

United States and Central America: Reagan Administrations links with Guatemala's Terrorist Government

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An article detailing the peak in US-Guatemalan collaboration in state terror.

Contents

- [The Campaign Connections](#)
- [The Death squads](#)
- [Guatemala and the Carter \(...\)](#)
- [The Guatemalan Lobby](#)
- [Public Relations](#)
- [The Deal With Reagan](#)
- [CIA Death Squads: Allan Nairn](#)

Local businessmen and government officials involved with Guatemala's notorious death squads say they have struck a deal with Ronald Reagan which provides for restoration of U.S. weapon sales and training facilities to the Guatemalan military and police, curtailment of State Department criticism of the Guatemalan regime's massive human rights violations, and the ultimate prospect of U.S. military intervention to shore up that beleaguered Central American government.

Before his election, Reagan met personally with two leading spokesmen of the Guatemalan right and also through a series of visits to the country by aides and associates conveyed the details of what one U.S. businessman calls his promised "180 degree turn" in U.S. policy toward Guatemala. These visits include one at the time of the Republican Convention to offer Reagan's "salute" to Guatemalan president General Romero Lucas Garcia and inform him that "things were going to be changing."

High-level Guatemalan officials say that Reagan's assurances may already have led to an increase in the number of death squad assassinations and a senior leader of Guatemala's moderate Christian Democratic Party-already decimated by more than 34 assassinations of its top leadership in the last year-fears for his life.

The Campaign Connections

An ominous bargain has been struck by means of an extensive network of connections between the Reagan team and the Guatemalan extreme right, which include:

Junkets to Guatemala by a "who's-who" of the American New Right, sponsored by Guatemalan speculator and right-wing activist Roberto Alejos Arzu, , who made his plantation available as a training site for participants in the CIA's Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961.

Those along on one trip in April 1980 included top executives of Young Americans for Freedom, the Heritage Foundation, Moral Majority, Young Republicans' National Federation, the American Conservative Union, Conservative Digest, and such right-wing activists as Howard Phillips of the Conservative Caucus and John Laxalt, president of Reagan's campaign organization Citizens for the Republic, and brother of the Reagan campaign chairperson, Senator Paul Laxalt.

A Spring 1980 meeting in California between Reagan and Guatemalan hotel magnate Eduardo Carrette-the man whom General Lucas [Garcia] has asked to be his new ambassador to the U.S. and a leading figure in Amigos del Pais, a pressure group comprised of businessmen and landowners which Guatemala's recently-resigned Vice President Dr. Francisco Villagran has compared to the John Birch Society.

The now extremely active Amigos paid a hefty \$11,000 per month in retainer fees to Deaver and Hannaford, a Los Angeles-Washington, D.C. public relations firm headed by Reagan confidante Michael Deaver, which handled advertising for the Republican presidential campaign. Deaver is now White House Deputy Chief of Staff.

Pressure on Congress by Reagan associates to "lend a sympathetic ear" to the Amigos current lobbying campaign for the restoration of military aid and training for the Guatemalan military.

Several other Reagan advisors have visited Guatemala in the past year, including Roger Fontaine, National Security Council assistant for Latin American affairs and retired Lt. Gen. Daniel Graham, of his defense advisory committee, who also visited El Salvador for President Reagan.

Fontaine, who is an established hard-liner in regional matters, is the former director of Latin American Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, perhaps the nation's most conservative academic-activists center for Latin American affairs. He bolstered Guatemalan hopes in an interview published in the Miami Herald where he was quoted as saying, "It's pretty clear that Guatemalans will be given what aid they need in order to defend themselves against an armed minority which is aided and abetted by Cubans."

The Death squads

Guatemala's death squads with such names as "Secret Anti-Communist Army" and "Eye for an Eye" specialize in "disappearances" of their political opponents, routine torture, and high-noon machine-gun executions in downtown Guatemala City as well as the countries' outlying provinces.

Sources close to the Lucas Garcia regime report that the death squads are staffed and directed by the Guatemalan Army and Police under the command of President Lucas, Interior Minister Donald Alvarez Ruiz, and a group of top-ranking generals, with the assistance of Lucas's right-hand man, Colonel Hector Montalban, and national Chief of Police, Colonel German Chupina. Private businessmen provide the payrolls for the squads, and often assist in "compiling" the lists of troublesome labor, professional and political leaders as well as other suggested victims.

Cotton grower Raul Garcia Granados-a leader of the Guatemalan right who is the brother of Lucas's Chief of Staff and co-owner with Lucas of an estate in the northern Franja Transversal region-traces the lineage of the current death squads back four administrations to the late 1960s.

"Of course when they were organized, they were organized under the patronage and the approval of the government and the army," he said in a transcribed interview. "They have lists of people that are suspected to be communists of whatever kind, and they kill them. It's a war, you see, a war between

the communists and the anti-communists. They [the death squads] have the sympathy of most of the Guatemalan people.”

Elias Barahona, former press secretary to Interior Minister Alvarez Ruiz, who controls the national police, fled the country, declared he had become a member of the EGP (Ejercito Guerrillero del Pueblo) an anti-government guerrilla group, and in a Panama City press conference issued a 15 page statement detailing how Lucas and the generals run the death squad from the fourth floor of the National Palace Annex. He listed the address of houses used by the government for detention and torture of its kidnap victims.

Despite such mounting evidence, and the near-universal recognition that Guatemala is one of the worst human rights violators in the entire world; both Arano Osorio, known as “the butcher of Zacape,” and former Guatemalan vice-president Mario Sandoval Alarcon, generally considered high commander of the death squads, were invited to the Reagan inauguration.

Guatemala and the Carter Administration

To the Lucas regime and the businessmen who support it, President Carter’s human rights policy was an anathema. Lucas called Carter “Jimmy Castro.” Feeling increasingly isolated and betrayed by Carter State Department policy in Guatemala, officials there chose to ignore Washington’s urging that human rights violations be corrected.

Businessman Roberto Alejos complained: “Most of the elements in the State Department are probably pro-communist-they’re using human rights as an argument to promote the socialization of these areas. We’ve gotten to the point now where we fear the State Department more than we fear communist infiltration. Either Mr. Carter is a totally incapable president or he is definitely a pro-communist element.”

Milton Molina is a wealthy plantation owner who is reputed within Guatemala to have funded and ordered death squad attacks on dozens of peasants and workers. When asked about the squads in a transcribed interview, Molina replied, “Well, we have to do something, don’t you think so?” Molina says he and his friends back Reagan “one hundred percent.”

The death squads’ defenders base their faith in Reagan on direct conversations with him and his top military and foreign policy advisors. According to a Reagan fundraiser, Reagan told ambassador-to-be Carrette, “Hang in ’til we get there. We’ll get in and then we’ll give you help. Don’t give up. Stay there and fight. I’ll help you as soon as I get in.”

The Guatemalan Lobby

The Reagan camp’s courtship of the Guatemalan right began in earnest with the December 1979 visit to Guatemala of a delegation from the American Security Council, a private ultra-hawk U.S. military lobby. One of the consultants on Guatemalan affairs for the ASC film “Attack on the Americas” was John C. Trotter, the notorious manager of Guatemala City’s Coca-Cola bottling plant franchise. Trotter has been implicated in the death squad murders of a number of workers and union leaders at the bottling plant and was removed from management by Coca-Cola headquarters after an international union and church-led boycott of Coke protesting the situation at the plant in Guatemala.

Trotter is also a director of the Guatemala Freedom Foundation, a pro-Lucas international lobby

group founded by Roberto Alejos, which is more extreme than the Amigos del Pais organization. Alejos hosted the ASC delegation and helped set up an itinerary which included visits with President Lucas and the Guatemalan military high command, helicopter tours to inspect rural counter-insurgency activities, and a cocktail party with Guatemalan businessmen at Alejos's estate. The delegation was headed by two Reagan associates- retired General John K. Singlaub who has served as ASC's Director of Education, and retired Lt. Gen. Daniel Graham, the former Defense Intelligence Agency head, who maintains an office at ASC's Washington, D.C. headquarters.

As an advisor to Reagan, Graham retains his position as co-chairperson for the Coalition for Peace Through Strength, a Washington lobby composed of retired military personnel, pushing for a larger defense budget. The Missouri branch of the Coalition met with Guatemalan and Salvadoran business and political leaders in St. Louis last May. Among the Guatemalan visitors were Manuel Ayau and Roberto Alejos. Ayau is a member of his nation's most ultra-conservative party, the National Liberation Movement, which is allegedly directly linked to paramilitary death squads freely operating in the country. He is considered to be the ideologue of the more extremist sector of the business community, and is also on the board of GFF.

Alejos and Ayau are now well-known figures in Washington. With extensive help from their PR people, they have met with Congressional staff and State Department officials in the hopes of enlisting support for their political position.

Public Relations

Their publicity is handled primarily by MacKenzie, McCheyne, Inc. of Washington, D.C. In the past, this firm received hundreds of thousands of dollars from the Somoza government of Nicaragua. It also promotes the El Salvador Freedom Foundation, which purports to be to the right of the Salvadoran junta, and it openly arranged the April 1980 Washington press conference given by Roberto D'Aubuisson. In the past two years, MacKenzie, McCheyne has received over \$250,000 from the GFF.

The Guatemalan emissaries are known to have been heartened to hear Gen. Graham's statement made during a trip to Argentina last year, that "Carter's human rights policy has had disastrous effects on America's relations with Latin America. . . and if Reagan is elected, the U.S. would abandon the policy of throwing old friends to the wolves."

Singlaub, the former commander of U.S. forces in South Korea dismissed by President Carter for insubordination, has good contacts with the informal network of radical right-wing mercenaries who aid dictatorships around the globe.

In a tape-recorded interview last August, Singlaub said that he was "terribly impressed" at how the Lucas regime was "desperately trying to promote human rights" and lamented the fact that "as the [Guatemalan] government loses support from the United States, it gives the impression to the people that there's something wrong with their government."

As for Graham, he acknowledged during a Washington telephone interview last year that he told President Lucas Garcia that on his return to the United States, he would urge the Reagan campaign team to provide for the resumption of military training and aid to Guatemala as soon as a victorious Reagan would be installed in office.

The Reagan aides' advice and supportive comments were the talk of official Guatemala for days after their visit. Within weeks, death squad assassinations increased dramatically and there was talk in

government circles of even harsher measures.

The parade of visiting advisors continued. Roger Fontaine made at least two trips to Guatemala. Fontaine is on a first name basis with right-wing figures and keeps in constant touch with them by telephone.

Through the Amigos del Pais and Alejos's and Trotter's Guatemala Freedom Foundation, a number of Guatemalans also came to the U.S. to meet Reagan and his staff; Both Amigos del Pais director Maegli, and Manuel Ayau, chief ideologue and theorist of the Guatemalan right, have met with Richard Allen, head of the National Security Council, and early last year, Alejos met with Reagan in California.

The Deal With Reagan

As described by Guatemalan and U.S. businessmen and Guatemalan government officials, the bargain with the Reagan forces has four key elements. First, there is an agreement, as Maegli puts it, "to take our Army off the blacklist"- to restore weapons and ammunition sales, supply badly needed spare parts for the U.S.-built helicopters, and make available fighter and cargo planes to the Guatemalan air force as well as crowd control and counterinsurgency gear to the army and police.

Second, a commitment has been made to resume Pentagon training of the army and police, particularly in surveillance, intelligence and interrogation techniques. According to Robert Merrick, an American-born plantation owner who was in close touch with Reagan advisors, Fontaine promised him and a group of Guatemalan businessmen that Reagan "would do everything he could within the law to help train the Guatemalan police."

Third and perhaps most importantly, the Reagan supporters have agreed to cut back U.S. criticism of the death squads which the Guatemalan regime feels has so tarnished its international political and financial standing.

Finally, although the signals have been less explicit, there is also the expectation in government and business councils that President Reagan would intervene militarily in the event that a popular uprising threatened the Lucas government.

In anticipation of such support, businessmen who back the death squads gave their all for the Reagan campaign. In addition to the more than \$120,000 which Amigos del Pais paid to the Deaver and Hannaford firm, other public relations efforts by right wing Guatemalan groups attempted to sway U.S. opinion concerning Central America, in Reagan's favor.

According to Merrick and others, American businessmen based in Guatemala gave heavily to the Reagan campaign. Yet a check of the names of more than 200 such individuals-including several who said specifically that they had contributed-against the list of Reagan donors disclosed to the Federal Election Commission, showed no public trace of any such contributions. (The sole exception was John Trotter, who through his wife, had given \$750 to the Reagan primary campaign.) One businessman who was solicited by the Reagan campaign said explicit instructions were given repeatedly: "Do not give to Mr. Reagan's campaign directly." Monies went instead to an undisclosed committee in California.

Last spring-when the Amigos del Pais were making the rounds of Congress asking for restoration of Guatemalan military training appropriation-Nancy Reynolds, Nancy Reagan's former press secretary and the current Vice President for public relations of the Bendix Corporation, called the office of

Congressman Don Pease (Dem.-Ohio) and asked that he "lend a sympathetic ear" to Amigos del Pais members' plea for aid. "It's the first time we ever got a phone call like that," said the congressman's aide." It was Nancy Reynolds who recommended Deaver and Hannaford to Amigos del Pais.

Allan Nairn

- Covert Action Quarterly magazine, Summer 1989.

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CIA Death Squads: Allan Nairn

Allan Nairn on the decades of direct CIA involvement in Guatemalan death squads.

The U.S. government has systematic links to Guatemalan Army death squad operations that go far beyond the disclosures that have recently shaken official Washington. The news that the C.I.A. employed a Guatemalan colonel who reportedly ordered two murders has been greeted with professions of shock and outrage. But in fact the story goes much deeper, as U.S. officials well know.

North American C.I.A. operatives work inside a Guatemalan Army unit that maintains a network of torture centers and has killed thousands of Guatemalan civilians. The G-2, headquartered on the fourth floor of the Guatemalan National Palace, has, since at least the 1960s, been advised, trained, armed and equipped by U.S. undercover agents. Working out of the U.S. Embassy and living in safehouses and hotels, these agents work through an elite group of Guatemalan officers who are secretly paid by the C.I.A. and who have been implicated personally in numerous political crimes and assassinations.

This secret G-2 / C.I.A. collaboration has been described by Guatemalan and U.S. operatives and confirmed, in various aspects, by three former Guatemalan heads of state. These accounts also mesh with that given in a March 28 interview by Col. Julio Roberto Alpirez, the C.I.A.- paid Guatemalan G-2 officer who has been implicated in the murders of Guatemalan guerrilla leader Efraim Bamaca Velasquez and a U.S. citizen, Michael DeVine.

One of the American agents who works with the G-2, a thin blond man in his 40s who goes by the name of Randy Capister, has been involved in similar operations with the army of neighboring El Salvador. Another, a weapons expert known as Joe Jacarino, has operated throughout the Caribbean, and has accompanied G-2 units on missions into rural zones.

Jacarino's presence in the embassy was confirmed by David Wright, a former embassy intelligence employee who called Jacarino a "military liaison." Col. George Hooker, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency chief in Guatemala from 1985 to 1989, says he also knew Jacarino, though he says Jacarino was not with the D.I.A. When asked whether Jacarino was with the C.I.A. he replied, "I'm not at liberty to say."

Celerino Castillo, a former agent for the Drug Enforcement Administration who dealt with the G-2 and the C.I.A. in Guatemala, says he worked with Capister as well as with Jacarino. He showed

photographs of himself and Capister at embassy events and in the field. Guatemalan sources say Capister meets regularly with Guatemalan Army chiefs. He has been seen in meetings in Guatemala City as recently as the spring of 1994.

When I reached Colonel Alpirez at the La Aurora base in Guatemala, he denied all involvement in the deaths of Bamaca and DeVine and said he was never paid by the C.I.A. But he discussed at length how the agency advises and helps run the G-2. He praised the C.I.A. for "professionalism" and close rapport with Guatemalan officers. He said that agency operatives often come to Guatemala on temporary duty, during which they train G-2 men and provide "advice and technical assistance." He described attending C.I.A. sessions at G-2 bases on "contra-subversion" tactics and "how to manage the factors of power" to "fortify democracy." He said the C.I.A. men were on call to respond to G-2 questions, and that the G-2 often consulted the agency on how to deal with "political problems." Alpirez said he was not authorized to give specifics on the technical assistance, nor would he name the North Americans the G-2 worked with, though he said they were "very good friends."

Other officials, though, say that at least during the mid 1980s G-2 officers were paid by Jack McCavitt, then C.I.A. station chief, and that the "technical assistance" includes communications gear, computers and special firearms, as well as collaborative use of C.I.A.-owned helicopters that are flown out of the Piper hangar at the La Aurora civilian air port and from a separate U.S. air facility. Through what Amnesty International has called "a government program of political murder," the Guatemalan Army has, since 1978, killed more than 110,000 civilians. The G-2 and a smaller, affiliated unit called the Archivo have long been openly known in Guatemala as the brain of the terror state. With a contingent of more than 2,000 agents and with sub-units in the local army bases, the G-2-under orders of the army high command-coordinates the torture, assassination and disappearance of dissidents.

"If the G-2 wants to kill you, they kill you," former army Chief of staff Gen. Benedicto Lucas Garcia once said. "They send one of their trucks with a hit squad and that's it." Current and former G-2 agents describe a program of surveillance backed by a web of torture centers and clandestine body dumps. In 1986, then-army Chief of Staff Gen. Hector Gramajo Morales, a U.S. protege, said that the G-2 maintains files on and watches "anyone who is an opponent of the Guatemalan state in any realm." A former G-2 agent says that the base he worked at in Huehuetenango maintained its own crematorium and "processed" abductees by chopping off limbs, singeing flesh and administering electric shocks.

At least three of the recent G-2 chiefs have been paid by the C.I.A., according to U.S. and Guatemalan intelligence sources. One of them, Gen. Edgar Godoy Gaitan, a former army Chief of Staff, has been accused in court by the victim's family of being one of the prime "intellectual authors" of the 1990 murder of the noted Guatemalan anthropologist Myrna Mack Chang. Another, Col. Otto Perez Molina, who now runs the Presidential General Staff and oversees the Archivo, was in charge in 1994, when, according to the Archbishop's human rights office, there was evidence of General Staff involvement in the assassination of Judge Edgar Ramiro Elias Ogaldez. The third, Gen. Francisco Ortega Menaldo, who now works in Washington as general staff director at the Pentagon-backed Inter-American Defense Board, was G-2 chief in the late 1980s during a series of assassinations of students, peasants and human rights activists. Reached at his home in Florida, Jack McCavitt said he does not talk to journalists. When asked whether Ortega Menaldo was on the C.I.A. payroll, he shouted "Enough!" and slammed down the phone.

These crimes are merely examples of a vast, systemic pattern; likewise, these men are only cogs in a large U.S. government apparatus. Colonel Hooker, the former D.I.A. chief for Guatemala, says, "It would be an embarrassing situation if you ever had a roll call of everybody in the Guatemalan Army who ever collected a C.I.A. paycheck." Hooker says the agency payroll is so large that it

encompasses most of the army's top decision-makers. When I told him that his friend, Gen. Mario Enriquez Morales, the current Defense Minister, had reacted to the Alpirez scandal by saying publicly that it was "disloyal" and "shameful" for officers to take C.I.A. money, Hooker burst out laughing and exclaimed: "Good! Good answer, Mario! I'd hate to think how many guys were on that payroll. It's a perfectly normal thing."

Other top commanders paid by the C.I.A. include Gen. Roberto Matta Galvez, former army Chief of Staff, head of the Presidential General Staff and commander of massacres in the El Quiche department; and General Gramajo, Defense Minister during the armed forces' abduction, rape and torture of Dianna Ortiz, an American nun. Gramajo also managed the early 1980s highland massacres. Colonel Hooker says he once brought Gramajo on a ten-day tour of the United States to speak at U.S. military bases and confer with the U.S. Army Chief of Staff.

Three recent Guatemalan heads of state confirm that the C.I.A. works closely with the G-2. Last year, when I asked Gen. Oscar Humberto Mejia Victores (military dictator from 1983 to 1986) how the country's death squads had originated, he said they had been started "in the 1960s by the C.I.A." Gen. Efram Rios Montt (dictator from 1982 to 1983 and the current Congress President), who ordered the main highland massacres (662 villages destroyed, by the army's own count), said the C.I.A. did have agents inside the G-2. When I asked Rios Montt-a firm believer in the death penalty-if he thought he should be executed for his role in the slaughter, he leapt to his feet and shouted "Yes! Try me! Put me against the wall!" but he said he should be tried only if Americans were tried too. Specifically, he cited President Reagan, who, in the midst of the massacres, embraced Rios Montt and said he was getting "a bum rap" on human rights. Vinicio Cerezo Arevalo, civilian President from 1986 to 1991 (under whom the rate of killing actually increased), said "the C.I.A. often contracts with our military and G-2 people," and that from what he knew they "very probably" had people inside "who have participated with our G-2 in technical assistance and advice."

These C.I.A. operations are, of course, part of the larger U.S. policy. The Bush and Clinton State Departments, for example, in the midst of a much-touted "cutoff" of military aid to Guatemala after 1990, authorized-according to classified State Department records-more than 114 separate sales of U.S. pistols and rifles.

The killing of defenseless people has been state policy in Guatemala for thirty years. The question is not whether the U.S. government has known-it is obviously aware of its own actions. It is why, with overt and covert aid, it has helped commit the army's murders.

Allan Nairn

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