

Guatemala: War and Revolution

Part II

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The CIA coup to overthrow Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 would put the nation of Guatemala on the path to a nightmare future of poverty, war, and genocide. The United States would reshape Guatemala's intelligence military and police to fight a counterinsurgency war on the majority of the population.

CIA, Special Forces, military advisers, and Office of Public Safety advisers would arrive in Guatemala to create a massive coordinated killing machine. The result was the introduction of death squads, wide scale torture, rape, mass murder, and genocide.

Guatemala became the textbook example of the worst dirty war in 20th century Latin America outdoing the crimes of the countries under the boot of Operation Condor in South America as well as the crimes of neighbouring El Salvador and Somoza's Nicaragua. Hundreds of millions of dollars in development aid only served to further impoverish and fragment Guatemala so that today Guatemala is now a textbook example of the poverty and chaos produced by neo-liberalism and globalization.

Castillo Armas, leader of the CIA proxy army that invaded Guatemala during the coup, was finally installed as a dictator after two short lived juntas were maneuvered into and out of power. He banned unions and political parties; burned and banned books; locked up 9,000 Arbenz supporters and communists and forced thousands to flee into exile. Hundreds of union leaders were killed while the CIA, operating under the cover of the Committee Against Communism, composed a massive black list of "subversives" that already had 70,000 names on it by the end of the year.

Decades later the military and police would murder elderly, returning exiles who had ended up on the list because of union membership or other "subversive" activity during the Arbenz years. Armas confiscated all the lands that Arbenz had given to 100,000 peasant families returning them to wealthy landowners and the United Fruit Company.

Corruption was rampant under Armas as the US flooded the country with development aid. Armas had risen to power thanks to United Fruit but he would be assassinated for cracking down on its rival Standard Fruit Company and its gambling interests, casinos controlled by Ted Lewin. Lewin was part of the Meyer Lansky Syndicate (He had also worked closely with the CIA in the Philippines) and was closely allied to Standard Fruit through its President Seymour Weiss.

When Armas cracked down on Lewin, John Rosselli, a mobster who was a fixer for Standard Fruit, made a trip down to Guatemala and arranged for the military, who were being bribed by the casinos, to assassinate President Castillo Armas. Armas was killed by his own bodyguard, who immediately committed suicide (or at least it was made to look that way).

The whole thing was conveniently blamed on the communists. Rosselli would later be contracted by the CIA to arrange the murder of Fidel Castro and was killed after testifying about the JFK case in front of the House Committee on Assassinations in the 1970's. I can only hint at Roselli's complex connections to the mafia and the CIA, which included people like Rip Robertson, John Martino, and William Pawley linked to covert wars coups and the assassination of JFK. Rosselli's contact in the Guatemalan military Lt Col Enrique Trinidad Olivia was promoted to head the Guatemalan secret police after the assassination of Armas.



Back in 1953, the year before the coup that overthrew Arbenz, when the CIA was looking for the man to lead it, they had asked Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes a supporter of the dictator Ubico whose handpicked successor Arbenz had overthrown. Ydigoras had run against Arbenz in 1950 and lost by a landslide fleeing the country to avoid harassment by Arbenz supporters. Ydigoras had turned down the CIA offer to lead the invasion but referred them to Armas. Ydigoras had a secret deal with Armas to offer his secret support in exchange for the promise that he would be allowed to run for president after Arbenz was overthrown. However Armas had broken the deal by cancelling the presidential elections in 1956. With Armas dead the Government announced elections for 20 October 1957, Ydigoras saw his chance returning from his Ambassador's post in Colombia to run (Colombia would also see decades of dirty war and death squads thanks to American advisers.) Armas' party the MLN, which in future would become infamous as the party of death squads, selected Armas former Interior Minister Miguel Ortiz Passarelli as their candidate.

Ydigoras won the election but Ortiz was declared the winner anyway. Ydigoras threatened to launch a coup and his supporters flooded the streets. The military attaches at the US embassy managed to negotiate a settlement between Ydigoras and the MLN for new elections for January of 1958. Despite the CIA giving his new MLN opponent Luis Cruz Salazar almost \$100,000 dollars in campaign funds Ydigoras won again and Congress voted to confirm him. He took office 15 March 1958.

Voters elected him as an alternative to Armas hated MLN ignoring Ydigoras record of support for Ubico, the 1954 coup, and his far right views. They foolishly believed Guatemala would return to democracy as in 1944-1954. Instead in what would become a recurring pattern things were about to get much worse. Things began amusingly. A newspaperman called Ydigoras a feeble old man and Ydigoras appeared on national TV to skip rope and juggle Indian clubs. Of course most Guatemalans had no electricity let alone television sets.

As a darker joke when Ydigoras visited Washington the Americans demanded he pay them back 1.8 million dollars to cover the costs of the 1954 coup. Back in 1954 a young Argentinian named Ernesto “Che” Guevara had arrived in Guatemala to defend the country against the coming coup. After the coup he’d been forced to seek asylum in an embassy while John Foster Dulles tried desperately to have him and thousands of others hiding in embassies illegally arrested then either killed or deported to the Soviet Union. Armas had himself been forced to seek asylum in an embassy a couple years before plus he didn’t want to offend every countries diplomatic corps by carrying out Dulles plan and refused. So “Che” Guevara headed to exile in Mexico met Fidel Castro and helped him liberate Cuba after an initially disastrous beginning to their campaign.

The victory of the Cuban revolution on 1 January 1959 marked the beginning of the second of three phases of the “Cold War” culminating in the liberation of Vietnam in 1975. Both the goal of preventing another Cuba and the Empire’s ever deteriorating situation in Vietnam would shape the future of the third world in general, Latin America specifically, and especially Guatemala in the decades to come.

US advisers CIA, Special Forces, and police would rotate from Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Laos to countries like Guatemala, Colombia, and El Salvador or vice versa. In each country a version of Vietnam’s Phoenix Program would be created: Centralized control of Intelligence, military, and police. The creation of communications and computer networks to share information on “subversives.”

They set up death squads, torture centres and disappearances followed. Eventually this massive killing machine would be coordinated across borders evolving into Operation Condor in South America in the 1970’s. In Central America this regional coordination began even earlier with the creation of CONDECA in the 1960s. The US became obsessed with counterinsurgency although of course these techniques were a feature of the earlier dirty wars in places like Greece, Korea, and the Philippines in the 1940’s and 1950’s. The roots of counter-insurgency went back much further to the marine corps “small wars” in Latin America and the Caribbean, to the invasion and occupation of the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico at the turn of the century and further back still to crushing slave revolts and committing genocide against the Indians. American counterinsurgency theorists combined this long American experience with the lessons learned by the British and French in places like Malaysia, Kenya, Indochina, and Algeria. The United States also learned from the Nazi SS and other fascist death squads who battled partisans and carried out mass murder and genocide during World War 2. These fascists were recruited by the Americans after the war. Many were founding members of US Special Forces. War crimes were an extension of policy, part of the science of psychological warfare.

Image below: Black and white photograph of General Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes in full military uniform decorated with medals of honor. (Source: Public domain)



Cuba’s revolution inspired panic in Washington that other countries in Latin America might follow the Cuban example. Soon plans were under way to train a proxy army of Cuban exiles to invade. Training camps were built in Florida and Louisiana as well as in Nicaragua and Guatemala. The CIA went directly to President Ydigoras and he agreed to host the training camps without even asking the military high command. The military was cut out of it’s share of the bribe and the camps were built on the land of Robert Alejos who had worked for both

the CIA and United Fruit in the past, later becoming part of a massive drug smuggling ring.

These foreign bases in Guatemala offended the nationalist pride of the army. On 13 November 1960 there was a military uprising involving 120 officers and 3,000 soldiers at Ft Matamaros in Guatemala City (Where Arbenz's uprising had begun) and at Zacapa base and Puerto Barrios. Ydigoras asked the Americans to intervene and the CIA had the Cuban exiles repaint their planes with Guatemalan air force insignia and begin bombing the rebelling troops. Eisenhower also sent in the US navy to patrol the coasts. The uprising was quickly crushed but it included future guerrilla leaders both US trained ironically Marco Aurelio Yon Sosa and Luis Turcios Lima who had attended ranger school at Ft Benning Georgia. In 1962 they would return from exile launching an unsuccessful offensive that inspired massive demonstrations and strikes in Guatemala City. In March of 1962, 20 student demonstrators were killed further enraging the populace and soon 3 political parties including the far right MLN were demanding Ydigoras resignation.

The same month Ydigoras replaced his entire cabinet, except the Foreign Minister, with military officers. While all this was going on the CIA, the Pentagon and OPS (Office of Public Safety) were busy restructuring Guatemala's intelligence, military, and police along COIN (Counterinsurgency) lines. Their Guatemalan point man for these changes was Ydigoras' defence minister Colonel Enrique Peralta Azurdia who was a deep believer in COIN having served 2 years on the Inter-American Defense Board in Washington DC. By the Summer of 1962 the guerrillas had been crushed while the US embassy was working on an Internal Defense Plan which called for increased centralization and coordination between intelligence, police and military and the creation of an intelligence agency out of the president's office that would combine the powers of the CIA and NSA and run the dirty war. The same request had been made of the US Embassy in El Salvador (and embassies around the world) and they came up with nearly identical solutions leading to a similar bloodbath.

The guerrillas had been crushed but Ydigoras was still wildly unpopular. Moreover, he had agreed to let ex-President Arevalo return from exile to run for president. In January 1963 a team of military advisers on a fact finding mission declared that the threat of insurgency was over. In January 1963 the JFK administration authorised a coup against Ydigoras. Arevalo returned from exile on 29 March 1963 and the next day Ydigoras awoke to discover tanks on his lawn. He had been overthrown by his Defense Minister Peralta Azurdia who had been in charge of restructuring the security services along the lines suggested by his American advisers. In fact they had used this fact to help finance the coup and after the coup sent a massive increase in MAP (Military Assistance Program) funds and OPS funds. After the coup the US State Department even bragged that by preventing the election of Arevalo they had achieved the primary goal of the internal defense plan.



Peralta Azurdia (image on the right; from public domain) was declared Chief of State instead of President and the constitution was immediately suspended. His main goal was to completely restructure intelligence agencies, military and police along the lines set forth by the latest in US counterinsurgency doctrine. Further Guatemala was integrated into CONDECA (founded in 1964 and part of the OAS) a Central American precursor to South America's Operation Condor of the 1970s and 1980s.

A surveillance net covered the whole region with state-owned (and military controlled) telecoms like Guatemala's GUATEL listening in on every phone call, supplemented by American listening posts. Panama was the key US base of operations in Central America home to FT Gulick and the School of the Americas where countries like Guatemala and El Salvador sent their military to train COIN specialists. Panama was also where special forces like Guatemala's Kaibiles were taught to carry out atrocities beginning like serial killers with torturing animals, and then witnessing torture of humans before carrying it out themselves. Panama was also home to US airbases whose planes would secretly bomb Guatemala and napalm villages during the dirty war.

Under the dictator Peralta Azurdia Guatemala's security system was completely reshaped so that it could continue to carry on the dirty war no matter who was elected president. Nonetheless the military would only allow two civilian presidents over the next 25 years preferring to hand power to hand picked officers via fixed elections. Acting on US advice Peralta Azurdia created a Presidential Intelligence Agency, which combined the powers of the CIA and NSA directing the dirty war, and using a US supplied computer network to keep the entire country under surveillance.

They were in charge of the most high profile political assassinations and cases of kidnapping, torture and murder of the disappeared. It would change names being known as the Estado Mayor, or "La Regional." The National Police also had their own centralized intelligence centre known as the "Box." This centralization of intelligence also made it easy for the CIA and US MILGRP (The US Military mission) to secretly help coordinate the coming decades of dirty war as they worked daily alongside the Presidential Intelligence Agency allowing them to control things from the top. Information from the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Labour was funnelled into this centralized intelligence hub and used to draw up death lists of teachers, union leaders, cooperatives members and others. Peralta Azurdia immediately brought back the black list of the Armas years with much more deadly results.

Since the role of the Military and Police would crystallize under Peralta Azurdia this is a good time to describe the structures that would remain in place well into the 1990's. The military's intelligence branch G2 or S2 operated out of every military region and reported directly back to their G2 superiors rather than base commanders. They ran networks of informants and organized kidnap torture and disappearances with extreme brutality.

They were the brains behind the dirty war. They also supervised the torture. The military was responsible for the vast majority of the killing and conscripts were expected to execute anyone they deemed a "suspicious" character on sight. They underwent 3 months of abuse and brainwashing after being basically kidnapped. The system of military conscription operated through kidnapping raids the military would surround a market or a village and seize any male from ages 15 to 21. Anyone capable of paying a small bribe was exempt so it was poor Indian peasants who made up the majority of conscripts. After their 3 months of torture brainwashing and forced Ladinoization (they were taught Spanish via beatings) they were always assigned away from their home regions so that their Indian victims would speak a different Mayan language. The tiny officer corps in contrast was made up of Ladino's who had passed through a series of military academies.

For them the military was a road to riches as the military gained increasing control of some sectors of the economy and were invited to serve as partners in enterprises owned by rich Guatemalans. Special forces and other counter-Insurgency specialists like the Guatemalan rangers were increasingly the elite of the military. Trained by US Special Forces in Panama, the US or in Guatemala the special forces called Kaibiles were trained to commit unspeakable atrocities as part of psychological warfare, counter-terror, and counterinsurgency warfare.

The military was sometimes resistant to giving the police a greater role in the dirty war because of old rivalries, as a result the US advised them to create a mobile military police the PMA who would play the role of special police during the dirty war. They would terrorize the countryside cordoning off areas and conducting sweeps for subversives. Peralta Azurdia transformed the role of military commissioners. Now in addition to overseeing forced conscription raids they were armed and empowered to create auxiliary military commissioners.

The military commissioners were responsible for being the eyes and ears of the military making up lists of subversives. Increasingly they used their network of auxiliary military commissioners as death squads in the countryside killing torturing and disappearing any peasant standing up for their rights. The military commissioners usually recruited MLN party members of the increasingly fascist party the CIA had created for Armas during the 1954 coup. To carry out death squad killings and high profile assassinations the military used "confidenciales". These were troops secretly requested from regional commanders who were sent to the capital for a couple of months to carry out assassinations requiring an extra layer of plausible deniability and then returned to their provinces.

The National Police were the main Guatemalan police force. US OPS advisers helped them strengthen their investigative divisions so they could be used to hunt down subversives. The detective corps of the National Police carried out most of the torture and killings. The police had their own off the books force the rebajados. Police who got into trouble were forced to serve as rebajados paid out of the informants' budget. They carried out killings targeting not just subversives but common criminals. Slum areas became dumping grounds for corpses of petty criminals and vigilantes were blamed for these police killings. Sometimes union

leaders were killed by these “Vigilantes” and the police would manufacture a phony criminal record of the victim. Also murdered were people in jails, often buses transferring prisoners between prisons were stopped and prisoners were murdered or prisoners were murdered upon release.

OPS advisers also helped set up a counter-terror strike team commando six aka SWAT that was used to raid Guerrilla safe houses as well as arresting subversives and policing demonstrations. They would later be responsible for the infamous massacre of sit in protestors at the Spanish embassy in 1980. In addition to the National Police there were also the Treasury police and the Judicial Police both of whom served as political police and death squads renowned for their brutality, a role they had played since Ubico’s time.

The final element in the new security structure was the creation of paramilitary death squads. Fascist MLN members were recruited into paramilitary death squads. However civilian death squads in Guatemala existed merely to provide plausible denial for the military and the police who were the ones actually responsible for vast majority of the killings and disappearances. Death squads were blamed even when the military and the police had quite openly arrested the victim wearing their uniforms and the victims had been taken to the nearby military base or police station for rape, torture and dismemberment. They were a tool of psychological warfare adding to the confusion and terror. The death squads were the brainchild of the CIA and American Special Forces who talked quite openly of the need to terrorize the populace while maintaining plausible denial through the creation of paramilitary forces.

They appeared in Guatemala just prior to the election of 1966 publishing manifestos and death lists threatening to target anyone they considered subversive. MANO Blanca was the most infamous one. There was also CEDAG and host of other names for the same group that was secretly controlled by the military. The plausible denial provided by death squads had a further advantage it allowed the Guatemalan press to magnify the terror felt by the populace by filling their papers and magazines with horrifying photos of the killings designed to terrorize even illiterate “readers” while at the same time hiding the role of the military and police in the killings.

Any journalist, politician or activist who dared to point out the connection between the military and the police with the killings was likely to end up dead. The MLN political party was headed by Mario Sandoval Alarcon, a former CIA student leader in CIA backed CEUA (Committee of Anti-Communist University Students) would later become infamous as the “Godfather of the Death Squads” mentoring Roberto D’Aubuisson in El Salvador and helping to create the Nicaraguan contras. Mario Sandoval Alarcon was also the head of the Guatemalan branch of the World Anti-Communist League with close ties to Taiwan. Many in the Guatemalan military would be sent to Taiwan to study political warfare. MLN bragged that it had a paramilitary force of 3000 men and was also happy to take the credit or the blame for the wave of death squad killings.

In his three years in office Peralta Azurdia was able to reshape the military and police into an efficient killing machine, linked by modern communications thanks to American OPS advisers like Alfred Naurocki who set up the communications systems for the militaries throughout Central America as well as in the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. In 1965 Peralta Azurdia created a new constitution founded on anti-communism. In 1966 he decided to hold elections and restore the democratic facade. It was a complete farce the left wing backed candidate Mario Mendez Montenegro was assassinated. His brother Julio Cesar

Mendez Montenegro ran in his place but was forced to sign a secret nine-point pact with the military terms of which included complete military independence from civilian control, no negotiations with “subversives” to end the war, and complete immunity for all crimes committed during Peralta Azurdia’s reign. All the candidates were forced to sign this agreement.

The military took no chances on any negotiated settlement. Shortly before the election over 28 of the top communist party and labour leaders were arrested and disappeared eliminating anyone in a position to negotiate an end to the war. It was called Operation Cleanup and owed its success to OPS adviser John Longan. Longan a police adviser had been assigned to Guatemala back in 1957 as part of the first wave of advisers then rotated to various hotspots like Brazil and the Dominican Republic and returned in 1965 to set up a police intelligence unit and strike force. He taught them the “frozen area” method cordoning off a few block radius and conducting house-to-house searches. This culminated in a series of raids where left wing leaders were arrested tortured and forced into giving the locations of their leaders.

It became known as the “Case of the 28” although the actual number of victims was higher. Its victims included Victor Manuel Gutierrez a former congressman and leading PGT leader in Arbenz’s time and Leonardo Castillo Flores who had founded Guatemala’s first peasant federation back in Arbenz’s time. Gutierrez died of a heart attack while he was being tortured. All of them were tortured, murdered and disappeared. Needless to say the American embassy helped mastermind this whole episode. When the university student Union AEU investigated their disappearance and exposed their perpetrators they were hunted down and forced to go underground.

The left wing candidate Mendez Montenegro won the election and was inaugurated July 1966. He was powerless to carry out his promises to end police torture or negotiate an end to the war. Instead he became completely silent on the ever-escalating brutality that even targeted his political party. The real power was held by his defense minister Colonel Arriaga Bosque Mendez. Bosque Mendez appointed Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio as commander of the Zacapa Izabal military zone. Col. Arana Osorio had served for 2 years in Washington DC as a military attaché and was a COIN specialist. The Zacapa zone was to become the laboratory of counterinsurgency warfare.

Over 1,000 American troops mostly Special Forces arrived there to train Colonel Arana Osorio’s troops and secretly taking a direct role in the combat. American bombers also flew out of Panama napalming villages believed to be sympathetic to the guerrillas. This covert war occurred at the height of the war against Vietnam and so is almost completely unknown in the US. Similar wars were taking place around the same time in Colombia and Peru, which are still largely unknown. Colonel Arana became known as the Butcher of Zacapa and he and other officers who worked closely with CIA and Special Forces in Zacapa became known as the Zacapa group.

The Zacapa group included Col Arana Osorio, Kjell Laugerud, Romeo Lucas Garcia, and Mejia Victores. They would dominate the presidency throughout the dirty war rotating through the post of Defense Minister to President. Zacapa was where the scorched earth tactics, the massacres, the death squad killings, torture, rape and murder rapidly escalated and then spread across the country. The Zacapa campaign began in October of 1966. In November of 1966 a state of siege was declared nationwide all civil rights were suspended and strict

press censorship of the Zacapa campaign and death squad killings were instituted.

The Zacapa campaign was successful in crushing the FAR guerrillas in the countryside although their defeat in the 1960s only led to the creation of new Guerrilla groups in the 1970s like EGP (The Army of the Poor) and ORPA who established even broader popular support especially among the Maya Indians. The poverty and misery that the US had imposed on Guatemala by overthrowing Arbenz continuously led to more revolutionary discontent. Guatemalan planters began to set up sugar and cotton plantations, dispossessing peasants of their lands and transforming them into seasonal labourers who lived a miserable existence in shacks poisoned with pesticides. Both crops destroyed the future fertility of the soil in exchange for short-term profits for the planters while the real winners were huge American agribusinesses that sold them fertilizer.

The dirty war targeting unions, activists, and even church lay workers and priests made non-violent resistance more dangerous than armed resistance. It also fuelled a desire for revenge. In December of 1967 a former Miss Guatemala known for her left wing views, Rogelia Cruz Martinez was kidnapped, raped, tortured, and murdered, her body dumped in Guatemala City. On 16 January 1967, the guerrillas struck back machine gunning a truck carrying US military advisers, killing the head of the US military mission Colonel John D. Webber and Naval attaché Lieutenant Commander Ernest A. Munro. The attack was masterminded by the son of one, "The 28" Castillo Johnson, son of Castillo Flores. He also tossed a grenade at a military base before being gunned down.

Interestingly "Strategy of Tension" architect Yves Guérin Serac was also serving as an adviser in Guatemala in the late 1960s. He was an ex-French paratrooper and OAS terrorist part of Operation Gladio (He ran the Portuguese branch Aginter Press). One definite and one possible "False Flag" attack took place in Guatemala although of course his presence could have been a coincidence.

He may merely have been training death squads or advising on counterinsurgency. His partner in crime and fellow GLADIO terrorist Stefano Delle Chiaie would also serve as adviser in Guatemala in the late 1970s and early 1980s while working for Argentine intelligence. In any case Guatemala did suffer a false flag attack. The military kidnapped right wing Archbishop Mario Casariego on 16 March 1968 and tried to blame FAR guerrillas. He escaped and exposed the military role and Col. Arana Osorio was sent into "exile" as Ambassador to Nicaragua. In August of 1968 Ambassador Gordon Mein was killed during an attempted kidnapping by guerrillas.

Later a whistle-blower came forward implicating the military. Ambassador Mein had warned his superiors that he felt the military was plotting to kill him and the German ambassador Von Speti. The guerrillas did not deny involvement but they may have been tipped off to Mein's location by the military. Von Speti was later kidnapped on 31 March 1970 and then killed when the government refused to negotiate. The Mein kidnapping served to justify an increase in US aid and a wave of death squad killings in the city soon followed.

On 1 March 1970, Col Arana Osorio was elected president because no opposition candidate who had a popular following was allowed to run and in the countryside military commissioners threatened to burn villages that did not vote for the MLN. He was inaugurated in July 1970 and a wave of death squad killings swept the capital. He expanded the dirty war throughout the country. Torture and murder were rampant. In 1973 he picked as his successor his defense minister Kjell Laugerud another veteran of the Zacapa

campaign. His opponent General Rios Montt won the 1974 election but Laugerud stole the election. Rios Montt was forced to go into exile in Spain as a military attaché when he complained. Laugerud's specialty was the civic action side of counterinsurgency the winning of hearts and minds. Thus he initially pretended to support the labour and cooperatives groups during the 1974 election and early in his term. In reality it was a sinister ploy to find out who the leaders were so they could be eliminated. While publicly supporting cooperatives the Laugerud regime murdered hundreds of their leaders at the same time. There was a slight decrease in the number of killings in Laugerud's first two years in office at the same time the power of unions and social movements began to grow. Laugerud was forced to drop his tolerant facade and the number of killings began to rise. This coincided with the catastrophic earthquake of 1976, dubbed an A-class quake, as the rich emerged unscathed while 22,000 poor people died, 77,000 were injured and hundreds of thousands homeless were made homeless. The poor lived in fragile shantytowns that had been built on what little unoccupied land they could find in Guatemala city which was ever expanding as people were forced to flee the war in the countryside or driven to the city by the ever unfolding economic catastrophe. Laugerud responded to the natural disaster by unleashing the death squads while the people were increasingly radicalized and demanding action to provide food and housing. Foreign NGO's and missionaries descended on the country like vultures in the wake of the disaster. An evangelical cult, the Church of the Word based in Eureka, California arrived and in 1978 future president Rios Montt joined their church. American Evangelical Christians would later play a key role in the dirty war. They were invited into war zones to convert the refugees from the massacres as a way to combat liberation theology.

Another dangerous legacy of the Laugerud years was the increasing alliance between fascist Guatemala and Israel. Laugerud had first visited Israel back in 1971. In 1974 upon coming to power he sent a delegation of military men to ask for counterinsurgency assistance. Soon Israel was sending weapons, mercenaries, and advisers to Guatemala and they would help design the plan for the coming genocide, help set up model villages turning them into cash crop exporters employing slave labour. Israel's security assistance often operated under cover of its agricultural and development advisers and of course Counterinsurgency and development are always deeply entwined. Israel would update the Guatemalan intelligence computers in the 1970's teaching the Guatemalans new tricks like monitoring utilities consumption to discover guerrilla safe houses. Israel provided planes, and guns and the Israeli Galil and Uzi became the standard weapon of the Guatemalan forces. Over half the victims of the genocide of 1981-1983 were killed with Israeli weapons. This relationship became even more important in 1977 when the Carter Administration announced it would begin enforcing the Foreign Assistance Act of 1974, which meant that countries human rights records had to be assessed if they received US military assistance. Guatemala, El Salvador and other countries defiantly renounced aid rather than risk criticism of their horrifying human rights record. The Pentagon however used accounting tricks to continue to supply Guatemala in the Carter years, a fact hidden from Congress. Israel however was left with a leading role in Guatemala and a major role in El Salvador, Panama, and Colombia (training death squads and terrorists for drug cartels) and other Latin American countries.

In 1978 Laugerud handed power via a fixed election to yet another member of the Zacapa group his defense minister General Romeo Lucas Garcia. On 29 October 1978, the Panzos Massacre occurred in which 78 peasants protesting for land rights and demanding an end to the killings by the military were massacred and 25 survivors were also machine gunned by helicopters as they fled. 6 Survivors managed to make it to Guatemala City winning the

support of the PGT, unions and activists leading to massive demonstrations in support. President Lucas Garcia would ruthlessly set about eliminating even the moderate opposition death squad killings skyrocketed. His brother General Benedicto Lucas Garcia would oversee the start of the genocidal extermination campaign launched against the Maya Indians in the highlands. In 1979 the American Security Council sent General John Singlaub (CIA/Special forces) and Daniel O. Graham former head of the DIA to Guatemala with a secret message from candidate Reagan that he would resume military aid to Guatemala. Wealthy Guatemalans funnelled illegal campaign funds that helped get Reagan elected along with a series of machinations including the October Surprise by the CIA and ex-CIA loyal to former DCI and future President George H.W. Bush. Reagan was unable to overcome congressional opposition to a massive increase in military aid until 1985. However the Reagan Administration did find loopholes and technicalities allowing them to send weapons and advisers. More importantly his administration was willing to constantly conceal what was happening in Guatemala. US moral support meant Guatemala was free to carry out the genocide that began in fall of 1981 and continued into 1983.

The Reagan administration backed the coup in 1982 that would overthrow Lucas Garcia and install Rios Montt, the evangelical Christian. That made Montt very popular with Reagan's Christian Right supporters, like Pat Robertson. They also provided a loophole to provide aid to fascist Guatemala. Food and medical supplies were donated by the Christian Right and transported free by the US military. It was part of a little known program that existed worldwide thanks to a law that had the military provide free transportation and logistical support for Christian right-wing NGOs. It was one of many ways that the Christian right had made itself part of global counterinsurgency war the US was waging on the planet. The food along with UN food aid was then used as a weapon of war in Rios Montt's "Beans or Bullets" campaign. Indians who surrendered to the military were fed living in virtual slavery, doing forced labour building roads so the military could massacre more villages and in constant danger of being tortured and killed. Every other Indian was to be killed. Televangelist Pat Robertson organized the massive project Love Lift, which raised millions for food "aid" to be used in this campaign of slavery and genocide. They were also encouraged to send missionaries to the war zone many Indians converted in hopes that they would be spared by the military and in exchange for food and medicine. Some missionaries actively participated in torture and acted as advisers in the dirty war. Yet again Guatemala had been the laboratory of imperialism. Back in the 1930s Ubico had welcomed SIL the Summer Institute of Linguistics to Guatemala where they first tested their strategy of learning Indian languages so that they could create a bible in that language and convert the Indians. SIL soon joined with Nelson Rockefeller and the CIA converting Indians and helping to control them as they were wiped out across Latin America. Ironically the SIL converts of the 1930s were also being wiped out in the 1970s and 1980s because they were Maya Indians. Now in the 1970s and 1980s, with the need to wipe out left wing Catholic activists, American style fundamentalist Christianity was heavily promoted in Guatemala as an alternative to any social reform. By 1992 over 30% of the country had become evangelical Christians.

The genocide of 1981-1983 followed three stages. First there was selective terror: the military and police would kill community leaders, lawyers, doctors, village elders, Maya spiritual leaders, Catholic priests and lay members, labour leaders and mayors. The goal was to destroy any traditional social cohesion that could rival total military rule. In cities and Ladino areas things never moved beyond selective terror. 50,000 people were "disappeared" in Guatemala. Sometimes a victim would receive death threats for years before finally being disappeared. They were arrested at home, at work or at checkpoints.

Women were often raped in front of their families before being taken off to the secret prisons set up in churches, schools and on every military base and in every police station. The victims were often kept in the Guatemalan version of Vietnamese “Tiger Cages” holes were dug, filled with water and sewage and covered in a tin roof that trapped the heat often they were forced to share these holes with other prisoners. They spent the first day starving in the sweltering heat constantly struggling to keep from drowning. Then they were pulled out of the hole for hours of torture usually wearing hoods filled with insecticide or lime. They were beaten, burned with cigarettes, raped, electric shocked, suffered, dental torture, drowned, and were mutilated with knives. Then they were killed or thrown back in the holes. Most were eventually killed but some were released so they could spread the story of the fate awaiting subversives. The survivors were often physically and psychologically crippled for life reliving the horror every night in nightmares. The mutilated corpses of the executed were dropped in public places or on their families doorsteps often with notes attached describing in detail the torture they suffered. Others were simply shot as the Guatemalan military conducted tens of thousands of extrajudicial executions. Other killings were far more gruesome as the Guatemalan military loved to slice people up with machetes and “Kill them slowly” was one of their favourite mottos. They had a dark sense of humour some victims were crucified; others impaled and buried the way one would barbecue a cow. In Indian areas the military loved to stage murders that would desecrate Mayan shrines and Christian churches.

The second phase of the genocide was mass terror, which meant massacres: the phase when the genocide proper took place. Villages were bombed with napalm and then machine-gunned. Then the troops arrived surrounding the village with orders to kill anything that moved. Residents were shot, chopped to pieces with machetes, and burned alive in their homes, tortured, raped and killed. Crops, were destroyed, livestock killed, and wells poisoned. Often since the military knew it was dealing entirely with unarmed civilians they decided to take their time with the massacre and enjoy themselves. Upon arriving they would demand a cow to barbecue. They would separate the villagers into 3 groups men, women, and children. The children were killed first. The military seldom wanted to “waste bullets” so instead, they were picked up by their legs and had their brains bashed in, or had their heads bashed in with hammers or were thrown down wells. The rest of the village listened helplessly while they were slaughtered. Then the women were raped. Afterward they were hacked up with machetes. Finally the men were killed with machetes, beaten to death or shot. The massacre often lasted for two days and the soldiers would get drunk and feast on the barbecue it was all a big party. They stole anything of value in the village, another perk. Between 200,000 and 300,000 people were killed in Guatemala’s dirty war and the massacres exclusively targeted the Indians. Hundreds of villages were destroyed and between 500,000 and 1.5 million people were turned into refugees.

The third phase of the genocide was the reorganization. Israel helped design this strategy so it bore a certain resemblance to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Once one Indian village had been massacred the neighbouring villages would flee. The military would then arrive to burn their crops and destroy their homes. Fleeing genocide was considered a sign of disloyalty. Survivors of massacres as well as those who fled from nearby massacres were hunted with helicopters and machine-gunned. Many were massacred as they tried to leave the country. Even once they had fled the country the military sent secret missions to kill refugees in refugee camps across the borders. Those who tried to relocate to other parts of Guatemala were targeted because of their Indian dress and often killed. Many were forced to live in the wilderness foraging for food. Eventually starvation would force them to

surrender themselves to the military in exchange for food. They were promised amnesty but it was a lie. Once they surrendered they were screened and the military would torture and execute some of them as subversives as an example to the rest. Often people were eliminated because their land had been stolen after they fled. They would spend months under the total power of the military subjected to constant threats and indoctrination forced to conduct forced labour. They were completely at the mercy of the military for food, medicine or even blankets. Finally they would be resettled in model villages where they were subject to constant surveillance and exploited to grow cash crops for wealthy planters.

In addition to model villages the military created civilian defense patrols called PAC. This was the most sinister aspect of the reorganization phase. Every Indian male between 15 and 60 had to serve in PACs patrolling the countryside and villages for signs of the Guerrillas and recording the movements of every peasant. Villages either agreed to join the PAC or were massacred. Once in the PAC they were ordered to carry out their own genocide. The military might order them to execute village elders or even their own families and they were forced to kill their victims slowly with machetes. Other times PAC were ordered to massacre nearby villages. PAC members who disobeyed orders were tortured or killed. PAC members that failed to round up subversives could be tortured or killed. Often as punishment they were put in the same water filled holes used to soften up torture victims. The PAC system would be in place until the peace deal in 1996, keeping the survivors of the genocide under total military control. Today those who lost family at the hands of the PAC are forced to live side by side with the killers. The system of model villages and PACs had some scandalous side effects as the cash crops grown came to include opium poppies and marijuana fields guarded by armed PACs. Of course the intertwining of the dirty war and the drug trade had begun long before and would grow far worse. In future torturers and mass murderers in the police and military joined the drug cartels. G2 Guatemalan military intelligence was deeply involved in the drug trade as was the brother of Guatemala's first civilian president since the 1960s Vinicio Cerezo.

Rios Montt lasted in power only for a year. The Reagan administration had hoped that by putting in Montt they could mount a PR campaign that would fool congress into restoring aid to Guatemala. Reagan personally met with Rios Montt and praised him in the Press. Montt cooperated by calling a halt to death squad killings in the capital but soon replaced them with a system of arbitrary military executions. One of the goals of the scorched earth campaign had been to completely eliminate anyone living along the Mexican border and so news of the genocide soon leaked to the world press. Montt had also angered the Reagan administration by refusing to revive CONDECA and turn it into an alliance targeting the Sandinista's in Nicaragua. Montt's efforts to convert Guatemala to evangelical Christianity angered the Church. Montt had already alienated the original coup backers by abolishing the junta with key MLN allies in it. The fascist MLN had been a key backer of Montt. The young officers who had launched the coup were immediately betrayed when he overruled their demand for elections and an end to military rule. Montt was able to placate the coup plotters for a couple months by firing his economic advisers, the "seven dwarfs" military technocrats, as well as his advisers from the Church of the Word. That was in June 1983, when an open letter from the ex-head of military intelligence had provoked a military uprising. In August 1983 the top military commanders met and decided Montt had to go. His replacement was his defense minister General Oscar Humberto Mejia Victores.

The new president continued the dirty war concentrating on the reorganization of the countryside and the violent suppression of dissent in the cities. He was yet another veteran

of the Zacapa campaign and ruled like the many dictators who had preceded him. Since the 1960s death squads and disappearances had continued. Nonetheless the Reagan administration finally managed to restore military aid in 1985. However while the Guatemalan military had won the war the economy was on the verge of collapse and many countries refused to trade with the country because of its appalling human rights record. The Guatemalan military decided it was finally time to allow for another civilian president. The CIA and the State Department also wanted to restore civilian rule for PR purposes. On 14 January 1986, Christian Democrat Vinicio Cerezo was elected president thanks to behind the scenes support from the US. Cerezo had barely managed to survive the dirty war himself having survived multiple assassination attempts. However once in office he broke his promises of reform. The military remained the true power operating with total impunity and the number of death squad killings actually rose instead of falling under Cerezo in his first two years. However the slow process of restoring civilian rule and ending the dirty war had begun. In reality the dirty war never truly ended but was simply waged with lower intensity.

President Cerezo began the peace process contacting the URNG, the joint group combining the 4 guerrilla groups FAR, EGP, ORPA and PGT. They demanded the end of PACs death squads and a purge of war criminals in the army before they would negotiate. Cerezo demanded they completely disarm before negotiations could begin. In August of 1987 a national reconciliation commission was set up which included church figures active in exposing the horrendous war crimes and human rights violations in the country. In 1990 American Michael Devine was arrested by the military and had his throat cut with a machete. The killers were CIA assets. The American Ambassador Thomas Stroock convinced his long-time friend President George H. W. Bush to suspend aid. Ambassador Stroock asked the CIA if they had any connection to the killing and they claiming they didn't. In 1995 the truth would be exposed thanks to the valiant efforts of lawyer Jennifer Harbury who was married to guerrilla leader Efraim Bamaco who was "disappeared". For years she lobbied and engaged in hunger strikes demanding answers. Finally in 1995 the government was forced to admit that her husband and Michael Devine had been killed by the same group of military officers and that they were CIA assets. Two former CIA chiefs of station in Guatemala were fired 8 members of the operations directorate were disciplined. None of them went to jail.

Back in 1990 Guatemala's new President Jorge Serrano Elias (an evangelical) hired the PR firm Patton Boggs and Blow to control the damage. Eventually they got House Foreign Affairs committee chair for Latin America Robert G Torricelli, a Democrat, to meet with President Serrano who then sent him to meet with the URNG. When Bill Clinton was elected in 1992 Torricelli got the Clinton administration to back a peace deal in Guatemala. Having a communist guerrilla movement still fighting in Central America was a threat to US plans to create a Central American version of NAFTA called CAFTA that would allow American corporations to loot the region and exploit its people. The URNG made the mistake of trusting the Americans who created a peace deal which enshrined the capitalist order. Serrano was forced to resign after launching his self-coup firing his cabinet and trying to seize sole power. He was replaced by President Ramiro De Leon Carpio as the peace process slowly went forward. Finally in 1996 newly elected President Alvaro Arzu fired 8 of 16 generals and then signed the peace deal on 29 December 1996. PACs were finally abolished but G2 and the Estado Mayor remained. As part of the peace deal the UN set up a truth commission to study the dirty war. Worried that the result would be a white wash the Church decided to create its own report released in April 1998. Two days after it was published, its main author Bishop Juan Jose Gerrardi Contrera had his head bashed in. In

1999 Clinton apologized for the US role in Guatemala. Clinton meanwhile had already unleashed a far worse bloodbath in Rwanda and the Congo that would claim 10 million lives. Less than one year later Rios Montt's preferred candidate Alfonso Portillo Cabrera was elected in 2000 and the death squad killings began again. Rios Montt himself headed congress from 1996 through 2007. Neither he nor any other former Guatemalan dictator was tried for his crimes despite the terms of the peace deal, which had falsely promised justice for the victims.

Guatemala was never to know peace. During the same period 1986-1996 where the peace process was moving at torturously slow pace the destruction of the Soviet Union took place and the age of TINA began. TINA means "There is no alternative". The forces of neo-liberalism and globalization unleash chaos across the world. World War 3 "the Cold War" had become World War 4 aka "the War on Drugs", the "War on Terror", "the Long War", and now "The New Cold War." Poverty, terrorism, crime and chaos were unleashed by the triumph of capitalism leading to constant social fragmentation. The solution has been endless war on the planet, total surveillance, militarized police, private mercenaries, ultra sophisticated psychological warfare that weaponizes pop culture. An endless war on terror or war on drugs is waged using the same tactics that had created bloodbaths in Vietnam, Indonesia, El Salvador and Guatemala. It is a phony war since the CIA controls the global drug trade and is secretly in control of the terror groups it pretends to hunt. Capitalism creates chaos and insecurity and increasingly its profits come from selling security in the form of weapons, mercenaries, security firms. "The haves" live in gated communities while the have-nots live in shantytowns that are often urban war zones. The same blueprint used in Guatemala: centralized intelligence, fusion centres, counter-terror assassination squads, militarized police, torture in secret prisons, and paramilitary death squads continues to be used in Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact many tactics of the Central American dirty wars are being used on the streets of the US today with activists kidnapped and fascist paramilitaries working in conjunction with police to crush protests.

It would require another article to do justice to the history of Guatemala in this new post cold war period. Guatemala became a poster child for what happens when a government follows the disastrous neoliberal advice of the Americans. The country opened itself up for tax-free foreign investment and was looted by foreign corporations. There was a massive expansion in the number of sweat shops where underage girls work 17 hour days, forbidden bathroom breaks, and earn \$96 to \$150 a month. They suffer systemic sexual abuse at the hands of their employers. 70% of Guatemalans work in the "informal sector" meaning they have no real jobs instead trying to survive by selling merchandise on the streets, carrying groceries, begging, dealing drugs, or selling their bodies. The poverty and dirty war forces millions to flee the country. The US war on immigrants has exported American gang culture to Guatemala. Crime is rampant and many of the horrors of the dirty war continue. Vigilantes and gangs hack up or burn their victims alive. The torture, rape, and murder of poor women are rampant as is the murder of gays and transgender people. Of course it is equally dangerous to be a man or a boy. And the police and military are interchangeable with the higher levels of organized crime. G2 military intelligence in addition to trafficking drugs was caught running a kidnap ring. Indians are still being robbed of their land now in the name of mining and are being killed for resisting. On 5 October 2012, 7 people were killed in the Alaska massacre. Last month Indian journalist Anastasia Mejia Tiriquiz was arrested for exposing corruption. Union leaders are assassinated. In 2018 Guatemala was the country where the most environmental activists were killed in the region.

Back in 2015 the US organized a colour revolution to overthrow President Otto Perez a former general who ironically was a US trained war criminal, having headed the notoriously brutal Kaibiles special forces during the dirty war. So much for civilian rule. Apparently despite his decade long ties to the Pentagon, CIA, and State Department, he was arrogantly refusing to follow orders and was toppled in an anti-corruption campaign masterminded by the future Colombian president Ivan Duque. He was replaced by Jimmy Morales, a staunch ally in Trump's war on immigrants, who disbanded the anti-corruption agency. Now President Alejandro Giammatei has provoked an open revolt as he tried to slash health care and the zero hunger program that feeds poor children. An Angry mob burned down part of congress. Strangely though the left CODECA alliance of Indians and peasants are not part of these protests, which have more in common with the anti-corruption movement of 2015. The national police were able to crush the protests but Guatemala remains a powder keg. 60% of the country lives in poverty 60% of children go hungry and that was before Guatemala was hit by two hurricanes and the economic disaster brought by the COVID19 outbreak. Sadly Guatemala's left was never able to recover from the dirty war or transform itself into a party capable of winning power. Unlike El Salvador or Nicaragua, Guatemala never joined the pink tide countries following the Venezuelan example.

The struggle for Guatemala's future continues. Guatemala might have known a very different future if the CIA had not overthrown Jacobo Arbenz destroying all hope of a better future. Instead Guatemala suffered a brutal dirty war that claimed 200,000 and possibly 300,000 lives with 50,000 people disappeared and 1.5 million people internally displaced. Their deaths were the inevitable result of the counterinsurgency strategy America continues to apply all over the world. Millions were kept in poverty to enrich a few. Chaos, misery and suffering were the inevitable result of the victory of capitalism in Guatemala, the victory of the American empire.

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