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THE CENTRAL AMERICAN CRISIS: POLICY PERSPECTIVES

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INTRODUCTION

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On March 17, 1982, the Latin American Program and the International Security Studies Program of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars jointly sponsored a workshop on U.S. policy in Central America.

The workshop was intended to look beyond the immediate question of the March 28th elections in El Salvador which were then attracting intense public and policy-making attention. The purpose of the meeting was to help focus the general debate on Central America which is now going on in the United States, and to clarify issues and policy choices.

The format was designed to stimulate informed debate on the fundamental issues surrounding U.S. involvement in the area. Foreign-policy specialists representing a wide spectrum of viewpoints and professional backgrounds attended (see Appendix for a full list of workshop participants), but Central Americans as well as U.S. government officials were not present. Each participant was asked to prepare a brief "think piece," addressing the following suggested questions:

(1) Given one's concept of the U.S. interest, what is the best outcome in Central America we can realistically hope for, and how, specifically, can U.S. policy contribute toward that goal?

(2) Given one's concept of the U.S. interest, what is the worst outcome in Central America we should reasonably fear, and how, specifically, can U.S. policy help avoid that outcome?

Papers were circulated among participants in advance, and an attempt was made at the end of the meeting to distill the main points of consensus which emerged. This report summarizes our personal interpretation of the main points raised in the meeting; it has not been reviewed or cleared by others at the meeting. Following our summary, copies are included of all the papers discussed at the meeting whose authors agreed to their circulation in this form.

The workshop opened with an effort to define U.S. interests in El Salvador, and in Central America generally. A distinction was drawn between positive interests on the one hand, and negative interests (the prevention of undesirable outcomes) on the other. Participants agreed that the United States has no significant economic interests directly at stake

in Central America. The discussion of positive U.S. interests (e.g., concerns over Mexican oil fields and the Panama Canal) raised questions about U.S. security, the nature of the revolutionary movements in the region, and the interconnectedness of developments in each Central American country. The discussion of negative interests focused on a different set of issues, involving the domestic and international context of U.S. foreign policy.

Some participants identified the avoidance of U.S. military intervention as a negatively-defined interest, since this outcome would entail not only human and material costs but also political costs in terms of U.S. foreign policy in the Third World. Others suggested that the United States also has an interest in avoiding certain costly domestic political consequences. Escalating U.S. involvement in Central America could strain the credibility of government assurances regarding vital interests, possibly producing an isolationist backlash.

Another negatively-defined U.S. interest derives from the prestige already invested in a "favorable" outcome of events in Central America. A high level of prior rhetorical commitment to specific outcomes creates a U.S. interest (or, as some argued, an Administration interest) in avoiding a potentially debilitating loss of prestige. To a certain extent, U.S. interests are defined by the public commitments of the U.S. government. In order to consider the question of whether the current level of U.S. commitment to El Salvador is appropriate, it is necessary to return to the set of issues surrounding positively-defined U.S. interests. It is important to distinguish between the partly self-created prestige interest and, for example, objective security interests. Perhaps, then, the United States could, to some extent, define out of existence the prestige problem associated with successful leftist revolutions in Central America.

U.S. security interests in Central America hinge on the close proximity of Mexican oil fields and the Panama Canal, the commercial importance of Caribbean sea lanes, and the possible establishment of hostile bases from which these strategic targets might be threatened. Participants agreed that the United States has an "irreducible minimum security interest" in preventing the establishment of hostile bases in countries dependent on the Soviet Union which might threaten the security of the United States.

Participants disagreed, however, on the extent to which this basic security interest was actually threatened in Central America. Some argued that the simple geographical proximity of Central America to strategic targets and the possibility of future Soviet military bases in Nicaragua or Grenada represent a security threat which, ipso facto, requires a costly diversion of U.S. resources to the region. Others pointed out that there is no need for the United States to devote significant quantities of military resources to the region if there is no credible scenario for conventional war between the United States and the Soviet Union with Central America serving as a forward military base for Soviet attacks. Debate over the likelihood of this scenario revolved around the shifting U.S.-Soviet strategic nuclear balance, the marginal value to the Soviet Union of an additional base in the region, and Central America's high degree of economic dependency on the United States.

Discussion then turned to the implications for the United States of radical change in Central America. In what ways does the existence of self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist governments threaten U.S. interests? This raised the issue of external involvement in the revolutionary movements. Revolutionary regimes emerging in the area are likely to be nationalist, even anti-American, but not inevitably pro-Soviet. In terms of U.S. policy, the international alignment of Central American regimes represents a different set of stakes from their internal policies. It seems clear that Cuba has been providing some degree of support to the revolutionary forces in El Salvador. On the other hand, there was consensus that the basic conditions fostering revolution are internal in origin, and that no amount of external involvement could create a revolution without these internal conditions. At issue, however, are the degree and nature of Cuban support, the involvement of the Soviet Union, and, most importantly, the question of control of the revolutionary movements in Central America. Some argued that the movements are simply supported by sympathetic countries, while others maintained that they are controlled externally as part of a larger plan. The latter view suggests a variant of the "domino theory," while the former view suggests that local conditions are of primary importance.

Some participants speculated that Central American revolutionary leaderships may feel impelled to seek help from the Soviet Union in breaking with the United States--both in terms of establishing revolutionary credentials at home and in terms of an East-West geopolitical dynamic. Others stressed the distinction between Cuban or Soviet support for revolutionary movements before they take power, and Cuban or Soviet influence after the successful revolution. Different interpretations were offered regarding the independence of Cuban foreign policy from Soviet objectives, as well as the Cuban capability and desire to provide large-scale support to Central American revolutionary movements.

Before discussing policy options, the workshop addressed the question of short-term trends in Central America, identifying regional interconnections. Opinion differed as to the likely specific outcome of the scheduled March 28th elections in El Salvador. Most agreed that the Christian Democrats would almost certainly not win an absolute majority of seats in the Constituent Assembly. Many felt that Major D'Aubuisson's right-wing ARENA party would win in a coalition with PCN, the traditional Army party; others thought the Christian Democrats could put together a winning coalition. Many felt, however, that U.S. options would narrow no matter what the results of the election. Even if Duarte won, it seemed unlikely that he would emerge from the election with increased control over the security forces. In general, participants were doubtful that the post-election government would enjoy a high degree of legitimacy.

There was considerable concern at the workshop over the regional implications of civil strife in Central America. In Nicaragua, continued external threats to the Sandinistas, real and perceived, are likely to decrease the degree of domestic pluralism and increase tensions with Honduras. The fragile military/civilian balance in Honduras could easily be tipped by events elsewhere in Central America, such as increasing Argentine military involvement. Mexican President López Portillo's negotiation initiative recognized the interrelation between the problems of the

region. One policy option for the United States would be to endorse this effort at a negotiated regional solution, perhaps seeking to involve other actors as intermediaries (e.g., Venezuela, Costa Rica, France). Many participants felt that this option held the best potential for the United States, in terms of pursuing realistically attainable goals and avoiding a prolonged, costly escalation of U.S. involvement.

Most participants concluded that it would be unrealistic to attempt to impose political stability in Central America by defeating the revolutionary movements militarily and establishing stable, democratic/centrist governments. Among alternative policy options, it was suggested that the United States might pursue a "damage-reduction" strategy. This would mean not expanding ties with repressive governments in the region, and perhaps accepting the prospect of a series of "Yugoslavias" in Central America. Lowering expectations does not necessarily imply that the United States should not have an activist policy, however. Many felt that the United States could identify with the forces of change by supporting those governments which make progress toward social and political development--not just with security assistance, but with a long-term economic development policy. It was generally agreed that a strictly military solution would not solve the fundamental development problems which create political instability in the region.

Participants generally thought the United States should actively encourage reforms and strengthen democratic institutions in Central America, but they were not agreed on which governments should receive what kinds of U.S. aid. According to one view, the newly-formed "Central American Democratic Community" could form a nucleus of stable, U.S.-backed regimes. An alternative view suggested that the United States should provide economic aid to reinforce Costa Rican democracy during the current balance-of-payments crisis there, but should not encourage Costa Rica to become involved in an alliance with Honduras and El Salvador. It was generally agreed that the Guatemalan government should not receive U.S. military aid, and that the current U.S. policy of unrestricted support for the junta in El Salvador gives the United States relatively little leverage over the Salvadorean security forces.

The capability of the United States to affect outcomes in Central America must be assessed in terms of the range of feasible policy instruments. U.S. actions which seek to prevent revolutionary victories in Central America are limited in their effectiveness as well as their domestic political acceptability. Congress would not approve a commitment of U.S. combat troops. Public opinion is strongly opposed to covert operations. There is no hemispheric consensus for intervention by a multilateral "peacekeeping force." Economic assistance eventually runs into resource limitations, particularly in time of recession. Security assistance is not likely to be effective, given the poor morale of local government forces, and it also creates fears of escalation as U.S. military advisors become more directly involved. In the absence of any single workable U.S. policy instrument, the United States is left with an ineffective policy which amounts to incrementalism. For this reason, although their premises differed and their policy recommendations were likely to be different as well, workshop participants were generally dissatisfied with

current U.S. policy in Central America and convinced of the necessity of stepping back from immediate events to rethink policy at a more fundamental level.

UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARD CENTRAL AMERICA

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U.S. Interests in Central America

East-West Relations. The United States has a general interest in preventing the expansion of Soviet and Cuban political and military influence in Central America. U.S. security is enhanced by insulating the United States and countries in the Western Hemisphere from Soviet military power and by reducing Soviet and Cuban political influence. If the Soviet Union were to expand its military capabilities or bases in the region, the United States would face additional and difficult military problems--e.g., in protecting U.S. airspace and lines of communication. But such an expansion of Soviet military power would not affect in a major way the military security of the United States or the overall balance of military power.

Individual Countries in Central America. The United States has an interest in promoting democratic governments and human rights in the countries of Central America. It also has important economic interests. At the same time, the United States suffers from the historical legacy of having supported conservative and repressive regimes. The United States has alienated many groups in Central America. Moreover, the conditions for the development of democratic political institutions do not exist. Violence, not elections, remains the means for achieving political goals.

U.S. Prestige. U.S. prestige has been committed to having predominant political and military influence in the Western Hemisphere. The United States has opposed the establishment of Marxist and communist regimes and has sought in a variety of ways to topple Castro's regime in Cuba. The Reagan administration has specifically staked its credibility on ending Soviet and Cuban activity in the region.

U.S. Political Interests. The United States has a number of general political interests in the region, as in other regions of the world. The United States would not like to be seen (by the American public as well as by U.S. allies and friends) as losing political and economic influence in these neighboring countries of Central America, reneging on commitments to specific groups or governments, or failing to contain the expansion of Soviet political and military influence. The United States must also be sensitive to the manner in which it pursues its goals in Central America, for certain methods (military intervention or covert paramilitary operations) could alienate U.S. friends throughout the world as well as undermine support from the U.S. public.

In summary, the United States has many different interests in Central America, all of which it would like to promote. It is difficult, if not

impossible, to establish which ones are more or less significant, and which are essential as opposed to desirable, without a specific analysis of the projected costs in seeking any of them in the individual countries of Central America.

Positive Outcomes

Given these interests and the legacy of U.S. policy in Central America, what is the best outcome the United States can realistically hope for? How can U.S. policy contribute to that goal?

The actual stakes for the United States and the Soviet Union in Central America are very small. The fact that the other super power becomes involved and acquires influence will probably be more important than what happens inside the country. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union can contribute importantly to a resolution of the indigenous problems. But their actions could make the problems more difficult to solve and further exacerbate Soviet-American tensions. The best outcome for the United States would be: (1) for the politics of the individual countries to become less (or not at all) important for East-West relations, and (2) for the political competition in these countries to develop without major interferences from either the United States or the Soviet Union.

Realistically, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union will give up its interests in these countries or refrain from political, economic, and military assistance to their favorite groups. The United States cannot expect to keep the Soviet Union or Cuba from exploiting economic and political conditions in these countries. Leftist groups will appeal for Soviet and Cuban help to make their revolutions effective. But the United States should not dramatize the Soviet role or bring the Soviet Union into the process of resolving the political or economic problems in the region. U.S. policy in Central America should not become hostage to Soviet actions or approval. The United States carefully tries to minimize the role of the Soviet Union in resolving problems and disputes in other parts of the world, namely the Middle East. It should not legitimize a major role in Central America for the Soviet Union, or a more important role than it deserves.

U.S. policy should instead focus on the problems in the individual countries. The United States should help (through primarily economic aid, but, if necessary, military assistance) those groups that seek democratic political solutions, favor economic freedom and reform, and support U.S. policies. But the United States should appreciate that its assistance may not be sufficient for these particular groups to prevail. The United States should ultimately be prepared for the groups within these countries to find their own solutions to their problems. The United States should avoid having its prestige tied to specific political outcomes. If the political outcome does not provide a basis for continued U.S. support, because the groups or governments systematically violate basic human rights, the United States should withdraw its support. But the United States should refrain from seeking to overthrow the resulting government. Any U.S. actions to that end would probably not be very effective, could not be certain to promote U.S. interests in the future, and would certainly alienate U.S. friends around the world.

In contrast, the Reagan administration's policy toward El Salvador and Nicaragua focuses almost entirely on overall East-West relations. The administration places the blame for the problems in these countries on Soviet and Cuban interference. It has sought to involve the Soviet Union in finding solutions. It has staked U.S. prestige in El Salvador not only on the Duarte government but also on a successful election. The administration appears unwilling to recognize the interests of opposition groups and may be preparing for covert or overt military operations.

Given this Reagan administration policy, the United States will only be able to move to this recommended policy in El Salvador with help from other countries, who are less directly involved in the situation. Mexico and Venezuela are the obvious candidates. Through the good offices of other countries, the United States along with the Soviet Union and Cuba should disengage from support for individual groups in El Salvador and agree to abide by a political solution worked out internally. U.S. prestige needs to be tied not to a particular political outcome but to the disengagement of outside powers and to the resolution of the internal conflicts.

Whether such steps are possible or have any chance of success will depend on the upcoming elections. While the elections will not solve any of the underlying problems, they could make their resolution even more difficult--e.g., if the Duarte government is defeated or if violence between the army and the leftists produces political chaos. In these cases, it will become even more important for the United States to turn to the good offices of other countries and avoid being tied to any one group.

This recommended policy for the United States in Central America is consistent with the three-point strategy for Nicaragua offered by the president of Mexico. The United States would renounce any threat or use of force against Nicaragua; following the disarming of Nicaraguan exile bands in Honduras, Nicaragua would renounce the acquisition of arms and aircraft and reduce the size of its army; and Nicaragua would conclude a nonaggression pact with the United States and its neighbors.

Negative Outcomes

Given U.S. interests in Central America, what is the worst outcome in Central America the United States should reasonably fear? How can U.S. policy help avoid that outcome?

For the United States, the worst outcome would be to find itself obliged to intervene militarily in Central America to ensure a specific political outcome in opposition to Soviet and Cuban interests. Such a step could be required if the United States becomes closely tied to one group which is about to lose, for whatever reasons. Military actions cannot be expected to have much chance of success, particularly if other types of U.S. assistance have failed. It would certainly represent a serious blow to U.S. prestige worldwide and could provoke a serious confrontation with the Soviet Union.

Such an outcome would be less likely to the extent that U.S. policy makers could agree on the following judgments:

* The United States will find it difficult, if not impossible, to shape events for whatever ends in the countries of Central America.

* The United States cannot expect the political outcomes in the countries to be particularly satisfactory, given the historical legacy of U.S. policy and the fact that economic and political conditions do not exist for the establishment of democratic governments.

* The Soviet Union and Cuba will continue to exploit the problems in these countries and provide various kinds of assistance to leftist groups. But the Soviet Union will not commit major military capabilities to achieve their goals in the region.

* These prospects do not have to undermine U.S. prestige worldwide and will not seriously affect U.S. military security.

These judgments are not, however, held by the Reagan administration. The views of the American public are not clear. As a result, the United States could find itself closely associated with (or opposed to) particular groups in these Central American countries; staking its prestige on specific political outcomes, without sufficient means to achieve them; and, in frustration, facing the choice of either "losing" or intervening with military force.

U.S. INTERESTS AND OPTIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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Current Trends

The situation throughout Central America has deteriorated sharply in the last two years. In El Salvador, the opportunity that the October 15, 1979 junta offered for a peaceful, centrist solution vanished, and during the last year, the military balance of forces has been gradually shifting toward the revolutionary left. In Guatemala, the military high command has rejected external advice that it seek a moderate outcome, and has instead opted for Armageddon. Despite economic difficulties and a resourceful opposition, Nicaragua's Sandinistas have consolidated their political hold, and now possess the most reliable security forces in the region. Honduras and Costa Rica have both escaped widescale violence, and are even witnessing peaceful transfers of power; but both economies are contracting, and the unstable regional environment is discouraging investment and gradually polarizing the political environment in both countries.

Key Assessments: The Conservative Option

Can a conservative stability be restored? In El Salvador, it might be possible to paste together the old alliance between business and the military, this time perhaps allowing for the participation of center-right and even centrist politicians and labor leaders. But could such a coalition establish political order and regain business confidence? Surely the honest answer is no. Business has already largely liquidated itself, having taken its capital and often its families to safer havens outside the country. The military is internally fractured, increasingly infiltrated by guerrilla elements, and the officer corps is daily more removed from the surrounding political realities and less willing to compromise with civilian politicians. Centrist political parties have, to a considerable degree, been disarticulated and absorbed either into the government or the center-left Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR). The severely depressed economy makes coalition-building and a lasting compromise between conservative and centrist elements that much more difficult. Similarly, in Guatemala, the majority in the army high command seem to have voted against compromise and a widening of the regime's social base. As the economy contracts, such compromise will be even less attractive and harder to implement.

Can the FSLN be ousted? Honest opinions can differ, but my own judgment is to answer in the negative. The FSLN have absolute control over the security forces. Only they have the semblance of a mass-based political structure, a unified political command and a governing mystique. Only they have demonstrated the decisiveness and will to win. While their popularity has eroded, and will probably further decline as the Nicaraguan

economy stagnates, no alternative political force is on the horizon that is likely to have the capability to mount an effective challenge.

Modest external military assistance to the Salvadoran or Guatemalan governments, or to the opposition to the FSLN, is unlikely to turn the tide. The political forces in motion are too powerful to be detoured by marginal obstacles injected from outside. Moreover, in each case, they possess the capability to match limited escalation. The Sandinistas have their external supporters, and can allocate an increasing share of Nicaragua's own resources to national security. The Salvadoran guerrillas have already demonstrated their ability to more than match at least moderate escalations by external backers of their opponents.

Massive and direct military intervention by the United States would, of course, alter the balance of forces in Central America. Devising a political strategy within which such an application of force would work, however, is a more complex task. In any event, it now seems probable that the U.S. Congress will block any such long-term, massive military intervention.

A short-term military intervention would probably create more problems than it would resolve. Some Salvadoran guerrilla strongholds could no doubt be erased, or arms-supply networks interrupted, but the psychological impact of a U.S. intervention would certainly rebound to the guerrillas' benefit in the medium term. In Nicaragua, the Sandinistas would emerge triumphant as the defenders of national sovereignty, and even the centrist opposition would have no choice but to close ranks behind them.

Current U.S. Policy

The current U.S. strategy of limited and gradual military escalation is not succeeding. The administration has a broadly defined objective--namely, the containment of Soviet and Cuban influence and the defeat or neutralization of leftist political forces. The administration wants to reassert the credibility of U.S. power, and to help construct friendly governments in the region with security forces linked to our own. The administration does not, however, have a visible strategy that has a reasonable chance of attaining these objectives. In El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, the United States has identified neither allies nor processes that are likely to produce the desired objectives.

There are elements of a strategy. The formation of the Central American Democratic Community (composed of El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica), support for elections in El Salvador, and threats made against Nicaragua, are all meant to strengthen centrist elements and processes. None of these, however, is likely to contribute significantly to the fundamental objectives, and some may even prove to be counterproductive. The net effect of the elections in El Salvador, for example, may be to further polarize the political environment.

A continuation of the current tactics of gradual escalation will be costly to U.S. interests. Internationally, Central America has become one more irritation in already strained relations with important European allies.

The Soviet Union has itself been cautious, and so far has been unwilling to commit its resources or prestige to Central America;[1] the Kremlin, however, must be pleased that U.S. actions in El Salvador are being likened to Soviet actions in Afghanistan and Poland. The moral prestige of the United States is suffering. In Latin American affairs, the United States has been able to gain the support of Venezuela and Argentina, thereby at least partially offsetting the opposition of Mexico. More profound, however, is the domestic polarization that will afflict Venezuela, Colombia, and Costa Rica, among others, if the conflicts in Central America escalate. Regimes that side with the United States will do so at the risk of their own internal legitimacy. Within Central America, current U.S. policy is in danger of reducing direct U.S. influence over eventual outcomes, and possibly radicalizing leftist forces and further weakening centrist ones.

Concern for the global credibility of U.S. power lies behind the administration's approach. Yet, we will be able to maintain our credibility only at the cost of our moral posture. Administration credibility will also require constant escalation--until the U.S. Congress decides that credibility is less tangible and important than scarce resources. Such a congressional decision, however, will only occur after U.S. society has again been sharply divided over a Third World conflict, and another presidency has been tarnished if not demolished.

An Alternative Approach

Is there an alternative scenario? Can the United States imagine a realistic outcome, and devise an appropriate strategy, that would still protect important U.S. interests? My answer is yes--but only if U.S. interests are redefined. The United States can no longer reasonably hope for uncompromisingly friendly governments in Central America. We cannot expect Central America to adopt "supply side" economics. We can hope, but not expect, that all of Central America will adopt U.S.-style democracy. It did not in the past, when U.S. influence was greater, the economic environment was more promising, and conflict less severe.

An alternative definition of U.S. interests would place greatest weight on the Central American nations' foreign policies, and would accept a genuine nonalignment. External behavior would be more important than the particular choice of political institutions, so long as basic human rights were not systematically violated. More important than the particular mix of state and private-sector activity would be willingness to maintain financial and trading links with the international economy. In short, primary U.S. interests would be defined as limiting--but not completely erasing--Soviet and Cuban influence, containing regional conflict, maintaining Central America's integration in the international economy, and halting the slaughter.

The United States could seek to guarantee these objectives by becoming a participant in compromise solutions. Playing such a constructive role, we would be in a better position to state categorically our willingness to use force, if necessary, to eliminate any Cuban or Soviet military bases or facilities established on the isthmus. If framed within the context of a series of regional political agreements, the United States might be able to have such a right formally legitimized by the OAS.

A fresh approach in El Salvador is most urgent. The administration appears to be overestimating the staying power of the security forces and underestimating the strength of the guerrillas. The guerrillas do not need majority support to mount an offensive which will definitively restrict the operations of the security forces and gain the FDR enhanced international legitimacy. A sudden unravelling of the army cannot be ruled out. The administration may be attempting to strengthen the Salvadoran government now, in order to increase its bargaining power in any future negotiations. Unfortunately, the correlation of forces over the last 6-9 months has been steadily shifting toward the opposition FDR. Last February, negotiations may have allowed the FDR to win at the bargaining table gains they had been unable to make on the battlefield. Today, the situation is reversed. Negotiations offer the government, and the United States, the best opportunity to salvage fundamental interests.

It is not possible, before the fact, to lay out a detailed plan for a negotiated solution. The United States, however, must be clear on its priorities. There should be firm agreements that no Soviet bloc security personnel will be invited, nor other security ties established. Nonintervention in neighboring states can be guaranteed by peacekeeping forces stationed along the borders with Honduras and Guatemala. The lives of those Salvadorans who lose at the bargaining table or in the subsequent political processes should be guaranteed by the right of asylum.

By participating in the negotiations, or standing behind the scenes with such friends as Mexico and Venezuela playing the leading public roles, the United States would be better placed to influence the outcome. Mexico and Venezuela are likely to support these priority U.S. objectives, since they serve their interests as well. When López Portillo spoke recently of preserving vital U.S. security interests in a negotiated solution in El Salvador, he presumably had such concerns in mind.

The U.S. negotiating offer made to Nicaragua last summer contained a long list of demands, concerning Nicaragua's global and regional policies, the size and nature of its security forces, domestic political institutions, the timing of elections, and perhaps other matters. Only after Nicaragua acceded to at least some of these demands would the administration consider approaching Congress to request legislation on matters of concern to the Sandinistas. For reasons of both style and substance, this approach was bound to fail.

The priority U.S. objectives in Nicaragua should be the reduction of the Cuban security presence, containment of the still low-level Soviet presence, and demonstrations of genuine nonalignment. These are realistic goals. A heated debate is occurring today in Nicaragua on the nature of nonalignment, and the more pro-Soviet elements in the Sandinista directorate seem to be losing influence. The fact that the Soviets have not been willing to commit significant resources is weakening the position of those who might prefer a Soviet alliance.

A subtle combination of carrot and stick diplomacy could increase the likelihood that Nicaragua will adopt genuine nonalignment. Realization of López Portillo's proposal, of nonaggression pacts and border patrols between Nicaragua and Honduras and Costa Rica, would reduce the Sandinistas' felt

need for an external security umbrella. More unified and directed pressures from Nicaragua's financial backers--Mexico and Western Europe--could underline the economic payoff to nonalignment. It is not realistic, however, to expect a complete halt to arms flows from Nicaragua to El Salvador until that conflict is resolved. Both moral and security concerns compel the Sandinistas to maintain at least some support for the Salvadoran guerrillas. The apparently low level of the arms flows has been a victory of sorts for the United States, and ought to have been rewarded.

In the broader context of a negotiated resolution to the Salvadoran conflict and a reduction in tensions along Nicaragua's borders, the issue of the Nicaraguan arms buildup could be broached. In fact, the approximate size of the Nicaraguan army does not seem out of line with the strength of the growing Salvadoran or Guatemalan security forces. The fear that the Sandinistas plan to conquer their neighbors is surely misplaced, since any such adventure would legitimize countermoves by the United States and the OAS. Nevertheless, it would be desirable for the Nicaraguan army not to be so large as to alter a balance of power in the region.

A policy of hostility toward the Sandinistas not only reduces the chances of realizing these objectives, but makes it more likely that the Sandinistas will pursue an arms buildup and tighten their security ties with Cuba. The likelihood that Nicaragua will default on its foreign debt and reduce its international economic activities will also be increased. Political pluralism and perhaps human rights will also be endangered. Barring the unlikely ouster of the Sandinistas, a policy of hostility is clearly counterproductive.

Stability in Honduras and Costa Rica can best be enhanced by dampening conflicts in El Salvador and with Nicaragua. Otherwise, spillovers from these conflicts will continue to dampen business confidence. Honduran democracy is unlikely to survive if the Honduran military becomes increasingly involved in fighting the guerrillas in El Salvador and assisting anti-Sandinista elements operating out of southern Honduras.

The United States currently possesses little leverage in Guatemala. The new regime of General Angel Anibal Guevara can be given a grace period, but is most likely to continue to pursue current policies. Guatemala can best be approached after El Salvador and the rest of the region have been stabilized. The best hope would appear to be a progressive coup, of the sort which broke the stalemate in El Salvador in October 1979. Such tendencies are likely to surface as it becomes more obvious that the current course poses severe dangers to the army as an institution.

In sum, this strategy places less emphasis on maintaining a U.S. image of power, and more on the preservation of concrete economic and security interests. Conflict reduction is given priority over ideology, although political pluralism is more likely to prosper in an atmosphere of compromise than confrontation. The resulting political regimes, of the center and center-left, would enjoy the minimum degree of ideological compatibility needed to defuse regional tensions, and would also be compatible with the laudable Caribbean Basin Initiative.

REFERENCES

[1]See my forthcoming article, "Central America: The View from Moscow," The Washington Quarterly, Spring 1982.

U.S. POLICY TOWARD CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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In the current intense debate over U.S. foreign and defense policy, the sharpest differences of view concern our policy toward Central America and the Caribbean. This is not surprising when one considers the proximity of the region, its importance to the United States, the commitment that may be required to influence developments favorably, and the after-effects of our experience in Vietnam. The debate ranges over the nature of U.S. interests in the region, the extent to which they are threatened, and the steps we should take to promote peace, stability, and better economic and social conditions in this troubled part of the world.

Abraham Lowenthal and Samuel Wells have suggested addressing the problem within the framework of two questions: (1) Given one's concept of the U.S. interest, what is the best outcome in Central America that we can realistically hope for, and how, specifically, can U.S. policy contribute toward that goal? (2) Given one's concept of the U.S. interest, what is the worst outcome in Central America that we should reasonably fear, and how, specifically, can U.S. policy help avoid that outcome?

The questions themselves prompt one to begin by addressing U.S. interests. Here we find that political, military, economic, and social concerns overlap and interact so that it is difficult to discuss them separately.

The threat of German involvement in Mexico in World War I, the need to protect the Gulf and Caribbean sea lanes against German submarine attacks in World War II, and the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 all illustrate the nature of our security interests in Central America and the Caribbean. In the event of another war in Europe, half of NATO's supplies, the great preponderance of petroleum shipments, and important reinforcements destined for U.S. forces in Europe would leave the United States by way of our Gulf ports. In such a conflict, protection of the sea lanes and our littoral would depend on interdicting enemy use of bases in the region for intelligence gathering, clandestine operations, and operations and resupply of air and naval forces. Short of war, proliferation of hostile countries in such close proximity would complicate and magnify our defense problems, increase the cost of preparedness, and very likely force diversion of resources from protective measures in other vital areas of the world. The Soviet Union and its proxies have good reason to support subversion, terrorism, and insurgency next our vulnerable underbelly, and we have an immediate interest in denying them any more bases from which to provide such support.

Nearly half of U.S. trade, two-thirds of our imported oil, and more than half our imported strategic metals pass through the Gulf of Mexico and the Panama Canal. Recent experience in the Middle East illustrates that the safety of vital sea lanes cannot be taken for granted even if the United States is not directly engaged in war. Besides the importance of the trade routes which traverse the Caribbean, we have a substantial interest in the region as a source of petroleum, minerals, and other raw materials. While only about one-tenth of our overseas investment and export trade is with this region, the countries of the Caribbean basin receive about 40 percent of their imports from the United States and depend upon us for 60 percent of their vital export revenue. With such economic dependence on the United States, we have to be concerned about further decline of already weak economies, concomitant political and social deterioration, and the economic, social, and political impact of such developments on the United States.

The United States has a deep interest, both idealistic and practical, in the growth of democratic institutions and social justice in Central America and the Caribbean. The American people will support continuing assistance to countries of the region only if they perceive that these ideals ultimately will be served. Unless there is such progress, we have little hope for greater stability and the other conditions essential for economic improvement. We believe in the inherent superiority of our economic and social system over communist totalitarianism, but this must be demonstrated by progress under our system in the less fortunate countries of Central America and the Caribbean. If this fails, or if a series of additional countries fall under the yoke of communist dictatorship, we can expect a recurring flood of refugees and illegal immigrants. When one contemplates the economic, social, and political repercussions of such an outcome on the United States, the extent of our interest in the region is even more fully revealed.

How seriously are these interests threatened, particularly by developments in Nicaragua and El Salvador? In trying to answer this question, we are handicapped by a flood of contradictory information reaching us through the media and variously interpreted according to the many individual biases that bear on this complex problem. One could write an entire paper on the subject of the conflicting information. However, one conclusion seems obvious: such extensive and blatant contradictions can only be the result of deliberate efforts to mislead the American public. Indeed, every participant has been accused of this. However, none has more experience or more reason to engage in this than the Soviet Union and its proxies, and it would be an incredible departure from the practice of the last 60 years if the Soviets were not once again engaged in a massive disinformation program.

We do have hard evidence of the buildup of Nicaraguan forces. The Sandinistas have announced intentions to increase their armed forces from 60,000 to 250,000. Already their army is the largest in the history of Central America, and the intended expansion would put one in every ten Nicaraguans under arms. The ostensible purpose of the buildup is to protect the new regime against counterrevolutionary activity by the imperialists. This is the standard communist euphemism for maintaining internal control under repressive conditions. However, this does not entirely

explain the lengthening of runways, the training of 70 Nicaraguans as jet pilots and mechanics in Bulgaria, and the arrival of MIG crates from Cuba. Nor are 20 to 30 Soviet tanks essential for crowd control. These high-performance weapon systems serve primarily to threaten neighbors and increase the security of Nicaragua as a base for communist-supported insurgency.

We also know that there are over 5,000 Cuban advisers as well as advisers from East Germany, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union in Nicaragua. There is evidence that Cuba helped to organize the guerrilla combined command in El Salvador in 1980, assisted in launching the failed "final offensive" in January of 1981, has been instrumental in arranging for the acquisition and delivery of weapons to the guerrillas from Vietnam, Ethiopia, and Eastern Europe by way of Nicaragua, and has provided extensive training in Cuba to individual guerrillas, and probably guerrilla units, currently operating in El Salvador.

The nature and magnitude of the involvement of the Soviet Union and its proxies in Nicaragua and El Salvador is the measure of the threat to U.S. interests in the region. Regardless of the justifications advanced for the overthrow of the Somoza government by the Sandinistas or for the current revolutionary activity against the Duarte government, the motivation for Soviet support of these actions is to gain important strategic advantage at our expense dangerously close to our homeland. Even those who believe that we can somehow sever or neutralize the Soviet ties of the revolutionaries must agree with the danger of these ties to our interests.

What then are "the worst outcome we can reasonably fear" and "the best outcome we can realistically hope for"? If we do not adopt a course of action which frustrates the Soviet plan, it seems reasonable to expect that over time externally supported insurgencies will subvert El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and even Costa Rica. Together with Nicaragua, all could become communist dictatorships more or less resembling the Cuban model. The new regimes would build up their armed forces--as Nicaragua is doing now--as a necessity for internal control but also as a resource for external aggression. Their economies would stagnate or decline, and we would witness the sort of economic privation and political repression that we are seeing today in the Soviet Union, Poland, and Cuba.

Through such a cluster of Central American satellites the Soviet Union would be able to direct insurgencies against Mexico and Panama. These would be more clearly perceived as endangering U.S. interests, and the United States would be called upon for massive assistance to try to redress the balance. The outcome could be neutralist regimes in both Mexico and Panama, whose policies would frequently diverge from our own and be the source of severe security, economic, and social problems. Panama will become an even more lucrative target for communist meddling when the canal treaty expires at the end of 1999. Accompanying such an outcome would be a flood of refugees and illegal immigrants larger than any we have experienced to date. Having failed to deal with the problem at its origin, we would have to deal with it at home, and the impact on our economy and society would be very adverse.

If, on the other hand, we act now to counter the Soviet scheme, we can hope for a gradual improvement in economic and social conditions. Guerrilla warfare is likely to be prolonged in El Salvador and for a time to increase in Guatemala. However, reform can succeed in El Salvador, shrinking even further local support for the insurgency. Success there and gradual reestablishment of assistance to Guatemala can provide the incentive for reform in Guatemala, undercutting the attraction for communist-supported subversion and terrorism. Such political developments cannot be expected without substantial and sustained U.S. assistance, particularly economic assistance, and dependence on U.S. aid may continue indefinitely given the inherent economic problems of these Central American states. While reform is possible and, in fact, essential to achieve any solid political, economic, and social progress, one cannot expect model democratic societies founded upon robust middle classes to come about for many years, if ever. It is probably not realistic to expect Nicaragua to be weaned away from its Soviet and Cuban protectors any time soon, and Cuba itself seems firmly in the Soviet camp. Thus, the best outcome we can realistically hope for is gradually improving conditions and control rather than an end of communist-supported subversion, terrorism, and insurgency. This may seem too modest a goal, but it contrasts sharply with the steep negative trend we can expect if we do not make the best use of our natural advantages over the Soviet Union and our substantial power and resources.

How, specifically, can we help avoid the worst outcome and contribute toward the best? In one sentence, we should provide sustained security and economic assistance, use our influence to bring about reform, and use the truth to discredit enemy propaganda, under a plan that represents a broad consensus of Latin American governments and U.S. public opinion.

The first requirement is to provide security assistance so that it is possible for the governments in power who are friendly to the United States to bring about economic and social improvement and embark upon political reform. It is important to note that the junta in El Salvador now headed by President José Napoleon Duarte came to power in October 1979 through the overthrow of a repressive military dictatorship. The new junta was committed to land reform, nationalization of the banks and other key commercial enterprise, establishment of order, and free elections. This was a revolution in the best tradition. However, its program preempted much of the appeal of the extreme leftists, denying them an avenue to power. They resorted to escalating violence, knowing that the government would have to use force in an attempt to restore order and that there would be excesses which would alienate the affected population. We have seen this pattern all over the world, even when the security forces came from such bastions of democracy as Great Britain and the United States.

Our security assistance programs must be directed at training and equipping indigenous forces so that they can deal with terrorism and insurgency in the most effective and professional manner. Otherwise, the government forces will neither prevail nor gain the confidence and support of the people. Such training is not accomplished easily or quickly, and units must be tested under fire and retrained if found inadequate.

Introduction of U.S. forces is not the answer. The American people would not support it, our troops would be resented by the host country and its neighbors, they could not remain indefinitely, and it would only delay the development of indigenous forces capable of controlling the situation.

Some have advocated cutting off security assistance to El Salvador as a sanction against reported abuses by government security forces or to compel government negotiations with the insurgents. Neither past nor recent experience recommends this course. The insurgents appear determined to seize power by force or guile, but unwilling to contend for it through the generally accepted medium of free elections.

We are witnessing in El Salvador more than normal success in cooperation between the host government and the United States in achieving reform in tandem with improvement in military capability. First credit belongs to the revolutionary goals of the Duarte junta, and particularly President Duarte himself. But we must also recognize that the U.S. leadership has been through similar experiences. As was noted earlier, we can sustain a consensus for our support of the government of El Salvador only if there is evidence of political, economic, and social progress.

The requirement for economic support to aid the stricken economies of Central America is almost universally agreed upon. There are honest differences of opinion as to the types of support which would be most effective, especially the division between multilateral and bilateral assistance and between use of government channels and the private sector. There is also the perennial problem of the U.S. budget, in which foreign assistance is arrayed against the full panoply of domestic economic problems. Perhaps the most telling indicator of the importance of economic aid for Central America and the Caribbean is the fact that President Reagan would advance his Caribbean basin initiative right in the midst of one of the most intense debates over U.S. budget austerity that we have witnessed in many years. Congress will fine-tune the president's proposal, but its chances of enactment are probably as good as any part of his foreign-assistance program.

We have already commented on the role which reform must play if U.S. support is to be sustained. Unfortunately, it is much too appealing politically to call for the termination of aid if human rights or some other reform objective seems not to be served. This reminds one of the old medical remedy of bleeding the patient to rid him of bad blood. Many a worthy died before his time on account of this misguided practice, including George Washington. In modern times we are much better able to influence the course of disease by transfusions, intravenous feeding, and the administration of drugs. So too is our influence with friendly governments most effective when they are receiving vitally needed support.

Winning the war of words and developing a consensus among the affected friendly countries and the American people may be the most difficult step to master. The problem is compounded by the healthy skepticism of the news media and the undeniable truth that controversy makes news. Events of the last 20 years, especially Vietnam, have clouded perceptions of our international role, our vital interests overseas, and the extent to which

they are threatened by Soviet expansionism. In the last election, the American people showed an awareness of the danger from the Soviet Union, but we are now seeing how difficult it is to translate that awareness into concrete action. Perhaps the best way to sum up this point is to observe that development of a viable policy toward Central America and the Caribbean is not a theoretical or even a purely analytical exercise. It is a highly political process in which the views of other countries and of the American people are every bit as important as the relative strengths, equipment, and other resources of the contending parties.

The discussion of U.S. policy toward Central America and the Caribbean would not be complete without a few more words on the subject of negotiations. The history of negotiations with communist representatives, particularly in cases of insurgency, has not been very successful for the U.S. side. The insurgents have tended to take what they could get at the time and then to resume their insurgency with a view to forcing further concessions in another round. However, if the insurgency is made up of many factions, as it is in El Salvador, negotiations may serve to divide them, accommodating the less radical and isolating the extremists. For this purpose, negotiations may be recommended after the March elections in El Salvador have strengthened the credentials of the government. If a formula for negotiations can be worked out with the cooperation of Mexico, it will have the advantage of broadening the consensus on our course of action and strengthening it for the longer haul.

U.S. INTERESTS IN CENTRAL AMERICA: DESIGNING A MINIMAX STRATEGY

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Avoiding the worst is often at odds with seeking the best. Whether that is true in Central America depends very much on what U.S. interests in the region are and what the likely developments in each country are. Only with that background and at least a second-order agreement on these questions is it possible to turn to the question posed of how the United States can contribute to the desired outcomes or avoid the least-desired ones.

In considering the question of U.S. interests in Central America, it is best to start with an agnosticism which says that no important interest of the United States will be affected in any noticeable way by any conceivable change in the nature of the regimes in Central America. The desirability of starting in this way is reinforced by the recent suggestion of the U.S. secretary of state that what distinguishes Central America most from Vietnam is that we have vital interests in the former and not the latter.

One must at least ask when and why the secretary of state and many others changed their opinion as to whether the United States had vital interests in southeast Asia. More directly relevant to this subject, one is entitled to insist that those vital interests be specified and that the validity of the assertion be demonstrated before being concerned with how to maximize gains or minimize losses.

President Reagan's Caribbean Basin Initiative speech and associated documents appear to provide the most definitive statement of U.S. interests in the area. Three basic interests are defined, relating to trade, refugees, and strategic matters focused on trade routes. The first two seem to be singularly unpersuasive, and can be dealt with briefly. The third deserves more attention.

To assert that the United States has an interest in trade with Central American countries or that it is concerned about the flow of illegal refugees from the region to the United States is not sufficient to establish that the United States has an important interest in determining what sorts of regimes exist in the region or how they come to power. One must also demonstrate that the nature of the regime affects the interest being discussed.

As regards trade, I would argue that this is impossible to do. Every country in Central America will be willing to trade with the United States and to supply us with any goods or services we wish to purchase regardless of the nature of the regime. Trade will be denied only if the United States imposes an embargo, which we need not do.

The refugee problem is slightly more complicated. As long as there is severe economic deprivation, people will seek to flee and come to the United States. As the situations in Haiti and Mexico make clear, political stability alone will not prevent people from seeking to emigrate. Only a combination of political stability, respect for human rights, and economic progress will prevent a flow of refugees. Only Costa Rica fits that pattern now and the United States should be doing what it can to stabilize that situation. As far as El Salvador and Guatemala are concerned, the efforts of people to escape severe political and economic repression will continue as long as the current governments are in power. Conceivably the coming to power of a moderate political regime committed to economic equality could reduce the flow of refugees. It is worth noting that a victory for the opposition groups in either country would almost certainly generate a very different category of refugees, including the very rich and the middle class. The economic impact of such immigration would be very different.

The security interest of the United States is potentially much more important but also much more difficult to come to grips with. Lately the administration has been emphasizing what it calls "vital sea lanes." The implication seems to be that the United States might find itself in an armed conflict with the Soviet Union which is protracted and worldwide and which involves only conventional weapons. Moreover, this must be a conflict in which movement of goods through the Panama Canal is important. Given all of these assumptions, it is then argued that the granting of certain unspecified base rights by Central American countries to the Soviet Union will in noticeable ways increase the Soviet capacity to operate in the region compared to what it now has with Cuban bases. If one compounds the possibility of each of these events occurring, one can only conclude that the possibility of these bases being of any importance is so small as not to even remotely approximate the degree of importance that would justify the current level of U.S. effort in El Salvador, not to speak of the increased efforts being discussed nor the large-scale covert operations now underway.

One also hears vaguely-defined talk that Marxist revolutions will spread up the isthmus and ultimately engulf Mexico. One is tempted to suggest that the problem be left to the Mexicans, and leave it at that--but one can also note that the Mexicans have the firm view that accommodating the interests of those fighting the government is much more likely to be effective than an effort to defeat them.

That said about U.S. interests in the region, the second issue which must be addressed is what is now happening. The crucial question concerns the degree of Cuban/Soviet control of the revolutionary movements in El Salvador and Guatemala and the degree of their control over the government of Nicaragua. The question is not whether the guerrillas are receiving aid from Nicaragua, Cuba, the Soviet Union, and other communist countries, or even whether there are bases in Nicaragua from which orders are being given concerning the conduct of military operations in El Salvador. All of that may be taken for granted. Many other groups have come to power in countries around the globe having received such aid; none have made themselves into satellites of the Soviet Union. Other nations, such as Cuba, have entered into dependent relationships with the Soviet Union, but not because of aid received during the struggle for power.

The crucial question is whether those who are leading the revolutionary struggle in El Salvador (and Guatemala) view themselves as part of an international revolution and, for ideological or other reasons, are determined to subordinate the interests of their country to the foreign-policy goals of the Soviet Union or Cuba. I know of no revolutionary leadership that has taken this position in the past, and there is no reason to believe that the current guerrilla leadership in these countries will do so, regardless of their views on the appropriate social, economic, and political structures of their countries.

The best outcome that one could realistically hope for would involve: (1) the maintenance of a democratic regime in Costa Rica; (2) the coming to power of democratic regimes dedicated to economic equality and human rights in Guatemala and El Salvador; and (3) the maintenance of some degree of pluralism in Nicaragua with political freedom and no military alliance with Cuba or the Soviet Union. The worst outcome can be simply put: the coming to power in every country of Central America of a repressive Marxist regime closely allied to the Soviet Union and dedicated to overthrowing the governments of Mexico, Panama, and the island nations of the Caribbean. A cynic might say that current U.S. policy, while ostensibly directed at the first set of outcomes, is in fact maximizing the possibility of the second.

If the worst scenario is not far-fetched (and I do not believe that it is), and if the best scenario is very optimistic, what should be the realistic goal of U.S. policy toward Central America? I believe that U.S. policy should be aimed at two objectives. First, we should seek to persuade the countries of the region not to grant base rights to the Soviet Union or to otherwise enter into a military alliance with the Soviet Union or with Cuba. Second, we should seek to protect and promote human rights within the region, including rights to political participation and economic equality. In support of these ends the United States should:

* provide substantially greater economic assistance to Costa Rica and help it to overcome its current economic problems, while insisting that steps be taken internally to create a sustainable economic situation.

* negotiate a <u>modus vivendi</u> with Nicaragua along the lines of the most recent Mexican proposal. We should seek to protect as much political pluralism as possible, keep human-rights violations to a minimum, and obtain firm assurances that Nicaragua will not provide military bases or facilities to the Soviet Union or Cuba. We should not be concerned with how the Nicaraguans structure their own economy, nor should we expect a commitment not to support other revolutionary movements in the region. We should seek to prevent open and massive movements of weapons.

* withdraw all support from the governments of El Salvador and Guatemala because of their human-rights records and because they are unlikely to survive. In any event, as long as they survive they will not act contrary to U.S. interests. We should open contacts with the revolutionary movements in those two countries, and make clear our willingness to have economic relations with them,

> our indifference to their internal economic structures, our concern for the rights of the people of each country, and our opposition to foreign military bases on their soil.

Perhaps the most important U.S. interest in El Salvador is one that has nothing to do with that region. It has rather to do with the support within the United States for U.S. involvement in the world, for sensible economic and military aid programs, and for the continued defense of Europe and Japan. Somehow those commitments survived the controversy over Vietnam. They may not survive another U.S. debacle and the threat of war over a region that we will again later discover was not vital to the security of the United States.

THE STAKES IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND U.S. POLICY RESPONSES

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Central America is a region in turmoil. The unrest there is the result in part of the area's endemic economic, political, and social backwardness and its leaders' resistance to change. It is also the result of a series of international economic shocks, including the rise in cost of petroleum since 1973, prolonged depressed prices for the region's principal export commodities, and policy mistakes in dealing with these shocks. The unrest is exacerbated by uncompromising radical opposition on the one hand, and by subversion on the other.

Over the years the United States has paid far too little attention to Central America. The region appeared stable, with firm national leadership providing unquestioning (and unquestioned) support for the United States and its policies around the world. Small national economies seemed to perform without serious problems, unless one looked closely. Few did.

The United States now faces a tremendous challenge in Central America. Important U.S. national and national-security interests are at stake in a campaign that is neither well understood nor appreciated by the American public.[1] The challenge to U.S. national interests in Central America, and in the wider Caribbean basin as well, is not yet credible, yet it is real. At stake are:

- U.S. interests in the developing economies of the region;
- the security which the United States has enjoyed because of a friendly, stable, trouble-free border region along its southern flank;
- U.S. prestige in the region and more widely in the developing world;
- the respect of friends and allies of long standing;
- U.S. ability to continue to exercise leadership in the regional and global community of nations;
- the political futures of the nations in the area.

The challenge faced by the United States in Central America today is political--and it is, most simply stated, to provide political leadership. Though organized political oppositions in the region increasingly use military action as the instrument to achieve their own goals, U.S. military

might cannot be used against them. Though economics are at the root of most problems in the region, solutions to these problems are complex beyond imagination, and not readily achieved overnight. Nevertheless, what is presently taking place in Central America and the larger Caribbean basin of which it is part directly affects long-term U.S. national-security interests. Finding the political instruments to deal with present problems in the region is of vital interest to the United States.

The Stakes in Central America

The importance to U.S. security of a region of underdeveloped countries whose populations live in rural impoverishment, and whose principal items of exchange with the world economy are coffee and sugar exports, is a subject that is understandably open to question. While U.S. security interests in the Caribbean basin[2] may not be on the same plane with our interests in the Persian Gulf, in NATO, or in Japan, they are nevertheless quite important. Were conditions different in the Caribbean basin, U.S. security could be seriously threatened, or made to be much more costly to defend than at present. In the present turmoil, in Central America and some of the outer islands, one of the United States' most important and difficult tasks is to insure that the risks to and costs of security in the region are not increased.

Not only because of current turmoil in Central America, but also for reasons of longstanding tradition--Latin American as well as North American--and treaty agreements, the United States has important national interests in Latin America. First and foremost, the United States has a major interest in the friendliness and tranquility of the region. In the past it has had only a mild interest in the economic and political development of the region, but this is changing. It has a major, crucial interest in instability and hostility in the region. In short, when things go wrong, U.S. security interests are threatened. In contrast, when they go right, U.S. interests are not much enhanced. This fact has traditionally been one of the prime reasons why it has been difficult to attract adequate attention to the region except in times of turmoil. Present regional instability demands that we give closer attention to understanding our long-term interests in the political environment along our southern border.

Elsewhere I have argued that at least three separate geographic areas of U.S. security interest can be identified in Latin America: the Caribbean basin and Gulf of Mexico, east-coast South America, and west-coast South America.[3] The intensity of U.S. interest in each region is determined in large part by proximity to the continental United States, proximity to other areas of security concern, and the political, military, and economic capabilities of the member states. The focus of security interest in each area is quite different, reflecting the different objective political and economic conditions in the regions.

The Importance of the Caribbean Basin

Today U.S. attention is focused intensely on the Caribbean basin, where Grenada appears to be moving closer and closer to Cuba, and the many

small economies are struggling against great odds to meet the economic demands of their populations. In one part of the basin--Central America--first Nicaragua, then El Salvador, and now increasingly Guatemala, have experienced wrenching civil turmoil resulting from leftist opposition to entrenched right-wing oligarchic regimes. The United States is intensely concerned that political instability in these countries could result in the emergence of hostile, possibly Communist, states that could provide shelter to a more adventurous Soviet fleet, harbor offensive weapons aimed at the United States, or serve as listening posts to monitor our military movements in the area. A repetition of the Cuban revolution of 1959, the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, or the Cienfuegos submarine-base incident of 1969 is clearly in the minds of defense planners and policymakers as they observe the present military buildup in Nicaragua, the ongoing insurgency in El Salvador, and increasing instability elsewhere in the region. The future of the political processes unfolding in these countries is of vital concern to the United States and warrants the attention of U.S. leadership at the highest level.

The Caribbean basin represents the United States' southern flank. This country has traditionally defined the area as a region of highest security concern. The statistics of U.S. use of armed force since World War II demonstrate this dramatically. Of 215 uses of armed force for political purposes between 1946 and 1975, over one-fourth took place in the Western Hemisphere, and virtually all of these in the Caribbean basin.[4] The current instability in Central America and some of the Caribbean islands has recalled the longstanding concern for this region. Moreover, the intensity of recent U.S. reactions to instability in the region is directly related to our perception and interpretation of security interests in the most traditional terms of East-West conflict--the principal focus of U.S. security concern. At the same time, the region warrants security attention for its own reasons.

The Caribbean is militarily important to the United States in providing critical links in the network of U.S. listening posts monitoring ship and submarine activities in the Atlantic Ocean and approaches to the Caribbean. A variety of military training activities takes place at Panama, Puerto Rico, and Cuba that would be costly to move, or, in some cases, would be irreplaceable. Communications, tracking, and navigation facilities are located throughout the region, particularly in the eastern islands. The U.S. Navy's Atlantic Underseas Test and Evaluation Center in the Bahamas is critical to the development of anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capabilities. The Panama Canal has become newly important due to increased shipment of petroleum, coal, and grain on East-West trade routes. It would be militarily important in any future prolonged conventional conflict.

The Caribbean basin is also important economically. A continuing high volume of interoceanic and hemispheric trade moves through the Caribbean on north-south trade routes, and to and from the Panama Canal. Lightering operations in the Antilles will be critical to the supply of U.S. crude petroleum imports until port facilities are developed to handle supertankers. Refineries in the Antilles supply over 50 percent of U.S. petroleum products made from Middle Eastern and African crude.

The Caribbean basin is also the principal source of U.S. raw-materials imports from the Western Hemisphere. Mexico is the United States' second most important supplier of critical raw materials after Canada, and the principal supplier of silver, zinc, gypsum, antimony, mercury, bismuth, selenium, barium, rhenium, and lead. With new petroleum wealth, Mexico could supply up to 30 percent of U.S. petroleum import requirements or up to 2 billion cubic feet of natural gas per day by the mid-1980s. Venezuela provides 28 percent of U.S. iron-ore imports, 23 percent of its petroleum products, and 8 percent of its crude petroleum. Nearly 50 percent of U.S. bauxite imports have traditionally come from Jamaica. The availability of such mineral imports from the Caribbean-basin countries represents a convenience to the United States today. In the event of a major global conflict, their availability would be critical. At the same time, the cumulative "conveniences" of ready availability and longstanding commercial relations with the countries in the Caribbean-basin region represent a real interest that is lost on neither the United States nor the regional governments. Political interests in the region are far less tangible, and more open to debate and discussion. Nevertheless, U.S. political interests are being challenged in the current instability of Central America.

The Political Challenge in Central America

The United States has compelling political interests in maintaining good relations with the nations of Latin America. As part of the Western Hemisphere, and in the immediate U.S. geographic sphere of influence, Latin America has long been perceived as a key element in the U.S. political following in the world. While the inter-American system is not as closely knit today as it once was, and Latin American states are on record as seeking to diminish their dependence on the United States, the hemispheric community still figures importantly in our own and others' perceptions of our political following in the world and, by extension, of the East-West balance. The Soviet Union has always recognized the importance of Western Hemisphere solidarity and has taken advantage of every opportunity to embarrass the United States when cracks appear. The United States has demonstrated a less clear understanding of the importance of the hemispheric community in measuring its own relative weight on a world scale. In the 1960s and 1970s it adopted policies, including policies in the arms-control, trade, nuclear-energy, and human-rights areas, the perhaps unintended consequences of which were to undermine hemispheric cooperation and lessen Latin American commitment to the inter-American system. The dramatic swing in U.S. policy toward the region has tended to create uncertainty and skepticism. Though the Latin Americans at times resent their closeness to the United States, and at times use it as leverage against the United States, they nevertheless continue to figure importantly in the global assessment of U.S. political weight in the world. Failure to achieve their support and collaboration represents a net loss in U.S. "prestige" in the international balance of power. This applies whether one speaks of Southern Cone countries such as Chile or Argentina, or of Mexico or Panama nearer to home.

From the U.S. point of view, recent political instability in the Caribbean basin is especially unsettling because it reflects badly on the solidarity and viability of the Western Hemisphere community and on U.S.

leadership of it. Instability challenges the cherished U.S. security assumption that political stability and strongly pro-American governments in the region are essential for the United States' security and well-being. As long as U.S. interpretation of its own security depends on this conventional wisdom, the Caribbean basin, with Cuba present, will be a gnawing problem for the United States.

The presence of a Soviet-backed regime in Cuba is a profound irritant to the United States both because it represents an undeniable crack in hemispheric solidarity and because it provides a base of operation for Soviet fishing, naval and satellite intelligence, and other activities. Moreover, Cuba is an unabashed source of support for anti-American movements in the Caribbean basin and elsewhere in the world.[5] While Cuba kept a low profile in the region until the late 1970s, its activism in other world regions threatened U.S. interests abroad, increased the opportunities for U.S.-Soviet confrontation, and suggested what could occur closer to home. The establishment of militant Communist regimes in Angola and Ethiopia became reminders of the possibility of Communist regimes in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Grenada, or Jamaica.

Present U.S. concern in Central America focuses precisely on the possibility that unstable political situations there could provide an entree for further Soviet encroachment in the hemisphere. This concern is both justified and sometimes exaggerated. The Soviets recognize the psychological victory that Cuba represents and have exploited it. However, as the incidents of 1962 (missile crisis) and 1970 (Cienfuegos submarine-base incident) suggest, they seem not to be willing to confront the United States directly in its sphere of influence.

Indeed, it would be difficult for the Soviets to make important inroads in the region. The Central American and Caribbean economies are extremely dependent on the United States for markets, investment, and replacement parts. They would be hard pressed to maintain economic activity if they were to break relations with the United States or if the United States chose to embargo them. They could survive only if the Soviets were to underwrite their economies substantially, as they have in the case of Cuba. Though the Soviets support the Cuban economy to the tune of $3 billion per year, they have not been generous with other "potential Cubas." They have not yet been especially generous with either Grenada or Nicaragua. They were not generous with Chile under Allende. Cuba's dependence on the Soviets is well known. Few political leaders in the Caribbean or Central America desire to trade one overlord for another if a better alternative exists. Cuba itself has only limited tangible resources to offer these countries. Its chief appeal is psychological. Soviet support would be required for the Cubans to underwrite Caribbean and Central American economic development. Strong direct Soviet support appears unlikely today when Soviet interests are occupied elsewhere.[6]

At the same time, it is both plausible and logical that the Soviets would encourage low-cost Cuban harassment of the United States by supporting and funding Cuban adventures in the Caribbean and Central America. Hence, it is not surprising that massive and persuasive documentary evidence has emerged that Cuba, other Communist bloc countries, and the Soviet

Union were supplying arms and training to Salvadoran guerrillas. Only the naive believe that the Cubans and Soviets are not aiding and abetting leftist forces in the war of political will that is emerging in Central America.

The Caribbean-basin countries are able to contribute very little to their own internal defense or to regional defense. The responsibility consequently falls to the United States. Most Central American and Caribbean countries have poorly armed, poorly trained forces. A direct consequence of poor training is lack of order and discipline, especially when units are actually put to test in the field. The countries of the eastern Caribbean do not have the equipment to enforce their own fishing and anti-drug-trafficking laws in their own waters. Only Venezuela and Mexico have the population and economic wherewithal to support a sizeable military capability in the Caribbean basin, but it is in neither's interest to replicate capabilities available under the United States' umbrella. In the context of these regional military capabilities, Nicaragua's announced plan to build an armed force of 50,000 equipped with Soviet tanks and aircraft is threatening. Such a force is totally disproportionate to the threats that could be mounted against it from the region, and only serves to alarm Nicaragua's neighbors.

Because the area has had such a low military profile, because it has been "dependable" and "predictable," and has effectively served as a buffer zone for the United States, the escalation of irregular military activity in Central America is especially alarming to U.S. defense strategists accustomed to focusing their attention on other world areas, confident that the neighborhood was safe. When a hostile enemy power is perceived to be behind the widespread instability, terrorism, and guerrilla activity, alarm is intensified. Moreover, the United States has always been inclined toward a pessimistic interpretation of events in its backyard.

The tone with which policymakers today react to events, especially negative events, in Central America and the Caribbean, antedates by many years the current alarums that "the Russians are coming; the Russians are coming." In the 1970s it was not in vogue to wave that banner. Moreover, it is an undeniable fact that Cuba has been more active in the region in the past two years than before. Other extra-hemispheric actors--Libya, the PLO, the Europeans, other Latin American powers--are all, for different reasons, getting involved in a region that few of them paid any attention to before. The region has become infinitely more permeable in the past 10 years than had ever before been imagined. Even the benevolent or benign participation of these many actors contributes to perceptions of diminished U.S. ability to maintain control over or to influence unravelling situations. Such perceptions heighten feelings of insecurity.

The very strong, almost visceral, U.S. response to Central American crises results from factors that have characterized U.S. policymaking toward the region for many years. The first factor influencing our reactions to crises in Central America has been our ill-founded overconfidence in the stability and placidity of this region and in the United States' ability to control events there. A second factor is the very essence and nature of the long-range strategic planning process and its tendency to force all conflict toward the mold of East-West military confrontation.

Third, the crisis-management process itself also tends to focus attention on the East-West element of a conflict, even when it may be a minor component of the situation.[7] Finally, the United States has not had a constructive policy toward the region since the Alliance for Progress, and even that policy concentrated its efforts on South America, not Central America.

Identifying the problems of past policy toward the Caribbean basin, however, does not necessarily point out solutions. How should the United States deal with the present crisis in Central America?

Policy Choices in Central America

First, there must be recognition that the region is undergoing dramatic change. The old order cannot last, and we should not seek to maintain it at any cost. I believe this premise is widely accepted in the United States; however, it is not necessarily so well understood by our neighbors in Central America who tend to read U.S. policy statements selectively as it suits their own interests.

It is essential that the United States be seen as supporting responsible, progressive reforms in the region. Too often, because of our past performance, our commitment to the need for reforms is believed to be weak--both by those resisting change and by those promoting change. Revolutionaries on the left believe that we are their arch enemy; extremists on the right assume that we will back them to the end to avoid "Communism." Moderates whom we would prefer to support are uncertain of our commitment and, as a result, frequently fail to assert themselves effectively. More attention needs to be given to the image which the United States projects in the region.

Second, we must recognize that our motives are suspect in Latin America. No amount of posturing on our part will change the fact that Latin Americans, and especially Central Americans, have a negative memory of their historical relationship with the United States. The countries have been exploited economically by U.S. corporations, invaded by U.S. marines, and plotted against by the CIA. U.S. administrations, one after another, have promised a "new deal" for Latin America, then failed to deliver. It will take many years to overcome the suspicions generated over the decades. Moreover, the enormous gap between U.S. political, military, and economic power and that of our Central American and Caribbean neighbors guarantees that the relationship will always be uneasy. Friendship cannot thrive in such an unequal relationship.

Third, we must decide what desirable range of political and economic conditions we are willing to support in the region and at what effort. Then we must set about implementing a policy that is consistent with those goals. The end state can be agreed upon, I believe. The United States desires in Central America (and elsewhere) friendly, stable, prosperous states in which honest elections, respect for human rights, and creative attention to improving the lot of the poor are common values actively pursued. Moreover, we want no hostile neighbors. We have learned to live uneasily with Cuba, but an expanded Cuban/Soviet military presence in the region is simply intolerable. Even the present state of relations with Nicaragua or Grenada is highly undesirable.

To accomplish desired goals, channels of communication with opposition or revolutionary leaderships should be kept open and available, even if not always used. It should be made clear to these leaderships, many of whom seem to act on the most bizarre premises about the United States, that we would like to establish and maintain good relations throughout the hemisphere. The rules of the game as we see them and the limits of tolerable behaviors should be made clear, and the rewards of good relations should be understood and widely disseminated. At the same time, if the United States is to be a reasonable and pragmatic broker of its own interests in the region, if it is to be successful in leading politicized elements of right and left toward moderate, pragmatic, and democratic solutions, it must be cautious in its use of rhetoric against the Cubans and other revolutionary groups in the region. Rightly or wrongly, the Cuban revolution enjoys considerable respect among Latin American political leaders, in part because it was accomplished in spite of U.S. opposition. It is unbecoming of the United States' superpower status to rail against revolutionary movements. Too often, such language merely leaves the impression that we are against social change. A better strategy for dealing with Cuba would be to simply ignore it--write it out of our vocabulary, and concentrate on positive, constructive activities that would help minimize Cuba's revolutionary appeal. Quiet diplomacy, aggressively implemented, would seem to provide a better and more effective approach to the problems of the Caribbean basin.

Fourth, the United States must make a long-term commitment to promoting conditions conducive to political stability and economic prosperity in the region. Social-science literature, revolutionary doctrine, and common sense argue persuasively that at the root of political instability are poverty, illiteracy, frustrated aspirations, unequal income distributions, and inadequate economic opportunities for people. Such conditions provide the friendly sea in which the fishes of dissent prosper and proliferate. Political crises in Central America are likely to continue until the economic crises and the crises of political leadership are resolved.

If the United States' long-range goals for the Caribbean basin are that it be less crisis-ridden and demand less of our security attention, a commitment to its economic development becomes a logical policy remedy. A U.S.-sponsored development program for the region that includes commitment of enough U.S. funds to reflect the region's importance to U.S. national security and that is tailored to respond to the economic needs and capabilities of individual countries in the region would tell the people of the region that the United States has an interest in the fate of its neighbors and is committed to their well-being. It would go a long way in making up for past errors of omission and lack of concern. Not incidentally, it would present a tremendous psychological and economic challenge to the Cubans and Soviets, which quite likely they could not meet. The Reagan administration's Caribbean Basin Initiative is a bold, important step in the right direction. It will not be a panacea for regional problems, and it will require considerable effort and energy in the United States and in individual Caribbean-basin countries to be successful. But it is a set of programs for the long term, a first step that merits strong bipartisan support.

The United States should not expect gratitude for its development effort. Nor should our policy makers expect either economic development or political stability to lead to a lining up of Caribbean states behind U.S. leadership on all issues. Our history of involvement in the region evokes too much emotion for such responses. But a well-orchestrated diplomacy of regional development and stability would contribute to a more desirable state of affairs in this now volatile, impoverished region. It would represent a constructive reassertion of U.S. leadership at an especially crucial time. The time for exercising leadership in Central America is short.

REFERENCES

[1]The ideas expressed in this paper are the author's own and do not in any way represent the opinions or positions of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, or its members. Several of the ideas presented here were developed in Margaret Daly Hayes, "U.S. National Security Interests in Central America in Global Perpsecitve," in Richard E. Feinberg (ed.), Central America: The International Dimensions of the Crisis (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1982 forthcoming).

[2]The term "Caribbean basin," as used here, includes the Central American nations (Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama); Colombia and Venezuela; the island republics of the Greater and Lesser Antilles; Guyana, and Surinam. Mexico also is included. Focus on the Caribbean basin as a region of national-security interest does not mean that there are not great differences in political and economic conditions within the region; however, it places attention first on the region, and then on the sub-regions within.

[3]Margaret Daly Hayes, "Security to the South: U.S. Interests in Latin America," International Security, V:4 (1980).

[4]Barry M. Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan, Force Without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1978).

[5]See "Cuba's Renewed Support for Violence in the Hemisphere," research paper presented to the Subcommittee for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, by the Department of State, Washington, D.C., December 14, 1981.

[6]Jiri Valenta argues this position in his chapter in Feinberg (ed.), Central America: The International Dimensions of the Crisis. In contrast, Robert Leiken maintains that the Soviets have embarked on a major economic and political offensive in the Western Hemisphere. See "Eastern Winds in Latin America," Foreign Policy, 42 (Spring 1981).

[7]The impact that these characteristics of the policy process have had on U.S.-Latin American interactions is discussed in Hayes, "U.S. National Security Interests in Central America in Global Perspective."

TOWARD A VIABLE U.S. POLICY IN THE CARIBBEAN

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The fundamental issues facing the United States in the Caribbean basin--principally in El Salvador and the rest of Central America at this time--are two: (1) philosophical--assuming that the region can prosper only if its societies are open and free, are we not obligated to do everything possible to help them become so? (2) security--is it not in the interest of ourselves and our neighbors to insure that the dynamics of extremism-expansionism do not threaten our mutual security?

Whether or not to condone or support states that are "moderately" repressive is not the issue. A "moderately" repressive state can lead to one of total repression--which is what happened in Cuba. Consequently, polarization must be avoided. But in cases where it cannot be avoided, such as El Salvador, clearly the lesser evil is to choose the "moderately" repressive regime, which offers a window, however small, on freedom, whereas the totalitarian state offers not a chink.

Proof of the latter is abundant. Since 1917, Russia has been in the grip of a dictatorship whose control over the people is total. Since World War II, the East European countries annexed by the Kremlin have suffered a similar fate, punctuated by periodic revolts or efforts at "liberalization" which are usually, in the end, brutally aborted; Poland is only the latest example of this. Even a laid-back tropical country such as Cuba can succumb, as we have seen since 1959, to the suffocating embrace of totalitarianism.

Totalitarianism is, by its very nature, expansionist. Of this, again, there is more than ample evidence: Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, the Soviet Union, and more recently, even tiny Cuba. Though Cuba is expansionist by virtue of its role as a Soviet surrogate, it can play the same role in Central America--under the same Soviet auspices--as in Africa.

Totalitarianism is also, by its very nature, militaristic--and of course fascistic. Communism, as Susan Sontag has recently discovered, is only fascism "with a human face." (Only, that qualification is doubtful when one recalls Stalin's sacrifice of millions of "kulaks" on the altar of collectivization in 1929--a phenomenon called "genocide" when Hitler practiced it--or the resurrection of the anti-Semitism of the Tsars under the Politburo's auspices.) Thus we see Cuba, and now Nicaragua, arming to the teeth. Is there any reason to believe that if El Salvador fell to the FMLN it would not also become militarized? (The argument, first put forth by the Cubans and now by the Sandinistas, that they had to arm in the face of a perceived threat of U.S. armed intervention is specious. Washington ceased to rattle the saber at Cuba after the Bay of Pigs, and

since 1962 has observed an understanding with Moscow not to invade Cuba; nevertheless, there has been an alarming buildup of military power on the island for two decades. In Nicaragua's case, following the Sandinista triumph, we provided $170 million in bilateral economic assistance besides being the biggest contributor to multilateral aid; our "aggressiveness" toward the Sandinistas was produced by, not the cause of, their all-out militarization effort.) Obviously, two militarized totalitarian states in Central America, backed by the military might of Cuba and, behind it, that of the Soviet Union, would represent a threat to the security of their immediate neighbors, in the first place, and to those just over the horizon, in the second. Thus the convergence of the twin issues of political philosophy and national security in examining what policy we should pursue in the Caribbean.

In the specific and immediate case of El Salvador, the choice for the United States is crystal clear. One need not regard the Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno (JRG) as a paragon of democracy to understand that it is preferable to the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), and that a victory for the latter would be far worse for the Salvadoran people than even an outright military dictatorship. Already, the FMLN, in the name of "revolution," is attempting to destroy the revolution that began with the reformist army-officer coup in October 1979: for all its faults, the land reform it initiated is benefitting tens of thousands of peasants (who, not incidentally, for that reason have not joined the guerrillas), while the nationalization of the banks and the export trade border on socialism. The FMLN, which has yet to present a counter-program that is more revolutionary than the JRG's, has resorted instead to a "scorched earth" policy aimed at destroying the national economy and leaving a ruin for whomever governs El Salvador in the future. A more savage and destructive policy is difficult to imagine.

Before we consider the options available to the United States in El Salvador and elsewhere in Central America, I should like to underline a basic cultural-historical factor about Central American society which most commentators usually overlook, yet whose impact upon it must constantly be borne in mind if the current crisis is to be understood. That factor is the predominance of authoritarian attitudes in popular thinking since early pre-Columbian times, a predominance reinforced by the Spanish conquistadores. With the major exception of Costa Rica, Central America has never experienced anything resembling democracy in all its history. (Guatemala went through a more or less democratic interlude from 1944 to 1950, only to fall prey to political violence and terror during the presidency of Jacobo Arbenz afterward.) Does this history not suggest the futility of expecting a full-blown democracy to emerge in El Salvador, and elsewhere in Central America (excepting Costa Rica), at this stage?

What are, realistically speaking, the options in Central America?

Short-Term Options

Is negotiation, as proposed by the Mexicans, feasible? Can there be effective linkage if negotiations are held with Cuba and Nicaragua, or Cuba and the Soviets? What about El Salvador?

Regardless of where the Mexican proposals may lead, the United States must first give its unstinting support to the March 28th elections in El Salvador for a constituent assembly and dialogue later. The reasons are these:

1. Although the elections will not solve any basic problems, they will initiate a political process for the resolution of national problems democratically. A further stage in the process will be the holding of presidential elections in 1983.

2. They will produce a government having some claim to legitimacy and to representativeness. Such a government, assuming the army respects it, should have enough credibility to gain more support at home and abroad than the JRG has.

3. They will express the will of a vastly larger number of Salvadorans, demonstrably, than the FMLN/FDR do. For backing the elections are three major forces: the free labor unions and peasant organizations (who together represent an estimated total of 300,000 voters), the Catholic Church of El Salvador (to which nearly everyone belongs), and six political parties (who represent additional tens or perhaps hundreds of thousands of voters not belonging to labor or peasant groups). The FMLN/FDR, on the other hand, "would poll from 12 percent to 20 percent of the vote," at most, R. Bruce McColm estimates in his Freedom House pamphlet on "El Salvador: Peaceful Revolution or Armed Struggle?"

The Mexicans have proposed negotiations with the guerrillas instead of elections, but are now reconciled to waiting until after March 28. Are negotiations desirable? What will be negotiated?

Mexico's desire to negotiate is obviously dictated, first, by its recognition of the guerrillas as "a representative political force," and second, by its belief that the civil conflict will thus be contained and the threat--admittedly still somewhat distant--to itself lessened. But negotiations imply a willingness on both sides to share power--what other purpose could they have?--and it is doubtful whether either side wants that. The bottom line of negotiations is: who will control the armed forces? The guerrillas demand the destruction or at least the emasculation of the army--a demand which the army naturally rejects as a form of suicide. Even if some compromise on that question could be worked out, and at this juncture it is impossible to foresee what that could be, the guerrillas would remain essentially intact even if they agreed to disband; the very nature of leftist guerrilla forces is that they can regroup at any time, given their common ideology and strict discipline. The Salvadoran conflict, then, is basically not negotiable--unless the elections produce a hopeless situation within JRG ranks that will compel them to work out a compromise.

(It should be kept in mind, in assessing the possibilities of negotiation, whether in El Salvador or Nicaragua or Cuba, that compromise, the very idea of forming a consensus by surrendering a point or a position for the sake of the greater good, is foreign to the Latin mentality. Intransigence, a form of machismo, is endemic, and generally makes impossible consensus politics in Latin America, with rare exceptions.)

I see no practical alternative in El Salvador, at this point, than to make the electoral process (including the followup to March 28) workable, while continuing military aid to the junta and its successor and pressing forward with the land and other reforms. There is a good possibility that, once the government is legitimized, it will be able to rally more support at home and abroad than the JRG. Indeed, that can be made a probability if the United States, Venezuela, and, hopefully, Mexico can be persuaded to lend their fullest support to the elected government.

Nicaragua, notwithstanding the current hardening of the Sandinista and U.S. positions, may yet lend itself to negotiation, and there the process should be tried. Three factors seem to favor a satisfactory negotiation, at least in the short term: (1) the continuing schisms within Sandinista ranks and, above all, the absence of a single caudillo to impose monolithism; (2) the amazing resilience and will of the middle class, the remaining free trade unions, the dominant forces in the Church, and the free press (La Prensa), to resist Communism; and (3) the steady deterioration of the economy and accompanying rising popular discontent, forcing the Sandinistas to seek large injections of foreign (principally U.S.) aid. Probably a fourth factor is that the Soviets, in view of the cost of sustaining Cuba and their own fiscal and economic troubles, cannot be expected to bail out the Sandinista regime.

There are, however, serious factors militating against a satisfactory negotiation in Nicaragua. Above all, the diehard Marxist-Leninist faction among the Sandinistas rejects compromise and is driving toward a Communist dictatorship and militarization. Second, militarization itself is concentrating power in extremist hands--the latest example of which is the new state of siege. Third, the Sandinistas appear to be taking direction from Havana and Moscow, and both of the latter are unlikely to agree to a dilution of their power which negotiation would imply. (Will, can, the Sandinistas dismiss their Cuban and Soviet advisers in exchange for a U.S. promise to cease aiding the anti-Sandinista exiles?) Finally, the Sandinistas fear that negotiations might lead to the strengthening of the Nicaraguan private sector and, in general, their opponents at home.

Nevertheless, negotiations should be attempted, using a carrot-stick approach: major concessions (primarily economic), while making basic demands (such as credit guarantees for the private sector, demonstrable cessation of aid to the Salvadoran guerrillas, and so on). Further, Washington should bring into the negotiating process not only Mexico but also Costa Rica and Venezuela (all three contributed decisively to the Sandinista triumph) to exert constant pressure on the Sandinistas. If, despite a genuine effort, negotiations fail, nothing will have been lost and something gained: the world will know that at least the United States tried.

Cuba is another matter entirely. I doubt whether, after two decades of enmity, either Cuba or the United States is ready to make basic concessions, or that there is the basis for a genuine quid pro quo. Assuming that the United States would be willing to lift the trade embargo, what can Castro give us in return? What does "normalization" of bilateral relations mean, beyond the formality of establishing fully accredited embassies in each country? Would Castro be willing to cease militarizing

Cuba, much less demobilize any of his armed forces? Would he cease training and supporting guerrillas in Latin America? Would he withdraw his troops from Angola and other African countries? Further, does normalization mean creating the basis for profound, friendly relations with the United States which might, at some future date, displace those with the Soviets? Or does it mean something less, like largely wanting to get rid of the trade embargo so that Cuba can obtain international credits for much-needed imports? Meanwhile, supposing that negotiations with Cuba began immediately, would this be preceded or accompanied by a cease-fire in El Salvador and Guatemala? Does Cuba, in fact, possess the power to order the FMLN or the new Patriotic Unity front in Guatemala to lay down their arms? The situation vis-à-vis Cuba has, in all probability, deteriorated too far to offer real promise of a satisfactory outcome from negotiations.

Whether or not negotiations--with the Salvadoran guerrillas, with Nicaragua, or with Cuba--continue to be a topic for discussion, and whether or not any of them ever get under way, U.S. policy should be to keep our powder dry and expect the worst. Translated into practical terms, this means gathering in the democratic forces in Central America and giving them fullest economic and, where necessary, military backing, and meanwhile utilizing every means to divide our enemies and weaken them. Unless we are successful in attaining those objectives, there is a prospect of intraregional warfare between the two contending major forces--a war which can overflow into Mexico and even to the United States.

Long-Term Options

If the short-term prospects for civil peace, progress, and pluralism in Central America appear grim, a long-range policy could conceivably attenuate the crisis, offer the people of the area some hope for the future, and perhaps even discourage new insurgencies and dampen old ones. But if such a policy is to succeed, it must be pursued by the United States with resolve, consistency, foresight, intelligence, pragmatism, and understanding. An essential requirement would be to staff the agencies involved, from the White House on down, with real specialists in the field of Latin American relations--specialists, that is, with first-hand field experience including a knowledge of Spanish.

First, although Central America may be properly regarded as part of the Caribbean basin, for many practical purposes it should be considered apart from the rest of the basin.

Second, Panama, although formally not considered as belonging to Central America, should come under a general Central American policy.

Third, the United States should obtain the active backing for such a policy of the three major relatively democratic states in the region: Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela.

Fourth, it goes without saying that it should also seek to obtain a consensus for the policy among the Central American republics (including Panama) themselves, as well as here at home.

The basis for a Central American policy should be the establishment of an integrated regional economy, outside the Caribbean Basin Initiative. The devastating impact of fluctuating world markets on each of the Central American economies demonstrates, quite clearly, the fundamental weaknesses of each of them. Tiny, essentially monocultural and agrarian, they are profoundly affected every time the world price of coffee or cotton goes up or down, and especially by the highly inflated price of petroleum products. United, sharing an equitable division of labor, joining in regional planning--but not highly centralized--the several economies of Central America would at least be able to withstand the perennial shocks of market fluctuations better than they have traditionally.

A major step in the direction of regional economic integration was taken in the late 1950s with the organization of the Central American Common Market. A success in many basic respects, the CACM foundered over the 1969 "Soccer War" between Honduras and El Salvador, although internal stresses and strains had been evident earlier. That war, of course, had less to do with soccer rivalry than the problem of Salvadoran immigrants flooding into Honduras because their own economy could not provide them with a living. (In a new regional economic arrangement, that problem would be dealt with collectively and, needless to add, peacefully.) Under the CACM, all sorts of intraregional economic, financial, and social accords proliferated, as did intraregional financial, trade, labor, and business-management institutions. The United States was a motive force behind the CACM, operating through a regional agency of the Agency for International Development called ROCAP; ROCAP prodded, persuaded, cajoled, and led in getting all five Central American republics to join in what was, for a time, a successful experiment. Restoration of the CACM, even if less than five countries join, is feasible, and necessary.

A mechanism for restoring the CACM and going beyond it to regional economic integration and eventual political union is at hand, in the form of the Central American Democratic Community established on January 19, 1982, by Costa Rica, Honduras, and El Salvador. Panama could almost certainly be persuaded to join them, and eventually, if the new Guatemalan regime can perform a miracle and begin to democratize itself, the region's richest and largest country might follow. In any event, the present three members of the Community could begin the restoration of the CACM, which is implicit in the Community's January Declaration (as is also the creation of "an economic community based on the integral and balanced development of its members").

Also implicit in the Declaration is the idea of a Central American union, a very old idea going back to the United Provinces of Central America formed in 1821 out of the former provinces of the Captaincy General of Guatemala under the Spanish Crown. More recently, in 1951, the five Central American republics formed the Organization of Central American States (ODECA), but it fell apart when several member states complained of serious Communist infiltration directed from Guatemala, then ruled by the pro-Communist Arbenz regime. A repetition of that is unlikely, since the January Declaration states as a political proposition of the Community that it would "promote democratic values and consolidate the full rule of representative democracy," as well as "seek solutions to their social problems through the democratic way" and "affirm that free and democratic

elections are the highest expression of the popular will." Such statements would appear to preclude Nicaragua, as it is presently constituted, from joining either the Community or a new ODECA.

The case for the political unification of Central America is too obvious to require extensive explanation here. Suffice it to say that the countries of the isthmus have geographical contiguity in common, in addition to a common history, culture, language, and religion. If it be argued that existing governments with the vested bureaucratic and personalist interests underlying them would be most reluctant to surrender their "sovereignty" to some supranational body, the answer is that that need not be the case at this juncture; in fact, it would make for healthy intraregional pluralism for each national government to retain its identity indefinitely, or until such time as they may feel free to give it up--piecemeal, perhaps--in the future. Certainly member states could contribute toward maintaining a regional defense or peacekeeping force without, at this point in time, dismantling their armed forces. (This would not affect Costa Rica, of course, since it has no standing army.)

Whether we call it a Central American Community or Union, a regional political organization will prove no more viable than a regional economic one without the active, ongoing participation of the United States, Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela. These nations ought, in fact, to agree to become guarantors of the Community or Union. Needless to conclude, here is an instance in which the United States can assume strong leadership without running the risk of being attacked as "imperialistic" or "interventionist."

I do not agree with the conventional wisdom that the United States should encourage Mexico to take the lead in resolving the Central American crisis (which implies that the United States should play a secondary role) because that nation commands the respect and influence in Central America required to perform such a function. That is simply not true. I have long advocated that Mexico be encouraged to join with others in the process of aiding Central America, but not as the leader. Mexico, apart from its recent big-brotherly relations with the Sandinistas, is not widely respected in Central America and commands little influence; it is regarded, rather, as arrogant, patronizing, and overbearing--as, in short, the local "Colossus of the North." Also, if "familiarity breeds contempt," the Latins rarely admire their Latin neighbors and usually regard them with a combination of suspicion and envy. In Mexico's particular case, although it has been successful in maintaining political stability for 60-odd years, that has been at the cost--as other Latin Americans, and even many Mexicans, see it--of sacrificing democratic values. Its "democratic dictatorship," then, is not regarded by its Central American neighbors as a model.

The United States, notwithstanding the many acts of injustice and negligence it is guilty of in its relations with Central America over the years, continues to command more respect there than any other country. It should not allow itself to be intimidated by the harsh attacks from the left, or by occasional manifestations of anti-Americanism--often manufactured by the left or by the ultranationalists--into accepting anything but the role of strong leader in Central America. Strength, of the judicious rather than the arbitrary kind, is the quality perhaps most respected by our Latin neighbors. Let us be aware of that, and let us work to create a new, revolutionary, and democratic Central America before it is too late.

DISCUSSION PAPER ON CENTRAL AMERICA*

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This paper addresses the questions posed by the workshop's organizers: given one's concept of the U.S. interest, what are the best and worst outcomes in Central America we can realistically hope for, and how can U.S. policy contribute to the achievement of the best outcomes and help avoid the worst?

Conceptual Discussion

Although I will address the question as posed, brief discussion of two of its key terms is in order. I will not quibble too much with the concept "the U.S. interest." I take it for granted that foreign-policy makers pursue other interests besides their concept of the national interest. And in an extremely ideological administration such as the present one, it is not clear that policy rests on any concept of the national interest. Nevertheless, the question does not require using the national interest as an explanatory concept, but rather as a way of organizing a discussion, so that I do not think the concept poses insurmountable problems.

I have more problems with the concept of "outcomes." The utility of this concept is called into question by the fact that we never seem to be able to agree on when an outcome exists, how to characterize it, or what policies produced it. The reality appears to be that on any given day you have in Central America (or anywhere else) a set of situations--characterized differently by different people--which are the outcomes, in part, of past policies. And on any given day we are pursuing policies designed to sustain some of those outcomes and to change others into other outcomes. In other words, there is never an outcome--only an ongoing process that one tries to influence in what one considers to be a desired direction.

The difficulty with the concept of outcomes is of more than mere academic interest. It fundamentally affects political debate, and will intrude at all points into the discussion of these papers. The difficulty of identifying when you have an outcome and when you do not have one yet--and, if you do, what it is, and what policies it is an outcome of--is illustrated by the frequency with which, at one and the same time, some protagonists in the American political debate are characterizing a set of

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*The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author, and should not be taken to reflect the views of the Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs or any member thereof.

policies as already having failed (i.e., there is an outcome), while others are saying the policies haven't even been tried yet (i.e., there isn't an outcome). To illustrate, it is certain that, at some point in the discussion of these papers, someone will say that U.S. policies of accommodation toward Nicaragua have already produced the outcome of a totalitarian enemy state; others will say that we have never seriously tried policies of accommodation, but that there is still time because there is no outcome yet in Nicaragua.

The reason that outcomes cannot be identified objectively is that one's view of when an outcome exists, and what it is, is largely if not entirely a function of one's basic policy perspectives. People who think an outcome is in our interest keep saying that the only sensible thing to do is to keep trying to achieve it (i.e., there is no outcome yet), while people who don't think that outcome is in our interest say the policies have failed (i.e., there is an outcome) and we ought to try different policies designed to achieve a different outcome (i.e., one they deem to be in our interest).

The U.S. Interest in Central America

I believe our most basic interest in Central America is to prevent the emergence of countries that are hostile to us, or that are allied to countries that are hostile to us, or that are bases of subversion against other states. Our goal in the region ought to be stability--the kind of stability that results from the existence of governments that are respectful of the rights of their people, and from political and economic conditions that give people hope that they can meet their fundamental aspirations for themselves and their children. The best "outcome" would be a region of stable, healthy, equitable democracies whose views of their interests in the region were compatible with ours. The worst "outcome" would be a region of hostile, subversive states allied with Cuba. I do not view the existence of right-wing dictatorships that butcher their people as significantly better than the worst case, but it appears that such regimes will not long endure no matter what we do. I would not lament their passing no matter what they are replaced with. Between the best and worst outcomes, I would be quite comfortable with a region of countries with different political and economic systems, even if they were not particularly friendly, so long as they were not forces for instability and bases that Cuba and the Soviet Union could use against us. A region of "Yugoslavias" would not be a disaster.

Our minimal interests, at least, should be quite easy to achieve. Given our overwhelming power relative to the countries of Central America, and consequently the incentive those countries have for constructive relations with us, our minimal interests would be achieved almost automatically if we would stop giving our right-wing a veto power over any attempts to get along with countries that do not meet its ideological litmus tests. There is no country in the region with which we cannot at least develop nonhostile relations, if only we do not set out deliberately to make enemies.

More positively, U.S. policy in Central America should include support for democracy, economic development, the eradication of poverty, human rights, and peaceful resolution of conflicts. U.S. policy should avoid catering to military regimes, overemphasizing military aid, regionalizing conflicts, drawing Central America into the cold war, and--I hope it goes without saying--destabilizing governments through covert action. Insofar as possible, we should pursue our policies in concert with the major regional actors, Mexico and Venezuela, and, where appropriate, through multilateral institutions. A rapprochement with Cuba would, of course, be enormously helpful in achieving our objectives in the region.

To be more specific, I will now discuss each country individually. Because workshop participants will not agree on where we are starting from, I will first describe what I see as the current situation in each country, then where we should be trying to go and how we should be trying to get there.

Costa Rica. Costa Rica already meets most of my "best outcome" criteria. The maintenance of this situation depends on Costa Rica's ability to surmount its devastating economic problems. The worst outcome we should fear is the collapse of the economy, the breakdown of always-fragile democratic practices and institutions, an increase in terrorism, and a slide into political and economic chaos with incalculable consequences.

The policies for fostering the best outcome are the same as those for avoiding the worst. They include large-scale bilateral balance-of-payments support, strong support for international financial institutions that can help Costa Rica through its economic crisis, measures to foster trade and investment, technical and other forms of development assistance to help Costa Rica address such economic problems as increasing nontraditional exports and developing alternative energy sources, and perhaps a more forthcoming attitude toward attempts to achieve stabilization of commodity prices at the international level. Note that military aid does not appear on my list. If given, it is crucial that it be given only if genuinely desired by--and only through--the democratic political leadership.

Nicaragua. Nicaragua is ruled by a revolutionary movement that took power by military means from a U.S.-sponsored dictator. This outcome could conceivably have been avoided if the United States had thrown its weight behind a political solution when there was still time for a more broadly based alternative to Somoza. However, this was not done, and we must now deal with a historically anti-American Sandinista movement that took power over our opposition. The attempts of the Carter administration to achieve an understanding with the revolutionary government were commendable but insufficient, and were hampered by inadequate support from Congress. The election of Ronald Reagan a mere 16 months after the success of the revolution ended the abortive attempt at accommodation, and no real attempt has been made since.

A private sector, an opposition press, and a political opposition still exist in Nicaragua, although they operate within severe constraints set by the revolutionary authorities. The Nicaraguan government still promises elections and purports to want to establish pluralist democracy and to

maintain a private sector. The government professes to desire better relations with the United States while engaging in hostile rhetoric (which the United States gives back in spades). Commander Ortega recently announced a five-point proposal for meeting U.S. concerns. Relations with Cuba are close, a large military buildup is apparently underway, and Nicaragua is giving some disputed degree of support to the Salvadoran left. (Both Cuba and the Salvadoran left, of course, gave crucial aid to the Sandinistas during the revolution.) In an incredibly stupid move, the United States is reportedly seeking to destabilize the Sandinista regime through covert action.

After spending the better part of a century working for anything but pluralistic democracy in Nicaragua, it is a bit late now for the United States to make the immediate achievement of democracy a condition of normal relations. And after opposing the revolution to the end, it is somewhat presumptuous of us to expect the Sandinistas to sever all relations with those who did support them. I do not think we can realistically hope for an outcome in the short term whereby the Sandinistas would give up their role as the vanguard of revolution, overall control of the society, some degree of commitment to Marxist principles, and friendship with their natural allies who helped bring them to power. However, I do believe there is a realistic hope for reasonably friendly U.S.-Nicaraguan relations, for the maintenance of a private sector, political opposition, and other forms of pluralism, and for an understanding concerning Nicaragua's contribution to instability in the region. I would pose this as my "best outcome," the worst being Nicaragua's becoming "another Cuba." The means for working for the best case and against the worst seem clear. I quote from a recently published article by Rep. Michael D. Barnes:

> How do we get off the down escalator? How do we effectively pursue our interest in keeping Nicaragua from becoming a totalitarian, Cuban/Soviet satellite? The only way is to stop treating Nicaragua as if it were <u>already</u> a totalitarian, Cuban/Soviet satellite.
>
> The first thing we should do, on both sides, is to stop the rhetoric.... U.S. hostility...fortifies the position of the more radical elements in Nicaragua, fosters a siege mentality that is used to justify repression of dissidents and diversion of scarce resources into a military buildup, and makes opposition seem like disunity in the face of an external threat.
>
> I believe the Reagan Administration should immediately and unconditionally pledge not to undermine or destabilize the Nicaraguan Government; declare unequivocally that we are not engaging and will not engage in military or covert action against Nicaragua, or support anyone who does; move as forcefully as our laws allow against the exile training camps in our country, and demonstrate by word and deed that we are not aiding exiles in Honduras or elsewhere; propose to work with Nicaraguan and other Central American countries to dampen tensions and

> control the arms race in the region; and state our willingness to help reconstruct Nicaragua's economy. These declarations would cost us nothing and would only reaffirm our own stated principles of international behavior....
>
> Above all, we should start talking with each other about how to salvage our relationship, and we should not stop until we succeed.

A possible framework for such talks is provided by recent declarations of President López Portillo and Commander Ortega concerning ways in which U.S. concerns might be satisfied. Beyond such talks, the best thing we could do for our relations with Nicaragua is to work for a political solution to the war in El Salvador. This would remove the major issue in U.S.-Nicaraguan relations.

Honduras. Honduras has recently returned to civilian rule via democratic elections. The attitude of the military toward democracy appears to be ambiguous, the possibility that the military will not stay in the barracks appears real, and therefore the scope within which democratic civilian authorities can maneuver appears narrow. By expanding military aid and encouraging--if not forcing--Honduras to be drawn into our conflicts with Nicaragua and the Salvadoran left, U.S. policy contributes to the danger that the military will dominate or take over the government. Severe problems of poverty must be addressed if the people's faith in democracy is to be redeemed, but the government's capability to address these problems is hampered not only by lack of resources but also by endemic corruption which causes diversion of development aid from its intended recipients. While there is no significant insurgency yet, there are signs that one may be developing.

The best outcome we can hope for is the gradual strengthening and institutionalization of democracy, and of the ability of democratic institutions to address socioeconomic problems and reduce the appeal of the insurgents. The worst outcome is one that might happen if the best doesn't: growing unrest and instability leading to another and possibly more repressive military takeover, and possibly civil war further down the road. (In between, of course, muddling through, possibly with continued alternation between military and civilian regimes, is a possibility, but an increasingly unlikely one, it seems to me, if internal factions continue to develop links to external actors as Central America becomes further engulfed in the cold war.)

To encourage the best outcome and avoid the worst, the United States should: (1) place its highest priority on nurturing democracy in Honduras; (2) make it clear to the military that we will not countenance a coup for any reason; (3) be generous with balance-of-payments support and development assistance; (4) resist the temptation to load the military up with aid to better enable it to help fight the war in El Salvador; and (5) resist the temptation to use Honduras as a base for the destabilization of Nicaragua. Arming Honduras to help us fight in El Salvador and Nicaragua can only exacerbate tensions, strengthen the military, weaken the civilians, and increase the chances of a coup.

El Salvador. El Salvador, it goes without saying, is engaged in a civil war which has deep domestic roots but is fueled on both sides by outside actors. Notwithstanding the fact that the term "revolutionary government" has recently crept into the Reagan administration's lexicon in an attempt to create the impression that the current junta is the same as the October 1979 junta, it seems clear that the revolutionary government has long since ceased to exist and that the government is increasingly controlled by the right-wing military. President Duarte, an admirable but pathetic figure who has been effectively abandoned by the United States, seems increasingly a figurehead. The civil war is at best a stalemate; even Secretary of State Haig, in an unguarded moment, admitted that. At worst, the government is losing. Predictions of how long the government can hold out without foreign troops range from months to a year.

The left, fearing massive U.S. intervention, began sending out feelers about negotiations after the failure of the January 1981 offensive, and is now publicly declaring in every available forum its desire to negotiate an end to the war. All overtures have been steadfastly rejected by the United States and its client, the Salvadoran military. The United States has termed negotiation proposals a ploy by the left to win at the conference table what it has not been able to win on the battlefield. The United States and the Salvadoran government have offered to let the democratic left participate in the March 28 elections if it will surrender first--clearly a counterploy to win at the ballot box what it has not been able to win on the battlefield. There is some faint hope that, after the elections, everyone will be willing to take a new look at the possibility of negotiations. But meanwhile, massive escalation is the only visible U.S. policy.

The administration claims that we have only two options in El Salvador, escalation or surrender, and has chosen the former. Present administration policies, if continued, will lead us to a situation where those will in fact be the only alternatives. Unfortunately, either option leads to a worst-case outcome: continued destruction and rule by violent, antidemocratic forces. At the moment, however, there is a third option: a negotiated settlement.

The left has in fact won something on the battlefield: it has denied the government the ability to control the country and to govern. Therefore, a negotiated settlement will necessarily include a role for the left in the government. Thus the fundamental U.S. objective, which is to deny such a role to the left, is incompatible with any conceivable settlement of the conflict short of a military victory.

The best outcome we can realistically expect is a negotiated cease-fire, a negotiated settlement of the conflict that would provide for elections that all parties would respect, and the creation of a government that could make a beginning at national reconciliation and economic reconstruction. I assume that such a government would be left of center, and would be in continual danger from both the right and the left as it tried to build up its authority. The United States should work for this outcome and should determine to give whatever government emerges the support it will need to survive. Acceptance of the López Portillo initiative would be a good first step toward implementing a negotiations policy. I am

inclined to think that the United States should let other countries and international organizations take the lead in bringing the parties together and working out a solution, but clear U.S. support for the process is crucial if it is to get off the ground.

Guatemala. Guatemala is ruled by right-wing thugs who are challenged by an armed left. The center has been effectively killed off. The regime is the hemisphere's--and one of the world's--champion human-rights violators, so evil that even the Reagan administration blushes when proposing military aid. At this writing, the meaning and implications of the March 23 coup are completely unclear.

There are three equally bad "worst outcomes": continued civil war, a victory by the left, or a victory by the right. There is no best outcome that we can realistically hope for in the foreseeable future. Guatemala is the most hopeless situation in the hemisphere, a tragic example of what mindless anticommunism--in this case our overthrow of the Arbenz government in 1954--can produce.

The only policy that the United States could follow that has even the faintest hope of ameliorating the situation is one designed to encourage less repressive elements in the military, if any exist, to take over and seek a settlement with the left, if such is still possible. And the only ways to encourage that are the following: (1) to stop encouraging the current regime to think that there is any conceivable circumstance in which the United States would render it any aid whatsoever; and (2) to show--by settling the conflict in El Salvador, reaching an accommodation with Nicaragua, and committing ourselves unequivocally to democracy in Honduras--that the era of right-wing military dictatorship and U.S. support thereof is at an end in Central America. Faced with such a reality, it is barely conceivable that someone will emerge in Guatemala who wants to bring the country back into the company of civilized nations. The worst possible course we could follow would be to help the government butcher its own people.

CENTRAL AMERICAN OUTCOMES

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In my view, the worst outcomes of the Central American crisis from the standpoint of U.S. national-security interests would involve a regionalization (with a subsequent likely continentalization or even globalization) of the conflict and/or Soviet acquisition of additional (to Cuba) military facilities in the region. I regard both of these outcomes as being well within the realm of possibility, given present administration policy and Soviet strategic aims in the region.

The best realistic outcome of the current crisis from the standpoint of genuine U.S. national-security interests would be the establishment of genuinely nonaligned governments in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. I believe the age of U.S. hegemony, of U.S.-aligned governments, in Central America is passing. To attempt to sustain such governments would eventually entail the "worst outcomes" mentioned above. On the other hand, genuinely nonaligned governments in the region would pose no threat to U.S. security and offer tangible benefits for U.S. relations with the region, with Latin America as a whole, the third world, and Western Europe, and thus would strengthen currents opposing Soviet expansionism both in the region and worldwide. These outcomes are not "best/worst" cases but destinations which can be charted from the unfolding current situation in Central America.

U.S. Interests

In his peace proposal, Mexican President José López Portillo offered to "provide guarantees" that "the basic interests and the national security of the United States" would not be jeopardized in "a negotiated solution of the Salvadoran crisis." But just what are U.S. national-security interests in Central America and how can they best be served? This question is at the heart of the current Central American debate inside and outside the administration.

Our current economic interests in the region are relatively few. U.S. investment in the region is small, as is its trade. No strategic raw materials are presently obtained from Central America. It is not a major petroleum producer, although, according to recent geological surveys and preliminary explorations, both Guatemala and Honduras could become middle-level oil exporters by the end of the decade. It is unlikely that the region will experience dynamic economic growth in the near future--quite the contrary--though by the end of the century this could be the case.

Central America is more significant for what it lies near or forms part of than for its own intrinsic importance. It borders Mexico and is adjacent to the Panama Canal and Venezuela--the first and the latter major oil exporters. Geopolitically Central America is part of the Caribbean basin--a single region which embraces the littoral states as well as the islands. The Caribbean basin is a vast zone which connects both the Atlantic and the Pacific and the north-south trade routes of the hemisphere. It is the great crossroads of trade with the Middle East, Europe, Africa, the Indian Ocean, and Latin America. The Caribbean is a key transit and transshipment zone for imported oil coming from the Middle East, Africa, Venezuela, and Mexico. Its high-density oil routes presently carry half of U.S. oil imports. It contains several singularly important refineries and two world-level oil exporters. The U.S. Department of Commerce has forecasted that imported raw materials will rise from 20 percent of total U.S. raw-material consumption to nearly 50 percent by the year 2000. The bulk of these raw materials enter the country via the Caribbean.

The Caribbean basin plays a major role in U.S. security. Not only is it the entry route to the American southern flank, it is the prospective passage for U.S. ship convoys essential for the relief of Western Europe in NATO contingency planning. In World War II, over 50 percent of U.S. supplies to Europe departed from U.S. ports in the Gulf of Mexico. In the early phase of the war, German U-boats destroyed considerable allied tonnage in the Florida straits. The prospective entrenchment of a Soviet naval interdiction force with the capability of disrupting troop convoys departing from Gulf ports or transiting the Panama Canal would jeopardize the Western alliance and, consequently, vital U.S. security interests.

The Panama Canal itself has increased, not decreased, in strategic (and commercial) relevance in recent years. While supertankers (rapidly becoming economically obsolete) and large aircraft carriers cannot pass through the Canal, its traffic has been growing in recent years as high fuel costs have rendered South American routes prohibitive. Only 13 of the 475 U.S. naval vessels cannot transit the Canal. By the 1990s, a new Panama Canal will probably be built, underscoring the region's salience.

Central America and the Caribbean have become important suppliers of the U.S. labor market. Along with Mexico they constitute the largest and fastest-growing sources of immigration to the United States. The entrance of large numbers of men and women from the region is altering the composition of the United States' national minority population and is bound to affect American political life in years to come.

Soviet efforts to turn the local insurgencies of Central America to their own advantage do not signify an independent threat to U.S. security. But they are more serious precisely because they are components of and subordinate to the USSR's global strategy. Soviet strategists publicly recognize that "in military strategic terms [the Caribbean basin] is a sort of hinterland on whose stability freedom of U.S. action in other parts of the globe depends." The main object of the Soviet strategic offensive launched in the mid-1970s is Western Europe and, secondarily, Japan. Since 1975, the Soviets have engineered a flanking movement designed to bring pressure on the raw-material "lifelines" connecting Europe

and Japan to the oil and mineral-rich Indian Ocean basin. This has been accompanied by a sustained military buildup and a political, diplomatic, and ideological campaign aimed at encouraging neutralism in Western Europe and Japan so as to cripple the Western alliance.

While Western Europe is the main target, the third-world countries of Africa, south and southeast Asia are the main arena of the Soviet strategic thrust. Because third-world countries have become increasingly independent, with increasing will to resist absorption into any empire, whatever its ideological logo, the Russians keep running into problems: in Afghanistan, Kampuchea, Ethiopia, etc. However, Moscow, presenting itself as "the natural ally of national liberation," has had signal success in diverting some of the most fiercely nationalistic of third-world countries, such as Vietnam and Cuba, into the Soviet orbit. And now the Cubans play a major role in the Soviet effort to hitch the Central American revolution to the Red Star. The great danger for the United States in this is that it will fundamentally alter the military balance of the region, decisively augmenting the pressure on the western "lifelines" of the Panama Canal and the sea lanes of the Caribbean. On the other hand, a U.S. military response which would regionalize the conflict in the area would also serve Soviet purposes--by constricting the "freedom of U.S. action" to respond to Soviet actions in areas of even more fundamental strategic concern: the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean basin, Europe, and southeast Asia.

It is clear that the Caribbean basin is of major strategic, commercial, and human significance for the United States. What then are U.S. interests in the region?

It is obvious that the United States has an interest in the stability and the economic development of the Caribbean basin. A stable thriving Caribbean basin will promote trade, opening new markets for U.S. technology, capital, and merchandise, and creating jobs in the area which could stem the tide of immigration into our country. Right now one of every seven children born in the Caribbean comes to live in the United States. President Reagan has taken a step in the right direction with his Caribbean Basin Initiative.

The most fundamental and pressing national interest in the region is its political independence. For trade and investment to prosper, for our commerce to be safeguarded, the Caribbean need not be aligned with the United States, still less a colony or neo-colony of it. That kind of relationship is neither desired by the people of the region nor is it desirable from the standpoints of economic and political development, nor from a strategic standpoint. The national independence of the countries of the region is the greatest bulwark against their falling into the orbit of the other superpower. Events in other parts of the third world are demonstrating that the most potent force in resisting Soviet expansionism is that of countries defending their independence.

Outcomes

Central America, and with it U.S. policy, has reached a crossroads. The prospect of a regional military conflict has sharpened in recent months.

A spiral of misperceptions, mutual recriminations, suspicions, and threats have created a situation reminiscent of the Balkan tinderbox before World War I. Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Guatemala are alarmed at the Nicaraguan military buildup and its Cuban-Soviet backing. The Nicaraguan government fears U.S.-backed intervention from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Argentina, and Florida. Mexico is worried about an eventual conflict with Guatemala in which the United States would be found on the side of the latter. The Soviet buildup of Cuba is a major source of concern for the United States and many countries in the region, including Venezuela. On the other hand, efforts to resolve these conflicts peaceably have also become more serious, most notably with the vigorous Mexican initiative, supported by Costa Rica, Panama, and Nicaragua, and received sympathetically by the United States. The meetings of Central American countries and Panama in Tegucigalpa and of the former with the Nassau group offer the prospect of regional economic cooperation over and above ideological and political differences.

Thus, if a peaceful settlement can be attained, prospects for renewed economic growth and cooperation would be possible. Furthermore, this situation would enable the United States to develop harmonious relations and promote regional development. However, without a peaceful settlement, the outlook for the 1990s is one of inter-regional conflict, regional war, and the Sovietization of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, as well as an unstable Costa Rica.

As at the present moment, these two roads have intersected before. In the fall and winter of 1980, a briefly propitious moment for negotiations was shattered by the assassination of six FDR leaders and the mounting of the January offensive. In the early spring of 1981, the energetic diplomatic activities of Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela (culminating in the Mexican-Venezuelan communique of April), and the European Social Democrats, the administration's placing of El Salvador on "the back burner," and the FDR-FMLN offer to negotiate seemed to create another opportunity and another crossroads. Once again, the issue reverted to the test of arms. After the FMLN's summer regional offensive, negotiations were again broached in the poorly-managed Franco-Mexican communique. This was rejected by the Salvadoran government and its international supporters, and another round of military struggle ensued.

The "test of arms" has not proved favorable to the Salvadoran government. It is clear that in the year since the Mexican-Venezuelan and Wischnevsky initiatives, the military balance has shifted in the favor of the FMLN. Salvadoran military officials who a year ago were boasting of having the guerrillas on the run are now urgently pleading for massive new injections of military aid and are seeking additional troops from as far away as Argentina. In the light of this brief survey of their historical trajectory, let us look at where our two roads are likely to lead.

The Military Road

None of the available "vehicles" for travelling down this road inspires confidence.

An increase in U.S. military aid. A significant increase in direct U.S. military aid to El Salvador--e.g., 50 helicopters (General Garcia has told Congressman Coyne that at least 180 would be necessary); 200 trainers for instructing noncommissioned officers; large-scale training in the United States (already under way); increased arms, transport planes, etc.--would not overcome the junta's basic military and political weakness. Indeed, Americanizing the war would debilitate the junta politically and license the incorrigible elements in the Salvadoran military and security forces. This would certainly raise public and congressional opposition to the breaking point and stimulate more military opposition to U.S. policies in Western Europe and in Latin America. Moreover, such actions would be countered by a corresponding increment in outside aid for the guerrillas, from both Soviet and non-Soviet bloc forces.

The northern-triangle option. An operation by the resurrected rump of CONDECA would be militarily inadequate without a major U.S. troop commitment. The Salvadoran army is already tied down internally, and most of the Guatemalan army is similarly occupied in its western highlands. The Honduran army is no match for the Nicaraguans, who are probably capable of overpowering the rest of the Central American military combined. Recourse to U.S. troops would remove the presumed advantage of utilizing Latin Americans in the first place. Any U.S. troops involvement in Central America will raise the spectre of Vietnam and jeopardize the administration's precious and precarious consensus for a revived U.S. defense posture.

The Argentine card. The introduction of Argentine troops on a scale large enough to shift the balance in El Salvador would entail intolerable political costs for the already fragile regime of General Galtieri. It would produce splits in the Argentine military, with the Viola-Videla group in sharp and powerful opposition. It would bolster the "multiparty" opposition and spark opposition in the trade unions, already increasingly critical of governmental policy. It is conceivable that Argentine advisers in small numbers could be sent, but this, even in conjunction with "CONDECA" forces and some increased U.S. aid, would not stem the tide.

Actions against Nicaragua. A blockade of Nicaragua would generate some of the same political problems as the preceding option. It would be equally futile militarily without a massive deployment of U.S. naval resources. Nearly 200 ships were involved in the 1962 blockade of Cuba. Stretched thin in the Norwegian and Mediterranean seas and in the Pacific and Indian Oceans by the Soviet naval buildup, the United States simply cannot sustain a major ship transfer to the Caribbean.

Covert military actions designed to topple the Nicaraguan government would probably have the opposite effect--uniting the populace in support of the present government. It would enflame the situation to the point where the FSLN could make good on their threat to "make war all over Central America," thus bringing about a regional war with grave consequences for the U.S. international position.

Military actions against Cuba. Some limited military actions against Cuba may be tempting from a narrow military standpoint, but they would release the Soviets to undertake any of the multiple options open to them--among them a blockade of West Berlin, and intervention in Baluchistan,

Pakistan, or Poland. Is the United States prepared for a face-off with the Soviet Union right now? In addition, a U.S.-backed military adventure against Cuba would restore the faded image of the Cuban "David" resisting the American "Goliath."

Above all, such actions would facilitate rather than frustrate Soviet purposes. In this context, U.S. military actions in Central America would give credibility to Soviet propaganda that the United States, and not the USSR, is the menacing imperialist power and the main threat to peace, thus serving to heighten pacifist and neutralist tendencies in Japan and Europe and further dividing the alliance. Such a course would likewise divert world opinion from Poland and Afghanistan and tie down the United States politically and militarily in the Caribbean basin, thus reducing its flexibility and freeing the Soviet hand in areas of primary Soviet strategic concern: the Indian Ocean and southeast Asia. Finally, this course would seriously aggravate relations between the United States and the third world at a time when the United States' reputation in this region is of pressing strategic concern. The third world has become an independent and crucial variable in the global strategic question and, for much of this region, U.S. relations with Central America are an index and a symbol. Thus, such a course would not only impair efforts to reach a strategic consensus, but would in fact make more profitable the establishment of Soviet military facilities in the region.

The Peaceful Road

Two vehicles have been offered for a peaceful settlement of the Salvadoran crisis: by the junta elections; by Mexico and other negotiations.

Elections as peaceful settlement. It is now admitted even by their supporters that the March 28 elections will not bring about a peaceful resolution to the Salvadoran crisis. Elsewhere I have presented some of the reasons for thinking that this "political solution" would be ineffective.[1] One can now go much further, for it is becoming increasingly clear that the elections, rather than offering a solution to the conflict, are in fact an obstacle to that solution. The most likely outcome of the elections is that the intransigent, die-hard position will be strengthened. This will make it more difficult for the United States to implement the only policy which can end the conflict in a manner consistent with U.S. national-security interests--i.e., via a negotiated settlement between the two parties.

A negotiated settlement. The necessity for and the prospects of a negotiated settlement in Central America are clearer than at any time in the recent past. This is true for a number of reasons.

(1) There has been a revealing "test of arms." The argument (rather dubious for other reasons) that the guerrillas should not be allowed "to win at the conference table what they could not win on the battlefield" has been overtaken by events on the field of battle. The army's search-and-destroy campaigns have proved ineffective; the guerrillas have established secure rear areas, lines of communication, and countrywide control and coordination; and the military initiative is swinging to the insurgents. Sharply increased U.S. assistance will be necessary to restore the stalemate

which prevailed in the summer of 1981. Even this is dubious given the vertical and horizontal fissures now beginning to surface in the Salvadoran military.

(2) The FDR-FMLN has modified its negotiating stance. Not only has it accepted unconditional negotiations and the principle of elections, it has agreed to a minority position in a transitional government and, most significant, to accept the institutional integrity of the Salvadoran army.

This presents a realistic framework for negotiations, one which would safeguard significant U.S. security interests. In this framework, the security forces would be returned to the real (not just titular) jurisdiction of the interior department and replaced by the FMLN forces as a territorial militia. The officer corps of the Salvadoran army would be preserved, and only individual officers guilty of major abuses, convicted after proper investigation and due process, would be retired with compensation. The same would hold for FMLN officials in the territorial militia. Officers of the military reform movement led by Colonel Majano would be transferred from administrative and diplomatic posts and returned to their commands.

This dual military structure could provide the framework for a pluralistic and nonaligned political outcome in El Salvador. It seems utopian to me, and to most Salvadorans, that the two current military forces could be "integrated" after a war of unprecedented viciousness and bitterness. Moreover, the proposed arrangement would underwrite the major political trends in a post-settlement El Salvador.

Pluralism happens not because a powerful individual (Duarte, Ungo, etc.) desires it, but because a certain balance of power underwrites it. Such a balance of power did not exist in Nicaragua when the FSLN came to power. Due to the failure of previous mediation efforts, the Sandinistas enjoyed a virtual monopoly of military and political resources on gaining power. This has been a major factor in the subsequent internal evolution of Nicaragua in the direction of a monolithic political apparatus and alignment with the Soviet bloc.

Should negotiations occur in El Salvador, a multiplicity of political actors, each with military and political resources, will contend for power. These will include the Christian Democrats, the dissident Christian Democrats, the MNR, the vying factions of the FMLN (who have different internal and external agendas), the military reformers, and more conservative military and political groupings. Negotiation will not end the struggle in El Salvador--it will shift it to a different terrain, the political and economic terrain. On this terrain the Cuban-Soviet bloc is at its weakest.

(3) The Mexican proposal adds a decisive element to the "critical mass" tending toward negotiations in El Salvador. The Mexican proposal is significant for several reasons.

President López Portillo stated explicitly in Managua that "the main U.S. concerns regarding the possible consequences of a negotiated resolution

of the Salvadoran crisis should be resolved. Mexico and other countries that are friends and even allies of the United States could be in a position to provide guarantees in this regard." Given Mexico's influence in Managua and among the FMLN, this is an assurance of fundamental significance. Given the regional nature of the crisis, this Mexican guarantee strongly suggests which way Mexico will go should future events work to the United States' jeopardy in El Salvador.

Anyone familiar with Mexican diplomacy can attest that the Mexican commitment to its present proposal is unprecedented in its sustained commitment of resources. Mexico is actively pursuing a peaceful settlement in the region.

The Mexican proposal is an overall one, explicitly embracing not only Nicaragua but, also, even the Cuban presence in Angola. An arrangement providing for a peaceful settlement in Namibia, a return of the Cuban occupying army from Angola, a military deescalation in Nicaragua, and a pluralistic and nonaligned El Salvador, plus the added bonus of warm relations between Mexico and the United States, would be a bonanza for the Reagan administration.

As I argue elsewhere,[2] a settlement in El Salvador is not only the key to cooling the conflict with Nicaragua and warming our relations with Mexico but to the formation of a nonaligned anti-interventionist front in the region. The formation of such a front is the best bulwark against Soviet expansionism in the region. This bulwark cannot be unilateral U.S. action, which will only boomerang, creating anti-Yankeeism and opening the way to increased Soviet penetration. On the other hand, since I am not one of those who believe that the Soviets have no geopolitical ambitions in the region, I do consider that such a bulwark is necessary. But it can be neither pro-U.S. nor counterrevolutionary if it is to succeed.

These revolutions are rooted in the impoverished, underdeveloped, and dependent character of the region's economies. A bitter history of U.S. military intervention and political interference has made anti-Yankeeism a rallying point for revolutionary movements. These revolutions are the result of deep-going changes in the socioeconomic fabric of Central America in the last three decades. The peoples and countries of the region wish to see social change where it is necessary and wish to be independent. These aspirations present no danger to the United States' security interests, if those interests are properly defined. U.S. interests are perfectly compatible with an independent Latin America. This is not the case with the Soviet Union--as proven by the fate of Poland, Afghanistan, and Cuba. U.S. partnership in finding a peaceful settlement in Central America will permit the realization of the "collective security," based on collective and independent will, which would constitute the greatest impediment to Soviet colonial expansionism in Latin America.

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POLICY OPTIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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Defining best and worst outcomes is not so easy as it might first appear. It is not enough to begin with a notion of the national interest and measure alternative results against it, for the cost of achieving the "best" outcome may prove to be so vast that it is not justified by the interests served. Similarly, one must take into account the likelihood of achieving a particular outcome and the price of failure. The best can indeed become the enemy of the good if the failed pursuit of the best leaves us not with second best but with worst.

If analysis is to take all of this into account, it must move forward from the present, rather than trying to trace backward from some imagined result. Nevertheless, in order to get a sense of what interests are at stake in Central America, it is useful to compare the consequences of two "extreme" outcomes: military victory by Marxist-Leninist forces throughout the northern tier of Central America, or victory by the rightist military forces.

Let us suppose that the Nicaraguan revolution is radicalized, that the FDR-FMLN win and create a Marxist-Leninist regime in El Salvador, and that Guatemala and Honduras follow close behind. The greatest cost would be to U.S. political interests, for these states would constitute an anti-U.S. minority in the OAS, and would add to the chorus of anti-U.S. rhetoric in the United Nations and the Nonaligned Movement. Even if the United States could manage to maintain reasonably normal relations with these states, they would cease to be U.S. allies in the international arena. Others in the world might view the existence of such states within the U.S. sphere of influence as a sign of U.S. weakness. Finally, these societies would be organized around values profoundly different from those of the United States.

The economic interests of the United States might sustain some damage if Marxist states in Central America were to nationalize all U.S. property or cut off trade with the United States. These outcomes are less likely, however, since Central America needs the United States economically more than we need the region. Even a severing of all economic links would mean only small losses (comparatively speaking) to U.S. investors, and would deprive the United States of no strategic goods.

With regard to security interests, none of the countries of Central America could, by themselves, pose any strategic threat to the United States. Could these states threaten Costa Rica, Panama, and Mexico? Perhaps, but this is by no means a certainty, and the United States would by no means be powerless to counter such threats. The only real security

threat of any consequence is the possibility that one or more of these states would give the Soviet Union military bases from which the Soviets could threaten the Panama Canal, the sea lanes, or the United States directly.

How likely is this? Economically, it would be suicidal for any Central American state to throw itself into the Soviet camp in this way without an assurance that the Soviets would be willing to provide massive economic support. Given the drain on Soviet resources from Cuba, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Poland, and half a dozen others, it is by no means clear that the Soviets would be willing to pay the bills for bases in Central America. What would they gain strategically over their current position in Cuba? Finally, there is no reason that the United States would have to stand idly by and allow the creation of such bases. As with Cuba in 1962, the United States could simply refuse to tolerate such a strategic threat. A Soviet decision-maker, weighing the potential costs against the potential gains, would not be anxious to provoke a confrontation with the United States over such small stakes.

In short, a Central America full of new Cubas would certainly damage U.S. interests, but the damage, upon inspection, proves to be less grave than contemporary rhetoric would have it. It is difficult to make a case that "vital" interests are at stake.

Suppose, on the other hand, that the Sandinistas are overthrown in Nicaragua, and that the military prevails in El Salvador and Guatemala. Are U.S. interests better served? Since this outcome would require fairly deep U.S. involvement on the side of the right, and since the right would prevail only at great cost in blood, U.S. political interests would also sustain considerable damage as a result of this outcome. Current policy, let alone any deeper involvement, is already exacting a political cost in relations with such key allies as Mexico and Western Europe. The political damage from a deeper U.S. involvement would be different than the damage from Marxist-Leninist victories, but there is no guarantee that it would be less. Rightist military regimes would also be as anathema to the values of the United States as Marxist-Leninist ones.

At first glance, the prevalence of the right would seen to ensure the protection of U.S. economic interests, but this may be a chimera. It is doubtful that regimes of the right could produce long-term stability, which is a necessary condition for safeguarding U.S. economic interests, whether in the form of trade or investment. Moreover, the cost of installing and sustaining right-wing regimes would be astronomical--perhaps, ultimately, more than all U.S. investment in the region combined.

Friendly "authoritarians" would, of course, safeguard our strategic interests, if they could survive. But if stability on the right is unattainable in Central America, so too is absolute security.

Surprisingly, the two most "extreme" outcomes possible in Central America do not differ markedly in their effects on U.S. interests. We would prefer neither, but could probably live with either. Both entail significant political costs to the United States, both pose some risk to economic interests, and both contain the seeds of security problems,

though these problems could in both cases be met with further U.S. responses. These are both worst-case outcomes.

What is the best possible outcome? A region full of states which are stable, democratic, and willing to carry on normal, reasonably friendly relations with the United States. To determine whether such an outcome can even be approximated, we need to turn to a discussion of the policy options available to the United States in the specific countries of the northern tier.

El Salvador

For the past year, the United States has tried to stabilize the military-civilian government of El Salvador by providing it with military assistance sufficient to either defeat, or at a minimum contain, the guerrilla insurgency in that country. At the same time, the United States has supported the efforts of the Salvadoran government to enhance its domestic and international legitimacy by spotlighting its domestic reforms and promoting elections in March 1982.

Neither element of this policy is working. The military situation of the government has deteriorated over the past year despite U.S. military assistance. The guerrilla forces of the FDR-FMLN have gained strength to the point that many analysts believe the war is stalemated at best. Some believe that the guerrillas are winning. The economic condition of the country is deteriorating rapidly, both as a result of war damage and of capital flight.

The reform program of the Salvadoran government has become bogged down because of rightist opposition within the country, resistance within the government itself, and the difficulty of carrying out reforms in the midst of civil war. On the other hand, the continuing brutality of the armed forces alienates the general population from the government and probably enhances the popular support of the FDR-FMLN.

The failure of the government to gain ground militarily against the guerrillas has made the election scheduled for March largely irrelevant. Since the FDR-FMLN is not participating, the election holds no hope of ending the war, and cannot therefore be the "political solution" it was originally intended to be. In light of the history of electoral fraud in Salvador and the continuing human-rights violations committed by the armed forces, the scheduled elections have failed to gain any significant degree of legitimacy. Both within the United States and among its key allies, many voices have been raised in opposition to the elections even before they are held.

What will be the policy of the United States on March 29? If the right is able to construct a majority coalition in the Constituent Assembly which excludes the Christian Democrats, U.S. policy will have to be completely reassessed. The indiscriminate violence which the right promises is not likely to defeat the guerrillas, but it will surely polarize the polity beyond the point of no return. Under such circumstances, barring a direct U.S. intervention, the FDR-FMLN will almost surely win a military victory. It would be both futile and morally reprehensible for

the United States to continue supporting a government of the right. The only reasonable policy would be disengagement.

Assuming that the PDC wins a majority in the Constituent Assembly, either alone or in coalition, the political, economic, and military situation will be basically unchanged from what it is today. There is no reason to believe that an electoral mandate will give the PDC any greater leverage over the Salvadoran armed forces than they currently enjoy. Under these conditions, the United States has a number of options:

(1) The United States can continue the basic strategy underlying the current policy--i.e., providing military and economic aid incrementally in the hope of reversing the military trend of the past year and strengthening the current government. The main objection to this is that it has not worked thus far. Moreover, the Salvadoran army is reaching the limit of its ability to absorb military aid without U.S. personnel taking some direct combat role--either as helicopter pilots or as infantry advisors in the field.

An escalation of U.S. military assistance can also be countered with increased assistance to the FDR-FMLN from its external allies. Thus even major increments of U.S. aid may not significantly alter the military balance. The United States could try to supplement a policy of increased military aid with efforts to cut off the guerrillas' external supplies, but the porousness of Salvador's borders--land, sea, and air--makes an effective quarantine difficult to implement.

Consequently, the best that can be expected from this policy is that the guerrillas can be militarily contained, not defeated. That is to say, the most one can hope for is interminable war, continued bloodshed, and further economic deterioration.

(2) Assuming that some alternative to the first option must be found, a second option is to escalate the U.S. military role qualitatively by placing U.S. personnel in combat roles on a limited scale. It is debatable whether this would increase the combat capacity of the Salvadoran army enough to change the military balance. Given the forced conscription, poor training, and low morale of the Salvadoran army, there is surely a limit to how effective U.S. advisors would be. Such a step could also prove to be counter-productive politically; by visibly identifying the Salvadoran forces with the United States, this policy would allow the guerrillas to appeal to the population's nationalism.

The introduction of U.S. personnel into combat would also exacerbate political opposition to the administration's policy within the United States--opposition which is already growing in response to the current policy. Such a policy would clearly fall under the provisions of the War Powers Act and would therefore require congressional approval. It is by no means certain that the Congress would agree to it. Thus the United States could conceivably be forced to reverse this policy, or even to disengage entirely, as a result of congressional action.

Finally, there is a good chance that even this level of U.S. involvement could not produce a military victory for the Salvadoran army. A

stalemate would certainly be more likely, but perpetual stalemate, as already noted, is not a positive outcome.

(3) If neither of the first two options is able to halt the deterioration of the Salvadoran government's military position, a third option is to deploy U.S. ground combat forces in an effort to win the war. This is certainly an option which the administration hopes to avoid, but it is also one that it has refused to rule out. If the Salvadoran army appears to be on the verge of collapse, it is reasonable to assume that this option will become an active one.

With tens of thousands of troops and a massive application of air power, the United States could probably win the war--i.e., exterminate the guerrillas as a serious military threat to the government. Such an effort, however, would have several immediate costs. Conventional forces would have to be diverted from most other theatres of operation worldwide. Since victory would probably not be quick, this diversion would leave weaknesses elsewhere for a considerable period of time.

Such an intervention would cost tens of thousands of Salvadoran lives, demolish the economy of the nation, and remove any hope of creating a stable legitimate government in its wake. To prevent a resurgence of guerrilla activity, U.S. forces might have to occupy El Salvador for a considerable period even after the defeat of the FMLN.

Internationally, the diplomatic costs of intervention would be immense, whatever cloak of legality might be devised to justify the action. It would create severe strain in U.S. relations with a range of crucial allies, including Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, and Western Europe. The repercussions in NATO could be devastating, since public opinion in Europe would surely seize on the intervention to pressure governments on the continent to refuse to cooperate with the United States on a whole range of European security issues. An intervention would be condemned by the Nonaligned Movement (reversing the current trend within the Movement to see the Soviet Union as a danger equal to the United States), in the United Nations, and perhaps in the OAS as well. The Soviet Union would quickly regain much of the diplomatic ground it has lost over the issues of Kampuchea, Afghanistan, and Poland.

The domestic political consequences of intervention would be equally cataclysmic. Extrapolating from the growth of opposition to current policy over the past year, an antiwar movement on the scale of the Vietnam era would be a virtual certainty. Moreover, there is a strong possibility that Congress would force a withdrawal which would, in turn, produce a certain victory for the FDR-FMLN under conditions that would maximize their hostility to the United States.

In short, options (1) and (2) have a low probability of success (i.e., of defeating the guerrillas or containing them sufficiently to allow the development of a stable government), while option (3) entails extremely high costs with no guarantee of success. In addition, these options are not independent of one another. The failure of one tends to impel the United States on to the next since the justification for one applies equally well to the others. As the administration seeks to deflect

opposition by harping on "vital interests," "Soviet imperialism," and the unacceptability of failure, it creates a political environment in which a reversal of policy becomes increasingly difficult. This, of course, is the logic of escalation.

The bottom line, however, is that none of the military options promises to produce a "best case" result. If they fail, the outcome will be a guerrilla victory and a post-revolutionary government whose animosity towards the United States will be directly proportional to the level of U.S. involvement. If one or another of the military options succeeds (against the odds), the most likely outcome is either perpetual war or a brutal right-wing dictatorship that will still be vulnerable to insurrection since the socioeconomic conditions which produced the current insurrection will remain. At best, the military options will continue to artificially extend the life of an anachronistic social, economic, and political order that could not survive on its own.

(4) There is, of course, an alternative option: negotiations along the lines suggested by Mexico and the Socialist International. Such negotiations should be aimed at creating a new government within the framework of democratic procedures.

If negotiations are to have any chance of success, a number of conditions must be met. The United States will have to force the Salvadoran armed forces to accept a negotiation process and to abide by its results on pain of a cut-off of aid. Both the government and the opposition will have to be assured that they will not suffer militarily as a result of entering into negotiations. Some non-partisan authority, either international or domestic, will have to oversee the transition from the current government to a government selected by elections in which all parties are free to participate. The Salvadoran army will have to be restructured in such a way as to eliminate officers of the far right and to incorporate the guerrilla forces. This is no mean agenda, but neither is it impossible to conceive of solutions to all of these problems.

Negotiations could fail, of course, but in that case, the situation would be no worse than it is now. If negotiations produce a workable solution, the result would probably be either a coalition government of the PDC and FDR, or an FDR majority. Even an FDR government, however, would owe its legitimacy to a set of democratic procedures rather than to military victory over the army. Center-left civilians of the FDR would have a more prominent role under this scenario than if the FMLN were to win a military victory. And an FDR government would probably be disposed to maintain good relations with the United States.

In effect, there are only three possible outcomes in El Salvador: a right-wing military dictatorship which is perpetually unstable; an FDR-FMLN government installed by force of arms and probably hostile to the United States; a left or center-left government produced by negotiations and elections. The last is the best possible outcome and can only be achieved by negotiations.

Nicaragua

The current policy of the United States toward Nicaragua is one of hostility. Its components thus far include an escalating rhetorical war of denunciations and military threats, efforts to cut off Nicaragua's sources of external financing, and a covert-action program promoting armed incursions across the Honduran border and internal sabotage.

It is not entirely clear what the objective of this policy is. It may be aimed at destabilizing the Nicaraguan government enough so that it can be overthrown by internal opponents, or it may be merely setting the stage for direct intervention by the United States either alone or in concert with other governments in the hemisphere. On the other hand, the policy of hostility may simply have the more modest aim of intimidating Nicaragua into changing policies which the United States finds objectionable.

Two years after the ouster of Somoza, Nicaragua's political situation is still fluid. The central dynamic is the conflict between the FSLN-dominated government and the private-sector opposition over the right to define the nature of post-revolutionary Nicaraguan society. The FSLN retains a near monopoly of political power, while the private sector still controls the bulk of the economy. Each is struggling to expand the domain of its power at the expense of the other. The Sandinistas have tried to use their control of the state to bend the private sector into cooperation with the government's economic plans; the private sector has tried to use its economic muscle to extract political concessions from the FSLN. The conflict between the two waxes and wanes as one side or the other periodically seeks a test of will, thereby precipitating a crisis. Thus far, every crisis has subsided with limited concessions by both sides, for neither has been willing to leap into the abyss by pushing confrontation to a final showdown. The FSLN avoids it because they have the power to expropriate the economy but not the expertise to run it; the private sector avoids a showdown because they lack the resources to win. Thus Nicaragua's revolution muddles along, politically stalemated.

If the Reagan administration's policy is designed to overthrow the FSLN without massive intervention but simply through a combination of destabilization and exile invasion, it will not work. The internal opposition to the FSLN is politically sophisticated, but it does not have a political apparatus through which to mobilize its supporters. In this regard, it is very different from the Chilean opposition to Allende.

Efforts thus far to form paramilitary groups within the country for the purpose of sabotage and assassination have been unsuccessful. The forces of the ministry of interior appear to be highly efficient at thwarting such plots in the embryonic stage. Finally, a significant portion of the internal opposition to the FSLN is nationalistic enough to refuse any cooperation or identification with either Somocistas or U.S. efforts at destabilization.

Given the paucity of internal support for counterrevolution, the fact that the army is a revolutionary army organized around a corps of guerrilla combat veterans, and the small size of the Somocista forces in Honduras, there is virtually no chance that any combination of internal revolt and exile invasion could topple the Sandinista government.

It may be, however, that the strategy of overthrowing the FSLN is more long term. In an "Atlantic coast" strategy, the United States would seek to foment internal opposition among the Miskito community in northern Zelaya (using an essentially ethnic appeal), and target exile attacks on that remote area. If an exile invasion could gain a beachhead there, it could declare independence, received recognition and immediate aid from the United States, and then serve as a rear base for a protracted guerrilla war against the Sandinista government on the Pacific coast. This is the scenario which the FSLN most fears, both because conditions on the Atlantic coast are ideal for it and because certain elements of such a strategy seem to be occurring already. The extreme measures taken by the FSLN on the Atlantic coast--the forced relocation of Miskito communities inland and the militarization of the border area--reflect their deep concerns about their vulnerability in the region. Nevertheless, whatever one's view of the human-rights implications of the FSLN's recent actions, they have reduced considerably the feasibility of pursuing an Atlantic-coast strategy of destabilization.

If the Reagan administration's policy is to destabilize Nicaragua short of U.S. intervention, it is pursuing a high-risk strategy, for the price of failure will be the radicalization of the revolution and its alignment ever more closely with the Soviet Union and Cuba. Since the probability of failure is substantially higher than the probability of success, this policy seems most likely to produce a worst-case outcome for the United States.

In light of this, one is led to suspect that the efforts at destabilization are merely a prelude to direct intervention, perhaps under the cover of the Rio Treaty, invoked by Honduras as a result of border skirmishes. But such an intervention would be infinitely more difficult militarily than an intervention in El Salvador. The United States would have to confront not 6,000 guerrillas, but an army of 20,000 backed by a population that would be virtually unanimous in its opposition to the U.S. role. Occupation of the country could not be achieved quickly enough to prevent Nicaragua from requesting military support from abroad--perhaps from Cuba--and that would pose the danger of the conflict escalating into a superpower confrontation. Occupation and pacification of Nicaragua would be long and bloody, and it is difficult to imagine what sort of government the United States could install that would have any legitimacy whatsoever. Internationally, an invasion, whatever legalism it might be cloaked in, would be perceived worldwide as naked aggression. The diplomatic costs would be incalculable.

Perhaps all that the Reagan administration intends is intimidation. If so, the result thus far has been counterproductive. Nicaragua has not reduced its support for the FDR-FMLN (if the administration is to be believed), and it has continued its arms buildup, at least in part out of fear of attack. The logic and effectiveness of coercive strategies aimed at altering the behavior of revolutionary regimes has been much discussed elsewhere; there is no need to repeat it here. Suffice it to say that two decades of U.S.-Cuban relations ought to give pause to anyone who thinks that the likelihood of success with such a policy is high.

Apart from an invasion by the United States, which seems unlikely because of its prohibitive costs, there are only two possible outcomes in Nicaragua: a Marxist-Leninist regime on the Cuban model, aligned with the Soviet Union and hostile to the United States; or a left-wing version of Mexico in which a mixed economy endures, a limited form of pluralism exists, and normal relations with the United States are at least possible.

For the second of these alternatives to prevail, a number of internal conditions must exist in Nicaragua. Those elements within the FSLN and within the opposition who still believe in the possibility and desirability of accommodation must retain the upper hand in their respective groups. The Nicaraguan economy must at least limp along without going into collapse. And the FSLN must not feel so threatened by external attack that they throw themselves into the Soviet camp in search of military protection.

Whatever the ultimate objective of the Reagan administration's policy of hostility, its practical effect is to negate all of these conditions, thereby raising the probability of a radicalization of the revolution. The only way the United States can exert its influence on the side of the "Mexican model" is to enter into discussions with the Nicaraguans in order to defuse the growing tensions between the two nations.

Moreover, since events in Nicaragua and El Salvador are obviously interrelated in a variety of ways, a search for accord would only be consistent with a policy of negotiation in El Salvador, so that U.S. policy toward these two countries must be viewed as a package.

Guatemala

In the midst of a growing war and a collapsing economy, the Guatemalan armed forces remain intransigent in their commitment to exterminate all opposition elements. Over the past year, the United States has been unable to elicit even the slightest moderation of the government's systematic campaign of violence--not even cosmetic changes that could be used to justify a resumption of U.S. military assistance. Guatemala is moving down the same road traversed by El Salvador, and the United States appears powerless to alter its course.

There are not many options available to the United States under these conditions. We could simply continue the current policy of holding the Guatemalan government at arms length and let the impending war run its course. Ultimately, either the government will prevail by killing tens of thousands more people (as it did in the early 1970s), or the guerrillas will prevail as a result of their success at mobilizing the heretofore-quiescent Indian population. If the government prevails, a renewal of insurgency will simply be a matter of time, as it has been twice before. If the guerrillas prevail, they will surely establish a government of the left, but they might nevertheless be willing to maintain normal relations with the United States if we refuse to come to the aid of the Guatemalan army.

A second option is to restore military aid to Guatemala, despite the government's viciousness, in order to avert a guerrilla victory. Such a policy might be rationalized as a way of regaining leverage over the

Guatemalan army, but that would be no more than a rationalization. This option simply recreates all of the problems associated with current U.S. policy in El Salvador.

A third option is to try to prevent the war in Guatemala from escalating by finding a political solution before the conflict reaches the dimensions of the war in El Salvador. The difficulty with this is that, unlike El Salvador, the Guatemalan army is neither beholden nor responsive to the United States. We must recognize that the practical effect of the actions of the Guatemalan government at this point are endangering the interests of the United States, and we should consider both multilateral and unilateral sanctions against it unless it agrees to entertain the possibility of a political solution to the war.

Once again, we find that policies toward individual countries are interdependent. A military victory for either the FMLN or the government in El Salvador will harden the resolve of the Guatemalan army, while a successful negotiated settlement in Salvador might begin to open the way for such a solution in Guatemala.

Honduras

Honduras is the only country in the northern tier of Central America where U.S. policy has enjoyed any recent success. Both the Carter and Reagan administrations supported a return to civilian rule there through the mechanism of elections in 1980 and 1981. This transition to democracy, widely regarded as the best and perhaps only way to avoid the growth of insurgency, was successfully begun last year.

Honduras' democracy is by no means consolidated, however. The armed forces still command a major share of political power, and there are some officers among them who would prefer a return to military rule, even if that means increasing repressive violence against opponents. If these hard-line officers should come to dominate the army, Honduras' democracy will be short-lived and the country will probably suffer the same polarization and spiralling violence as its neighbors.

Currently, U.S. policy must be to help consolidate Honduras' transition to democracy by clearly and unequivocally warning the armed forces that good relations with the United States depend upon it.

The greatest danger in Honduras, however, is that it will be swept up in the tides of conflict in the surrounding countries--that it will be drawn into the war in El Salvador or into a new war with Nicaragua. On this issue, U.S. policy has been less than helpful, for Washington has cast Honduras in a regional role which the Honduran political system may not be strong enough to sustain without fracturing.

Both the Carter and Reagan administrations increased military assistance to Honduras dramatically, even though there is no guerrilla movement there. Various explanations can be offered for these increases. During the Carter years, Honduras was the only northern-tier country not under sanctions for violating human rights, so it was the only site for increasing the U.S. military presence. After the Nicaraguan revolution,

the expansion of U.S. aid was at times justified as necessary to defend Honduras from aggression or subversion from Nicaragua, or to prevent Honduran territory from being used as a channel for arms shipments to the Salvadoran guerrillas. The arms buildup could also have more offensive intentions--e.g., increasing the Honduran army's capacity to participate directly in the Salvadoran war, or to join with exile groups in an invasion of Nicaragua.

It would be particularly tragic if the one country in Central America that seems to have an opportunity to avoid civil war should squander its chances by being enticed into the conflicts of the surrounding states. If the intention of the United States is to use Honduras as an instrument of U.S. policy toward El Salvador or Nicaragua, we should recognize that we are wagering the future of Honduras as well.

Elements of a Regional Policy

Formulating policy in the midst of crisis is always difficult. Normal patterns of political interaction and relationship are ruptured, uncertainty mounts as reliable information becomes scarce, and events always outpace the ability of policymakers to plan for them. When past policy has been oriented toward preserving the status quo, the disruption that comes with crisis seems threatening as well as unpredictable. Policymakers are then tempted to fall back on familiar responses, pursuing them with a vengeance even if they show little sign of producing the desired results.

The depth of the crisis in Central America and its complexity make such routinized responses very dangerous for the United States. A reformulation of U.S. policy for Central America must begin with an unemotional assessment of U.S. interests in the region, whether they can be safeguarded independently of the survival of rightist military dictatorships, and whether the emergence of revolutionary governments necessarily poses a critical threat to them.

It may be that the traditional U.S. goal of regional stability can no longer be attained in Central America by supporting traditional elites. It may be that the revolutionaries are less the enemies of democracy and human rights than the military regimes fighting against them. And it may be that less direct U.S. involvement in the region's political and military conflicts offers the best hope of safeguarding U.S. influence and interests.

The most sensible general strategy for the United States to pursue in Central America today is one which seeks to reduce the level of internal violence and the potential for international conflict in the region. This implies a policy in which diplomacy and economic assistance are the principal levers of influence, and military assistance is minimal. In Nicaragua, the United States should try to improve bilateral relations by restoring economic assistance and offering to help reduce tensions on the Nicaraguan-Honduran border. In the case of El Salvador, the United States should join the growing international consensus in favor of a negotiated solution to the civil war and should do its utmost to convince the Salvadoran armed forces to enter into a dialogue with the FDR. In Guatemala,

the United States should resist the temptation to increase military aid to the rightist military regime. The withholding of such assistance constitutes the only lever of influence that Washington has to push the regime into some sort of political accommodation that can avoid full-scale war. In Honduras, the United States should make clear to the armed forces that it supports the electoral transition to civilian rule and that U.S. military aid does not constitute an endorsement of either military government or regional intervention.

These are the sorts of policies that offer the best hope of restoring regional stability to Central America, and of doing so in a way that benefits the people of the region. In the pursuit of such policies, the United States would enjoy wide support both in Latin America and among our European allies. The greatest danger to the United States in Central America today comes not from the Cubans' support of the FDR in El Salvador, but from a lack of vision in Washington--an apparent unwillingness to look beyond the policies of the past, even though they no longer serve us.

DANGERS, CAUSES, AND OPTIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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The crisis in Central America needs to be analyzed in terms of the dangers to U.S. interests, the causes of these dangers, and the real policy options open to the administration.

Dangers to U.S. Interests

The military danger can assume two aspects. Under one scenario, the Soviet Union would ask friendly countries in Central America to permit the establishment of Soviet military facilities close to major U.S. interests--the Panama Canal and the Mexican oil fields--and to the U.S. heartland. Upon reflection, this danger does not seem very realistic. Soviet troops are not going to invade southern Mexico. A Soviet base threatening the U.S. heartland would trigger a new crisis similar to the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

Alternatively, some argue that the Soviets are working to establish a new military surrogate in the Americas in addition to Cuba. Nicaragua and perhaps a leftist El Salvador could provide a critical mass of military strength that might intimidate neighboring states. Unlike Cuba, surrounded by water, Nicaragua and El Salvador might succeed where Castro failed, namely in spreading revolution throughout a traditional U.S. sphere of influence.

The political danger facing the United States might be phrased somewhat like this: A Communist Nicaragua or El Salvador might hesitate to commit overt aggression against a neighboring state and would hesitate to provide the Soviet Union with overt military facilities, since either would trigger an immediate and hostile U.S. reaction. Nevertheless, the example of successful revolution in Nicaragua and El Salvador could give the impression to leftist groups in neighboring states that historical momentum now lay with the left. The balance of political power in neighboring states might in this way be tilted. Without the Soviets providing much more than marginal military assistance, revolution might move like a prairie fire throughout Central America, finally lapping the two critical U.S. interests: the Mexican oil fields and the Panama Canal.

The alleged military and political dangers of the current crisis unfortunately elude the kind of analysis that brings consensus. It is just as plausible, perhaps more plausible, that the alarming scenarios which the pessimists draw out will never come to pass. Moreover, the description of the scenarios fails to take into account other factors (e.g., skillful U.S. diplomacy) that might affect fundamentally the final outcome.

The diplomatic danger is more established as genuine. Even if Nicaragua and Granada never become Soviet allies in the way that Cuba has, each can provide important support to the Soviet Union diplomatically. There is a tendency in the United States to discount the value of international institutions like the United Nations and its specialized agencies, including the World Bank and the IMF. But in fact, the activities of these agencies represent a major foreign-policy concern of any major country. While a few votes would hardly seem to be that important, the issue is one of leadership. Previously, Cuba was isolated within the Latin American bloc, and had little influence on its positions. Now it no longer is isolated; and the Soviet Union could derive significant diplomatic advantages from the existence of hard-core countries within the Latin American bloc inclined to support vigorously Soviet diplomatic initiatives.

The last danger facing U.S. interests in Central America, the psychological danger, is also more easily established than the military or political danger. All U.S. administrations since the mid-1960s have worried about the perception around the globe that U.S. power is in a phase of contemporary decline. Even more than earlier administrations the Reagan administration came to power determined to reverse this perception. A guerrilla victory in Central America, combined with continuing Nicaraguan defiance of U.S. pressure, will accelerate the growth of a worldwide perception that, after historic setbacks in southeast Asia and the Persian Gulf, the United States is now poised to suffer a similar setback in its own backyard, the Caribbean basin. Spreading belief that Soviet power is on the rise while U.S. power is in decline could adversely affect American foreign interests.

Causes of the Crisis

Before a nation can cope with the dangers posed by a crisis, it must understand that crisis's causes. In the case of Central America, not all of these causes unfortunately are subject to significant or early influence by U.S. policy. There are five identifiable causes in question: social, historical, economic, regional, and international.

Socially, Latin America has changed dramatically in the last 30 years. There has been a demographic, urban, and communications revolution in Latin America as in much of the rest of the Third World. As a result, the problem of governance has changed--the ruling elite has not become more cruel, simply less relevant. The Somozas of Central America are like the earlier Balkan monarchies. That they must go is known. What is not known is what will replace them.

There is also an important historical cause for the current crisis. It can be no accident that the revolutions in Iran and Central America have been so much more virulently anti-American than similar revolutions in other parts of the Third World; after all, in Iran and in Central America during the mid-1950s, the United States through CIA intervention prematurely cut off an historical process. The hatred developed among those then on the losing side but now on the winning side should not cause surprise. Examining our past relationship with Mexico should help us understand the political dynamics involved. Just as Mexico was vigorously anti-American in its revolutionary period, in part in reaction to repeated humiliations it had suffered by the United States in the 19th century, so

there will be an inevitable surge of anti-Americanism in Central America. As was the case in Mexico, there is little that the United States can do to change the hostile attitude of those on the verge of success in Central America. Only passage of time will cause memories to fade. Sensible policies can shorten the period of time.

The economic crisis is another major cause of the Central American drama. Increasingly the plight of countries in the region resembles the plight of weak countries in the 1930s: as was the case then, moderate politicians are in danger of being swept aside because the economic stress is too painful and the demand for action at any political cost is too high. Stabilizing the price of coffee and sugar at appropriate levels would do more to restore peace in Central America than any action against Cuba.

There is also a regional cause for the crisis. For several decades after the building of the Panama Canal, the United States enjoyed a unique political position in Central America. Our presence there and the robust way we developed that presence temporarily invalidated the laws of geopolitics. Mexico and Venezuela, countries that normally would have a major influence in Central America, were induced not to exercise it. Many people forget that El Salvador was at one point actually part of Mexico.

The high price of oil has enabled Mexico and Venezuela to reassert the laws of geopolitics. This reassertion has neutralized U.S. influence in Central America. Mexico and Venezuela now compete with the United States in providing aid to Central America. With this aid goes a demand for a role in the political evolution of the region. For that reason, at least as critical to the success of U.S. policy in Central America as a cessation of Cuban support for the guerrillas is a cessation of Mexican support for courses of action opposed by the Reagan administration.

The international cause of the crisis is support given by the Soviet Union and Cuba to revolutionary groups in Central America. In any objective analysis, this support is probably the least important of the causes, but it is conceivable that Soviet assistance provided a small but critical margin tipping the political balance in favor of insurrection.

U.S. Options

What are the United States' options given the foregoing dangers and causes? One option is military action. The United States might decide that since the Soviet Union attempts to block any deviant political evolution in its sphere of action, the United States will follow suit in its own sphere. In that event, the Soviet Union itself has offered three models of hegemonic behavior.

One is the Hungarian model. Like the Soviets in 1956 in Hungary, the United States could unilaterally invade El Salvador to prevent a guerrilla victory. Success might come after great bloodshed, domestic turmoil, and alliance alienation.

A second possibility is the Czech model. Like the Soviets in Czechoslovakia in 1968, the United States could press the local government, or a significant fraction thereof, to request "assistance" from others in order

to prevent further deterioration of the political position. According to many rumors, Argentina is now poised to serve as the leader of the multilateral effort.

A third choice would be the Polish model. The United States would either encourage or not care about harsh efforts to crush local resistance. Current policy in fact resembles the Polish model. As the Soviets encourage the Polish government not to negotiate with Solidarity, the United States encourages the government of El Salvador not to negotiate with the guerrillas.

The pragmatic issue is whether military intervention can succeed. When we look at the causes of the crisis, there appear to be many reasons to believe that it will not work. The United States has committed a number of historical mistakes in Central America. These cannot be corrected except with the passage of time. The social convulsion transforming Central America is also beyond immediate U.S. influence. The economic crisis is worldwide in nature. And it will be impossible to persuade Venezuela and Mexico to assume again a posture of noninvolvement in the affairs of Central America.

All of these factors significantly and adversely affect the probability of successful U.S. military intervention. More to the point, they dangerously sap public support within the United States for any U.S. military involvement. On the assumption that the United States wishes to have a positive influence on the area, therefore, two major options exist for the United States. They might be called the Mexican example and the regional handoff.

The Mexican example is provided by the way in which the United States attempted to deal with the violently anti-American Mexican revolution earlier in the century. There were many calls for military intervention in the interwar period, but thanks to the brilliant efforts of the U.S. ambassador in Mexico, Dwight Morrow, the United States decided in effect to give Mexico time to pass through its revolutionary anti-American stage. We swallowed hard and allowed Mexico to pass through its period of internal turmoil without U.S. intervention. The current, relatively solid state of U.S.-Mexican relations is the positive fruit of Ambassador Morrow's diplomacy, which so impressed press pundit Walter Lippmann that until Morrow's untimely death Lippman wanted to run him for president.

Could the Mexican example work today? There is one complicating difference between the challenge to U.S. interests then and now. Mexico in the early 1930s was less likely to become the fellow traveler of a major power hostile to the United States. Nicaragua and El Salvador are more likely to become close supporters of the Soviet Union, which does pose an increasingly serious global challenge to the United States. Conversely, Nicaragua and El Salvador are much less important to the United States today than Mexico was to the United States in the 1930s. Moreover, the United States does have an agreement with the Soviet Union regarding the type of military presence which the Soviet Union can establish in the Western Hemisphere. Given the Soviet difficulties in Eastern Europe, it should not be beyond the possibility of negotiation for the United States to establish certain limits to the international repercussions of an anti-American, Mexican-type revolution in Central America in the 1980s.

For the United States to accept such a prospect would require the same degree of patience, equanimity, and historical perspective which the United States was able to demonstrate in the 1930s. It should be recognized, however, that assuming we could achieve the balanced approach of the earlier period, there are major costs that we would pay now that we did not pay then. The role of international institutions in world diplomacy is now much greater than it was in the 1930s. Consequently, this particular cost of an anti-American victory would be higher now than it was then. In addition, the general perception in the 1930s was that U.S. power was on the rise. Now the general perception is that U.S. power is on the decline. In short, there would be a diplomatic and psychological cost in the 1980s greater than the cost which we incurred in the 1930s. But overall, these would seem to be costs that we could bear.

The regional handoff is a phrase borrowed from columnist Joe Kraft, who mentions, however, only Mexico and not Venezuela. If both are beginning to play a major diplomatic role in Central America, it would seem to be in the U.S. interest to work out a modus vivendi with the Mexicans and Venezuelans regarding the permissible parameters of change in that area. They, after all, even more than the Soviet Union, make change against U.S. wishes possible. Without their current role, the United States would be able to bring to heel with time even hostile Nicaragua. If the United States is to agree with the Mexicans regarding the issue of negotiations, it would seem to be desirable for the United States to have the Mexicans spell out precisely the limits beyond which they also would not permit Nicaragua to go.

In conclusion, U.S. prospects in Central America are not brilliant. We are facing irreversible social, historical, and economic events which do not bend to the normal processes of diplomacy. Traditional great-power responses of military intervention are not sensible or feasible. Consequently, the most intelligent alternatives for the United States are either damage limitation or shared responsibility. Unless we can pursue either one of these alternatives, the prospect is for a major U.S. setback in this sensitive area of the world.

THE BEST OF TIMES, THE WORST OF TIMES: CENTRAL AMERICAN SCENARIOS - 1984

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In order to deal with both best-case and worst-case scenarios for the United States in Central America, it is first useful to do two things, establish a time frame and define basic U.S. interests. The first of these is, of course, the easiest. I have arbitrarily set the time of our next presidential election as the end point in the scenario. This has several advantages. It eliminates the problem of dealing with continuity of policy over several administrations and of the increasingly speculative nature of any projections set more than two or three years in the future. Yet it does allow sufficient time for policies to be formulated and implemented, and for their results to become apparent.

The definition of basic interests is more difficult. Perhaps the most basic interest of any U.S. administration should be to minimize its interest or at least its active involvement in Central America. The region offers us almost nothing in the way of vital strategic materials, potential military resources, or, assuming the exclusion of Panama from this discussion, even geographic advantages for potential bases. What it does have is a considerable capacity for diverting our attention and resources from more important areas, damaging our image and credibility throughout the world, and producing acrimonious and divisive debates at home. All of this makes U.S. interests more negative than positive. Conversion of the region into an area controlled by forces hostile to the United States and allied with the Soviet Union and/or Cuba must be prevented. An image of weakness or incompetence, of an ability to effectively influence the course of events in an area so close, so traditionally dominated by Washington, and so weak in its own right, should be avoided. Above all, relations with major allies, as well as with potential adversaries, should not be jeopardized by internal disputes over Central America.

One additional U.S. interest should be noted. Increasingly, the willingness to use whatever degree of violence is required has become the key to power in Central America. The armed faction which endures the longest, whether on the right or the left, assumes that this gives it a right to a virtual monopoly over political and economic decisionmaking. Those who seek to produce change or promote stability by other means find themselves increasingly marginalized. This trend, and the accelerated political polarization related to it, is destructive to U.S. interests as well as to the societies directly involved. In order for the situation to become internally self-stabilizing and for the United States to be able to reduce its current preoccupation with the region, the image that violence is the only real road to power must be corrected. What is needed is a situation in which resort to violence marginalizes those who

depend on it instead of propelling them to the center of the stage.

U.S. interests, therefore, are best served by a Central America at peace, a peace resting upon the widest possible degree of popular support for existing governments and faith in the ability of nonviolent measures to produce at least progress toward resolving pressing social and economic problems. At the moment this is impossible. Fear, not hope, dominates Central America; and, force, not popular support, is the most common means of gaining and holding power. Economic conditions are at best stagnant and, in most nations, deteriorating. Conflict, rather than cooperation, dominates regional relations. Capital flight far exceeds new private investment. Guerrilla strength is growing in El Salvador and Guatemala. In Nicaragua, the government slips steadily further left as both internal and external threats to the Sandinistas increase. The new civilian government in Honduras is weak and fragile. Its chances for economic and social progress are seriously jeopardized by the rising tide of conflict in all of its neighbors. Even Costa Rica's traditional democracy shows increasing signs of strain under the burden of massive economic problems. It is obviously impossible to resolve all of these problems by the end of 1984. The critical question is whether the trends currently in motion will continue, with the resultant destructive effects on U.S. interests, or whether a combination of internal and international efforts can begin to reverse the current tide of destruction and begin to restore stability and the hope of future progress.

In developing the best possible scenario for the end of 1984, I will proceed country by country, beginning with El Salvador, then Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala (with a brief reference to Belize), and concluding with Costa Rica. The same order will be followed in presenting the worst-case scenario.

Resolution of the fighting in El Salvador--a key factor in the future development of Central America and in the United States' ability to exert effective influence--will be determined, to some degree, by the results of the March 1982 elections and the subsequent reorganization of El Salvador's government. In a best-case scenario, the Christian Democrats will retain a preponderant degree of influence and the followers of ARENA (Major D'Aubuisson) will be essentially marginalized. This would both retain some credibility for the Duarte government and leave open the possibility of a negotiated settlement, perhaps building on the Mexican initiative.

In order to begin any negotiation process, it would be necessary for the United States to use every means possible to convince the Salvadoran military that a military victory is neither possible nor desirable and that their only hope of survival lies in accepting the necessity of a negotiated settlement. Prospects for achieving this have always been rather questionable and have been made more so by the events of the past year. A best-case scenario, however, must assume that this can still be brought off. At this point, with the assistance of international mediators, negotiations between the government and the FDR could begin, focusing on arrangements for some sort of cease-fire. The best result which could be hoped for would be the ultimate establishment of an interim government, including elements of the left, the scheduling of elections and, perhaps

most critical, the introduction of a peacekeeping force, drawn from nations acceptable to both sides in the conflict, which would supervise a cease-fire, conduct the elections, and perhaps even provide a degree of protection for political leaders. Such nations might include Panama, Canada, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia (depending on 1982 election results there), and the Dominican Republic, with token, essentially police, contingents from Costa Rica and the British Caribbean. It might even be possible to include a few Nicaraguans, operating in mixed international units. Mexican participation, if at all possible, would be a major plus.

From elections held under such supervision the best that could be hoped for would be the emergence of a center-left coalition, including moderate elements of the FDR and Christian Democrats. Groups further left might also have to be included. A restructured military, possibly with Mexican and French assistance in organization and training, would include both regular military and guerrilla elements. While very difficult to stabilize and maintain, such a system could survive, especially given the massive dependence on external sources for economic reconstruction and the potential energy leverage which Mexico and Venezuela could exert. Such a government could be functioning by 1984, economic recovery could have begun, and, except for scattered incidents, the fighting could be ended. The U.S. military presence would be withdrawn, though major economic aid would still be needed. Perhaps most important, the destabilizing effect of the conflict on neighboring states would be ended, many refugees would have returned, and trade and travel links within the area would be in the process of restoration.

Any hope of improvement in the situation in Nicaragua depends on a restoration of peace in El Salvador. This would remove the issue of Nicaraguan involvement in the Salvadoran civil conflict and might make possible a reduction in tensions with the United States and along the Honduran border. A best-case scenario would produce a Nicaragua where, under pressure from the rest of the hemisphere and from Western Europe, a significant degree of economic pluralism and limited political pluralism would survive. This would mean a triumph of the so-called pragmatic faction of the FSLN and a concentration of governmental energies on internal development rather than external involvements. Again, building on the Mexican initiative, it would require establishment of some degree of control on both sides of Nicaragua's borders, especially that with Honduras. It would also require an internal arrangement by which COSEP and the major opposition parties recognized and basically accepted the fact of FSLN control of the government for at least the rest of the decade. Under this scenario, elections would be scheduled for 1985, but with no real question as to the fact that these would simply confirm the FSLN's hold on power, while providing some channels for representation by other factions. La Prensa and opposition radio stations would still function, but with less than total liberty. Guerrilla activity, especially in the north, would probably continue, but at a declining level. For their part, freed from the immediate threat of an armed overthrow of their regime, the Sandinistas would have halted the arms buildup, agreed not to acquire advanced Soviet combat aircraft, and reduced, though not eliminated the Cuban advisory contingent. In international affairs there would be a slight shift back toward actual nonalignment, though still holding a position which often supports Cuba and the Soviet Union in world

forums. While far from ideal, such conditions are the best that can be reasonably hoped for by late 1984 and would at least act to further reduce regional tensions.

Honduras will play a key role in any effort to stabilize the situation in Central America. At the same time, developments there will be heavily dependent on events in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Given the previously outlined situations in El Salvador and Nicaragua, there would be reason to hope for the preservation of civilian rule and, by 1984, the restoration of economic growth in Honduras. An end to the massive influx of refugees from El Salvador and Nicaragua would also contribute greatly to prospects for a more favorable outcome.

One key factor in Honduras would be restoration of trade links within the region and an end to fears that conflicts in its neighbors will ultimately engulf this weak nation. Regional peace could lead to an increase in both foreign and national investment in the economy. It could also make possible an emphasis on badly-needed administrative reforms and a cut-back in the current high levels of corruption. A best-case scenario in Honduras would find the nation still at peace, pursuing a joint policy with Nicaragua to neutralize their common border, and with confidence in the viability of the civilian government and in future economic prospects slowly strengthening.

It is hard to imagine any favorable scenario for Guatemala by the end of 1984. The alternatives seem to range from bad through worse to awful. Perhaps the least negative outcome would be an utter failure of the Guevara government's efforts at repression as a solution to internal dissent, combined with a degree of humiliation over the failure of policies in Belize and the evolution of events in El Salvador. Again, a resolution of the El Salvador conflict without an assumption of power by the far left would do much to undercut the arguments of the extreme right in Guatemala. Under such circumstances, 1983 might witness an internal coup by younger officers with important support from urban economic interest groups. Such a government would be committed to ending internal repression against moderate, democratic elements such as the FUR and the Christian Democrats, reaching an accord with Belize, and using reform as well as military force to undercut support for the guerrillas. It would remain difficult to imagine, however, at least in the short run, any negotiated settlement with the insurgents. Under the best of circumstances, guerrilla violence will still be widespread in 1984, the economy will be stagnant if not still declining, and a negotiated settlement will still be some time away. But there could be moves toward opening up the system to moderate groups, ending repression directed at democratic labor and political groups, and ultimately weakening popular support for guerrilla violence. At best, the drift toward total polarization and civil war can be halted by 1984 and a beginning made at establishing a base for future negotiations and a restoration of peace. It is also possible that Belize could be freed from the threat of Guatemalan attack and left to develop its own internal economic and political institutions.

Costa Rica, despite its current massive economic problems, still offers the region's best prospects for 1984. Democratic government should survive. Restoration of peace in El Salvador and a moderation of current

trends in Nicaragua would aid the economic situation greatly and help restore some confidence in the future. Some increase in private investment and in tourism would result. Higher coffee prices would also be a major factor here, as in the entire region, in helping to stabilize the economic situation. With continued increases in international assistance, a trend toward increased stability in the rest of the region, a consistent policy of internal austerity and higher coffee prices, coupled with lower interest rates, Costa Rica could well be on the path to economic recovery by late 1984. And if the economy recovers, the political situation will probably take care of itself.

A scenario such as this would enable the United States to reduce its military commitments in the region, would dampen the internal debates over Central America, and would greatly reduce the threats to our image as well as our security posed by developments in that area. It would set Central America on a course in which internal stability could become increasingly self-generated, enabling the United States to concentrate its attention and resources on other, more vital areas.

U.S. policy is clearly critical if anything like this scenario is to be realized. The critical step would be a willingness to consider the Mexican initiative in regard to El Salvador and Nicaragua. In the case of El Salvador, only the United States has any chance of forcing the Salvadoran military to accept the necessity of a negotiated settlement and a major reorganization of the military establishment. Only if they are convinced that the United States cannot and will not support efforts at achieving total military victory and that their actual alternatives are negotiation or destruction is there any chance that sufficient elements in the military will accept negotiations. While involving high levels of risk, such a policy offers the only realistic opportunity to escape from the current deteriorating situation.

Policy must also emphasize the maximum degree of cooperation and involvement of other non-Communist nations in the peace process. Mexico is a key here. Western Europe, Panama, Costa Rica, and the nations of the Andean Pact would also be vital. I would favor some effort to gain Canadian participation as well. This would provide a mechanism for guaranteeing any settlement and would reduce the visibility of U.S. involvement in the process.

Nicaragua must be afforded an alternative to confrontation with the United States. Honduras is a key in this process. The United States must make clear its willingness to help control attacks on Nicaragua from Honduras and to use its influence to secure Honduran cooperation in this area. In return, of course, Nicaragua must halt its current arms buildup and prevent efforts at subverting Honduras from Nicaraguan territory. It must also join the United States in support for a negotiated settlement in El Salvador.

The current emphasis on a military buildup in Honduras must be ended and U.S. efforts concentrated on the pressing need for administrative reform. Everything possible should be done to withdraw the Argentine presence, which constitutes at least as great a threat to future civil-military relations in Honduras as it does to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Honduras

must be encouraged to concentrate on its own massive internal problems and to orient its regional foreign policy towards accommodation rather than confrontation. The United States needs to give the Hondurans assurances regarding their security and territorial integrity, but it must also make it clear that continued support for the military is contingent upon the preservation of civilian government, reduced corruption, and respect for human rights.

Options in Guatemala are limited. What must be made clear is that continuance of the current policy of all-out repression will make assistance to Guatemala impossible. U.S. support for the territorial integrity of Belize and opposition to Guatemalan involvement in El Salvador must be stressed in the strongest possible terms. At this point, however, any real improvement in relations probably depends on indications from Guatemala of a willingness to alter policy. Indeed, indications that the United States is too anxious to become involved in internal developments there may strengthen the extreme right in its belief that ultimately Washington will support them. A studied willingness to let the ruling generals stew in their own juices for a while may offer the best long-range hope.

Financial assistance, encouragement of a moderating course in international affairs, and strong public endorsement of the existing democratic institutions remains the best policy in Costa Rica. At the same time, Costa Rican responsibility for putting their own economic house in order must be stressed. But, as previously noted, events in Costa Rica are more dependent on the results of U.S. policy in the rest of the region than they are on direct bilateral relations.

Worst-case scenarios, unfortunately, have a higher probability than best-case scenarios. In a worst-case scenario, the Christian Democrats will leave the government of El Salvador following the 1982 elections and the new constituent assembly will ultimately install a right-wing coalition, including ARENA representatives. U.S. options would now be extremely limited. The new-found ideological unity could produce a brief improvement in the efficiency of the Salvadoran government, but would also eliminate any pretext of moderation on the part of the military. Repression might be extended to the Christian Democrats, the surviving peasant and labor organizations, and any advocates of negotiation, compromise, or reform. This would end the last support for El Salvador from such democratic nations as Venezuela, and might well lead the U.S. Congress to cut off military and perhaps even economic assistance.

Such actions would rapidly bring the Salvadoran government to the point of collapse. As bad as this might be for U.S. interests, any effort to involve other nations, such as Guatemala or Argentina, in providing emergency military support or even intervention would be more disastrous. This would undoubtedly increase Nicaraguan support for the guerrillas, escalate border conflict between Nicaragua and Honduras, and raise the specter of transforming a civil conflict into an international war. Even Costa Rica would not be immune to the negative effects of this scenario, as the threat of escalated conflict would accelerate capital flight and labor unrest, dashing hopes for economic recovery, and even increasing pressures for that nation to reestablish a regular army.

By 1984 this scenario could easily produce a regional war. Civilian government in Honduras would be one of the first casualties of such a conflict. What remains of the middle, outside of Costa Rica, would be further decimated by murder or exile. The debate in the United States would become increasingly bitter and partisan. The image of the United States would suffer throughout the hemisphere and, in all probability, throughout the world. Our credibility as a leader of the Western alliance would be weakened. Our ability to criticize Soviet actions in such areas as Poland and Afghanistan would be further weakened as we are identified with increasingly desperate elements on the far right. Ultimately, congressional restraints will cut off U.S. assistance to the military governments. Last-minute efforts at negotiation will fail. The left will be too confident of ultimate victory, the internal situation too polarized, and the middle so weakened and discredited that it can play no meaningful role in the future. A worst-case scenario in 1984 would have an armed, militant left victorious in El Salvador; a monolithic, Marxist-Leninist state established in Nicaragua and engaged in border conflict with Honduras; a Guatemalan government virtually besieged in the major cities and on the verge of total economic collapse; and Honduras now encircled by enemies, run by an incompetent military which is losing the conflict with Nicaragua and is desperately trying to find some negotiated way out of the conflict before rising internal conflicts and economic problems bring it down as well. Costa Rica's economic situation will have deteriorated, faith in democratic institutions will be profoundly shaken, and even there clear signs of the beginnings of a polarization process will be visible. U.S. influence in the region will be virtually nonexistent, and our major hope will be that the institutions in Mexico and Panama will be strong enough to withstand the rising tide of regional violence.

As bad as such a scenario is, U.S. efforts to deal with it through direct military involvement would be even worse. There would be a return to the internal confrontations between executive, Congress, and public that characterized the Vietnam era. An utter worst-case scenario, of course, would include military action against Cuba and a consequent Soviet response, the results of which would make any concern about conditions in Central America rather academic. In more limited terms, the worst-case outcome would be the establishment of radical, Marxist-Leninist regimes in a devastated Central America in spite of strong administration opposition. The United States would find itself further inundated with hundreds of thousands of additional refugees. Relations with Mexico would be severely strained. Right-wing military regimes would likely become more intransigent and less amenable to U.S. influence, while the hemisphere's democratic governments would be attempting to distance themselves as much as possible from the United States. Guerrilla movements in other parts of Latin America would be encouraged and would likely escalate. A divided, embittered United States would face the prospect of future, much more important problems in this hemisphere with a considerably reduced credibility and a questionable ability to respond to any future challenges.

Obviously, this sort of scenario stresses our own ability to use Central America as a vehicle for shooting ourselves in the foot. An exaggerated rhetoric of the global importance of outcomes in the region increases the risk of adverse outcomes and multiplies their cost without increasing either the probability or magnitude of any possible favorable

outcomes. Indeed, such rhetoric serves to strengthen the most intransigent and polarized factions of both left and right in their views of the conflict as one which must be fought to the bitter end rather than negotiated.

The best policy for avoiding such an outcome does not differ markedly from that involved in promoting the best possible scenario. Emphasis must be placed on the need for a negotiated settlement in El Salvador. At the moment, the Mexican initiative is the best available way to begin that process. Should the far right win the 1982 Salvadoran elections, it must immediately be made clear that their program is incompatible with U.S. interests and that any effort to implement it will endanger future U.S. support. Beyond that, our options would be extremely limited, resembling in great degree those existing in Guatemala.

In the case of Nicaragua, pressure for an end to assistance to El Salvador and continued clear signals that we would not tolerate the introduction of modern combat aircraft must be coupled with a willingness to negotiate, a back-down on efforts at internal disruption, and a willingness to promote an accommodation with Honduras. It is no more in our interest to see the FSLN paint themselves into a corner in their relations with Honduras than it is to place ourselves in a similar situation with regard to El Salvador. They, like ourselves, must have a face-saving way out of the current pattern of escalation.

In the cases of Honduras, Guatemala, and Costa Rica, avoidance of worst-case and promotion of best-case scenario policies are nearly identical. Efforts to form alliances among right-wing elements in the region should be resisted, especially in the event of a triumph by the right in Salvador's elections. Honduras and Costa Rica must be encouraged to concentrate on internal development and stability and on reducing potential conflicts with their neighbors. In both of these cases, the rhetoric as well as the actions of Washington will have a major effect.

In projecting any scenario, the very real limitations on U.S. policy must be borne in mind. Some of these spring from domestic sources, budget limitations, Congressional and popular opposition to escalated involvement, and legal restrictions on executive actions. Even more important, however, are the limitations of history. The crisis in Central America has been developing for decades. It is the product of past U.S. policies and of years of misrule and increasing repression by domestic elites. Most of all, it is the product of growing world economic pressures on a resource-poor region dependent on a few nonstrategic commodities for export earnings. Combined with revolutions in communication and transportation, increased urbanization and literacy, and rapid population growth, this has subjected inflexible, elite-dominated structures to intolerable strains. More than ever before, external forces are available and willing to exploit these strains, further aggravating the situation. All of this has produced a loss of legitimacy by existing governmental structures, growing conflicts with both the Church and the educated youth, and a dominant climate of fear among the middle and upper classes. No policy made in Washington can deal effectively with all of these factors, and no U.S. initiative can escape the costs of the region's history. There is no quick fix, no easy solution, no way to avoid high human and

political costs. The United States cannot restore the status quo that existed before 1978, nor can it expect a revival of the client-state system typical of the area. Basic change is inevitable; what is critical is our ability to adapt to and shape it. No good options remain to the United States. Our major task today is to avoid creating for ourselves even worse ones than those we currently face.

CENTRAL AMERICA IN U.S. CONTAINMENT POLICY

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The present threat in Central America of expanding indigenous Marxist-leftist influence and control, supported by Cuba and the USSR, is preeminently a post-Vietnam containment crisis. Before Vietnam, it would certainly have called for the unquestioned application of the Truman Doctrine, as did the U.S. interventions in Guatemala and the Dominican Republic. After Vietnam, not only a trickle of arms aid and some 50 U.S. military advisers but also the whole rationale of protecting local governments against Marxist countries and revolutionary movements supported by outside Communist powers is inevitably brought into question. Unlike Angola in 1975, the United States, for reasons of historical concern and geographical proximity, is bound to be involved by some means and to some extent in an effort to implement containment in the current Central American crisis. But this is the first serious involvement in behalf of containment to take place under the international and domestic constraints that emerged in the wake of the war in Vietnam and the enhanced Soviet and Cuban Third-World intervention capabilities that emerged in the 1970s. It is therefore a critical occasion for revising, through action and concept, the strategy of containment, which remains the core of U.S. foreign policy, to fit the changing imperatives of U.S. regional and global security.

The first requirement of a revised strategy of containment is to address the kind of question that did not get asked before it was too late in Vietnam: what is the irreducible core of vital interests that the United States should try to protect in Central America even with direct force if necessary? The answer to this question will establish the boundaries of ends and means that should encompass the consideration of policies to cope with less-threatening situations, including those that may threaten the core interest because one thing leads to another.

I believe that the most essential U.S. interest and the only one worth trying to protect with direct force can best be expressed in negative terms: preventing the establishment in Central America of a base of Soviet, Cuban, or indigenous power that would threaten through military or paramilitary operations or through subversion and revolution the physical security of the Panama Canal, militarily critical sea lanes, Mexico, or the United States itself.

This means that a host of less important but still serious threats to U.S. interests--for example, the establishment of a Marxist government in El Salvador or of another expansionist Soviet dependency like Cuba in Nicaragua--are not worth taking the risks and costs of armed intervention to prevent unless there are compelling reasons to believe that they will

lead to the loss of the core interest I have identified. But even in this eventuality it does not follow that the United States should intervene militarily unless (a) military intervention would hold a reasonable chance of defeating the threat, (b) there is no other way to defeat the threat, and (c) intervention would not jeopardize equally important interests in the United States, the Caribbean and Central American region, or elsewhere.

Thus, if the core interests are in jeopardy, and diplomacy, arms aid, and other measures short of armed intervention will not secure them, the United States should be willing to incur the costs of intervention, including the political costs of supporting oppressive right-wing regimes and the widespread opprobrium evoked in Latin America, Western Europe, and elsewhere--but only if intervention would actually nullify the threat and if the material, domestic political, and international political costs of intervention would be less damaging than the threat itself.

Are conditions in Central America likely to lead to the kinds of threats to U.S. vital interests that are postulated here as jeopardizing core security interests?

It is doubtful that either Cuba or the Soviet Union feels a pressing need for military bases in Central America. They already have sufficient military presence and access in the Caribbean. Yet, sufficiency may not be enough for them if the appetite and the opportunity for power should grow with the achievement of more proximate goals. The proximate strategic interests of Cuba and the USSR are to establish friendly leftist governments, stimulate revolutionary movements to overthrow unfriendly governments, diminish and, if possible, remove U.S. influence, and--from the Soviet perspective--tie down U.S. military and other containment resources in a strategic diversion. These are not unrealistic objectives.

Given these objectives and the unsettled conditions in Central America, one can imagine a plausible worst case like the following: With the backing of continued Cuban arms and Soviet assistance but short of the direct participation of Cuban and Soviet forces, El Salvador comes under the control of an oppressive left-wing regime that looks to continued Cuban and Soviet support to maintain itself in power against the remnants of "fascist" and "imperialist" opposition. A militant, somewhat paranoid, heavily armed Sandinista regime makes Nicaragua a base of spreading pro-Soviet, anti-American revolutions and takeovers in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. This generates a flood of refugees into Mexico and the United States, and poses a threat of border war and subversion in Mexico. It threatens the stability of Panama and the security of democratic Costa Rica.

Conceivably, such a successful extension of Marxist regimes, oriented toward Cuba and dependent on Soviet support, could lead to the establishment of naval, air, and staging bases that would tie down mobile U.S. forces and pose a strategic threat to U.S. global operations. From the Soviet standpoint, such bases might look like a tolerably cheap and riskless counterpoise to the emplacement of intermediate-range missiles in Western Europe and to the creation of a rapid deployment force for intervening in the Gulf. To Cuba, they might seem to diffuse Yankee hostility and fulfill the aborted vision of Castroism taking root in Latin America. To prevent or defeat this extension of Communist power, an intensive

involvement of U.S. arms aid and naval and ground forces would be justified if they could nullify the threat without incurring more damaging costs. Could they?

I doubt that a successful military counter to the hypothesized threat is feasible at a reasonable cost. I doubt it not only because of the proportion of America's global containment resources that would have to be tied down by a successful blockade or an invasion of Cuba, or because of the risk of Soviet counterintervention in the Caribbean, southwest Asia, Poland, or elsewhere, but primarily because of the near-impossibility of U.S. arms and troops replacing hostile regimes and guerrilla movements with friendly, stable governments that would permit U.S. forces to withdraw. To be sure, with a substantial diversion of global forces, U.S. forces could overwhelm El Salvador and perhaps Nicaragua too, but they could not count on installing stable, cooperative governments short of an arduous counterrevolutionary war and a prolonged occupation. The simple fact is that if political conditions should facilitate such a formidable expansion of revolution and subversion as hypothesized in the worst-case scenario, U.S. arms and forces would be hard put to defeat the expansion. At most, they could contain it by keeping Cuban and Soviet forces out and helping to protect Mexico, Guatemala, and other strong points.

Given this limitation, a blockade of Cuba or an invasion of Cuba would only compound the diversion of U.S. resources without doing much to remove the threat to vital U.S. interests in Central America. Yet, short of full-scale U.S. military involvement in the area, lesser measures of intervention (like naval blockades) are no more likely than major interventions on land to advance vital U.S. security interests. They would only be likely to provoke and sanction direct and indirect Soviet and Cuban military counter-measures. Of course, the international political costs of U.S. military action--in Latin America, the Third World generally, and Western Europe--would be tremendous, as would the domestic political costs (including the frustration of the Reagan administration's plans to revitalize containment). Only if the Soviet Union were foolish enough to repeat the mistake of unprovoked overt military maneuvers and emplacements committed in the Cuban missile crisis might these political costs be mitigated.

I conclude, therefore, that the only plausible situation more threatening to U.S. core security interests than the one postulated would be the situation resulting from a futile U.S. effort to counter it by armed intervention. Therefore, the range of useful measures to protect vital U.S. interests, short of the actual establishment of hostile bases that pose a strategic threat to U.S. security, falls short of armed intervention. If such a threat should materialize, U.S. forces (one hopes, with regional cooperation) would have to neutralize it. But counterrevolutionary intervention or preemptive military interdiction to prevent this extreme and unlikely circumstance would be more likely to provoke it and raise its costs. Therefore, this is one case in which it is better to wait for the last domino than to try to prevent the first ones from falling by military action.

What are the best measures to prevent the postulated threat to U.S. core security interests, and what measures might promote the best long-term outcome of Central American development that one can reasonably anticipate--namely, a regional environment not uncongenial to the full range of U.S. security, economic, and political interests?

What is called for is, essentially, a strategy of active regional diplomacy designed to elicit the support and the diplomatic and economic cooperation of Mexico, Venezuela, Canada, and other anti-communist countries in the region toward the objectives of (a) opposing Cuban and Soviet arms aid and other forms of intervention, (b) opposing Nicaraguan intervention in behalf of "liberation" movements in the area, (c) creating and maintaining a collective regional program of economic assistance (emphasizing trade and investment stimulation), and (d) promoting a settlement of the war in El Salvador.

In the Caribbean Basin Initiative and some diplomatic advances in bilateral relations with Mexico and Venezuela, and in collective relations with the Nassau Group (United States, Canada, Mexico, and Venezuela), the U.S. government has made a promising beginning in this direction. But, in my judgment, it can neither gain the support of Mexico and a number of other countries nor end the revolution in El Salvador unless it eventually throws its weight, including the lever of arms aid, behind a negotiated settlement on terms that stand a chance of establishing a stable government through elections or otherwise. But we should not expect a negotiated settlement to be more than the validation of a balance of power that favors a victorious coalition. What the ideological and tactical complexion of that coalition will be--whether it leans toward revolutionary goals and alignment with Cuba and the USSR or toward more moderate social reforms and true nonalignment--remains to be seen, but it is unlikely to be centrist. Nevertheless, the best chance the United States and other interested countries have of exerting any influence on the composition and policies of El Salvador's government lies in participating in the process of a negotiated settlement.

While pursuing this diplomatic strategy, the United States should try to resume proper, if aloof, relations with Nicaragua, while encouraging it, in collaboration with France and other interested European allies, to avoid too great a dependence on Cuba and other Soviet proxies. It will be futile to try to overthrow or improve the political system and orientation of Nicaragua, El Salvador, or any other country through covert action. At most, covert action can occasionally add weight to existing trends in an internal balance of power. The United States can exert its best influence in strengthening any remaining enclave of democracy, like Costa Rica, and bolstering besieged friendly governments that are able to expand their base of political support with economic assistance for internal improvements (perhaps Honduras qualifies). Therefore, the United States should take the position that it is staunchly noninterventionist as far as the internal affairs of any country are concerned, that it is equally opposed to such intervention by Cuba or any other country, and that it will respect the independence of all countries as long as they do not become a base of operations against vital U.S. strategic interests. On this basis the United States should seek the understanding and cooperation of as many countries in the region as possible.

As for the place of U.S.-Central American and Caribbean policy in U.S.-Soviet relations, since Moscow does not discount the possibility of escalating indirect or even direct U.S. military action but since Washington should know that such action would be counterproductive, the U.S. government, through judicious secret diplomacy, should try to exact in return for U.S. self-restraint informal reciprocal restraints on Soviet and Soviet-proxy behavior, including the shipment of arms to Central America. At the same time, it should capitalize upon its own self-restraint by encouraging the widespread propensities of less-developed countries to avoid close alignments with and dependencies on the USSR, while they look to the United States and its major industrial allies for the economic assistance and profitable trade that Moscow cannot offer. In order that self-restraint should be seen as a sign of strength rather than weakness, the creation of truly mobile global intervention forces not tied to the Persian Gulf or any other one region would have a salutary effect, if their strictly limited mission of protecting truly vital security interests is made clear.

If this diplomatic strategy should create a harmonious region of friendly, stable, developing, non-Marxist countries that spurn all entanglements with Cuba and other pro-Soviet regimes and oppose Soviet diplomatic positions on the world stage, that would be an ideal outcome. But the ideal is exceedingly unlikely and should not be the basis for policy and actions.

For reasons of history, ideology, and the struggle for domestic political power, Nicaragua is likely to remain under a Marxist regime that sees the United States as the principal threat to its revolution and sees Cuba (if not the USSR) as a partner or at least counter-poise to the United States. In El Salvador, a stable centrist regime is much less likely than either continued political fragmentation and turbulence or a Marxist dictatorship. Before long, the oppressive right-wing regime in Guatemala will probably be replaced by an oppressive left-wing regime, or else this country is in for a long period of revolutionary instability under a repressive military oligarchy.

Under any Marxist regime, the prospect of economic advancement and respect for human rights is as slim as the prospect of a friendly orientation toward the Yankee colossus to the north. It will be a long time before the Caribbean-basin program can produce any of the beneficial economic results anticipated, and many political-economic obstacles stand in the way. (Any comparison to the Marshall Plan is ludicrous.) Meanwhile, one must expect Cuba and other Soviet friends to continue to explore, with indirect Soviet assistance, opportunities for fostering centers of pro-Communist strength and/or unrest as a strategic diversion to the United States in its geopolitical backyard. We have too few penalties to threaten and too few incentives to offer in order to persuade Cuba under Castro to abandon its Soviet connection, its revolutionary expansionist mission, and the political advantages of Yankee hostility.

Can the American government and people live comfortably with this plausible best (though far from good) situation? I believe so, if the U.S. government will exert the requisite leadership within the framework of a coherent global strategy of containment.

By this I mean, among other things, that it is important for Washington to pursue a concerted diplomatic strategy in the Central American/Caribbean area as the manifestation of a hard-nosed but not ungenerous global strategy--a strategy that is based on convergent security and economic interests without unrealistic expectations of reforming the internal politics of states and without dissociating the United States from normal diplomatic business with the unreformed. It is important that Central American policies reflect an explicitly limited view of U.S. security interests; an exercise of power, in all its dimensions, commensurate with these interests; and confidence that Americans can tolerate some local Marxist and pro-Soviet regimes in the world--especially if they are not fully dependent on Moscow for their security--because the basic forces that move Third-World countries in their relations with the superpowers and the developed world are working in our favor in the long run. Such a posture in Central America would contribute to, as well as reflect, a more selective conception of global containment, which this country needs more than ever before in the light of its expanding interests and increasingly constrained power since World War II.

What we need in Central America is essentially a damage-limiting strategy that avoids gross mistakes and gains the maximum regional support for a diplomatic posture commensurate with the limited but significant influence that outside powers can project to prevent the establishment of Cuban or Soviet dependencies. Will the American people and Congress, accustomed to a simpler, relatively uncompromising and undifferentiated view of containment, accept such a moderate strategy in the United States' backyard, especially when it seems to many that the United States has been slipping behind in the global contest for a decade or more? An affirmative answer depends very much on the quality of leadership the government provides, and assumes that the government itself understands the strategic imperatives. Therefore, I am hoping, but not predicting, that the Reagan administration will rediscover an honorable and prudent conservative tradition that recognizes the limits of U.S. power without denigrating the full use of the power available.

WINNING THROUGH NEGOTIATION*

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The United States is becoming so worried about "another Vietnam" in El Salvador that it is about to repeat an historical error of a quite different sort--the error that led to foreign policy failures in Cyprus and in Angola and on emigration from the Soviet Union and on human rights in the mid-1970s. In each instance, Congress sent the executive branch a foreign policy signal; in each instance, that signal was ignored. The result, predictably, was that every time the executive went back to Congress with additional requests, Congress shortened the leash, limiting the flexibility necessary for good diplomacy. In the end, there was no flexibility, and no U.S. interest was served. Then the executive blamed Congress--for alienating Turkey, for "losing" Angola, for reducing emigration from the Soviet Union, for antagonizing friends.

We seem to be headed in the same self-defeating direction in El Salvador. Congress is sending a foreign policy signal to the executive, and the executive doesn't appear to be listening. Last December, Congress amended the International Security and Development Cooperation Act of 1981 to instruct the president to withhold aid to the government of El Salvador unless that government "is making a concerted and significant effort to comply with internationally recognized human rights," is gaining control over its security forces, is carrying out its reforms, and is demonstrating a "good faith effort to begin discussions with all major political factions in El Salvador." In the same law, Congress wrote that economic and military aid from the United States "should be used to encourage" these and other specific objectives, including a complete investigation of the deaths of the U.S. religious workers.

Congress left the president some discretion on how to implement these provisions. Mr. Reagan took every bit of it and more; indeed, he pursued a different policy entirely. Instead of using the aid to pursue the seven objectives in the law, he is using it to pursue one: the defeat of the guerrillas. Instead of encouraging the Salvadoran government to make a good faith effort to open discussions with the left, he has supported the insistence by José Napoleón Duarte's government on a wholly disingenuous precondition to discussions: that the left lay down its arms.

So the Reagan administration should not be surprised if, in the next round of requests for aid, Congress limits the discretion and shortens the leash. We can then expect, before too long, to hear Secretary of State Alexander Haig complain that Congress is tying his hands, that those

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military options he is forever "ruling neither out nor in" are in fact ruled out. And then, when El Salvador goes the way of Cuba, the Reagan administration will blame Congress. Congress will blame the administration. And the country will blame them both.

There is a better way. Although Congress is far from unified, one can identify the seeds of an emerging policy toward El Salvador in the 1981 law and in the view of those who pressed for the amendment, including Representatives Michael Barnes, Stephen Solarz, and Jonathan Bingham, and Senators Paul Tsongas and Christopher Dodd. These seeds, properly tended, are the basis for a successful U.S. strategy.

The administration believes that there is one war in El Salvador--against the Communists--and that the United States should do all that is necessary to win it. Congress believes that there is a second war--against the repression by the right and the security forces--and that unless the Salvadoran government succeeds in winning this war, it will not win the one against the left. Congress is correct. The three seeds of the congressional strategy are conditionality, negotiations, and limits. Here is a look at each--along with the administration's objections, and a suggestion of what might happen if the administration stopped objecting to these ideas and started implementing them.

(1) Conditionality. Strict conditionality would mean a credible threat to reduce aid if concerns on human rights, etc., are not met. The administration objects to this because it does not want to desert or undermine a friend in a moment of crisis. In addition, the administration accepts the argument of El Salvador's military high command that to insist on disciplining the security forces is to risk dividing and weakening them. The result is that the administration is likely to continue to urge the military to clean up its act and the government to implement the reforms, but it will never threaten or reduce aid if progress is not evident in these areas.

The strategy of conditionality, like the strategy of nonviolence, cannot work if a government is implacable or without moral scruples; it would not work, for example, in Guatemala or the Soviet Union. But it can work--indeed, has worked--in El Salvador, because both the civilian leadership (Duarte) and the military leadership (Defense Minister José García and Junta member Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez) understand that reform helps the government and repression hurts it. Duarte can't control the repression because the Reagan administration has denied him the leverage necessary to command the respect of the military. García and Gutiérrez will not do it on their own because they are too busy fighting the war, and because they do not want to do anything that could risk demoralizing part of the military and perhaps even stimulating the emergence of new rightist paramilitary forces which could threaten their control. They will take such risks only if they are informed that they will risk even more--all U.S. and international support--if they do not. But as long as Mr. Haig is saying "we will do whatever is necessary" to defeat the left in El Salvador, he is giving the military a blank check and telling the government not to take the risk of disciplining its security forces.

García and Gutiérrez need to be pushed to do what they know they must do but will not do on their own. Let me cite some cases to show that a strategy of conditionality could work.

Barely two months after overthrowing the "old order" on October 15, 1979, the first revolutionary government in El Salvador came apart, unable to translate its lofty pronouncements for reform and social justice into policy. Few inside or outside El Salvador thought that the new Christian Democratic-military coalition would have any more success implementing the reforms or even surviving. But with firm pressure from the United States--the threat to suspend aid, the promise to increase it once the reforms were promulgated--the Salvadoran government announced the reforms and began the long, hard process of carrying them out. There had been warnings that the reforms would weaken and divide the government. Instead, the reforms weakened the left and helped the government widen its precarious base.

Even in the closing days of the Carter administration, the blunt instrument of conditionality succeeded in moving the military. In December 1980, after the wanton murder of six leftist democratic leaders and of four U.S. religious workers, President Carter suspended all economic and military aid until the military complied with the ultimatum of the Christian Democrats in the government, who had threatened to withdraw unless the violence was brought under control. The military agreed to investigate the murders of the Americans, to reorganize the government to give greater authority to Duarte, and to transfer or dismiss a dozen key military officers associated with the repression, including Vice Minister of Defense Nicholas Carranza. In return, the United States reactivated economic and "nonlethal" military aid, but withheld "lethal" military aid until the government took six additional specific steps in the murder investigation, including giving the United States a list of the security forces in the area. In early January 1981, after the government took these six steps, and after the leftist offensive on January 10 revealed that the left had covertly received large quantities of military supplies, the United States released $5 million of military aid. Not surprisingly, human-rights progress has halted since the Reagan administration discarded the lever of conditionality. But there continues to be evidence that conditionality can work. How else can one explain why the Salvadoran government has taken another step forward in the religious workers' case now that the Reagan administration is about to go to Capitol Hill to ask for more funding?

Conditionality can work, but four lessons based on the experience of the Carter years are worth noting. First, even though Salvadoran military chiefs--and perhaps even Duarte--will complain about having their arms twisted in public, the United States should never rule out public pressure even as it tries to do as much as possible privately. Second, after consulting with the Christian Democrats and others genuinely concerned about the repression, the United States should name specific indicators that would demonstrate the military's sincerity in gaining control of the violence. Such indicators could include: the dismissal of Colonel Francisco Antonio Moran, head of the Treasury Police; the abolition of the Treasury Police and the National Guard or their consolidation under the army; completion within six months of the trial of the six National Guardsmen

accused of murdering the religious workers; and reassignment--either out of the country or into prison--of a dozen or so of the most repressive officers. Third, each large step--like the agrarian reform--actually represents hundreds of microscopic steps that require constant prodding and pushing. There were something like 200 individual steps between the murder of the religious workers and the indictments of the six National Guardsmen. Such procrastination is infuriating, but the United States cannot afford to relax the pressure. Fourth, the United States should be realistic and recognize that success may be partial. Bargaining over repression is gruesome, but it is the only choice between giving up on the military or giving in to its atrocities.

(2) Negotiations. The closest both sides have come to talking was in September 1980, when Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas offered to mediate. Duarte quickly accepted on behalf of the government, and U.S. Ambassador Robert White used his influence to keep the military from vetoing it. The leftists, however, rejected the offer, insisting instead on two preconditions: first, they would negotiate only with the United States; and second, they would negotiate only if there were a restructuring of the armed forces and dismissal of García, Gutiérrez, and others. That was the state-of-play on negotiations until June 1981, when the international democratic left convinced the guerrillas that they could regain the political initiative if they dropped the two preconditions. They did so. The response of the government and the Reagan administration was to block negotiations by interposing a new precondition of their own: negotiations could begin only when the left gave up their arms.

The Reagan administration says it would be wrong to negotiate with--and thereby to legitimize--those who seek to change the government by violence. But that notion, applied consistently, would also preclude the United States from talking to the current government, which came to power by force. A more important (and sustainable) view is that the United States should not in these circumstances allow itself to appear as the obstacle to negotiations that could reduce violence. The administration's second objection is more pragmatic: if the Communists are permitted a power-sharing arrangement through negotiations, they will ultimately take over the government. However, if the administration believes that only the left can manipulate the negotiations, it is doing nothing more than confessing its own incompetence. Moreover, now that the left has dropped its preconditions, there is no reason why power-sharing should be the agenda--or even be on it.

The irony is that perhaps the only reason the left stays unified is our unwillingness to talk to them. Rather than fearing negotiations, we should welcome them as the best, and perhaps the only, way to move El Salvador from civil war toward credible elections, to divide the left between those civilians who believe in democracy and those guerrillas who do not, to discipline the excesses of both the security forces and the guerrillas, and to mend fences with Mexico and our European allies on this issue.

How can negotiations produce these outcomes? We are fortunate that the nominal head of the left is a Social Democrat, Guillermo Ungo, and of the government a Christian Democrat, Duarte. Potential international sponsors (or guarantors) of the left could be Mexico, France, the Social

Democratic parties of Germany, Spain, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic. The sponsors of the government could be the governments of Venezuela, the United States, and perhaps Costa Rica. We should exploit the fact that our friends--not Cuba or the Soviet Union--could serve as international sponsors of the left and could assert tutelary responsibility over the guerrillas, as we seek to do with the security forces. Such an alignment would strengthen moderates such as Duarte and Ungo.

The administration should embrace Mexican president José López Portillo's peace proposal of February 21 and use it as a means for bringing all sides to the bargaining table. López Portillo thinks there is room for compromise between those who argue for elections without negotiations and those who argue for negotiations without elections--and there is.

Negotiations could begin by seeking to build trust and confidence: cease-fires should be declared in certain areas and enforced by international peacekeeping forces, representing the international sponsors. The areas in the cease-fire zone should be gradually expanded. The second subject for negotiations should be the conditions necessary to guarantee a free and fair election. Given the current violence--for which the guerrillas share the responsibility--it is understandable, if not justified, that the democratic left is boycotting the March 28 elections. (Indeed, the Christian Democrats may be making an irrevocable mistake by participating in that election. Though it may not be the first time the right steals an election from them, it could well be the last.)

The left will insist on restructuring the armed forces to eliminate the repression. But that is equally in the U.S. interest. The Salvadoran government, however, should obtain, as a quid pro quo, an agreement from the left (or some portion of it) to participate in an electoral process and to disband at least one of its more atrocity-prone guerrilla groups.

Once negotiations become meaningful, if not before, the left will almost certainly split, and the military may do so as well. Indeed, some of the guerrilla leadership is likely to try to sabotage negotiations from the beginning. In an interview with a Mexican newspaper in 1980, Cayetano Carpio, the founder of the Faribundo Martí Popular Forces for Liberation, and now the top guerrilla leader, explained why he resigned from the Communist Party a decade before: "Because of the Cuban Revolution... I understood that the transformation in Latin America is by the path of war. The Salvadoran Communist Party held that the path was politics and that only at the end, when the final blow was to be aimed, should arms be used." Carpio's group has since boasted of assassinating a moderate education minister, a respected foreign minister (Mauricio Borgonovo, in 1977), and the Swiss chargé; of seizing the Costa Rican, Venezuelan, and French embassies; and of numerous bombings of electric power stations and buses. Joaquin Villalobos, founder of the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), in 1974 "executed" his chief rival in the ERP, Roque Dalton. Dalton's followers split to form a new guerrilla group, the FARN. The FARN's leader, Ernesto Jovel, was killed in a plane crash in mysterious circumstances in 1980, just after his group--allegedly the most barbaric--refused Castro's overtures to cooperate with the others. In an interview before his death, he held up a list of names of journalists and others whom he accused of favoring the government, and warned them that if they

did not leave the country soon, they "will be executed." Much of this sanguinary history is described in Gabriel Zaid's excellent article, "Enemy Colleagues: A Reading of the Salvadoran Tragedy," in the Winter 1982 issue of Dissent.

It is scarcely likely that such people will trust in a democratic framework. But if they do not, the negotiations ought to aim to constrict their power--and to encourage those who have swelled the guerrilla ranks in the last year because of repression to return home. The very fact of negotiations would begin this process. Just as important is the return to active political life of the democratic left. This can only be made possible by negotiations leading to an international authority to guarantee free, fair, and safe elections.

(3) Limits. What could be more self-defeating, Secretary of State Haig asked Robin McNeil on February 16, than to rule out military options? The answer to Haig's rhetorical question is the opposite of what he imagines. Haig should ask himself why it is that spokesmen for the left repeatedly invite the United States to send troops. The truth is that a U.S. combat presence would be an injection of nationalistic adrenalin for the guerrillas, making credible their assertions that they are really fighting U.S. imperialism. It would change the character of the war overnight, creating the basis for a long-term Communist-nationalist movement that could not be defeated. In any case, Congress would correctly reject it, and, under the War Powers Act, the troops would be out in 90 days. The United States would look either ignorant or impotent, depending on which end of Pennsylvania Avenue you work. By refusing to rule out military options, Haig buys only grief for himself, and gives a propaganda point to the guerrillas. To set limits on our involvement in El Salvador is in fact to enhance our capacity to influence developments there.

The three-part strategy of conditionality (linking our support to genuine progress in reducing the repression), negotiations (with the left under the sponsorship of Mexico, Venezuela, and other friends), and setting limits to our involvement can succeed. That strategy would have an additional dividend. The debate in the United States is shaping up between those who want to stop the Communists and those who do not want to support a repressive government. The strategy outlined here can serve as a bridge between those two positions, between Congress and the executive, and between the political parties. This could also help to gain support for the administration's Caribbean Basin Initiative.

The administration should urge negotiations immediately--before the March 28 elections. Afterward, it could be too late. If the Christian Democrats lose, we could find ourselves tied to an indefensible regime, not a more legitimate one, and the game will be up.

But if the administration holds to its current disastrous strategy and fails to grasp the thread of the policy emerging from Congress, the American people should know whom to blame if the left (or the extreme right) seizes power in El Salvador. It won't be Congress.

EXAMINING THE "CUBAN THREAT"

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In early March of 1982, the Reagan administration held a press briefing to present evidence that Nicaragua, with Cuban and Soviet backing, was assembling the largest military force in Central America. This buildup, according to administration officials, far exceeds Nicaragua's defensive needs and poses a major threat to the stability of the entire Central American region. The briefing was the first in what the administration says will be a series of briefings to present "overwhelming" and "irrefutable" evidence of Communist subversion in Central America.

Charges of Cuban-backed subversion are not new for the Reagan administration. What was unusual about this presentation was the fact that it was conducted by high-level members of the U.S. Central Intelligence and Defense Intelligence agencies. The decision to unleash the intelligence agencies--traditionally used only in times of grave crisis--was a testimony to how important the Reagan administration considers the issue of Cuban subversion, and how concerned it is about the American public's increasing skepticism about such charges. For the administration, Cuban subversion is not only the primary cause for the spiralling violence in Central America, it is also the only possible justification to a war-wary American public for making a major economic and military commitment to the region.

As important as it is, the administration has had a terrible time proving the existence of the Cuban threat. The white paper on El Salvador was soundly debunked last June. More recently, the administration was twice embarrassed after two alleged Nicaraguan guerrillas captured in El Salvador failed to confirm a link between Havana, the Sandinista regime, and the Salvadoran opposition.

In the aftermath of these public-relations debacles, critics of the administration are asking, if the Cuban and Nicaraguan involvement in El Salvador is so extensive, why has it been so difficult to prove?

In the end, the administration has been forced back to <u>ad hominem</u> and atavistic arguments about the Cuban threat. Nowhere was this clearer than in last October's "telegram" on renewed Cuban subversion in the hemisphere. Unlike the earlier white paper, this report contained absolutely no documentary evidence to support its charges of hemisphere-wide Cuban subversion. Instead it relied solely for proof on a detailed rendition of Havana's earlier history of violence and subversion in the hemisphere. The logic in this report, and the logic the administration has been forced to rely on time and again when its evidence has proved unsatisfactory, is no more sophisticated than: they did it once, therefore they <u>must</u> be doing it again.

It is time we took a critical look at these assumptions about Cuba and the threat it allegedly poses to U.S. interests. Specifically, three questions must be asked:

Question 1: What did the Cubans really do in Latin American during the 1960s?

Question 2: What are the Cubans really doing now?

Question 3: How important is the Cuban threat in Central America? Is the administration right when it claims that the upheaval in El Salvador is a "textbook case of indirect armed aggression by Communist power through Cuba"? Or has the administration allowed its fear of the Cuban threat to obscure the genuine and popular bases for the Salvadoran civil war as well as the means for resolving the conflict?

These questions must be answered before any clear calculation can be made of the U.S. interest in Central America.

Question 1:
What Did the Cubans Really Do During the 1960s?

The common perception is that the Cubans spent all of the 1960s and a good deal of the 1970s trying to subvert legitimate regimes around the world. Although the Castro regime is best remembered for its revolutionary rhetoric--notably Fidel Castro's pledge to "turn the Andes into the Sierra Maestra of Latin America," and Che Guevara's call to create "two, three, many Vietnams"--the export of revolution was only one brief and comparatively limited phase of Cuban foreign policy.

During the early years the Castro regime devoted a majority of its energies to building normal diplomatic relations with its hemispheric neighbors. Cuban leaders visited all of the major capitals and regularly attended meetings of the OAS. At a 1959 meeting of OAS ministers, Castro even proposed a plan for regional economic development in which the United States would underwrite the Latin American economies with a grant of $30 billion over the next ten years. According to one observer close to Castro, the Cuban leader was "very enthusiastic about his private Alliance for Progress scheme." At the time Castro was seriously considering "staying on the American side of the fence as the sponsor of this [plan] and as the leader of a Nasser-type revolution."

It is also true that during these early years the Castro regime provided safe haven and some aid to a number of Caribbean exile groups. In 1959 Cuban-based exiles launched attacks on Haiti, Panama, and the Dominican Republic--all failed. But it must be emphasized that Havana's support for these adventures was very limited. It must also be recognized that giving aid to revolutionaries seeking to overthrow dictatorships is a longstanding tradition for Latin America's democratic left. Costa Rica's Figueres, Guatemala's Arévalo, even Venezuela's Betancourt--Washington's number-one ally in the Alliance for Progress--all played similar roles during the late 1940s years of the Caribbean Legion.

The breakdown of Cuba's diplomatic relations in the hemisphere was due to a variety of factors including Havana's diplomatic bumbling, a limited amount of Cuban subversion, strong pressures from Washington, and a right-wing turn in the hemisphere. By 1963 every major state in Latin America except Mexico had turned against the Castro regime. It was at this time that Havana turned its full energies to the export of revolution. What had earlier been a temperamental and ideological commitment now became essential to the republic's survival.

Even then, Cuba's actual military commitments to continental revolution remained extremely limited. According to a 1967 study made for the U.S. House of Representatives, only "four instances of direct Cuban support to insurgent groups in Latin America" could be proven--in total no more than 200 Cuban guerrillas and several tons of weapons for the entire decade. Cuba's on-island training for Latin American revolutionaries was comparably small. According to Defense Intelligence Agency testimony in 1971, only an estimated 2,500 Latin American leftists were trained in Cuba during the entire 1961-69 period. This was a far cry from the 1960s estimates of 1,500 to 2,500 a year. It must also be recognized that Havana's attempts to export revolution were not only small, they were also utterly ineffective. Not one Cuban-inspired, -backed, or -trained guerrilla group ever succeeded in taking power. The Cuban threat during the 1960s never lived up to either Havana's claims or Washington's fears.

Given the strength of Havana's ideological commitment to the export of revolution, the question must be asked, why were Cuba's actual efforts so limited? The Castro regime suffered from some very real material constraints. The Cuban economy was weak. There was very little foreign exchange. Cuba had no armaments industry and only very limited transport capability. Finally, Moscow opposed Havana's attempt to export revolution. Conditions in Latin America were not ripe for revolution, the Kremlin's theorists argued. Moreover, by the late 1960s Moscow was more interested in opening diplomatic and trading relations with the Latin American regimes than overthrowing them.

After 1968, Havana abandoned even this limited support for Latin American guerrillas. Military defeat after military defeat culminating with Che's death in Bolivia in late 1967 convinced the Cuban leadership that the strategy of armed struggle was not working. At the same time, the Cubans were feeling increasingly strong pressures from their Soviet allies to abandon their adventurist policies. By the late 1960s, the Cubans could also no longer afford an independent foreign policy--even one as limited as the mid-1960s efforts to export revolution. Failures in its domestic development programs demanded the republic's full resources and Castro's complete attention.

Finally, with the appearance of a leftist-oriented military junta in Peru in 1968 and the election of Salvador Allende in Chile two years later, new policy options became available. These developments placed a new premium on the issue of national sovereignty. It was one thing for Havana to ignore the sanctity of national boundaries when it had no diplomatic relations to maintain. But with a growing number of states seeking to normalize relations, Havana had to respect conventional international behavior.

By mid-1969, Havana had forsworn the export of revolution and was again expressing interest in renewed diplomatic and trading relations with its Latin American neighbors. Where once Castro had condemned Soviet overtures to Venezuela and Colombia as collusion and betrayal of internationalist solidarity, the newly pragmatic leader had come to consider links to Latin America a necessity if Cuba were ever to overcome its dependence on the Soviet Union and its underdevelopment.

Havana's new commitment to diplomacy was accompanied by a cut-off of aid to the Latin American guerrilla movements. Given the limited amount of aid sent to begin with, this was, of course, difficult to document. Nevertheless, a Senate Foreign Relations Committee report issued in 1971 described Cuban support for Latin American insurgency at the time as "minimal." Perhaps a better indicator of the shift in Cuban policies is the response of Havana's previous allies. Early in 1970, Venezuelan guerrilla leader Douglas Bravo attacked Castro by name and accused the Cubans of abandoning the continental revolution in favor of their own selfish concerns about economic development.

Bravo's charges notwithstanding, Havana's decision to abandon the export of revolution did not mean that Cuba had abandoned all interest in the region. If anything, after 1970 Cuban aid to Latin America actually increased. The difference was that Cuba's new aid programs were predominantly humanitarian rather than military, and they were directed to official state governments rather than guerrilla movements. Cuba sent earthquake relief to Peru, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala. By the mid-1970s, Cuban technical advisers as well as hundreds of doctors, teachers, and construction workers were involved in development programs in Jamaica, Guyana, Grenada, and St. Lucia.

Even with all of these humanitarian gestures, the image of the Cuban guerrilla was not easily shaken. With time, however, and repeated promises from Havana that no Latin American government had anything to fear from the Cuban military, efforts to woo its neighbors began to pay off. One by one, Havana's earlier enemies abandoned the OAS sanctions and reopened diplomatic and trading relations with the Castro regime. By the summer of 1974, even the United States, under the leadership of Henry Kissinger, began to make overtures toward rapprochement with the Castro regime. To all observers it looked like the days of guerrilla warfare were finally over.

The commitment of some 15,000 Cuban troops to Angola by mid-1976 caught everyone by surprise. The Ford administration immediately broke off negotiations, saying the Cubans had obviously lied about wanting readmission to the arena of normal diplomacy. While Havana's links to the MPLA could be traced back to the mid-1960s, Washington was wrong when it claimed that the Angolan involvement was a return to the export of revolution. In Angola, the Castro regime was not trying to subvert a sovereign state. Instead it was supporting a movement which, if not yet sovereign, was recognized as legitimate by a good number of liberal European states and the mainstream Organization of African Unity.

Even more important, most of Havana's new-found allies did not think of the Angolan involvement as a return to the export of revolution. Instead of undercutting Havana's international standing, it actually improved

it. In the aftermath of the Cuban-backed MPLA victory, Cuba was elected chairman of the Nonaligned Movement. The Ethiopian involvement in mid-1977 was also not a return to the export of revolution. Instead of intervening in another state's affairs, Cuba was helping defend a sovereign state against an intervention from Somalia. The Cuban involvement in Ethiopia again received the endorsement of the OAU, although soon thereafter several states began to express concern about the continued presence of some 35,000 Cuban troops in Africa.

The revolution in Nicaragua offered Havana a new set of opportunities and a new set of dilemmas. The Castro regime's enmity toward the Somoza dictatorship can be traced back to the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion when Luis Somoza--father of Anastasio--lent his ports for the launching of the anti-Castro exiles. During the mid-1960s, Havana had tried to return the favor giving training and a limited amount of arms to the fledgling Sandinistas. Thus there was both history and emotion to bind the Castro regime to the Sandinista cause. But by 1978 there was also good reason for Cuba to exercise restraint. The Castro regime was on record as having abandoned the export of revolution to Latin America. Should there be even a hint of Cuban subversion in Nicaragua, Cuba could well jeopardize a decade's worth of hard-won diplomatic gains.

As a result, the Cubans played only a limited role in the Sandinista revolution. According to a CIA report issued in May 1979, Havana sent the Nicaraguans only two to three planeloads of light weapons. The Cubans sent no troops to fight in the civil war. During the last months of the final offensive, the Castro regime may have escalated its commitment, sending both military advisers and several large arms shipments. It must be remembered, however, that at the time Cuba's backing for the Sandinistas was far outweighed by the amount of support provided by such liberal regimes as Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Mexico. Cuba's diplomatic standing in the hemisphere did not suffer.

By the end of the decade, with 35,000 troops stationed in Africa, another 10,000 civilian advisers stationed worldwide, the chairmanship of the Nonaligned Movement, correct diplomatic relations with almost every state in the hemisphere, and victories in Angola, Ethiopia, and Nicaragua, the Castro regime had achieved an international reach that it could only have dreamed of during the days of revolutionary export. All of this had been attained with a careful eye toward diplomatic conventions and international opinion. Whatever their role during the radical days of the mid-1960s, the Cubans were no longer revolutionary outlaws.

Question 2:
What Are the Cubans Really Doing Now?

In February 1981, the new Reagan administration issued its white paper on El Salvador. In it, the administration charged that the spiralling violence in El Salvador was the result of Cuban-sponsored insurgency rather than genuine popular resistance to El Salvador's military-dominated regime. Specifically, the white paper charged the Cubans with providing arms, political and strategic direction, military training, and sophisticated propaganda support to the guerrillas, all intended to "widen and intensify the conflict" in El Salvador, "greatly increasing the suffering of

the Salvadoran people and deceiving much of the world about the true nature of the revolution." The white paper further asserted that El Salvador's was not an isolated case of Communist subversion in the Third World. It called the events in El Salvador "strikingly familiar" and part of a "pattern we have seen before, to be specific in Angola and Ethiopia."

It is difficult to determine the extent of Cuba's actual involvement in the Salvadoran civil war. The Castro regime has repeatedly denied the Reagan administration's charges of Cuban subversion, calling them "absolute lies," and levelled countercharges of its own that Washington was using the Cuban threat as a pretext for hostile actions in El Salvador and against Nicaragua and Cuba.

There is good reason to be skeptical of the Castro regime's denials, since Havana denied its participation in the Angolan, Ethiopian, and Nicaraguan conflicts with equal vehemence. Yet, despite the importance of the issue, the fact remains that there is little evidence to support the Reagan administration's charges or Havana's denials.

The Reagan administration was right to suggest that there are precedents of Cuban overseas involvements that could shed some light on Cuban policies in El Salvador. The administration was wrong, however, when it pointed to the Cuban involvements in Angola and Ethiopia as the appropriate precedents. In neither Angola nor Ethiopia were the Cubans involved in "a well-coordinated, covert effort to bring about the overthrow of [an] established government and to impose in its place a Communist regime with no popular support," as the white paper described Cuba's efforts in El Salvador. It must be remembered that in Angola, the established government--the Portuguese regime--withdrew voluntarily, and Cuban military support was used by the MPLA to help defeat alternative guerrilla groups vying for power and their foreign backers from South Africa and Zaire. In Ethiopia, the Communist coup came three years before Cuban troops were ever committed, and Cuban military aid was used to repulse an invasion from neighboring Somalia. Neither of these experiences fits the white paper's charges or the situation in El Salvador.

A much more appropriate precedent would be Cuba's participation in the Nicaraguan civil war. In Nicaragua, covert Cuban military aid as well as Cuban political, military, and strategic advice helped bring about the overthrow of an established--if illegitimate--regime and helped impose in its place a Socialist, if not traditionally Communist, regime.

The similarity between the white paper's charges and the Nicaraguan situation, however, ends there. The Nicaraguan revolution was not the result of Cuban or any other externally-sponsored insurgency. It was a grass-roots struggle against a repressive and increasingly illegitimate regime which received military aid, advice, and political support from a large number of political actors--both Communist and non-Communist--including Mexico, Venezuela, Panama, Costa Rica, and Cuba. Furthermore, Cuban materiel commitments to Nicaragua were nowhere near the level of massive arms shipments described in the white paper.

According to a May 1979 CIA report, the Cubans did not make more of a commitment to the Nicaraguan civil war because of their fear that any greater involvement would lead to a confrontation with Washington and jeopardize their already delicate political relations in Latin America. There is little reason deductively, and very little evidence to suggest, that Havana would significantly alter its modus operandi in El Salvador. If anything, there were more reasons for restraint in El Salvador. Washington under Ronald Reagan was obviously much more hostile to the Castro regime and the Salvadoran opposition, and thus much more likely to take any suggestion of Cuban involvement in El Salvador as cause for confrontation. Cuba's Latin American allies would also be much less tolerant of a Cuban involvement in El Salvador. Unlike the Nicaraguan civil war, in which every major liberal regime supported the Sandinistas, the Salvadoran civil war split the region's ranks, with Mexico and Panama unofficially backing the opposition and Costa Rica and Venezuela strongly backing the junta.

Finally, the Salvadoran opposition is a less likely candidate for large-scale Cuban support. In Nicaragua, Havana was very cautious about extending aid to the Sandinistas, requiring that they overcome internal political problems, form a united front with members of the Nicaraguan business and land-owning communities, and build a broad base of popular support before endorsing a military struggle and before sending any military aid. The Salvadoran opposition is today much less assured of solid popular support than the Sandinistas during their final offensive. If the Cubans are following the pattern established in Nicaragua, they would counsel the Salvadoran guerrillas to hold back until they are better organized and assured of greater popular support before launching their final offensive. Cuban arms would be withheld until Havana determined that the time was right for the Salvadoran revolution.

This is not to suggest that the Cubans are not sending some aid to the Salvadoran guerrillas. There is no doubt that Havana is strongly committed to the Salvadoran opposition and has given advice and training to its leaders over the years. Certainly Havana's self-image as the vanguard of the Latin American revolution, as well as the personal leanings of its revolutionary leadership, would require as much. And it is possible that extraordinary circumstances may have forced Havana to overcome its recently-acquired natural caution and send arms to support the Salvadoran opposition even if it considered the situation in El Salvador somewhat premature. Castro may have been persuaded by the Salvadoran opposition's arguments that this is their last chance for victory given the Reagan election and the massive increase in U.S. arms deliveries to the Salvadoran junta.

But even if Havana has sent, and is sending, the Salvadoran guerrillas military aid, logic, the available evidence, and the Nicaraguan precedent suggest that the Reagan administration is wrong when it describes the Salvadoran civil war as a "textbook case of indirect armed aggression by Communist powers through Cuba." The Castro regime can no more create the conditions for civil strife in El Salvador than it can guarantee the Salvadoran opposition ultimate victory. The Castro regime learned two important lessons in the late 1960s: First, revolutions cannot be exported, they can only be aided and abetted. Second, for the sake of its own

survival, Cuba must be very careful about which movements it supports and under what conditions.

Question 3:
How Important Is the Cuban Threat in Central America?

A review of Cuban policy over the past two decades suggests that Cuba is not and has never been a major cause for revolution in the hemisphere. The Castro regime was never committed to indiscriminate subversion or violence. And in recent years Havana has been more interested in maintaining good diplomatic relations than in fomenting revolutions. Over the last decade, the vast majority of its overseas commitments have been overt, humane, and constructive.

Even when Havana has decided to support or export revolutions, it has never had the means in terms of money, arms, or transport to define the outcome--at least not alone. Washington consistently overestimates Havana's capabilities. In 22 years, the Castro regime has supported only two successful revolutions: Angola and Nicaragua. Both of these revolutions received a significant amount of international support from a wide variety of mainstream, even liberal, states.

Finally, those revolutions that have succeeded with Cuban backing have not turned immediately into Cuban or Soviet pawns. Despite our worst fears, the MPLA victory in Angola has not been that costly to the United States. Southern Africa has not gone Communist. Angola has not turned into a military base for the Soviets. Gulf Oil rigs continue to produce in Cabinda while Cuban troops stand guard.

It is still too early to determine the costs of the Nicaraguan revolution. Nevertheless, before the Reagan administration started threatening the Sandinista regime, Managua seemed quite interested in maintaining correct and even cordial relations with Washington. The Cubans even urged their Nicaraguan allies to maintain their economic and political ties with the West in general and the United States in particular. It is not that Havana has suddenly become pro-United States. It has not. Rather, Cuba's repeated economic failures and crushing dependence on the Soviets have made Havana realistic about the alternatives open to small states. These states, Havana has been saying, cannot afford the luxury of opposing the United States.

The events of recent weeks evoke more than a passing sense of déja vù. During the 1960s, the Cuban threat was the primary focus of U.S. policy toward Latin America. Washington spent millions of dollars arming and training Latin American militaries in counterinsurgency and domestic pacification techniques. There was irony in this response, for despite U.S. allegations (and Cuban claims) of a hemisphere-wide Cuban threat, there were never more than a few hundred Cubans fighting in all of Latin America in the 1960s. But the effects of Washington's overreaction were less ironic than they were tragic. Our efforts to protect the struggling Latin American democracies actually hastened their demise in many cases. The Communist threat became the justification for military coups in many countries. Today's persistent repression under the military dictatorships of Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay makes the cure seem deadlier than the disease.

We are now in danger of repeating this mistake. Such hardline policies will be even harder to resist, for today there really is a substantial Cuban presence in the region--several thousand advisers in Nicaragua, Grenada, and St. Lucia. Havana is also most likely sending a limited amount of military aid to the guerrillas in El Salvador and possibly even Guatemala. Nevertheless, Cuba is not the cause for the current instability in the region.

The United States can afford a tempered response. There is no need to overreact to the Cuban presence. Indeed, the costs will be high. Much of the current instability is the result of a similar decision 15 years ago to side with the Latin American right. These regimes used the Cuban threat as an excuse to avoid making the economic and social reforms that would have guaranteed human rights and stability based on governmental legitimacy rather than military force.

There may be more opportunities for the United States in the region if Washington adopts a course of active competition rather than reactive return to military containment. Our technical know-how, investment and trade, and our commitment to democracy and human rights should be more effective in winning allies and undercutting the power of enemies.

Such measures will not be easy for the Reagan administration. The temptation to overreact is great. Nevertheless, this is a mistake. For while the Cuban presence in the region is clear, it is not necessarily a present danger to the United States. The real danger to both democracy and long-range peace may well lie in choosing military strength over the strength of negotiated reason, both at home and in Central America.

U.S. POLICY IN EL SALVADOR: A PROPOSAL

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This paper will focus on U.S. policy toward El Salvador, because it is central to a solution in Central America. If the Salvadoran civil war is ended, appropriate U.S. responses to the serious problems of the other Central American countries will be made much easier--in particular the related areas of policy involving Nicaragua and Guatemala. Conversely, as has already been demonstrated, a worsening in El Salvador has a clear adverse effect on the formulation of U.S. policy toward the other countries in the region.

The conflict in El Salvador is not, as implied by some recent films (e.g., El Salvador, Another Vietnam) and some media coverage, a war between a murderous government and noble peasants, nor is it simply an externally-imposed and -directed Soviet-Cuban-Nicaraguan effort at subversion. It is rather a conflict that involves at least four general tendencies and views of the world.

(1) On the right, the upper classes and the bulk of the armed forces see the guerrilla threat as Communist-directed, opposed to their traditional values and those of the West, and aimed ultimately at the establishment of a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship. They are willing to resist this threat by force of arms, exercised by both military and paramilitary groups, and any other means necessary, including--according to Roberto d'Aubuisson's recent speeches--the use of napalm on guerrilla-held areas.

(2) In the center is the Christian Democratic Party, headed by Napoleon Duarte, three times elected mayor of San Salvador, and almost certainly the victor of the 1972 presidential elections. His party supports the reforms adopted after the October 1979 coup, especially the agrarian reform, and looks to a solution based on a PDC victory in the March 28 elections and the subsequent evolution of El Salvador along the lines of Venezuela in the early 1960s--i.e., the gradual domestication of the military, the discrediting of the guerrillas, and ultimately the reincorporation of a large segment of the FDR-FMLN into a functioning system of competitive elections, social reform, and constitutional government.

(3) On the center-left are the civilian members of the Frente Democrático Revolucionario (FDR), headed by Guillermo Ungo. They include the Social Democratic MNR, ex-Christian Democrats such as Ruben Zamora, and other individuals and groups, mostly reformist/democrat in orientation. They favor a mixed economy, some nationalization, and nonalignment in international relations.

(4) On the left are the guerrilla groups, including the FPL of Salvador Cayetano Carpio, the FARN of Fermán Cienfuegos, the Salvadoran

Communist Party, the Revolutionary Army of the People (ERP), and the Central American Workers Revolutionary Party (PRTC). They are linked together in the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) but seem to control different areas of rebel-held territory, although they are represented in the Political-Diplomatic Commission along with the FDR, and in the case of Cienfuegos have stated that "at this historical stage" they accept "the unified conclusion" for El Salvador of a coalition government, a mixed economy, and nonalignment (Washington Post, March 8, 1982). The FMLN groups have a history of violence over the last ten years, including the assassination of the leader of one of their own groups, and the kidnapping and murder of government officials, which undermines the credibility of their stated commitment to democratic government if they take power.

The problem for U.S. policy is that the extremists on both left and right believe that they have the military resources to impose their views by force, while the two democratic groups are neither willing nor able to use violence to achieve victory. The democratic groups are split, with the Christian Democrats allied with the military and the FDR in alliance with the FMLN. Thus, as the current issue of the Socialist magazine Dissent argues, each side is a "mirror-image" of the other, and no legitimate political elite can claim the right to rule El Salvador. (The March 28 elections that began as an attempt to produce a legitimate government were discredited by the evident threat from rightist violence to any left candidate.)

The Best Outcome in El Salvador

In the light of this analysis, it seems that the best outcome from the point of view both of the Salvadorans and the U.S. national interest would be the reestablishment of the alliance of the center and center-left (Duarte and Ungo) that won the 1972 elections, and the isolation and, hopefully, ultimate disarming of the violentistas of the right and left. This would merit support from U.S. public opinion and Congress, offer legitimacy and popular support, and, through a process of social reform including completion of the agrarian reform, blunt the appeal of the extreme left and the corresponding violent responses of the right. It would provide an example to Guatemala, reinforce the claims of the civilian government in Honduras, and exert a positive influence for pluralist democracy in the continuing internal debate within the Sandinista leadership about the future evolution of Nicaragua.

Is this a workable objective or simply a utopian dream? How does one get from here to there? Neither the blank check for the Salvadoran military advocated by the Reagan administration, nor the immediate cut-off of military and economic assistance to the Duarte junta mandated by the Studds Amendment will achieve this--indeed either solution makes likely a continuation or increase of violence. The objective of U.S. policy should be to achieve a deescalation of violence, a recognition by each side that total victory is not possible, and the establishment of conditions which will make it possible for the Salvadorans to choose a freely elected government. To do this, there must be further involvement of outside elements, particularly those that can contain the violence--i.e., a peacekeeping force. Four neighboring Latin American countries

have the interest, the political clout, and the credibility to help to bring about such a solution: Mexico, Venezuela, Panama, and Costa Rica. Those four countries might be involved in a mediation effort that would make an attempt to bring about a cease-fire and a peaceful solution. Their effort should include from the outset the intention to introduce a peacekeeping force into El Salvador to guarantee security and make it possible for free elections to take place. The expenses of the force, which would not need to be large but should be stationed at strategic positions in the country, would be borne by the OAS, but it would not be formally subject to OAS direction in terms of day-to-day policy. The peacekeeping force would also be supplemented by international observer teams before, during, and after the elections. A key role would be played by Mexico, but if it refused to participate, France might be an alternative power that could provide the necessary political balance for the peacekeeping and mediation effort.

The U.S. role would involve an expansion of economic aid and the exertion of pressure on the military, involving carrots (a massive program of scholarships abroad for the top military leaders) and sticks (threats of sharp reduction and ultimate elimination of military aid--due to congressional and public opposition to an indefinite and escalating involvement). It would be linked with a shift in U.S.-Nicaraguan policy along the lines of the current Mexican proposals for a mutual deescalation and termination of the recently initiated "covert" but widely publicized CIA activities, and it would also conceivably assist in persuading the Guatemalans to moderate counterproductive policies such as those of President Lucas García before his overthrow.

The results of the March 28th elections obviously have considerable bearing on the feasibility of this proposal. It would be much more difficult to carry out if there is a victory by the right-wing parties. If the Christian Democrats win a majority or near-majority, there could be a political base for such a solution.

Worst Outcome and U.S. Policy

The worst scenario would be the advent of a Marxist-Leninist government in El Salvador that is closely linked to, and dependent economically and militarily upon, the Soviet Union, followed by an escalation of the civil war in Guatemala now supplied from El Salvador, and a consequent heightening of tension and political polarization in Mexico. This would leave the United States government with a choice of (a) providing military assistance to the Guatemalan government, which has had one of the worst human-rights records in the world, thus creating deep domestic divisions and discrediting the United States internationally, or (b) not giving aid, with the possible result of a victory for the left in Guatemala after a prolonged popular war intensified by Guatemala's racial divisions, and possibly a resulting rightist-military coup in Mexico, accompanied by widespread guerrilla activities, and a contest for control of the Chiapas oil fields. (The domino theory is not all that inapplicable in Central America.) This would leave Honduras and Costa Rica isolated and threatened and could involve the United States in continuing efforts to overthrow the leftist regimes, or at least defend the non-leftists against subversion from their neighbors. Clearly it is in the U.S. interest to avoid such an outcome.

How to do so? Assuming that the "best-case" scenario is not workable, what alternative policies can be pursued? This would depend again on the March 28th elections. If the Christian Democrats win, continued support for their efforts to control the military, combined with offers to negotiate the conditions for the 1983 presidential elections with the left opposition, would help to shift the balance of power in the government toward the center and promote the conditions for a possible rapprochement with like-minded members of the opposition. If the right wing wins or a stalemate ensues as a result of the election, U.S. support would have to be less enthusiastic and we might be obliged by public opinion to reconsider our position. If it then appeared that the left was about to take over the country, the United States might be faced with a choice between sending in a military force with or without OAS support--which would run into congressional and popular opposition and perhaps a congressional veto under the War Powers Act--or attempting to strike a deal with the left in the hope that they may be induced to deliver on their promises of nonalignment and a coalition government, using promises of economic aid in an effort to keep the lines open and strengthen the elements of the FDR-FMLN who are not hostile to the United States. Again Mexico's role would appear to be crucial to the effort to encourage populist nationalism rather than Marxism-Leninism. The Europeans might also be involved as they are in Nicaragua--although, given the deep divisions of popular opinion in El Salvador, the foreign role would be a difficult one, and the temptation to back counterrevolutionaries considerable. Any Salvadoran government, however, would need economic assistance, and would be concerned not to provoke such a U.S. response, so that there is hope for an effort at a more flexible policy. A similar policy in Nicaragua along the lines of the Mexican proposal, involving a limitation on outside arms and guerrilla support in exchange for U.S. economic aid and control of the exiles, could be used to demonstrate that the United States can live with nationalist-populist nonaligned regimes provided they do not engage in the export of revolution.

Neither Best nor Worst

In all likelihood, neither the best nor the worst scenario will be played out in Central America. Rather, it looks now as if we are in for a long and frustrating conflict in El Salvador between a determined guerrilla force and an equally determined military, backed by a Reagan administration that has decided that it will not "lose" El Salvador. If that is the way things go, a break in the present situation may not take place until after the U.S. presidential election of 1984, which may be the first time that the exploration and development of alternative policies along the lines sketched above may be possible--not exactly the most propitious date for the initiation of a new approach.

As far as the current administration is concerned, it appears that the best and worst scenarios for El Salvador are not the same as those sketched out in this paper. The best outcome in the view of the Reagan administration would appear to be a victory by the Salvadoran military, bolstered by U.S. arms and training, over guerrilla forces that have been weakened by interdiction of arms flows to them--followed by a centrist government that consolidates but does not press forward with the reforms already carried out. The worst outcome, it appears, is any participation

by the left in Salvadoran government--on the theory that a coalition government would provide the basis for the ultimate victory of the left, through a coup, manipulated elections, or a plebiscite. It is because of what I take to be their inaccurate and unrealistic perceptions and projections for El Salvador and Central America that the administration's policy is in such disarray at present.

LIVING WITH CENTRAL AMERICA

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There is the question of who rules in El Salvador and Nicaragua. And there is the question of the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Although these issues overlap, they are not identical. What distinguishes them is at least as important as what unites them. Yet it is the overlap that threatens to involve the United States as a major actor in yet another third-world guerrilla war.

This is a war that, like the earlier one in Vietnam, we are entering without a clear-cut set of goals. Rather, we are acting upon an inherited set of assumptions, some of which may have been relevant in an earlier period, few of which offer useful guides to the dilemmas we face today in Central America. Among those assumptions are the following:

* That the revolutionary movements in Central America are fed primarily not by local causes, but are instigated and orchestrated from abroad.

* That the prime instigator is that least-revolutionary of all societies, the Soviet Union.

* That should these revolutionary movements come to power, they will do the bidding of the Kremlin at the expense of the interests of their own nations.

* That such nations are in a position to do grievous harm to the United States.

* That, therefore, it must be an objective of national policy to prevent, by whatever means necessary, radical third-world movements from attaining power, particularly in the Western Hemisphere.

These assumptions have been questioned many times over. The effective refutation of them is what drained away public support for the war in Vietnam, and destroyed the popular consensus that had supported both U.S. involvement in the war and, beyond that, much of U.S. cold-war diplomacy. There is no need here to attempt to refute those assumptions. That they again need to be refuted at all is not a testimony to the strength of arguments behind them. Rather, it indicates the inability of U.S. foreign-policy elites to undertake the necessary and long-overdue reexamination of U.S. interests in a world greatly transformed from the time when they were formulated.

Let us, for the sake of this discussion, posit a different set of assumptions.

* That neither the United States nor the Soviet Union can control third-world revolutionary movements, and that such movements, on assuming power, will behave in ways that further national needs--as such needs are defined by the elites that determine them.

* That their primary objective is independence and development, and that their relationship to the great powers will depend primarily on the ability and willingness of those powers to further the above objectives.

* That the internal development of these nations, however interesting or dramatic, cannot affect--except perhaps in a very few special cases (such as Saudi Arabia)--the security interests of the great powers.

* That, therefore, while the great powers, and particularly the United States, might reasonably want to influence events in these countries to conform to their economic interests or political views, such a desire must not be allowed to assume greater proportions than the stake at issue.

* That the stake at issue is primarily one of influence--of how a great power seeks to reassure itself that it is still predominant, despite economic woes and insubordinate ally-dependents--rather than of security.

* Finally, that the security aspect not be allowed to be introduced artificially--particularly in the Caribbean--by attempts of one great power to gain military bases within the rival power's clearly delineated sphere of influence.

These being the parameters, what, then, is the best outcome we can realistically hope for in Central America?

* That the revolutionary movement under way is able to take place under conditions of democratic pluralism throughout the area.

* That the United States will be viewed as a friendly, or at least benign, helper rather than as an enemy.

* That the tide almost certain to sweep through all of Central America not affect the political stability of Mexico.

* That we have relations with these countries no worse than those we have evolved with Mexico, a nation which, after all, went through similar upheavals in the early decades of this century and which was under threat of U.S. invasion as late as 1927.

How can U.S. policy contribute to that goal?

* By providing economic assistance to democratic governments.

* By using U.S. influence to support democratic, rather than authoritarian or military, elements within governments.

* By seeking negotiation between rival forces in Central America just as it does in the Middle East.

* By not providing direct military assistance to authoritarian regimes for internal use.

* By making clear to both the Cubans and the Soviets that we will not tolerate hostile military bases in Central America.

What is the worst we can reasonably fear?

* That the war in El Salvador will escalate, that the government forces will be unable to subdue or even match the rebels, and that the Reagan administration, like the Johnson administration in Vietnam, will be saddled with either honoring a foolish commitment at incalculable cost, or facing a humiliating defeat.

* That the United States, even if U.S. troops are not sent to Central America, will be unable to extricate itself from an endeavor that will alienate its democratic allies.

* That the attempt to repress, through force of arms, radical elements in reform movements will lend legitimacy to the most extreme and radical elements, thereby defeating the democratic evolution that should be our objective.

How to avoid that outcome? By insulating the upheaval in Central America from the U.S.-Soviet rivalry.

The crucial point about Central America is that nothing that happens there--including any kind of revolution or social upheaval--need affect U.S. security. The only feasible exception is the establishment of a Soviet military base. Even such a base may not seriously affect security. But it would have the appearance of doing so, and it would certainly cause a major convulsion in U.S. public opinion. For this reason it is essential that the Soviets be put on warning that they cannot, under any circumstances, be allowed to set up a military base in Central America. We should not have tolerated a Soviet base in Cuba; we certainly cannot allow duplicates in Central America.

Beyond that, from a security point of view, it does not much matter what happens in the area. We would like governments there to be democratic --although in the past we have been content that they be undemocratic so long as they were friendly. We should aid them economically if they show a serious desire to be aided. At the least, we should not stand in the way of the reform that has been so long delayed that, as many in the area have come to believe, the revolutionary option seems the only alternative to the status quo. We should not, by our behavior, reinforce that belief and thus make it inevitable that the authoritarianism of the left succeeds the authoritarianism of the right.

CENTRAL AMERICA 1982

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Central America is an agonizing issue for the United States because of the national-security dimension--i.e., its perceived connection with the Soviet global threat--and the essence of the policy problem is how best to come to grips with that element. Unfortunately, the logic of the administration's conceptions, premises, and assumptions about the Central American turmoil--and the consequent "bottom lines" it has drawn--can only lead to deeper U.S. involvement and an expansion of the crisis to intractable proportions. Present strategy, in short, does not promise to be the best way to meet the security concern itself.

The administration sees in the insurgencies in El Salvador and Guatemala--and in the policy and position of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua--a direct challenge to the national-security interest of the United States, i.e., a Soviet/Cuban effort to expand their influence and control to the mainland. Its conclusion is that this effort must be contained and the line drawn.

In making containment and "line drawing" a centerpiece of its policy, the administration has to be convinced of a prior set of interrelated premises about the world, international dynamics, and Soviet motivations, which may be described as follows:

* The greatest threat to the survival of the United States lies in the expansion of Soviet power;

* The Soviets are highly motivated to extend their control to other areas, with world domination as their goal;

* They are on the march now, with expansionism in a dangerous phase at present because of new Soviet military strength and growing internal problems;

* The establishment of additional Marxist regimes in the world adds to Soviet power globally;

* The Soviets, through and with the Cubans, are particularly on the move in Latin America; and Cuba, with Soviet support, is systematically expanding its capacity to project military power beyond its own shores;

* Cuba and the Soviets effectively control the Sandinista regime and are exploiting Nicaragua as a base for the further export of subversion and armed intervention to the rest of Central America;

* If the insurgencies which the Cubans and Soviets are supporting seize power elsewhere, the effect will be cumulative (dominoes), and the result will be "totalitarian regimes so linked to the Soviet Union that they become factors in the military balance" (the quotation is from Thomas Enders' testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, February 1, 1982);

* The decisive battle is thus El Salvador, and the line has to be drawn there.

For the administration, the real analogy to El Salvador is not Vietnam, but Greece, 1946-48.

The flip side of these security concerns, however, is the fact that the turmoil is being played out in terms of indigenous problems and strains, through inequitable political and social systems, and against a long, bitter history of injustice, brutality, violence, repression, and the savaging of the innocent. This immensely complicates the policy task. First, it makes any simplistic conception of the situation as a pure red and white, East-West struggle between "moderates" and "radicals" inaccurate and inadequate. Secondly, it introduces a whole series of considerations having to do with equity, socioeconomic reform, human rights, justice and self-determination which are discontinuous with security considerations. But it also means that the security concerns cannot be addressed without reference to equity or to the indigenous roots and nature of the problems concerned.

In recognition of this complexity, the administration has professed that its policy has two "pillars": (1) defense of national security--i.e., suppressing and eliminating leftist insurgency, and (2) support for "freedom and (where necessary) social reform allied to economic development." (Enders, op. cit.) But as between these two concerns it is clear that the former will take precedence. Preventing leftist movements from coming to power is the bottom-line arbiter that will decide any contradictions between sub-objectives or the direction to be taken at forks in the road.

The difficulty is that the two purported thrusts of our strategy--defending national security and promoting change and reform--keep colliding with each other. The way we have conceived of the security task, for one thing, tends to make our credibility as regards reform suspect. The insurgencies in El Salvador and Guatemala, for example, are cast in terms of demands for change and correction of abuse. But if we see such demands as constituting only sheeps' clothing hiding totalitarian wolves, then we are inevitably led to view status quo elements resisting needed change and reform as assets, however unsavory, in the struggle against the Soviets. "Our side" is thus often ambiguous. This is a central problem in El Salvador. The Salvadoran government is not--as the administration on occasion implies--a coherent, unified, uniformly moderate, reformist authority. It is a mixed bag, suffering continuous internal tugs of war. President Duarte clearly has limits placed on his authority by the military. Not all elements in the government or associated with it are equally committed to reform, redress, or change, or quite agree upon these things.

The most perplexing question of all, however, is what one really can expect from "reform." What is really at issue in these situations is not just the amelioration of current inequities, but the underlying power pattern which these inequities reflect. The issue is: who is to exercise power for whom? If the military in El Salvador, for example, approve a "reform" measure, such as land reform, but insist on ultimate control and veto as in the past, the underlying problem is not solved. How will the Salvadoran peasant, or labor-union member, or small entrepreneur advance and protect their interests on an ongoing basis if these interests cannot be aggregated and effectively expressed in an open, participatory political process? This is a concept which should not be hard for Americans to understand. The battle over civil rights in the Deep South in this country was of the same genre. Only when local power patterns were changed or affected, could blacks be secure in their status and assured of their rights on a permanent basis. (It is ironically the underlying issue in the current controversy over extension of the Voting Rights Act.) In short, it is not reform itself that is the magic; it is the exercise of power and the openness of the political system which can permit that reform to be achieved and respected. And it is the touching of existing power patterns that renders these situations so passionate, explosive, and intractable.

The present situation in El Salvador is at a crossroads. The more the fighting continues, the more its urgency will polarize the nation and destroy the middle. Circumstances, therefore, must move along either the zero-sum road of confrontation, with one side or the other prevailing, or along a "political" road of seeking to reincorporate opposing elements into a new consensus underpinning a process.

The administration has up to now ruled out "negotiations" or bargaining with the left, because it believes that to give it a share of power or political participation would inevitably lead to a "Marxist-Leninist" (read Soviet/Cuban) takeover. On the other hand, the administration denies that it seeks a "military" solution. It argues that its goal is a "political" solution, by which it means that it wants to so strengthen the official side, and so weaken the leftist side, that the former will eventually prevail, with the left either breaking up, withering away, or being defeated.

The vehicle for this strategy is the electoral process, the March 28 elections for a constituent assembly being the first step, with the writing of a constitution and subsequent presidential elections being other parts of the process. Apparently, the idea is that elections, reflecting popular opinion, will legitimize the government and delegitimize the insurgents, who can then be more freely fought as subversives. It is hard, however, to see how such scenarios will unfold. The legitimacy of the March 28 elections as a referendum or plebiscite will be challenged by all of the left groups who have refused to take part, and their challenge cannot be disproved even by large turn-outs. Moreover, the likely result is a fragmentation of the vote among several political groups, many of which are antithetical to each other. The authority of the government may thus end up being weakened, and its image more ambiguous. It is difficult to see how anything short of an overwhelming victory for the Christian Democrats--which does not appear to be in the cards--can be a prelude to

reconciliation, unless talks are opened with the opposition and a compromise effected (which would have to be done even with a Christian Democratic victory). The alternative is a continuation of the armed struggle.

The current "bottom lines" of internal Salvadoran actors, for their part, also render "negotiations" a very difficult process. The hard-core Marxist insurgents are not likely to be interested in negotiation or reconciliation because they will want it all and may reason they can win it all. The Salvadoran military's fear is that negotiation or reconciliation must at some point focus on the nature and role of the military, its historic ties to the old oligarchy, and the savage right-wing death squads that still roam the country. Fear of purges and institutional destruction, therefore, leads to a fundamental impulse for self-preservation, the upshot of which is opposition to "negotiation." The notion which the administration has pushed, that negotiations are possible if the left will only lay down their arms and come to the table, is obviously a non-starter. Even the non-Marxist opposition will not deprive itself ahead of time of its defense against forces it has mortally feared and against which it went into armed resistance in the first place. The conclusion is thus inescapable: negotiation and reconciliation between opposing forces cannot be generated spontaneously from within.

The administration's belief that Salvadoran insurgency persists only because it is fed from outside provides the focal point for its approach to Nicaragua. The administration has, in effect, written Nicaragua off, perceiving the Sandinista regime as operating under Cuban control. It evidences very little conviction that internal dynamics in Nicaragua can ever moderate the regime or the course of revolution. The logical extension of this perception can only lead to tactics, in their most benign form, of isolating the Sandinista regime or "making life difficult for it," or in their most belligerent form, trying to destabilize it--a notion which appears to tempt many.

There seems little question that the Sandinistas <u>are</u> aiding the Salvadoran insurgency. One can debate whether this is an effort to sustain their own power internally, a reaction to U.S. hostility, a strategy of self-preservation which reasons they must have "friendlies" on their borders, an effort to fulfill their revolutionary mystique, a repayment to Cuba for past support, part of a Cuban/Soviet master plan, or any combination thereof--and therefore how reversible it is. Whatever the case, it is a matter which must be dealt with somehow.

Purported plans to deal with it by mounting covert paramilitary actions against Nicaragua would be a truly tragic strategic error--regardless of whether such an effort was at the initiative of the United States or thought up by other nations, whether it was U.S.-supported or merely tolerated. Leaving aside the question of whether such actions can ever be effective, they would have pernicious consequences. First, paramilitary activity--combined with an already pugnacious public stand of hostility by the United States overall--would surely sign the death warrant for Nicaraguan moderates within the country. It would make it easy for the hard-core Marxist elements within the Sandinistas to consolidate their power into a totalitarian dictatorship. They would simply do so in the plausible name of national survival.

Secondly, covert paramilitary campaigns undermine the concept of rule of law and of international order which the hemisphere has been struggling so long to establish. Covert action violates Articles 18 and 20 of the OAS Charter. As such, it would let the Nicaraguans get off the hook, and blur what is apparently a good, legal case on our side: Nicaraguan violations of Articles 14 and 18 of the Charter. Ad hoc responses of this kind to crisis, in short, weaken the juridical and legal inhibitions to abuse of power which the Latin Americans particularly have fought so hard to obtain. Thirdly, such a strategy would polarize the rest of Latin America, which cannot help but be profoundly affected by the fear of intervention which lies so deeply imbedded in the Latin psyche. No one should have any doubt that a great many Latin Americans, however they may sympathize with the security rationale, would nevertheless ask themselves, "Today Nicaragua; tomorrow who and with what justification?" To the extent, moreover, that it would be believed that such paramilitary activity could not occur without U.S. knowledge and acquiesence if not U.S. inspiration and support, it would arouse all of the old fears of U.S. intervention--and that rather than the Marxist-Leninist threat, would become the focus of debate and controversy. Fourthly, such a strategy can only promote escalation by the "other side," leading to still more explosive confrontations.

The essence of the administration's policy dilemma with regard to Central America generally, in short, is its predisposition to view the problems there as absolute zero-sum games. A perception of opposing forces as wholly implacable can only lead to casting the conflict in "all or nothing" terms, with the option of compromise excluded by definition. To assume that one's adversary has no desire for peaceful settlement or compromise means an inevitable conclusion that any concession simply weakens one's position for the future confrontation.

The trouble with this "Munich" view of conflict/compromise options is that it is very often self-fulfilling. One's unwillingness to negotiate becomes the justification for one's adversary taking a similar "all or nothing" stand. It is, as one commentator has put it, "like one man in front of a mirror with each belligerent move reflected back and promoting a further escalation." Conflict feeds itself. This is the essence of the vicious cycle which plagues other chronic trouble-spots in the world--Ireland, Palestine, Cyprus.

The conception of the relationship with the Soviets as one of implacable hostility leads to particular difficulties with regard to Third World conflicts, like Central America. If it is the battle with the Soviets that is the central focus and determining "bottom line," then one is compellingly led into trying to keep the lid on revolutionary pressures without being too meticulous about who is on our side. The trouble with this Manichean view of Third World instability is that it provides no vision for eventually stabilizing the situation; it can only offer continual involvement to support one's allies and an endless set of maneuverings in a continuing struggle. It further requires us to categorize all indigenous actors as "moderates" or "radicals," whereas these are relative terms whose meaning depends on local circumstances. It is a mind-set, furthermore, which foregoes or discounts beforehand any possibility of moderating or changing the hostility of "radicals." And since the obverse of "the left cannot be allowed to win" is "our side cannot be allowed to lose," we are

indeed on a slippery slope to growing involvement in response to open-ended possibilities for escalation.

But to grant the vision of Soviet/Cuban efforts to expand their influence does not necessarily imply that the situation is therefore inexorably a zero-sum game requiring an "all or nothing" confrontational approach. If one argues that change toward the left in Central America can only mean a strategic gain for the Soviets, one can also argue that the real strategic problem is the failure of a spirit of compromise which can permit a peaceful resolution of the conflicts there, that the Soviets gain as much from a state of chronic conflict as from any particular change.

It is true that in El Salvador the hard-core Marxist insurgents are brutal revolutionaries (Ambassador White's "Pol Pot left"). But it is also true that the total left opposition is heterogeneous. And one can legitimately argue that the better strategic tactic is to put pressure on this heterogeneity by bringing them to the negotiating table; actual negotiations have a good chance of splitting the insurgency, whereas hostility and confrontation only coalesce it. Similarly, while the Sandinistas do not seek to spread revolution even if their motives are subject to conjecture, external hostility and pressure only provide the hard-core with a plausible pretext for extending its control. Moderate, private-sector elements continue to operate in Nicaragua and are needed by the regime to deal with the economy. Yet rather than see this economic weakness as a lever for coopting and moderating, we are prone to see it as a club to weaken, destabilize, and "make it more difficult" for our "enemies."

The logical extension of the premises currently underpinning our conception of Central American problems, in sum, can only lead to a worst-case scenario: the continuing savaging of innocents; the need to provide increasing amounts of military aid; the probability of counter-escalation leading to inextricable stalemates; the sucking-in of outside actors and nations in a Spanish Civil War-kind of imbroglio; the resurrection of fears of U.S. intervention; the blurring of the root problems of political and social systems, reform and redress; the continued polarization of the region with the middle being squeezed further.

In short, unless we can adjust our premises and perceptions about the security threat to take into account more realistically the complexity, heterogeneity, and diversity of the Central American situations, as well as a more sensitive understanding of the consequences and ramifications of our own actions, we will be on the road to disaster <u>in terms of our security concerns themselves</u>.

There is thus both a strategic and moral obligation to look again at the political road. Two things become immediately evident. First, the United States can no longer take the lead or initiative in resolving the conflict or stabilizing Central America. We now arouse too much passion and suspicion; we are <u>too</u> involved. Secondly, for geopolitics' sake, resolution of the problems of Nicaragua and El Salvador (and probably Guatemala) needs to be found within a framework of international law and international order. Rather than dismiss the OAS out of hand, for example, as inadequate and inefficient, we need to redouble efforts precisely to channel the primitive passions and atavisms loose in the region through

the juridical concepts and constraints of the Charter--for the sake of the Latin Americans as much as for ourselves. And it must involve not just resolution-approving "blessings" for things we are going to do anyway, but actually inviting the "system" to provide its own peacemaking initiatives. No one can properly dismiss such notions as naive, impractical, or "already tried" until we have made further insistent and imaginative good-faith efforts to go the "political" route.

Other nations must now be brought into the picture to take the lead and the initiative--with our full urging and sincere support. Instead of simply critically appraising the suggestions of others as if the burden of proof rests with them, the United States should be prodding insistently and urgently for them to take on the peacemaking role and perfect various suggestions. The Mexican initiative, as imperfect and even inadequate as it may be in its present form, nevertheless offers an opening for the United States to enlist it and other nations for this peacemaking role.

One can imagine a number of possible formulae that would merit examination and consideration. With regard to Nicaragua, the Mexican suggestion of nonaggression pacts and some meaningful form of mutual assurances might very well remove the Sandinista self-preservation pretext for both the spread of revolution and the military buildup. Some convincing sanitized form of the evidence available to us of Nicaraguan support for Salvadoran insurgency can surely be laid before the OAS as an indication of violation of the Charter, so that responses can be fashioned within an orderly juridical system--and so that the Sandinistas are provided with a face-saving, nonhumiliating line of retreat. International inspection teams patrolling the borders could be contemplated. The use of "guarantor powers" to underwrite mutual commitments could be considered; it is a concept the inter-American system has used before. An effort to use economic aid to lever an explicit renunciation of the spread of revolution might be tried.

In El Salvador, the use of an international panel for mediation or "good offices" to discuss (a) a cease-fire and (b) an electoral process in which all would participate with guarantees could be explored. A "guarantor powers" concept might also be employed here to insure the fulfillment of commitments and avoid the internal sabotage which many fear in the revolutionary cycle. Why not a panel of Guarantors of Mexico, Venezuela, Canada, and Brazil, for example?

Obviously, there are numerous questions and problems with such suggestions. The point is that the likely adverse consequences of our alternative confrontational strategy and the seriousness of the situation require every effort to re-explore and rethink the political-negotiation route. While the United States cannot lead a negotiating strategy, its support is indispensable for it. If we were to oppose it, it would never work. Furthermore, it must be a support that is extended imaginatively, energetically, and in good faith. If it is grudging, or entered into cynically only to lull critics until we can figure some way to "win," we will reap the consequences.

And let there be no mistake. The political route means acceptance of the concept of compromise, of the idea that it need not be a zero-sum game, of the conviction that some cherished things such as peace and

security are frequently gained or lost by all sides together. It would therefore involve some accommodation with "radical" elements, but need not mean the yielding of power to Marxists-Leninists.

Unfortunately, the administration's present premises, convictions, and perceptions do not permit it to take that political option. Under present circumstances, therefore, given all of the current bottom lines, Central America is a classical Greek tragedy, with all of the actors, on the basis of their beliefs, ideas, and premises ("fulfilling their nature," the ancient Greeks might have said) rolling inexorably toward tragedy. And there is no deus ex machina in sight.

Or is he the one wearing the big sombrero?

UNITED STATES POLICY FOR CENTRAL AMERICA: CONSTRAINTS AND CHOICES

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Premises

United States political, military, and economic activities in the Caribbean over the last 85 years have created a powerful legacy of opposition to Yankee intervention and suspicion of whatever activity the United States initiates and supports. In order to have a reasonable chance of achieving stability in individual countries and in the region as a whole, the United States must avoid direct intervention against broadly based movements even if they are ideologically distasteful. The foundation on which U.S. policy must be built is the tradition of nonintervention initiated in a real sense by Herbert Hoover and christened by Franklin D. Roosevelt in the Good Neighbor Policy. The principle of nonintervention now has widespread respect throughout the inter-American community and is one which basically suits long-range U.S. interests. It is also a policy which, if followed strictly, would place highly desirable constraints on the activities of the Soviet Union, Cuba, and even Nicaragua to interfere in the affairs of other states.

El Salvador represents the present front-line of the crisis in Central America. In varying forms and degrees, similar problems exist in all countries of the Central American isthmus, and they are fundamentally internal in their origins. The unrest in El Salvador, as in Nicaragua, stems from years of oligarchical exploitation and has deep economic, social, and political roots. This combination of internal factors has generated movements essentially native in origin which are now being exploited by Cuba and the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union has not traditionally shown interest in the nations of the Caribbean and Central America. But the leadership in Moscow currently sees an important opportunity to involve the United States in a costly effort to maintain control in its own immediate neighborhood. In assessing the international implications of the situation in El Salvador, one must place Soviet involvement in the proper context of broad strategic and political objectives. The basic goals of the Soviet Union are to maintain parity or superiority in strategic arms, to support conventional military forces adequate for the maintenance of the system of satellite Socialist states in Eastern Europe, Cuba, and now in Afghanistan, and to pose a major threat to its economic and political competitors in Western Europe and Japan. In its political objectives in the developed world, the Soviet Union seeks to expand its own influence and to separate the nations of Western Europe and Japan from their close ties with the United States.

In the Third World, the Soviet Union has inaugurated since the mid-1970s a series of activities directed at gaining advantages in access to the resources of Africa and the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf regions and at involving its adversaries in expensive political and military conflicts. It is in this latter context that we should analyze Soviet involvement in El Salvador, where Moscow has provided through Cuba and Nicaragua the basic supplies, funds, and arms for the increased guerrilla activity of the last 18 months. The Soviet objective is unlikely to be bases in Central America or indeed Mexican oil, but rather to involve the United States in a complex set of conflicts which absorb its resources, create dissension within the Western alliance, and basically undermine the Reagan administration program for a military buildup and economic recovery.

Given the nature of anti-Americanism throughout Latin America and particularly in Central America, it is impossible to develop a military solution to the crisis in El Salvador or to the lower levels of unrest in Honduras and Guatemala. Sharply increased security assistance or covert activities might provide temporary advantage; but to the extent they were publicly known, they would raise the spectre of "Yankee imperialism" and prove ultimately counterproductive. Not only will military instruments fail in Central America, they will also make it more difficult to assert U.S. leadership in political and economic policies at a later time and in neighboring countries.

The only feasible solutions lie in multilateral political and economic policies. The United States should make every effort to act in concert with the leading Caribbean powers, Mexico and Venezuela, as it seeks policies which will create and maintain open and stable societies throughout the Caribbean and Central America.

The range of U.S. interests involved directly in El Salvador is not great. The political prestige of the nation is involved, but no vital or strategic interests lie in that small country. Yet many U.S. resources come from nations surrounding El Salvador and pass through sea lanes close to it, and the basic U.S. interest in stability in its neighborhood and particularly in Mexico, Venezuela, and Panama is endangered by the prospects of a hostile government in El Salvador in collaboration with an unfriendly regime in Nicaragua. In trying to achieve stability in El Salvador, the United States should not take actions which undermine its more vital relations with other Latin nations.

Despite fundamental disagreements and past difficulties, the United States should not rule out possible cooperation with Cuba or an agreement to restrict each nation's activities in Central America. But any agreement which would be made with the Cubans should be precisely drawn and enforceable.

In trying to resolve a problem in which the administration has placed a great deal of political prestige, U.S. leaders must keep our fundamental objectives and priorities clearly in mind. The U.S. goal in the Caribbean and Central America is long-range stability, and our principal national interests lie in Western Europe and the Middle East. We must also be conscious that the major threats to our interests come from the Soviet Union, domestic instability which can be exploited by the Soviet Union and its associates, and economic deterioration around the world.

The Political Environment

Nicaragua is a good starting point, because it has recently undergone a political upheaval sufficiently similar to the one currently underway in El Salvador to provide some interesting parallels. In the Carter administration the United States moved belatedly to support the ouster of General Anastasio Somoza in the hope of encouraging centrist elements among the range of guerrilla opposition. While this policy was justified, it came too late to achieve the desired ends, and after a series of internal conflicts individuals quite opposed to the United States have taken control of the Sandinista government. Available evidence today indicates that Nicaragua is essentially closed to U.S. influence and is engaged in a significant military buildup which will, within a short time, produce a military force superior to all of the other Central American nations combined. Strong evidence exists that Nicaragua is providing vital support in resources and guidance to the guerrilla forces in El Salvador.

El Salvador is today in a very precarious condition. The civilian government is in power only at the will of the military, and its support within the country clearly comprises less than half the population. The elections of March 28 gave President José Napoleon Duarte and his Christian Democratic Party about 41 percent of the vote, but the returns also served to legitimize the party of former Major Roberto D'Aubuisson and to encourage the several parties of the far right to collaborate to minimize the power of the Christian Democrats. The United States will have a difficult time maintaining support for the basic reforms introduced by Duarte, and it seems unlikely that either Duarte or D'Aubuisson will have a post in the new government.

Widely disliked through the country, the military is far from a desirable instrument for the United States to rely upon in achieving stability. Any use of U.S. combat troops would be counterproductive, and there is serious question about the feasibility of any significant increases in military assistance. At best, the United States can provide political and economic support and enough military assistance to hold the ring for the civilians to establish order. But this will require an improvement in the performance of the army and the internal security forces, and demands a much higher degree of support by the army leadership for a strong civilian government than has been demonstrated in the past, as well as sharply increased cooperation among the political parties of the center and the right.

The situation in Honduras appears to be significantly better, and there is reason to think that a great deal of U.S. effort should be focused on improving political and economic conditions there. We cannot proceed to develop a policy for one country at a time but must consider the need for coordinated policy for the whole region. The Caribbean Basin Initiative is designed to deal with fundamental problems on a long-range basis, but pressure will develop to divert most of its assets to El Salvador. It would be wise to conduct a serious reassessment shortly after the Salvadoran elections to determine if funds would not be better spent in Honduras and Guatemala. For many, Honduras may be a much better place to draw the line against militant anti-U.S. movements than El Salvador.

For a variety of reasons, Guatemala is also in a very difficult situation. There are reports of large numbers of refugees moving into Mexico, and the government has been pursuing a harshly repressive policy against political dissidents and the Indian population. The majority Indian population poses special problems in this country, and the guerrilla resistance has made significant progress in organizing the Indians and representing their case. The recent elections were clearly fraudulent, and the government has been blatantly unresponsive to U.S. initiatives. The coup of March 24 has installed a new ruling junta headed by retired General Efrain Rios Montt, a respected moderate who led the presidential vote in 1974 only to have the election overturned by the military. At this date, it is unclear whether he will be able to retain the support of the junior military officers who staged the coup, avoid being dominated by his highly conservative senior colleagues, and take steps toward stabilizing the nation with broader public support.

The key to any long-term stability in Central America rests with Mexico. While there are clearly rivalries between the Central American political elites and the leadership of Mexico's Revolutionary Party, the Mexican interests in a stable and open Central America are immense, and their concern about Soviet exploitation of unrest and instability is rising. Recent accounts indicate that Mexican leaders are in a dilemma: they are concerned with the problem to the south and they would like the United States to solve it and take responsibility for any steps which do not prove successful; yet they do not trust the United States to initiate and maintain a solution which they could endorse, and they fundamentally disagree with past and present U.S. policy toward Cuba. One of the principal goals of U.S. policy must be to diminish Mexican suspicion and establish a better relationship of trust and cooperation. Even if this can be attained, it is not clear that the Mexicans will push effectively for peace conditions which would satisfy the United States.

Contrasting Scenarios

In responding to the general questions posed, the best outcome which could realistically be hoped for in Central America would be the development of a close working entente among Mexico, Venezuela, and the United States. This group, with the support of Costa Rica, Panama, and hopefully other Central American states, would strive for a solution based on nonintervention and economic cooperation.

At the other extreme, the worst outcome would be an unsuccessful series of U.S. military steps against El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Cuba which left strong authoritarian Socialist governments in control in each of these countries and helped unify sympathetic opposition groups in the other countries of the region.

U.S. Policy Choices

The United States should make every effort to explore and cooperate with the Mexican offer of good offices in achieving a negotiated settlement in El Salvador. Discussions between Secretary of State Alexander Haig and Foreign Minister Jorge Castaneda in New York during the weekend of March 13-14 provide hope that such a detailed exploration is underway.

If the Venezuelans can be added to this venture, it would provide significant additional strength. The United States must develop its Caribbean-basin program quickly and focus its operating programs in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. In developing this entente with Mexico, the United States will have to be prepared to invest considerable resources in collaborative policy dealing with drug smuggling and immigration. This might be the type of effort which could utilize the prestige and energies of José López Portillo after he retires as president of Mexico.

In El Salvador, the United States should make a thorough political and economic effort to support President José Napoleon Duarte and his centrist government. They are the only hope the United States has at present, and if they do not succeed, we will not likely find a suitable alternative. The United States should not use combat troops in El Salvador and should resort to increased military assistance only as a last resort. But if Duarte and the army fail or if the election sets in motion forces which push Duarte to the far right, we must be prepared to cut our losses in El Salvador and absorb the defeat in order to be able to make a stand where conditions are better. In dealing with the Mexican mediation effort, the United States should try to stiffen the terms as much as possible but should be prepared to take some risks in order to proceed in a cooperative inter-American leadership group.

In Honduras and Guatemala, although the circumstances are quite different in each state, United States policy should be roughly the same. We should try to win the support of the government for economic reform, broader political participation, and public disclosure of the nature of the opposition groups. We should get the maximum possible support from Mexico and Venezuela in this general range of policies, and develop long-range plans from our Caribbean Basin Initiative which can provide additional hope and room for political maneuver to those portions of the political leadership which we seek to support.

The United States should not get itself involved in a military confrontation with Soviet-supplied guerrillas in Central America. We are constrained severely by our past legacy of dealings with Central America, and we must take the high road of support for democracy, nonintervention, and broad economic and political rights. In doing so, we should make every effort to conduct extensive political-education campaigns and provide long-term economic and financial assistance. We can also make a concerted effort to explain to the peoples of Latin America, as well as to our allies and the Third World countries outside this hemisphere, the exact nature of Soviet and Cuban support for revolutionary movements. This must, of course, be done in a convincing way with authentic and persuasive evidence and spokesmen.

While the solutions which will come from a noninterventionist, multilateral approach will not always suit the political and economic preferences of many U.S. leaders, we must be prepared to accept the need for our neighbors to be different. And we must always keep open the opportunity and try to make it worthwhile for them in being different still to remain friendly.

U.S. POLICY TOWARD CENTRAL AMERICA: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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Introduction

The issue before our country is not whether to involve ourselves in the affairs of our Caribbean and Central American neighbors, but the form and substance of that involvement. A prudent regard for our own security in the region need not mean a revival of the Monroe Doctrine or dollar diplomacy. Too often, an active policy in the near neighborhood is equated with intervention and the big stick. If at the same time that we seek to safeguard our security interests, we also demonstrate respect for sovereignty, an interest in advancing economic well-being, and a lively concern for the promotion of democratic institutions, the people of the small republics in and about the Caribbean Sea will welcome our involvement. We must build on history by following the example of our most enlightened presidents. If we temper the exclusive concern of the Reagan administration for the security of the area with the wisdom of Woodrow Wilson's support for constitutional government, the sensitivity of Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy, the vision of John Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, and the idealism of Jimmy Carter's Human-Rights Doctrine, we will have the building blocks of a realistic, enlightened policy.

To pay attention to our national interests in Central America and the Caribbean is right and proper. Those who dismiss security considerations have common sense and the weight of history against them. At a minimum, our policy should ensure that communism is denied any further footholds in the region. Cuba already functions as an outpost of the Soviet Union in the Western Hemisphere. Nicaragua demonstrates disturbing tendencies to follow in Cuba's path. The insurgents in El Salvador and Guatemala identify the United States with support for the pattern of oppression which has gripped their countries for over 25 years. Other countries in the region face instability primarily because of stagnating economies. These problems demand creative, sound policies.

Contrary to the general impression, the Reagan administration does not have a policy toward Central America and the Caribbean. A government may be said to have a policy only when it has fashioned a strategy adequate to achieve defined objectives. The world is acutely aware of our objectives in the region. Secretary of State Alexander Haig talks about them all the time. He wants a military defeat of the revolutionaries in El Salvador and Guatemala. He wants to eliminate Cuba and Nicaragua as supply depots for rebellion. Yet this too-frequent defining of our objectives has only made more obvious the lack of any strategic doctrine adequate to bring about the desired results. Threats and bombast only focus the

attention of the world on this basic lack. To shoot from the lip is no substitute for a solid policy which must specifically include the imaginative use of diplomatic resources.

Overview

From the death of John F. Kennedy to the election of Jimmy Carter, the United States had no foreign policy worthy of the name toward Central America--fourteen crucial years worse than wasted in a sterile anti-communism, a propping-up of military dictatorships, and a desultory mix of economic and military assistance which did more to shore up and enrich the wealthy elites than to meet the needs of the poor. As we search for the reasons to explain the causes of our problems in the region, look first to these 14 years when our policymaking officials ignored Central America except to reiterate support for the corrupt dictatorships of Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

The most tragic event in the modern history of our relations with Central America took place in 1954. Confronted with an inept leftist government feebly attempting to play off the Soviet Union against the United States, Washington furnished arms to rebels based in Nicaragua and Honduras, and when General Castillo Armas and his band arrived in Guatemala City, the United States immediately recognized his regime and showered him with grants and loans. No one has ever denied that this was a CIA operation from start to finish. With this action, the United States left the path of judicious application of diplomatic influence and respect for sovereignty, judicial equality, and territorial integrity. In place of these principles and practices that serve as the accepted basis of international conduct among independent states, the United States placed the preponderance of its resources into strengthening the Latin American military establishments and fighting an ill-defined communism and other so-called subversive movements through huge CIA stations and public safety programs.

In Guatemala and elsewhere in Central America, we made the basic error of confusing the security of a government with the security of a state. Central American militaries tend to believe that they embody the entire nation and that anyone who opposes them is subversive. This leads to the division of the country into patriots who support the military-dominated government and others who subscribe to "alien doctrines." It is one thing for authoritarian governments to propagate this nonsense in order to justify their abuse of power and suppression of their own constitutions. It is quite another for the United States to support and buttress this pernicious doctrine to the point where democratic leaders are harassed, persecuted, and killed by forces set in motion with our active encouragement.

This was the mentality that involved us in the Bay of Pigs, the occupation of the Dominican Republic, and the constant high-level military visits accompanied by gifts of helicopters, armed personnel carriers, etc. without which Somoza and his paler counterparts could never have succeeded in staying in power. Without this constant shoring-up of authoritarian governments, the peoples of Latin America would have found their own political solutions, sometimes democratic, sometimes not. But at a minimum we could have avoided the closing-off of democratic alternatives, and movements

such as the Sandinistas never would have gathered strength. It is worth noting that those who joined the Sandinista movement came not only from the downtrodden but also from the sons and daughters of wealthy followers of Somoza, almost all of whom found this revolutionary calling in the Catholic high schools and universities where they could no longer reconcile their developing Christian and Western ideals with squalid reality.

It is important to understand that our willingness to help did not lead these dictators to moderate either their demands or the brutal treatment of their people. On the contrary, it strengthened them in their excesses and dispirited their potential democratic opponents. As the corruption and repression continued, the moderates gave up hope of finding a democratic alternative. They united with the extremists to achieve the overriding objective: the ouster of the dictatorship and an end to the oppression.

Current Policy

In Central America, the Reagan foreign policy lurches from crisis to crisis, toward a full-scale disaster. To persuade Congress to vote more and more military assistance to El Salvador, administration spokesmen invoke the good name of the decent but now powerless civilian president, Napoleon Duarte. On the ground in El Salvador, however, the Reagan policy gives full backing to the military repression which has turned workers and campesinos against Duarte and in favor of the revolutionaries. A glance at two of El Salvador's neighbors illustrates what can be lost by bloody-mindedness or gained by courage.

During a visit to Guatemala in May 1981, Ambassador-at-Large Vernon Walters told the press that the government there is defending "peace and liberty" and "constitutional institutions." General Walters could find no serious fault with Guatemala's lamentable record on human rights and asserted that, in any case, "friends are friends." The Reagan administration accordingly sent helicopters, trucks, and jeeps to assist the Guatemalans in their bloody campaign of pacification. The results were totally predictable. Military terrorism increased dramatically, radicalizing the countryside and feeding new recruits into insurgent ranks. The revolutionary movement is rapidly gaining momentum and morale, especially among the Indians. By the end of the year, the rebels predict that they will have the capacity to challenge the military for control of the country.

Contrary to General Walters' assertions, the military of Guatemala are not fighters; they do not seek to confront the guerrilla forces. Instead, as the October 15, 1981 report of the moderate, authoritative Inter-American Human Rights Commission makes clear, the Guatemalan government is responsible for the "great majority of illegal executions." The Commission stated that those tortured and killed "are for the most part leaders of opposition political parties, union members, priests, lawyers, journalists, teachers and thousands of peasants and Indians" who met their fate at the hands of "security forces or groups of paramilitary civilians acting with the close collaboration of government authorities."

The parties of the left have gone into the mountains to fight as guerrillas. The parties of the center are hiding, with most of their

leadership either killed by the military or in exile. In the words of a Christian Democratic leader of Guatemala: "We live in an institutional dictatorship where elections are bestowed by the military on those they favor, we live in a climate of terror. Either the system will be opened to the representative forces or there will be no recourse but civil war."

The Guatemalan military are remarkable not only for their brutality but also their greed. With the economy collapsing and the business community facing ruin, the generals refuse to moderate their avarice. They continue to pocket millions of dollars annually from declining government revenues.

Within a few months, Congress can anticipate pressures to find a way around the human-rights legislation which has forced the Reagan administration to end overt security assistance to Guatemala. State Department spokesmen will reluctantly, but dutifully, echo the official line that there is no choice: we either swallow hard and back repression or face another Cuba in our backyard. They will produce documentation to prove that were it not for outside agitators those in bondage would be content with their lot. This mindboggling superficiality will not wash. The unjust structure of Guatemalan society is tearing itself apart and our intervention will only postpone the day of reckoning and make more radical the outcome.

Like Guatemala, Panama was a powder keg, but with an even shorter fuse. The national guard and the small upper class had maintained an economic and political stranglehold on the country. Revolution was in the air. Then the populist leader, General Omar Torrijos, came to power. He began the essential task of bringing dignity and hope to the poor. But to secure the gains, Torrijos needed a canal treaty to bring Panama out of colonial status into true nationhood.

The enemies of Torrijos, those who had formerly controlled the country, urged the Carter administration not to negotiate a treaty with General Torrijos. They knew that without a treaty they had a chance to divide the forces which supported the revolutionary program and return to power. These critics pointed to the frequent visits of Torrijos to Cuba, and his revolutionary and often pro-Marxist rhetoric. Fortunately, President Carter and Congress ignored predictions of Castro athwart the Canal, and achieved a treaty which assured the vital national interests of the United States. It also gave General Torrijos the stature necessary to complete his work of transforming the national guard from its former status of corrupt lackey to a truly national military force. As a result of the statesmanship of the Carter administration, Panama today is a sturdy ally, tranquil, prosperous, and increasingly democratic. The statesmanship of Carter, Vance, Christopher, Bunker, and Linowitz, combined with the intelligent use of the career foreign service, produced this remarkable result. How desperately we need that combination of leadership and diplomatic skill today.

With Panama, Costa Rica is a prime political asset. Its democratic, vital, youthful leadership is anxious to play a constructive role in bringing peace and democratic change to Central America. It is the country which most urgently and deservedly merits our economic assistance.

The political framework of Costa Rica makes it certain that our help will benefit the nation as a whole and maintain Costa Rica as a democratic anchor in Central America.

Honduras lies at the heart of Central America. If Honduras finds the road leading toward peaceful, democratic change, there is hope for the isthmus. If Honduras goes the way of El Salvador, Central America could become a cockpit of war.

The Reagan foreign-policy team has misunderstood the Honduran reality. Administration officials apparently believe that Honduras is a permanent island of tranquility in a sea of trouble which can serve as a base for the elimination of subversion in El Salvador and Guatemala. Honduras today is alive with U.S. military uniforms, Green Berets on their way to the Salvadoran border, U.S. Air Force personnel manning helicopters which can have no other purpose than to threaten Nicaragua, U.S. Army officers "inspecting" the border of Nicaragua, and a constant flow of military training teams from the Southern Command in Panama.

All of this military activity has convinced the progressive, moderate civilian leadership of Honduras that Reagan policies have the potential of drawing Honduras into a fratricidal Central American war. There are solid grounds for fear. The Reagan administration is sending to the Honduran military a constant message, which says that democracy is all well and good but your primary task is to eliminate "subversion."

Honduras is a country rich in political talent and blessed with a civilized military. It is a mistake of major proportions for the Reagan administration to push the Honduran military into "cooperation" with the Guatemalan and Salvadoran armed forces and to target Nicaragua as the enemy. This policy has the potential to tear apart the fragile political consensus which still exists in Honduras.

Nicaragua

The biggest stumbling block to gathering support for an intelligent policy toward Central America is the perception that Nicaragua is lost to communism. There is much to be discouraged about in Nicaragua. Many of the Sandinista leaders appear not to be acting in good faith. They maintain the façade of political liberty but in reality harass opposition leaders and close newspapers and radio stations. The presence of large numbers of Cuban advisors and a huge military gives adequate grounds for concern.

But there is another side. Six highly vocal, organized parties still exist. The leaders of these parties continue to criticize the government and the ruling Sandinista party. Freedom of the press is restricted but the press is certainly more free than in El Salvador or Guatemala. There are independent labor unions. Private enterprise dominates the country, with over 60 percent of the economy in private hands. Most importantly, in Nicaragua no one "disappears," and torture is unknown. There are no credible reports of security forces killing civilians. Persons accused of breaking the law are brought before the courts for public trials.

Nicaragua has given some evidence that it wants to remain friendly to the United States and the rest of the "free world," with which the vast majority of its foreign trade is conducted. When they came to power in July 1979, the Sandinistas inherited from Somoza a foreign indebtedness of over $1.6 billion, owed mostly to banks in the United States. Unlike Cuba, Nicaragua did not repudiate these debts. It agreed to repayment and, together with the banks' representatives, worked out a schedule for doing so. Also unlike Castro, the Sandinistas agreed to pay just compensation for all nationalized properties, including properties owned by U.S. citizens and corporations. They have honored this agreement. Currently, the Sandinistas are actively promoting trade with the United States and seeking involvement from our private sector. These are not the actions of an outlaw state.

Nicaragua's actions contradict Secretary Haig's attempt to paint the country as an "aggressor." The Nicaraguan government, like Mexico and virtually all of Western Europe, is actively seeking a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the tragic civil war in El Salvador. Nicaragua has used its good offices to encourage the Salvadoran rebel forces to agree to peace negotiations without any preconditions. A recent peace proposal--calling for immediate negotiations without preconditions--was presented to the United Nations by Comandante Daniel Ortega Saavedra, Nicaragua's chief of state.

The issue facing the United States in Nicaragua is of basic importance for the rest of Central America. Will we have the vision to understand that within the Sandinista government there are important pro-Western forces which, with our encouragement, can emerge triumphant? Or will we continue to follow a policy of harassment and estrangement designed to return the country to a Somoza-style dictatorship?

There are disturbing signs that the Reagan administration is actively seeking to alienate and destabilize the government of Nicaragua. Why does the Reagan administration permit U.S. territory to be used by paramilitary forces whose stated purpose is to overthrow the Sandinista government? Is an agency of the U.S. government supplying the hundreds of thousands of dollars necessary to support and arm the thousand or more Somoza counterrevolutionary exiles who conduct periodic forays from Honduras into Nicaragua? Were the recent outbursts of nationalism from the Miskito Indians deliberately provoked as part of a plan of covert operations designed to heighten internal tensions in Nicaragua? Is our country supplying funds to counterrevolutionaries whose methods include the planting of bombs on aircraft?

The stakes in Central America are too high for this kind of huggermugger which spreads fear and suspicion throughout the isthmus. The Reagan administration has criticized the Nicaraguan government for building a large army and acquiring sophisticated weapons. This would seem a normal and prudent measure in the face of constant harassment.

Nicaragua can go either way. It can end up totally identified with Cuba and the Soviet Union. Some influential figures within the Sandinistas regard the enmity of the United States as a fact of life which must be compensated for by closer association with our enemies. We have done much

to confirm this impression. Eight months ago, President Reagan withdrew the extraordinarily able ambassador, Laurence Pezzulo, and has not yet replaced him. To the young, angry, inexperienced, confused Nicaraguan leadership, Pezzulo was their trusted counselor on whom they counted heavily for advice and guidance. While Ambassador Pezzulo was in Nicaragua, relations between our countries were troubled but manageable. Since his departure, relations have dramatically worsened. It is legitimate to ask if this worsening was not precisely what the Reagan administration intended by leaving this vital post unattended.

The majority of those who are exercising power and influence still believe the future of Nicaragua depends on establishing close ties with the United States. This powerful sector has the capacity to transform Nicaragua into a democratic nation. What this group cannot do is achieve that goal of gradual democratization in the face of our opposition and harassment. We must ask ourselves what will we accomplish if we throw Nicaragua into a state of chaos with the assistance of many thousands of former Somoza military. Those in our government who labor under the illusion that the Nicaraguan people will not support their government in the face of a foreign-supported threat forget that it was the Bay of Pigs which made Castro undisputed hero of Cuba.

El Salvador

In El Salvador, will it be the courage and creativity demonstrated by the United States in Panama or the moribund, doomed-to-failure line we are now following in Guatemala? The signs are uniformly bad. Sound policies yield measurable progress. Barren policies produce tired rhetoric. Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Enders asserts that "the decisive battle for Central America is underway in El Salvador." And in an open-ended, Vietnam-like statement, Secretary Haig pledges that we will do "whatever is necessary" to defeat leftist insurgents in El Salvador. And in Guatemala? And in Honduras? The Reagan administration is well on its way toward making the United States the foremost status quo, counterrevolutionary power in the world. This retrograde policy will hand Central America to the communists on a silver salver. We have forgotten the wisdom of John F. Kennedy, that "those who make peaceful evolution impossible, make violent revolution inevitable."

President Reagan was guilty of an inaccuracy when he stated, "I didn't start the El Salvador thing, I inherited it." What President Reagan inherited was an intelligent, creative policy which had prevented El Salvador from falling to the left. An honest beginning on agrarian reform had been made. Right-wing demonstrators in front of the U.S. Embassy carrying placards denouncing U.S. policy as communist convinced many skeptics that the traditional alliance between embassy and oligarchy had finally been broken. The Salvadoran foreign minister publicly pleaded with the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) to come to the negotiating table. Pressures from the United States, combined with threats from the Christian Democrats to bolt the government unless human-rights abuses were curbed, resulted in some small but real progress. The military published a code of conduct and transferred many hard-line officers out of positions of power. In January, the highly touted "final offensive" of the guerrilla forces failed. The government began plans to complete the second and

third phases of the agrarian reform. The FDR began to talk seriously of entering the negotiations.

But within a few weeks the Reagan administration cut the heart and soul out of the revolutionary program of the government. The agrarian reform was slowed and its vital second stage, which decreed the redistribution of rich coffee lands, was explicitly cancelled. The Reagan administration's insistence on a military solution prevented the Christian Democrats from fulfilling their pledge to negotiate with the left. Thus the Christian Democrats, who have much more in common with the moderate wing of the Democratic Revolutionary Front than they do with the oligarchy, were demoted to a subordinate role. And then, as if to broadcast to the world that we had learned something from Vietnam, we sent in military advisors, armaments, and helicopters.

The results were totally predictable. The Reagan policy has given over final decisionmaking authority in El Salvador to the hard-line military, diminished to the vanishing point the influence of President Napoleon Duarte and the Christian Democrats, returned the oligarchy to its formerly dominant position, and associated the good name of the United States with the death squads and massacre of Salvadoran youth.

Unfortunately, the Reagan administration proved to be the prisoner of its own right-wing theology. As in the infamous white paper, it has tortured half-truths, unproved assumptions, and pure illusion into a crazy-quilt policy of contradictory words and actions which is well on its way to handing a military victory to the insurgents. To make certain that no one disturbs the administration with informed comment or knowledgeable dissent, the theologians of the "new right" have exorcised all Central American expertise. Today not a single senior State Department officer in a policymaking position on Central America has ever served in Central America.

This combination of theological certitude and lack of experience has led the Reagan apprentices to commit the crucial error of building on sand. The Salvadorans on whom the success of the Reagan formula depends are rotten to the core. Nothing we can do can instill morale into a Salvadoran military officer corps which has earned the contempt of the civilized world by its routine practice of torture and assassination. Nothing we can do can prevent the economic collapse of the country, as the rich and powerful systematically export the wealth of El Salvador into their foreign bank accounts. The people have now lost faith in the government and support for the guerrillas has increased. The right-wing businessmen who fear reformers, not communists, incite the military to continue to slaughter thousands of young people on the mere suspicion that they are sympathetic to the left.

In one of his finest poems, Father Ernesto Cardenal put these words into the mouth of a young martyr of the Nicaraguan revolution:

> If they force me to choose my destiny
> To die as Sandino died
> Or to live as the assassin of Sandino lived
> Then I will choose the way of Sandino.

This is the choice the Reagan administration is forcing on the youth of El Salvador. Either become, actively or passively, part of the corrupt, brutal military apparatus our government maintains in power or become a revolutionary. Increasingly they will choose revolution, and whether or not Cuba supports the revolution is not going to make an important difference. If Secretary Haig ever makes good on his threat to "go to the source" and eliminate Cuba as an agent of rebellion, he will find that the revolutionary movement will go forward unchecked. It is not Russia, Cuba, and Nicaragua that are making the revolutions in Central America. It is injustice, brutality, and hunger that feed the revolutionary flame. Outside support only causes the flame to burn faster.

A sound policy for El Salvador must begin with professional analysis based on solid evaluated information free of ideological tilt. For if you are wildly wrong in your analysis the chances that you will hit on the right strategy are substantially reduced. It is here that the trouble begins. In testimony before a congressional committee, Secretary Haig stated, "First and foremost, let me emphasize...that our problem with El Salvador is external intervention in the internal affairs of a sovereign state in the hemisphere--nothing more, nothing less. That is the essential problem we are dealing with."

Clearly this is not the problem we are dealing with. What we are dealing with is an authentic, homegrown revolution which enjoys important popular support. A substantial minority of the Salvadoran people would vote for a revolutionary leader with a radical platform to transform the country. This has always been true. What is new over the last 12 months is the conviction now shared by the majority of the Salvadoran campesinos and workers that a victory by the revolutionaries is the only way to stop the constant and increasing wave of mass killings by the Salvadoran military. There is not one poor family in the entire country which has not lost a close relative to the military death squads.

Alternatives

The Reagan administration contends that we must support the military or turn the country over to the guerrillas. This sterile approach attempts to force choices into mutually exclusive dilemmas. The reality is more complex. There are, in fact, several avenues which would ensure that El Salvador did not fall prey to Cuban-supplied insurgents.

The first avenue has been suggested by Alexander Haig: to go to the source and eliminate Cuba as a supposed avenue of clandestine arms shipments to El Salvador. This course has at least logic to recommend it. Cuba is an outpost of the Soviet Union in the hemisphere. It does train and support some of the revolutionaries of Central America. It is even possible that our highly competent representative in Havana, Wayne Smith, might be able to persuade Fidel Castro to agree to respect the recent United Nations resolution calling on all nations to refrain from sending arms to El Salvador, provided, of course, that the Reagan administration would also comply with the U.N. resolution and cease to supply the Salvadoran military with arms--far greater in quantity and sophistication than anything the revolutionaries receive from Cuba. Or can it be that the Reagan administration is opposed not just to what it characterizes as

Marxist revolution but to any revolution no matter how authentic? This would be a difficult position to justify to the American people, the majority of whom recall that our country was born in revolution.

Another more practical and less dramatic course to prevent a leftist military victory is to request Bishop Rivera y Damas to renew his 1980 offer to mediate a settlement, and to encourage President Napoleon Duarte to repeat his public acceptance of such mediation. The leadership of the Revolutionary Democratic Front has made a respectful appeal to President Reagan to end his opposition to peace talks. They have publicly stated their willingness to participate in elections. The revolutionaries do have this curious reluctance to enter into elections when they know that the military will gun down any political leader who campaigns on a platform of reconciliation and peace.

Another avenue is for the United States, in concert with its friends and allies, to work out the provisions for an international peace force in El Salvador. This would have the happy effect of putting the Reagan administration for once in the position of making a constructive gesture instead of leaving that responsibility to other governments, such as Mexico and France. It is urgent to recognize that El Salvador today is almost bereft of leadership. With intelligent, balanced men such as former junta members Colonel Adolfo Majano and Dr. Roman Mayorga driven from the country by the military, the political center cannot function. Without the presence of the hundreds of moderate democratic political figures now in exile, the institutional framework of the country cannot be rebuilt. If the Reagan administration would make the effort, it might recall that international and regional organizations exist for purposes other than to flay our real and imagined enemies. It would be a simple matter to work out with the democracies of this hemisphere a method to bring a peacekeeping presence to El Salvador. Elections could then be held under the strict international supervision necessary to protect the lives of all candidates. Of course, any initiative, whether through the Organization of American States or through other means, must not be a thinly disguised attempt to utilize this regional organization as an instrument of U.S. policy. But if our initiative is designed to advance peace and reconciliation, it will command overwhelming popular support. The Carter administration made a critical error in not having recourse to the Organization of American States until the Nicaraguan situation was too far gone to be saved by multilateral diplomatic efforts. Creative use of the OAS at this point might offer a civilized and inexpensive alternative to the futile and costly Reagan policy of supplying unlimited arms for uniformed death squads.

Perhaps the most promising course of all would be to respond positively to the peace initiative of President López Portillo of Mexico. The Mexican president recognized that a solution to the conflict in El Salvador could give rise to legitimate U.S. concern. In a sound and imaginative neighbor-to-neighbor diplomatic initiative, López Portillo offered to act, in concert with friends and allies, to guarantee that any negotiated peace in El Salvador takes into account the main security interests of the United States.

Mexico is our natural ally in Central America. It is axiomatic that no U.S. policy can work unless it has Mexican sympathy and support. López Portillo and his designated successor, Miguel de la Madrid, understand as well as we do that security considerations are important in fashioning an overall approach toward Central America. They also understand, as we do not, the history, culture, and motivations of those who fight and die in a neglected center of our hemisphere. The Reagan approach to Central America is in deep trouble at home and abroad. What possible sense can it make not to accept an offer by the Mexican president to help protect our security interests in the region and at the same time advance conditions for peace?

APPENDIX

Workshop on U.S. Policy in Central America
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
March 17, 1982

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