

ANTI-COMMUNISM IN GUATEMALA: WASHINGTON'S ALLIANCE WITH GENERALS AND DEATH SQUADS

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Introduction: Liberal and Conservative anti-communism

In the contemporary US social formation, both liberal and conservative political, economic and social forces have made the issue of anti-communism central to the domestic and foreign policy debate. Conflicts between political and economic nationalist regimes in the Third World and the US imperial state, over the conditions for capital accumulation and the nature of Third World class relations, have been conceptualized by post-World War II American policymakers in terms of anti-communist ideology in order to justify an interventionist foreign policy. The utility of the notion is precisely that it allows the US to disguise the basis of its ties to client regimes and ruling classes: economic interests are obscured and national-class struggles are redefined as East-West conflicts. Foreign policy is not discussed in terms of a secure environment for multinationals to extract the economic surplus or political-strategic concerns, but largely with reference to Third World allies' opposition to 'communist subversion'. While the resort to anti-communist ideology has functioned to divert attention from the systemic concerns of the US imperial state, it has also served to rationalize the impact of large-scale violence perpetrated by allied regimes against their own populations. In countries such as post-1954 Guatemala, the most heinous acts of pro-US military rulers are subsumed within the anti-communist struggle. The requirement that liberal forces in US society develop politics from the terrain of anti-communism in a context where the most reactionary groups have been, and remain, dominant has had profound consequences for liberal efforts to promote a reformist anti-communist option in the Third World. Ultimately, the liberal and conservative variants have generated similar outcomes: political terrorist regimes; social and economic regression; massive state-centred corruption; fraudulent elections; foreign economic domination; and rulers who collaborate with US regional and global objectives.

During the Kennedy and Carter presidencies, the White House launched major efforts to combine reformist policies with anti-communist ideology in Guatemala. Each, however, proved incapable of bringing about reforms or modifying the pattern of state-authored mass repression. Essentially the liberal version of reformist anti-communism differs from its conserva-

tive variant in terms of programmes, political allies and the scope of regime violence. Liberals propose to carry out changes that improve the standard of living of the masses at the cost of local elites, without adversely affecting the US multinationals, their local economic partners, or the institutional position of the military and police. The conservative anti-communists seek to unify all sectors of the local ruling class and downplay reforms in favour of an exclusive military approach. Hence, while American liberals try to forge an alliance between the middle class and the military, American conservatives promote a power bloc in which the traditional oligarchical-military Right is dominant. The third difference between liberal and conservative anti-communists has to do with the scope of repression. The former support violent regime measures against radical class-based organisations but hope to exclude Christian Democratic and other centre-based groups from the wave of terror. The latter do not usually draw these fine distinctions. Instead, they support each and every effort by military or military-controlled governments to stamp out independent organized forces in society.

While these distinctions between liberals and conservatives have surfaced in US public debate, one major factor has unified them, feeding similar policy consequences: an ultimate reliance on the military establishment and police forces to establish dominance in the target country. In the case of Guatemala, the policies of all administrations from Eisenhower to Reagan, whatever their initial intentions, have consolidated the repressive forces in society and, in so doing, strengthened precisely the most significant obstacles to any serious and sustained programme of socio-economic change. The reformist anti-communism promoted by imperial state liberals has been repeatedly undermined by the Guatemalan military who have destroyed the very social movements capable of instituting such changes. The unwillingness of either the Kennedy or Carter White House to break with these armed forces, despite criticism of the latter's 'excesses', indicates that in their order of priorities, defeating radical social movements was paramount over and against social and economic reforms. In the process of supporting the destruction of these movements, however, the liberals have strengthened the groups opposed to all changes—thereby also undermining the 'centrist' option. Thus the logic of US liberal anti-communism converged with the results of their conservative counterparts generating a continuous pattern of unrelieved repression sustained and supported by one set of imperial state policymakers after another. The Guatemalan experience offers a striking illustration of this convergence and its outcome: the persistence of one of the most brutal regimes in modern history.

Anti-communism as a destabilizing mechanism

✓ Anti-communism has served as a mechanism to destabilize democratic and

nationalist regimes which attempt to carry out reforms that adversely affect US propertied interests. In this context, anti-communist ideology transforms a conflict between poor peasants and workers, and multi-nationals into a confrontation between Communist Terror and the Free World. This transformation of reality is central to gaining domestic support in the US because as an imperialist democracy it must secure the consent or acquiescence of its citizens. (Anti-communist demonology is thus a necessary accompaniment of a manipulated democracy.) The use of anti-communism as a destabilizing mechanism probably offers no clearer instance than that of Guatemala during its brief decade of democratic rule beginning in the mid-1940s.

The overthrow of the brutal Ubico dictatorship in 1944 by a coalition of urban workers, dissident military officers and sectors of the bourgeoisie created the basis for the freest elections in Guatemalan history. The liberal democratic government of Juan Jose Arevalo (1945–1950) presided over a period of discrete but significant social and economic advances for the country's workers and peasants—as well as the revival of a competing political party system. The wage levels of the urban working class were increased and a labour code was enacted giving workers the right to strike, establish trade unions and engage in collective bargaining. Arevalo also introduced a social security system, passed a law forcing the oligarchy to lease unused land to the peasants, and at least established the conditions for social organization to take place in the countryside. But the resistance of the oligarchy and the United Fruit Company prevented the implementation of any changes in the highly concentrated pattern of landownership (2 per cent of the population owned over 70 per cent of the farm land) in a society where the mass of the population—mestizos and Indians—were landless and forced to sell their labour power to maintain a precarious existence and were, therefore, at the mercy of the large landowners who had ties with the coercive power of the state.

Amidst the rise of the Cold War and the ideology of anti-communism as a driving force in American foreign policy during the Truman administration, the basis of Washington's policy toward Guatemala remained essentially economic, reflecting, above all, the enormous weight exercised by United Fruit throughout the local economy where its investments were valued at \$60 million. Schlesinger and Kinzer provide a concise description of the Company's reach: 'It functioned as a state within a state, owning Guatemala's telephone and telegraph facilities, administering its only important Atlantic harbor and monopolizing its banana exports. The company's subsidiary, the International Railways of Central America (IRCA), owned 887 miles of railroad track in Guatemala, nearly every mile in the country.'

The election of Colonel Jacobo Arbenz as president in 1950 accelerated the process of social and economic change in Guatemala initiated by his

predecessor. The centrepiece of the Arbenz programme was an agrarian reform law which resulted in the expropriation of 1.5 million acres of uncultivated land belonging to approximately 100 plantations, including over 400,000 acres of United Fruit property—with compensation to be determined on the basis of 1952 tax declarations and paid in 25 year government bonds. By 1954, 100,000 families or approximately 500,000 individuals had received land as well as access to bank credits and state technical assistance.' Arbenz further sought to end the dominance of United Fruit and other American companies in the public utilities and transportation sectors (docks, railways, highways, electric power) of the economy. The government also fostered the development of industrial and agricultural labour organizations, increased the minimum wage, and began to elaborate an independent foreign policy within regional and global political forums. Despite these efforts to reshape the Guatemalan society and economy, Arbenz did not seek to challenge decisively the capitalist mode of production. The goal of the agrarian reform, for instance, was not structural changes in the existing landholding pattern but increased efficiency and higher production levels on the plantations. Nonetheless, this comparatively modest challenge to American capital accumulation in Guatemala and concern over the possibility of a 'revolution in the revolution' anchored in the newly mobilized workers and peasants led the Eisenhower administration to define the popular nationalism of Arbenz as a threat to imperial regional hegemony and world stability.

US policymakers (including Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and CIA Director Allen Dulles whose business and personal ties to United Fruit were longstanding) devised a multitrack strategy to disintegrate the Arbenz government and restore an environment for optimal capital accumulation and expansion. Washington placed an embargo on military assistance to Guatemala; economic and technical aid programmes were withdrawn; an extensive media-propaganda campaign jointly financed by the US government and United Fruit accused Arbenz of having permitted 'international communism to gain a political base in the hemisphere'; and great pressure was exerted by the White House to mobilize regional support for the imperial objective. High-ranking American official characterized the expropriation of United Fruit lands as 'discriminatory', denounced the compensation formula as unsatisfactory, and promised United Fruit executives that the restoration of the Company's pre-Arbenz empire would be given the greatest priority under a new regime:

At some point during the preparations for the invasion, a United Fruit official . . . met privately with Allen Dulles to discuss the status of United Fruit properties following Arbenz's downfall. Dulles promised that whoever was selected by the CIA as the next Guatemalan leader would not be allowed to nationalize or in any way disrupt the company's operations.

Although the takeover of United Fruit lands and the proliferating labour and agricultural laws were instrumental factors in the August 1953 White House decision to overthrow Arbenz by military force, the destabilization policy was consistently rationalized in terms of the ideology of anti-communism and the need to respond to an 'external threat' that might lead to Guatemala's withdrawal from the capitalist politico-economic orbit. Internal Truman administration memoranda expressing concern over the 'ascending curve of Communist influence'⁴ during the early months of the Arbenz presidency laid the basis for an evolving policy of diplomatic, political and economic hostility toward the nationalist regime. By the time of the Eisenhower White House, Arbenz's 'drift toward Communism' had become an established 'fact' among Washington policymakers. The notion that indigenous Communist Parties were agents of, or the transmission belts for, expansionist international communism was given explicit voice in relation to Guatemala in a draft paper prepared by the State Department in August 1953 for consideration by the National Security Council: 'In Guatemala Communism has achieved its strongest position in Latin America, and is now well advanced on a program which threatens important American commercial enterprises in that country and may affect the stability of neighboring governments. Continuation of the present trend in Guatemala would ultimately endanger the unity of the Western Hemisphere against Soviet aggression, and the security of our strategic position in the Caribbean, including the Panama Canal.'⁵

In October, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs John Moors Cabot castigated Arbenz for 'openly playing the communist game' and declared that there could be no 'positive cooperation between the two countries'.⁶ Another high-level interdepartmental report on Guatemala (May 1953) concluded that Communist political influence was 'far out of proportion to their small numerical strength' despite the fact that they lacked any influence within the key coercive fractions (army and police) of the state and had no ministerial representation.⁷ Their influence centred largely around the leadership of some urban based unions, the participation of individual party members in the administration of the agrarian reform, and the Party's capacity to organize and mobilize popular support for the government's programmes.

Following the tenth Inter-American Conference of Foreign Ministers in Caracas, Venezuela in March 1954 where the US delegation led by Secretary of State Dulles steamrolled through a declaration which 'established anti-Communism as the principal criterion for legitimizing and delegitimizing governments and judging their hemispheric policies'⁸ the CIA received its 'marching orders' from the White House and NSC, together with an estimated \$20 million in funds, to plan and train an invasion force of Guatemalan exiles to overthrow the Arbenz regime. United Fruit and other American corporations with major economic

investments in Guatemala were briefed on the project by senior administration officials on an ongoing basis until the ouster of Arbenz.

Washington's assessment of the Guatemalan situation was simply confirmed by the nationalist government's decision to purchase a shipment of arms from Czechoslovakia in May 1954. This 'discovery' provided a convenient pretext for unleashing Colonel Castillo Armas and his exiles training under CIA direction on a United Fruit plantation in Honduras. In early June, a senior State Department Middle America official wrote to the US Ambassador to Guatemala, John Peurifoy: 'There is 100 per cent determination here, from the top down, to get rid of this stinker [Arbenz] and not stop until that is done.'⁹ Some days later, Secretary of State Dulles announced that Guatemala was in the grip of a 'Communist-type reign of terror'.¹⁰ Before the end of June, Arbenz was overthrown, the social and economic experiment terminated, and a pro-US right-wing anti-communist regime installed in power.

Through the skillful use of anti-communist ideology, Truman and Eisenhower policymakers were able to mobilize domestic support for a policy of antagonism toward Arbenz. In the process they were able to obliterate the fundamental conflict over property ownership and obscure an array of social and economic issues which created conflicts between the regime and foreign capital and provided the substantive basis for US imperial state actions leading to the downfall of the nationalist government. As Walter LaFeber cogently points out, Washington's preoccupation with anti-communism in Guatemala, especially during 1953 and 1954, 'overlook[ed] the previous seven years of growing confrontation that had centred on issues of private property and personnel for the Guatemalan agencies that exercised power over property'.¹¹

Anti-Communism as a legitimizing mechanism

Anti-communism as a legitimizing mechanism has the virtue of obscuring the nature of Washington's principal allies, their methods of rule and their policy objectives. Under the vague rubric of anti-communist can be found the members of the death squads, military dictators, secret police tortures, and the like. The pursuit of anti-communist policies provides a cover for all the repressive activities as well as the massive corruption and pillage that has characterised arbitrary military rule. Washington's focus on the Communist-Anti-communist dichotomy has been central to the effort to redirect attention away from basic class and national dichotomies, thereby preventing any attempts by popularly-based Third World governments to mobilize international support and solidarity. The imperial state emphasis on anti-communism also serves an important domestic function: It weakens the anti-interventionist impulse among the liberal US public, thus neutralising internal opposition to foreign policy initiatives and alliances with totalitarian client regimes. The period in Guatemala after 1954

provides us with an excellent example of the way in which Washington used anti-communist ideology to mobilize US public opinion to support its ties with successive dictatorial rulers by redefining issues in terms ('anti-communist', 'anti-subversion' instead of economic/strategic interests) favourable to the creation of a bipartisan foreign policy. Moreover, the common use of anti-communism as a legitimizing mechanism by both liberals (e.g., Kennedy and Carter) and conservatives (e.g., Eisenhower and Nixon) indicates that the issue of protecting the status quo in Guatemala through the aegis of the armed forces (the country's major anti-communist force) is the overriding priority for US policymakers.

Having utilized the ideology of anti-communism to justify the overthrow of Arbenz, American officials now wielded it to legitimate the rightist military regime of Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas (1954-1958) which terminated all efforts at social and economic reform, destroyed the newly organized workers and peasant unions, abolished the political party process, and initiated a period of repressive capitalist development 'from above and outside' based on large-scale infusions of US public and private capital. Castillo Armas cancelled the legal registration of 533 unions and revised the labour code to make future union organizing virtually impossible. Hundreds of labour leaders were murdered and within a year union membership declined from 100,000 to 27,000.¹² In the political arena, Castillo Armas summarily disenfranchised the approximately 70 per cent of the population who were illiterate. ~~Meanwhile, the new regime—~~
~~removed quickly to recreate the conditions for optimal capital accumulation:~~ almost all the labour legislation of the 1944-1954 period was abrogated; a new petroleum law eased restrictions on exploration by foreign companies and some of the largest US oil multinationals received concession rights to begin operations; a pact negotiated directly with the military rulers restored to United Fruit all of the property expropriated by Arbenz; taxes on interests and dividends were abolished; efforts at agricultural and industrial diversification were terminated, and the traditional authority of the agro-commercial (principally coffee) oligarchy and United Fruit was restored. Under Castillo Armas, however, the period of economic growth came to an end and Guatemala experienced a reversion from balance of payments surpluses to substantial trade deficits. Nonetheless, the decisive factor shaping the Eisenhower administration response to the new regime was the reconstruction of the state and economy to serve the interests of private capital accumulation. US economic assistance to Guatemala during the Castillo Armas presidency totalled \$80 million which contrasts sharply with the miniscule \$600,000 authorized for the whole Arevalo-Arbenz period.¹³

The presidency of General Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes (1958-1963) witnessed no decisive break with the pro-US policies of the previous military government. Domestically, however, Ydigoras Fuentes presided

over a period of deepening class-economic inequalities and rural impoverishment in a context where there no longer existed political channels for social reform through elected leaders. Political closure and economic marginalization created the objective basis for the emergence of revolutionary politics in 1960 in the form of guerrilla movements led by US-trained military officers hostile to the revival of traditional landlord dominance and the expanded American economic and politico-military presence. These movements established a base of support precisely among those peasants and Indians most directly affected by the 'rollback' of the social and agrarian reforms of the 1944-1954 period.

The rise of the guerrillas definitively resolved the tension inherent within the Alliance for Progress between the reformist anti-communist goals of the Kennedy administration and the right-wing conservative (military-oligarch) anti-communists embraced by Washington in the post-Arbenz era. The White House shifted all of its political and military support to the most reactionary elements in Guatemalan society in order to defeat the guerrilla challenge for state power. By this time, however, US policymakers were growing increasingly disenchanted with Ydigoras Fuentes' seeming incapacity to contain the guerrillas despite the fact that his regime continued to accommodate US political and economic interests, and even allowed Guatemala to serve as a strategic base for American interventionary actions in the region (e.g. Cuba 1961). His decision to allow Arevalo to return from exile and participate in the proposed December 1963 presidential elections was the last straw as far as both the country's military high command and the Kennedy White House were concerned. In March 1963, the army, supported and, indeed, encouraged by Washington ousted Ydigoras Fuentes from office, cancelled the elections and installed former Defence Minister Colonel Enrique Peralta Azurdia as the new Head of State. Peralta Azurdia immediately dissolved Congress, banned all political activities, and rigorously enforced the existing 'state of siege' under which the country was already being governed.

Although the new military president was determined to vigorously prosecute the war against the guerrillas, his 'nationalist' orientation soon created frictions with Washington over the scope of direct Pentagon involvement in struggle. While he sought and accepted increased levels of US military assistance, Peralta Azurdia opposed on-the-ground participation by American counterinsurgency experts in the war against the rural antagonists of the military state—contending that the Guatemalan armed forces were quite capable of defeating the guerrillas without foreign combat support. Meanwhile, this period featured a consolidation of the power of the Guatemalan military throughout society, including the economic sphere where it deepened its linkages with the oligarchy through large-scale property purchases. During the latter part of his rule, Peralta Azurdia moved to create the conditions for a revival of a limited form of

electoral politics. A new constitution, enacted in 1965, provided for restricted political party competition and laid the groundwork for the election of a 'progressive' civilian Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro as president in 1966. Paradoxically, however, the Mendez Montenegro government (1966-1970) was responsible for the disintegration of the progressive liberal political option in Guatemala, clearing the path for a period of violent military rule. A forced alliance between the ultra right-wing forces and the liberal elements represented by the new president, promoted by the US with the cooperation of Mendez Montenegro, had devastating consequences for the mass of the Guatemalan populace.

Although the rightist military and oligarchy were wary of Mendez Montenegro's 'liberalism' and doubted his capacity to eliminate the guerrilla threat, Washington believed he would be more likely than his predecessor to allow Pentagon counterinsurgency specialists to play battlefield roles in the anti-guerrilla struggle. American officials participated in discussions between the president-elect and the army high command that established the conditions under which Mendez Montenegro was allowed to take office.¹⁴ The military would be allowed to prosecute the war without restrictions, the existing structure of command would be left intact, and the political Left would be excluded from participation in the government. Mendez Montenegro's decision to forsake his liberal anti-communism under military-US pressure, from the outset of his tenure in office, led directly to a period of wholesale massacres which had the practical effect of eliminating any differences between liberal and right-wing anti-communist forces in Guatemala.

During the Mendez Montenegro presidency (1966-1970), the US military-commitment to Guatemala expanded dramatically,—not only in the form of direct assistance (equipment and supplies) and manpower (counterinsurgency experts), but also through a US Office of Public Safety (OPS) programme to instruct and arm the National Police—which increased in numbers from 3,000 to 11,000.¹⁵ The OPS funding to Guatemala during this period constituted the second largest (after Brazil) programme in Latin America. When the Guatemalan army launched its brutal 'pacification' strategy in 1967 under the command of Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio in the Department of Zacapa, it was advised by US military attache Colonel John Webber and approximately 1,000 US Green Beret Special Forces.¹⁶ An estimated 15,000 individuals (mostly peasants) were killed in the Department of Zacapa alone over the next three years.¹⁷ Complementing this officially sanctioned violence were even more brutal forms of repression perpetrated by extreme rightist organisations with the complicity of the regime. 'With President Mendez's consent, and despite constitutional prohibitions,' writes one authority, 'private right-wing groups formed their own units to murder students, Indians, and labor leaders [even as the number of labour unions and rural cooperatives

actually increased under Mendez Montenegro] suspected of sympathizing with the rebels.¹⁸ More than twenty anti-communist 'death squads' composed of off-duty police and retired military officers proceeded to eliminate not only leftists and liberals but all those who in any way supported programmes of social change. A leading Christian Democratic official estimated that 6,000 political murders occurred during the 'liberal' president's tenure.¹⁹ The enormous amount of physical force applied by the state and its imperial benefactors partially destroyed a divided guerrilla movement while the vigilante terrorism of the oligarchy-supported death squads, created a more profound polarization in Guatemalan society.

In 1970, Colonel Carlos Arana Osario won the presidency, due to a split among the Left-liberal parties which received a majority of the votes, and immediately launched a ferocious campaign of terror in an effort to permanently eliminate all segments of the urban and rural opposition to military rule. Martial law was imposed and the right-wing death squads and the security forces were given carte blanche to literally cut a swathe through the heterogeneous political antagonists of the Arana presidency. As many as 1,000 people were murdered in the first three months of the regime but this did not dissuade the Nixon administration from looking favourably on Arana Osario's government as an important regional ally and showering it with military and economic aid. 'During the height of one particularly bloody repression in 1971,' according to an account of the period, 'twenty-five officers and seven former US policemen worked with that military.'²⁰ In 1972, Washington dispatched \$32.2 million in economic assistance, the second largest annual total ever provided to a Central American country. Meanwhile, the authoritative *Amnesty International* reported that between 1970 and 1973 over 15,000 people were killed or 'disappeared' by the regime.²¹ The majority of the victims were peasants, but they also included large numbers of trade unionists, students, journalists, social democratic politicians and representatives of various professional groups. The complicity of the Nixon-Ford administrations, in this period of uncontrolled terror waged by the military state against its own population during the late sixties and early seventies, is strikingly illustrated by the fact that between 1967 and 1976 almost all of Guatemala's foreign military assistance—\$35 million worth—came from the United States.²²

In 1974, General Kjell Laugerud, the preferred candidate of the military leadership, became president in one of the more fraudulent elections in contemporary Guatemalan history. Under Laugerud, the level of state-authored violence experienced a relative decline during the first two years of his tenure and was accompanied by the reinstatement of political activity, a growth in union membership from 28,000 in 1974 to approximately 80,000 in 1976 (still below the Arbenz period),²³ and the formation of rural cooperatives. In the urban centres, this controlled

political 'opening' led to a recomposition of the opposition forces and the emergence of a growing mass-based popular movement representing disparate political, social and ideological forces. In the countryside, following the violent repression of the Arana Osorio period, guerrilla movements reemerged and began to concentrate on the development of labour and **peasant unions**. Land conflicts (the growth of a landless or near landless peasantry had reached enormous proportions) and government terrorism of the preceding years had fostered an increased militancy among the Indians and peasants and the development of linkages with the guerrillas, especially in the northern province of Quiche. The radicalization of these highland Indian communities, the growth of a broad based urban opposition, and the renewed effectiveness of the guerrillas forced Laugerud to **resort** to a policy of selection assassinations, beginning in 1977, to eliminate the leadership of this burgeoning opposition to military rule and repression.

The response of the Carter administration was an attempt to influence changes in the method of **Laugerud's** rulership that did not threaten any serious rupture in bilateral relations⁴ While careful not to risk actions that might endanger the large US economic stake in Guatemala, the Carter White House applied some pressures, primarily in the form of a cutback in military credits, to force the regime to modify the scope of its repressive policies: to be more selective in their application and to combine state control with limited social reforms. The refusal of the clientist **ruling** class to modify the more extreme features of its policy of terror created friction between Washington and Guatemala City and the suspension of military assistance, (although previously authorized weaponry and funds continued to flow until 1980)—but the flow of economic assistance was not disrupted.

Carter's **effort** to elaborate an anti-communist foreign policy 'with a human face', like Kennedy's earlier attempt to combine counterinsurgency warfare with reformist anti-communist regimes, ultimately foundered on the existence of a hegemonic anti-communist ruling class in Guatemala "opposed to any kind of social and economic change and, therefore, to the type of heterogeneous political coalition that Washington viewed as the basis for instituting reforms. In both instances, the White House sought to separate and disassociate liberal anti-communism from right-wing anti-communism in Guatemala, but the imperial state's capacity to pursue this type of flexible anti-communist policy (Christian Democratic-reformist military-centrist Social Democrats, etc. coalition) was obstructed by the totalitarianism of the military-oligarchy forces which controlled the state and Washington's (liberal and **conservative**) first priority: sustaining the capitalist state in the context of a rising guerrilla challenge.

The fraudulent election of General Romeo Lucas Garcia in 1978 signalled the total collapse of the reformist anti-communist option pursued

by the Carter foreign policymakers. Lucas Garcia instituted a reign of terror that can be compared with the worst excesses of the early 1970s. Between 1979 and mid-1980, over 3,000 unarmed combatants were slaughtered by the army and the death squads, including peasants, labour organizers, religious workers and priests, lawyers, teachers and journalists.²⁴ During the subsequent ten months, 76 leaders of the Christian Democratic Party and 10 officials of the Social Democratic United Revolutionary Front were murdered.²⁵ Meanwhile, army massacres of entire Indian villages was a not uncommon occurrence. By early 1981, 'killings of people in opinion-making positions [had] decimated university faculties, student groups, moderate and left-of-centre political organizations, rural cooperatives, newspaper and radio staffs, peasant leagues, unions and churches'.²⁶ At this time, *Amnesty International* released a detailed report on Guatemala which documented in great detail the military government's role as the only author and practitioner of the 'official' and 'unofficial' terror: '... the selection of targets for detention and murder, and *the deployment of official forces for extra-legal operations*, can be pinpointed to secret offices in an annex of Guatemala's National Palace, under the direct control of the President of the Republic.'²⁷

With the advent of the Reagan presidency, the tension evident in the US imperial state at certain historical moments between promoting the interests of liberal anti-communism as opposed to alignment with right-wing anti-communist regimes was unambiguously resolved as the new group of Washington policymakers sought immediately to provide legitimacy for the murderous Lucia Garcia regime. 'It is very important to our interests in the region to re-establish relations with the Government of Guatemala,' remarked a senior State Department official at the beginning of Reagan's tenure, 'and we are actively pursuing ways in which to do so.'²⁸ In May 1981, Secretary of State Haig's special emissary, General Vernon Walters, visited Guatemala where he dismissed human rights criticisms as without foundation and expressed US support for the military's efforts to defend 'the constitutional institutions of this country against the ideologies that want to finish off those institutions'.²⁹

Emboldened by this public display of Washington's support, the repression continued apace, reaching its zenith in 1982 when the army, security forces, national police, intelligence services and death squads, working in concert or individually perpetrated several hundred documented massacres.³⁰ This terror 'offensive' was conducted largely under the auspices of General Efraim Rios Montt who succeeded Lucas Garcia as president following an internal military coup in March 1982. In early April, he approved a secret army plan for a major escalation of the counter-insurgency war in the countryside which 'focused upon eliminating the insurgent's popular base by massacring whole communities of suspected sympathizers. . .'³¹ Indiscriminate and generalized murder became the

order of the day in the months that followed. Military and paramilitary forces engaged in random executions, selective assassinations of community leaders and massacres of whole indigenous villages suspected of guerrilla sympathies.³² Between March and September, almost **8,000** non-combatants were killed, disappeared or were victims of collective holocausts.³³ Rioss Montt's scorched earth policy against peasant and Indian villages was largely responsible for the more than **100,000** Guatemalan refugees that have entered Mexico since January **1981** and another one million displaced persons who remain in the country as internal refugees or in forced 'relocation centres' (concentration camps).³⁴

Within the Reagan anti-communist Cold War schema, Rioss Montt was a valued regional client. The Guatemalan military's war of annihilation, especially in the countryside, was of limited concern to Washington when contrasted with the regime's pro-capitalist orientation, its acceptance of the Reaganites bipolar view of the world, and the nature of the local political antagonists—a guerrilla movement with a growing popular constituency. The Reagan White House exploited loopholes in Congressional restrictions on military aid to Guatemala, directly and indirectly, to bolster the firepower of the armed forces.³⁵ To facilitate US corporate sales, it reclassified such items as jeeps and trucks as non-military forms of assistance in order to circumvent the letter of the Foreign Assistance Act. Between December **1980** and December **1982**, Bell Helicopter Company, acting under a licence authorized by the White House and issued by the Commerce Department, sold Guatemala **\$25** million worth of civilian helicopters that were subsequently used for military purposes.³⁶ In January **1983**, the Reagan administration formally approved export licences for the sale of **\$6.3** million worth of helicopter parts. The imperial state exhibited similar determination to continue economic assistance to the Guatemalan rulers. In October **1982**, the White House declared that the US would no longer vote against multilateral development bank loans to Guatemala on human rights grounds because, according to State Department officials, human rights in the Central American country had actually improved under Rioss Montt!³⁷ Reagan concluded a trip to Guatemala in December with a ringing declaration of support for Rioss Montt whom he described as 'totally dedicated to democracy in Guatemala' and the object of 'a bum rap' in regard to accusations of widespread human rights violations committed during his presidency.³⁸

Defence Minister General Oscar Humerto Mejia Victores who replaced Rioss Montt in August **1983** following another army coup has continued, although with not the same high level of intensity, the brutal policies of his predecessor. During the first four months of his rule, killings and disappearances of regime opponents were also accompanied by a massive programme of arbitrary arrests which affected more than **7,000** persons in Guatemala City alone. The change in military leadership had no effect

on Washington's policy and Reagan's efforts to increase the still relatively limited flow of economic and military assistance to Guatemala, even though Congress continues with some success to obstruct administration objectives. US representatives in the international banks, for instance, have vigorously supported Guatemalan loan requests since the October 1982 policy shift. In September 1983, they voted in favour of loans to their right-wing anti-communist allies totalling \$70.5 million." The Reagan desire to normalize military and security ties was writ large in the administration fiscal year 1984 security assistance proposals which included a request for \$10 million in Foreign Military sales credits and loan repayment guarantees for Guatemala. In February 1984, the White House lifted a two month freeze on the sale of \$2 million worth of helicopter parts, ostensibly imposed to pressure the Mejia Victores regime to improve its human rights performance, even though more than 800 persons were reported assassinated or 'disappeared' during the first three months of the year.⁴⁰

Conclusion

US policymakers bear direct responsibility for the ascent to political power of the Guatemalan military in 1954; and the policies of successive Republican and Democratic administrations have been instrumental in the armed forces' calculated escalation of military control and state-authored repression over three decades. On the one hand, presidents from Truman to Reagan have opposed progressive democratic governments and movements in Guatemala. On the other, they have lavishly financed and supported right-wing military and military controlled regimes receptive to US corporate interests at the expense of the country's vast majority of workers and peasants and who were prepared to align themselves with Washington's regional and global objectives. US direct private investment in Guatemala rose from \$131 million in 1960 to \$186 million in 1970 to \$260 million in 1980—the largest US multinational commitment in Central America.⁴¹ The ideology of anti-communism has been utilized by Washington policymakers, time and again, to justify opposition to agrarian reform, organized worker-peasant movements and nationalist development projects, and to legitimate the repressive policies pursued by rightist military rulers. The results have ranged from the reversal of democratic and social reform based on parliamentary politics to the blockage of all avenues of political expression and opposition based on force and violence; from growth through national development benefiting the mass of the population to growth through national exploitation based on state terror financed and supported by Washington which enriched the military-oligarchy ruling class and impoverished the country's Indians and peasants. The social consequences of US-financed and supported military rule in Guatemala since 1954 has been profound: a concentration of land owner-

ship and wealth in the hands of the army, oligarchy and US corporations; a decline in virtually every area of social welfare—education, public health, drinkable water, access to electricity; widespread malnutrition and low life expectancy levels in rural areas; a persistent and serious infant mortality problem (35 per cent of children nationwide and up to 60 per cent in rural Guatemala die before the age of 5); massive illiteracy; extensive unemployment and underemployment; the growth of urban slums; and a decline in the minimum wage to below the level of the Arbenz period (the purchasing power of the urban workers fell by one third between 1970 and 1980 alone).⁴² Between 1950 and 1978, the share of national income obtained by the poorest 50 per cent of the population declined from 9 per cent to 7 per cent while the top 5 per cent of the population increased its share from 48 per cent to 59 per cent.⁴³

Since the US orchestrated destabilization and overthrow of the reformist Arbenz government in 1954, every Guatemalan regime has engaged in large-scale extrajudicial execution of noncombatant civilians. In December 1983, *Amnesty International* which has closely monitored the human rights situation in Guatemala since the early 1970s, issued a report which concluded on the following note:

Under successive administrations, the regular security and military forces in Guatemala—as well as paramilitary groups acting under government order or with official complicity—have been responsible for massive instances of human rights violations, including 'disappearances' and extrajudicial execution, directed at people from all sectors of Guatemalan society [Indians, peasants, teachers, students, trade union leaders, health services personnel, journalists, other professional groups, etc.] . . . although there have been fluctuations in the volume of killings and 'disappearances', the policies and structures responsible for these violations have remained virtually the same.⁴⁴

In the three decades since democratic popular rule in Guatemala, the institutionalized terror of the rightist anti-communist regimes supported by conservative and liberal Washington administrations has claimed over 100,000 victims.

Anti-communist ideology in both its liberal and conservative guises has been the key mechanism destabilizing the emergence of independent political forces and legitimizing a succession of repressive military rulers in Guatemala for more than three decades. The notion has functioned to undermine the class analysis of class conflict and substitute fictitious world-system ideological conflicts. Every imperial administration from Eisenhower to Reagan has employed it to mobilize domestic support for these totalitarian regimes that have shown themselves willing to accommodate US economic, political and strategic objectives throughout the Central American-Caribbean region. Moreover, anti-communist ideology has served to empty the language of Western democracy of all of its

cognitive meanings: anti-communist terror and massacres have been continually associated with the defence of free institutions. Clearly, no return to a democratic foreign policy in the United States and elsewhere in the capitalist world is possible without a complete rejection of the ideology of anti-communism and the policies associated with it.

NOTES

1. Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1982), p. 12.
2. See Richard M. Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 66; Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983), p. 116.
3. Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *op. cit.*, p. 120.
4. Quoted in Walter LaFeber, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
5. Draft Policy Paper Prepared in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Top Secret, 'NSC Guatemala', August 19, 1953, in US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume IV, The American Republics*, (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1983), p. 1074.
6. Quoted in Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
7. National Intelligence Estimate, Secret, 'Probable Developments in Guatemala', May 19, 1953, in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume IV, The American Republics, op. cit.*, p. 1061. On the limited influence of the Communists within the state and governing regime, see Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-61; Cole Blasler, *The Hovering Giant: US Responses to Revolutionary Changes in Latin America*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976), p. 227.
8. James Petras, *et al.*, 'The Monroe Doctrine and US Hegemony in Latin America', in James Petras (ed.), *Latin America: From Dependence to Revolution*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973), p. 257.
9. Quoted in Richard M. Immerman, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-158.
10. Quoted in Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
11. Walter LaFeber, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
12. See Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *op. cit.*, p. 219.
13. See *Ibid.*, pp. 232-233.
14. See Suzanne Jonas and David Tobis, (eds.), *Guatemala*, (Berkeley: North American Congress on Latin America, August, 1974), p. 105.
15. See Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *op. cit.*, p. 247.
16. See Walter LaFeber, *op. cit.*, p. 169.
17. See Thomas P. Anderson, *Politics in Central America*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983), p. 26.
18. Walter LaFeber, *op. cit.*, p. 170.
19. See Thomas and Marjorie Melville, *Guatemala: The Politics of Land Ownership*, (New York: Free Press, 1971), pp. 247-248.
20. Walter LaFeber, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
21. See Jenny Pearce, *Under the Eagle: US Intervention in Central America and the Caribbean*, (Boston: South End Press, 1982), p. 71.
22. See Walter LaFeber, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
23. See Thomas Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

24. See Walter LaFeber, *op. cit.*, p. 260; Lars Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy Toward Latin America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 352-354.
25. See Warren Hodge, 'Repression Increases in Guatemala As US Is Seeking To Improve Ties', *New York Times*, May 3, 1981, p. 3.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
27. 'Guatemala: A Government Program of Political Murder—The Amnesty Report (Extracts)', *The New York Review of Books*, March 19, 1981, p. 38.
28. Quoted in Warren Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
29. Quoted in Christopher Dickey, 'Haig's Emissary, in Guatemala, Discounts Charges of Rights Abuse', *Washington Post*, May 14, 1981, p. A1.
30. See Richard Alan White, *The Morass: United States Intervention in Central America*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984), p. 104.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
32. See *Ibid.*, p. 100-101.
33. See Comité Pro Justicia Y Paz de Guatemala, *Human Rights in Guatemala*, February 1983, p. 21.
34. See David B. Lawrenz, 'Rearming the Guatemalan Military: "Reagan Refugees" for Mexico and the US', *COHA Memorandum*, (Washington, D.C.: Council on Hemispheric Affairs, February 13, 1984). 6 pp; 'Refugees are everywhere', *Central America Report* (Guatemala City), Vol. XI, no. 6, February 10, 1984, pp. 42-43; United Nations, General Assembly Report of the Economic and Social Council, *Situation of Human Rights in Guatemala*, 38th Session, Agenda Item 12, A/38/485, November 4, 1983, pp. 32-34.
35. See Richard J. Meislin, 'US Military Aid for Guatemala Continuing Despite Official Curbs', *New York Times*, December 19, 1982, pp. 1, 18; Bruce P. Cameron and Christopher D. Ringwald, *Aid to Guatemala: Violating Human Rights*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for International Policy, May 1983), 6 pp.
36. See Christopher Dickey, 'Guatemala Uses US "Civilian" Copters in Warfare', *Washington Post*, January 23, 1982, pp. A1, A11.
37. See Raymond Bonner, 'US Now Backing Guatemala Loans', *New York Times*, October 10, 1982, p. 17. Also see Jim Morrell and William Jesse Biddle, *Central America: The Financial War*, (Washington, D.C.: Center for International Policy, March 1983), pp. 6-7.
38. Quoted in Steven R. Weisman, 'Reagan Denounces Threats to Peace in Latin America', *New York Times*, December 5, 1982, p. 1.
39. See *MesoAmerica*, (San Jose, Costa Rica: Institute for Central America Studies), Vol. 3, no. 5, May 1984, p. 2.
40. See, for example, 'Government sanguine about violence problem', *Central America Report* (Guatemala City), Vol. XI, no. 7, February 17, 1984, pp. 51-52.
41. See 'Garrison Guatemala', Special issue of *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Vol. XVII, no. 1, January-February 1983, p. 12.
42. See Washington Office on Latin America, 'Guatemala: The Roots of Revolution', *Special Update*, (Washington, D.C., February 1983), pp. 2-6; Walter LaFeber, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-168, 259; Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *op. cit.*, pp. 253-254.
43. See Washington Office on Latin America, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
44. Amnesty International, *Guatemala Update: Amnesty International Human Rights Concerns in Guatemala Since the August 1983 Coup Which Brought General Oscar Humberto Mejía Victores to Power*, (London, December 23, 1983), p. 1.