

Dangerous Liaisons: The U.S. in Guatemala

by Susanne Jonas

On March 23, 1995, Guatemala burst into the news with revelations that a Guatemalan military officer on the CIA payroll had in the early 1990s been involved in the murders of an American citizen, Michael DeVine, and a guerrilla commander, Efraín Bámaca, who was married to American lawyer Jennifer Harbury. The revelations were provoked by Harbury's hunger strike outside the White House. As more details emerged in the U.S. press, it became clear that this case was just the tip of the iceberg. The iceberg itself is a complex web of relations between various agencies of the U.S. government and the Guatemalan military over the last 40 years.

Today, more than a year after the scandal broke, most of the iceberg remains submerged from public view. Moreover, these extraordinary revelations have not disrupted the "business as usual" sense characterizing U.S. relations with the Guatemalan army, although they have aggravated an already deteriorating relationship. When I asked a high-level U.S. foreign policy official last fall whether the March 1995 revelations have led to an overall review of U.S. policy toward civil war-torn Guatemala, he responded, "What's to review? We're already doing everything we can to promote democratization: We support elections and the peace process."

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That is true enough, on the surface. But beneath the surface lies a long-standing relationship overdue for reexamination: U.S. reliance on the Guatemalan army as a strategic ally in Central America. This view of the Guatemalan army as a problematic but "reliable" ally is reflected in the statement of a U.S. official, as reported in the *Christian Science Monitor* on December 11, 1990: "No matter what happens, the army is still the most important institution and will have to be the conduit for Guatemala's development." Although many U.S. policymakers still hold this view, it no longer corresponds to reality and is an inappropriate basis for policy.

American officials have never wanted to say much about Guatemala, much less the American role there. However, last year's disclosure of CIA ties to human rights violators in the Guatemalan army has forced the issue into the open. Paradoxically, this embarrassment creates an opportunity for Washington to bring U.S. actions in Guatemala into line with stated commitments to promote demilitarization in Latin America. To do so calls for a sophisticated policy shift—one that will serve long-range U.S. interests in the region while removing the major obstacle to democracy, human rights, and modernization in Guatemala.

Such a shift is urgent because 1996 presents a historic "window of opportunity" to initiate fundamental institutional change in Guatemala. Despite the army's fierce resistance to yielding power or making concessions, it is on the defensive politically, at home and abroad. Moreover, since 1991 the army has taken part in peace negotiations with the leftist insurgency, the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG), to end the 35-year-long civil war. Although the Guatemalan peace process has moved slowly and remains extremely difficult, the resulting agreements will be internationally binding and verified. The central issue, soon to be negotiated, is the army's future—the establishment of civilian control over the military and its reduction to the size and very limited functions appropriate in a democratic society. This transformation will require overhauling a counterinsurgency army that interferes in all aspects of the country's life. And on this issue the United States is in a unique position to tip the balance toward permanently demilitarizing Guatemala.

The path toward doing so is neither straight nor easy, and U.S. officials can think of a dozen reasons to stick to the path of least resistance—further appeasement of and collaboration with the Gua-

temalan army. But today, as never before, the conditions have emerged for breaking off this dysfunctional, dangerous liaison and initiating an overdue divorce.

CIVIL WAR AND U.S. INVOLVEMENT

Although it has received far less international attention than the 12-year conflict in neighboring El Salvador, Guatemala's civil war is the longest and deadliest in Central America, having taken the lives of up to 200,000 unarmed civilians, primarily highland Indians. The war began in 1960, six years after the 1954 U.S. intervention ousted the popularly elected government of Jacobo Arbenz. (The last U.S. president to tell the truth about U.S.-Guatemalan relations was Dwight Eisenhower, who proudly acknowledged the CIA's role in overthrowing Arbenz.) This intervention ended Guatemala's "ten years of springtime," as Guatemalans refer to the democratic and modernizing capitalist revolution of 1944-54. At the height of the Cold War, the United States was unwilling to tolerate a moderately progressive and nationalistic government that sought to regulate U.S. interests in the country, and it branded Guatemala a "Soviet beachhead" in the Western hemisphere.

The reversal of the revolution and its land reform set the stage for 40 years of turbulent, polarized history. Many Guatemalans, correctly reading the message of 1954, concluded that moderate change would not be permitted. In 1960, shortly after the Cuban revolution, a group of progressive military officers joined forces with disaffected civilians to form a guerrilla movement, one of the earliest in Latin America. Its political influence grew during the early and mid-1960s as Guatemalan politics offered virtually no legal channel for the expression of social demands. In March 1963, a U.S.-approved military coup led to the cancellation of the 1963 presidential election, which the progressive ex-president Juan José Arévalo had been expected to win.

During the 1963-66 military regime, the army ran the country but was unable to stop the growth of the insurgency. Ironically, the first major counterinsurgency campaign in Guatemala was launched during the elected civilian government of Julio César Méndez Montenegro (1966-70). Méndez had to sign a pact with the army in order to take office; the pact gave the army a free hand to crush the insurgency. At this point, in 1966, the United States became directly

involved in counterinsurgency operations in order to "professionalize" the Guatemalan military. The United States sent hundreds of Green Berets to Guatemala and played a crucial role in training and reorganizing what it viewed as an inefficient army; the goal was to transform it into a disciplined counterinsurgency force, driven by Washington's Manichaean "national security" logic, that could keep Guatemala from becoming a "second Cuba." This is the origin of the killing machine that is today the Guatemalan army.

It was in Guatemala that Latin America first saw such phenomena as death squads and "disappearances," which subsequently became standard operating procedure in counterinsurgency wars throughout the hemisphere. U.S. military advisers were involved in the formation of the death squads, and the head of the U.S. military mission publicly justified their operations. The army campaign, combined with the rebels' errors, left the rebels temporarily defeated. Since the army's objective was to eliminate support for the guerrillas, the price was paid in civilian lives (around 8,000) in the conflict area and among center-leftist forces in the capital—a pattern repeated on a much larger scale during subsequent phases of the war.

The insurgents managed to reorganize and reinitiate their struggle in the early 1970s, this time in the western highlands, with the indigenous communities of the region becoming central participants. The active support of up to half a million Indians in the uprising of the late 1970s and early 1980s was without precedent in Guatemala, indeed in the hemisphere, and threatened the army's century-old domination of rural Guatemala. During 1979, as the Sandinistas triumphed in Nicaragua and civil war broke out in El Salvador, the United States and Guatemala's elites saw a very clear threat. The army responded with a scorched-earth war (1981-83) of unprecedented proportions: During those two years, 440 villages were wiped out, between 100,000 and 150,000 civilians were killed or "disappeared," and more than 1 million persons were displaced.

During a second phase (1983-85), the army aimed to consolidate its control through the imposition of coercive institutions throughout the conflict areas. Forced resettlement camps were set up in which every aspect of the people's lives was subject to direct army control. Mandatory army-controlled paramilitary "civilian self-defense patrols" (PACs) were also created, at one point involving 1 million Indian peasants, around 50 per cent of the adult male popula-

tion. These counterinsurgency institutions were legalized in the 1985 constitution, the same document that paved the way for elections later that year and a return to civilian rule in 1986.

During this period, however, the Vietnam Syndrome and the rise of human rights politics in the United States began to influence American policy. Given the Guatemalan army's reputation for brutality unsurpassed in Latin America, it became politically infeasible for Washington to openly support the army's scorched-earth campaign of 1981 to 1983. Strains had first emerged in the late 1970s, when human rights pressures led the Carter administration to impose conditions on U.S. aid; Congress subsequently cut direct security assistance during the period from 1977 to 1983. Simultaneously, during the early 1980s the Guatemalan army and government, for their own reasons, chose not to openly support the U.S. *contra* war in Nicaragua. Despite these irritants, the Reagan administration battled with Congress to restore open aid to the Guatemalan military dictatorships of the early 1980s, but public opinion made Congress resistant. This contradiction gave rise to a two-track double-message policy that has characterized U.S.-Guatemalan relations throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. Publicly, U.S. policymakers paid lip service to human rights concerns and pushed the Guatemalan government to liberalize—eventually coming to believe that a civilian government backed by a strong army was preferable to outright military rule. But behind the scenes, through visits by U.S. officials, collaboration on counterinsurgency plans, and covert CIA assistance, the Reagan administration signaled its approval to the Guatemalan army for winning the war, dirty as it might be. In short, the underlying ties were never broken and were openly renewed after the 1985 election of a civilian government, led by Christian Democrat Vinicio Cerezo.

Washington's mixed-message policy intensified after the 1986 restoration of formal civilian rule on terms that left the army's power intact. Democrats in Congress now took the lead in promoting aid to the army, arguing that such contact would "civilize" the Guatemalan security forces and that the army should be "rewarded" for permitting a civilian government. After 1987, direct U.S. military collaboration with the army increased, as it became clear that the URNG had been weakened but not defeated, and the war heated up again, though never to the levels reached in El Salvador in the late 1980s. While overt military aid remained at modest levels, hundreds of mil-



ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN VAN

lions of dollars were channeled to the Guatemalan government through Economic Support Funds—disguised security assistance insofar as it freed up local funds for counterinsurgency. Even with the Bush administration's emphasis on curtailing human rights abuses, which culminated in the suspension of military aid in December 1990, U.S. officials continued to regard the Guatemalan army as a strategic ally in the region—and, as we now know, secretly substituted CIA funds for overt military aid.

THE PEACE PROCESS

Even as the civil war continued at a low intensity, the late 1980s saw the first moves toward peace. After the scorched-earth war of 1981–83, the URNG recognized that a strategy based on military victory or “taking state power” was unthinkable: Aside from its own military weakness, the cost in civilian lives was unacceptable. Hence, shortly after the return to civilian government in 1986, the URNG began to propose dialogue and negotiations to settle the war politically. For several years, the army and the civilian government stubbornly refused, insisting that the insurgents had been defeated and therefore must disarm unilaterally. By 1990, however, even army and government spokesmen had to acknowledge that the war was persisting. The implicit admission by both sides that the war could not be “won” militarily permitted serious discussions about ending it.

Considerable political pressure for peace had built up within Guatemala as well as internationally. In 1989, the Catholic Church sponsored a National Dialogue, which, though boycotted by the army, government, and private sector, expressed a clear consensus by the other sectors of society in favor of a substantive political settlement. The dialogue called for a series of URNG meetings with the political parties, private business leaders, popular and religious movements, and, finally, the government and army. The 1990 sessions included an unprecedented meeting between the URNG and the big business umbrella organization known by the acronym CACIF. Beyond the formal meetings, the dialogue process enabled public discussion of issues that had been undiscussable for decades; in this sense, it became an important avenue for beginning to democratize Guatemala.

In early 1991, the newly elected government of Jorge Serrano opened talks with the URNG. For the first time, top army officials

joined meetings to set the agenda and procedures for peace talks without demanding that the URNG first disarm. The following year saw an agreement in principle on democratization and preliminary discussions on human rights. Yet the Serrano government turned out to be more interested in imposing a ceasefire deadline than in resolving substantive issues—a stance unacceptable to the URNG. The process stagnated in mid-1992 and approached total breakdown during the last months of Serrano's corrupt, discredited government, which culminated in his May 1993 attempted self-coup, or *autogolpe*.

The political crisis unleashed by Serrano's attempt to seize absolute control (initially supported by some army factions) was resolved with the ascendancy of former human rights ombudsman Ramiro de León Carpio to the presidency. But the peace process remained stalled during the rest of 1993 as the new government, in alliance with the dominant wing of the army high command, presented unrealistic negotiating proposals that would have discarded previously signed agreements and required the URNG to disarm without substantive settlements. The army perhaps hoped to use de León Carpio's legitimacy to secure the URNG's unilateral surrender. However, these proposals were strongly rejected by all sectors of Guatemalan society except for the army and business leaders and were viewed as completely unviable by the international community.

In January 1994, serious negotiations resumed on a new basis. Earlier, Guatemala's peace talks had been moderated by Monsignor Rodolfo Quezada Toruño of the Guatemalan Catholic Bishops' Conference, with the United Nations playing an “observer” role. Now the U.N. became the moderator, and the international community became much more involved. A January 1994 Framework Accord set a clear agenda and formalized a role for the broad-based Assembly of Civil Society (ASC), which included the political parties and virtually all organized sectors of civil society (the propertied elites of CACIF refused to participate). Throughout 1994, the ASC hammered out proposals on each of the themes on the new agenda.

A breakthrough Global Human Rights Accord was signed in March 1994, calling for the immediate establishment of international mechanisms to monitor human rights, but for months the government took no steps to comply with its obligations under the accord, and the mandated United Nations Verification Mission (MINUGUA) did not arrive until November. Two new accords were signed in June

1994: one on the resettlement of displaced populations and the other to establish a watered-down Truth Commission. Empowered to shed light on past human rights crimes but lacking the mandate to name or prosecute the individuals responsible, the Truth Commission accord was strongly criticized by Guatemala's popular and human rights organizations. Meanwhile, human rights violations worsened, leaving the impression that the government was going through the motions of a peace process without intending to change anything.

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Within this difficult context, an accord on the next issue, Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, was not reached until March 1995. Nonetheless, it was a landmark achievement for a country whose population is 60 per cent indigenous. Negotiations on social and economic issues continued throughout 1995, making some progress but without a final resolution.

At the same time, the peace process was directly affected by the dynamics of the November 1995 general election campaign. During the first half of the year, the URNG issued an unprecedented call urging Guatemalans to vote; this was interpreted as signaling an implicit shift toward political means of struggle. A few months later, for the first time in 40 years, a center-left front of popular and indigenous organizations was formed to participate in the elections, though it ran candidates at a great disadvantage due to its lack of resources and political experience. Equally significant is that, in an August agreement, the URNG promised to suspend military actions during the last two weeks of the electoral campaign in exchange for a commitment from the major political parties that the peace negotiations would continue under a new government and that the accords already signed would be honored. For the first time, Guatemala's political class accepted that the negotiated pacts constituted "accords of state" and hence could not be jettisoned by any future government or Congress.

Slowly but surely, amid fierce resistance and significant delays, the peace process has acquired credibility in Guatemala. Despite the volatility and fragility of the process, issues that have been taboo for

decades are now being negotiated. The peace process offers Guatemalan civil society its best and perhaps last opportunity to democratize a thoroughly exclusionary system and to make changes that would be impossible under any other circumstances. Even within Guatemala's most recalcitrant power centers, some "modernizing" factions have invested in the peace process, recognizing that it offers the only way to avoid being isolated and left behind in the world of the twenty-first century. In short, the major Guatemalan players have nowhere to move but forward.

As in El Salvador, however, none of the advances will be consolidated or irreversible without agreement on the most difficult issue: the transformation of the army. Beyond being reduced in size, subordinated to civilian control, and purged of human rights violators, the army will have to accept constitutional changes that strip away its internal security functions and limit its postwar tasks to the defense of national borders. The URNG will doubtless insist on significant changes in the army and a simultaneous or synchronized process of demilitarization in exchange for its own demobilization.

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE FROM WASHINGTON?

The U.S. role in demilitarization will be crucial. The U.S. government is a member of the Group of Friends (with Mexico, Norway, Spain, Colombia, and Venezuela), whose purpose is to facilitate the peace process and support the U.N. as its moderator. The responsibility presumes a fully neutral U.S. role, but the reality is far more complex.

By virtue of its long relationship with the Guatemalan army—despite the restructuring of that relationship and the "relative autonomy" of the Guatemalan army since the late 1970s—the United States remains the only international player with the leverage to pressure for demilitarization. Diplomats close to the peace process and even some U.S. officials recognize this reality. Yet Washington continues to send mixed messages. Although Congress has clearly pressured for the demilitarization of Guatemala, many U.S. policymakers still view the army as the country's most (or only) efficient institution. While strongly criticizing the most outrageous human rights abuses, Washington maintains close working relations with the army. For example, the U.S. government has been supporting a

continued role for the army and its intelligence unit in antidrug operations (even while identifying some top military officers as drug traffickers) as well as an expanded role in civic action and development-related tasks. The Pentagon's "Humanitarian and Civic Assistance" exercises in Guatemala convey an image of U.S. cooperation with the army and suggest that the army is the appropriate institution for meeting the needs of the local population and carrying out nonmilitary tasks (such as building roads, schools, and clinics, and providing medical services). Although Congress cut off aid to the Guatemalan army and security forces in the fall of 1995, the Pentagon's "assistance" program and CIA "liaison" funds for antidrug operations continue.

To take another example, while the U.N., the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Europeans have repeatedly called for immediate abolition of the army-controlled PACs, Washington has refused to do so; at least implicitly, it supports Guatemalan government proposals to convert them into "peace and development committees"—units of local power that could continue to dominate their communities in new ways. Furthermore, unlike the Europeans, the United States has consistently favored sparing Guatemala from the harshest condemnation at the annual U.N. Human Rights Commission meetings in Geneva. These actions raise questions about Washington's political will to help demilitarize Guatemala.

In the past, criticisms of the U.S. stance have been primarily on moral grounds. Today, Washington's wavering is outdated and unworkable as well, because the decades-old alliance increasingly has come to resemble a deteriorating and dysfunctional marriage. On one occasion, during Serrano's attempted 1993 autogolpe, the Clinton administration threatened to break the bond (through trade sanctions) unless the army backed a return to constitutional rule—which it then did. The 1993 accession to power of the former human rights ombudsman, de León Carpio, left Washington once again feeling good about supporting the Guatemalan government. But as it became evident that this new government was presiding over a worsening human rights situation, the Clinton administration was obliged to criticize the army more sharply, even as it continued close cooperation.

These tensions were a mere prelude, though, to the fissures opened up since news broke in March 1995 of the CIA's ties to human rights violators in the Guatemalan army. While some in the U.S.

government tried to prevent the airing of these dirty secrets, at least one government official helped bring the truth to light by taking the Harbury/DeVine story to Representative Robert Torricelli (D-New Jersey), who divulged it to the media. Since then the administration has been under public and congressional pressure to fully declassify and disclose its information on Guatemalan human rights criminals and their relation to the CIA and other U.S. government agencies. Even the conservative Republican-led Congress seems unwilling to settle for a purely cosmetic damage-control operation. In September 1995, the CIA dismissed two high-level officials and disciplined nine others whose involvement and/or attempts at cover-up broke the law; but that was only a first step, and it leaves pending the issues of full disclosure of the past and overhaul for the future. The July 1995 report from the CIA remains secret, and the report by the Intelligence Oversight Board has been postponed month after month.

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Meanwhile, the Guatemalan army and its civilian partners have been infuriated by U.S. pressures for an in-depth investigation. As they see it, the scandal is Washington's problem, not theirs, and any investigation represents U.S. meddling in Guatemala's sovereign affairs. Behind their rhetoric, some Guatemalan officials cannot understand why the Clinton administration does not simply ignore (or silence) annoying public opinion pressures—or why the U.S. embassy in Guatemala City is indulging the demands of the wife of a deceased URNG "terrorist." Washington, they conclude, must be trying to embarrass them. Their rancor may have passed from words to deeds: In January 1996, a bomb destroyed the car of Harbury's lawyer in his driveway in Washington, D.C.; the FBI is investigating the possibility of terrorism, though Guatemalan authorities deny any involvement.

The loss of trust in the once-warm relationship between the

United States and the Guatemalan army is probably permanent. The end of the Cold War, the negotiated settlements of the other wars in Central America, and the Guatemalan peace process all leave Washington little justification for an alliance with the Guatemalan army. Both post-Cold War U.S. administrations have claimed to promote democracy and human rights in Latin America, but in Guatemala their strategic ally is the main obstacle to those goals.

The United States under the Clinton administration no longer seems ideologically committed to the Guatemalan army, as was the case during the 1980s, and is increasingly uncomfortable about the alliance. But without a coherent policy, old thinking dies hard. U.S. officials still offer a variety of arguments for sending mixed messages and for changing policy as little as possible. At issue are two misconceptions, one concerning the U.S. view of the army as the "most important institution" in Guatemala and the second concerning U.S. leverage.

OVERESTIMATING THE ARMY

Policymakers in Washington tend to accept the Guatemalan army's version of Guatemala's realities, leading to minimalist expectations about the prospects for significant change. The Guatemalan armed forces are seen as so strong that the United States cannot afford to antagonize them. The URNG (unlike the Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional, or FMLN, in El Salvador) is considered militarily weak. Hence, the army has no reason to make major concessions, and the URNG and the popular sectors must settle, as soon as possible, for a minimal peace agreement that focuses primarily on a ceasefire. Furthermore, in the absence of strong civilian institutions, this thinking goes, the army is needed to carry out antidrug operations, civic action projects, reforestation, road-building, vaccinations—and even internal security (police) functions.

This view is based on appearances, half-truths, and jumps in logic; it reflects a watered-down version of the army's public-relations campaign. Inside Guatemala, the army has used the mass media to convince people that its power is forever and that the peace process will change nothing: Rather than negotiating changes, the army itself will define its postwar tasks. In the wake of the CIA-Guatemala scandal, the propaganda campaign went international, with the Ministry of Defense hiring the Washington public-relations firm of R. Thomp-

son & Co., at \$70,000 a month, to attempt to derail human rights measures in the U.S. Congress.

Of course, there are elements of half-truth mixed in with the army's presentation: the army's relative unity and strength (ability to dominate) in Guatemalan society; the URNG's inability to mount a military challenge comparable to the FMLN's in El Salvador; and the still-incipient development of the popular movements. However, it is a gross distortion and oversimplification to focus only on those aspects and ignore the significant changes in Guatemalan society.

First, the army is not the only strong institution in Guatemala: The Catholic Church and the private sector are formidable in their own ways. Albeit slowly, indigenous Mayan and popular organizations are beginning to act in coordination: The ASC has made advances that were inconceivable until recently. Moreover, the emergence of a coherent leftist opposition (the Frente Democrático Nueva Guatemala) and its surprisingly strong showing in the November 1995 election promises to broaden the political panorama.

Second, changes within Guatemala and abroad have created divisions within the private sector; "modernizing" groups are coming to recognize that the old model, based on totally excluding the majority of Guatemalans from political and economic power, is no longer viable. Within the army leadership, the (very few) genuine moderates are challenging intransigent hard-line factions as well as those "institutionalists" who yielded to civilian government 10 years ago and now want to concede nothing more. If Washington is serious about changing Guatemala, it can ally with opposition forces and pressure the moderate elites, tipping the balance of power against the status quo.

Third, the peace process itself is evidence that the URNG has not been defeated; that process is far more than a mechanical reflection of the military correlation of forces, and its outcome will go far beyond a ceasefire. It is about making Guatemala politically viable in the next century—as one diplomat put it, a "normal" country.

Finally, the Guatemalan counterinsurgency army is an anachronism in the post-Cold War world, and it certainly is not the agency of choice to carry out civilian tasks. A key objective of the peace process is to strengthen civilian institutions; this will require constitutional reforms to vest them with real responsibilities and divest the army in those areas. In postwar Guatemala, an autonomous, professional, and civilian police force should guarantee citizen security; en-

vironmental organizations should protect the rain forests; and the appropriate ministries should build roads and vaccinate children. The only proper task for a reduced and "cleansed" army should be the defense of national borders. In the face of rising crime on the streets, it is essential to resist the argument that only the army can maintain law and order; in Guatemala, the army is widely recognized (and criticized) as a major source of criminal activity, as well as drug trafficking and corruption. The army is no longer the "most important institution" and no longer merits treatment as such.

THE "LEVERAGE" DEBATE

The second cluster of arguments concerns U.S. leverage in Guatemala. U.S. officials argue that Washington has lost leverage over the Guatemalan army since cutting off military aid. Further measures would cause the United States to lose all remaining influence (as happened during the Carter years). Pressures to improve human rights, the argument goes, interfere with peace negotiations and thwart the U.S. role as a friend of the peace process, since they increase the army's resistance to change; the United States should instead seek to reward "good behavior," such as the army's support for civilian government. Finally, since the army is said to be reforming itself from the inside, and even "cleansing" its ranks of human rights violators, outside pressure is unnecessary.

These arguments are based on convoluted logic, according to which the United States can best promote democracy by rewarding or tolerating undemocratic behavior. Obviously, leverage is more subtle than telling Guatemala what to do, but even indirect pressures must carry a clear message. When Washington stops sending mixed messages, it knows well the pressure points in Guatemala and how to use them, as it has done on at least one occasion. During Serrano's attempted *autogolpe* in 1993, the United States and several European governments sent an unequivocal message: Return to constitutional rule or face the immediate suspension of trade privileges, economic aid, and access to international credit. This stand immediately convinced wavering Guatemalan business leaders to prevail upon the army to abandon Serrano and permit a return to constitutional rule. Since 1993, however, the Clinton administration has reverted to sending mixed messages. Apparently it is satisfied that the exist-

of a civilian government qualifies as "good behavior," regardless of the army's continuing conduct—rather a low standard for "democracy." The peace process has set the stage for raising that standard.

In the end, arguments over leverage come down to whether the United States intends to press for the major *institutional* changes in the army that will be needed. It is absurd to argue, as the "minimalists" do, that U.S. pressure for institutional change disrupts the peace talks; the peace process is about nothing if it is not about substantive institutional change. If this is understood in Washington, U.S. pressures can help isolate those in Guatemala who oppose peace or advocate peace without concessions to the guerrillas. Unlike during the Carter years, the resisters cannot prevail: Guatemala cannot now afford to risk international isolation by eschewing peace.

As for army "self-reform," this myth has been revealed time and again to have no credibility. Recent reports by MINUGUA, the U.N. Independent Expert on Human Rights in Guatemala, the U.N. Committee Against Torture, and the OAS Inter-American Commission on Human Rights all make clear that army reform has been minimal. Impunity still reigns. Any real reform the army makes will be in response to domestic and international pressures—and, ultimately, as a result of constitutional changes negotiated, implemented, and verified through the peace process.

A CHANCE FOR PEACE

Since taking office in January 1996, Guatemala's new president, Alvaro Arzú, has expressed a strong desire to advance the peace negotiations and to establish civilian control over the army. His first moves included shake-ups in the army high command. These and other actions created a new political climate and paved the way for the URNG's "good-will" gesture of calling an open-ended halt to offensive armed actions in March; the government in turn halted offensive counterinsurgency operations. Despite the optimistic mood of early 1996, however, the road ahead is mined with impediments to peace. If Washington seriously intends to strengthen the peace process against those who stand in the way, it will have to go beyond applause for the government's actions. At this critical moment, the United States should be a step ahead of the Guatemalan government, not a step behind, and that means pressing for perma

ment institutional reforms.

But such a policy shift requires that Washington be willing to break what the *New York Times* has called a shameful silence about the past and current activities of the Guatemalan army and of the U.S. government in relation to that army. Failure to declassify and disclose the truth at this critical moment will leave the United States in the position of continuing to defend past policies that permitted the deaths of thousands of civilians. Shamefulness aside, the pressure for public disclosure, in both the United States and Guatemala, is too strong to be ignored or postponed indefinitely—as dramatized most recently in the vigil for truth across from the White House by American nun Dianna Ortiz, another victim of the Guatemalan army's atrocities.

Over the long run, the United States and Mexico have a practical stake in confronting the issue of the Guatemalan army since it presents an obstacle to their plans for cooperative economic arrangements with Central America. Because Guatemala is the region's largest country, and because its army remains the bastion of hard-line military reaction and destabilization in Central America, the issue of Guatemala's demilitarization will have effects throughout the region. Central America cannot be a zone of peace or development until Guatemala is demilitarized.

The outcome of the Guatemalan peace process is also of concern to the international community. The U.N. is already heavily involved in the peace negotiations and has begun its investment in a peace-keeping mission. But its success will require U.S. cooperation. A clear message from Washington will be essential once demilitarization becomes the focus of negotiations later this year. Predictably, that is when efforts to derail the peace process will intensify.

The CIA's 1954 intervention in Guatemala brought the Cold War to the hemisphere. In the 1960s, the United States fought its first Latin American counterinsurgency war in the country, with the Guatemalan army serving as its proxy. More than three decades later, Guatemala (together with Cuba) remains the last preserve of Cold War policies. Guatemala presents a test of whether U.S. policymakers really understand that the Cold War is over in Latin America.