Reagan's War cont'd.

the point, a month later the President of the United States called openly for funds for the Contras and for the overthrow of the Sandinista government.

Stories in the press circulate about American servicemen fighting and dying in Central America, despite government claims to the contrary, as more U.S. troops pour into Honduras for manuevers just miles from the Nicaraguan border. And under pressure from Washington, the Contadora peace process stalls in its tracks. Finally it has become apparent to just about everyone that the U.S. strategy in Central America is solely a military one. The region is becoming militarized, and the wars are becoming regionalized.

To understand how the situation is deteriorating, we need to look more closely at the countries our government is supporting in its drive for victory.

El Salvador

The key to U.S. policy in the region is El Salvador. Last year during the U.S. presidential campaign, Duarte signaled to the rebels that he wanted to talk and the FMLN responded. For Reagan's re-election campaign, this move toward negotiations looked good. But Duarte was also pressured by elements within his own Christian Democratic party weary of the long civil war to open talks with the insurgents. Initially the talks seemed to guarantee an increased flow of U.S. military aid to the armed forces. Yet after only two meetings, Duarte terminated the negotiations. He had brought demands that the rebels surrender to the first talk, and after the second round, declared that they must lay down their arms before any future meetings occur. This was, of course, unacceptable to the FMLN.

During the two months of the talks, they struck a responsive chord among Salvador's urban population. For the first time in years, mass demonstrations were seen in the cities, calling for peace, as the rebels took advantage of this political opening in the urban areas, all the while remembering how their mass movements of the early eighties had been decimated by the death squads. Reagan and the Salvadorean generals tolerated the politization generated by the talks and the legitimation given the rebels and the idea of peace only as long as they felt they could smash the rebellion. But just the opposite was happening. The civil war of half a decade was not gong well for the military. The army's latest and largest operation ended in disaster and in the death of one of its top commanders, Col. Monterrosa. The guerrillas, who control nearly one-third of the countryside with a half million inhabitants, have claimed they've inflicted thousands of casualties on government forces over the last six months. Facing these defeats and the prospects of the continuation of the long, drawn-out conflict, the military and the more righ-wing elements within the government forced Duarte to pull out of the talks.

Duarte had his own reasons too. Another round of elections are being held in March, with 60 legislative seats open mayoral posts up for grabs in over 250 towns. With the left—the FDR—boycotting the voting, Duarte wanted to prevent the extreme right-wing ARENA party from outflanking him on the right. Talking "peache" appeared to liberal, especially with reports circulating that the U.S. Embassy was throwing its weight being ARENA to persuade it to remain part of the "democratic process."

The tone and climate surrounding the elections is vicious, reflecting the level of polarization. Candidates from both major parties accuse each other of assassinating each's officials. Plots and rumors of plots abound. The Archbishop of San Salvador surrounds himself with ten bodyguards because of threats on his life after he came out publically in favor of the peach talks. Duarte himself was the target of an ARENA assassination plot, so the CIA warned him.

With its troopa defeated on the ground, the Salvadorean military has taken the war to the air. The new U.S.-supplied C-47 gunships and the attack helicopters are able to fire 5000 rounds a minute, and the new counter-insurgency jets bomb and stafe rudral rural areas held by the rebels. The bombardment and aerial attacks signal a new phase in the war, becoming a cornerstone in the military's strategy, as the air force attempts to drive the civilian population out of the rebel zones.

The situation is ugly and the tensions are high. The U.S. has smothered this small country with over $1½ billions in aid since 1980, with 85% of it going to bolster the military. As the civil war grinds on, the guerrillas will make more advances and more of the Salvadorean army will collapse, forcing the Reagan administration into few options as it tries holding onto El Salvador as the lynchpin of its regional strategy.

Honduras

While El Salvador is the key to U.S. strategy, Honduras is the base; it has today become the nerve center of our government's military operations throughout the region and the chief recipient of U.S. military and economic assistance after El Salvador. Having drawn the country further into the area's conflicts, this U.S. designated role has fermented domestic opposition that has tried to place a brake on the Honduran rush to become America's puppet.

True to Honduran tradition, General Gustavo Alvarez as head of the armed forces dominated all politics, and happily accepted the U.S. military build-up and the country's new role. Yet domestic opposition grew and intensified until finally in 1984, a group of young, more liberal and nationalistic army officers staged a palace coup and overthrew Alvarez. He was replaced with General Walter Lopez, who immediately began making demands on Washington for increased aid, backing them up by threatening to oust the 10,000 Contras based in the eastern region and by refusing to allow Salvadorean troops to train at the newly constructed U.S. military camps. Despite the new show of Honduran autonomy, Reagan has requested over $200 million in aid for this year, and plans to grant another $237 million next year.

Three weeks after Reagan's re-election, a hundred American military strategists arrived to map out the next Big Pine exercise, as Honduras still allow the U.S. armed forces the run of its countryside. The latest joint military exercise has now begun, continuing the permanent "war games" staged since early 1983. These ratings are designed to develop the rapid deployment capabilities of U.S. troops in the event of a U.S. invasion and to train the Honduran army in modern warefare. After four years of build-up, Honduras has become the permanent home for 2000 American troops, and it allows the U.S. to use the new airfieds as bases for reconnaissance flights over rebel zones in El Salvador.

Of late, the issue of the Contras has become a sticky problem for the Honduran military due to reports of human rights violations and terrorism committed against Hondurans by the Contras. If the Reagan administration can't find funding for its surrogate forces, Honduran chieftains will have to force more concessions from Washington to allow their continued presence or again threaten to upset the yankee strategy.

Guatemala

The people of Guatemala have suffered as much as any other in Central America, being forced to live under a

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Reagan's Freedom Fighters

by Rick Nadeau

"We are not doing anything to try to overthrow the Nicaraguan government."
Ronald Reagan (April 1983)

"You can say were trying to oust the Sandinistas. . ."
Ronald Reagan (February 1985)

The disinformation specialists in the C.I.A., the State Department, and the Pentagon must be working overtime these days. The recent orchestrated barrage of propoganda against the Sandinistas and in favor of new funding for the "contras", as well as the renewed hints by Secretary of State Schultz that U.S. forces may have to be used if the contras fail to achieve their declared goal of overthrowing the Sandinistas, are strong indications that the Reagon administration is escalating the level of counter-revolutionary violence in Central America. The long range goal seems to be a "reversal" of the Nicaraguan revolution (as occurred in Chile and Grenada), the destruction of the El Salvadorian insurgency, and a return to the "good old days" when Uncle Sam was the unchallenged imperial Lord and Master of all of Central America.

Re-Packaging The Contras

The Reagan administration is determined to pressure Congress to restore aid to the 15,000 man contra army which was cut off in the fall of 1984. A full scale media campaign is being organized to convince the American people that the contras are "freedom fighters" attempting to liberate the Nicaraguan people from the curse of "communist tyranny" and "Soviet domination." The harsh Cold War rhetoric is alternately tempered with claims that renewed assistance to the contras will provide the necessary military pressure which will force the Sandinistas to the negotiating table – an interesting claim considering it was the U.S. that walked out of the latest round of negotiations.

This latter variation of the "peace through strength" argument has served Reagan well in the past, and it is now hoped that it will be instrumental in pushing the "moderate" democrats into line if they can be convinced that the "tough" strategy will facilitate "peace" talks. The new strategy represents a shift of emphasis away from the earlier discredited claim that aid to the contras was needed to intercept arms shipments to El Salvidor. This attempt to re-package the contras in new glossy wrappings, however, is not likely to fool administration critics. It is already clear to many that this new strategy merely represents a de-stabilization policy in search of a rationale.

Freedom Fighters???

It is a well documented fact that the contras have been organized, armed, and trained by the C.I.A., a peace-loving organization with an impeccable historical legacy of supporting democracy and freedom in the Third World. It is also a known and well publicized fact that the leadership of the contras is dominated by former National Guard members who served as hatchet men for the hated Somoza dictatorship. Furthermore, it is no secret that these paramilitary forces have received training at C.I.A. funded military camps located in Florida and Texas. Contrast this American hospitality towards those who are being trained for sabatoge and murder with its treatment of the Sanctuary Movement which protects and supports terrorized refugees fleeing the violence of the civil war in El Salvador!

Over 7,000 Nicaraguans, most of them civilians, have died as a result of the contra war. Increasingly, Reagans "freedom fighters" have resorted to kidnappings, ambushes, torture, rape, and brutal raids on Nicaraguan villages. Massacres have been reported. The victims of this counter-revolutionary violence are usually teachers, health workers, priests and nuns, literacy campaign volunteers, workers from community based co-operatives, and all others who are perceived as being sympathetic to the Sandinistas. The goal of this contra violence is to intimidate and terrorize the underlying population into abandoning support for the Sandinistas by fostering an atmosphere of endless economic and political turmoil. U.S. complicity with these acts was recently highlighted with the publication of the controversial C.I.A. Manual. "Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare," which openly advocates the kidnapping and murdering of Nicaraguan civilians as a means of destabilizing the government.

Between 1981 and 1984, when Congress cut off the funding as a result of the adverse public reation to the C.I.A. mining of Nicaraguan harbors, the contras received close to 80 million dollars in American aid. Another 14 million dollars has been set aside should Congress be persuaded to change its mind in 1985. Meanwhile, more "covert" and in-

direct channels of funding have opened up – U.S. monies now flow through Israel, Honduras, and El Salvador (all three receive most of their military aid from the United States) into the hands of the contras. It is probable that these conduits of U.S. funding will be expanded should Congress refuse to buy the new re-packaged contras.

Organized State Terrorism

In a recent (February 7, 1985) lecture in San Diego, former C.I.A. analyst David MacMichael presented an interpretation of the contras that is diametrically opposed to that of the Reagan administration. MacMichael worked from 1981 to 1983 investigating charges that the Sandinistas were providing military aid to the El Salvadorean rebels. He concluded that these charges were fabrications created to support a pre-established policy of overthrowing the Sandinistas. He also suggested that the agency continues to routinely manufacture propaganda for the press.

MacMichael went on to assert that the Reagan administration has been "lying" to the American people about the nature of the contra war against Nicaraguan society. He added that U.S. policy, "let us call it what it is", represented a form of "organized state terrorism" which may ultimately prove disastrous for the American people. MacMichael claimed that he became "ashamed" and "disgusted" with his government's behavior and could no longer remain silent.

This testimony of a former C.I.A. analyst that the U.S. government is unleashing "proxy terrorism" against the Nicaraguan people is not difficult to accept given the actual behavior of the Reagan administration during the last several months. Every attempt on the part of the Sandinistas to appease the Reagan administration (e.g. offers of amnesty, elections) has been met with mockery and more threats of aggression. Consider recent actions such as the mining of Nicaraguan harbors, the C.I.A. manual,