorro was finally filled by Arturo Cruz in February 1985. By June, Cruz, Calero and Robelo announced the Nicaraguan Opposition Unions (U.N.O.) formation; which Robelo described as:

"an umbrella for all democratic forces". 28

The U.N.O.'s marriage had been shaky from the beginning with Calero, as head of the F.D.N., constantly blocking Cruz and Robelo's plans. This rivalry was heightened by the fact that the F.D.N., being the most right wing of all the contra movements, was solely backed by the C.I.A.; whereas the U.N.O. - the main contra political movement - was backed by the State Department. 29 The amount of back-stabbing began its frenzied rise during 1985 as Calero began stacking the U.N.O. with former Somoza officials, while Cruz and Robelo responded by talking about the human rights abuses of the F.D.N. 30 The two factions' distrust of one another reached a peak in late January 1987 when Cruz claimed Calero was trying to kill him. 31

In February Calero resigned from the U.N.O and the State Department claimed a minor victory in its success to reform the contras by putting "politicians" in charge of the "military". But, equally abruptly, Cruz announced his resignation on the eve of the House of Representatives vote on releasing the last forty million dollars for contra funding in 1987. Cruz believed he had
The following May (1983) saw the House subcommittee, by a 9-5 vote, ban aid to the Nicaraguan rebels. Instead it authorized eighty million dollars for "overt aid" to "any friendly country in Central America" to help curb the flow of weapons from Cuba through Nicaragua to Central American revolutionaries. More specifically the Bill banned the C.I.A. and any other intelligence agency or entity from "supporting, directly or indirectly, military or paramilitary operations in Nicaragua". Reagan termed the committee's action as "irresponsible" telling reporters that:

"We'll keep right on fighting".353

With the revelation of the C.I.A.'s role in the mining of Nicaragua's port of Corinto, in April 1984, Reagan's once persuasive strength continued to diminish as the House of Representatives denied approval to contra aid three times in 1984; notably in October, by a sixty-four vote margin.356

Despite Reagan's strong re-election victory his renewed request to Congress for aid was rejected by the House of Representatives by a sixty-eight vote majority. In response Reagan changed his tactic labelling his April request "humanitarian aid" and limiting funds to fourteen million dollars. This time the package was defeated by just two votes. By June both the House of Representatives and the Senate voted in favour of funding "non-lethal" aid; this about-turn in voting was primarily in response to Daniel Ortega's well publicised visit to Moscow - the administration was able to turn this into an instant propaganda victory.357

March 1986 saw the House of Representatives defeat Reagan's request for one hundred million dollars in mostly military aid by 222-210 votes. Reagan termed this defeat a "dark day for freedom"
and vowed that he would "never give up" the contra cause. Reagan's commitment was reflected in that the following week (March 27) his proposal was approved by the Senate, by 53-47 votes. In June the vote finally went through the House of Representatives, succeeding by 221-209. Combined with Reagan's August victory in the Senate (53-47) the administration won its contra package for 70 million in military aid and $50 million in 'humanitarian' aid. Together these measures also repealed the prohibition on C.I.A. and Defense Department collaboration with the contras.

Once again changing views in United States voting was blamed on Nicaragua's own actions. In this instance two days after the House of representatives defeated contra aid two battalions of Sandinista soldiers crossed the Honduran border and attacked contra camps.

With the disclosure of Iranian arms profits being diverted to the contras House Democrat leaders became divided as whether to block the final allocation of forty million dollars in assistance. In March the House of Representatives voted 230-196 in favour of freezing the final forty million dollars for up to six months while money previously given was accounted for. Although the Senate refused to pass such legislation, by 52-48 votes, the House of Representatives used this moratorium as a clear signal to the administration that there would be no additional aid. House majority leader, Thomas S. Foley, predicted that Congress has spent its "last official dollar" on the contras. Like the Phoenix Reagan remained true to his cause, advising Congress that he would be seeking a further one hundred and five million dollars for the contras for the 1988 fiscal year, beginning in October.
announced that he would be fighting for two hundred and seventy
million dollars in renewed contra aid. At this present moment in
time it still appears doubtful that Congress will pass the aid
request as serious negotiations for a Central American peace are
well underway. Despite Central American hopes for peace Reagan
has continued his tired old theme that contra aid is necessary
"insurance" to prevent "Sandinista backsliding" concerning demo-
cratic reforms. If Congress did approve more contra aid, it
appears doubtful that this aid would alter the contras situation.

With the blocking off of aid this considerably narrows the
options left open to the Reagan administration. With each escala-
tion toward a military option we see the possibility of a negoti-
ated solution disappearing; thus leaving only one door open to
the United States if it is that committed: direct United States
invasion.

Although the exact extent of direct United States help in
contra operations is something impossible to measure, the last
seven years have seen rapid increases in C.I.A. willingness to
become involved. By 1983 the C.I.A. was often taking a direct
role in contra operations as United States pilots began regular
surveillance flights over Nicaragua photographing targets, map-
ing terrain, and spotting Sandinista manoeuvres. A former
C.I.A. analyst stated:

"Our intelligence from Nicaragua is so good... we
can hear the toilets flush in Managua".

The discovery of United States pilots flying combat mis-
sions and carrying contra supplies inside Nicaraguan territory
was made all the more public after several planes were shot
down. Most United States personal involved flew in civilian
clothes and were specifically told by Pentagon officials that if
The most recently publicized of these 'captured' planes occurred after the downing, on October 5, 1986, of a cargo plane carrying weapons and United States crewmen over Nicaragua. Because of the planes documents and testimony of the only surviving crewman, Eugene Hasenclever, an ingenuous White House plan involving C.I.A. agents and a meridian of shadowy characters side-stepping around the Boland amendment by providing arms to the contras, was made public — all of which remained a mystery until the secret United States arms sales to Iran was further disclosed.69

The most damaging C.I.A. involvement saw C.I.A. explosive technicians, using specially trained commando units, plant explosive mines inside the Nicaraguan port of Puerto Cabezas; all of which resulted in damaging ships from Nicaragua, Netherland, Panama, Liberia, Japan and the Soviet Union. The Reagan administration defended the mining as a form of self defense by El Salvador and its allies under international law.70

The Sandinistas filed suit at the International Court of Justice (I.C.J.) at the Hauge on April 9, 1984. Nicaragua demanded a halt to all United States assistance to the contras and compensation for damage. The ensuing months saw a battle of words that involved the United States informing the United Nations Secretary General that they would not accept the I.C.J.'s ruling in any cases involving Central America.71 Three days later the I.C.J. unanimously issued an interim ruling calling on the United States to "immediately halt" any further military activity against Nicaragua. In a further vote the I.C.J. ruled that Nicaraguas political independence:

"should be fully respected and should not be jeopardised by any military or paramilitary
After deliberating over the evidence for some months the court unanimously ruled in November to accept Nicaragua’s suit, thereby rejecting the United States argument that the I.C.J. did not have proper jurisdiction to try the case. The United States had always believed that Nicaragua was using the court for "political purposes" and as a result could not accept the court ruling in favour of Nicaragua. Instead the United States believed it was "providing a security shield" in that it "acted in the exercise of the inherent right of collective self defense" and by taking such actions it did so "in defense of the vital national security interests of the United States and in support of the peace and security of the hemisphere". Neither the I.C.J., Nicaragua, nor the American public believed this. A well publicized New York Times/C.B.S. News poll reported that only one in three Americans supported Reagan’s policies in Central America, while sixty-seven percent of those polled were against the mining of Nicaragua’s harbours, compared to thirteen percent who were for the act. Congress had already expressed its disapproval by cutting off contra aid because of revelations of C.I.A. involvement in the mining of Nicaragua’s harbours.

The chapter has documented Reagan’s unflinching commitment to the contras during the administrations early years. Yet with the Boland amendments passing and the ensuing years restrictions on contra aid, Reagan found himself exploring the possibilities of circumventing Senator Boland’s act in order to keep aid flowing to the contras. All of which recently resulted in the disclosure of the administration’s illicit dealings with Iran and the syphoning of thirty-four million dollars in arms profits to the
Beginning in the spring of 1984 the administration began its search for additional funding. Robert McFarlane, after unsuccessfully approaching Israel for funds, persuaded King Fahad of Saudi Arabia to help Reagan’s special cause. Between July 1984 and February 1985 the Saudis deposited one million dollars a month into a contra bank account. This amount was raised to two million a month after Fahad visited the White House in February. Still the White House was not satisfied and the solicitation of contra funds continued.

With the Boland amendments passing White House Chief of Staff, Edwin Meese, Vice-President Bush, C.I.A. Director William Casey, National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane and N.S.C. staff member Lt. Colonel Oliver North met to devise procedures for intentionally circumventing the Congressional ban. After several meetings it was concluded that North would establish contact with “The Secret Team” as well as have Robert Owen and ex-General John K. Singlaub – head of the United States Council On World Freedom – to set up a private citizen operated contra support group to publicly solicit funds and assistance to the contras.

It was the Secret Teams task in 1985 and 1986 to undertake the sale of arms to Iran by employing its tried and tested procedure of purchasing military equipment from the Pentagon at “manufactures cost” and selling them to Iran at “replacement cost”. “Excess profit” earned in the sale was redirected through Lake Resources Inc., Companie de Services Fiduciaries and into their Grand Cayman account in the name of C.F.S. investments Ltd., where deposits were secretly used to finance the Reagan administration’s contra war. William Casey believed Oliver North’s
idea to fund the contras from Iranian arms sales was "the ultimate covert operation". Casey especially loved the irony that went with it, that Iran had previously attempted to ship arms to the Sandinistas. Over the years the Ayatollah had also provided Nicaragua with one hundred million dollars in oil credits. 

The Iran-Contra affair proves, beyond any doubt, both the intense personal commitment of Ronald Reagan and certain elements within his administration had toward pursuing the downfall of the Sandinista government. With the disclosure of the 'affair' the once 'teflon president' came under a lot of pressure. It was only now, with all the glitter and magic lost, that the United States public were beginning to see the real Reagan. As Philip Geyelin noted at the time:

"The Reagan Presidency has been unmasked". 

With the revelation of United States officials diverting profits from Iranian arms sales to Nicaraguan contras Reagan's popularity plummeted twenty points in a month. As the scandal moved into the new year a Reagan recovery was nowhere in sight. Iran was probably the most hated country in the United States and to send arms to even the most moderate factions of Iranians was un-American and un-Reagan. Especially to an American public raised on Reagan rhetoric brandishing the 'big stick' and refusing to negotiate with terrorists. Some reporters compared the fiasco with the tale of The Emperor's New Clothes:

"now that Reagan's imperial apparel has been shown to be little more than invisible weaving, some press commentators are saying that the embarrassments of November were an inevitable result of his chronic lax management".

What had once been politely labelled Reagan's "management style" of "detachment" from the details of government by the Tower Commission was now
coming under heavy attack. Time noted:

"For many close observers of Reagan the surprise is not that his passive approach has got him into trouble, but that such a fiasco did not happen sooner."

The article went to great lengths questioning how Reagan was "oblivious to the nuances of his policies" and the way he was "out of touch with the daily operation of government". Time further questioned Reagan's "gung-ho activism" as it had obviously led to a "can-do approach" that had little regard for "details". Lou Cannon chimed in that officials were "whispering" that Reagan was "slipping":

"At 75, he tires more easily and asks even fewer questions of aides than he did 3 or 4 years ago. His hearing has declined...he is said to be increasingly preoccupied and under strain. ‘He always enjoyed being President’, says a friend, ‘I don’t think he finds it fun anymore’." 64

Reagan’s "hands-off style of management" was reflected in his nonchalant concern with keeping abreast of the televised hearings. When asked by one reporter if he was watching the hearings Reagan quipped that his viewing times were limited to "when I can’t find a ball game". 65 Doubts about Reagan’s "grip on issues" was reflected in his stubborn refusal to apologise or even take responsibility for his administration’s actions. 66 It was not until Reagan’s sixth State of the Union address that he broke the silence and lamented that "serious mistakes were made". The speech devoted barely two small paragraphs to the issue out of which nobody was singled out for the blame and nor was there any sense of regret. 67

By March Reagan finally came out of his protective shell to defend his initial decision to sell arms to Iran:

"A few months ago I told the American people I did not trade arms for hostages. My heart and my best intentions still tell me that is true, but the
Michael White termed Reagan’s televised speech as like “hearing a reformed tippler promising never to touch the stuff again with the smell of gin on his lips”.

It was not until the Congressional hearings began that a complete picture of what went on, and under from instructions from whom became available. As far as Reagan’s knowledge and approval of the operation was concerned it is best to rely on sources close to Reagan as Reagan was too concerned with contradicting his previous statements. The hearings began with an investigation of retired Air Force Major General Richard V. Secord. Secord told the committee that he assumed Reagan knew and supported his activities; he based this knowledge on comments from North, McFarlane, Poindexter and Casey, stating:

"I was told by Admiral Poindexter in January 1986 that not only was he pleased with the work I had been doing, but the president was as well."

After the second week of hearings, and testimonials from McFarlane, Reagan emerged very much as a "hands-on president". McFarlane depicted Reagan as a "willing participant" stating that:

"Reagan personally approved a secret plan in early 1985 to pay up to $2 million dollars in bribes and ransom for Americans held hostage by pro-Iranian factions in Lebanon."

McFarlane also described his daily meetings with Reagan in which he kept Reagan up to date with developments.

The following week Robert Owen, John K. Singlaub, Adolfo Calero, Joseph Coars, Ellen Garwood and William O’Boyle all testified that North gave the impression that he was acting under orders; but none knew to what extent Reagan was involved.
It was not until July when Oliver North, after plucking "the patriotic heartstrings perhaps more musically than even the president", dropped a bombshell on top members of the Reagan administration by indicting Edwin Meese, William Casey, Robert McFarlane, Elliot Abrams and John Poindexter. Only on the subject of Reagan's knowledge did North state he "assumed" Reagan knew about raising private funds for the contras; that he "believed" he saw the president's signature authorizing the Hawk's sale to Iran, and that although he "wrote at least five memos detailing the contra support operation" he could not say whether the president personally approved any of the memos.\textsuperscript{73}

The following week Admiral Poindexter said it all when he insisted: "the buck stops here with me".

Therefore while Reagan knew of the arms for hostages trade he knew nothing - according to his staff - about the diversion of profits to the contras because, Poindexter insisted, then the president could be "insulated" from the decision "and provide some future deniability".\textsuperscript{74}

The overall feeling of the hearings reveals a classic example of an end-justifies-the-means mentality at work in the White House. Clearly there had been a break-down in the system of political checks and balances; the likely effect of the hearings will be the redressing of this balance in favour of Congress at the expense of the President.\textsuperscript{75} This must be the only logical outcome for the protection of the United States public against presidents like Ronald Reagan, who invoke such intense loyalty from their staff that they feel compelled to "insulate" them from the reality of their own policies. As seen in the example of Reagan, it soon becomes harder and harder to distinguish the reality
If the United States backed mercenary war against Nicaragua had demonstrated one thing over the years it was that the contras could not and will not overthrow the Sandinista government. United States backers initially believed in the possibility of establishing a beachhead in the sparsely populated eastern region of Nicaragua. Once taken over and declared a "free territory" this would give the contras international recognition as Nicaraguans poured into the eastern region to escape Sandinismo - or so the theory went. Yet after years of constant fighting the contras have certainly not become the focus of discontent by any major segment of the Nicaraguan people. At the same time the contras have also lost a great deal of their 'international sympathy'; this was especially so in the United States where the contras remain aligned to only a small group: the far right. Whereas, ex-contra Arturo Cruz notes, the Sandinistas public relations with the United States public opinion has steadily increased over the years.

Thus while the contras have succeeded in disrupting the Nicaraguan economy and terrorizing the population, it was clear that they could not overrun the Sandinistas; except with the direct help of United States intervention, the feasibility of which appears unlikely unless it could be done so swiftly, as in Grenada, that the United States public and Congressional opposition could not react quickly enough. This was unlikely as United States military experts agreed that a prolonged conflict would be necessary. A price that Reagan appears unwilling to pay at the moment. Instead the United States applies a variety of measures to continue the destabilization of Nicaragua.
FOOTNOTES


(11) "U.S. Ties To Anti-Sandinistas Are Reported To Be Extensive", Raymond Bonner and Philip Taubman, New York Times, April


(13) Ibid.

(14) Ibid.


(16) Ibid.

(17) Ibid.

(18) Ibid.


(25) "President Orders 2 Investigations On CIA Manual", J. Brinkley, New York Times, October 18, 1984, A1, A8. The same issue published excerpts from the manual, showing "Freedom Fighters" how to overthrow the Sandinista government by sabotage; among the suggestions were:

"stop up toilets with sponges, put nails on the roads and highways, hoard and steal food from the government, leave lights on".


(53) U.S. Foreign Policy, Editors Of Congressional Quarterly, p.71.


(58) The Secret Team was set up in 1973 by Theodore Shackley, Thomas Clines, Richard Armitage, Richard Secord and Albert Hakim. Together these people had been operating a very successful secret
political assassination group funded by Van Poo's opium income and by selling United States armaments at inflated prices. But with the end of the Vietnam war in sight the Secret Team was set up as a secretive non-C.I.A. authorized program dealing in private anti-communist assassination and unconventional warfare program. See Daniel P. Sheehans Affidavit filed on December 12, 1986, on behalf of the Christic Institute.

(59) Ibid.

(60) Veil, R. Woodward, pp.466-467.


(63) "Who Was Betrayed", George V. Church, Time, December 8, 1986, pp.4-5.


(69) "The Old Pro Does It Again", Michael White, The Guardian

(71) "Unfolding Story Of Arms Deals Points To Active Reagan Role", Steven Pressman and John Felton, Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, May 16, 1987, pp.964-966.


(79) "A Revolution Under Siege", Richard L. Harris, Nicaragua: A Revolution Under Siege, edited by R. Harris and Carlos M. Vilas, pp238-239. Former head of the United States Army Southern Command, General Paul F. Gorman, was widely quoted in January 1987 after he told the Senate Armed Services Committee: "I don’t think [the Sandinistas] regard the contras as a serious threat. I think they’re got the situation under control", quoted in "Into The
CHAPTER FIVE: NICARAGUA, THE FOCUS OF RONALD REAGAN'S FEARS.

The Reagan administration's antipathy toward the Sandinistas' victory in Nicaragua is well known. The constant barrage of taunts and abuse from the United States along with Reagan's personal commitment to supporting Nicaraguan "freedom fighters" continued interminably. A complex century old sequence of events resulted in this intense loathing. Only Cuba and Nicaragua managed to escape from under the yoke of United States hegemony which was imposed on Central America in the first quarter of the twentieth century. But while it can be argued that Cuba has had a protector in the Soviet Union, Nicaragua never had this advantage. Therefore with each passing day that the Sandinistas survived their presence further infuriated the Reagan administration. The United States appears to have forgotten its own revolutionary origins in which the Founding Fathers were labelled as radicals and subversives in courts throughout Europe.

What was it that the United States so feared from Nicaragua's example. It could not have been the threat of invasion by three million desperately poor Nicaraguans, half of them under fifteen years of age. The charge must have been seen in Nicaragua's communist conversion, thereby making her the new focal point for the spread of communism in the western hemisphere. But the Reagan administration's textbook response of the 'International Communist Conspiracy' being busy at work in Nicaragua was misguided.

The Sandinista revolution was unable to fulfill its promise
because of pressure applied by the United States of America. Often when a revolution starts with idealism and romance it ends with betrayed expectations. Revolutions do have a tendency to go wrong, to become the object that they had created to destroy; Nicaragua was not one of these.

At first Nicaragua attempted to enact its promises of political pluralism, a mixed economy, and international nonalignment. United States actions forced her to become increasingly militarized and polarized as rationing of basic commodities and the conscription of young men and woman became dominant factors. An examination of the middle ground, between the two conflicting portraits of the Reagan administration's and the Sandinistas, is essential in deciding whether Nicaragua was the product of a betrayed revolution, as the Reagan administration contested, and if so, whether this was caused by internal or external influences. By examining the response of the administration to the four ideals of Sandinismo it is possible to ascertain the extent to which the United States attempted to negate Nicaragua's revolution.

United States interference in Nicaragua had occurred for over a century; culminating in the United States Marines intervening in the Nicaraguan civil war of 1926-1927, thereby depriving the Mexican backed revolutionaries of their victory. From this General Sandino emerged as the only Nicaraguan national leader who refused to accept United States arbitration of the conflict. Instead Sandino led his troops in a guerrilla campaign against the Marines that lasted until 1933 when the Marines withdrew because of mounting pressure from home. In their place the United States installed a National Guard with Anastasio Somoza
Debayle as its head. Once the Marines left Sandino was willing to make peace with Somoza, all of which led to his assassination and the imposition of a United States backed local tyranny over Nicaragua for almost the next fifty years.2

Sandino’s legacy, though slightly embellished because of his martyred status, portrays him as not only one of the precursors of modern revolutionary guerrilla warfare but also the creator of Sandinista ideological thought. Arturo Cruz believes Sandino’s lack of ideological coherence caused many of the more ‘orthodox’ members of the Sandinista Front to have doubts about using him as their symbol. That Sandino should remain the banner of the Sandinistas was due to the continual insistence of Carlos Fonseca.

"What mattered to Fonseca was the legend of the general, and its utility in capturing the popular imagination".3

The Sandinista governments Minister of Foreign Affairs, Miquel D’Escoto, gives the reader a false impression when he states that the Sandinistas aim was to fulfil the four goals of Sandino. Unlike Mao Tse-tung who clearly recorded his political thoughts, Sandino did not. Constantly on the move, Sandino never had the luxury of victory as Mao did and subsequently the time to commit aims and thoughts to paper never occurred. Instead Sandino’s philosophy was recorded in the memories of the numerous bands of revolutionaries he fought with over the years. After his death a new generation of Sandinistas were able to draw on what Sandino told their parents, had victory been permanent. For the Sandinistas Sandino’s unrecorded philosophy proved a useful legacy as it relied on individuals utilising their own interpretation from which D’Escoto emphasises four fundamental concepts.
Nationalism, which was manifested in the will of the Nicaraguan people to regain their sovereignty, to determine their destiny, even to make their own mistakes and learn from them. Sandinismo was not nationalistic in the sense that it did not believe it has discovered a suitable formula for imposing on another country. This arrogance was certainly not apart of Sandinismo as the Sandinistas themselves acknowledged that their revolution was not an exportable item. Rather, revolutions take place only when a people decide to make them possible, without broad popular participation revolutionary success is impossible.

Pluralism was the second Sandinista goal. Total people participation in social, economic, and political democracy, not just the formality of democracy. Sandismo philosophy aimed never to sink to the level of holding frequent but controlled elections -as Somoza did- so that the United States can say a regime has a democratic guise.5

Christianity was a strong element within Sandinista thought. The Catholic churches hold over Central - and Latin - American peoples is well known and recorded. It was not until 1960 in Medelin, Columbia, that Vatican II, the historic meeting of Latin American Bishops, began a renewal process within the Catholic church. The ideas from which quickly filtered down into the educated and elites conscience who began helping, and stopped exploiting, their fellow man. As students and parish priests began working among the poor they discovered the pitiful plight of their fellow country-folk and began to search for a solution. That solution found both educated and uneducated joining the Sandinista National Liberation Front (F.S.L.N.) and together, with the backing of the church, they were able to break the bonds of
two generations of totalitarian rule.\textsuperscript{6}

Social Justice is the fourth Sandinista belief. The revolution was brought about primarily to create a democratic system that "the people" as a whole believed and trusted in. As a twentieth century revolution Sandinismo was undoubtedly influenced by Marxist thought which helped it define 'social justice' and bring about its enactment. The obvious example being how Marxist philosophical perspective enables us to understand the connection between thought, capitalism, and racism.\textsuperscript{7}

Just as the United States once looked for the guidance from its Founding Fathers Nicaragua too was reliant on the security and insight of Sandino’s philosophy. All countries look toward a certain set of ideals that they hope to obtain. Sandinista ideology, while containing a certain degree of idealisation, does not enlist notions of fanciful naivety like many revolutions. The hope for self determination, pluralism, social justice, and a Christian society are not beyond the scope of any nation. Nor are they that different from the goals once espoused by Washington, Jefferson or even Ronald Reagan. Then why did the Reagan administration deliberately set out to destroy any hopes Nicaragua had of initiating the realisation of its revolution.

What is it that United States rulers disliked about the Sandinistas and their philosophy?

The Reagan administration’s most common complaint about the Sandinistas was that they "betrayed their revolution":

"The Sandinistas betrayed their repeated promises of democracy and free elections. They betrayed many who fought beside them in the revolution, and they’ve set up a communist dictatorship".\textsuperscript{8}

The consensus throughout the hemisphere is that while the Sandinistas promised their people freedom, all they’ve done is replace the former dicta-
"Behind a cloak of democratic rhetoric, the Nicaraguan communists have betrayed the 1979 revolution and embarked on a course of tyranny at home and subversion against their neighbours."

"The Sandinistas betrayed the hopes of a Nicaraguan revolution and sold out their country to the Soviet Empire."

The above statements, extending from 1985 to the end of 1986, are examples of how the administration believed the Nicaraguan revolution was "betrayed" by the Sandinista's as they seized power and then failed to hold democratic elections. In reality the Sandinista's alone did not seize power, rather the various anti-Somozaista groups united in a broad front under the F.S.L.N. to achieve victory. Secondly, any historian can only find irony in the Reagan administration's continuing call for pluralism and democratic elections in Nicaragua, given the United States long record of oligarchical rule in Latin America. This dramatic conversion therefore represented a cynical display of double standards.

Thirdly, while it was true that Daniel Ortega was widely quoted on August 25, 1981, stating that:

"elections would not be to contest power but to strengthen the revolution."

This was not a testimonial to the Sandinistas noncommitment to freely contest elections, rather it pointed to the self confidence of the revolutionary regimes willingness to compete, in a democratic contest, to prove beyond all doubt their popular support.

With the Sandinista's elections scheduled for November 4, 1984, Reagan's administration, who had up until this time been able only to base criticism of the Sandinista's around their failure to live up to their previous promises of democracy, moved
to sabotage the elections. This took the form of influencing opposition parties and candidates to abstain from participating.

The main opposition group, the Democratic Coordinating Alliance’s (D.C.A) initial objection was the lack of preparation time given to candidates for campaigning. The November election date was announced on February 21. Party registration was set for July 25 at which time seven parties registered. The D.C.A. refused to register and their head, Arturo Jose Cruz, announced he would not run unless the Sandinista’s opened dialogue with the contras. The D.C.A. also demanded that the registration deadline be extended. Although the Sandinista’s complied with the D.C.A’s demands about extending party registration deadlines, to October 1, the D.C.A. again failed to register this time stating it wanted the election date moved from November to January 1985.

Cruz had already reasoned that he believed after five years of Sandinista rule Nicaraguan’s had become too indoctrinated for any opposition to have a chance. To observers it became obvious that Cruz and the D.C.A had no intention of contesting the election, thereby casting a sense of doubt over the whole election. Reasoning for such action by Cruz and the D.C.A. was uncovered by the New York Times, which stated in no uncertain terms that:

"The Reagan administration, while publicly criticizing the November 4 elections in Nicaragua as a 'show', has privately argued against the participation of the leading opposition candidate for fear of his involvement would legitimatize the electoral process, according to some senior administration officials.

Since May, when American policy toward the election was formed, the administration has wanted the opposition candidate Arturo Cruz, either not to enter the race or, if he did, to withdraw before the election, claiming the conditions were unfair,"
Christian Party (P.P.S.C.) six, the Nicaraguan Communist Party (P.N.C.) two, the Nicaraguan Socialist Party two, and the Marxist-Leninist Popular Action Movement (M.A.P.-M.I.) also gained two seats.

The election for President, Vice-President and a constituent national legislature should have eliminated one of the protested the United States used to justify its aggression against the 'illegitimacy' of the Sandinistas. The larger voter turnout must also refute the abstentionist position taken by the rightist parties. Instead the immediate United States response was an escalation of military pressure, as the United States announced major military exercises in Honduras, combined with a refusal to negotiate Contadora unless Nicaragua held 'free elections'.

The years following Nicaragua's 1984 election saw the Reagan administration continuing its anti-Sandinista rhetoric complaining about Nicaragua's "one party power", explaining how "Marxist-Leninist...policies of repression and mismanagement...make them poor prospects for success in free elections".

Secretary Shultz dismissed the Nicaraguan election as something "more like a plebiscite". President Reagan still believed reconciliation in Nicaragua could only be: "Based on democratic elections" which were "the key to peace in Central America". It was this theme that was constantly reverberated in administration statements and remained one of the key factors for Reagan in Contadora negotiations. Yet, upon returning to the initial four points of Sandino a pluralistic society was a priority, along with the Nicaraguan peoples own determination to decide their destiny. Once again there are "facts" on both sides possibly pointing to underhandedness; this study has merely touched
the surface by pointing to the Reagan administration's involvement in persuading rightist candidates not to contest the election. One could have easily have asked: Why did it take the Sandinistas five years before they held elections? In doing so did they give the opposition adequate preparation time? The answer depends purely on one's own particular ideological outlook, the 'facts' as such play only a minor part in an individual's decision.

Reagan's fear of Nicaragua as a security threat also dominated his ideological outlook. He believed that Nicaragua was not only a threat to her neighbours but to the United States itself. Justification for this attitude was based on Nicaragua's supposed military build up and close ties to the Soviet Union and Cuba. It was true that the Nicaraguan army had grown from seven thousand regulars to over fifty thousand, along with a militia of around two hundred thousand. Yet Nicaraguan military expansion was a response to direct United States actions and certainly did not deserve the administration label of a "superpower in Central American terms". Secretary Haig further fermented the idea by insisting that Nicaragua's military build up was "but a prelude to a widening war in Central America". Haig added that Nicaragua was implementing "a costly arms race at the expense of economic development and social progress".

By 1987 Reagan official's had totally enveloped Nicaragua in its East-West rivalries by not only accusing Nicaragua of a military build up, but also of receiving extensive modern weaponry and support from a whole host of Eastern bloc countries. Reagan claimed in March 1986:

"The Nicaraguan military machine is more powerful than all its neighbours combined..."
part from thousands of Cuban military advisers, contingents of Soviets and East Germans, and all the elements of international terror - from the P.L.O to Italy’s Red Brigades. 34

Administration estimates on the number of Soviet, Cuban and Eastern bloc advisers were all around the eight thousand mark, of which three thousand five hundred were military and security personal. 345 A further breakdown of this figure reveals that neither the P.L.O nor the Red Brigade had representatives in Nicaragua; this was confirmed by the fact when journalists contacted the White House press office and the State Department neither could name any individuals nor present any proof of their presence. However it was true that the East Germans, Soviets, Bulgarians and North Koreans did have trade missions in Nicaragua, but only the Soviets and Cubans had a military presence there. 344

Like estimates about advisers, there were ‘guestimates’ about the amounts of military aid the Soviet Union had given Nicaragua. The beginning of March saw Secretary Schultz put the figure at half a billion dollars in Soviet arms shipments including tanks and other heavy armaments. 343 Less than four months later Reagan was telling the American public that Soviets had "invested over $1 billion in Nicaragua". 346 Interestingly enough Reagan’s own Secretary of Defense, Fred Ikle, testified before the United States Congress, in March 1983, that the Soviets had provided only four hundred and forty-four million dollars in aid to Nicaragua since the revolution. An additional one billion six hundred million dollars had been provided from non-Soviet sources, what Ikle termed “misguided European governments”. 347 One well example was that of France which sold Nicaragua seventeen million dollars worth of armaments in 1982 alone. United States
displeasure and pressure forced France to curtail this activity; although they continued to sell her military trucks and other nonlethal equipment. 383

As stated previously there are two ways of looking at the evidence. The first believes Nicaragua was building up its internal army, with the aid of Soviet bloc advisers, money, and the latest technology, in order to spread its own Marxist-Leninist revolution throughout Central America and eventually the world. The opposing view held that the Sandinista's were building up their army because they were expecting an imminent attack; not just from the contras but either a two, three, or four pronged attack involving Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and the United States. Although the involvement of Costa Rica and the United States seems unlikely given President Arias peace proposal and the United States public displeasure at any major military involvement, this had only recently become implausible as reports of United States and Honduran troop involvement in helping the contras had been well documented. Thus it was understandable and justifiable that Nicaragua prepared itself for an invasion by building up its military numbers and arsenal of weaponry.

It was the Reagan administration which pushed Nicaragua into a closer relationship with the Eastern bloc by undermining Nicaragua's private sector through embargoes and by blocking international loans. Such actions by the administration sought to create the 'totalitarian state' that was required to justify United States violence. Beginning January 23, 1981, Reagan initiated his first act of war against Nicaragua by suspending all aid and loans to Nicaragua. This was specifically aimed at withdrawing the remaining fifteen million dollars of the seventy-five
million dollar aid package previously approved by the Carter administration. At the same time the United States cancelled all future loans and credits to Nicaragua. Both measures were justified by Reagan, claiming that the Sandinista's had given military support to guerrillas in El Salvador.38

In April 1981 the United States formally cut off United States food shipments and then pressured international agencies not to lend to Nicaragua. Because of United States vetoes the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank have not extended credit to Nicaragua since January 1982. The United States also slashed Nicaragua’s sugar quota in 1982 for the 1983 fiscal year by ninety percent. The United States also refused to sell replacement and spare parts to Nicaragua; thereby rendering a large percentage of all Nicaraguan machinery inoperative.40

May 1985 saw the Reagan administration officially impose a full trade embargo against Nicaragua, granted under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act. This included not only a "total embargo on trade with Nicaragua" but also a "notification of U.S. intent to terminate its Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation with Nicaragua" and a "suspension of service to the U.S. by Nicaraguan airlines and Nicaraguan flag vessels". Reagan authorized these steps in response:

"to the emergency situation created by the Nicaraguan government's aggressive activities in Central America...[and] Nicaragua's continuing efforts to subvert its neighbours, its rapid destabilizing military build up, its close military and security ties to Cuba and the Soviet Union, and its imposition of communist totalitarian internal rule".41

Since 1981 the economic situation in Nicaragua has constantly worsened as the Sandinistas became forced to devote massive chunks of their resources to preventing contra victory. By
1985 Nicaragua's foreign debt was over four billion dollars as she fell over six months behind in her repayments to the World Bank. Nicaragua's economy had been placed under unnecessary burden stemming directly from United States actions. As a result most Nicaraguan's experienced a decline in their standard of living instead of the increase promised by the revolution. United States imposed hardships have resulted in massive amounts of capital flight from Nicaragua as companies dissolved, wages fell and unemployment rose. Meanwhile a loss of overseas markets caused nationwide food shortages as peasants were unwilling to sell produce at state imposed prices, choosing instead to cut back on production and only sell to the black market. In February 1985 Daniel Ortega announced a new economic policy that sharply reversed previous Sandinista economic policies by drastically reducing the extent of government intervention in the economy. The new policy, in an attempt to revive Nicaragua's exports devalued the currency more than two hundred percent, removed price subsidies, cut state spending and state employment, restricted the property of state farms, increased taxes and intensified its campaign outlawing the black market.45

Yet again world witnessed another example of the United States using food as a weapon to pressure a third world country. Obviously these economic tactics were a response to the contras inability to ignite any internal anti-Sandinista rebellion so United States policy adapted to a more direct attack on the Nicaraguan economy. In response the Sandinistas shifted to a "survival economy", thereby placing a priority on self sufficiency.45

The Reagan administration has also protested loudly over
alleged Sandinista human rights violations and other internal repressions. The Catholic church especially was constantly cited as coming under repression:

"...in Nicaragua the Church is the enemy...Cardinal Obando y Bravo...is prevented from speaking freely to his flock".44

"The biggest obstacle to the Sandinistas complete domination is the Church, which has been harassed mercilessly...the government doesn't hesitate to have priests beaten, arrested...kicked out".45

"All Marxist-Leninist governments eventually reveal themselves as atheistic - even though in the case of Nicaragua, a few misguided priests hold high government positions".46

It was true that since the 1980's the Catholic church had become increasingly estranged from the Sandinistas. Within Nicaragua it was recognised as the only institution capable of challenging the government. Ronald Radosh points out that since the revolution "merely to support the traditional church has become per se an act critical of the traditional regime".47

The most scandalous of clashes between the two factions occurred when Pope John Paul visited Nicaragua. During the Pope's stay his appearances were met with a mixture of religious devotion and revolutionary cat-calls. Contention still surrounds the Pope's refusal to say mass for the dead of the popular militia. The Archbishop believed the Pope "prayed for all who died" and as such would not "engage in propaganda for political reasons".48 Yet if this was so surely the Pope would have nothing to do with Poland's Solidarity Movement.

The Reagan administration also believed that Jews were persecuted in Nicaragua:

"The capital's only synagogue was desecrated and firebombed - the entire Jewish community forced to flee Nicaragua".49
This charge was first made by Reagan in 1983, and at the time Anthony Quainton, Reagan’s own Nicaraguan Ambassador, took the extraordinary step to notify the press that this allegation was false. Not only was the synagogue free from damage but the only Jews to have fled Nicaragua after the revolution had been allies of Somoza, therefore suspected of criminal acts.59

With the Sandinistas tightening of state security, declaring Nicaragua under state of emergency conditions, and suspending rights of habeas corpus in 1982, the Reagan administration continued to tell the world of Nicaraguan’s having their human rights withdrawn. Prior to these actions the Sandinistas were worried about a disintegrating economy in the midst of war, in particular the effect that strikes would have on an already weak economy. They decided to contain this threat by creating the Sandinista Workers’ Federation in 1980 — which joined the Soviet controlled World Federation of Trade Unions.51

Along with controlled unions freedom of the press was also restricted, with the countries only newspaper, La Prensa, being forced to close down indefinitely from June 26, 1986; this came after years of censorship.52

Without becoming embroiled in the long standing debate on repression and censorship within Nicaragua, it is important to note that since March 1982 Nicaragua has been in a state of emergency and like any country engaged in a war-like economy certain democratic rights are withdrawn, for example the right to strike. Censorship is also common in countries at war, the perfect example is of Great Britain and the press censorship imposed by the Thatcher government during its Falklands operation. The United States followed Thatcher’s example during its Grenada
invasion wherein United States press, radio, and television crews were not allowed near the island during the invasion. The only information available was from official government reports. In Nicaragua almost all of the items censored were concerned with military affairs, and in this respect she was no different from any other country at war.\(^{53}\)

Regarding attacks made on the Catholic church it is hard to decipher fact from rhetoric. It appears that certain Sandinistas are quite devout Catholic's and as such do not regard the church as a threat. Others within the party view any dissension from the party line as irresponsible and as such unac-ceptable. The Sandinistas cannot be completely exonerated from harassing the Church, but it is contestable whether the Reagan administration's charge of mass persecution of the Church can be sustained.

Daniel Ortega rightly believes that:

"Press freedom and a mixed economy need a minimum of stability in order to develop...To the extent that the U.S. is closing the noose around us, we have to tighten the screws".\(^{54}\)

During all this time the Reagan administration has never considered that a different approach might bring about a changed result. Instead the United States cut economic aid, eliminated the sugar quota, and intensified its contra war aimed at overthrowing the Sandinistas.\(^{55}\)

Reagan's campaign of disinformation about the plight of the Miskito Indians provides a further example of how the United States through its own actions, caused further hardship and tension. By initiating and supporting the contra war this led the Sandinistas, in January 1982, to evacuate Miskito villages along the Coco river border between Nicaragua and Honduras towards five sites some fifty miles further inland. This forced relocation.
resulted in a highly publicized propaganda campaign being initiated by the Reagan administration after twenty thousand Miskitos chose to cross into Honduras. Consequently, speculation of Sandinista human rights abuses ran wild as administration officials competed with one another to tell the most horrific descriptions of abuse. Alexander Haig waived a picture of burnt bodies before television cameras as "proof" that Sandinistas were slaughtering Miskitos. A photo later revealed to be over four years old and taken of victims of Somoza's National Guard. Three years later Reagan was still commenting about "massacres".

"Eyewitnesses said some Miskitos were burned alive. Ten thousand Indians were forced marched to relocation camps. Miskito villages were burned down; they're still being burned down. Miskito villages were bombed and shelled...In the name of humanity these atrocity must be stopped.

In reality the removal of Miskitos from bordering areas was in response to the frontier being turned into a war zone, and as such all people in that area except the military were evacuated. Therefore in no way can this act be viewed as singling out the Miskito population for punishment. This conclusion was also found by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organisation of American States after they carried out a two year investigation of alleged human rights violations on complaints from Misurasata - a group of Miskito contras. Not only did they find human rights allegations "unfounded", but they also ruled that the Sandinistas were "justified, for military reasons, in evacuating the Miskito Indians from the border war zone". The study ended with the recommendation that people be allowed to return to their homeland once the threat ceased. Since June 1985 resettlement has begun with the Nicaraguan government trans-
porting Miskitos back to their former villages and providing them with basic medicines and food.

To an outsider such wanton destruction appears barbaric, the Reagan administration, by its very actions, was deliberately destroying any hopes the Sandinistas had for improving the Nicaraguan economy and overall standard of living of its third world status. The administration began its propaganda war in 1981, preparing the United States public for its aggression. By April 1981 Reagan had invoked section 533(f) of the Foreign Assistance Act, calling for the termination of Nicaraguan economic support funds, because of "Nicaraguan support for violence in El Salvador".61 By 1983 Reagan’s reasoning had expanded to include the fact that Nicaragua was a security threat to her neighbours.

Reagan failed to prove his administration’s charge against the Sandinistas. In March 1984 Reagan’s Under Secretary of Defense, Fred Ikle, stated that fifty percent of arms reaching Salvadoran revolutionaries were United States made weapons captured off Salvadoran soldiers.62 Other officials have acknowledged that aid from Nicaragua and Cuba was in no way critical to the opposition movement in El Salvador.63 More importantly, administration claims against Nicaragua have never been backed up by the contras who clearly stated Nicaragua had no ties to revolutionaries in El Salvador. No arms shipments from Nicaragua, Cuba, or “anywhere” to El Salvador have ever been intercepted.64 David MacMichael, a highlevel C.I.A. analyst specialising in Central America, until 1983, confirmed that the arms flow argument was a deliberate deception by the Reagan administration:

"The U.S. systematically misrepresented Nicaraguan involvement in the supply of arms to Salvadoran guerrillas to justify its efforts to overthrow the Nicaraguan government", 65
No proof has emerged that Nicaragua was involved in supplying Salvadorean rebels with arms. The Sandinistas are prepared to testify relentlessly to their innocence. Nicaragua's Foreign Minister, Miguel D'Escoto, stated to the World Court:

"My country is not engaged, and has not been engaged, in the provision of arms or other supplies to either of the factions engaged in the civil war in El Salvador".65

Once again the 'truth' of the matter depends solely on ones personal ideological outlook and interpretation. For Ronald Reagan and his supporters there was no questioning the fact that Nicaragua attempted to 'export its revolution'. This attitude was clearly reflected in the Kissinger Commission which reported that:

"The evidence reveals that arms flowed into El Salvador from Nicaragua in preparation for the Salvadorean guerrillas unsuccessful 'final offensive' of January 1981. Air supply of arms to Salvador guerrillas came from Nicaraguas Papalonal airfield, small boats smuggled arms across the Gulf of Fonseca, and indirect supply routes which involved the use of Costa Rican territory were developed by the Sandinistas. The evidence also indicates that the Salvadorean guerrilla headquarters in Nicaragua evolved into a sophisticated command and control centre".67

Yet at the same time Sandinistas deny all knowledge of participation.

The Reagan administration used fear of Nicaragua as a security threat to her neighbours as an excuse for mustering contra support; Reagan confirmed these suspicions, stating:

"The Sandinistas have been attacking their neighbours through armed subversion since August of 1979. Countering this by supporting Nicaraguan freedom fighters is essentially acting in self defense and is certainly consistent with the United Nations and O.A.S. Charter provisions for individual and collective security".68

Aside from the massive build up of military infrastruc-
ture, arms and manoeuvres in Honduras, many saw the United States invasion of Grenada, in October 1983, as a model for possible United States action against Nicaragua. One United States State Department official said:

"If [Nicaragua] had any doubts about our willingness to use forces under certain circumstances, those doubts should be erased." 69

The following year saw a continuing push for contra victory as first Reagan warned of the "communist sanctuary" Nicaragua had become, 70 then the Kissinger Commission echoed the administration's line warning the United States about Nicaragua being a permanent security threat to its neighbours. The beginning of 1985 saw Reagan boldly state on a televised news conference that the United States objective was to "remove" the "present structure" of Nicaragua. When pressed to say whether the United States was actively seeking the Sandinistas overthrow Reagan replied:

"Not if the present government would turn around and say 'uncle' to the Nicaraguan rebels..." 71

That the United States was engaged in overthrowing the Sandinistas was reinforced in July 1986 when John Echeverria, United States Ambassador to Honduras, was dismissed after stating that the Reagan administration had deliberately avoided a "negotiated settlement" and instead pursued a "military goal". Echeverria believed that the one hundred million dollars allocated for contra aid was just a "down payment" in what was going to be a long war. 72

In conclusion the chapter has shown the many facets in which the ghost of Sandinismo lives in the 1980's. The Sandinistas remain an intensely nationalistic group trying to bring about an ideal utopian society. The extent that they are succeeding can be mirrored in the Reagan administration's response to the
Nicaragua is a pluralistic society with an exemplary human rights record. But equally so, one must take into account the damage and pressure that the United States has applied on Nicaragua and the internal mess that the Sandinistas inherited from the final Somoza regime. Given Nicaragua's history and current United States actions Nicaragua has made great strides towards fulfilling the ideals of Sandinismo. Although the true test of the Sandinistas commitment to Sandinismo will come after a cease-fire, for then there can be no excuses for any form of internal repression or loss of human rights. Until this time the world must wait and watch before it passes judgement.
FOOTNOTES


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(5) Ibid.

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(60) "Questions And Answers Regarding The Miskitu People Of Nicaragua", Roxanne D. Ortiz and Chockie Lottier, Indigenous World, number 103.


(66) "The Charters Goal And Todays Realities", Secretary Shultz address before the U.N. General Assembly, September 23, 1985, Department Of State Bulletin, November 1985, p.68.


CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to discuss the duality of the Reagan administration’s foreign policy in Central America. Ronald Reagan deliberately chose to ignore human rights policies, initiated by the Carter administration, which were promoting an end to state violence and terror. Instead Reagan poured his own personal fears into his foreign policy and made the containment of communism in the American ‘backyard’ his overriding concern. The result for Central America was seven years of hardship and bloody civil wars.

Yet Reagan, by narrowly focusing his policies, has failed to achieve the foreign policy consensus he so readily accused the Carter administration of lacking. This lack of unity was a contributing factor to the ineffective nature of both Carter’s and Reagan’s foreign policy. Richard Feinburg, writing about Reagan’s Central American foreign policy notes:

"Apart from anti-communism the administration is still struggling to design a comprehensive and coherent policy for that area".¹

Margret Hermann supports this argument by dividing the leaders of United States foreign policy into either "crusaders" or "pragmatists". The pragmatist awards primacy to facts and knowledge gained through experience while the crusader’s credo remains uncompromising as for him empiricisms must bow to the rigidity of his abstract philosophy. Reagan, she believes, was a crusader in the mold of John Foster Dulles, who viewed every Soviet action as a threat to United States interests. Reagan’s
conservatism was an attitude, not a theory, and as such he made
decisions based on a preconceived idea, rather than after explor-
ing the alternatives. 2

The thesis began by outlining the foreign policy of Ronald
Reagan. The chapter clearly documented how the policies of Rea-
gan’s administration lacked initiative and innovation. Instead
Reagan continued the United States post-1930’s policy of main-
taining the status quo by funding local military powers to that
end. Rather than looking at the indigenous root causes of the
crisis in Central America, Reagan continued the post World War
II habit of publicly focusing on Cuban and Soviet designs, making
claims of communist political aggression the overriding justifi-
cation for his Central American policy. Consequently, with United
States support, the governments of Central America have tended to
rely on coercion rather than diplomacy to solve any problem. As
The New Republic noted, the “colonels” and “commissars” of Cen-
tral America “are in the business of power, not in the business
of justice”. 3 These strong arm tactics employed by the United
States did not achieve the re-creation of conditions prevalent in
the Central America’s of pre-1970’s. Wielding the ‘stick’ served
only to further escalate the wars.

The Reagan administration promised to achieve two objec-
tives in Central America: to end the war and bring about peace
and prosperity. The thesis has shown how this ‘guardian angel’
image reeked of duplicity. Analysis makes it clear that the
United States projection was motivated by a desire to avoid ques-
tion and criticism. Chapter one demonstrated how government
statements served to explain away United States interference in
Nicaragua, the financing and military backing of contra rebels in
pursuit of their goal to destabilise and eventually overthrow the Sandinista government, and the implementation of trade sanctions and economic embargoes toward the same end. Chapter one established that the Reagan administration’s economic proposals, which it vowed would revive and revitalise the depressed economy of Central America, failed. The Reagan administration’s efforts in Central America were not inspired by a desire to improve conditions for the peoples of the region; rather, their only objective was that of the containment of the region within United States control. The administration sought to achieve this end through both military and economic means.

El Salvador provided the thesis with its first example of Reagan’s foreign policy back-firing. As Reagan raced to take charge of the situation, a solution to El Salvador’s problems moved further into the distance. By 1988, seven years after the civil uprisings initiation, war continued to ravage the land and its people. A war that could have been quickly avoided had the revolutionaries grievances been allowed to be aired. Instead Reagan chose to intensify the war by citing communist foul-play. The familiar rallying cry marked the beginning of the United States embroiling El Salvador and Central America into the Cold War.

El Salvador became a priority for Reagan not because of its depressed economy but because of the propaganda value it offered had ‘communist’ backed revolutionaries quickly been stamped out. As the civil war raged on Reagan was forced to change tact. This time focusing attention upon a group of staged elections. Neither elections, nor military or economic aid was sufficient to solve El Salvador’s problems. Assistance given to the Duarte government merely polarized the situation, so that the
1988 electoral victory of O.R.D.E.N. meant El Salvador, once again under the control of the far-right, is set for a mass of confrontations. El Salvador is representative of a localised war that began in 1981 and would have quickly run its course had the United States not interfered.

Honduras provided a second example of the disruptive influence Reagan’s foreign policy was having. Known as a traditionally stable country, Honduras became transformed, by the Reagan administration, into a military state. The continual militarization of Honduras resulted in the cracking of Honduran infrastructure, notably the appearance of human rights abuses.

Economically the contras presence in Honduras had proved very costly, especially to coffee farmers in the border regions of El Paraíso, Choluteca and Gracias a Dios. The seven year old economic crisis was reflected in the country’s instability as labour strikes continually stalled production; meanwhile the gross domestic product has dropped to one percent during the 1980’s. Like El Salvador Honduras was equally plagued by foreign debt servicing on its balance of payments. To counter this Reagan spent millions of dollars on aiding Honduras. In return this aid caused Honduras to become dependent on United States aid as a major source of income.

As in El Salvador, the polarization of the Honduran people can be directly linked to Reagan’s foreign policy. In this instance polarization was the result of the contra presence and massive United States military residency in Honduras. To the United States Honduras was the vital intermediary for all its Central American policies; providing not only a staging ground for United States shows of strength, but also a storage depot.
where extensive training programmes were carried out. The extent that the United States exploited these Honduran "services" can be seen in the growing 'anti-yankee' feeling that arose during the Reagan administration's two terms of office. As a result of United States and contra pressure Honduras exchanged its stable image for one more erratic.

A recent explosion of Honduran "Anti-Americanism" was felt in April 1988, when rioters, demonstrating in Tegucigalpa, caused "serious damage" by setting two buildings of the American Embassy on fire; thereby compelling President Jose Azcona Hoyo to declare a state of emergency. The New York Times quoted a Honduran newspaper editor declaring that:

"There has never been a demonstration of such violence and anti-Americanism." 5

Unqualified support of the contras became the litmus test for Reagan loyalists. Foreign policy prestige rested on a contra victory. The creation and backing of the contras showed the extent that Reagan was willing to go to disrupt Central America, by chasing his fear of communist infiltration. While Reagan saw contra activity as an attempt to force the Sandinista's to renegotiate their revolutionary victory, the contras own activities showed them up for what they really were: United States backed terrorists. The documentation of contra human rights abuses in Honduras and Nicaragua proves this beyond all doubt. More disturbingly though is the support given to contra aid by the United States House of Representatives. Up until 1989, when aid was suspended, this was interpreted as a confirmation of Reagan's East-West vision of Central American conflicts. 6

The thesis finally discussed Nicaragua. Centring its examination on the barrage of taunts and the economic and mili-
tary persecution inflicted upon Nicaragua, in an effort to point out the absurdity of such a policy. Absurd in that Reagan’s reasoning for such policy action was unfounded and unjustified. Reagan’s Nicaraguan policy was based solely on personal paranoia: fear of communist expansionism. Thus, in the tradition of “Teddy” Roosevelt, Reagan used the “stick” in an attempt to erase the Sandinista’s. Reagan’s actions, so dedicated to the principles of James Monroe, sought to revive the period of Manifest Destiny in which the United States ruled supreme in its own backyard. Although Reagan failed in his attempt to preserve the status quo it was not from lack of trying.

What sort of threat was Nicaragua to the United States and Central America. It was that of example and not military fear or anxiety of an adjacent Soviet satellite. What the United States feared was that Nicaragua would prove to the rest of Central and Latin America that a small undeveloped country could follow an independent political and economic life. This not only threatened United States hegemony and ‘global interests’, but United States ‘credibility’ as preeminate force in the international arena. Therefore Nicaragua not only represented a loss of ‘empire’ but its threat as an example of a peoples revolution confronted United States hegemonic interests as did the ‘loss’ of Cuba over three decades ago. Reaganites saw the Sandinista victory as ‘another Cuba’; whereas opponents to the contras and Reagan’s policy viewed United States action as instigating ‘another Vietnam’.

Over the past seven years the Reagan administration attempted to reverse the Sandinista victory, thereby proving to the rest of Central America their dependence on the United States
for survival. Instead what has resulted is a bitter war that has divided opinion throughout the world. In the years immediately prior to 1983, world opinion—including that of the United States—steadily sympathized with the Sandinistas, much to the disgust of the Reagan administration. It was only with opinion mounting against him that Reagan was forced to negotiate seriously a peaceful solution. But while declaring his commitment to peace and the ideals of democracy, Reagan simultaneously prepared for war. As Contadora talks progressed into 1983, with contra and Sandinista leaders meeting in Managua, on April 16, the United States continued to build military landing strips in Honduras just forty miles from the Nicaraguan border.

Throughout his two terms Reagan has lied unconvincingly to the American public about his actions in an attempt to hide the true motives behind his foreign policy: the prevention of communist backed revolution in the American backyard. To ensure local conformity Reagan willingly paid an attractive price. This has since lost its appeal as Central American governments weighed the price of United States aid against the costs of internal instability. This is reflected in the mass appeal Contadora negotiations had.

Regardless of the success or failure of Contadora’s cease-fire negotiations, the cost of continuance has already proved too expensive, both politically and economically. To an incoming President the Contadora negotiations represent the opportunity of foreign policy success by merely supporting the negotiations.

The attainment of peace apart, the United States managed to steer the emphasis of these negotiations away from the most significant handicap affecting Central America, that of mass pov-
property. Whilst Contadora may ultimately be able to end the war it
cannot solve the problem of poverty that faces all Central Amer-
ica.

Reagan's Central American policy showed neither innovation
nor success. Instead his policies represented the machinations of
an arch-type 'Rambo' styled leader whose prejudices, stubbornness
and paranoia allowed him to cause long term damage to, not only
the Sandinistas but, all the peoples of Central America. For it
is they who ultimately had to pay the price for Reagan's personal
fear of communism.

Reagan's enduring reputation is not to be as the 'Great
Communicator' but is rather to be accompanied by a notoriosity more
akin to that of Richard Nixon. Many Americans, after learning of
their President's dealings with Iran, relived a past that they
preferred to forget : a memory of Richard Nixon and Watergate.
Senate and Congressional 'checks' and 'balances', intended to
prevent the abuse of power, proved ineffective during the Reagan
era. Everyday 'democratic' rights appeared to have been super-
seded by 'personal politics' aimed at personal gain. How else can
one rationally explain United States involvement with Iran or the
power that Oliver North wielded. Of greater importance is Rea-
gan's involvement, or lack of, in this issue. If Reagan was fully
informed why did he not fully notify Congress of his actions.
This questions Reagan's loyalty, honesty and capacity to serve
the people of the United States. Reagan brushed this interpreta-
tion aside and instead told the world that his knowledge of the
operation was incomplete. During the Congressional hearings it
emerged that John Poindexter deliberately kept Reagan uninformed,
so as to 'insulate' him from the pressure of further details and
decision making, and from downfall if the operation became public knowledge. Yet it was Reagan's own persona of fragility and lack of memory that forced top level government advisers into such positions of total power. Neither Reagan nor his staff appeared to realise the gravity of their actions. For the American voting public it brought further disillusionment with the present system of governing. To the victims of the intimidation it meant increasing undue hardship. Meanwhile the rest of the world cannot help chuckling at the incredible irony of Reagan trading weapons and a Bible with the leader of 'international terrorism'.

For Reagan, foreign policy has been a game in which the sole objective was to achieve the eradication of your opponent by any means necessary. Unfortunately the pawns on both sides of the board are already beginning to tire in their old status of blind allegiance. The United States was no longer the nineteenth century colonial ruler it believes it still was. Just as the Soviet Union has withdrawn from Afghanistan, Ronald Reagan, and future leaders of the United States of America, must relinquish the 'American backyard' from their grasp. Likewise the United States must develop a foreign policy suited to the needs of the late twentieth century and not insist on reusing such outdated ideas as Roosevelt's 'carrot' and 'stick'. The sooner Central American independence is achieved the less blood will be shed in removing the present 'yankee' system of domination.
FOOTNOTES


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