

Meetings: Mondays at 5:00
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CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

A Project of CRESP

CENTRAL AMERICA: WHAT NEXT?

The past six months have been a time of hope and fear for Central America. As guerrilla movements in El Salvador and Guatemala have gained strength, the Reagan administration has steadily become more militaristic in its policy toward the region. Military and economic aid to El Salvador have been increased, and there has been open consideration of military intervention. How real is the threat of overt military action? Is El Salvador (and Central America in general) the site of Reagan's attempt to find a winnable Viet Nam?

There are striking parallels between the Central American situation of the 80s and the Viet Nam of the early 60s. The dominant foreign policy and tactics of the two periods are, on the surface, identical.

The U.S. foreign policy with regard to Central America under Reagan is, at base, the Domino Theory. The situation is viewed

in this way: Nicaragua has fallen to Communism (due to outside subversion, mainly from Cuba). The revolutionary movements in Guatemala and El Salvador are armed, trained and assisted by Cuba and Nicaragua. If El Salvador falls, its neighbors, Guatemala and Honduras, and even Mexico will be next. This analysis has been voiced repeatedly by the administration over the past year. The completely discredited White Paper has been used to portray Nicaragua as a tool of Soviet and Cuban expansionism. In addition there have been wild charges of active intervention by Cuban troops.

The cure prescribed for what is seen as the spreading rot of revolution is massive military and economic aid to the embattled totalitarian regimes of El Salvador and Guatemala, coupled with the economic and political isolation of Nicaragua. Administration officials have also suggested military buildups in both Honduras and Costa Rica.

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On examining the political and economic roots of the revolutionary movements in Latin America, it is obvious that the U.S. analysis and foreign policy in the region are bankrupt. As they did in Southeast Asia, U.S. policy-makers are ignoring the deeply rooted economic inequities and totalitarian repression of the masses in Central America. Yet it is these factors, rather than pressure from Cuba and the Soviet Union, that are propelling the revolutionary movements in the region. In fact, the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua receives little support from Cuba or the Soviets. The bulk of the aid received is from Mexico, Venezuela, West Germany, France and Libya. The Sandinista leadership has made clear its desire to avoid dependency on the Soviet Union.

To understand the tactics employed by the U.S. and the options most likely to be employed in the future, it is important to look at the counterinsurgency techniques evolved during Viet Nam, and honed in Guatemala during the 70s. The overriding goal of these tactics is to maintain U.S. influence in Central America and the administration has made it clear that it will not let human rights stand in its way. Since Viet Nam, the preference in counterinsurgency is for "preventive" actions, that eliminate revolutions before they get started. This involves the identification and elimination of any

individuals who have potential as revolutionary leaders or organizers. Thus you see the massive repression of any group or individuals that speak for the masses' interests--intellectuals, labor leaders, or church leaders. The waves of political assassinations in El Salvador and Guatemala by government forces or government sponsored death squads are the grim reminders of this policy in action.

The aim of this policy is to protect U.S. interests without open U.S. military intervention--which has little domestic support and runs the risk of alienating world opinion. Yet, as case after case has demonstrated during the late 70s, this preventive counterinsurgency is not successful. Like the foreign policy, it ignores the realities of revolutions and has proven unable to prevent the overthrow of repressive regimes.

In the two notable examples of Iran and Nicaragua, extremely repressive regimes were unable to resist popular revolutions despite tremendous U.S. military and economic support. In Iran in particular, the repression had reached heights of sophistication and brutality unmatched elsewhere, yet the U.S. was unable to prop up the Shah: as repression grew, so did resistance. During the Nicaragua and Iran revolts, Carter refused to intervene militarily. The question now is whether the Reagan administration will exercise similar restraint as the Salvadoran situation deteriorates..

Since the Viet Nam war, the U.S. has operated under the unspoken constraint of what has been termed the "Viet Nam Syndrome"--the U.S. public's unwillingness to accept direct intervention in Third World conflicts. Those who, under this constraint, have sought nonmilitary solutions to conflicts have met increasing opposition, however. A growing faction of policymakers has called for a free hand to take military as well as political measures to achieve foreign policy aims. Until the Reagan election, the moderates dominated policy, resulting in the relative restraint shown in Iran and Nicaragua. With the Reagan election, however, interventionism has again been openly advocated. A renewed reliance on military options has been voiced by Reagan, Haig, and Weinberger. Till now, the emphasis has been on the buildup of U.S. interventionist capability--in Weinberger's words to prepare to engage "in wars of any size and shape and in any region where we have vital interests." The buildup of the Rapid Deployment Force, the continuation of a standby draft, and massive defense expenditures are all designed to enhance that capability.

As Haig stated clearly in November, the El Salvador situation is rapidly approaching a crisis point. In spite of brutal repression by the government and increased U.S. aid and military advisors, the Farabundo Marti

Front for National Liberation (FMLN) is gaining strength. If the fall of the Duarte government appears imminent, El Salvador is the likely first test of the administration's willingness to opt for intervention. Haig has made it clear that the options of military intervention either in El Salvador, or even in Nicaragua or Cuba, are being considered.

Overt military intervention is likely to be a last resort. Intermediate steps considered include increased military aid, training and more U.S. advisors. At this time 1600 Salvadorean soldiers (6% of their security forces) are being trained in the U.S. If these steps fail, the intervention of other foreign troops, most notably from Argentina, could be coupled with a blockade of Nicaragua, on the pretext of halting arms flow to the FMLN.

Whether the situation escalates to an open involvement such as in Viet Nam is difficult to predict. If it becomes the only alternative to allowing the victory of the FMLN, there will be great pressure within the administration to act on its openly warlike rhetoric. A blockade of Nicaragua holds great potential for a military clash which might provide a rationale for such action. It is clear that the administration has taken the initial steps down the path--the key may be the ability of the Hawks to minimize domestic resistance to intervention. ●

DO ELECTIONS MEAN DEMOCRACY?

Guatemala

On March 7 presidential, congressional and local elections will be held in Guatemala. The election are intended to produce a semblance of democracy in a country where 11,000 people have been killed in the last year. The four presidential candidates, three civilians and one general, represent four right-wing parties or coalitions. The history of the last decade in Guatemala suggests that the general will be the next president. Guatemala has had three military presidents since 1970; the second, Gen. Kjell Laugerud García, was declared president after the election of 1974, although he came in second.

General Aníbal Guevara, a former defense minister, is running on the ticket of the Popular Democratic Front (FDP). The FDP represents dominant elements of the military, headed by current president Gen. Romeo Lucas García. He is seen as a compromise candidate who will win back sectors of the oligarchy who have been alienated by the current government. The Lucas forces have used their power to amass private fortunes and have failed

in their attempt to quash militant opposition.

Among Guevara's civilian opposition, the furthest to the right is Mario Sandoval Alarcón, the candidate of the National Liberation Movement (MLN). Sandoval was one of the founders of "Mano Blanca," the right-wing death squad. He was also President of the National Congress in the early 70s, and was Vice President under Gen. Laugerud.

The only participating party that could be viewed as centrist is the Christian Democratic Party, which has joined with the National Renovation Party to form the Union of the Democratic Center. Their candidate, Alejandro Maldonado Aguirre, was formerly a member of the MLN, and is emphasizing his determination to wipe out the guerrilla movement.

Reportedly the choice of the Reagan administration is Gustavo Anzueto Vielman, candidate of the Authentic Nationalist Central. This is the party of former president Col. Carlos Arana Osorio, who led a brutal counterinsurgency program with U.S. aid in the early 70s. Arana imposed a state of siege, and wiped out the leadership of labor unions and political organizations. Anzue-



to's platform is based on a laissez-faire economic program including a regressive reorganization of taxes. He has appealed to business sectors with links to foreign corporations, but has failed to unite the army and business sector around his candidacy.

The choice at the polls is among different programs for the elimination of the center and left opposition in the country, and over how power will be split among the business, military and landowning sectors. The most important question to be resolved in March is whether the outcome of the elections will convince the U.S. to resume large-scale aid to Guatemala. The ruling powers realize that, at this point, the problems of Guatemala will not be resolved through elections. Increased U.S. assistance is essential if they are to quash the opposition, which is being excluded from the electoral process.

El Salvador

In El Salvador on March 28 elections will be held for a constituent assembly, which will draft a new constitution and name an interim president for the next year. The elections have been criticized by the office of the Archbishop of San Salvador, the head of the Central Electoral Council and the national association of lawyers. None of the forces of the opposition Revolu-

tionary Front (FDR), which consists of all center and left political groups in the country, are participating in the elections. The U.S. is using the elections to convince its citizens and allies that the government of El Salvador is moving towards democracy.

The Christian Democratic Party, the single independent, political party that continues to participate in the ruling junta, is a leading contender in the elections. The party has been steadily losing support because of its tacit support for the repression carried out by government forces. The party is expected to choose José Antonio Morales Erlich, a current member of the junta and proponent of the discredited agrarian "reform", to lead its slate of candidates.

The second main party running a slate in the elections is the National Conciliation Party, the official party of the military from 1962 through the rule of Gen. Carlos Romero, who was overthrown in the coup of 1979. This party's most likely candidate is the current Defense Minister, Gen. José Guillermo García, who is generally regarded as the most powerful man in the junta.

Two of the smaller parties participating in the election have strong ties to right-wing paramilitary organizations. The Party of Popular Orientation is led by retired Gen. Jose Alberto Medrano, former head of the Na-

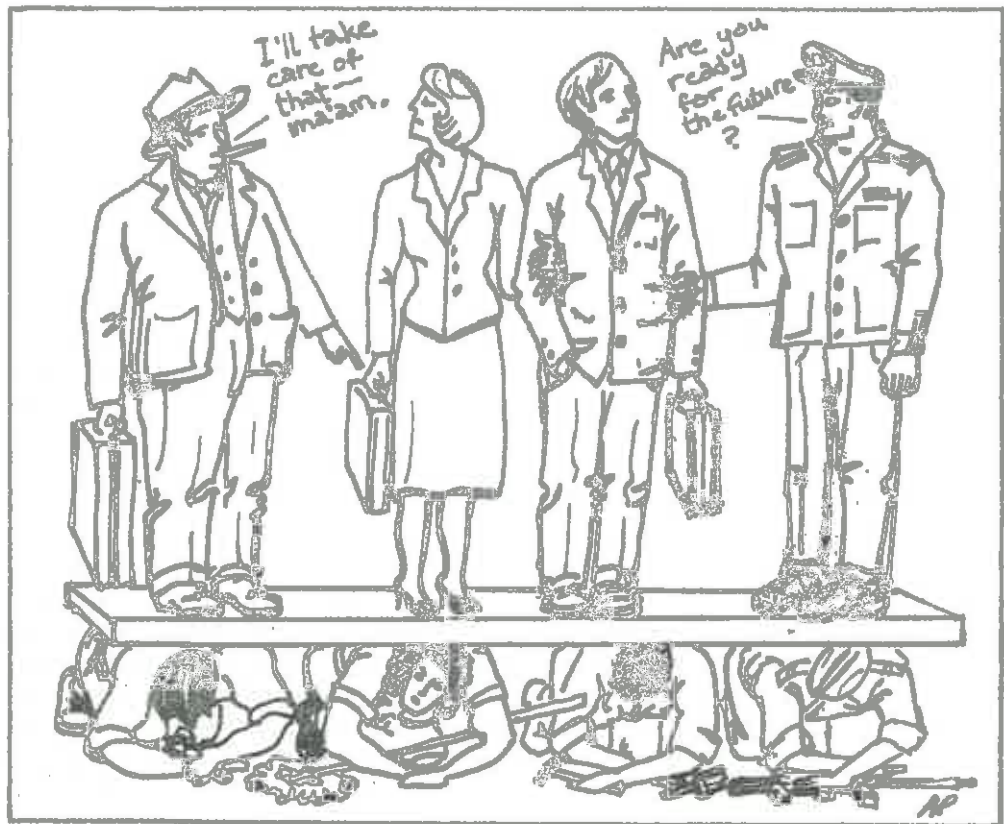
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tional Guard and founder of ORDEN (the main death squad in El Salvador). The National Republican Alliance (ARENA) is led by ex-Maj. Roberto D'Abuisson. D'Abuisson has been involved in the murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero and several coup attempts in the last two years. He is believed to be commander-in-chief of the Secret Anti-Communist Army.

Two other parties, Acción Democrática and the Salvadoran Popular Party, represent more moderate business sectors of the population. Acción Democrática borrowed its name from the social democratic party of Venezuela, although its program is to the right of the Christian Democrats.

These two parties are not expected to have a significant impact on the elections.

Most political groupings are blocked from any participation in the upcoming elections. The junta has announced that a party cannot run candidates unless it denounces the struggle of the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN). Most of the potential candidates in the opposition are named on hit lists and marked for assassination by ORDEN and the Salvadoran security forces. Because of this all member organizations of the FDR have denounced the elections as fraudulent. ☉



We Recommend PIXOTE

The uniqueness of Latin America's cultures and problems cannot be grasped through any one form of representation. Statistics can document poverty, but they give an incomplete understanding without a view of existing social conditions. To see, night after night, hordes of tots, hungry, barefoot and often cold, in the thinnest and most tattered of clothes, selling things and begging against a backdrop of plush highrises, is to begin to understand. Through our film series CUSLAR seeks to bring another dimension to our activities on Latin America. See the CUSLAR film schedule posted around campus for titles and dates.

We also recommend that you see the Brazilian film, Pixote, to be shown by Cornell Cinema Feb. 12 and 13. The film is the story of street children in São Paulo, Brazil. Director Hector Babenco interviewed over 1500 slum kids, finally selecting a few to portray the main characters. The children were encouraged to express their own ideas on "who I am" and to help define the central personalities of the film based on their own experiences. The costumes in which they performed were chosen by the children. They even contributed to the development of the story line, although the general plot outline is based on the book

Infância dos Mortos (The Childhood of the Dead) by Jose Louzeira, a Brazilian novelist. The result is an excruciating and rarely seen vision of youthful prisoners of poverty in the big cities of Brazil. More remarkable is the degree of self-expression brought to the characterizations by the kids themselves. In the final melange the contributions of Louzeira, Babenco and the street urchins become inseparable, and the film's strength is on this intermingling. ●

NEW BOOK

New Book Recommended:
El Salvador: Central America
in the New Cold War. Edited
by Marvin Gettleman, et al.
1981, Grove Press, \$7.95.
A collection of documents and
articles from government
sources, opposition forces,
church groups, etc.

FEBRUARY 1982

Calendar of Events

CUSLAR films:

- Feb. 4 8 PM Uris Aud. Free
Rebellion in Patagonia
Argentina, Hector Olivera,
107 min. The story of a
strike by rural workers in
Argentina in the early 20s.
- Feb. 25 8 PM Uris Aud. Free
The Uprising Nicaragua
Peter Lillenthal, 96 min.
A film about the uprising
in León, made four months
after the fall of Somoza.

Cornell Cinema showing:

- Feb. 12 9:45 PM
Feb. 13 7:30 & 10 PM Uris Aud.
Admission \$2
Pixote See review in this
newsletter.

Peña

- Feb. 20 9 PM, Big Red Barn
A festival of Latin American
music and food. Tickets in
advance at CUSLAR or at the
door.

Concert

- Feb. 5 7 & 9:30 PM Bailey Aud.
Benefit concert for CRESP
and Mark Green for Congress.
Featuring Steve Chapin, Tom
Chapin, Pete Seeger, Mary
Travers and Peter Yarrow.

Watch for:

CUSLAR and Latin American Studies
are arranging speakers on Nica-
ragua and El Salvador in the com-
ing months. A group of people
from the area have just returned
from Nicaragua and will be shar-
ing their experiences with us.
Anthropology and Native American
Studies are planning a panel dis-
cussion on the Cayuga Indian
settlement.

