

## WAGING IDEOLOGICAL WAR: ANTI-COMMUNISM AND US FOREIGN POLICY IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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The Bolshevik leaders have had very definite ideas with respect to the role which Mexico and Latin America are to play in their general program of world revolution. They have set up as one of their fundamental tasks the destruction of what they term American imperialism as a necessary prerequisite to the successful development of the international revolutionary movement in the New World. . . Thus Latin America and Mexico are conceived as a base for activity against the United States.

– *Secretary of State Frank Kellogg, 'Bolshevik Aims and Policies in Mexico and Latin America', 1927*<sup>1</sup>

In Guatemala, international communism had an initial success. It began ten years ago, when a revolution occurred in Guatemala. The revolution was not without justification, but the Communists seized on it, not as an opportunity for real reforms, but as a chance to gain political power. . . If world communism captures any American State, however small, a new and perilous front is established which will increase the danger to the entire free world and require even greater sacrifices from the American people.

– *Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, 1954*<sup>2</sup>

As Nicaragua is already doing, additional Marxist–Leninist regimes in Central America could be expected to expand their armed forces, bring in large numbers of Cuban and other Soviet bloc advisors, develop sophisticated agencies of repression and external subversion, and sharpen polarizations, both within individual countries and regionally. . . The crisis is on our doorstep.

– *National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, 1984*<sup>3</sup>

A haunting echo emerges from the solemn warnings today about the potential communist domination of Central America. For more than half a century US officials have harped on a similar theme and have followed it with intervention in the region. During much of this time journalists and scholars focused on the interventions, and treated the alleged threat of communism as little more than a pretext for US domination. The *New York World*, for example, exclaimed in response to the 1927 State Department memorandum:

One can only characterize this as a degrading form of propaganda aimed either to save Mr. Kellogg's face. . . or as part of a concerted effort on the part of the State Department to mislead and inflame American opinion as the prelude to a diplomatic rupture and an armed intervention.<sup>4</sup>

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The claims of protecting the hemisphere from a communist threat by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, when the US assisted in the overthrow of the Guatemalan government, have been similarly dismissed by most scholars as little more than a weak justification for other American purposes in Central America.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the anti-communist theme has been repeated so often to cover up the true intentions of the United States in Central America that many analysts have viewed it only as a pretext—and nothing more—for US intervention in the region.

The current fervour against communism is not the same as the pretexts of years past. It has taken on a new dimension. Ridding the hemisphere of communism has become an end in itself for the United States; it has become a religious crusade, an ideological war. For this reason the contemporary anti-communist campaign should not be dismissed as sheer hypocrisy. As it has gathered momentum, the campaign has become a crusade against which the mere exposure of its associated fallacies or the recitation of rational argument provides little resistance. To be sure, anti-communist posturing retains many elements of rationalization, whereby it serves other interests. But this alone does not describe its character or suggest its importance as an animating force of US policy in Central America.

This article will examine the nature of the United States' ideological war against communism in Central America today. The first section will describe the way anti-communism has become associated with a multiplicity of goals that are invoked to justify US intervention. The description suggests the crusade-like quality of the anti-communist campaign. The parallels to a crusade will be drawn up explicitly in the second section, which focuses on the distortions that are propagated in order to bind the faithful together. The third section explores why anti-communism has taken such a firm hold on Washington. In the concluding section the way in which the crusade has been manifested in policy will be examined, because this suggests the significance of the crusade, which will be considered.

### *1—Intervention and anti-communism*

During the twentieth century the United States has intervened in the Caribbean and Central America for a variety of reasons in pursuit of at least as many interests. Although scholars differ in their emphases on particular reasons, most include three prominent ones: to keep out foreign powers, to ensure access to sea lanes, the Panama Canal, raw materials and markets, and to maintain stability. A consensus on these is evident across the political spectrum from scholars on the left to those on the right.<sup>6</sup> To be sure, explanations differ as to why the three have been sufficiently important to the United States to warrant intervention. Walter Lafeber, for example, points to the US interest in its own security

and the desire to develop and maintain a system of neo-dependency. Cole Blasier suggests the US has had 'an interest in control, or dominant political influence, for its own sake.' In each case, particular interests also may have been factors. They range from the particular interests of the people involved in the bureaucracy, to the electoral insecurity of presidents.<sup>8</sup>

The three prominent reasons are clear in many of the cases of US intervention. Concern about a foreign power appears to have prompted the US to occupy Haiti in 1914, because it feared German control of the Windward Passage, and to invade Mexico in 1916, because of Mexican relations with Germany.<sup>9</sup> In both cases the concern turned around security matters. Attention directed at the Panama Canal and Caribbean sea lanes has at times been less a matter of security than commerce, though it would be difficult to disentangle the two. The United States has equated open commerce with its security in this century for several reasons. First, commerce provides the raw materials necessary for domestic industry and development. Thus in 1950, when Ambassador George Kennan underlined the importance of Latin America to the United States, he pointed to the protection of 'our raw materials', but he suggested a security context: were Europe to turn against the United States, he said, 'Latin America would be all we would have to fall back on.'<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Latin American raw materials were used extensively in the arms build-up during the Korean War.

Second, commerce provides markets for US industries, which have been important for the US economy. Finally, open commerce has meant investment by US capitalists who would maintain Latin American countries in a position of dependency vis-à-vis the United States. Dependency reduced the ability of these countries to turn away from the United States and to welcome a non-hemispheric power into a relationship that might threaten the US.

Certainly the dynamics of neo-dependency were not clear to many US policymakers. Neo-dependency may have been understood, if at all, only at an intuitive level. It appears that policymakers often opted to intervene merely at the behest of private interests.<sup>11</sup> They may have done so on the crude basis of their own personal and pecuniary relations with threatened companies, or on the basis of a shared outlook about the sanctity of private property, and about the responsibility of the United States government to protect American property. Regardless of the source—whether it was a sophisticated calculus about dependency or a simpler notion about American owned property—the concern for private investors seemed for the most part compatible with US security interests.

Likewise, stability has been prized because it seemed to ensure US security and commercial interests. Repressive governments that suppressed dissent—which often took the form of strikes—and that were aligned with the United States, thus became more desirable than democratic govern-

ments. The latter had more tolerance for disruption, and were more difficult to control because they were less autocratic.<sup>12</sup>

The common thread that runs through most of the explanations of US intervention is the sense that the United States has viewed the Caribbean and Central America from the perspective of a great power, and has seen the region as within the US sphere of influence. All great powers, the conventional wisdom holds, act from a logic that dictates a power must maintain hegemony over an area it sees as in its sphere. Great powers define their security partially in terms of such maintenance, and resort to techniques such as neo-dependency to promote and perpetuate hegemony.

The assertion that the United States treats Latin America as a protectorate, as a region under its sphere of influence, does not resonate well with the American vision of itself as a non-imperial—and even an anti-imperial—power. Americans hold a profound belief in their exceptionalism, a belief that in the New World they built a society that rested on neither the class divisions nor the imperialism of the Old World, and that was guided by a moral vision. Indeed this faith has tinged public pronouncements about US intervention in Latin America. As the eminent conservative historian Dexter Perkins observes:

**Again and again, in the controversies that arose, the emphasis is on ideology, rather than on security. American statesmen have believed, and acted on the belief, that the best way to rally American opinion behind their purposes is to assert a moral principle.**<sup>13</sup>

In part this accounts for the repeated use of an alleged atheistic communist threat to justify intervention. A fight against communists required no other moral justification. It became the equivalent of earlier rationalizations for US intervention, which characterized the United States as a noble missionary out to civilize or Christianize backward populations.

The point at which this missionary overlay—the crusade to rid the hemisphere of communism—took on a life of its own is difficult to specify precisely. As noted, anti-communism was invoked before World War II. In the decade after the war anti-communist appeals with respect to Latin America gained greater frequency as they coincided with the Red Scare of the period. There is evidence, for example, that a crusade-like mentality animated US intervention against Guatemala in 1954 even more than the desire to restore United Fruit's property. Blasier observes that 'Dulles' policies toward Guatemala were in part a religious crusade against atheistic communism, in part an ideological struggle on behalf of free enterprise, and in part a battle with Soviet expansionism'.<sup>14</sup> What is clear is that today the crusade is wholly coincident with professed US concerns for security, the maintenance of neo-dependent relations, and hegemonic domination. Where these interests might have been distinguishable at one

time from an anti-communist posture, they are now one and the same. This equation has enabled anti-communism to take on a life of its own as the guide for US policy.

It is revealing to examine the official reasons for US military activities and expanded presence in Central America and the Caribbean today.<sup>15</sup> In each instance, the foreign threat—that is, the threat from outside the hemisphere—is the Soviet Union, which has allegedly injected itself into the hemisphere directly by assisting and controlling its agents, and indirectly through its ideology, communism.<sup>16</sup> Marxism-Leninism and communism are seen as one and the same, as a consistent ideology with a clear associated political programme, and most importantly, as foreign.<sup>17</sup> Starting from these premises, the logic of the US concern becomes apparent with respect to the traditional reasons for US intervention.

*1. Foreign power.* Little distinction is made between US security and keeping the Soviet Union out of the hemisphere. Of necessity, because Cuba and Nicaragua are in the hemisphere, a ready equation is made between these two countries and the Soviet Union. Cuba and Nicaragua are linked to the Soviet Union as 'surrogates', 'mercenaries', 'part of the Soviet intelligence network', 'partners', and 'collaborators'.<sup>18</sup> At times, an activity is referred to as 'Cuban-Soviet', or the three countries are contextually linked as in: 'Cuba, Nicaragua and the Soviet Union aided. . .'.<sup>19</sup> This sleight of hand enables Cuba and Nicaragua to be the focus of arguments about protecting Central America from a non-hemispheric power. These 'foreigners' threaten the United States for several reasons. Their presence allegedly undermines US credibility in the eyes of allies, who presumably could not trust the United States to come to their defence if the US is unwilling to attack enemies so close to home.<sup>20</sup> In a time of war with the Soviet Union, the US would be hampered in sending supplies and reinforcements to the battlefield (which presumably would be outside the hemisphere), because the Soviet navy could attack US deployments from bases in Central America and the Caribbean, and could block up the Panama Canal.<sup>21</sup> [Short of war, such bases would improve the Soviet capability to gather intelligence about the United States, and to pursue their expansionary aims through the hemisphere.<sup>22</sup> Their goal, it is said, is to control all of Central America and then Mexico, which would place a hostile power directly on the US border. The United States has been able to develop as a democracy and as the strongest country in the world because it has been in the fortuitous position of never having to defend its borders. The necessity of a border defence would change the American way of life.<sup>23</sup> Such an aim is facilitated by the nature of these foreigners. They are ruthless and untrustworthy. They do not respect coalition government, and they take advantage of 'liberal' open systems the way in which the Bolsheviks were able to undermine Eastern European governments. Their weapon is terror, and to permit their terror in this hemi-

sphere is to encourage the international terror network that the Soviet Union sponsors.<sup>25</sup>

2. *Access to markets, etc.*: The Soviets understand how vital the Caribbean sea lanes are to the United States. Half of US 'shipping tonnage and imported oil passes through Caribbean shipping lanes', President Reagan exclaimed in 1984, 'and nearly half of [U.S.] foreign trade passes through the Panama Canal and Caribbean waters.'<sup>26</sup> The emphasis on oil is a version of the old concern about protecting US sources of raw material, even though much of the oil is not produced in the region. An increasing amount is refined in the Caribbean basin. While the old concern was largely economic, the new emphasis is both commercial and strategic. Similarly, open sea lanes and an accessible Panama Canal have had simultaneous security and commercial casts placed on them. This is the case even with respect to private investment. The denunciation of Marxist-Leninist regimes for their lack of pluralism is based on a complex link between security and commercial interests.<sup>27</sup> The regimes in question are Cuba, Nicaragua, and the potential governments that would be ruled by guerrillas fighting in El Salvador and Guatemala. Such regimes are said to deny the unfettered penetration of US capital, which makes their countries inhospitable climates for investment. Investment is one of the bonds that tie a country to the United States, and make it less susceptible to Soviet penetration. US investment is also seen as the only route to economic development in the region, and without development the countries provide 'ripe conditions' for exploitation by Marxist-Leninist subversives.<sup>28</sup>

3. *Stability*: These subversives appreciate that ripe conditions are unstable ones, which is why 'an explicit purpose of guerrilla violence is to make matters worse'.<sup>29</sup> The consequences of instability in the region are not only the likely takeover by the Soviet surrogates, but the massive migration of Central Americans to the United States.<sup>30</sup> Such a flow of immigrants threatens even the stability of the United States and so poses a security problem. While official statements avoid explicit racial references about the nature of the refugees, they muster up images that have been used for more than a century to describe undesirable aliens who do not fit into the mainstream population of the United States.

4. *Moral goals*: Implicit in this litany of threats to the United States and the hemisphere is the moral purpose that attaches to a struggle against communism. But what can be made explicit should not be left to the imagination, so the moral case has been spelled out.—To fight totalitarian communism in the hemisphere is 'a moral duty and a solemn responsibility', President Reagan told the US Congress. To be idle would mean that the United States would 'stand by passively while the people of Central America are delivered to totalitarianism'.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the Kissinger Commission declares the primary US interest in the region is the preservation of 'the moral authority of the United States'. This includes the require-

ment that the United States 'be perceived by others as a nation that does what is right *because* it is right. . .<sup>32</sup> What is right is to help 'our friends' who are fighting communism. 'The people of El Salvador,' the President admonished, 'are earning their freedom and they deserve our moral and material support to protect it.'<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the other democratic countries in Latin America are looking to the United States to protect their freedom from the dangers of totalitarianism in their *midst*.<sup>34</sup>

In sum, by official reckoning, a war against communism in Central America comports with the historic interests and values of the United States. Anti-communism throughout the century equates perfectly with the reasons for US intervention in the region. With such a unitary correlation, anti-communism can be readily substituted at all times as the rationale for US action. In the process of such substitution, anti-communism has slowly become the end itself.

### *II—The anti-communist crusade*

Political crusades are no new phenomena in the United States. Many movements in the last two hundred years have taken on an evangelical *fervour*.<sup>35</sup> They have been accompanied by an ideological world view that explains events in terms of conspiracy; that reduces complex issues to a struggle between good and evil, and that exaggerates the evil to the point of paranoia; that prompts a self-righteousness on the part of the faithful; and that ultimately rests on a blind faith. The current anti-communist crusade directed at Central America fits this mould quite securely.

A conspiratorial view of events in Central America runs rampant through the official declamations reviewed in the last section. The Soviets, Cubans and now Nicaraguans have a plan to take over Central America, officials allege, and so all turmoil in the region can be traced directly to this source. 'The Soviet-Cuban thrust to make Central America part of their geostrategic challenge,' the Kissinger Commission asserts, 'is what has turned the struggle in Central America into a security and political problem. . .'<sup>36</sup> Concomitant with the conspiratorial view is a portrait of the enemy that takes on fantastic proportions. As William LeoGrande observes: 'In this envisioned conspiracy, the communists are omniscient and omnipotent, the noncommunists ignorant and *impotent*.'<sup>37</sup>

\Having enlarged the enemy to frightening dimensions, crusaders then register enormous fears about the monster. The communists in Central America hate the United States, officials charge, see control of the region as a first attack on the United States, and finally seek to destroy America and 'its way of *life*'.<sup>38</sup> Such fears lead to a rigidity that cannot tolerate any deviation, because to accept any accommodation is to expose Good to Evil. 'President Jimmy Carter's Ibero-American policies', the Committee of Santa Fe sermonized,

are the culmination of this accommodation process whereby. . . Latin American regimes are abandoned to extracontinental attacks by the international Communist movement.<sup>39</sup>

To wage war against this enemy thus becomes a moral obligation as much as it is self-serving. The Kissinger Commission proudly proclaims that 'in Central America today, our strategic and moral interests coincide'.<sup>40</sup> The United States can self-righteously arrogate to itself, therefore, the prerogative to determine which regimes in the region are legitimate and which are not. Cuba and Nicaragua fail the tests!

The tests have a mystical quality to them. They do not rely on ready proofs, but emerge from a fabric of distortions and blind assertions. To believe these requires a leap of faith, which is what all crusades demand of their followers as a condition to join the fold. Richard Hofstadter explains that

**The typical procedure of the higher paranoid scholarship is to start with such defensible assumptions and with a careful accumulation of facts, or at least what appear to be facts, and to marshal these facts toward an overwhelming 'proof of the particular conspiracy to be established.'**<sup>41</sup>

Six articles of faith constitute the 'proofs' of the anti-communist crusade over Central America. Repeated regularly, they are: (1) the United States is supporting democracy in Central America; (2) US credibility is at stake in Central America; (3) there is a Soviet/Cuban/Nicaraguan nexus that makes Nicaragua and Cuba surrogates of the Soviet Union; (4) Nicaragua is a threat to its neighbours and the United States; (5) the countries of the region are potential 'dominoes'; (6) the anti-Nicaraguan guerrillas are fighting for democracy.

The six shibboleths do emerge from some undeniable facts, as Hofstadter suggests is often the case. The facts are invoked to affirm the veracity of the web that is spun out of them, and to obscure the leaps of faith that constitute the web itself. There is no question, for example, that Cuba is a Marxist-Leninist state, and that it views the Soviet Union as a 'natural ally'. Nearly three-fourths of Cuba's trade is with Comecon (Soviet and Eastern European trade bloc) countries. The Soviet Union provides significant amounts of economic and military aid to Cuba along with large subsidies, on the oil and machinery it exports to Cuba and on the sugar it imports. Cuba has supplied arms to Nicaragua, and has given extensive assistance in the form of teachers and medical professionals. In the ruling Sandinista directorate there are some people who consider themselves to be Marxist-Leninists, and this is true as well of some leaders among the insurgents in El Salvador and Guatemala. What is questionable are the conclusions that are developed on the basis of these facts. Consider

each of the six.

1. Democracy in Central America may be the most often stated goal of the Reagan Administration, but incantation does not substitute for action. In El Salvador, which is the main focus of the policy, it has promoted three elections since 1982. But in each instance, the choices were limited by the exclusion of candidates associated with the FDR (Democratic Revolutionary Front). This meant that many Christian Democrats and Social Democrats who had run for office even in earlier, disrupted and discredited Salvadoran elections were kept off the ballot. The last election, in May 1984, was further distorted by the intrusion of the US through its massive support for Jose Napoleon Duarte. Still, the United States has maintained the fiction that the elections were democratic, because at least the 'centre' and right participated fully. This fiction rests on the claim that the El Salvador government is a centre regime which had instituted reforms beginning after the October, 1979 coup, and that it has been continuing those reforms. In fact, the government that came to power in October, 1979 lasted for three months, and most of the reforms it tried to develop were undermined by the military and right wing, which regained power by March, 1980.<sup>42</sup> Most of the people involved with the first junta are now in exile, and many of them are working actively with the FDR. The lack of real progress in democratizing El Salvador prompted President Reagan to veto the military aid bill he had requested at the end of 1983, because it would have required the President to certify continuing progress towards democracy.<sup>43</sup>

What the Administration would have to overlook in such certifications is the close link between the 'death squads' and the government. The death squads are not the **rogue groups** of right-wing extremists Administration officials describe. They have been organized and directed by high military officials and form a part of the apparatus the government uses to control the **populace**.<sup>44</sup> There is some evidence that they may be even linked to the Central Intelligence Agency.<sup>45</sup>

Democracy in the other Central American countries also appears to be of little real concern for the Administration. It points to the 1981 Honduran election as a **movement** away from authoritarian rule, and then ignores the way in which real control of the government has remained in the hands of the military.<sup>46</sup> Worse, it obscures the way in which increasing US military assistance to Honduras has strengthened the military's control, and how US plans for a permanent base there are likely to nullify the civilian rule it upholds rhetorically.<sup>47</sup>

The obfuscation with respect to Guatemala is the most callous. President Reagan already has resumed the sale of military equipment there despite congressional bans, and has proposed a military aid package for the junta of \$10 million. He claims that the rate of killing by the military has diminished and elections are in the offing. But the sales were begun during

the rule of General Efraim Rios Montt, who increased the murder rate for rural Indians, and the 'hope' for democratic reform is pegged on the regime of General Oscar Meija Victores, who was involved with the so-called rural pacification during the Rios Montt era. He is a member of the officer corps that had prevented free elections and produced the blood-baths in the 1970s.<sup>48</sup>

2. If the pursuit of democracy and the associated prevention of dictatorship express the moral component of US policy, the most important self-interested component is insuring US **credibility**. Central America is a 'vital' US interest. Numerous officials have declared. If the US were to give up a vital interest to its enemy, then its credibility with allies who depend upon the US would wither. However, it is far from clear to which allies the officials are referring. Major European allies repeatedly have told the Administration that neither do they see the stirrings in Central America as vital to US interests, nor do they believe the US should pursue a military solution to secure what it alone perceives is in its interest. One French diplomat said in 1983:

**Just because the United States believes that every problem that arises in the Southern hemisphere has the Russian hand behind it, that doesn't mean it is so.**<sup>49</sup>

Western leaders are far more concerned that the United States might actually become enmeshed in a Central American war and thereby reduce its military commitment to Europe. In that sense the Administration is correct about its credibility, but for the wrong reasons. US credibility as a rational and responsible international actor is at stake in Central America and the Caribbean.<sup>50</sup> Even Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher publicly rebuked the United States for its 1983 invasion of Grenada, and for the mining of Nicaragua's harbours in 1984.

Europeans have been advising the Reagan Administration to rely on the Contadora countries (Mexico, Panama, Colombia and Venezuela) to mediate the conflicts in the region. These four US allies grouped together precisely to encourage the United States to reduce its involvement in the Central American wars. Along with other Latin American countries, they have told the United States both that its credibility would not be affected if the guerrillas won in El Salvador or the Sandinistas remained in power, and that its credibility would be harmed if it did intervene militarily.<sup>51</sup> The United States has turned a deaf ear to its allies' entreaties. It has not responded positively to Contadora proposals, and it continues to base its actions on what it perceives are worst case scenarios, which the Latin Americans find are highly problematic. The worst case is that Nicaragua and other so-called Marxist-Leninist regimes would open bases for the Soviets, which might endanger free US access to the Canal and Caribbean

sea lanes. However, Nicaragua has asserted time and again that it will not permit any foreign base on its soil, and the Soviet Union has shown no inclination to seek such a base. It appears unwilling, or unable, to pay the cost that such a base would entail, which would be the case in El Salvador and Guatemala as well.<sup>52</sup>

3. The 'worst case' scenarios turn on the important and unsupported assumption that Nicaragua and Cuba are surrogates of the Soviet Union, as would be any Marxist-Leninist state. It is an assumption, born in the simplistic pre-Sino/Soviet split era, of a monolithic communist world. It is also an assumption on which the Administration relies only with respect to Central America. Elsewhere, as in China and Yugoslavia, it recognizes that not all Marxist-Leninist regimes are alike, or are pawns of the Soviet Union. China and Yugoslavia, for example, carry on a greater proportion of their trade with the Soviet Union than does Nicaragua. Nicaragua has received aid and weapons from the Soviet Union; it also has received these from several Western countries. Unlike Comecon countries, it has not organized its economy along a Soviet model, and it has maintained a large private sector, a relatively uncensored press, and religious freedoms.<sup>53</sup> But its internal organization is less critical for the assumption than its external relations, because supposedly it is Nicaragua's foreign policy that worries the United States. In this regard, there is no evidence that the Soviet Union has been able or even has tried to direct Nicaraguan foreign policy. Charges that Nicaraguan support of the Soviet Union in the United Nations demonstrate its slavishness are credible only if one accepts the premise that a country could never vote with the Soviets without being a Soviet pawn. In fact, Nicaragua has taken a non-aligned stance in the UN. Cuba has also respected Nicaragua's sovereignty. The best evidence suggests that when Cuba has advised Nicaragua how to handle its foreign affairs, it has told the Sandinistas to avoid Cuba's mistakes and not to alienate itself from the United States.<sup>54</sup>

Assertions about Cuban puppetry did not originate in the Reagan Administration. They have been prevalent for twenty years, and most prominently since the 1970s, when Cuban support for the MPLA in Angola and the Ethiopian government in its war against Sudan began to involve troops. The evidence points to a mixed record: that Cuba took the lead in enlisting Soviet support for the MPLA and agreed to the Soviet request for assistance to the Ethiopians.<sup>55</sup> Other cases also paint a picture of two independent countries who have similar goals at times and who might work in concert when their goals coincide.<sup>56</sup> Most importantly, however, there is no evidence that either country has any plan to control Central America or desire to do so. Indeed, the Soviet Union has tended to be far more respectful about US domination over its sphere of influence than the US has been of the Soviet Union's.<sup>57</sup>

4. Similarly, there is no evidence of a Nicaraguan plot to overthrow

other countries. The United States has maintained the most sophisticated reconnaissance of the El Salvador border, yet has produced no solid proof to support its claims that Nicaragua is shipping arms and ammunition to El Salvador. The weakness of the Administration's case was articulated succinctly by an especially well-informed Central American analyst in mid-1984, shortly after he left the Central Intelligence Agency. He said,

**The whole picture that the Administration has presented of Salvadoran insurgent operations being planned, directed and supplied from Nicaragua is simply not true.**<sup>58</sup>

√ The Salvadoran insurgents appear to receive most of their arms and ammunition from the Salvadoran army.<sup>59</sup>

In part the Administration's case revolves around the large build-up of Nicaraguan military forces. What the case omits is the obvious need for such a large force to protect Nicaragua from daily incursions by CIA-supplied contra forces. Moreover, the Nicaraguans reasonably anticipate even heavier fighting in the future, directly against the United States or Honduras.<sup>60</sup> The weapons they have received are defensive, though clearly they were insufficient even to prevent the mining of key ports by the CIA in 1983 and 1984.

5. The Nicaraguan threat to its neighbours is an element in the complex scenario of how Central America is likely to fall under Soviet domination. In effect it is a modern version of the 'domino' thesis. Three versions of the domino effect have been propounded by the Administration. In the first, the countries of the region are said to be ripe for direct Soviet/Cuban/Nicaraguan aggression, which occurs through agents sent in for this purpose. In a second version, the countries might fall by 'contagion' or by a 'ripple effect', again because they are ripe or lack sufficient stamina. The third version is a variation of the first: the insurgents may be locals but they are controlled by foreign forces and in effect are not indigenous.

All of the versions rest on the vivid metaphor of dominoes, and little else. Dominoes are each carved alike, and fall from the same pressure. In reality, countries have different histories, different forces at work in their midst, different reasons for turmoil and stability. Each country must be understood in its own terms to appreciate whether revolution is likely at a particular time. Costa Rica, for example, with a long democratic tradition and little repression was less affected by the Sandinista victory than was El Salvador.<sup>61</sup> Mexico, which is seen as the ultimate domino, is a stable country with enduring political institutions. This is one reason why it has given so little credence to Administration worries about falling dominoes.<sup>62</sup>

Undoubtedly, guerrillas in El Salvador and Guatemala were heartened by the Sandinista victory. But in such cases the focus should be placed on the reasons for revolution—the oppression and poverty—and not on the

example that heartens them. They might well draw sustenance as well from successful revolutions in other parts of the world. As in other revolutions, including the American Revolution, they also rely on a range of ideas to energize their followers. Some form of Marxism-Leninism has been embraced by nearly all successful twentieth century revolutions, and Central American revolutionaries should be expected to embrace these ideas, too. But as in other countries they have adopted those ideas that suited their particular conditions and meshed them with other relevant concepts. Liberation theology, with its emphasis on democracy, the grievances of the poor, and bearing witness, has also engendered the struggle against tyrannies in El Salvador and Guatemala.

The argument that the Central American insurgencies are not indigenous because only a foreign-supported revolution could be sustained starts from an unsubstantiated assumption.<sup>63</sup> It also bears little relation to the reality of these cases: The roots of the Guatemalan struggle emanate from the repression that followed the US-sponsored overthrow of the Arbenz government in 1954. It gained momentum in the 1970s, precisely during the period when Cuba had turned its attention to Africa and was harmonizing relations with Latin American countries.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, the guerrilla movement in El Salvador developed strength during the 1970s, following the military's nullification of the 1972 election.<sup>65</sup>

6. The web is fully enmeshed with the final claim of the anti-communist crusaders, which draws attention back to the opening proposition. The United States is said to be fighting for democracy in Central America against foreign totalitarian forces that aim to take over the countries and weaken the US. Therefore, whatever means the United States uses is ultimately democratic in character because its aim is democracy. In this way the contras who are attempting to overthrow the Nicaraguan government with US support are 'freedom fighters', and their goal must be the creation of democracy in Nicaragua, because they oppose the present regime.

There is little doubt any more that the aim of the contras is the overthrow of the government. Even the Administration has shifted its rationale for support of thgm from the flimsy claim that they intended merely to interdict arms.<sup>66</sup> The official intention now is to pressure the Sandinistas to fulfill their 'promises' of creating a democracy. But would the contras provide democracy if they succeeded? Nicaragua has not had any experience with democracy in half a century, so that none of the contra groupings can claim to spring from democratic roots. Of the three major groupings, moreover, the two based in Honduras—and which are the most powerful—have direct ties to the repression of the Somoza dictatorship.<sup>67</sup> This is especially true of the FDN (Nicaraguan Democratic Force), whose military command structure is entirely drawn from the Somoza National Guard. Their alleged fidelity to democratic freedoms is hardly credible.

Indeed, their sabotage is aimed partly at the Nicaraguan effort to hold democratic elections in November, 1984. The defence against the contras has forced Nicaragua to impose some curbs that could distort a process of free elections. Preparation for the elections has included a successful literacy programme and long consultation with several US universities about procedure. Thus the US professes its support for democracy by blindly sanctioning the efforts in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, and by discounting the efforts in Nicaragua while aiding the guerrillas who are trying to undermine these efforts.

The durability of the six propositions, especially in the face of serious criticism from scholars, journalists and commentators, indicates that they have become articles of faith. It is possible that the Reagan Administration is ignorant of the reality it pretends to describe in Central America. Administrations do tend to arrive in Washington with a type of 'amnesia', a lack of historical memory about what has happened before it arrived. As Eldon Kenworthy explains, 'Washington confuses its discovery of the guerrillas, *its awakening*, with what has actually been going on in these countries.'<sup>68</sup> Indeed, several of the key policymakers on Central America in the early days of the Administration were ignorant about the region. But this perspective does not explain why the Administration chose to be ignorant. Nor does it explain why the Kissinger Commission, which consulted with more than seven hundred people by its own reckoning, persisted in propagating the myths.

An alternative explanation is that the distortions are the result of a deliberate campaign of misinformation. Evidence for this comes from numerous examples, such as the first 'white paper' that the Administration issued to support its Central America policy.<sup>69</sup> A *Wall Street Journal* inquiry into the document determined, in the words of the White Paper's principal author, that parts are deliberately 'misleading' and 'over-embellished'.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, one official explained to me in a 'background' interview how the fictitious claim materialized that there were 250,000 Nicaraguans under arms. He said, 'Someone happened to use that figure one day in a briefing for reporters, and no one questioned it. So we stuck with it.'

While it is widely accepted that all administrations attempt to manipulate the media to some extent, and distort information especially with regard to military operations,<sup>71</sup> it would take a grand conspiracy to maintain so consistently the six assumptions of US policy. They cannot be merely the result of ignorance and deliberate distortion. They have become the ready catch phrases of officials throughout the foreign policy bureaucracy and in Congress. Without evidence of a conspiracy at work, it strains credibility that such predominance for the myths is the result of a conspiracy. A far more plausible explanation is that a religious mindset

has enveloped official Washington, an anti-communist framework that has the earmarks of a paranoid crusade, and that the six propositions have become its intellectual glue.

### *III—The politics of anti-communism*

**So first of all, let me state clearly that on some very important things, all Americans stand in agreement. We will oppose the establishment of Marxist states in Central America. We will not accept the creation of Soviet military bases in Central America. And we will not tolerate the placement of Soviet offensive missiles in Central America—or anywhere in this hemisphere.**

—*Sen. Christopher J. Dodd (Democrat, Connecticut), 1983*<sup>72</sup>

Anti-communism pervades and sets the limits on all debate about Central America in Washington today. Senator Dodd had been the leading opponent of the Reagan Administration's military approach in Central America when he delivered the above address. Even with this opening, he was criticized severely by House Majority Leader Jim Wright (Democrat, Texas), because the address minimized the communist threat and challenged the President's programme. Now, when critics of the Administration policy comment on Central America, they feel compelled to begin their remarks by reciting canons about the horrors of communism.

What accounts for this ideological straitjacket is unquestionably the anti-communist fervour of Reagan Administration officials. But their success is only partly explained by their ardour. Anti-communism has taken hold throughout the policymaking apparatus because it serves a variety of interests at this particular time. To appreciate how anti-communism has become a crusade in Washington, it is necessary to examine ideological, domestic political, and particularistic factors that are at work.

**A. Ideological Factors:** Like previous anti-communist crusades, the current one could count on a vast popular prejudice against communism. By the 1980s popular culture no longer was dominated by the anti-communist themes of the 1950s, but residual fears and fantasies from earlier propaganda barrages remained. Thus facile equations between Marxists, Marxist-Leninists, and communists are accepted readily. For example, Chilean President, Salvador Allende, was a self-described Marxist. The description bore a closer relation to his intellectual critique of Chilean capitalism than it did to a Marxist-Leninist political programme, as the MIR (Left Revolutionary Movement) in Chile frequently reminded him. In Central American countries, Marxist-Leninist insurgents have been at odds frequently with the Communist Party of each country, because the communists have tended to eschew armed struggle. Such distinctions are easily blurred when the three terms are used interchangeably by US officials.

What gave anti-communism its greatest popular force at the end of the

1970s was its inherent xenophobia. Communism was linked to a foreign power—the Soviet Union—and was seen as a foreign ideology. At a point when national pride had deteriorated, and the United States seemed to be reeling from blows in Southeast Asia, in Iran, and at the Panama Canal, a foreign devil explanation provided easy comprehension for the state of affairs. The foreign devil theory replaced a national debate that might have occurred and never materialized about the United States' role in the world. It obscured the nature of US hegemony in Central America for the previous eighty years, and the dynamic of de-colonization that was occurring there. The American people had never acknowledged that the US treated Central America as a protectorate, and so could not understand why movements for sovereignty would involve hostility towards the United States. They had been misled about the structural sources of oppression in Central America, and so could not understand how these structures would generate indigenous rebellions.<sup>73</sup>

Anti-communism facilitated a peculiarly American explanation of social unrest to emerge once again: the germ theory of turmoil. The theory rests on the metaphor of a healthy human body, which is equated to the supposedly well functioning systems of Central America. A healthy body, in this view, is not upset by its normal operation from the inside. Sickness comes only when a foreign agent, a germ, enters. Notably, one version of this theory dominated US social science during the anti-communist crusade of the 1950s, and it lasted into the 1960s. 'Consensus' historians, for example, contended that significant social movements, such as abolitionism, were the product of people who felt they were outside the system—in effect, people who were abnormal.<sup>74</sup> The system itself, they suggested, could not produce such turmoil, because it rested on a consensus about fundamentals.

A corollary to the theory is that germs can spread and make sickness contagious. Interestingly, the notion that communism is contagious in Central America emerged during the Cold War of the late 1940s and 1950s. It has re-emerged as a dominant metaphor today.<sup>75</sup> The germ theory and its corollary justify hostility towards communists, especially as they engender the American spirit of messianism, a spirit of cleansing the temple. Anti-communism thus appeared as a way for Americans to recall their best instincts, the instincts to help others and to prevent the imposition of tyranny. Americans had risen to the challenge in World War II against totalitarian Nazism, and could do the same against totalitarian communism.

For some Americans, totalitarianism was evil less because of its alleged effects on the societies in question than because of their reduced ability to penetrate these societies. For similar reasons that the Soviet Union opposes pluralism in Eastern Europe—because its domination occurs through the Party—so American business and political leaders have championed plural-

ism in Central America, US control occurs through the economy, which it wants separated from politics. Herein lies Jeanne Kirkpatrick's distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes that President Reagan found so compelling.<sup>76</sup> (Authoritarian governments have permitted US businesses to operate with relatively little restraint. This suggests that anti-communism serves some domestic US interests especially well.)

**B. Domestic Factors:** At the moment when ideological factors were coalescing towards a crusade against communism in Central America, the capacity of the US Congress to resist such a campaign was deteriorating. Campaign spending had skyrocketed in the 1970s, with several House races costing in excess of \$500,000 and many Senate races running over \$1 million. No incumbent felt immune from the potential threat of a well financed opponent, and all sought ways to reduce their vulnerability. Thus one senior House member, who was involved in Central American policy formation, explained his pessimism about congressional efforts to curtail the US commitment. When asked in a personal interview why Representatives continue to vote for military aid to El Salvador even though their constituents opposed it, he said, 'They may be against it today, but who knows what they'll think tomorrow. Constituents are easily swayed on these matters, and no one here wants to risk being caught on the wrong side of this war.'

A major factor in increased campaign costs has been the rise of political action committees (PACs).<sup>77</sup> While PACs encompass the conventional political spectrum, the best coordinated and richest are those which support right-wing candidates. Some, such as the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, ostensibly focus on 'social' issues. But their effect has been to defeat legislators who have opposed military intervention in the Third World, and to elect virulent anti-communists. Increasingly campaigns have emphasised foreign policy issues, with right-wing candidates charging that incumbents who are not vigorously anti-communist are tacitly supporting the enemy. With Republicans in control of the Senate since 1981, and prominent anti-communists such as Jesse Helms (Republican, North Carolina) chairing Senate subcommittees related to foreign policy, the legitimacy of the anti-communist rhetoric has been enhanced. Meanwhile, potential resisters to the tide feel increasingly powerless.

The career civil service has been similarly weakened as a potential source of opposition to the anti-communist crusade. The bureaucracy had tended to place a brake on major departures by new Presidents in the past.<sup>78</sup> To some extent it has prevented President Reagan from implementing fully all that he has said he would like to do in Central America. But when Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Thomas Enders was—dismissed in—1983, because he had advocated a 'two-track' approach that included dialogue with the El Salvador insurgents, it sent a

chill through the bureaucracy. The removal of US Ambassador to Nicaragua Anthony Quainton in early 1984 firmly signalled to career bureaucrats—what they had suspected already. Quainton, a career foreign service officer, met with displeasure because he refused in his reporting to bow to the official line that Nicaragua was in the grip of intractable communists. For those who wanted to retain any influence or advance their careers, it was clear that a vigilant anti-communism with respect to Central America had to be manifest. The bureaucracy was disposed towards anti-communism already.<sup>79</sup> What it might have opposed were adventurist actions that were inconsistent with US interests in the region. But it had few resources on which to rely, especially with Congress so weakened and public debate so oriented to a new Cold War.<sup>80</sup> The Reagan Administration's cold war orientation placed even greater pressure on career service officers in the Latin American bureau to conform to the anti-communist posturing that was emerging throughout the State Department.

President Reagan did not invent the posture of the Cold War. It had begun to gain strength in the 1970s as 'Cold War liberals' grouped together to oppose detente with the Soviet Union and the slower rate of growth in military spending.<sup>81</sup> They also shared an outspoken and long-standing commitment to fight communism, and they preached a 'militant containment' of the Soviet Union. Though the Committee on the Present Danger—their major forum, organised in 1976—received no money from defence contractors, Committee members had extensive links with the defence industry and military establishment. Their prestige also lent credibility to appeals from the New Right, which in turn reinforced the Committee's efforts through conservative PACs. Notably, the Cold War liberals and the New Right had kept their distance from each other prior to the 1970s. Each had viewed the other with suspicion and hostility, because of differences over domestic issues. An anti-communist crusade enabled them to make common cause and grow together symbiotically. It was also their route to power, as several members of the Committee on the Present Danger joined the Reagan Administration along with New Right disciples.

*C. Particularistic Factors:* President Reagan's appointees who had been members of the Committee on the Present Danger were located throughout the foreign policy machinery.<sup>82</sup> The President himself had been a member. This is not to suggest that a conspiracy was at work, because the Committee itself had no control over these people. Their common membership does suggest a like-mindedness with respect to communism.

Though the media described some of the new Latin American policy-makers as 'pragmatists'—Thomas Enders, for example, was opposed by Sen. Jesse Helms because of his prior association with the detente-tainted Nixon and Ford Administrations—all of those associated with Latin

American policy accepted the Cold War prism that the President and Secretary of State Alexander Haig immediately imposed on the US perspective of Central America. Still, some were more ideologically inclined than others, and the ideologues were well situated at key locations. They were people who had developed their careers as anti-communists, and they were single-minded in their devotion to the cause. For example, Roger Fontaine, a co-author of the vitriolic Santa Fe report, was Latin American specialist on the National Security Council. Constantine Menges, who had propounded the Central American domino thesis in the 1970s (and who was severely criticized by several senators in 1981 for ideologically biased and deceptive reports), was responsible for the CIA's National Intelligence Estimates on Latin America. Whether the anti-communist crusade could have been mounted with different people is of course difficult to evaluate, even with the ideological and domestic political factors coinciding to give anti-communism its force. It is clear that the particular people who made up the Reagan Administration were such vigorous anti-communists that credit for the crusade must be given to them in the first instance.

√ Their task was made easier by the pleas for help to ward off the communist menace, which came from conservatives in Central America. This coincided with Reagan's ascension, because the guerrilla movement in Guatemala and El Salvador had gained strength in the 1970s. Local oligarchs may not have believed that the guerrillas were communist and directed by Moscow, or they may have believed their own propaganda. In any case they had learned from experience in the 1950s and 1960s that the alarm of a communist threat could be sufficient to generate US assistance. In these countries the military and local police were generally inclined to see communist threats, because of a well developed anti-communism within their ranks.<sup>33</sup> Businessmen in El Salvador and Guatemala were closely allied to the military, and also tended to embrace a rigid anti-communism, as a defence against any reforms that they believed would reduce their power.<sup>34</sup>

A final factor at the end of the 1970s uniquely fuelled the broad ideological and domestic political movements that were being shaped into a crusade. President Jimmy Carter prepared the way for the anti-communist crusade by introducing and propounding many of the very same assumptions that the Reagan Administration had used so forcefully. In this respect, the development of the anti-communist crusade of the 1980s followed the pattern of the crusade in the 1950s. President Harry Truman had paved the way for McCarthyism by focusing the terms of the foreign policy debate on anti-communism and through his attempts to ferret out communists in the government. When conservatives attacked him for being an insufficiently diligent anti-communist, he had little to offer in defence. He himself had identified the 'menace', and he shared the critics' assumptions.<sup>35</sup>

The Carter legacy is evident with respect to three key countries: Cuba, Nicaragua and El Salvador. Consider in each case how Carter paved the way for Reagan's policies.

+Cuba: The Carter Administration moved quickly to reduce hostility towards Cuba in 1977.<sup>86</sup> UN Ambassador Andrew Young characterized the Cuban presence in Angola as a 'stabilizing' influence. US and Cuban diplomats began to staff the 'interests sections' that had been operated previously by the Swiss and Czech embassies. Tourist and cultural exchanges flourished. But by the end of 1978 coolness prevailed again. Cuba and the US had been on opposite sides of the Sudan-Ethiopian war, and Presidents Carter and Fidel Castro had had a personal blow-up over the invasion of Zaire by Shaba rebels. Strains grew in September, 1979 as Carter exaggerated the importance of a Soviet brigade in Cuba and denounced Cuba for threatening the United States. To underscore the now official view that Cuba was a major enemy, the President issued a policy statement, PD-52, that ordered national security agencies 'to devise strategies for curbing Cuba's activities [in the Third World] and isolating it politically'. The new attitude shaped the agenda of demands that Carter developed as the basis for a normalization of relations. These focused on bilateral issues such as migration, unsettled claims, and the Soviet military presence in Cuba, and international issues such as Cuba's involvement in Angola, Ethiopia, and Caribbean Basin countries. Reagan adopted both the agenda and the view that Cuba is a major enemy of the United States. The Reagan Administration has taken more active measures against Cuba than were undertaken in the Carter years. But the measures follow from an orientation towards Cuba that Reagan inherited from Carter.

+Nicaragua: The revolution in Nicaragua offered the Carter Administration an opportunity to act in accord with its professed human rights goals, and its claim that it sought new ways of relating to anti-colonial forces in the Third World.<sup>88</sup> Charges by conservatives that Carter's policy drove Somoza from office and handed over Nicaragua to the Marxist-Leninist Sandinistas suggest that, at the least, his orientation differed from Reagan's. In reality, the Carter Administration acted on premises that are not far from those of the conservatives. Until the eve of the Sandinista victory, the Carter Administration attempted to prevent the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) from gaining control. In June 1979, the US called for an emergency meeting of the Organization of American States, to install a multilateral force in Nicaragua that would 'preserve order'. The Latin Americans refused to support the ruse. A White House spokesman called for the retention of the National Guard, that is, somocismo without Somoza. The National Security Council emphasized Cuba's role in the struggle, and introduced the idea that the Sandinistas were puppets of the Cubans. The Administration never repudiated these premises. But with the coming to power of the FSLN in July, Carter

attempted to find a way of working with the revolution. He quickly sent emergency assistance of \$20 million to Nicaragua, and he proposed a \$75 million aid package to Congress. However, by September the Administration again was criticizing Nicaragua for its anti-US statements at the summit of non-aligned nations, and in December, the Administration reacted angrily when Nicaragua refused to condemn the Soviet Union over the invasion of Afghanistan. It seemed to them that Nicaragua was falling into the Soviet camp, and they said so. This hardly helped the \$75 million aid package sail through Congress. Indeed, Administration lobbyists devoted little effort to securing congressional approval of the bill, which passed finally in October, 1980. Ultimately, the Reagan Administration chose not to expend the full amount of the package, on anti-communist grounds that echoed the Carter sentiments.

+El Salvador: While the Reagan Administration may not conceive of El Salvador as the jewel in the crown, it has focused on this war-torn country as the place to halt the forward advance of international communism—the site where the US had drawn the line. Such was the conception of the Carter Administration too. Following the Sandinista victory in July, 1979, Carter policymakers feared that revolution might spread to El Salvador because of the brutality of the Romero dictatorship there. There is evidence that the Administration encouraged junior military officers in their plans to stage the October, 1979 coup. The October junta unsuccessfully tried to implement a series of major reforms, and the Carter Administration applauded the efforts with economic aid and with military assistance designed to mount a campaign of 'clean counter-insurgency'. But the old line military quickly moved to consolidate its power, and the aid only buttressed their strength. The Carter Administration refused to acknowledge the changes that returned control to the most repressive forces in El Salvador, and introduced the fiction after March 1980 that the regime was a continuation of the October, 1979 junta. As violence increased in 1980—dramatized by the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero—the Carter Administration developed the position that the government stood at the centre, and that the violence was a product of extremism on the left and right. Links between the government and the right were obscured, and Carter continued military aid with the justification that military stability provided a 'shield' for social reforms. When four American churchwomen were assassinated brutally on December 2, 1980, the aid was suspended. But in mid-January, just days before he left office, Carter resumed the assistance. The State Department declared, in its explanation for the resumption, that

**We must support the Salvadoran government in its struggle against left-wing terrorism supported covertly with arms, ammunition, training, and political military advice by Cuba and other Communist nations.\***

Carter thus provided Reagan with virtually every premise that has undergirded the anti-communist crusade. In each of the three cases, he rationalized his actions by reference to a communist threat, and he focused on communism as the source of the problem he confronted. His reasons for taking this approach may have involved his own anti-communist inclinations, his fear of electoral defeat in a growing anti-communist climate that had developed from the broad ideological and political factors discussed above, and his reliance on National Security Council director Zbigniew Brzezinski, who had long advocated an East-West orientation for US-Third World relations. Whatever the source of his approach, though, it served to reinforce the anti-communist climate, and to pave the way for the crusade that Reagan has led.

#### *IV—Ridding the hemisphere of communism*

The war against communism in Central America is rooted in neither security nor commercial interests. Fear about threats to these interests often prompted US intervention in the past. Now officials focus the fears wholly on communism, which they have substituted in a meaningless way for the traditional threats. Hegemony may still be an underlying interest that animates the Reagan Administration's crusade. But Administration officials have tended to discount cavalierly those critics—including prominent members of the foreign policy establishment<sup>g0</sup>—who focus on the seeming irrationality of the Administration's approach to preserving US hegemony in the region. It can do so because the critics are not speaking to the Administration's principal objective, which is to wage ideological war against communism and rid it from the hemisphere.

An ideological war can be waged on several fronts: in a battle of ideals, in economic competition, and in military confrontation against those who might embrace 'unacceptable' ideals and economic arrangements. The United States is now engaged on all three fronts against communism in Central America.

The war has been pursued on the first front by Reagan Administration demands for elections and pluralism in Central America. These have become the ideals on which the US is relying to counter the idealistic appeal that it believes communism holds out for the poor. In this way the US hopes to develop a glue that will bind countries ultimately to the United States without coercion. Though actions by the US belie its democratic intentions, this aspect of the anti-communist war embraces a positive thrust. It expresses an idealism that would be beneficial to the mass of people in the region if the necessary concomitants to real democracy—adequate health care, education, housing, food, and jobs—were also pursued. But such concomitants would require fundamental structural changes that the US has opposed, and so the aim of removing communism from the hemisphere has rested minimally on the hope that

this front will be victorious.)

On the economic front, the Administration has proposed programmes that would provide some development to counter the Cuban model, which has had a high regard in Latin America. But the main effect of its two major proposals—the Caribbean Basin Initiative and the aid package based on the Kissinger Commission recommendations—would be to reproduce the dependency status of the region's countries while recreating conditions for profitable investment by US multinationals.<sup>91</sup> Neither consequence would have much impact on reducing poverty in Central America. Even with the \$8 billion assistance programme that Kissinger advocated, internal reforms would be piecemeal, and would not alter the structures of economic power that generated and maintain the poverty.

Given the weaknesses of the first two fronts, militarization has thus become the linchpin of the war against communism in Central America. Here the Administration has adopted the very practices that it alleges the communists have used.<sup>92</sup> The military war against communism includes: the training, supply and direction of guerrillas who are attempting to overthrow a government (Nicaragua); the development of a government's (Honduras) capability to support the invasion of another country (Nicaragua); the regionalization of the war; and the introduction of foreign troops into direct combat. The aims of these practices became clear by 1984.<sup>93</sup>

The first aim has been to establish a new military base in the region from which the United States could readily intervene or direct military operations. Existing bases in Panama, Cuba and Puerto Rico were considered too insecure or distant for this purpose. This has been accomplished in Honduras, where the US has built and improved airstrips to handle large transport planes, constructed barracks, dredged harbours, and installed sophisticated communications facilities. As Michael Klare reasons, 'By the conclusion of Big Pine II, the United States had a fully developed combat infrastructure in Honduras capable of supporting any level of military operations through Central America.'<sup>94</sup>

Such a base may not be used by US forces in large numbers, but it would be difficult for the United States to achieve its second aim without direct intervention. That aim is the total destruction of all guerrilla forces in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. It has discouraged all efforts to establish a dialogue with armed opposition, and has declared a 'victory' over the guerrillas as 'vital' to US interests. A large obstacle in the way of achieving this objective has been the weakness of the El Salvador army. The army has been unable to defeat the guerrillas militarily or to gain effective control over the four provinces that guerrilla forces dominate. Morale in the El Salvador military has been low, and retention of the best trained troops has been difficult. The US worked especially hard to secure

the election of Duarte in May, 1984, so that the eventual call for US troops would come from a government that appeared both legitimate and centrist. The United States recognizes that total victory will require the involvement of US military forces.

However, victory over the guerillas would be only temporary, US officials reason, if Nicaragua continues to be governed by the Sandinistas. They see Nicaragua as a sanctuary for rebels who might rise again after a short respite.<sup>95</sup> The lesson they apply from their Vietnam war experience is that total victory depends on 'no sanctuaries and no Ho Chi Minh trails'. They see the war as a regional conflict, and victory must entail the overthrow of the Nicaraguan government. This became their third aim.

Overthrow of the Nicaraguan government has required a complex strategy, because the military there is well trained and armed, the government still enjoys broad support, the contras are associated with the still hated Somoza national guard, and past US intervention resulted only in repression and deprivation. The strategy draws on lessons learned in the 1983 invasion of Grenada. Administration policymakers saw that its victory there was secure when the press reported that the Grenadian populace welcomed the invaders. Indeed, Grenadians had suffered from the economic sabotage of US perpetrated against the island. The invasion was triggered by dissension within the ruling party that led to the assassination of Prime Minister Maurice Bishop. The anti-Nicaragua strategy, then, is to reproduce in Nicaragua the conditions that worked to the US advantage in Grenada!

The US plan, it appears, is to weaken the Nicaraguan economy so that the populace would welcome conquering US troops who were accompanied by promises of massive relief. It also hopes to divide the military so that it could not effectively combat the invaders.

In order to effect this plan, the United States has first engaged in economic warfare against Nicaragua.<sup>96</sup> Western allies have been encouraged to reduce trade and deny credits. The US set an example when it cut back 85 per cent of Nicaragua's sugar quota in 1983, and opposed loans in international banks. In part, the activities of the US-supported contras have been aimed at the Nicaraguan economy. The destruction of oil depots prior to harvest and the threat to international shipping has reduced its hard currency earnings significantly.

Second, it has directed the contra military actions towards demoralizing the Nicaraguan army and instilling fear in the populace.<sup>97</sup> The hope is that repeated contra success will engender recriminations and feuds in the military. US bravado in defying international law over the port mining was an effort to intimidate a peasantry that is beginning to grow war-weary. Continued actions, it is thought, will ultimately turn the peasants against a Sandinista government that cannot protect them.

The ideological war against communism in Central America thus

involves a far greater commitment than any previous war of this sort. It is a war on three fronts, and its aims are total victory. Prosecution of the war has included the relentless bludgeoning of domestic opposition into an anti-communist **mindset**. Significantly, the war also has led to the re-assertion of unbounded presidential power, which had been associated with the era of 'imperial' presidents. Congressional limitations on CIA support for the contras, on the use of US troops in combat, and on the construction of permanent facilities in Honduras have been **ignored**.<sup>98</sup> The Administration has shown a wanton disregard for international law as well, in the mining of the Nicaraguan ports. The mining highlighted the fact that President Reagan had approved a general resumption of the type of discredited CIA covert activities which had been curtailed in the 1970s.<sup>99</sup> In effect, he had declared that no obstacle would stand in the way of victory in the struggle to rid the hemisphere of communism.

What makes this war especially dangerous is its ideological character. The enemy, that is, the object of the struggle, is amorphous, because the communist label has been applied so indiscriminantly. The enemy may be Cuba, countries which ally themselves with Cuba, or even those which merely trade with and recognize Cuba and the Soviet Union. But the bounds of the crusade have not been clearly established, because paranoid fears are unrelated to real threats. It has been the dangers of such craziness that have led elites to urge the Reagan Administration to stop its crusade.''' In a **sense**, the objective of the crusade is the traditional US goal of hegemony. Yet by translating this aim into an anti-communist crusade, the US now wildly searches for communists to destroy. This has the effect of generating resistance among potentially hospitable countries, of creating enemies where none existed, and so of undermining US hegemony in the region.

United States engagement in the war is still unfolding, and the Administration's determination may not be sufficient to bring the United States fully into the Central American conflict and to pursue the war as it would wish. It has not yet convinced the public, important sectors of the business community, and significantly, its Latin American and European allies of the need to wage this ideological war. These centres of power hold out the possibility that the Reagan Administration could be forced to end its crusade.

#### NOTES

1. *US Congressional Record—Senate*, January 14, 1927, p. 1649.
2. John Foster Dulles, 'The Kremlin Out to Destroy the Inter-American System', in *Guatemala in Rebellion: Unfinished History*, eds. Jonathan Fried, et al., (New York, Grove, 1983), p. 78.
3. (Washington, D.C.; January, 1984), p. 93. [Hereafter cited as Kissinger Com-

mission.]

4. 'If You Want Peace. . .', *New York World*, January 13, 1927, reprinted in *US Congressional Record—Senate*, January 14, 1927, p. 1651.
5. On Guatemala see: Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, (New York, Norton, 1983), pp. 122-123; Richard Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala*, (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1982); Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit*, (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1982).
6. For representative examples of each orientation, see: LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, pp. 79-80, 106-111; Cole Blasier, *Hovering Giant: US Responses to Revolutionary Change in Latin America*, (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976), pp. 211, 229-231; Howard J. Wiarda, *In Search of Policy: The United States and Latin America*, (Washington, D.C., American Enterprise Institute, 1984), p. 24.
7. Abraham Lowenthal suggests that the orientation towards domination, which he aptly labels 'the hegemonic presumption', was less a conscious definition of US interest than a consequence of the overwhelming US influence in Latin America that developed from a coincidence of changes favourable to the US. See 'The United States and Latin America: Ending the Hegemonic Presumption', *Foreign Affairs*, October, 1976.
8. Abraham F. Lowenthal, ' "Liberal", "Radical", and "Bureaucratic" Perspectives on US Latin American Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Retrospect', in *Latin America and the United States: The Changing Political Realities*, (eds.) Julio Cotler and Richard Fagen, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 227-233; Richard J. Barnett, *Intervention and Revolution*, (New York, World, 1968), chapter 2; Blasier, *Hovering Giant*, p. 232.
9. Jenny Pearce, *Under the Eagle: US Intervention in Central America and the Caribbean*, (London, Latin America Bureau, 1982), p. 19; Blasier, *Hovering Giant*, pp. 108-110.
10. Quoted in LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, p. 107.
11. Blasier, *Hovering Giant*, p. 220; LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, pp. 60-63. This pattern was described most vividly in the famous statement by General Smedley D. Butler: 'I spent thirty three years in active service as a member of. . . the Marine corps. . . And during that period I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and, for the bankers. . . . Thus I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for National City Bank to collect revenues in. . . I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras "right" for American fruit companies in 1903.' Quoted in Pearce, *Under the Eagle*, p. 20.
12. LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, p. 107. In a clear recent articulation of this view, former State Department Policy Planning Staff member, Susan Kaufman Purcell, observed—without condoning the tendency—that the US 'is hostile to revolutions even before we see how they turn out. . . We know that authoritarian regimes will not be hostile to us, while democratic governments will be less subservient, and perhaps more hostile.' Forum, 'Can the US Live with Latin Revolutions?' *Harper's*, June 1984, p. 43.
13. Dexter Perkins, *The United States and Latin America*, (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1961), p. 19.
14. Blasier, *Hovering Giant*, p. 229.
15. The following were used as a representative sample: (1) President Reagan's televised address, May 9, 1984; text in Congressional Quarterly *Weekly Report*, May 12, 1984 [hereafter cited as Reagan address, May 1984]; (2) President

- Reagan's address to the US Congress, April 27, 1983; text in Congressional Quarterly *Weekly Report*, April 30, 1983 [hereafter cited as Reagan address, April, 1983]; (3) Kissinger Commission; (4) Testimony of Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Fred Ikle, March 11, 1982, in US Congress, Senate, 'The Role of Cuba in International Terrorism and Subversion', Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism, 97th Cong., 2nd Sess., Serial No. J-97-97 (Washington: 1982) [hereafter cited as Ikle testimony]; (5) Testimony of Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Thomas Enders, March 12, 1982, in *ibid.* [hereafter cited as Enders testimony]; (6) Nestor D. Sanchez (Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for Inter-American Affairs), 'United States Security Interests and Concerns in Latin America', Remarks before a workshop sponsored by the American Bar Association (San Diego, December 11, 1981), mimeo. [hereafter cited as Sanchez speech]; (7) 'Background Paper: Central America', Paper released by the US State Department and Defense Department (Washington, May 27, 1983) [hereafter cited as Background Paper].
16. Reagan address, May, 1984, p. 1131; Reagan address, April, 1983, pp. 853,855; Kissinger Commission, pp. 4, 12, 14, 15, 38, 84; Ikle testimony, pp. 85, 96, 105; Enders testimony, pp. 143-47; Sanchez speech, pp. 3, 5-9; Background Paper, pp. 3-5, 15-17.
  17. Reagan address, May, 1984, p. 1131; Reagan address, April, 1983, pp. 853,855; Kissinger Commission, pp. 12, 14; Enders testimony, p. 146; Sanchez speech, p. 3.
  18. Reagan address, May, 1984, p. 1131; Reagan address, April, 1983, p. 855; Kissinger Commission, pp. 14, 30, 88-91, 107, 113; Ikle testimony, pp. 89-93.
  19. Reagan address, May, 1984, p. 1133; Background Paper, p. 6.
  20. Reagan address, April, 1983, p. 855; Kissinger Commission, pp. 37, 93, 107; Ikle testimony, p. 97; Enders testimony, p. 159; Sanchez speech, p. 2.
  21. Reagan address, April, 1983, p. 853; Kissinger Commission, pp. 91-93; Ikle testimony, pp. 88-89, 137; Sanchez speech, pp. 11-13.
  22. Kissinger Commission, pp. 12, 38, 92; Ikle testimony, pp. 85, 137; Background Paper, p. 15.
  23. Reagan address, May, 1984, p. 1131; Kissinger Commission, pp. 91-92; Ikle testimony, p. 89; Enders testimony, p. 159. Also see 'Kirkpatrick on the "Contagion"', *Newsweek*, March 14, 1983, p. 22; William J. Casey, 'The Real Soviet Threat in El Salvador—And Beyond', *US News & World Report*, March 8, 1982, p. 123.
  24. Reagan address, May, 1984, p. 1132; Kissinger Commission, pp. 30, 85-88; Ikle testimony, pp. 95-96; Background Paper, p. 4.
  25. Reagan address, May, 1984, p. 1131; Kissinger Commission, pp. 14, 37, 85; Ikle testimony, pp. 93, 97; Enders testimony, pp. 145-146.
  26. Reagan address, May, 1984, p. 1131. Also see: Kissinger Commission, p. 92; Ikle testimony, pp. 88-89; Sanchez speech, p. 11.
  27. Kissinger Commission, p. 41; Ikle testimony, p. 93; Background Paper, p. 3.
  28. Kissinger Commission, pp. 4, 86-87; Enders testimony, p. 143.
  29. Kissinger Commission, p. 87.
  30. Reagan address, May, 1984, p. 1131; Reagan address, April 1983, p. 855; Kissinger Commission, p. 93; Ikle testimony, p. 115. Also see, Alfonso Chardy, 'Salvadoran refugee flood threatens US, Shultz says', *Miami Herald*, March 7, 1984.
  31. Reagan address, April, 1983, pp. 856, 855, respectively.
  32. Kissinger Commission, p. 37 [emphasis is theirs]. The second interest is, 'To improve the living conditions of the people of Central America', and the third

- is, 'To advance the cause of democracy, broadly defined, within the hemisphere'. *ibid.*
33. Reagan address, April, 1983, p. 854.
  34. Kissinger Commission, p. 113; Enders testimony, p. 155.
  35. Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, (New York: Knopf, 1965), Introduction.
  36. Kissinger Commission, p. 12. The report later concludes (pp. 86-87) that 'Cuba and Nicaragua did not invent the grievances' on which turmoil feeds, but that insurgencies could not exist without foreign sustenance, which ultimately generates 'a totalitarian regime in the image of their sponsors' ideology.'
  37. William M. LeoGrande, 'Through the Looking Glass: The Kissinger Report on Central America', *World Policy Journal*, Winter, 1984, p. 261. Such imagined omnipotence is precisely the pattern Hofstadter describes as typical of political paranoia: *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, p. 36.
  38. Reagan address, May, 1984, p. 1131; Kissinger Commission, p. 38.
  39. The Committee of Santa Fe, 'A New Inter-American Policy for the Eighties', (Washington: Council for Inter-American Security, 1980). Three of the five authors of the report took on significant Central American policy roles shortly after publishing this report. For a probing critique of the Reagan Administration's ideological rigidity, see Richard E. Feinberg, *The Intemperate Zone*, (New York: Norton, 1983), pp. 191-194.
  40. Kissinger Commission, p. 37.
  41. Hofstadter, *Paranoid Style in American Politics*, p. 36.
  42. Kenneth E. Sharpe and Martin Diskin, 'Facing Facts in El Salvador: Reconciliation or War', *World Policy Journal*, Spring, 1984, pp. 520-527; Cynthia Arnsion, *El Salvador: A Revolution Confronts the United States*, (Washington: Institute for Policy Studies, 1982), pp. 40-56; 'Locked in Battle', *NACLA, Report on the Americas*, March/April, 1984, pp. 14-17.
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