

U.S. policy options in  
Central America.



THE  
NETTIE LEE BENSON  
LATIN AMERICAN COLLECTION

of  
The General Libraries  
University of Texas  
at Austin

Gift of the Publisher

2 E 744 U54 LAC COP.2  
2

# U.S. OPTIONS in Central America

Eduardo Ulibarri



Cuban-American National Foundation, Inc.

4

This is one of a series of papers on issues of Cuban concern distributed by the Cuban American National Foundation

Permission to use this material is granted by the Cuban American National Foundation. We would appreciate credit when this study is quoted.

Nothing written here is to be construed as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

U.S. POLICY OPTIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

# U.S. Policy Options In Central America

by  
**Eduardo Ulibarri**

**The Cuban American National Foundation, Inc.**  
1982

U.S. Policy Options  
in  
Central America  
by  
Eduardo Ulibarri

About the author:

Eduardo Ulibarri is Editor of *La Nación*, San José, Costa Rica.

## U.S. POLICY OPTIONS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Two positions have crystallized in the U.S. in regard to developments in the deepening Central American crisis. Both positions are over-simplified. Neither provide a true idea of the extent or substance of regional Cuban involvement, nor the conditions which have permitted the development of this involvement.

One position blames all of Central America's conflicts on the traditional injustices and abuses inherent in oligarchic-military governments against which the people have rebelled. This school of thought believes that while the protest movements may be linked to external forces (i.e., Castro and, recently, the P.L.O.), they are fundamentally nationalistic, accepting outside aid only for the lack of any forthcoming elsewhere. At any rate, conditions are judged to be so favorable for the revolutionary movements that external assistance is viewed as incidental.

The other view holds an international communist conspiracy responsible for all crisis and chaos. Any discontent, questioning of the status quo or genuine attempts at democratic reforms are seen as manifestations of this conspiracy. The only viable option, therefore, is the use of force: the existing regime and its supporters must be armed so as to weaken its Communist adversaries.

Many sectors in the United States, particularly liberal groups, perceive all violent outbreaks—from the Nicaraguan civil war and fighting in El Salvador to a banana worker's strike in Honduras—as popular rebellions against corrupt oligarchies.

Other groups, generally conservative, draw different conclusions from the same events: in countries where the people are apparently so apathetic, opposition to the established order must be the product of outside influence.

As a result, liberal groups want the U.S. to either remain neutral in Central American events, or to crusade on behalf of the oppressed. The conservative groups advocate American involvement, militarily, if need be, to reduce the threat to friendly governments.

Both perspectives are nourished by a basic misunderstanding of Central America and its problems. Developments in Europe, Africa and Asia have for decades been the focus of concern in Washington. Thus, when disturbance in Central America intensified recently, few were prepared to deal with the problem.

The United States' indecisiveness has been reinforced by the national trauma it suffered over Vietnam. Its memory has greatly buttressed the "hands off" attitude toward Central America. The desire to avoid "another Vietnam" has so

paralysed the U.S. that it finds itself unable to form any policy beyond proposing negotiations between the various warring factions.

Until the United States becomes more knowledgeable about the problems of Central America and frees itself of the bridling memory of Vietnam, it will be difficult for it to formulate a coherent policy in the region. This policy must take into account both the systemic injustices that have historically prevailed and a more realistic consideration of Soviet-Cuban interests and objectives there.

Seen free of distortion, Central America is a convulsed region, for many years suffering from enormous economic inequity and often-brutal oligarchic dictatorship, making it an excellent breeding ground for violent guerrilla movements.

The Communist regime in Cuba, supported by the Soviet Union, sees in the area's problems an excellent starting point for attacking and eventually overthrowing the established governments there. By fuelling the existing strife, Cuba and the Soviet Union are creating conditions favoring their plans of expansion.

Clearly, this strategy runs counter to the interests of the U.S. and other democracies in the hemisphere. To defend those interests, the U.S. must aid in the creation of an environment favorable for economic development, social progress and political democracy. These are crucial responses to the conditions in which Communists gain support.

It must be remembered that Communist nations support whatever most weakens U.S. influence in any given region. In Central America, therefore, it is necessary for the U.S. to aid those sectors struggling for justice and progress, simultaneously opposing Soviet-Cuban attempts to manipulate these same aspirations. If the U.S. were to blindly support autocratic regimes, the native democratic groups would suffer and, eventually, radicalize. If it is not a force for change and a voice for reform, the unimproved conditions of the people will continue to provide a breeding ground for Marxist manipulation.

A brief glance at the seven countries comprising Central America—Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Belize and Panama—might help clear away some of the existing stereotypes and outline some options for U.S. policy in the region.

## Guatemala

Until the coup of March, 1982, from which General Efraim Rios Montt emerged as leader, Guatemala had been dominated by a strong alliance of the political and economic elite and the military.

This traditional alliance began to crack during the elections of 1978, when a party linked to the status quo, the National Liberation Movement, broke away to run its candidates independently. The Christian Democrats formed the center of the legal opposition, while the Revolutionary (PR) and Institutional Democratic (PID) parties, together with the Central American Organization (CAO) of ex-President Carlos Arana Osorio, supported the winning candidate, General Francisco Romeo Lucas.

Lucas' election, widely thought to have been fraudulent, only served to make guerrilla activity more propitious. When the government proved to be rife with corruption, general discontentment and frustration grew. By ignoring its promises of political freedom, the Lucas regime further weakened the already-cracking structure of the ruling hierarchy while radicalizing moderate groups. The political climate thus lent greater justification for violence, at both ends of the ideological spectrum. These divisions culminated in last year's elections when the alliance broke into four groups: the PR-PD coalition, which supported the government candidate; the MLN; Arana Osorio's group, renamed the Central Authentic National (CAN); and the Christian Democrats.

Declaration of victory for Lucas' hand-picked successor, General Angel Anibal Guevara, apparently sparked the final disintegration of the historical alliance between the oligarchy and the army.

Under these circumstances, Guevara's assumption of power would undoubtedly have widened the process of repression and led to increased chaos. For this reason, the March, 1982 coup and the ascension of General Montt might be seen in a more favorable light.

Although the Montt government has moved toward a more authoritarian framework in recent months, the possibility of bringing to prominence more democratic and reformist elements is still greater than under the previous government of General Lucas.

As Central America's richest country and the one least beset by productivity and balance of payment problems, Guatemala is in a favorable position to respond to U.S. influence promoting the political participation of more moderate and progressive sectors. Yet, the other part of the equation remains: the presence of guerrilla violence and its relation to Soviet-Cuban designs in the region.

Until the beginning of this year, Guatemala's four main guerrilla groups, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), the Organization of the Armed People

(ORPA), the Armed Rebel Forces (FAR) and the Guatemalan Workers Party (PGT), were divided, mainly due to questions regarding strategy. But in February, 1982, with Castro acting as mediator, they agreed to unite and form the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit.

In Nicaragua and El Salvador, greater Cuban involvement and the unification of guerrilla factions stepped up armed action; it is likely, therefore, that greater violence will follow the Guatemalan unification.

The Rios Montt coup has, for the moment, taken away the trump card—fighting the oligarchic alliance—employed by the guerrillas to justify their violence in the past. It is probable that they will try to find new opportunities for action, perhaps by increasing their attacks in order to provoke government repression, thus, acquiring greater legitimacy and popular support for their avowed goal: takeover through revolution.

Another danger currently facing the Guatemalan government comes from within. If a reform process does finally begin, it could be rejected by elements of the oligarchy who have exhibited their inflexibility in the past. This would reduce the government's maneuvering room in promoting reform. Much valuable time would be lost and those government agencies mandated with controlling violence as well as those initiating change could be paralysed.

In light of this situation, the U.S. should begin by supporting the most democratic elements within the government, the Army, and groups that could be influential in guiding Guatemala toward peaceful change and greater justice. Second, the U.S. can pressure rightist groups into not boycotting the political process, urging them instead to direct their opposition through constructive channels. Third, the U.S. can strengthen the armed forces so they can simultaneously combat the Marxist guerrillas and the right-wing paramilitary groups.

An improvement in the people's living conditions will undermine guerrilla support more thoroughly than a reliance on military repression or harsh government measures. There is no time to wait; sweeping reform must start now.

In this scenario, it is likely that the guerrillas will increase their activities in an effort to recover what they may have lost in popular support. If the U.S. has built bridges to the reformist, moderate elements of Guatemalan society, it can count on a viable democratic and anti-communist resistance to aid its efforts without simultaneously reinforcing an oligarchic government.

## El Salvador

The large voter turnout for the general elections in March, 1982, demonstrated that the leftist guerrilla forces were isolated from the majority of the Salvadoran people. It also revealed a major fallacy in American public opinion.

Prior to the election, an alliance of the Salvadoran Army and the Christian Democrats, led by Jose Napoleon Duarte, gave the government the stability and strength needed to initiate reforms such as the agrarian redistribution program. Yet, U.S. opinion generally viewed this alliance as "rightist." For this reason, it was somewhat of a surprise to many when more conservative elements were elected in March. What the elections illustrated was that the Duarte Government was unpopular in El Salvador not so much for its supposed rightist leanings, but for its inability to combat the leftist guerrillas.

One of the great dangers in El Salvador today is that this alliance has not been replaced and the new government is in danger of becoming too rigid to embark on needed reforms.

When, on October 15, 1979, a group of young Salvadoran officers toppled the government of General Carlos Humberto Romero, the country was experiencing a period of intense strife. Yet, poorly organized and confined to street demonstrations in the capital, the dissidence did not seem to represent a wave of irrepressible popular protest. The government's inability to cope with the situation resulted from the corruption and lack of discipline within the security forces. If the government had been in a position to exert more efficient control at the time, it might have contained the situation. It failed to do this, however, leaving the way open for civilian-military rebellion.

The first ruling junta after the 1979 coup issued a proclamation calling on the guerrillas to join in the political process, at the same time promising dramatic reforms. As proof of its intentions, the junta lifted the state of siege and martial law on October 23. On November 1, it announced an amnesty for political prisoners and ordered an investigation into the fate of missing persons. Sixty members of the National Guard were expelled for "abuse of authority." These actions showed that, at least at this time, the more positive sectors of the army were winning control of the situation.

The leftist guerrilla groups responded with a cynical strategy. Within days of the coup, they launched a major offensive in an effort to prevent the new moderate officers from resolving the explosive situation peacefully. A notable exception among the dissidents, and one which hailed the junior officer coup as a positive step toward "democratization" was the Salvadoran Communist Party.

But the guerrillas continued their violent course, which served to strengthen the junta's most reactionary members. These members found the guerrilla's intransigence as justification for their arguments for the shelving of reforms as a top priority.

Joaquin Villalobos, a commandant of the Revolutionary Army of the People (ERP) and now a member of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), explained his actions matter-of-factly in an interview published in the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior* on March 6, 1980: "Regardless of the good intentions of the individuals composing the first governmental junta, our policy consisted in applying constant pressure in order to force the military sector that had the real power to defend the true plans worked out by the imperialists, the oligarchy and their allies."

This guerrilla tactic showed clearly that their strategy was to promote chaos in order to create conditions more conducive for a complete takeover of power. In this manner, it might be said that their tactic succeeded, for with the weakening of the moderate members of the junta and the emergence of the more repressive ones, violence escalated and spread throughout the nation.

In 1980, with the strife intensifying, the junta underwent some transformations, resulting in the Christian Democrats holding the civilian posts and Duarte becoming President. The departure of Guillermo Ungo and his Social Democrat followers was a severe blow for moderate forces, not because they had a large constituency in El Salvador, but because their support of the armed Marxists, as well as that of the Socialist International, legitimized the guerrillas internationally.

Even before Ungo's new Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) allied itself with the rebels, the different guerrilla factions had united to form the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front. Here, the impetus came from Fidel Castro, who had already learned in Nicaragua that the combining of diverse armed factions not only eased military success but enhanced Havana's expansionist designs through greater control of the rebels.

The most impressive evidence of a "Cuban connection" is displayed by the military capacity acquired by the guerrillas. The January, 1981, "offensive" revealed the abundance of their sources of supply. A rebel force can attempt to survive off the proceeds of its activities (kidnapping, in El Salvador's case), or through widespread popular support. But if popular support is very limited, as it is for the FMLN, as demonstrated by the failure of the offensive and the large turnout for the 1982 national elections, the guerrillas need external support to continue their struggle.

If this Soviet-Cuban involvement indeed exists, the U.S. must participate in its turn. It is imperative to continue providing supplies and training to the Salvadoran Army. While avoiding direct armed intervention in the conflict, circumstances may demand the lending of logistical support, especially in controlling the nation's unprotected coastlines. Along with this aid, U.S. strategy must include support for moderate political sectors, the encouragement of liberal military officers, economic aid, incentives for the continuation of reforms already begun and endorsements for new reforms.

## Honduras

While Honduras is the poorest country in Central America, the greater flexibility of its leaders, together with the historical division between the National and Liberal parties, prevented the formation of oligarchic-military alliances such as those which have characterized Guatemala and El Salvador. These factors explain Honduras' success in making the transition from a military to a civilian government, culminating in the election of the reformist Roberto Suazo Cordova in January, 1981.

This power structure makes the problems of Honduras easier to manage, despite the economic and social difficulties which have emerged in the last few months. The major domestic dilemma now is to obtain the resources needed to carry out promised reforms and to keep the economy solvent at the same time. Nevertheless, the relative peace in Honduras does not immunize it from the troubles besetting the region.

Its abutment on both El Salvador and Nicaragua presents a major problem for Honduras. The long, jungled Salvadoran border has served as a conduit for the smuggling of guerrilla supplies into El Salvador, many of them presumably from Nicaragua. On the frontier with Nicaragua, where there have been a series of border clashes, there is the predicament of the Miskito Indians who occupy part of both nations' Atlantic coasts and who have fled into Honduras in great numbers to escape persecution by the Sandinista regime. Similarly, Salvadorans have sought refuge in Honduras from escalating violence in their country. The presence of these refugees has brought with it political implications, as has the presence of anti-Sandinista groups who use Honduras as a base for armed operations against Nicaragua.

At present, a guerrilla unit called the "Chinchonero Command" has taken responsibility for several actions against the Honduran government, including the recent seizure of the Chamber of Commerce building in San Pedro Sula. Other groups, such as the Morazanista Front, have been mentioned in the past. If these groups were to follow the example of Guatemala and El Salvador and unite, they could form an internal force capable of increased violence, making Honduras' borders that much more difficult to guard.

The U.S. should offer Honduras substantial economic aid so that they can pursue an effective reform policy thereby undermining support for the guerrillas. Nor should the U.S. forego the opportunity to provide better equipment for an army, which has already demonstrated its political sophistication, to help in its defense of the new democratic government. It should be kept in mind that the success of democracy in Honduras will have an important demonstrative effect on Nicaragua.

## Nicaragua

If any Central American nation fit the stereotype of the mass uprising of an oppressed people against a corrupt dictator, it was Nicaragua. Four decades of dynastic rule created a widening division between the people and President Anastasio Somoza's regime, a powerful alliance of family, government and business leaders, backed by the National Guard.

Despite the unpopularity of Somoza, organized rebellion did not occur until 1978. On January 10 of that year, the editor of the opposition newspaper, *La Prensa*, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, was assassinated. This act sparked a process of deterioration in the regime that, together with a less supportive U.S. policy, more effective rebel strategies and Somoza's own inflexibility, led to the dictator's fall in 1979.

The basic goal of Carter's policy in regard to Nicaragua—the removal of a pernicious dictator—might have been well-intentioned, but there was a lack of perception of the true situation and, above all, an inability to clearly evaluate the extent of Cuba's involvement or, once evaluated, to counteract it adequately.

The Administrations that preceded Jimmy Carter's failed because they abided by the Cold War mentality which dictated support for a strong, friendly government, regardless of its political system or its unpopularity with the people. They failed to apply enough, if any, pressure to bring about a democratic, civilian solution to Nicaragua's problems while it was still possible.

Carter also failed in this regard, for at the beginning of his term there still existed the possibility for exerting influence in Nicaragua. He made a major mistake when he opted to back the rebellion, without pursuing strategies which might have helped guarantee the strength of the moderates. In view of the identity of the armed elements and the Cuban influence on them, the idea of letting the rebellion run its course without U.S. conditions or concern should have been reformulated.

Currently, the U.S. is confronted with a Nicaraguan regime controlled by a military-political movement, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), demonstrating totalitarian tendencies internally, with its systematic campaign against opposition groups, and an external alliance with Soviet policy interests.

The Sandinista's growing control over the population, economy and all other sectors of Nicaraguan society, has reduced the political opposition to a decorative role. As occurred in Castro's Cuba, many prominent leaders of the Sandinista revolution have become disillusioned and fled into exile.

Nevertheless, the situation in Nicaragua still holds possibilities for U.S. leverage. The radical elements of the three-year-old regime have not yet had the opportunity to fully consolidate their authority and the opposition does retain some influence to veto certain directives. This influence does not seem to derive from respect for pluralism, but rather from the fact that important sectors of the economy remain in private hands and that geopolitical conditions are not entirely suitable for a complete commitment to a totalitarian course.

Given the absence of established checks and balances for internal influence, the few remaining means for affecting Nicaraguan politics are external ones. In this, the U.S. could play a chief role. If it were to act in concert with Western Europe and other regional allies, such as Mexico, this outside action could be more effective and, without isolating the Sandinistas, serve to moderate the Nicaraguan regime. Without such collective initiative, however, the task is formidable, for the Soviet-Cuban bloc have already made great inroads.

The involvement of Cuba and several Soviet bloc nations in Nicaragua is a fact, symbolized by the stockpiles of arms and military supplies. Further evidence is the formation of an enormous army, threatening Honduras to the north, even more so, Costa Rica to the south, a situation which could result in the gradual "Finlandization" of that country. It is becoming increasingly clear that this Nicaraguan arms build-up is not designed for mere defense or internal repression but as a not-too-subtle threat to its neighbors.

Faced with this situation, the U.S. should explore peaceful options in its approach to the Nicaraguan situation. At the same time, it should not commit the grave error of doing nothing to prevent the domestic consolidation of a totalitarian regime in exchange for assurances about the external intentions of the Sandinistas. If the U.S. were to allow the Sandinistas to consolidate their power along Marxist lines, it would be deserting the Nicaraguan people who carried out the rebellion against Somoza in which many gave their lives. Perhaps more importantly, it would be accepting a government whose ideology is expansionist by definition and which, though it may renounce such activities now for tactical reasons, might resume regional interference when the geopolitical climate is more suitable.

## Costa Rica

The new President of Costa Rica, Luis Alberto Monge and Foreign Minister Fernando Volio have both recently denounced Castro-supported Marxist efforts to destabilize their country. In Costa Rica, the oldest democracy in Central America and one of the few remaining in Latin America, the Monge government came to power on a wave of broad support. Consequently, it is a trustworthy ally and affords the U.S. the opportunity to carry out an intelligent policy at little cost and with excellent prospects for success.

The nation's most pressing problems are of an economic nature: a near collapse of the state welfare structure due to an excessive foreign debt, and a decline in productive capacity. The immediate treatment is to seek a renegotiation of the foreign debt, increase the flow of capital into the country and implement stabilization programs consistent with the present political realities. Such a policy would doubtless demand more resources than those included in the bilateral and multilateral aid already announced by the Reagan Administration, but it would be a productive investment, both in terms of aiding the institutional viability of the nation and as a positive role model for its more troubled neighbors.

Still, Soviet-Cuban-Nicaraguan designs must not be lost sight of even in this case. Costa Rica's northern border with Nicaragua, unprotected and ill-defined along much of its length, could be a scene of serious conflict. Several violations of Costa Rican territory by Sandinista forces have already occurred and, although officially repudiated by the Managua government, continue to take place. In Costa Rica, a country without an army and few resources to integrate historically-isolated border regions, it is imperative to formulate a policy which deals with the socio-economic development of these areas.

The U.S. should guarantee aid if the border conflicts with Nicaragua continue or intensify. Assistance could range from the involvement of the Organization of American States if Costa Rica were to invoke the InterAmerican Treaty for Reciprocal Assistance, to different forms of logistical support to direct diplomatic pressure on the Managua regime.

European experience proves that democracies are not immune to terrorism; in fact, terrorist organizations aim to destroy the very basis of democracy. This appears to be their goal in Costa Rica where terrorism has posed a serious security problem for the government. Connections between Costa Rican terrorist units and the guerrilla movements in El Salvador and, thus, to Cuba, have been uncovered. For the sake of frustrating any Cuban destabilization plans, it is imperative that the U.S. assist in containing a possible terrorist onslaught. Solving the economic crisis is a crucial step, but it is also necessary to contribute to the upgrading of Costa Rican security and police agencies, remaining within the nation's unique civilian framework.

The Costa Rican government has not had an ambassador in Cuba since 1962. Consular relations were re-established in February, 1977, but Costa Rica withdrew its diplomatic personnel from Havana in May of 1981 at the time of the Mariel exodus. Press reports indicated that the Costa Rican mission in Havana had been the object of continuing harassment by Cuban authorities. At the United Nations, the Cuban delegation has consistently berated the Costa Rican government.

## Belize

In this country, independent from Great Britain only since September, 1981, the current problems are of a lesser magnitude when compared to its Central American neighbors. Contrary to what many observers had expected, its independence has not been marked by a great Cuban influence, as has occurred in other Caribbean nations. Actually, the government headed by George Price appears to be following a moderate course, in which the presence of British troops protecting the country from neighboring Guatemala's territorial claims, is as fundamental as her economic aid.

This important role of Great Britain, however, shouldn't encourage the U.S. to ignore Belize. The current Administration in Washington seems to understand that Belize needs a great cooperative effort to give the impetus the nation needs for development and to avoid that any "vacuum" be filled by Cuban "advisors." It is important, for instance, that a well-disciplined security force be formed so that, when the British troops eventually depart Belize, they can guarantee not only the safety of the territory, but its democracy, as well. The U.S. can also play a key role in the search for a balanced "modus vivendi" between Guatemala and Belize, to avoid new conflicts or encroachments in the area. If this tension is not eased, it might conceivably pressure the Price government into seeking military help from Cuba.

Despite accusations by its detractors, the Belize government has shown signs of possessing a genuine democratic will. Given the youth of the nation's independence and the problems of underdevelopment afflicting it, political solidarity and economic aid should be immediately forthcoming.

It cannot be forgotten that, despite its peaceful political climate at present, Belize's geographic location makes it susceptible to involvement in the surrounding area's turbulence. Already, for example, thousands of Salvadoran refugees have ensconced themselves in the territory seeking security from civil war.

If this immigration is effectively channeled, it might be of utility to Belize, an under-populated nation with great agricultural potential. But if what is produced is an uncontrolled situation, or worse, political agitation, the results could be extremely serious.



## Panama

The Panamanian political outlook shifted greatly with the death of General Omar Torrijos. Under Torrijos, Panama had supported various forces seeking change in Central America, most notably the Sandinistas in the last days of Anastasio Somoza's reign. The support of Torrijos was very important to the Nicaraguan rebels both in gaining them international legitimacy and in supplying much-needed war materiel.

After the Sandinistas came to power, Torrijos began to have second thoughts about the new government, especially the cojoining of revolutionary strategies by Managua and Havana. In a report by the Spanish news agency EFE, in March, 1981, a high-ranking Panamanian official stated that relations between Cuba and Panama had sunk "to the lowest levels during the last years."

"In Nicaragua," the EFE report continued, "Castro's answer has converted the Sandinista militaries into an army with more offensive than defensive potential and with the risk that this example could be multiplied in the region."

With the death of Torrijos in August of 1981 and the recent resignation of President Royo, the Panamanian internal situation appears to be deteriorating. Although there still remains the possibility for a democratic understanding among the various political factions, two main issues are growing in prominence: a time-frame for democratic rule and a concern over official corruption. Nevertheless, the Marxist left doesn't appear to be very powerful at the present time and the present government has faced most of its opposition from the conservative political parties.

The government party, the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD), headed by President Ricardo de Estrilla, is a "Torrijista" force, a traditionalist, personalist party with all the strengths and weaknesses that implies. One important source of opposition to the government is the Panamanian Party (PP), organized around 81 year-old Arnulfo Arias. This broad-based front includes the Liberal Party led by David Salmudio and the Christian Democrats of Ricardo Arias.

Panama's domestic problems have encouraged the government in the recent past to at least rhetorically support an "independent" foreign policy. This, in reality has lent moral support to the Castro regime. Given the growing role of the armed forces in Managua, however, the prognosis is for growing Panamanian concern over Cuban involvement and developments there.

The United State's long-term strategy in regard to Panama ought to consider the Panamanian's need for a foreign policy independent of the U.S., while encouraging the development of democratic forces. The Panamanian political scene is very fluid at this time and elections before 1984 are quite possible. The events of the next few months are likely to decide whether Panama moves toward greater democratization or toward a traditional military dictatorship.

## Conclusion

Examination of these national cases, focusing on their political aspects, makes it clear that there are no easy choices in Central America and that it would be unwise for the U.S. government to succumb to stereotypes to define its policies.

The U.S. needs, first of all, a clear idea of what it wishes to accomplish, then, the fortitude to understand and utilize the resources available for carrying out those aims in each country.

The aims which would be most beneficial to the United States—political stability, democracy, justice and progress—are shared by various circles in all the nations of Central America. Together, they form an important common interest for coordinated action.

Within these circles, however, some sectors lack a clear idea of the dangers of Soviet-Cuban interference or, confronted with agonizing domestic problems, mistakenly see this interference as a risk which must be taken in order to find a solution. Moreover, as some of these democratic sectors persist in such alliances even after other options have opened up, as seems the case with Guillermo Ungo in El Salvador, it should be possible to exert enough pressure for them to define their sympathies. Simultaneously, if the U.S. strongly encourages intransigent ruling hierarchies in countries like El Salvador and Guatemala to support change, it will curb the chances of democratic-Marxist alliances, which can give totalitarian groups a means of winning international recognition, from forming.

This search for peaceful and permanent solutions to better the living conditions of historically-oppressed peoples must be made without resorting to oversimplifications. In addition, it must be accomplished with an awareness that for the Soviets and Cubans, the Central American crisis is only a question of aggrandizement and that they are prepared to manipulate each situation to their advantage, not to further democracy, but to increase their chances of taking control in these countries. Creating satellites in Central America is an attractive prospect for the Communist regimes; it would provide them with allies for their foreign policy and establish new enemies for the U.S. in its own "backyard." The Falklands-Malvinas conflict is a clear example of how a regional crisis can take on alarming global dimensions, and of the Soviet-Cuban capacity for exploiting critical situations in any part of the world to adversely affect U.S. interests.

Understanding the predatory manner of Marxism is an indispensable starting point in the search for permanent solutions to the problems of Central America. Equally important is the cognizance that there are ties between just and democratic objectives in Central America and the United States on one hand, and discrepancies between these objectives and those of the Soviet Union and Cuba on the other.

Should the Soviet-Cuban design be countered with several national strategies or with one for the entire region? Clearly, the answer is with both.

The problems of each of these nations differ. For this reason, solutions must be tailored with an eye to each case. But, while a great many of their problems are domestic, Soviet-Cuban strategy is regional and it must receive a regional and international response.

Central America confronts not the danger of war, but war itself. It is a war fought on a wide front by unconventional means. Militarily, Soviets and Cubans are using indigenous groups to project their influence. Politically, by enacting diplomatic maneuvers primarily against the U.S. in international forums, they have added the use of nationalist groups responsive to Soviet-Cuban interests. There also is established a large-scale propaganda effort, spread beyond the confines of Central America to have an effect on the United States itself.

This globalization of the Central American conflicts demands efforts to stem Soviet-Cuban intervention and create conditions suitable for the growth of democracy in the region, as well as methods to penalize the Marxist powers for their persistence in aiding and escalating the conflicts. Awareness and implementation of this task can work in favor of U.S. policy for it may well create a situation where the increased costs, financial and/or political, will prove too costly for the Soviets and Cubans to continue their interference. The time to seize the initiative is now.

In Nicaragua, the consolidation of a totalitarian regime will constitute a permanent danger for the entire region. At the same time, Cuba's continuance as an expansionist, Marxist state, even if it should temporarily decide that Central American intervention is not in its interests, represents a constant threat. It must not be forgotten that after the guerrilla failures of the 1960's, the Castro regime remained relatively passive in the area and even began an attempt to rejoin the interamerican system. Yet, at the end of the decade, its strategy changed once again and, with more sophisticated tactics, dedicated itself to the encouragement of international guerrilla movements.

Greater stability in Central America can not be guaranteed without confronting the activities of the Castro regime. The U.S. should encourage the emergence of elements willing to confront the Havana government with internal difficulties which may eventually lead to changes within it. This does not necessarily mean fomenting guerrilla movements within Cuba but it must be made clear to Castro that he cannot involve himself in the regional conflicts and stoke the fires of violence without repercussions. It would also make U.S. policy toward the region and the entire continent more comprehensive and more consistent.

The costs of Soviet-Cuban involvement in Central America is rising and the U.S. would do well to pursue its policy with that in mind. Recent positive developments, such as the establishment of a civilian government in Honduras, overwhelming popular support for the new Costa Rican administration, the El Salvador elections and the increased options emerging after Guatemala's coup, all serve to further the costs and risks for the Marxist elements.

Until now, the Soviet Union and Cuba have lost nothing from their aggressive conduct in Central America. Even a defeat in El Salvador, Guatemala and other nations in which they are involved would only constitute a defeat of their strategy, not for their system. For decades, these belligerents have heightened dangers in territories outside the traditional zone of Soviet influence.

It is time for this pattern to change, and for adventures of this kind to repre-

sent potential costs not only for Soviet-Cuban methods but for their system itself. With such a strategy, which can be effected without risk or war, the U.S. will be in a more favorable position to promote in Central America, as well as elsewhere, the development of democracy and justice, which should be its ultimate goals.

## CUBAN-AMERICAN NATIONAL FOUNDATION

The Cuban-American National Foundation is an independent, nonprofit organization devoted to the gathering and dissemination of data about economic, political and social issues of the Cuban people both on the island and in exile. The Foundation supports the development of independent and responsible press.

The Foundation promotes an objective view of Cuba and Cubans, and the objective appraisal of the Castro government and its policies.

The Foundation supports a network of correspondents and study groups worldwide, promotes Cuban exiles' efforts to fight against human rights, and promotes Cuban cultural, artistic and economic activities.

100 copies of this paper are available for \$1.00.  
Page 16 of 16 pages  
Cuban-American National Foundation  
1425 Third Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004

## **CUBAN AMERICAN NATIONAL FOUNDATION**

*The Cuban American National Foundation is an independent, nonprofit institution devoted to the gathering and dissemination of data about economic, political and social issues of the Cuban people, both on the island and in exile. The Foundation supports the concepts of an independent and democratic Cuba.*

*The Foundation promotes an objective view of Cuba and Cubans, and an objective appraisal of the Cuban government and its policies.*

*The Foundation supports a general program to enlighten and clarify public opinion on problems of Cuban concern, to fight bigotry, protect human rights, and promote Cuban cultural interests and creative achievement.*

Copies of this paper are available for \$2.00  
from the Cuban American National Foundation  
1625 "Eye" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006

**Other titles in this series are:**

*U.S. Radio Broadcasting to Cuba: Policy Implications.* A study of the proposal for a new U.S. government radio station for broadcasting to Cuba (Radio Marti), including discussion of the propaganda strategies of the Soviet Union and the Castro regime. Covers the information environment in Cuba and the impact of Radio Marti on it. Analyses options for administration and programming. Price: \$1.00

*The Cuban Scene: Censors and Dissenters* by Professor Carlos Ripoll. This article describes the mechanisms of intellectual repression under the Castro government. Outlines the history of the Cuban government policy toward literature since 1959, and of the effects of these policies on Cuban literature. Reprinted from *Partisan Review*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 4. Distributed free of charge.

*Castro and the Bankers: The Mortgaging of a Revolution* by Ernesto F. Betancourt and Wilson P. Dizard III. An analysis of the Cuban government's debt to Western banks and the Soviet Union. Describes the sources and uses of the Castro regime's foreign debt, and discusses the consequences of a default or rescheduling. Price \$2.00