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EDITORIALS

C.I.A. Death Squad

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 general 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 Efraín Bámaca Velásquez 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
to 1989, says he also knew Jacarino, though he says Jacarino with the C.I.A. he replied, “I'm not at liberty to say.”

Defense Intelligence Agency chief in Guatemala from 1985 as Joe Jacarino, has operated throughout the Caribbean, and 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 Alpírez at the La Aurora base in Guatemala, he denied all involvement in the deaths of Bámara 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. G-2 bases on “contra-subversion” tactics and “how to use the factors of power” to “fortify democracy.”

Other officials, though, say that at least during 1980s G-2 officers were paid by Jack McCavitt, the station chief, and that the “technical assistance” communications gear, computers and special firearms as collaborative use of C.I.A.-owned helicopter flown out of the Piper hangar at the La Aurora airport and from a separate U.S. air facility.

Through what Amnesty International has called an “enormous program of political murder,” the Guatemalan military, has, since 1978, killed more than 110,000 civilians and a smaller, affiliated unit called the Archivo have openly known in Guatemala as the brain of the te With a contingent of more than 2,000 agents and units in the local army bases, the G-2—under army high command—coordinates the torture, ass and disappearance of dissidents.

“If the G-2 wants to kill you, they kill you,” for Chief of Staff Gen. Benedicto Lucas García once sent one of their trucks with a hit squad and that fellow and former G-2 agents describe a program of assassination backed by a web of torturers and clandestine cemeteries. In 1986, then-army Chief of Staff Gen. H. majo Morales, a U.S. protégé, said that the G-2 mainan and watches “anyone who is an opponent of the Guatemalan state in any realm.” A former G-2 agent said he worked at in Huehuetenango maintained i matorium and “processed” abductees by chopping singing flesh and administering electric shocks.

At least three of the recent G-2 chiefs have been C.I.A., according to U.S. and Guatemalan intelligence. One of them, Gen. Edgar Godoy Caintán, a former chief of Staff, has been accused in court by the victims of being one of the prime “intellectual authors” or masterminds of the noted Guatemalan anthropologist M. Chang [see Victor Perera, “Where Is Justice in Guatemala?”]

Another, Col. Otto Pérez Molina, now runs the Presidential General Staff and oversees the President’s security office, there was evidence of General Pérez Molina's involvement in the assassination of Judge Edgar Ro Ogaldez. The third, Gen. Francisco Ortega Menaldo, runs the Presidential General Staff and oversees the President’s security office, there was evidence of General Pérez Molina's involvement in the assassination of Judge Edgar Ro Ogaldez. The third, Gen. Francisco Ortega Menaldo, now works in Washington as general staff director of the Inter-American Defense Board, was in charge in 1994, when, according to the Washington Post, there was evidence of General Pérez Molina's involvement in the assassination of Judge Edgar Ro Ogaldez.
These crimes are merely examples of a vast, systematic 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. (Sister Ortiz has testified that a man she believes to be North American seemed to be the supervisor of the agents who abducted her, Gramajo said he had sustained her 111 burn wounds during a "lesbian love trial.") 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. Efrain 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 Arévalo, 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 has written extensively on Guatemala and its military since 1980. Last fall in The Nation he broke the story of U.S. intelligence collaboration with Haiti's FRAPH.

Silent Racism

In February student activists at Rutgers University gave America their own version of a comparative history lesson: Racism Then and Now. In protesting a racist statement by university president Francis Lawrence, the United Students Coalition at Rutgers brought the difficulties of civil rights activism in the 1960s to the national stage. Rutgers students were seriously lacking in iconography: They had no visual representation of their oppression—no fire hoses, police dogs or billy clubs—for the front pages and nightly news. The Rutgers coalition had only Lawrence's inflammatory words—he called African-Americans a disadvantaged population because of their genetic and hereditary background. Since institutional racism is not easily photographed, the difficulty for activists whose causes are race-based becomes how to combat the "misspoken" word.

Otis Rolley, one of the heads of the student coalition's public relations committee, used the images of protests past to guide the coalition, although he was fully aware that times have changed. Before embarking on the campaign against Lawrence, Rolley and other students referred to Richard McCormick's The Black Student Protest Movement at Rutgers, an account of campus activism a generation ago. The students' knowledge of this history and their understanding of past tactics helped them turn what could have been a passing murmur into a full-scale movement. But the comparison revealed the differences between the activism of yesterday and today. "Back then there was such blatant racism: 'You're black and I don't want you at school,'" Rolley reflects. "Now everything is so much more covert that when you cry out, people say, 'What are you talking about? It's a great school, kid."

But at universities like Rutgers, young people of color continue to face shrouded but significant racism—the suspicious glance, the continual requests for identification not made of white students, the assumptions of favoritism due to quotas. Only rarely do words surface as a blunt reminder that the playing field is still slanted. Around the Rutgers campus, Rolley says, "some people yell 'nigga' from a car but they don't stick around. The attacks are always cowardly."

As cowardly, perhaps, as Lawrence's attempts to hide behind his "good" record on race relations. In the 1980s Rutgers failed to meet the most basic affirmative action goals for the enrollment of minority students. In response, the Rutgers Board of Governors created a Minority Community Leaders Advisory Board. Lawrence disbanded the board as soon as minimum minority enrollment levels were met. And despite the media's focus on Lawrence, the students' demands go far beyond removing him as president—to nothing less than a demand for full equal opportunity, including minority tenure...