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REAGAN'S MANIFEST DESTINY

The president is playing dominoes
in Latin America and losing.

by T. D. Allman

ONE CANNOT but marvel at the perspicacity of the Department of State. Nearly two and a half years ago it sounded a warning that, had it only been heeded, might have saved tens of thousands of lives—and saved the United States, too, from a severe loss of influence and prestige in a strategically sensitive part of the world. An external conspiracy, the State Department revealed in February 1981, was threatening the whole of Central America.

One Central American republic was already the victim of "a well-coordinated, covert effort to bring about the overthrow of [its] established government and to impose in its place a . . . regime with no popular support."

Still another Central American nation had been "progressively transformed" into a base for "indirect armed aggression" against its neighbors.

And in yet a third republic, armed terrorists were on the loose—killing thousands, violating every norm of civilized behavior. What was their goal? Nothing less, the State Department concluded, than seizing complete control, "legitimizing their violence," and once all forces of decency had been terrorized into submission, "to foster the impression of overwhelming popular support."

But that was only the beginning of it. A master hand lurked behind, and linked, these disturbing events. A conspiratorial outside power, U.S. intelligence sources revealed, was playing a "direct tutelary role" in the "political unification, military direction and arming" of the agents of subversion, chaos, and terror.

"In short," the State Department concluded, Cen-

T. D. Allman's article on El Salvador, "Rising to Rebellion," appeared in Harper's in March 1981. His book on Central America, Unmanifest Destiny, will be published next year.



tral America had become "a textbook case of indirect armed aggression." Would this campaign to subvert the "entire region from the Panama Canal to Mexico on our southern border," as President Reagan later described it, be permitted to triumph? Or would this effort "to destabilize our hemisphere" be stopped?

Today the answer is clear. A well-coordinated, externally planned campaign of subversion against the government of Nicaragua has created the risk of a full-scale regional war. Honduras, once the scene of a promising experiment in constitutional rule, has

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progressively become a base for outside military interference in its neighbors' internal affairs. More than 30,000 human beings have been murdered in El Salvador. Nor do Central America's afflictions end there. Costa Rica, the region's only real democracy, has also become the scene of armed subversion of one of its neighbors. Guatemala, Central America's most populous, powerful, and potentially explosive nation, has suffered its own terror campaign, which has killed thousands, and has also undergone a coup d'état.

Why did the State Department's warning go un-

heeded? As the last two years have shown, the State Department got the plot right but the main character wrong. The Soviet Union, for instance, was identified as playing "the central role" in fostering terrorism, subversion, and aggression in Central America, and the report itself was entitled "Communist Interference in El Salvador." Had the word "American" been substituted for "Communist," the report would in fact have provided a penetrating analysis of what has happened since. As a result of U.S. interference, Central America is in chaos, and much of the rest of the hemisphere opposes what

President Reagan calls his effort to defend the Americas against "outside ideologies that would take us back to colonialism."

Nor does the domino effect stop there: Reagan's effort to confer order and stability on the government of El Salvador has produced disorder and confusion within the government of the United States. Not since Watergate has Congress been more deeply suspicious of the wisdom and real intentions of the policy emanating from the White House. And seldom since the bureaucratic purges of the McCarthy era have officials in the State Department lived, and worked, in greater fear of vengeance from above. The result is that the more our interference in Central America deepens, the more the peril to our real national interests widens; things have gotten so out of hand, in fact, that the United States now really does face a serious threat. If our escalating interference in Central America is not somehow checked, President Reagan may well succeed in destabilizing the "entire region from the Panama Canal to Mexico," and the consequences may not stop there.

RECENTLY I returned to Central America for a visit, and while the realities of that part of the world, interesting as they are, clearly have nothing to do with current U.S. policy, they nonetheless led to an illuminating discovery. President Reagan has become a most reliable interpreter of events in Central America—so long as one reads his speeches the same way one should read the State Department report.

"Democracy is beginning to take root in El Salvador," the president told Congress in April. "The new government is now delivering on its promises of democracy, reforms and free elections." The president had high praise for the land-reform program, devised by American veterans of the Vietnam pacification campaign, and also lauded the U.S. military aid program, under which thousands of Salvadoran troops have been armed and trained by American personnel.

If one simply inserts the word "not" in the appropriate places, the Reagan statement provides an accurate summary of what has happened. The main result of last year's elections, which President Reagan heralded as "a triumph for democracy," has been to legitimize the terrorists and to foster the impression they enjoy considerable support. Even before the elections, hundreds of reform-minded Salvadoran leaders had been forced from office, been killed, or joined the guerrillas. And as a result of the elections pro-American José Napoleón Duarte and his Christian Democrats lost power, even though they had won the most votes; archconservatives, even outright terrorists, strengthened their control of the government.

Nothing so epitomized El Salvador's "triumph of democracy" as the rise to political respectability

of Roberto d'Aubuisson, a man once described even by the U.S. embassy as a "pathological killer." Two years ago d'Aubuisson was rightly treated as a criminal by the U.S. government. Today he is fêted as living proof that freedom is triumphing, and d'Aubuisson is not alone. Mass murderers now dominate civilian politics, and as U.S. military involvement has increased, Salvadoran officers deeply implicated in the slaughter of the civilian population have increased their control of the Ministry of Defense and the main field commands.

The killings have not stopped. In fact, some of the most gruesome atrocities lately have been committed by the U.S.-trained and -advised units the president praised—by those soldiers and officers who, following a crash course in "human rights" and counterinsurgency from their American advisers, are supposed not only to win the war, but to win the hearts and minds of El Salvador too. Even today, these U.S.-trained troops never take prisoners of war, preferring to massacre their captives instead.

President Reagan also declared that El Salvador was making progress "toward an orderly and democratic society." The truth is that the land-reform program is running in reverse; El Salvador's peasant organizations, labor unions, and church groups have been terrorized into inaction. A land of proliferating popular organizations and peaceful political demonstrations three years ago, El Salvador has become a place where even half a dozen people risk their lives when they gather together for political purposes—where, in fact, the only possible means of political opposition is guerrilla warfare. Meanwhile, members of the Salvadoran military directly implicated in the murders of at least five U.S. citizens have not been tried, let alone convicted.

"The Salvadoran people's desire for democracy will not be defeated," the president concluded.

PRESIDENT REAGAN has also had some illuminating things to say about Nicaragua lately. "Contrary to propaganda," the president told Congress, "the opponents of the Sandinistas are not die-hard supporters of the previous Somoza regime." He went on to accuse Nicaragua of conspiring with "Cuba and the Soviets to destabilize our hemisphere." But hard as he was on the Nicaraguan government, the president also said: "We do not seek its overthrow."

Once again, the president's statement was a model of illumination. For more than a year, the administration has attempted to foment armed insurrection among the Mosquito Indians on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast. It has armed and trained former members of Somoza's National Guard, and used Honduras as a base for subversion, much as it accuses the communists of using Nicaragua. Yet this effort has failed notably to attract the kind of broad-based support the administration had hoped for. In con-



More than 600 Nicaraguans have been killed, the equivalent, in a country of 2.7 million people, of 50,000 American deaths.

sequence, the CIA has been reduced to channeling almost all its money and guns to "die-hard supporters of the previous Somoza regime." Why, to borrow the State Department's terminology, this "textbook case of indirect armed aggression" against an underdeveloped tropical nation with one ninetieth the population of the United States? "The national security of all the Americas is at stake in Central America," the president said. The Nicaraguans, he added, "are doing everything they can to bring down the elected government of El Salvador."

No one doubts, of course, that the Salvadoran opposition has offices in Nicaragua, as it does in Mexico and Europe. No one doubts that the Salvadoran guerrillas get some of their arms through Nicaragua, as they do from the United States itself—which is the source of an uncontrolled hemorrhage of black-market weapons into Latin America that is at least as destructive as the counterflow of Latin American drugs into the United States. But as one could also glean from the president's unsubstantiated remarks, one of the administration's most embarrassing failures has been its inability to provide any conclusive proof that Nicaragua—let alone Cuba or the Soviet Union—is directing the insurgency in El Salvador.

Under U.S. direction the war of subversion against Nicaragua continues to grow. Already more than 600 people have been killed—the equivalent, in a country of 2.7 million people, of about 50,000 American deaths. One hundred U.S. advisers—and many more CIA operatives—are now based in Honduras. The president has asked Congress to triple U.S. military expenditures for El Salvador, and the

CIA is more than doubling the number of U.S.-paid anti-Sandinista guerrillas. "Violence," Reagan said, "has been Nicaragua's most important export to the world."

One consequence of the exportation of violence to Central America is clear: no one disputes that the guerrillas have not been eradicated or even defeated. They have not even been noticeably weakened; in fact, they have grown stronger, and the Salvadoran armed forces have grown weaker since the influx of U.S. rifles, ammunition, artillery, and helicopter gunships began.

El Salvador, however, would be an even stranger country than it is if nearly three years of indiscriminate slaughter by the government had not engendered a sizable resistance movement. In fact, the big change in the opposition forces over the last two years has not come in numbers or supplies. The total number of guerrillas has not increased greatly, and their weapons continue to be an assortment of mostly U.S. arms purchased outside the country and, increasingly, captured from the government forces themselves. The big change is that the American prolongation and escalation of the conflict has given the guerrillas no recourse except to learn how to fight.

In the waning days of the Carter administration, for example, the Salvadoran opposition mounted a "final offensive" that the government forces, even though they had not yet received much U.S. military aid, easily put down. As late as 1982, the war in El Salvador, in spite of all the talk in Washington suggesting the country was the victim of some

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Tet-style communist onslaught, was actually a very one-sided affair. While government troops and their allies assassinated thousands of noncombatants, the guerrillas mostly hid on the slopes of volcanoes, and government casualties were almost nonexistent: during the first two years of the conflict only a few hundred government troops were killed in combat. Since then, the nature of the Salvadoran war has been transformed. The guerrillas are now battle-hardened, strategically sophisticated, clearly ready and able to fight an open-ended war of attrition.

With U.S. acquiescence, the Salvadoran officer corps was purged of most of its truly reform-minded officers because they were not considered sufficiently "anticommunist." The most prominent victim was Colonel Adolfo Majano, one of the few Salvadoran officers who actually tried to curb terrorism. So respected was Majano for his incorruptibility that, in October 1979, his fellow officers elected him to the ruling junta as a partner with reformist politicians.

As U.S. intervention grew, he and scores of other honest Salvadoran officers were isolated, cut off from power, relieved of field commands, and, in many cases, obliged to resign their commissions. In the end Majano was forced from office. His finest moment as a member of the junta had come when he had attempted to arrest Roberto D'Aubuisson on charges that he had plotted the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero and others. Today, in an evolution characteristic of President Reagan's intervention there, Majano is in exile, and d'Aubuisson is a major ornament in the Reagan showcase of democracy.

WITH MAJANO and the reformist officers purged, U.S. support was concentrated on a quite different kind of Salvadoran military leader—the epitome of which was General José Guillermo García, who, at the behest of the U.S. embassy, had been made minister of defense. General García was an unsavory character—drenched in blood and corruption, as most Salvadoran officers of his rank are. But he at least understood the essentially feudal nature of the Salvadoran war. He also understood, and attempted to placate, the obsessions of the Americans. Unlike many Salvadoran rightists, notably d'Aubuisson, García did not talk only about fighting the good fight against the communist conspiracy. He also gave speeches about land reform and human rights, if only because, as his U.S. mentors constantly reminded him, such pronouncements were the key to prising more arms and ammunition out of Congress.

But García also understood his commanders and his troops. He recognized that in the end his own position rested as much on placating them as on the favor of the Americans. So their manifold human-rights violations went unpunished, indeed uncurbed. Even more important, García understood the real danger of a real war against the guerrillas—which

was not merely that the guerrillas would not be defeated, but that the Salvadoran armed forces would disintegrate.

By the end, in fact, García, like so much else in El Salvador, had become—even though the Americans had raised him to power and kept him there—a mystery to the U.S. government. There were the guerrillas. Here were the guns. Why didn't García, and the thousands of Salvadoran military men like him, go off and fight?

The more appropriate question, of course, was: why should they? The U.S. insistence that the Salvadoran military subordinate its usual pursuits of pillage, rape, massacre, and self-enrichment had created a novel situation. Government troops were no longer just killing, they were getting killed. And they were not at all pleased with this novel situation. The truth is, Salvadoran military men are completely indifferent to the American agenda in El Salvador. They want villas and swimming pools, not land-reform programs and counterinsurgency operations. And they want their careers to end in their Florida condominiums, not on some battlefield in the dirt-poor countryside, among the dirt-poor peasants they both fear and detest.

So García did little to pursue the war. Gradually the realization penetrated the U.S. embassy, the State Department, even the White House. Just as there was a charade of land reform and a charade of democracy so, under García, there was only a charade of war. It was decided, as one U.S. official put it, that García "had to go." The guerrillas had never managed to force García from power, but now—in another characteristic development—the Americans had. His American-approved successor is General Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, who is at least as sullied as García. Beneath all the talk in Washington about Casanova "shaking up the command structure," adopting the tactics of his U.S. advisers, and "taking the war to the guerrillas," the fact is that the Salvadoran officer corps is increasingly demoralized, divided—and apathetic about a war in which the U.S. embassy has come to pose at least as great a threat to their power and privileges as the guerrillas do. The result is that El Salvador, which lacks an economy and a political system, now also increasingly lacks a military—and must make do with an American imitation of one, conjured up in Washington and exported there, along with all President Reagan's other exportations of violence, via Honduras.

A military void is, in fact, opening up beneath President Reagan's plans for "peace, prosperity and freedom." There is every possibility that Casanova will wind up playing Thieu to García's Diem, and that as El Salvador's traditional military elite disintegrates under the combined assault of the guerrillas and of U.S. attempts to force an American-style war on them, President Reagan will face the old Vietnam choice: collapse or escalation.



Salvadoran troops, trained by U.S. advisers, have committed some of the war's most gruesome atrocities.

THE LIKELIHOOD that current U.S. policy will bring about the downfall of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua—who increasingly play Hanoi, in the president's rhetoric, to El Salvador's South Vietnam—is as hallucinatory as the likelihood that the Salvadorans are on the road to "freedom, justice and economic progress." At least, it is if the judgment of U.S. embassy officials in Managua can be trusted.

Interpretations vary as to the administration's real objectives in Nicaragua. For months, high officials in Washington have been talking as though the downfall of the Sandinista government is only a matter of time, that before long the CIA-backed forces will be parading down the streets of Managua conferring Somoza-style "freedom" on that much abused country once again. Others believe that the real intention has been to provoke the Nicaraguans into the kind of cross-border raid into Honduras that could be used as the pretext for a full-scale invasion of Nicaragua. Still others think the administration's strategy is to split the ruling nine-member Sandinista directorate, allowing U.S.-backed "moderates" to gain the upper hand, and so purge Nicaragua of "communists" that way.

The only sure conclusion a visit to Nicaragua provides is that none of these scenarios bears any relationship to reality. Somoza's guards have not lost their taste for visiting mayhem on their own country now that they work for the CIA. But repeated attacks from Honduras, including several full-scale invasions deep into Nicaragua, have completely failed to ignite any popular uprising against the San-

dinistas, or even to shake their hold on the country. Meanwhile, the U.S. attempt to turn Eden Pastora—the famous "Commander Zero" of the anti-Somoza struggle—into the leader of a credible, democratic "third force" has also backfired. The Costa Ricans are deeply embarrassed by the use of their territory as a sanctuary for Pastora's tiny guerrilla force. And Pastora himself, having failed to attract any significant support either inside or outside Nicaragua, has been reduced to a quixotic figure of the past—older and clearly far less resourceful than the nine Sandinista commanders, most still in their thirties, who run the government in Managua.

The two other scenarios for rolling back the Sandinistas are not working either. Instead of rising to the bait of a Honduran border war, the Sandinistas have opted for a defensive strategy—and called for peaceful negotiations with both Honduras and the United States. "The salient characteristic of the Sandinistas," according to a European diplomat in Managua, "is the stability of their joint leadership. Years of war and four years in power haven't divided them. And now President Reagan, by attacking them, is reinforcing their unity."

Nicaragua under the Sandinistas is certainly no paradise, either of the tropical or socialist version. But the Nicaraguan regime President Reagan finds so repulsive is a paragon of "freedom, justice and economic progress" in comparison with the Salvadoran regime the president admires so much.

In fact, over the last four years the Sandinistas have done some things that, if only their U.S. advisers could get the Salvadorans to do them, would

no doubt provide material for more than one televised presidential address on the great benefits of our intervention in Central America. The Sandinistas, for example, have taught virtually all the campesinos to sign their names (which they take great pride in doing, with many a graphological flourish, for a visiting foreigner) and to decipher simple texts, like health manuals and daily newspapers. They have eradicated polio. And their land-reform program, perhaps because it is so much less sweeping and draconian than the one the State Department dreamed up for El Salvador, seems to be appealing successfully to the Central American peasant's deep desire to own the land he tills.

Others have not prospered so well under the Sandinistas. Though the flight of capital from Nicaragua seems much less severe than from El Salvador, the middle class is disaffected. And conservative Catholics, who far outnumber supporters of the liberation theology, are increasingly unhappy with the regime. There are shortages of soap and other necessities, and the government's attempts to conserve foreign exchange by rationing some imported products, notably gasoline, have also created dissatisfaction.

Nicaragua nonetheless no more resembles some Soviet-style autocracy under the Sandinistas than El Salvador, under the ministrations of President Reagan, resembles the United States. In the end, indeed, Nicaragua is most notable for its idiosyncrasies, not for its degree of conformity to some Soviet or even Cuban model of what a revolution should be. There are Marxists there—and there are also dedicated Catholic reformers. There are also a number of similarities to the Mexican revolution, including the emergence of a political system in which one party dominates but does not monopolize power—a system, interestingly enough, that the United States strongly supported in El Salvador in the 1960s and 1970s.

What would really happen, and what would the consequences for U.S. security actually be if, in fact, any of the Reagan administration's scenarios for laying low the Sandinistas came true?

Not even U.S. officials in Managua suggest that if the Sandinistas somehow disappeared the Salvadoran insurrection would go away. But speaking privately, they say destabilization of Nicaragua could conjure up a veritable catastrophe—not for the Sandinistas and the “communists,” but for the United States and its allies in Central America. A full-scale Honduran-Nicaraguan war, they say, probably would not destroy the Sandinistas. But it might well reduce Honduras to chaos, lead to direct Cuban military intervention in Central America, and—if President Reagan attempted to introduce U.S. ground or air combat forces—create the biggest political crisis in Washington since Watergate.

CIA-directed forces advancing on Managua, they say, would result in a disaster nearly as great, as tens of thousands of well-armed Nicaraguans retreat-

ed into the hills to conduct protracted guerrilla warfare. “You really would have another Vietnam then,” one U.S. official said. What about splitting the Sandinista leadership? “An excellent way to hand Nicaragua over to real Marxist-Leninists,” the same official replied. “Fortunately, it won't happen.”

One enters the U.S. embassy in Nicaragua expecting to be preached the official line. One leaves with a rather odd realization: about all that stands between President Reagan and the Central American chaos he conjures up in his speeches is the restraint and resiliency of the Sandinista government, and its determination not to be baited into the kind of regional civil war the Reagan administration, wittingly or not, is trying to provoke. A serious threat nonetheless exists to the present precarious stability. What will happen when it finally becomes manifest even in the White House that the current level of U.S. intervention is neither defeating the Salvadoran guerrillas nor weakening the Sandinistas—only destabilizing Honduras?

“There is no thought of sending American combat troops to Central America,” President Reagan told Congress, thus voicing the thought that lies just below the surface of everything the administration is doing in Central America. In fact an eventual commitment of U.S. ground troops may be the only option left to President Reagan, so long as jettisoning the entire current policy remains, as it clearly is, unthinkable in the Reagan White House.

EVEN WITHOUT the U.S. commitment, El Salvador would probably have still suffered a bloodbath. The carnage there had already started well before Reagan took office. The Sandinistas were also firmly in power before he was elected—and probably no U.S. policy, friendly or unfriendly, could have undone that fact.

The Reagan policy has, however, produced two new and important developments, neither of which has much to do with Central America but both of which are critically important to the United States.

First of all, Reagan has managed to reduce U.S. influence and prestige in the rest of Latin America to a new low. Second, and not much less consequentially, he has succeeded in turning Congress and much of the Department of State, notably the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, into the bureaucratic equivalent of some banana republic. Nearly a year and a half ago, President Reagan, in an address to the Organization of American States, described his El Salvador policy as an effort not just to defend the Western Hemisphere against “outside aggression” but to help “create a peaceful, free and prospering hemisphere based on our shared ideals and reaching from pole to pole of what we proudly call the New World.” It was a classic invocation of hemispheric solidarity.

Soon afterward, the Falkland Islands war broke



For the first time, Salvadoran soldiers face the prospect, not just of killing, but of getting killed themselves.

out. Britain, back in the early nineteenth century, had seized the islands by force from Argentina. Did that give Argentina the right to seize them back? And once the Argentines did have possession of the islands, was it really justified for Britain to launch a full-scale war to recapture a remote and irrelevant territory with a smaller population than a New York apartment building? Diplomatically, the dispute presented the United States with a number of dilemmas.

But to Latin Americans of all ideological tendencies, the Falkland conflict was a simple test of hemispheric solidarity. The rights and wrongs of the issue were no more important than the rights and wrongs of El Salvador are to the Reagan administration. During the South Atlantic conflict, countries like Cuba and Nicaragua, democracies like Colombia and Venezuela, and military-ruled nations like Guatemala and Brazil all staunchly supported Argentina—while the United States, after attempting to straddle the issue, sided with Britain.

The administration's fascination with El Salvador, combined with its insensitivity to the real hemispheric issues raised by the Falklands war, wound up making all too obvious what the Latin Americans already knew: the United States is really only interested in hemispheric "unity" when it wants the rest of the hemisphere united behind American policy. When our neighbors want to resist "outside aggression" of their own definition, the United States invariably ignores their views and feelings and goes it alone.

The Reagan attempt to rally the hemisphere around an anticommunist crusade in Central Amer-

ica has in fact had the opposite result: it has increasingly united the Latin Americans against us. All the major Latin American democracies now refuse to support Reagan's crusade for democracy. Even the military dictatorships want no part of his counterinsurgency war. (Argentina withdrew its military advisers from the anti-Sandinista camp after the Falklands war.) Indeed, the Contadora Group—composed of Mexico, Panama, Colombia, and Venezuela—is now actively supporting the Sandinista position: that the Honduran border area should be demilitarized, that all outside forces should be withdrawn from Central America, and that disputes should be settled through peaceful negotiation. President Reagan has also helped reduce the isolation of Cuba, which no longer finds itself alone in saying that the real hemispheric problem is chronic U.S. interference, not "outside interference," in the internal affairs of countries like El Salvador.

In the end President Reagan may or may not "lose" El Salvador. But it is clear he has already lost the support of the Latin American nations he imagines are this country's natural allies.

MEXICANS, Colombians, and Venezuelans, however, are not the only ones who, over the last two and a half years, have found themselves increasingly estranged from the Reagan administration. That corps of Latin American specialists in the State Department who are supposed to report on Latin America to the White House—and to help shape and then imple-

ment our policy there—may have also grown aghast at what is going on in Central America.

As the Reagan policy has come to resemble a hall of mirrors, with our intervention in Honduras, for example, mirroring the accusations of Soviet intervention in Nicaragua, another glimmering reflection has also appeared: the State Department more and more resembles El Salvador. When the administration first took office, dozens of experienced foreign service officers were purged on account of their supposed lack of anticommunist fervor. In the very years when their utility to the United States was supposed to be at its peak they have been shunted aside, forced into early retirement, been driven from the State Department, or have quit in disgust. The most prominent victim was former U.S. ambassador to El Salvador Robert White, now one of the most thoughtful and perceptive critics of our transgressions of human rights in Latin America. Lawrence A. Pezzullo, who served both Carter and Reagan as ambassador to Nicaragua, now heads Caritas, the Catholic relief agency—and so ships food and medicine to the refugees our bombs and bullets have created. Wayne Smith, who was formerly head of U.S. interests section in Havana, has become a prominent advocate of a China-style normalization of relations with Cuba. One of the most revealing things about Reagan's Central America policy is that even our own ambassadors start sounding like the supposed "communists" after they have had the chance to experience the real consequences of U.S. actions.

Ambassador White was, as it were, the Colonel Majano of the State Department. But what of its General Garcías? As in El Salvador, the initial purge was only the beginning. Soon after General García "had to go," in the spring of 1983, the two chief officials in charge of our intervention in El Salvador, Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Enders and Ambassador Dean Hinton, were also dismissed for not combating the communist menace with suitable vigor.

Enders, who helped execute the secret bombing of Cambodia in 1971, was judged too soft when he delayed publication of an official "white paper" that claimed that the Nicaraguans, Cubans, and Soviets were plotting a hemispheric campaign of terror.

Hinton offended the White House (and charmed the San Salvador press corps) by failing, on occasion, to deny the obvious. The anticommunist death squads, Hinton declared on one occasion, were harming El Salvador "every bit as much as the guerrillas." Another time Hinton opined, quite correctly, that if the United States really did want to implant democracy in El Salvador it might take a generation. His implication was obvious: Reagan-style "peace, freedom and progress," if that was what the White House really wanted for El Salvador, would cost a lot more than a few hundred million dollars, and involve the commitment of many more Americans than a few hundred advisers.

The significance of Enders's and Hinton's official disgrace was precisely the same as that of García's. They were not, by any stretch of the imagination, starry-eyed reformers or even moderates. Yet in time the reality of Central America infected even them with notions that, by Reagan's standards, were subversive.

Enders, for example, argued that the United States should not imagine it could attain military victory in Central America until it was prepared to crush the guerrillas with "overpowering force." Since neither the American people nor Congress, nor probably even President Reagan, is willing to unleash the B-52s on El Salvador and send a U.S. army of occupation to invade Nicaragua, Enders's implication was clear: at bottom, the U.S. has only two options—to negotiate some sort of settlement with the guerrillas, or to fight (and, even then, not necessarily win) another Indochina war. Administration officials were quite right when, following the removals of Hinton and Enders, they assured the press that President Reagan's Central America policy was unaltered. That is the problem.

Just as the Reagan administration is fighting a war without an army, it is also pursuing a policy without administrators and diplomats. Most important posts in the Inter-American Bureau are unfilled. Officials are scurrying to avoid involvement in the growing Central America fiasco. Those assigned to the bureau or to our embassies in Central America have learned to survive by doing nothing and saying nothing, even when they hear a lot.

The situation in the State Department is becoming dangerously analogous to the situation in the late 1940s and early 1950s, during the most hysterical phase of the Cold War, when to report the truth about the Far East was to become, ipso facto, a "security risk." Most of the department's best China watchers were purged, and their replacements ushered in the Vietnam war. Even if U.S. policy should somehow suddenly change, it would probably take years to reconstruct the State Department's capacity to devise and implement an intelligent Latin America policy—just as it will take years to undo the damage already done to our relations with Latin America.

"Reagan, Clark, and Kirkpatrick aren't just destroying Central America," one official, who implored that his identity not be revealed, or even hinted at, said recently. "They are destroying the capacity of the United States to make intelligent Latin American policy." I asked this official, who, following two years in Washington, was finally being transferred to another post, what he had accomplished.

"I survived," he said. It might have been the comment of a Salvadoran campesino or exiled moderate politician. Two years after the Reagan administration set out to turn El Salvador into a triumph for American-style values, a quite different outcome

is visible. The conduct of U.S. policy has become Salvadoranized.

THE CRISIS in Central America contains a great mystery, although it is not a Central American mystery. It is the mystery of how we Americans act so irrationally and insensitively in the world. The historical pathology of our relations with Latin America certainly transcends individual presidents, but on one level the solution to the current mystery is painfully clear. When Ronald Reagan took office, he was the most ideologically committed president in memory. The only question was whether the realities he would face in the White House would lead the president to de-simplify his dogmas: "We are the last domino," the candidate Reagan said in 1980.

What has President Reagan learned since taking office—about Central America, about our own American capacity to sow mayhem, about the world? Recently the president had the following to say about El Salvador. "If we cannot defend ourselves there, we cannot expect to prevail elsewhere. Our credibility would collapse, our alliances would crumble, and the safety of our homeland would be put in jeopardy."

The defense of dogma is now clearly the president's real Central American strategy, and provides the key not only to understanding those whom he casts down in Washington but those whom he elevates to great power. Paradigmatic of the advisers on whom the president has chosen to confer the power of life and death over millions of Central Americans is William P. Clark. Clark, a California lawyer and old friend of the Reagan family, by his own admission was totally ignorant of foreign affairs when the president first appointed him to office. Since then he has risen to the post of national security adviser, and still knows nothing of foreign policy.

William J. Casey, Reagan's campaign coordinator in 1980, brings similar credentials to his position as director of Central Intelligence—and generalissimo of the CIA war in Central America. This may help explain the administration's conviction that winning in Central America is mostly a matter of adopting the right public relations strategy, and then selling it to Congress and the nation with the right kind of televised presidential address.

The rising influence of that other current mover and shaker of our Central America intervention, U.N. ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, bespeaks another of the president's proclivities: for blaming "communism" for all that displeases us, and in discerning a triumph for democracy in whatever we Americans happen to do. It was she, it should never be forgotten, who suggested that the four American church workers murdered in El Salvador were communist agents. It was also she who developed the doctrinal schema used to justify our support for

mass murderers. The Salvadorans, even when they kill thousands, according to the Kirkpatrick rubric, are merely "authoritarians," and hence worthy of our support. The Sandinistas, who imprison fewer political opponents in a year than the Salvadorans kill in a month, are "totalitarians," and thus must be opposed at all costs.

Secretary of State George Shultz has shown little interest in Central America, perhaps because he has learned what might be called the Enders Lesson: that one does not survive in the Reagan administration by raising the possibility that what we are doing in Central America might just be a mistake. Enders's replacement, an amiable, Brazilian-born Alaska developer and GOP politician named Langhorne A. Motley, will find that neither his knowledge of Portuguese nor his knowledge of the oil business will get in the way of the administration's preconceptions about Spanish-speaking, energy-poor Central America. Though the plan to name one of Clark's California cronies ambassador to El Salvador was headed off by open revolt in the State Department, and a career officer is replacing Hinton, that too is unlikely to change things. The White-Hinton lesson shows that ambassadorial careers are broken, not made, by telling truths about El Salvador that the White House does not want to hear.

Not that the sensibilities of more moderate supporters of the president are entirely neglected. The administration has called another election for El Salvador. And former Florida senator Richard Stone, who earned \$10,000 a month in 1981 as the registered lobbyist for the Guatemalan military authorities, and whose commitment to negotiations in Central America is comparable to Interior Secretary Watt's commitment to endangered species, charges around Central America giving press conferences in Spanish, and generating headlines about "peace." Altogether the Reagan White House seems safe from the subversion of reality.

There is always the possibility, of course, that the Reagan destabilization campaign could produce some event that might really shake the region, even imperil the president's reelection campaign: upheaval in Honduras; a general collapse in El Salvador; the Sandinistas finally being goaded into doing something like invading Honduras or inviting in Soviet missiles. None of these possibilities, however remote, can be completely excluded as a result of what the administration has done over the last two years. For the time being, things are very much as Reagan seems to want. The bullets are flying, the bombs are falling; the four horsemen of the apocalypse are loose in Central America, and their names are the CIA, the Pentagon, the White House, and—limping behind the pack—the Department of State. The main question for now is whether the Central Americans and their Latin American neighbors will be able to save themselves—and us—from the consequences of Reagan's first term in the White House. ■