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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE / COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES  
JCSP 33 / PCEMI 33

EXERCISE NEW HORIZONS

**GUERRILLA WARFARE IN CENTRAL AMERICA FROM 1960s TO 1990s  
AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR THE WAR ON TERROR**

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**23 April 2007**

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## INTRODUCTION

“Virtually every study of the region, including the [1984] Kissinger Commission Report, has concluded that the revolutions of Central America primarily have been caused by decades of poverty, bloody repression, and frustrated efforts at bringing about political reform”.<sup>1</sup>

The term ‘guerrilla’ originates from the action of small bands of Spanish soldiers who fought against Napoleon’s French army in the Peninsular War (1807 – 1814). The word ‘guerrilla’ is Spanish for “little war”. The tactics employed by ‘guerrillas’ date back to the ideas of Sun Tzu the Chinese military strategist who lived over 2000 years ago.<sup>2</sup> Sun Tzu argued that all warfare involves the employment of one’s strength to exploit the weakness of the enemy. “The essence of guerrilla warfare is highly mobile hit and run attack by lightly to moderately armed groups that seek to harass the enemy and gradually erode his will and capability”.<sup>3</sup> Guerrilla warfare differs from terrorism as the main targets are government’s armed forces, police, or support units and in some cases, key economic targets, rather than unarmed civilians. It is similar to terrorism as it is a weapon of the weak; it is decisive only where governments fail to commit adequate resources to the conflict.<sup>4</sup>

This essay will look at guerrilla warfare in Central America from the 1960s to the 1990s with emphasis on Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador. It will examine in detail the root causes of guerrilla warfare and a case study in each country, the United States influence during this period and the roles it played. It will show that whilst guerrilla

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<sup>1</sup> James Lemoyne, New York Times Magazine, 5 April 1989.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/VNguerrilla.htm> accessed 9 Jan 07

<sup>3</sup> Bard E. O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (Brassey’s, Inc 1990)25

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 26

fighting was common throughout this period and may have worked in other parts of the world, it was not always successful in Central America and finally it will show that guerrilla warfare had an overall negative effect in these countries.

## **BACKGROUND**

In most of Central America in the 1970s and into the mid-1980s guerrilla warfare appeared to be the only method available to win power, since the oligarchies and their cohorts had systematically closed the political space. Central American revolutionaries believed that the guerrilla model, used successfully elsewhere, could work for Nicaragua, Guatemala and El Salvador. Fidel Castro and two thousand Cuban guerrillas overthrew a dictator who was supported by a fifty thousand-man army and sparked a revolution that got rid of the U.S. influence in Cuba; Algerians militias drove out the French; Vietnamese guerrillas fought both the French and American to reunite their long-colonized land and the Chinese communists had 'liberated' their nation through a combination of guerrilla and regular warfare.<sup>5</sup>

Nicaragua, the largest country in Central America declared its independence from Spain in 1821. In 1823 Nicaragua joined the United Provinces of Central America, an entity formed by Spain, which lasted until 1838, when it broke down into the Central American republics.<sup>6</sup> In the late 60s into early 70s the attention was on Nicaragua and the fall on the Somoza dynasty. The focus was on the control of Nicaragua by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) and the democratic forces which had fought against the

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<sup>5</sup> Saul Landau: *The Guerrilla Wars of Central America* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1993)  
vii

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 13

Somoza regime. The United States only belatedly recognized its existence and tried to stop the Sandinistas achieving absolute control.

It is difficult to fix an exact beginning for Guatemala's guerrilla insurgency other than to say that it had its genesis in what came to be known as the MR-13 (the 13<sup>th</sup> of November Movement of 1960). However it is documented that a major guerrilla insurgency was organized during the last years of the Ydigoras regime. There are some doubts whether or not the MR-13 had a well defined political orientation in the beginning and cites evidence to show that it was directed mainly against the incompetence and corruption of the Ydigoras government.<sup>7</sup> However, as time progressed they seemed to have possessed the will and organization to launch formidable attacks on the armed forces. The guerrillas in Guatemala, led by two former army subalterns, Marco Antonio Yon Sosa and Luis Turcios Lima, were initially ill-prepared and badly co-ordinated. They were quickly dispersed by their former colleagues without further help from the USA. However, in 1963 a military coup brought to power the first of a long series of military governments which believed that military control was the necessary precondition to fighting communism. Military control did not slacken under the civilian regime of President Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro (1966- 70), which was followed by a new military government led by General Arana Osorio who gained a sinister reputation due to the ferocity of his apparently successful counter-insurgency campaign.<sup>8</sup>

In El Salvador the traditional orderly control of elections had broken down at the beginning of the decade, but was quickly restored due to the benefits offered by the

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<sup>7</sup> Kenneth F. Johnson, *Guatemala: From Terrorism to Terror* (The Institute for the Study of Conflict Ltd 1972) 5

<sup>8</sup>Peter Calvert. "The Democratic Transition in Central..." 4

newly established Central American Common Market (CACM). The smallest and most densely-populated state in the hemisphere, El Salvador received a steady influx of Honduran immigrants seeking work either wishing to earn higher wages in the United States or to take advantage of the

demonstrated the point that some of these guerrilla leaders were determined in their cause while their supporters followed the movement without fully understand the politics. From the mere fact that they feeling the brunt of the various regimes, that was enough cause from them to join the revolution.

What became readily apparent from an analysis of counterinsurgency operations in these three countries is the overwhelming influence that one country- the United States- had on the success or failure of guerrilla fighting. “Whenever the American government firmly opposed the insurgency, the rebellion failed. When the administration declined to support the government, the guerrillas triumphed.”<sup>12</sup>

### **The United States Intervention**

In 1823, the Monroe Doctrine came into being which essentially claimed the Western Hemisphere as a U.S. sphere of influence. “Lacking a mighty economy or formidable navy, the United States nonetheless staked out the entire hemisphere as its domain, warning potential European colonizers to stay away.”<sup>13</sup> The United States thereafter steadily deterred Russian, British, French and Spanish from their Continental North American lands while at the same time deploying US troops to Latin America. Although the original reason for these landings can be attributed to goals associated with preventing piracy, it set a precedent for landing US soldiers on foreign soil.

“In the 1830s U.S. expeditions landed in Argentina, Peru and Mexico on mission unrelated to pirates. Two were designed to suppress revolution; the incursion into Mexico was related to the Texas ‘war for independence’. In 1848 the United States took more than half of Mexican territory, which later became the state of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, California, Colorado and Nevada. In the 1850s, US forces landed in Nicaragua

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Weitz. “Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Latin America, 1960 – 1980” in Political Science Quarterly, Vol. 101 Number 3, Centennial Year 1886-1986.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 5

(three times)...mostly, according to a State Department document, 'to protect US property interests during a revolution'".<sup>14</sup>

Successive US presidents adopted an 'open door' approach in dealing with the Western Hemisphere, particularly Central America. This 'open door' approach gave the US the belief that they could dispatch marines and naval forces whenever and wherever they so desired. These were done under the rubric of protecting US corporations and businesses that were enjoying cheap labour force and at the same time exploiting these under-developed countries.

"In 1932 President Franklin Roosevelt announced that the US policy toward Latin America would change from one of 'gun boat and dollar' diplomacy to one that shows respect and friendship towards its neighbours. The events of World War II in Europe and the Pacific shifted the US focus away from Latin America, albeit for a short time.

President Roosevelt, seeking global support for the war effort against fascism, announced his doctrine of 'four freedoms' - the basis of the modern human rights language - as the cause of all humanity. With the signing of the United Nations Charter, Latin American reformers and even some revolutionaries took inspiration, believing that a new, non-imperialist order could dawn".<sup>15</sup>

The small third world countries soon came to the realization that, that was not the case as was proven in Guatemala from 1944-54. With a successful coup led by Fidel Castro in Cuba, America became concerned that other nations in the region might follow Castro's communist example. Because of Castro's ties and connection to communism, the Soviet Union began to replace the US as Cuba's closest ally and most important supplier. A series of events occurred which eventually led to the Cuban Missiles Crisis resulting in the Soviets installing medium-range bombers in Cuba to deter US invasion.

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<sup>14</sup> Saul Landau. "The Guerrilla War..." 5

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 7



From 1962, the year of the Missile Crisis, the Soviet Union became a player in the Western Hemisphere and that incident opened the eyes of even the smallest nation in Central America. Eventually President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev signed an accord in which the US pledged not to invade Cuba in return the Soviet Union would withdraw its missiles from Cuba and never reinstall them. The US involvement in Central America is perhaps the most obvious product of the Kennedy-Khrushchev Accord. The reason for saying this is because to combat the challenges of revolution posed by Cuba and to squash future attempts by other nations, the US developed two “contradictory

annual per capita income of agricultural worker was \$87”<sup>19</sup>. In El Salvador the story is not much different. Farabundo Marti, the revolutionary apostle, throughout his “childhood witnessed the naked exploitation of poor peasants. In the city he saw the working class living under similar conditions”.<sup>20</sup> These among other evidence of poverty were the factors that drove Marti, a university graduate from a middle class family, to form the FMLN. In Nicaragua, one writer commented:

“Under the Somoza regime,...where the peasant and working class are denied a fair share of the wealth by small ruling elite and capitalist classes, economic considerations are the primary motive[for guerrilla fighting]; in many other cases they are interwoven with, and reinforce, other grievances”.<sup>21</sup>

Without a doubt, poverty was a major cause for guerrilla warfare in Central America.

### **Demand for Equality and Civil Liberty**

“To better understand insurgencies, we need to go beyond the basic demographic attributes of a population and inquire about the impact of its social culture. Societies may be divided vertically by race, ethnicity, and religion, or horizontally by class or caste”.<sup>22</sup>

The Somoza dynasty demanded subservience in Nicaragua but, in contrast, offered servility to Washington. Anastasio Somoza Sr. was assassinated by a young poet who later wrote that he had planned to put an end to tyranny. Fidel Castro and other ‘revolutionaries’ challenged the axiom of permanent US hegemony over the region, and

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<sup>19</sup> William Blum, “Killing Hope. U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II”(Black Rose Books, 1998) 74

<sup>20</sup> Saul Landau, “The Guerrilla Wars...” 67

<sup>21</sup> Bard O’Neill, “Insurgency and Terrorism Inside...” 62

<sup>22</sup> Bard O’Neill, “Insurgency and Terrorism...” 59

initiated revolutionary steps toward social justice.<sup>23</sup> After the assassination of Anastasio Sr., one of his sons, Luis, ascended to the presidency, while the other son, Anastasio Jr. assumed leadership of the National Guard. It must be noted that while the literacy percentage in Nicaragua was very low, Luis Anastasio attended universities in Louisiana, California and Maryland and the younger brother, Anastasio attended West Point. However after seven years as president, Luis stepped down and Anastasio named himself president and began a reform program in which peasants were forced off their land and coffee and cotton replaced beans and corn. The transition and handing over of power within one family created the perception that, that family was more important than the others. This was further compounded by the fact that this family was given the opportunity to attend the best schools abroad while the other Nicaraguans was not given the same opportunity. The reform program that was undertaken by Anastasio caused a growth in the economy but also increased to the number of poor, uneven distribution of wealth, created an even greater division between the lower and upper class within the society and fostered strong insurgency sentiments.

### **As a Means to Political Ends**

“Where a consensus on the legitimacy of the political community exists, there may be other grounds for internal warfare. A case in point is violent discord over political system –that is, the salient values, rules and structures that make up the basic framework guiding and limiting the making and execution of binding decision. ‘Values’ are general ideas of the desirable, such as equality, justice, liberty and individualism, whereas ‘rules’ encourage desired patterns of behaviour.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Saul Landau, “The Guerrilla Wars of Central America...” 19

<sup>24</sup> Bard O’Neill, “Insurgency and Terrorism...” 14

As is evident today in the quest for political reforms, transparency and good governance nations are most often than not prepared to go to extremes to achieve these goals. Two American academics made the following observations with regards to Central America:

“During the years 1980-84 the death squad worked freely in El Salvador, in close coordination with the army and security forces. The average rate of killings of civilians in the thirty months prior to the 1982 election was approximately seven hundred per month. Many of these victims were raped, tortured, and mutilated. All of this was done with complete impunity, and only the murder of four American women elicited – by dint of congressional pressure- any kind of legal action. In Guatemala, too, the endemic fear based on years of unconstrained and continuing army violence was a dominant fact of national life. According to Americas Watch [ a US watchdog], writings in early 1985, torture, killings, and millions of peasants remain under the strict scrutiny and control of the government through the use of civil patrols and ‘model villages’. In short Guatemala remains a nation of prisoners. In the case of Nicaragua, we repeat that the central fact that differentiates it from the U.S. client states: in 1984 its government was not murdering civilians. The main fear of ordinary citizens in Nicaragua was of violence by contras and the United States”<sup>25</sup>.

### **Major Guerrilla Activity and its Economic and Political Impact**

The result of guerrilla activities within these countries did not always yield the desired outcome. In some cases it gave armed forces an excuse to unleash a series of massacres and other human rights abuses. To demonstrate the effects of the guerrilla’s movement, a major activity in each country will be highlighted.

#### **Nicaragua**

In late 1977 President Carter, in trying to restore U.S. credibility after the clouds of Vietnam, could no longer align himself and the US with Somoza. On the other hand Somoza had no desire to transform himself and his Praetorian Guard into anything that resembled a democratic nation. He believed that by increasing the level and degree of brutality, the Guard would regain the obedience of his people. His calculation was wrong

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<sup>25</sup> Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, “ Manufacturing Consent the Political Economy of the Mass Media (Pantheon Books, New York 1988) 106

in that it produced the opposite effect. “As Guards marched through the *barrios*, or randomly shot poor teenagers and middle-class youth, fear turned to outrage. People who for decades had accepted the savageries of the Guard could tolerate no more.”<sup>26</sup> The anti-Somoza sentiments within Nicaragua and the United States were growing rapidly that illiterate peasants and merchants formed an ally with exiled Nicaraguans in Houston and students at the University of California. This produced a cadre of guerrillas, while the more educated group served as lobbyists, pamphleteers and fund raisers.<sup>27</sup>

In January 1978, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, an editor for a leading daily newspaper, was assassinated for openly criticizing and calling for the removal of Somoza. Although they had no proof, most Nicaraguans believed that Somoza himself ordered the killing. This was enough for labour unions, the church and the Sandinistas to organize mass protests, strikes and demonstration. The U.S. intervention came in the form of President Carter asking Somoza to step down while the Guard remain intact. Carter faced two hard choices; either leave Somoza in power despite his flagrant human rights abuse record or support the Sandinistas regarded by many within the USA as communists.

“On 23 August 1978, eleven months before Somoza fled and the Guard collapsed, Sandinista soldiers dressed in Guard uniforms arrived in army trucks at both entrances of the National Palace, where Somoza’s legislature convened. Using their best imitation of Guard officers’ speech, they deceived the troops stationed at the doors and other posts. Once inside, the Sandinistas held captive Somoza’s friends, allies and even family members. For Tachito [Somoza] it was a supremely humiliating.

A demoralized Somoza yielded to the Sandinistas’ demand for the release of the Nicaraguan glitterati: \$500,000 in [foreign] exchange for safe conduct from the palace to the airport, where the captors would be flown to Cuba, plus the release of fifty-nine

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<sup>26</sup> Saul Landau, “The Guerrilla War...” 28

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 31

political prisoners. Even National Guard officers winced when Somoza caved in. Morale sank for a short time”.<sup>28</sup>

This humiliation would not go without retribution. Somoza ordered vicious levels of reprisals that were never seen before. When armed youths in rebellion took over city blocks, the Guard responded with a barrage of artillery, columns of armoured vehicles and heavy machine-gun fire to retake the neighbourhood. This created an environment of extreme political instability and insecurity. It deterred foreign investors from Nicaragua which in turn put a strain on the economy and in effect kept the wheels of poverty and social injustice turning.

After the Sandinistas took control President Carter authorized the CIA to provide financial and other support to their opponents. At the same time, Washington pressured the Sandinistas to include certain men in the new government, men who were not necessarily sympathetic towards the Sandinistas. Although these tactics failed, the Carter administration did not refuse aid to Nicaragua. However, upon the change in administration, President Reagan moved quickly to cut off aid to a ‘Marxist Sandinista’ government.

“Among the many measures undertaken: Nicaragua was excluded from US government programs which promote American investment and trade; sugar imports from Nicaragua were slashed by 90 percent; and, without excessive subtlety but with notable success, Washington pressured the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, and the European Common Market to withhold loans to Nicaragua.”<sup>29</sup>

## **Guatemala**

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 30

<sup>29</sup> William Blum, “Killing Hope...” 291

In Guatemala the picture was as dismal as was in Nicaragua. It is hard to exaggerate the misery endured and suffered by the Indian peasants and urban poor of Guatemala who, at that time, made up 75 percent of the population. The scene was nothing short of a concentration camp.

“In a climate where everything grows, very few escape the daily ache of hunger or the progressive malnutrition... almost half the children die before the age of five...the leading cause of death in the country is gastro-enteritis. Highly toxic pesticides sprayed indiscriminately by planes, at times directly onto the heads of peasants, leave a trail of poisoning and death ...public health services in rural areas are virtually non-existent...the same for public education...near-total illiteracy. A few hundred families possess almost all arable land...thousands of families without land, without work, jammed together in communities of cardboard and tin houses, with no running water or electricity, a sea of mud during the rainy season, sharing their bathing and toilet with the animal kingdom. Men on coffee plantation earning 20 cents or 50 cents a day, living in circumstances closely resembling concentration camps...looked upon by other Guatemalans more as beast of burden than humans. A large plantation to sell, reads the advertisement, ‘with 200 hectares and 300 Indians’... this, then was what remained of the ancient Mayas, whom the American archaeologist Sylvanus Morely had called the most splendid indigenous people on the planet.”<sup>30</sup>

However, to fully understand the situation in Guatemala, there are two roots for the unremitting guerrilla wars that should be borne in mind. One was the skewed division of wealth and property in the country, which, for centuries deprived the majority of access to land or social justice. The other was a 1954 decision by President Eisenhower to overthrow the elected government of Jacobo Arbenz. The events of the 1950s brought with it the bloodiest sequence of military governments in Latin America, a trend that continued for years. One must understand that the reason for President Eisenhower’s intervention was guided by the Monroe Doctrine that was enshrined in generations of U.S. presidents and State Department Officials. The U.S. coerced the politics of the Western Hemisphere either to provide the resources and labour in the area; U.S. security

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<sup>30</sup> William Blum, “Killing Hope...” 229

required decisive action from Washington; or the elite perceived disobedience on the part of a Latin American as upstart.<sup>31</sup>

In 1951 an intellectual and charismatic army colonel, Jacobo Arbenz, won the presidential election and took over from Juan Jose Arevalo. Arevalo, who by this time had carried out massive but slow land reform and redistribution, had faced many failed coups orchestrated by the military. Arbenz on the other hand was more assertive and changes were more rapid. During his first two years in office, he expropriated about 15 percent of farm land from the American owned, United Fruit Company (UFCO) and only compensated them a fraction of its value. This along with the construction of a power plant to compete with UFCO's electric power monopoly and the perception that Arbenz was pro-communist put the U.S. on the offensive.

Once the decision was made to get rid of Arbenz, the CIA took over and the UFCO officials cooperated with the agency in spreading propaganda. While this and other clandestine operations were going on, American Foreign Service personnel were working hard to persuade other sceptical Latin American governments to isolate Guatemala because of the communist influence over Arbenz. The young and radical Argentine physician, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara and others travelled to Guatemala to offer their service to Arbenz government and its reform program. During this time the CIA and UFCO executives staged a collaborative dress rehearsal for a coup. UFCO paid some disenchanted army officers to instigate revolts while the CIA supplied arms and ammunition.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Saul Landau, "The Guerrilla Wars..." 148

<sup>32</sup> Saul Landau, "The Guerrilla Wars..." 156



Just over a year later, CIA pilots dropped leaflets demanding that Arbenz step down; if not, they would bomb the city. At the same time radio messages broadcast from clandestine transmitters repeated the threats which caused a state of chaos and misinformation. The CIA's multifaceted destabilization effort sowed confusion and division inside Guatemala. The military leaders could not figure out the situation and Arbenz lacked the will and forces to command a formidable defence. Union groups and some peasants were willing to defend against the invaders but they possessed neither the weapons nor men with military experience to train and lead them. The greatest resistance came from officer cadets at the Cadet School in Guatemala City, who forced the invading soldiers to surrender and made them parade, arms raised high through the streets. However a combined CIA and army force negotiated their disarmament. After ten days Arbenz resigned and fled to Mexico. This action undercut any legitimacy that the government had and gave the CIA the belief that they could install Colonel Castillo Armas as the next president.

### **El Salvador**

American nuns and lay missionaries played a number of supporting roles in the broad movement for social changes in Central America. These services were not restricted to the traditional teaching in parochial schools or performing work related to the convent. On 2 December 1980 a lay minister and three nuns were on their way from the airport to their parish house. They never made it to their home as they were raped and killed approximately thirty minutes into their journey. The U.S. Embassy in El Salvador pressured the authority to launch an investigation resulting in the arrest of some Guardsmen.

The military, buoyed by its growing hold on state power, launched an offensive to wipe out ‘bandits’ as they began calling the guerrillas. In Morazan Province, an FLMN stronghold, the army did not eradicate the ‘combatientes’ of the left; instead they walked into ambushes. The officers who graduated each year had little military experience and the soldiers, poor and illiterate people, who had no choice, possessed no sense of fighting for a just cause. The guerrillas on the other hand, were highly motivated and better trained, albeit not as well equipped as the regular army. The guerrillas suffered not from lack of will or ability to fight; indeed they fought heroically and skilfully, overcoming great odds and superior weaponry. Some units fought with pistols, .22 calibre rifles, homemade hand grenades and machetes.

In El Salvador politics was controlled by powerful individuals and in February 1980, the attorney general, while hosting a dinner party was killed in his own home. His death was linked to the actions of Major Roberto D’Aubuisson, a charismatic young intelligence officer from a wealthy family who was fascinated by fascist’s ideologies and hatred of the revolutionaries. Government political violence of this sort had been sporadic in the 1960s but became commonplace in the 1970s and 80s as more Salvadorans, frustrated by the futility of achieving social change through elections, resorted to other means. The church was accused of teaching subversion to the peasants and after a most powerful sermon that was aired on radio stations throughout Central America; Archbishop Oscar Romero was gunned down in front of his followers. At his funeral attended by thousands including 23 members of the U.S. House of Representatives, a bomb was thrown amongst the mourners in the plaza, followed by automatic rifle fire.<sup>33</sup> It is obvious that regardless of who appeared to be sympathetic towards the peasants they

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<sup>33</sup> William Blum, “Killing Hope...” 355

were labelled as guerrillas. Likewise the US seemed to take more interest and likely to have applied pressure on the respective governments when Americans and American interests were involved. The most common result in many cases was reduction in US aid.

### **Common Effects**

The effects that guerrilla activities had on these countries were very similar. In general, the countries were in a state of chaos, flagrant human right abuses, and unstable political and economic climate. In cases where there were regime changes, the hope and expectations of the masses were short-lived as those who ascended into power soon followed their predecessors. On the other hand, in instances where the oppressor remained in power, it signalled a higher level of victimization, abuses and reprisals. On a number of occasions, the U.S. played pivotal roles in the removal and attempted removal of legitimate governments in concert with guerrillas in Central America. Likewise in some cases they also supported military governments, these roles were direct and indirect, overt and covert. It can be concluded then that the US support went to those (governments or guerrilla fighters) who satisfied the US interest.

### **The US Influence and its Relationship with Central America**

As noted earlier the U.S. influence spanned almost two hundred years ago with the creation of the Monroe Doctrine. More obvious however, is the proximity and geographic location which form part of the Americas. Throughout the years starting in 1823, the U.S. influence in this region had grown rapidly, primarily due to the U.S. interest for a foothold in the area and as a means of deterring communist influence. As a result of the 'Dollar Diplomacy' and the 'Big Stick Policy', Central American nations have relied so heavily on the U.S. for economic aid that America was always in a position

to make a difference in Central American politics. It would seem that America's foreign policy was in fact national policies for a number of these nations in that US was always in a position to call the "shot".

In earlier years U.S. corporations and business, cheap labour and resources were the driving force for U.S. involvement in Central America. In recent years, the relationship has grown to one that is centered on combating human and drug trafficking, that are destined to the United States.<sup>34</sup> This has led to joint military training exercises, joint anti- drug operations and other assistance programmes, all of which cause the region to be dependent on the U.S.

Presently the U.S. enjoys close diplomatic and military relationship within this region, particularly where counter-insurgency, counter-narcotics and terrorism are concerned. However the visit to Nicaragua by Iranian President Ahmadinejad in January 2007 on the inauguration of newly elected President Ortega, could strain this relationship.<sup>35</sup> The policies, close ties to Central America and public criticism of the US by Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez, could also undermine this relationship. The confidence building measures that were adopted in the 80s and 90s helped to foster multilateral relations with the U.S. and Latin America.<sup>36</sup> These confidence building measures were designed to bring peace and stability within these three nations, improve trade and commerce within nations as well as with the US. Its greatest product was the

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/states/ohio.html> accessed 15 April 2007

<sup>35</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/americas/01/14/nicaragua.iran.ap/index.html> accessed 1/14/2007

<sup>36</sup> Richard L. Millett and Michael Gold-Biss, eds, "Beyond Praetorianism The Latin American Military in Transition" (North South Center Press, 1996) 17

dialogue with governments and fighters that eventually led to the ceased fire agreements within the respective countries.

### **Conclusion**

In the late 1970s and early 1980s guerrilla warfare and its associated revolutionary movement appeared to be the modus operandi for regime changes in Central America. The idealism of Sandinismo, the conviction of Farabundo Marti rebels and armed Guatemalan farmers were a source of hope and improvement for these poor patriots. They thought that guerrilla warfare would bring about changes such as economic and political equality. However the guerrillas did not always achieve the desired objectives as some cases resulted with an effect opposite to that desired. Whenever and wherever the guerrillas were unsuccessful in regime change, the armed forces' reprisals, human rights abuses and torture increased to unprecedented levels.

The roles played by the United States cannot go unnoticed. The CIA took active and direct roles in overthrowing legitimate governments thereby lending support to the guerrillas in Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador. US owned companies such as UFCO, paid thousands of dollars to incite mutiny within government armed forces, while the State Departments worked in concert to help topple unfavourable governments.

During the fighting in all three countries, it is evident that despite the outcome of the guerrilla wars, there was an overall negative effect on the political and economic prosperity. In all three countries the root causes were the same; demand for equality be it political, social justice or economic. The trend of guerrilla warfare continued well in to the 90s until peace agreements and confidence building measures were implemented under the auspices of the Organization of American States.

The United States presently enjoys a healthy relationship with the region but recent elections in Nicaragua saw the re-election of leftist Daniel Ortega and Venezuelan Hugo Chavez's flagrant criticism of President Bush on every given opportunity which can impact the status quo.

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