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CONNECTING CENTRAL AMERICA TO THE SOUTHERN CONE: *The Chilean and Argentine Response to the Nicaraguan Revolution of 1979*

ABSTRACT: The history of the Cold War in Latin America in the 1970s is commonly split into two episodes: the establishment of anticommunist dictatorships and the ensuing repression across the Southern Cone in the early and middle decade, and the Nicaraguan Revolution and the eruption of violent conflicts across Central America at its close. By exploring the Chilean and Argentine response to the Nicaraguan Revolution, this article brings these two episodes together, demonstrating how they were understood to belong to one and the same ideological conflict. In doing so, it highlights the importance of the revolution in the Chilean and Argentine perception of the Cold War and explores how the Sandinista triumph directly shaped Southern Cone ideas about US power and the communist threat, also prompting reflection on their own 'models' for anticommunist governance. Both regimes responded by increasing their support for anticommunist forces in Guatemala and El Salvador, often conducting this aid through a wider transnational and clandestine network. This article contributes to new understandings of the nature of Latin American anticommunism in this period, challenges traditional understandings of external involvement in Central America, and demonstrates the need to understand events in Latin America in this period in their full regional context.

KEYWORDS: anticommunism, transnational, Cold War, revolution, counterinsurgency, Nicaraguan Revolution, Southern Cone, Central America

On July 5, 1979, as Anastasio Somoza Debayle entered his final two weeks clinging to power in Nicaragua, Mario Sandoval Alarcón, former vice president of Guatemala (1974-78), leader of the extreme-right MLN (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, National Liberation Movement) and de facto chief of the Guatemalan death squads, made a clandestine trip to the Southern Cone. That Thursday, July 5, Sandoval Alarcón arrived in Buenos Aires. Four days later, on Monday, July 9, he traveled from Buenos Aires to Santiago, where he sought to "meet with President Pinochet" to discuss "the situation in Nicaragua and the Marxist influence and designs in

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the area."[1] Sandoval Alarcón also carried a letter from Somoza himself, destined for Admiral José Toribio Merino, member of the ruling junta and Sandoval Alarcón's host during an official visit to Chile as vice president two years earlier. Dated July 3, 1979, the short letter requested that Merino grant Sandoval Alarcón, his good friend, an audience, so that the two could discuss "matters that interest the undersigned."[2]

While it was already too late for Somoza by the time Sandoval Alarcón reached Santiago, this clandestine journey indicates how the events of July 1979 in Nicaragua—the first left-wing revolution in Latin America since the Cuban Revolution two decades earlier—do not belong solely in histories of Latin America's transnational revolutionary Left. From at least 18 months before the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, Sandinista National Liberation Front) victory, events in Central America—not only Nicaragua but the almost equally delicate situation in El Salvador and rising violence in Guatemala—had been central to the development of an incipient transnational anticommunist network spanning the 6,500 kilometres from Guatemala City to Buenos Aires. The military dictatorships in Argentina (1976–83) and Chile (1973–90) were the two most important Latin American supporters of the brutal counterinsurgency that raged across Central America from 1977 onward.[3] The Nicaraguan Revolution was a watershed in the Cold War. By analyzing the Chilean and Argentine response to events in Guatemala and El Salvador, this article seeks to place the Nicaraguan Revolution within the history of the transnational Right in Latin America and beyond.

Over the last two decades, a broad consensus has developed regarding the importance of Latin American agency in the regional—and indeed the global —Cold War.[4] In this respect, this article does not re-tread existing paths to demonstrate the independence of Latin American anticommunist thought

1. Secret telegram, EmbaChile Guatemala a Subsec, Informa Visita Ex-Vicepresidente de Guatemala Sr. Mario Sandoval A., July 5, 1979, Archivo Histórico del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Santiago, Chile [hereafter AMRE]/Oficios/SEC./RES., Telegramas, Aerogramas, Guatemala/1979.

2. A. Somoza (Nicaragua) to Almirante Merino, Centro de Investigación y Documentación, Universidad Finis Terrae, Santiago [hereafter, CIDOC], CL-CIDOC-12-G.1-15289/1979, http://sarip.uft.cl/saripcidoc/documentos/27224/1437.pdf accessed March 15, 2019.

3. This was confirmed in two author interviews with former high-ranking civilians in Guatemalan government and private business in Guatemala City, August 2019. Chile and Argentina were the only two Latin American countries frequently cited by the left-wing guerrilla as supporters of Central American counterinsurgency in this period. See "Chile, pueblo en lucha," *Informador Guerrillero*, Año II, no. 25, July 4, 1983, Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica [hereafter CIRMA], Antigua, Guatemala, Archivo del Comité Holandés, Archivo Histórico, Cartapacio 3, no. 1; "Taiwan y Sudafrica Aliados de la Contrainsurgencia en Guatemala," *Informador Guerrillero,* Año IV, No. 38, February 28, 1985, Hoover Institution Library and Archives [hereafter HI], Stanford University, Guatemalan Subject Collection, Box 1, Folder 4.

4. See for example Max Paul Friedman, "Retiring the Puppets, Bringing Latin America Back In: Recent Scholarship on United States–Latin American Relations," *Diplomatic History* 27:5 (2003): 621–636.

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and action in this period.[5] Rather, it seeks to build on existing work to bring together the history of the Nicaraguan Revolution with that of the transnational Right. The article begins by asking what the Revolution—and events in Central America more broadly—meant to the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships and their conception of the Cold War. US inaction in the face of Somoza's downfall cemented both dictatorships' conviction that under Carter the United States had abandoned its duty as leader of the anticommunist bloc; in response, they took independent action to counter the international communist threat. The dictatorships perceived events in Central America as analogous to their own "dirty wars" at home—the Nicaraguan Revolution prompted reflection on their own records against "communist subversion" and the "solutions" they could offer to their beleaguered allies to the north. Subsequently, both the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships provided support to counterinsurgency efforts in El Salvador and Guatemala.

The historiographical contribution of this article is threefold. First, I show that the Southern Cone dictatorships' transnational anticommunist activity did not start and end with the infamous Operation Condor. Rather, transnational collaboration continued into the 1980s and involved a far wider network, drawing in state and non-state extreme-right actors in Central America.[6] Here, I build directly on existing work by Ariel Armony and Julieta Rostica exploring Argentine involvement in Central America, while introducing the Chilean perspective for the first time.[7] The second contribution of the article lies in the case it makes for a reassessment of traditional periodizations of the Cold War in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s.

5. See for example Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890–1939* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta, *Em guarda contra o Perigo Vermelho: o anticomunismo no Brasil (1917–1964)* (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 2002); and more recently Federico Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War: Fascism, Populism, and Dictatorship in Twentieth Century Argentina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

6. On Latin American transnational anticommunist activity before Operation Condor, see Marcelo Casals, "Against a Continental Threat: Transnational Anti-Communist Networks of the Chilean Right Wing in the 1950s," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 51:3 (2019): 523–548 and Mónica Naymich López Macedonio, "Historia de una colaboración anticomunista transnacional: Los Tecos de la Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara y el gobierno de Chiang Kai-Shek a principios de los años setenta," *Contemporánea: Historia y Problemas del Siglo XX* 1:1 (2010): 133–158. For the direct connection between Operation Condor and Argentine activity in Central America, see J. Patrice McSherry, *Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005).

7. Ariel C. Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America, 1977–1984* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1997); Julieta Carla Rostica, "Las dictaduras militares en Guatemala (1982–1985) y Argentina (1976–1983) en la lucha contra la subversión," *Revista de Estudios Latinoamericanos* 60 (2015): 13–52; Julieta Carla Rostica, "La política exterior de la dictadura cívico-militar argentina hacia Guatemala (1976–1983)," *Estudios* 36 (2016): 95–119. This is the first treatment of both Chilean and Argentine involvement in Central America in one place. For Chilean policy in El Salvador in this period, see Molly Avery, "Promoting a 'Pinochetazo': The Chilean Dictatorship's Foreign Policy in El Salvador during the Carter Years, 1977–81," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 52:4 (2020): 759–784.

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By demonstrating the connections between the Southern Cone and Central America, I show that actors on the Extreme Right in both subregions perceived events across Latin America as belonging to one and the same ideological struggle. Rather than dividing the 1970s and 1980s into two geographically defined chapters—events in the Southern Cone in the early and mid 1970s, followed by the outbreak of guerrilla violence and civil war in Central America from 1977 onward—this article highlights the need to place episodes of the Cold War in Latin America within their fullest regional context.

Finally, the story of transnational anticommunist collaboration told here is significant for scholars of the Right outside of Latin America. While the article focuses on the regional Latin American context, the connections traced here formed part of a much larger global anticommunist network. In this respect, the study of the Argentine and Chilean dictatorships and their foreign policy offers much to scholars working on new histories of the transnational Right during the Cold War, examining what Kyle Burke has described as "anticommunist internationalism."[8] Far from a clear-cut "proxy" conflict between the two superpowers, Chilean and Argentine involvement in Central America illustrates the variety of forms that ostensibly anticommunist government and counterinsurgency could take.

While the dictatorships in Chile and Argentina are the central actors, this article works from the premise that there existed broad agreement concerning the nature of the global and regional Cold War among those who made up what I describe as the Latin American Extreme Right. This term can be defined as encompassing both Latin America's anticommunist dictatorships—across the Southern Cone and in Central America—and the vast array of non-state groups and organizations comprised of extreme-right individuals across the Americas, from Los Tecos in Mexico to Cuban exiles based in Miami. In this period this Extreme Right was distinct from the wider Right (*las derechas)* in its rejection of Western-style democracy, preference for extrajudicial violence to address the international "communist threat," and its all-encompassing definition of that threat. The advance of communism was perceived not only in political terms but as another of the "subversive" forms of modernity that threatened traditional views on gender, race, and sexuality.[9] These groups were united through a web of transnational connections, chief among them those forged

8. Kyle Burke, *Revolutionaries for the Right: Anticommunist Internationalism and Paramilitary Warfare in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

9. To grasp the complexity of the Latin American Right in the twentieth century, see McGee Deutsch on the use of the term '*las derechas*' (the rights) over '*la derecha*' (the right). *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890–1939*, 4; For an example of the centrality of gender and sexuality to extreme-right conceptions of the communist threat, see Valeria Manzano, "Sex, Gender and the Making of the "Enemy Within" in Cold War Argentina," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 47:1 (2015): 1–29.

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through the World Anti-Communist League (WACL), and its Latin American chapter, the Latin American Anti-Communist Confederation (Confederación Anticomunista Latinoamericana, CAL).[10]

In exploring these actors, this article draws on research from archives in Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, and the United States. It begins by tracing the origins of Chilean and Argentine involvement in Central America in this period, providing the essential context for Mario Sandoval Alarcón's appearance in the Southern Cone on the eve of the Nicaraguan Revolution. It then highlights the importance of the Nicaraguan Revolution in the Chilean and Argentine perception of the regional and global Cold War, demonstrating the ways in which events in Central America shaped Southern Cone ideas about US power and the communist threat, as well as prompting them to reflect on their own "models" for anticommunist governance. Finally, it explores the Chilean and Argentine responses to the Nicaraguan Revolution in terms of their role as the principal sources of Latin American support for the counterinsurgency in El Salvador and Guatemala. Through material and ideological support, both dictatorships shaped events on the ground in Central America and provided Central Americans of the Extreme Right with a model that was distinct from, and largely independent of, US foreign policy goals.

PRELUDE: 1977–79

The Nicaraguan Revolution did not mark the beginning of Southern Cone anticommunists' concern and involvement with Guatemala and El Salvador. To tell the story of the significance of the Nicaraguan Revolution for the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships and the transnational Right more generally, it is necessary to look back to 1977. That year holds dual significance: it marked the escalation of left-wing guerrilla movements in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, and in January, Jimmy Carter was inaugurated as president of the United States, following his election on a platform that promised to put human rights front and center in US foreign policy making. These circumstances formed the crucial context for growing Chilean and Argentine involvement in Central America between 1977 and 1979.

10. The World Anti-Communist League was founded in 1967 as an outgrowth of the Asian People's Anti-Communist League, a regional group founded in 1954 with funding from the US government. In 1972, WACL held its first congress in Latin America in Mexico City. The 1972 congress also marked the foundation of the league's Latin American chapter, the Latin American Anti-Communist Confederation (Confederación Anticomunista Latinoamericana, CAL). Annual WACL meetings and semi-regular CAL congresses (roughly every three years) provided a space for representatives of anticommunist regimes and groups to meet to discuss the global communist threat. The most comprehensive account of WACL's history remains Scott Anderson and Jon Lee Anderson, *Inside The League: The Shocking Exposé of How Terrorists, Nazis, and Latin American Death Squads Have Infiltrated the World Anti-Communist League* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1986).

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Carter's election and inauguration, and the subsequent introduction of his human rights policy, prompted unanimous condemnation from the Latin American Extreme Right, bringing about an unprecedented divergence in opinion between the US and its traditional Cold War allies to the South as to how best to wage the Cold War. This rupture did not appear from out of the blue: since at least the mid 1970s Latin Americans had criticized US foreign policy in forums such as WACL and CAL, where they argued that the US government's misplaced faith in détente had allowed communist expansion worldwide.[11]

Nevertheless, Carter's human rights policy constituted a turning point in that it was perceived as a direct attack on the interests of both Latin America's anticommunist dictatorships and those fighting the "subversive threat" from outside the formal parameters of the state elsewhere in the region. The third CAL congress in Asunción, Paraguay, in March 1977 resolved that the enemies of these anticommunists now "had their headquarters as much in Washington as Moscow," and that the United States had turned its back on the struggle against "subversion" in Latin America.[12] Delegates representing the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships subscribed to this resolution, and public statements elsewhere confirmed the Southern Cone perception that US policy was working directly against the dictatorships' interests.[13] More than ever, the Southern Cone dictatorships were now compelled to defend their records at home and promote them abroad. This conceptualization of the United States as a hindrance in the regional fight against communist subversion marked a transformation of the dynamics of US-Southern Cone relations in 1977 and would be critical to the way in which both dictatorships perceived and responded to rising guerrilla violence in Central America in the years that followed.

Meanwhile, the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships understood events in Central America in the late 1970s through the lens of their own experiences in the "struggle against subversion" earlier in the decade. Bolstered by the presence of Argentine and Chilean exiles in both Central America and Mexico, rising popular opposition and its violent suppression and the subsequently escalating guerrilla insurgency were perceived as a continuation of the same transnational

11. Comunicado Final del Comité Ejecutivo de la Liga Mundial Juvenil Anticomunista (WYACL), February 23, 1975, Centro de Documentación y Archivo para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, Palace of Justice, Asunción, Paraguay [hereafter CDyA], R198F2556-8; Informe, 9th Conferencia General de la Liga Mundial Anticomunista, Dr. Antonio Campos Alum, May 4, 1976, CDyA, R108F1964-66.

12. Declaración Final del III Congreso de la CAL, March 28, 1977, CDyA, R094F0065-68.

13. See for example Chilean foreign minister Patricio Carvajal's speech in opposition to the US-sponsored human rights motion at the Organization of American States in June 1977, recorded in Oficio, EmbaSanSalvador, July 6, 1977, AMRE/Oficios/SEC./RES., El Salvador/1977.

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communist threat.[14] Chilean and Argentine diplomats stationed in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua were willfully blind to the national roots of growing opposition to the dictatorships, focusing instead on the role of Cuba and the transnational ties that existed between the guerrilla movements.

A little over a year before the Nicaraguan Revolution, the Argentine ambassador to Guatemala conceptualized the escalating violence in these terms when he described the "wave of violence" engulfing Guatemala ahead of the inauguration of President Romeo Lucas García on July 1, 1978.[15] Despite acknowledging national factors—such as ongoing large-scale demonstrations by public sector employees against low wages and the high cost of living—the ambassador nevertheless asserted that the situation in Guatemala could be understood only "within the context of what is occurring in Nicaragua and El Salvador, where the [subversive] elements have identical or similar objectives."[16]

Two days later, the ambassador expanded on these warnings, emphasizing how rising instability in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala raised the possibility of the entire Central American isthmus becoming a "*zona roja*" unless the governments of the respective countries, assisted by their militaries, were to "take the necessary measures in order to avoid the establishment of Marxist-Leninism" a result which "would be disastrous not only for the region but for this continent." This was not solely a Latin American struggle: Cuba, supported by the Soviet Union, was "the center from which guerrilla activity radiated, with the aim of dividing America and creating a socialist zone, as it is trying to do not only from Angola to Mozambique but also in other parts of Africa."[17]

In response, in the two years before the Nicaraguan Revolution, the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships deepened their involvement in Central America. Both increased the number of military scholarships on offer for Guatemalans and Salvadorans to travel to the Southern Cone for training, and this training itself became more and more focused on countersubversive measures, most notably in the introduction of a course in "Intelligence for Overseas Officials" at the Argentine military's Colegio de la Nación.[18] At the same time, the Argentine

14. On Argentine concerns about exiles, for example, see Informe Secreto al Señor Subsecretario del Relaciones Exteriores, Informar sobre COSPLA, September 11, 1978, No. 465, Archivo Histórico del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto, Buenos Aires, Argentina [hereafter MREC], Colección Fortí. Colección Fortí consists of documents on Argentine-Central American relations declassified under Resolución 408/2009, http://desclasificacion.cancilleria.gob.ar/. All other MREC documents cited were accessed in the physical archive in Buenos Aires.

15. Secret cable, EGUAT, June 26, 1978, No. 287, Colección Fortí.

16. Secret cable, EGUAT, June 26, 1978, No. 287, Colección Fortí.

17. Secret cable, EGUAT, June 27, 1978, No. 290/78, Colección Fortí.

18. While these numbers would never come close to the historic numbers of Central Americans undertaking training in US institutions such as the infamous School of the Americas, this growth was nevertheless significant. For example, in January 1978 nine Salvadoran students were present in Chile, spread across four military academies and

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dictatorship directly supported Somoza's ailing National Guard forces in Nicaragua.[19] Both Southern Cone regimes understood themselves—and their experiences of the mid 1970s—as models for the Central American republics to follow in the struggle against communism. Military training was conceived as a means to transfer the dictatorships' counterinsurgency expertise to the Central American republics now facing an analogous subversive threat.[20]

Throughout the period 1977–79, both dictatorships placed the apparent inability of the Central American governments to overcome the regional guerrilla threat within the context of the United States' failure to support its allies in the region, evident in both its termination of direct military aid and the manner in which Carter's human rights policy had bolstered international human rights scrutiny, undermining the dictatorships' ability to use the full force of the military and security services in response to the subversive threat. In April 1978, the Chilean ambassador described how the Salvadoran authorities "feared taking repressive measures [against guerrilla attacks on businesses and organized peasant opposition in rural areas], given the possibility of being denounced by the United States as violators of human rights," thus undermining the struggle against "subversion" in El Salvador.[21]

The institutionalization of human rights scrutiny under Carter also affected the measures that the Argentine and Chilean dictatorships could take to support their beleaguered anticommunist allies in Central America. Regardless of events in Central America, both dictatorships were already under intense international pressure over the human rights abuses already committed at home. With heightened international scrutiny, it was no longer feasible to openly support dictatorial regimes in the same way that, say, the United States had done in the case of Guatemala after the 1954 coup. Ensuring that they did not *appear* to support the Central American dictatorships was a central concern in both

the Escuela de los Carabineros, along with one Salvadoran professor in the Academy of War (Academia de Guerra), part of the aforementioned long-established exchange of military instructors. In the following six months, a further eight visas were granted to Salvadoran scholarship holders destined for Chile's academies. Oficio, EmbaChile, Envía Exposición Reunión Embajadores en América, February 13, 1978, AMRE/Oficios/SEC/RES., El Salvador/1978; Oficio, EmbaSanSalvador, Informe I Semestre 1978, June 30, 1978, AMRE/Oficios/SEC/RES., El Salvador/1978. Julieta Rostica highlights the introduction of COE-600, a course in "Intelligence for Oversea Officials" at the Argentine Colegio de la Nación in 1978, attended by two Guatemalans in its first year. Rostica, "La política exterior de la dictadura cívico-militar argentina hacia Guatemala (1976–1983)," 111.

19. On Argentine involvement in Nicaragua before the Revolution, see Ariel C. Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade;* and Eduardo Luis Duhalde, *El estado terrorista argentino: quince años después, una mirada crítica* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1999), 288–289.

20. Oficio, EGUAT, July 3, 1978, No. 292, Colección Fortí; EmbaGuatemala, Reunión Jefes de Misión en América, February 22, 1977, AMRE/Oficios/SEC./RES., Guatemala/1977.

21. The Catholic Church in El Salvador was also identified as amplifying this pressure. Oficio, EmbaSanSalvador, Informe mensual, marzo 1978, April 3, 1978, AMRE/Oficios/SEC./RES., 1978/El Salvador.

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Chilean and Argentine policy-making; this was the main reason why both regimes refused to host a public visit from Anastasio Somoza in the summer of 1978.[22] Instead, before July 1979, both Chile and Argentina had begun cultivating personal and non-state relationships with key individuals and organizations on the Extreme Right in El Salvador and Guatemala, chief among them Mario Sandoval Alarcón.

THE NICARAGUAN REVOLUTION IN THE REGIONAL AND GLOBAL IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE

Given that long before July 1979 both the Argentine and Chilean dictatorships had judged Cuba to be the central driving force behind guerrilla activity in Central America, it comes as no surprise that they perceived the Sandinista triumph through the same polarizing Cold War lens. As a result, the FSLN's efforts to "present the RPS (Revolución Popular Sandinista, Sandinista People's Revolution) in a nonthreatening way to potential enemies," as discussed by Eline van Ommen elsewhere in this special issue, were doomed from the start.[23] The wider Cold War context, rather than FSLN diplomacy, dictated the manner in which the two Southern Cone dictatorships understood the revolution's significance.

The March 1979 Grenadian Revolution loomed large in perceptions of events in Nicaragua. If Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement's rise to power in Grenada represented the spread of the "subversive threat" from Cuba through the Caribbean islands, then the Sandinista victory was its first base on the mainland. As the Chilean ambassador to Guatemala wrote on July 11, just a week before Somoza's fall, Cuba, through the FSLN, was installing a "bridgehead" in Central America. Somoza's impending fall was merely the first step in a "well-coordinated plan for the eventual fall of all of Central America into totalitarian hands with unforeseeable consequences"; El Salvador and Guatemala would be the next to go.[24] From this perspective, El Salvador and Guatemala's international significance as the new battlegrounds of the ideological struggle was made abundantly clear: they were, wrote the ambassador in September 1979, "under the constant threat of contagion" from Nicaragua.[25]

22. Secret memorandum, Departamento América Latina, Viaje del Presidente Somoza a la Argentina, July 10, 1978, MREC, Dirección América Latina, AH/0004/2.

23. See Eline van Ommen's contribution to this special issue, "The Nicaraguan Revolution's Challenge to the Monroe Doctrine: Sandinistas and Western Europe, 1979–1990," *The Americas* 78:4 (2021).

24. Oficio, EmbaGuatemala, Remite apreciación semestral, July 11, 1979, AMRE/Oficios/SEC./RES. Guatemala/1979.

25. Oficio, EmbaGuatemala, Informa Reunión Jefes de Estado de Guatemala, El Salvador y Honduras, September 3, 1979, AMRE/Oficios/SEC./RES., Telex, Guatemala/1979.

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Many in the Latin American Extreme Right placed this acute threat to regional stability within the context of the global ideological struggle. In a speech in March 1980, Chilean foreign minister Hernán Cubillos offered Nicaragua as proof that Soviet efforts to foment conflict and violence in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East had now reached Latin America.[26] Similarly, in a speech to the Congreso Mundial por la Libertad y la Democracia (World Congress for Liberty and Democracy) in September 1979, Rafael Rodríguez, general secretary of the CAL and member of the Mexican extreme-right group Los Tecos, painted Nicaragua as an extreme example within the rising tide of communism worldwide, from Cuban incursions in West Africa to "Eurocommunism" following the fall of the dictatorships in Portugal and Spain earlier in that decade.[27] From this perspective, the Nicaraguan Revolution marked a new phase in global communist expansionism that threatened the entire hemisphere; this threat would require a robust response.

The Nicaraguan Revolution likewise provided concrete proof to those who feared that US foreign policy under Carter was helping, rather than hindering, the expansion of communism in Latin America. In an August 1979 CAL circular on events in Nicaragua, Rodríguez declared that Somoza had been the victim of "Cartercommunist aggression," which now threatened the rest of the Latin America.[28] The Argentine ambassador to Guatemala echoed this sentiment in an October 1979 cable in which he expressed his sympathy for the view advanced by a Guatemalan private business organization that "the success of the Sandinista Revolution [was] owed principally to pressure from the [US] State Department [related to human rights] and arms and training provided by Cuba."[29]

US unwillingness to provide support in the face of the communist threat remained a central concern in analysis of how the situation in Central America might develop. In the embassy's "Plan of Action" for 1980, the Chilean ambassador to El Salvador described the "potentially explosive" situation in Central

26. I have found no evidence that the Chilean government had any proof of direct Soviet involvement, but make that assumption based on their general understanding of the advance of communism worldwide. Hernán Cubillos, Intervención en "Escuela de Negocios Adolfo Ibáñez," como Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, March 1980, HI, Hernán Cubillos Sallato Papers (hereafter HCSP), Box 1, Folder 9 - Speeches and Writings, speech on foreign affairs, March 1980.

27. Discurso pronunciado por el Prof Rafael Rodríguez, Secretario General de la Confederación Anticomunista Latinoamericana, en la Ceremonia de Clausura del Congreso Mundial por la Libertad y la Democracia, celebrado en Miami del 7 al 8 de septiembre, September 9, 1979, CDyA, R108F1977-80.

28. "Circular No. 9/79, sent by the General Secretariat of CAL [Rafael Rodríguez] to all its members regarding the events in Nicaragua and Central America is hereby transcribed to all WACL members, because it is considered as of general interest," August 17, 1979, HI, Kyril Drenikoff Papers, Box 104, Folder 4 – Subject File/Confederación Anticomunista Latinoamericana.

29. Telegram, Guatemala, October 16, 1979, No. 491, MREC, Dirección Comunicaciones, AH/0600 vol. 89.

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America that continued to be aggravated by "the ostensible intervention of the United States in relation to human rights"—an intervention made "without recognizing that it was opening the door to Marxism in Central America."[30] It is significant that at this point—after the re-establishment of high levels of US military aid in the wake of the October 1979 coup and return of civilians to the Salvadoran government—the Chilean ambassador *still* perceived US policy as an aggravating factor in the struggle against subversion in Central America. US support for El Salvador's Christian Democrats and the more moderate wing of the military continued to be understood as oppositional to Chilean—and wider anticommunist—interests.

While both the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships ascribed global significance to the Nicaraguan Revolution, events in Central America were also perceived as directly linked to their own experiences in combating the subversive threat at home. Acutely aware of the transnational nature of the Latin American revolutionary Left and the presence of Southern Cone exiles fighting alongside the FSLN and other guerrilla groups in Central America, the Southern Cone dictatorships continued to understand the conflicts in Central America as analogous to their own domestic histories. As a result, the Nicaraguan Revolution prompted both regimes to reflect on their domestic "dirty wars," and the extent to which their victories on the home front might constitute a model for export to Central America. These reflections were simultaneously rooted in long-held paternalistic and racist attitudes toward Central America.

SOUTHERN CONE MODELS

The Pinochet dictatorship had already assumed almost talismanic status among members of the Latin American Extreme Right in the years before 1979. The World Anti-Communist League celebrated the September 1973 coup and commemorated its anniversary worldwide, from Taipei to Rio de Janeiro. In September 1974, the WACL/CAL chapter in Brazil held a week of solidarity with the Pinochet dictatorship. The following year, the World Anti-Communist League requested that all members participate in solidarity activities on the coup's second anniversary.[31] This international prestige—albeit within the narrow parameters of the extreme-right anticommunist network—no doubt shaped the dictatorship's own conception of its role in the wider ideological

30. Oficio, EmbaSanSalvador, Envía Plan de Acción 1980, April 28, 1980, AMRE/Oficios/SEC./RES., El Salvador/1980.

31. Informe sobre el desarrollo de la 'semana de solidaridad a Chile,' Sociedade de Estudos Políticos Econômicos e Sociais [SEPES], September 1974, CDyA, R108F1879-81; Circular 008/75, a todos los miembros de la Liga Anticomunista Mundial, 2° Aniversario de la Revolución Chilena, São Paulo, September 1975, CDyA, R198F2617.

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struggle, and complemented its own narrative, in which the September 1973 coup saved Chile from communism. Indeed at the third CAL conference in Asunción in March 1977, General Gustavo Leigh, commander in chief of the Chilean Air Force and member of the ruling junta, declared that Chile, the only country that had "managed to emerge unscathed from the clutches of Soviet imperialism and the darkness of communism," was an example to all the world; his presence there was "a testimony to the action of a people that, together with its Armed Forces, has been able to rescue, from abuse, disorder, tyranny, and chaos, the essential elements of their national being."[32]

By 1979, having secured the domestic base of the regime and largely overcome the economic crisis of the mid 1970s, the Pinochet dictatorship was seeking to consolidate its power with a long-term vision. This effort had begun with the Chacarillas speech in 1977 and culminated in the introduction of a new constitution in 1980.[33] This process—"*la nueva institucionalidad chilena*"—was designed to secure Pinochet's rule and was specifically framed in terms of the ongoing Marxist threat. Following the constitution's approval via a plebiscite of highly questionable legitimacy, Maximiano Errázuriz, a close associate of Pinochet's close advisor Jaime Guzmán and a right-wing lawyer, journalist, and professor, expounded on its explicit anticommunist roots.[34] In his preface to *Bases de la Nueva Institucionalidad Chilena,* Errázuriz placed the new constitution within the context of the threats of the age: at the time the previous constitution, dating from 1925, was written, there were rights that "the constitution of 1925 did not contemplate, because they were not under threat"; specifically, "moral, spiritual, and family values." It was only "when Marxist totalitarianism began to destroy" such values that it became "necessary to consider their constitutional protection."[35] In short, through the creation of a "protected democracy," the new constitution was explicitly framed as a means to prevent the experience of the years from 1970 to 1973 ever occurring again.[36]

This notion that a democratic system akin to that which Chile had possessed prior to 1973 was not sufficient to protect the country from the Marxist threat is also the vital context for understanding Chilean suspicion of the US-supported

32. Discurso del General Gustavo Leigh Guzmán, Comandante de la Fuerza Aerea y miembro de la Junta de Gobierno de Chile, en la apertura del III Congreso de la CAL, March 28, 1977, CDyA, R094F0021-23.

33. On Chacarillas, see Matias Alvarado Leyton, "El Acto de Chacarillas de 1977. A 40 años de un ritual decisivo para la dictadura cívico-militar chilena," *Nuevo Mundo, Mundos Nuevos*, February 16, 2018.

34. For Maximiano Errázuriz's association with Jaime Guzmán and the *gremialistas*, see Verónica Valdivia Ortiz de Zarate, *Nacionales y gremialistas: el 'parto' de la nueva derecha política chilena, 1964–1973* (Santiago de Chile: LOM, 2008), 148; and Maximiano Errázuriz, *Bases de la nueva institucionalidad chilena* (1982), held in CIDOC (Folleto DINACOS) CL-CIDOC-14-M.2-122372/1982-, http://sarip.uft.cl/saripcidoc/documentos/26795/1323.pdf accessed January 8, 2019.

35. Maximiano Errázuriz, *Bases de la nueva institucionalidad chilena* (1982), 5.

36. Maximiano Errázuriz, *Bases de la nueva institucionalidad chilena* (1982), 43.

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Christian Democrats in El Salvador, particularly once they gained executive power after January 1980. Despite initially endorsing the September 1973 coup, former president Eduardo Frei Montalva, the Christian Democrat who had immediately preceded Allende as president, had by 1977 emerged as a critical voice of the Pinochet dictatorship, posing a significant threat to the regime's international prestige.[37] Accordingly, Frei's presidency (1964–70) was incorporated into the dictatorship's official history of Chile's decline into Marxism, and Christian Democracy painted as but one step away from total Marxist control under Allende.

Chilean suspicion of the Salvadoran branch of that same party was directly informed by this narrative and bolstered by the existence of direct personal connections between the two parties. Fidel Chávez Mena, appointed Salvadoran foreign minister in January 1980, had stayed in Frei's home while studying at Chile's Universidad Católica in the early 1960s and attributed his commitment to Christian Democracy to this period.[38] Interestingly, these parallels were apparent not only from a Chilean perspective: Salvadoran documents show that the extreme-right interest groups that organized in opposition to the proposed land reform in El Salvador in 1976 invoked the Frei government's "radical" land reforms as proof that any attempt at reform in El Salvador would lead to a similar "destruction of productivity" and "hunger" as experienced in Chile.[39]

This background on "la nueva institucionalidad chilena" is significant, as it was in this domestic context that news of the success of the Nicaraguan Revolution was received, shaping Chilean perceptions of how the Pinochet dictatorship could assist its beleaguered anticommunist allies to the north. Just one week after the Revolution, Jaime Guzmán drew an explicit comparison between Nicaragua and Chile, citing both Pinochet's leadership and the nueva institucionalidad as central to maintaining Chilean independence and strength in the face of the Marxist threat. By contrast, Somoza's regime had been weakened by its dependence on the United States, leading to its downfall.[40] Guzmán would reprise this theme—why the Pinochet regime was not susceptible to the

37. Eduardo Frei Montalva's journey from endorsement of the coup to opposition leader (and victim of political assassination) is outlined in Olga Ulianova, "El despliegue de un antagonismo: el ex Presidente Frei Montalva y el dictador Pinochet en los archivos estadounidenses (1973–1982)," *Historia (Santiago)* 47:2 (2014): 401–441.

38. Oficio, EmbaSanSalvador, Informe mensual, enero 1980, February 1, 1980, AMRE/Oficios/SEC./RES.,El Salvador/1980.

39. "La destrucción de la agricultura chilena por los planificadores," *La Prensa Gráfica*, July 18, 1976, CIDAI [Centro de Información, Documentación y Apoyo a la Investigación], Biblioteca P. Florentino Idoate, S. J., Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, San Salvador, El Salvador, Collection Grupos Anticomunistas, Agricultores del Oriente, Folder 4.

40. Jaime Guzmán, "El contraste entre Nicaragua y Chile," July 25, 1979, *Ercilla*, Archivo Fundación Jaime Guzmán, CJG.79.06.

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weaknesses that befell Somoza—once again, in 1984.[41] Through its actions since September 1973, from initial repression through radical economic reform and then the nueva institucionalidad, the Pinochet dictatorship—or at least its most prominent intellectuals—believed they had developed an independent anticommunist model. This model constituted a favorable alternative to US policy in Central America and a possible blueprint for anticommunist forces in El Salvador and Guatemala to follow in the wake of the Nicaraguan Revolution. As the Chilean ambassador to El Salvador wrote in April 1980, Chile constituted "a visible example of peace, tranquility, labor freedom, and economic and social development for all the countries of Central America."[42] This perception would shape subsequent Chilean involvement.

In contrast, the military dictatorship in Argentina was at a different stage in its life span and had a distinct ideological basis. Both would affect the form Argentine involvement in Central America would take. The Argentine dictatorship justified itself in terms of destruction of the revolutionary Left (primarily the Montoneros) and the associated, broadly defined, "subversion"—and so refrained from defining itself in theoretical terms.[43] Until only very recently embroiled in the peak of its own "dirty war" at home, the Argentine military largely perceived transnational anticommunist activity in Central America as an extension—in the most violent and practical terms—of that counterinsurgency across its borders, rather than as a venue for more intellectual connections or the promotion of any broader political model. As Eduardo Duhalde observed, the export of the Argentine military's repressive model constituted an extension of the Argentine National Security Doctrine to a new doctrine of Continental Security.[44]

This perception of events in Central America as essentially a continuation of the "dirty war" at home was bolstered by the significant presence of Argentine exiles in Central America and Mexico. Already in 1978, the Argentine military had sent operatives to Nicaragua to identify Argentine guerrillas fighting in the Sandinista ranks, an operation that one Argentine adviser later described as "the same tasks as in Argentina . . . intelligence tasks . . . struggle against communism through unconventional means."[45] This interest in Argentine exiles continued after the revolution: on August 8, 1979, three weeks after the

41. Jaime Guzmán, "Para que Chile no sea otra Nicaragua," March 23, 1984, *La Segunda*, Archivo Fundación Jaime Guzmán, CJG 84.10.

42. Oficio, EmbaSanSalvador, Envía Plan de Acción 1980, April 28, 1980, AMRE/Oficios/SEC./RES.,El Salvador/1980.

43. Gunnar Kressel, "Technicians of the Spirit: Post-Fascist Technocratic Authoritarianism in Spain, Argentina, and Chile, 1945–1988," 316.

44. Duhalde, *El estado terrorista argentino*, 284.

45. Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade*, 82.

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FSLN victory, the Argentine foreign ministry wrote to its embassy in Managua requesting information on Montonero participation in the "recent revolutionary process."[46] The embassy's response outlined the presence of an undetermined number of Montonero militants fighting alongside the FSLN, including between 15 and 20 doctors and at least one Argentine pilot occupying "an important post" within the new Sandinista air force.[47]

Beyond Nicaragua, that same month the Argentine embassy in San Salvador forwarded recordings from the pro-guerrilla Costa Rica-based radio station Noticias del Continente. Broadcasting on equipment that the Argentines believed to have been donated to Costa Rica by North Korea, the majority of the radio hosts themselves were "judged by their accents" to be Argentine and their broadcasts were characterized by "constant attacks" on Argentina and the ruling "tyrannies" in that country, in Chile, and in Uruguay.[48] These broadcasts had also reached Guatemala, drawing the attention of the Argentine ambassador there.[49] While Chilean exiles had also collaborated with FSLN forces, the Chilean presence in Central America barely features in correspondence from the Chilean embassies in Guatemala and El Salvador.[50] In 1979–80, it was the exile community's international human rights activism, not the material threat that exiles posed to the security of the regime, that remained the Pinochet dictatorship's primary concern.[51] In contrast, for the Argentine dictatorship, Central America was a direct extension of the domestic battleground against subversion. For both regimes, events in Central America formed part of the regional and global ideological conflict in which they contextualized their own historical narratives of the "struggle against subversion" on the domestic front.

In short, the success of the Nicaraguan Revolution confirmed anxieties about the state of the global ideological struggle that the Latin American Extreme Right had been articulating throughout the decade—particularly the US role in that struggle. With these fears made a reality, the Nicaraguan Revolution fundamentally changed the way in which the ongoing conflicts in neighboring countries—El Salvador and Guatemala chief among them—were understood.

46. Secret cable, Cancillería - EmbArgentina en Managua, August 8, 1979, No. 382/383, Colección Fortí.

47. Secret cable, Managua, August 13, 1979, No. 404/405, Colección Fortí.

48. Oficio, San Salvador a S. E. el Señor Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto, "elevar grabaciones emisora costarricense 'Noticias del Continente' tacando [sic] a nuestro país," August 7, 1979, No. 359/79, Colección Fortí.

49. Telegram, Guatemala, August 9, 1979, No. 365, MREC, Dirección Comunicaciones, AH/0600 vol. 89.

50. On the role of Chilean exiles in the Nicaraguan Revolution, see Victor Figueroa Clark, "Chilean Internationalism and the Sandinista Revolution" (PhD diss.: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2011).

51. For the threat posed by Chilean exiles through their human rights activism, see for example Hernán Cubillos's March 1980 speech. Hernán Cubillos, Intervención en "Escuela de Negocios Adolfo Ibáñez," como Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, March 1980, HI, HCSP, Box 1, Folder 9 - Speeches and Writings, speech on foreign affairs, March 1980.

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As James Dunkerley wrote in 1988, while "it would be misconceived constantly to measure these other countries by the yardstick established by the FSLN," the Revolution "produced a distinct regional condition in which it is plausible to imagine a Central American revolution, however distant and variegated that might be."[52]

This judgement is abundantly clear in an assessment of the situation in El Salvador by the Chilean ambassador there in December 1979. The ambassador described how the outcome of the ideological struggle in El Salvador was "of vital importance to Central America, and can determine whether the traditional influence of the United States remains in force in the isthmus or if it passes into the hands of socialist-Marxist control."[53] For the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships, the distinct possibility of El Salvador and Guatemala following in Nicaragua's footsteps drove a new phase in their involvement in Central America as they sought to provide their own solutions to the ongoing crisis.

THE CHILEAN AND ARGENTINE ROLE IN CENTRAL AMERICA AFTER JULY 1979

In the most immediate term, the Nicaraguan Revolution provided the imperative for greater transnational anticommunist collaboration and organization across Latin America. On November 8, 1979, at the Conference of American Armies (CEA) in Bogotá, Colombia, General Roberto Eduardo Viola, commander in chief of the Argentine army, called for "close cooperation in the struggle against communist subversion." Emphasizing that militaries must not remain on the margin of domestic politics, Viola argued that to "ignore the changes" in the nature of peace and war risked more countries "succumbing to the clutches of international communism." Viola's call for greater transnational military collaboration against the subversive threat won the support of military commanders from Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Haiti, and meetings at the summit went on to discuss new training, including "ideological courses," to provide the American militaries with "a clear vision of the subversive problems that they must confront."[54]

Viola's speech at the CEA was the culmination of a series of Extreme Right declarations calling for greater unity and coordination that began with the

52. James Dunkerley, *Power in the Isthmus: A Political History of Modern Central America* (London: Verso, 1988), 337.

53. Oficio, EmbaSanSalvador, Envía Exposición Reunión Embajadores, December 18, 1979, AMRE/Oficios/SEC./RES./ORD, El Salvador/1979.

54. "Lucha antisubversiva: los ejércitos americanos aprueban un plan argentino" *Clarín*, November 10, 1979, British Library.

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WACL conference in Asunción in April 1979 and reached new levels of urgency in the wake of the Nicaraguan Revolution. As Rafael Rodríguez put it in his August 1979 circular to WACL and CAL members, the anticommunist international was facing "a stage that will demand more effort, sacrifice, and real will for cooperation and solidarity among all Latin American anti-Communists . . . Let us do all we can . . . let us help with our utmost efforts whenever the safety of one country, even if it may not be ours, is in danger."[55]

Both the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships answered this call in Guatemala and El Salvador. Documents recovered in 2013 show that a little over a month after the CEA, the Argentine ruling junta resolved to increase the Argentine presence in Central America.[56] While there is no comparable access to the internal discussions of the Chilean junta, the story laid out below suggests that they took a similar decision, if with a comparably smaller military commitment. Within the realms of more formal state diplomacy, both dictatorships increased provision of military training with a specific counterinsurgency bent. Perhaps more importantly, the two dictatorships became increasingly embedded in the wider transnational anticommunist network, using personal connections and non-state organizations to coordinate support for extreme-right anticommunists both within and beyond government. Despite their common aims, the two dictatorships worked independently of one another. Having come to the brink of war over their southern border during 1978, relations between Chile and Argentina remained frosty, and in Central America they closely observed one another's movements.

In the months after the Revolution, both the Argentine and Chilean dictatorships studied increases in military and police training, specifically focused on enhancing Guatemalan and Salvadoran counterinsurgency capabilities. In October 1979, César Mendoza Durán, junta member and director of the Carabineros (the Chilean police force), issued an invitation to his Guatemalan counterpart, Minister of the Interior Donaldo Álvarez Ruiz, to visit Chile the following month to see Carabinero infrastructure and learn more about the organization of the force.[57] According to the testimony of his then press secretary and—it would later transpire - undercover guerrilla spy, Elías Barahona y Barahona,

55. CAL Circular Letter No. 9/79, August 17, 1979, HI, KDP, Box 104, Folder 4 – Subject File/ Confederación Anticomunista Latinoamericana.

56. Acta No. 125, Reunión de la Junta Militar, December 19, 1979, *Actas de la Dictadura: documentos de la Junta Militar encontrados en el Edificio Condór*, Tomo 4 (Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Ministerio de Defensa, 2014), 41. For all documents and the story of their discovery in 2013, see https://www.argentina.gob.ar/defensa/archivos-abiertos/instituciones-de-archivo/archivo-del-ministerio-de-defensa/edificio-condor/documentos-digitalizados, accessed July 9, 2021.

57. Oficio, Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores al Señor Embajador de Chile en Guatemala, Invitación para el Sr. Ministro de Gobernación de Guatemala, October 9, 1979, AMRE/Oficios/SEC./RES.,Telex, Guatemala/1979.

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Álvarez Ruiz returned from the trip enthused by the training the Carabineros were prepared to offer Guatemalan security forces, albeit disappointed that up to that point the Guatemalan military had sent 100 scholarship holders for training in Chile while the police received none. This soon changed, however, as 75 members of the Guatemalan police would depart for training in Chile by the end of 1979.[58] Argentine documents indicate that this deal also involved the sending of Chilean police trainers to work in Guatemala. In February 1980, the Argentine ambassador raised the presence of "Chilean police instructors training the local forces" as a possible reason for the Chilean ambassador's refusal to condemn the actions of the Guatemalan security forces during the Spanish embassy massacre—where, following its occupation by indigenous campesino activists, security forces stormed the embassy in violation of international law, killing 37, among them Vicente Menchú, the father of Rigoberta Menchú, who would go on to win the Nobel Peace Prize, and the Spanish consul, Jaime Ruiz del Árbol.[59]

The Argentine dictatorship's provision of training to the Guatemalan security forces after the Nicaraguan Revolution consciously mirrored that offered by the Pinochet dictatorship and soon far outstripped it. In November 1979, the Argentine ambassador to Guatemala heard directly from his Chilean counterpart of the upcoming trip of Donaldo Álvarez Ruiz, Guatemala's minister of the interior, to Chile, to tour Carabinero facilities and meet with César Mendoza Durán. Reporting this news to the Cancillería (the Argentine Foreign Ministry), he suggested that the Argentine minister of the interior invite Álvarez Ruiz, who would be stopping in Buenos Aires for two days, to make a similar tour of the facilities of the Policía Federal.[60] The following month, the Policía Federal advised the Argentine embassy that they had sent a brochure to the Guatemalan police authorities, describing the courses they could offer to Guatemalan trainees.[61] A copy of what is in all likelihood the

58. In September 1980, Elías Barahona y Barahona fled Guatemala and sought refuge in Mexico. There he revealed himself to have been working for four years within the Ministry of the Interior as a spy on behalf of the Guatemalan guerrilla forces. Documents relating to his revelations, widely publicized in September 1980 and afterward, are held in the Centro Académico de la Memoria de Nuestra América at the Colegio de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales of the Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México (UACM) and are accessible online. Barahona's story is drawn from these documents, which are uncategorized within a larger file: Elías Barahona. Guerrillero infiltrado en el régimen de Lucas García. Guatemala, 1980–1982, Centro Académico de la Memoria de Nuestra América (hereafter CAMeNA), Mexico City, T GT3, Fondo A, https://selser.uacm.edu.mx/busca_registros.php?lista_fondos=1&lista_secc_tem=20&lista_serie_geo=18&palabras= accessed February 21, 2019.

59. Secret cable, Guatemala, February 8, 1980, No. 77/78/79, MREC, Dirección América Latina, AH/0042/2,. This episode is recounted in Chapter 14 of Menchú's memoir *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1985).

60. Secret cable, Guatemala, November 10, 1979, No. 539-541, MREC, Dirección Comunicaciones, AH/0600 vol. 89.

61. MREC, Departmento América Latina to Guatemala, December 14, 1979, No. 3896, MREC, Dirección América Latina, AH/0031,.

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first 18 pages of this very brochure is held in the archives of Guatemala's Policía Nacional. The "Annual Scholarship Plan for Latin American Police Forces" detailed extensive counterinsurgency training offered in Argentina, including specializations in communications (communication systems, radio transmission and reception, electronic devices) as well as teaching in intelligence, geopolitics, and psychology.[62]

In some form or another, this offer was taken up. The nature of the training detailed in the brochure delivered in late 1979 tallies with the testimony of senior figures in the Guatemalan armed forces regarding the Argentine influence on Guatemalan counterinsurgency practice in this period. In interviews conducted by Jennifer Schirmer, members of G-2 (Guatemalan military intelligence) testified that it was the Argentines "who trained us a lot in intelligence," introducing the Guatemalans to the use of new technologies and techniques. Central among these tactics was the use of an Israeli computer system, installed in 1980; this, along with sophisticated Argentine computer network analysis to monitor electricity and water usage in Guatemala City, allowed the army to "zero in on buildings with high electricity and water bills or overnight electrical or water surges, where it was assumed clandestine meetings were taking place or an illegal printing press was in operation, and provide [an] address" that would be subsequently raided.[63] This Argentine presence in Guatemala was formalized with the opening of a new military attaché post responsible for Guatemala and El Salvador in March 1980 and supplemented with weapons sales and the ongoing provision of training for Guatemalans in Argentina.[64] According to Barahona y Barahona, there were up to 200 Guatemalans training in Argentina's military academies by September 1980, specializing in interrogation techniques and repression tactics.[65]

The Argentines involved in counterinsurgency training on the ground in Guatemala were likely drawn from the same group of operatives who Ariel Armony places there in the wake of the Nicaraguan Revolution: members of Argentine Battalion 601 who had been acting as advisors to the Somoza regime up to July 1979 and then fled to Guatemala following the Sandinista

62. Plan anual de becas año 1980 para Policías Latinoamericanos (18 páginas), Doc no. 1377393, Archivo Histórico de la Policía Nacional (AHPN), Guatemala City, Guatemala, https://ahpn.lib.utexas.edu/search/documento/1377393?s=1377393#page/1/mode/1up accessed February 27, 2019.

63. Jennifer G. Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 161.

64. Oficio, EmbaGuatemala, Nuevo Agregado Militar argentino, March 11, 1980, AMRE/Oficios/SEC.RES., 1-100 Guatemala/1980.

65. The 200 figure is drawn from Elías Barahona y Barahona's testimony, "Elías Barahona. Guerrillero infiltrado en el régimen de Lucas García." On arms sales, see Secret cable, Guatemala, June 2, 1980, No. 389–395, and Secret cable, Guatemala, July 21, 1980, No. 486, Colección Fortí.

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triumph. While some of these set to work organizing what would become the first *contra* forces, others sought to root out Argentine exiles working with the Left and "collaborated with the military regime in the repression of leftist organizations"—for example, performing the tasks outlined above or working directly with death squads.[66] The collaboration that Armony describes was likely arranged through Mario Sandoval Alarcón, who remained a key node for connections between the Southern Cone and Central America, visiting the former on at least once occasion in mid 1980 when he held private meetings with both the Chilean and Argentine presidents, despite holding no formal position in the Guatemalan government.[67] These connections would be crucial for the expansion of Chilean and Argentine support to the Salvadoran Extreme Right in the same period.

In the immediate aftermath of the Nicaraguan Revolution, both the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships showed a similar willingness to increase counterinsurgent support to El Salvador. Ariel Armony shows that from the summer of 1979, the Argentine army sent advisers to El Salvador at the request of the regime of General Carlos Humberto Romero, who "asked Argentina for intelligence experts specialized in interrogation techniques and analysis of information."[68] Then, in September 1979, three members of the Salvadoran government—Foreign Minister José Antonio Rodríguez Porth, Defense Minister Federico Castillo Yanes, and Castillo's deputy Colonel Eduardo Iraheta—visited Chile, with Porth also visiting Argentina. Topics under discussion included Southern Cone assistance in improving El Salvador's rudimentary police academy, as well as the expansion of other military training and the possibility of weapons sales to the Salvadoran military.[69]

However, the October 1979 coup in El Salvador directly affected El Salvador-Southern Cone relations and placed the Salvadoran Extreme Right on the defensive. Led by young, more moderate officers in the army, the coup established a new five-man ruling junta, known as the first JRG (Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno) and composed of both civilian and military members. Gaining the almost immediate backing of the US State Department and the liberal-leaning Catholic Church headed by Archbishop Oscar Romero,

66. Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America, 1977–1984*, 94. On Argentine involvement in the Guatemalan death squads, see Duhalde, *El estado terrorista argentino*, 292.

67. Telex, EmbaChile Guatemala to Subsec, May 27, 1980, AMRE/Oficios/ORD., Telex, Guatemala/1980; Telex, Guatemala, June 9, 1980, No. 413 MREC, Dirección América Latina, AH/0042/2; Secret cable, Guatemala, June, 9 1980, No. 409/10, MREC, Dirección América Latina, AH/0042/2.

68. Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade*, 84.

69. Oficio, EmbaSanSalvador, Informe II Semestre, Apreciación Anual, November 13, 1979, AMRE/Oficios/SEC./RES.,1979/El Salvador; Secret cable, Ceremonial a EmbArgentina San Salvador, No. 281, September 5, 1979, MREC, Dirección Comunicaciones, AH/0982/3.

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the junta announced a radical new program that included nationalization of banks, land reform, and greater state control of the export crop sector.[70] Although resignations by moderate civilian members of the new ruling junta in January 1980 marked a strong swing away from this ambitious reform program, the coup nevertheless marked the ejection of the majority of the most important extreme right-wing individuals from the upper echelons of the government and military. Those removed included all three visitors to Chile and Argentina that autumn, as well as Roberto D'Aubuisson, leader of the extreme-right faction in the military and de facto leader of the death squads. Many of those most closely aligned with the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships were now outside of government and in need of new, transnational channels to sustain their connections to the Southern Cone.

The October coup represented a major setback for the Salvadoran Extreme Right, and in the two months that followed its members sought to regroup and reorganize. Unlike the well-established MLN under Mario Sandoval Alarcón in neighboring Guatemala, no extreme-right party existed in El Salvador at the time of the Nicaraguan Revolution, and individuals from disparate organizations on the Salvadoran Right began organizing in earnest only in early October 1979, with this process accelerating in the wake of the coup. From its inception, this was an undertaking with transnational dimensions.[71] At its initial core was Ernesto Panamá Sandoval, leader of the small, inexperienced extreme-right group MNS (Salvadoran Nationalist Movement; Movimiento Nacionalista Salvadoreño) and, crucially, a nephew of Mario Sandoval Alarcón. Following the October coup, Sandoval Alarcón placed the MNS in contact with the now infamous Roberto D'Aubuisson, recently discharged from the army.[72] Finding common cause, the two began drawing together an array of landowners, private business, and right-wing women's groups under one umbrella, united by their opposition to agrarian reform and belief in the need to apply an iron fist against communist subversion. In December 1979, the Extreme Right exhibited their new, organized form with a series of several thousand-strong marches in San Salvador and the announcement of the formation of the Frente Amplio Nacional (FAN), the new umbrella organization for the Salvadoran Extreme Right.[73] The Chilean

70. Russell Crandall, *The Salvador Option: The United States in El Salvador, 1977–1992* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 125.

71. For the full story of the development of the Salvadoran Extreme Right after the October coup, see Aaron T. Bell, "A Matter of Western Civilisation: Transnational Support for the Salvadoran Counterrevolution, 1979–1982," *Cold War History* 15:4 (2015): 1–21.

72. David Ernesto Panamá Sandoval, *Los guerreros de la libertad* (San Salvador, 2008) 49.

73. ESALV to MREC, December 11, 1979, No. 573/79, MREC, Dirección América Latina, AH/0042/1. Aaron T. Bell, "Transnational Conservative Activism and the Transformation of the Salvadoran Right, 1967–1982" (PhD diss.: American University, 2016), 169–171.

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and Argentine dictatorships would soon find ways to provide this new organization with international support.

While the October coup had effectively removed all allies of Chile and Argentina from the Salvadoran cabinet, damaging the two dictatorships' diplomatic reach within El Salvador, the relationship between the Salvadoran armed forces and their Southern Cone counterparts had not, in the words of the Chilean ambassador, "changed in the fundamental sense."[74] Despite the removal of many senior right-wing voices within the Salvadoran military, the institutional links between the armed forces allowed Chilean and Argentine aid to continue expanding while the Extreme Right outside of government paused to regroup. In mid November 1979, the Chilean ambassador raised the possibility of cementing Chilean military influence through a mission to organize the training of Salvadorean security forces under one roof (a topic of discussion on Colonel Iraheta's pre-coup trip to Chile in September), as well as an increase in the provision of scholarships to Chile for officers at every level of the security forces.[75] Although Chilean documents shed no further light on the fate of these discussions, it appears likely that they bore fruit: in June 1980, the Argentine ambassador, in a discussion of that country's aid to El Salvador, described the extensive Chilean influence over the Salvadoran military derived from "the sending of instructors" from Chile to El Salvador.[76]

On the Argentine side, military support to El Salvador grew substantially from early 1980. In February, the Argentine ambassador held a long conversation with the Salvadoran defense minister, Colonel José Guillermo García, a senior right-wing voice in the military leadership. By this stage, the dominant right-wing faction within the military was in open disagreement with the Christian Democrats (PDC), with whom the armed forces shared power in the second JRG (established January 1980).[77] In conversation with the Argentine ambassador, García lamented the PDC's public condemnation of the perceived excessive force used by the security services, rejecting the PDC's preference for political solutions as insufficient for the extremist organizations that El Salvador faced. García went on to discuss the Salvadoran military's desire for a closer relationship with the Argentine armed forces. In response, the ambassador provided an overview of the training that Argentina could provide, drawing on Argentina's own "experience in the struggle against subversion and terrorism."[78]

74. Oficio, EmbaSanSalvador, Envía Exposición Embajadores, December 18, 1979, AMRE/El Salvador/1979.

75. Oficio, EmbaSanSalvador, Informe II Semestre, Apreciación Anual, November 13, 1979, AMRE/El Salvador/1979.

76. Secret cable, El Salvador, June 19, 1980, No. 482–485, Colección Fortí.

77. R. Crandall, *The Salvador Option: The United States in El Salvador, 1977–1992*, 129.

78. Secret cable, San Salvador, February 18, 1980, No. 131/133, Colección Fortí.

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A day after the Argentine ambassador communicated the details of this meeting with García, the Cancillería confirmed the creation of the new military attaché post in Guatemala, with jurisdiction in El Salvador, due to open the following month.[79] Concurrently, the Argentine presence in El Salvador increased. In a series of cables on March 8–10, the Argentine ambassador transmitted instructions on the steps the Cancillería would have to take to accredit Argentine "experts" due to arrive in the country, outlining the need for passports that would allow them to "enter and exit the country during their mission," and seeking details on the quantity of "arms and projectiles" that would be arriving with them, to ensure that they would pass through customs with ease. These instructions came with direct reference to "recent events in Bogotá," very likely a reference to Roberto Viola's vocal commitment to aiding other Latin American militaries to fight the *guerra sin fronteras* at the CEA in November 1979.[80]

In parallel to these military developments, from early 1980 the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships played a crucial role in providing international support to the fledgling FAN. While there is little to suggest any Chilean and Argentine involvement in the initial reorganization and institutionalization of the Extreme Right between October and December 1979, it was to the Southern Cone that the FAN's Guatemalan benefactor, Mario Sandoval Alarcón, directed his protégé in search of support in March 1980. That month, David Ernesto Panamá Sandoval led a small FAN delegation southward. With Sandoval Alarcón's Guatemalan nephew and MLN lieutenant Carlos Midence acting as their guide, the group visited Paraguay, Chile and Argentina. In his memoir, Panamá Sandoval related how these countries' experiences provided instruction to the fledgling FAN: "Fighting the nightmare of international terrorism, they seemed to suffer what we were suffering, but in advance."[81]

In Chile, the group was hosted by Gustavo Alessandri Valdés, Chilean representative to WACL and CAL, and later military-appointed mayor of Santiago and founder of the right-wing party Renovación Nacional (National Renewal).[82] While the memoir does not provide any details of his delegation's activities in Argentina, Panamá Sandoval revealed, in an interview with Craig Pyes in the early 1980s, that Sandoval Alarcón had provided the delegation with letters of introduction to high officials in the Argentine army, with whom

79. Secret cable, América Latina to EmbArgentinas Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, República Dominicana, February 19, 1980, No. 30, Colección Fortí.

80. Secret cable, San Salvador, March 8, 1980, No. 194, March 10, 1980, No. 196, MREC, Dirección América Latina, AH/0039/2.

81. Secret cable, San Salvador, March 8, 1980, No. 194, March 10, 1980, No. 196, MREC, , Dirección América Latina, AH/0039/2.

82. D. E. Panamá Sandoval, *Los guerreros de la libertad*, 98.

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they discussed the need to gather support for "a right-wing counteroffensive in Central America." According to the same interview, on his return Panamá Sandoval submitted a 25-page report on the methods of psychological warfare and other anti-guerrilla strategies that he had learned about from Southern Cone leaders to Roberto D'Aubuisson and that this report was duly passed on to "the right people in the Salvadoran army."[83]

By the spring of 1980, then, Chilean and Argentine support to the Extreme Right in El Salvador was being channeled through both formal military relations and renewed transnational ties to members of the Extreme Right, who were now acting beyond the formal parameters of the state to push for the use of increasingly violent and repressive measures against the revolutionary Left. These connections were thrown into sharp—and relatively public—focus in May 1980, when members of the Salvadoran military loyal to the moderate junta member General Adolfo Majano uncovered plans for an Extreme Right military coup under D'Aubuisson's leadership. If successful, it would have brought an immediate halt to reform efforts and launched a scorched-earth counterinsurgency against the Left. Among D'Aubuisson's co-conspirators were many of the former army officers ejected from their positions in October 1979, as well as former Sub-Secretary of Defense Colonel Eduardo Iraheta, who had visited Chile the previous September.[84]

In the wake of the coup, the connections between the coup plotters and the Southern Cone were made apparent: in an interview in late May, D'Aubuisson expressed his belief that the Southern Cone dictatorships could provide a "solution" to El Salvador's problems, with accompanying reporting citing the March 1980 FAN trip to the Southern Cone and stating that FAN had received "ideological and economic support" there.[85] As the Extreme Right both within and beyond the military launched a new offensive in 1980, it was from the Southern Cone that they drew inspiration—and support—for their alternative vision for El Salvador.

In the year after the Nicaraguan Revolution, the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships became more deeply involved in both Guatemala and El Salvador, offering support to the Central American Extreme Right based on their own experiences in the struggle against "subversion" at home. While the two

83. Craig Pyes and Laurie Becklund, *Salvadoran Rightists: The Deadly Patriots* (Albuquerque, N.M.: Albuquerque Journal, 1983), 12.

84. "Frustrado golpe de estado en El Salvador," May 3, 1980, *El País*.

85. Oficio, EmbaSanSalvador, Continúa información sobre entrevista clandestina a Mayor D'Aubuisson, May 17, 1980, AMRE/Oficios/SEC./RES.,1980/El Salvador. This was also reported in Argentine documents: see Cable, Guatemala, May 19, 1980, No. 360, MREC, , Dirección América Latina, AH/0042/2. On the significance of the Pinochet dictatorship as a model for the Salvadoran Extreme Right, see Molly Avery, "Promoting a '*Pinochetazo*'"

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dictatorships worked independently of one another in Central America, they shared a diagnosis of the damage wrought by US policy in the region and interpreted the conflicts through the same ideological lens. Representatives of both dictatorships reaffirmed their commitment to the transnational struggle once more, at the fourth conference of the CAL in Buenos Aires in September 1980. Sponsored by President Videla and the Argentine armed forces, the conference hosted over 250 delegates from 20 countries across Latin America and beyond and received official endorsements from the military dictatorships of Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay and Bolivia.[86] Conference resolutions echoed the arguments made by the Chilean and Argentine governments since July 1979, deploring the Sandinista takeover of Nicaragua and denouncing President Carter's betrayal of Somoza.[87] Widely acknowledged as a central event for the organization of Argentine support for the militaries and death squads in Guatemala and El Salvador, the conference speakers included President General Jorge Rafael Videla of Argentina, Mario Sandoval Alarcón, and Roberto D'Aubuisson, as well as his close Salvadoran associate Luis Ángel Lagos.[88] Here, one year after the Nicaraguan Revolution, these extreme-right Central Americans looked to the Southern Cone dictatorships for guidance and ideological and material support. It was the Southern Cone "solution"—of violent, uncompromising counterinsurgency—that they sought to reproduce at home.

CONCLUSION

The Nicaraguan Revolution was an event of fundamental significance in the Cold War. By addressing the Argentine and Chilean dictatorships' response, this article has placed that event within new histories of the transnational right in Latin America. Somoza's fall served to cement the Chilean and Argentine belief that the United States under Carter had abandoned its traditional role as the leader of anticommunist forces in the hemisphere. In turn, it prompted both regimes to reflect on how their own experiences earlier in the decade qualified them to offer support—and indeed, a blueprint—to the beleaguered dictatorships in Guatemala and El Salvador, understood to be facing the very same transnational communist threat. In analyzing the significance of the Nicaraguan

86. Report of the WACL Secretary-General, 1980–1981, August 1, 1981, HI, KDP, Box 61, Folder 4 – WACL Conference File, 1981; Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade*, 162.

87. Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade*, 162.

88. On the significance of the 1980 CAL meeting for Argentine involvement in Central America, see McSherry, *Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America*, 214; and Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade*, 162.

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Revolution to both dictatorships, this article thus contributes to new and more nuanced understandings of the nature of Latin American anticommunism in this period, revealing the creative and ambitious, rather than reactive, nature of the Chilean and Argentine anticommunist dictatorships.

In addition, the post-revolution escalation of Chilean and Argentine involvement in Guatemala and El Salvador described here reveals the Chilean and Argentine contribution to the counterinsurgent capabilities of the militaries and death squads in both Guatemala and El Salvador, which would be responsible for countless atrocities in the course of the civil wars (and in the Guatemalan case, genocide) in the decade that followed. By tying events in the isthmus to the earlier rise of violent, repressive, anticommunist military dictatorships in the Southern Cone, this study demonstrates the need to understand events in Latin America in this period in their regional and global context.

In terms of new directions for research, it is important to note that this article has gone only some of the way in exploring the Nicaraguan Revolution's significance for the development of the Latin American Extreme Right's critique of US foreign policy under Carter. The Chilean and Argentine dictatorships' efforts to promote their own "solutions" in often-explicit opposition to US foreign policy in Central America explored here were just some of myriad ways in which the Extreme Right sought not only to mitigate the consequences of Carter's foreign policy but ultimately to change its direction. Throughout the Carter administration and particularly in the wake of the Nicaraguan Revolution, Chileans, Argentines, Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and many other Latin Americans forged transnational ties to the US New Right—in the WACL and CAL, as well as in US-based groups such as the Council for Inter-American Security. In these forums and beyond, these members of the Latin American Extreme Right called for a realignment of US foreign policy, with a renewed focus on supporting counterinsurgency, ending human rights-based restrictions on military aid, and restoring support to the United States' traditional anticommunist allies.

That many of the members of the New Right present in these organizations then transitioned into the Reagan administration, which itself soon resumed massive levels of support for anticommunist forces in Central America, was no coincidence. Rather, it points toward a South-North influence on Ronald Reagan's Latin America policy that has so far gone unacknowledged by historians. While this article has focused on connecting the Nicaraguan Revolution to histories of the Chilean and Argentine dictatorships and their involvement in Central America, the story it tells is merely a small piece in

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terms of understanding the revolution's place in the history of the transnational Right in this period.

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