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<at>Promoting a '*Pinochetazo*': The Chilean Dictatorship's Foreign Policy in El Salvador during the Carter Years, 1977–81

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Abstract: This article takes existing histories of Chilean transnational anti-communist activity in the 1970s beyond Operation Condor (the Latin American military states' covert transnational anti-communist intelligence and operations system) by asking how the Pinochet dictatorship responded to two key changes in the international system towards the end of that decade: the Carter presidency and introduction of the human rights policy, and the shift of the epicentre of the Cold War in Latin America to Central America. It shows how both Salvadoreans and Chileans understood the Pinochet dictatorship as a distinct model of anti-communist governance, applicable far beyond Chile's own borders. This study of Chilean foreign policy in El Salvador contributes to new histories of the Latin American Extreme Right and to new understandings of the inter-American system and the international history of the conflicts in Central America in the late 1970s and the 1980s.

Keywords: Chile; El Salvador; anti-communism; Cold War

In June 1977, almost four years after the military coup that brought General Augusto Pinochet to power, regime-loyal weekly magazine *Qué Pasa* described how Chilean international isolation had 'reached alarming extremes … encouraging for our adversaries and a cause for concern for us'.[1] Since its inception, the Pinochet dictatorship had been at odds with the majority of the international community over its human rights violations,

[1] 'La difícil amistad', *Qué Pasa*, no. 320, 9 June 1977, Biblioteca Nacional de Chile (hereafter BN).

leaving it facing isolation and sharp criticism in the United Nations (UN). Meanwhile, the government-ordered assassination of exiled Chilean politician Orlando Letelier in Washington DC in September 1976 had galvanised the existing US Democratic congressional opposition to the regime. By the time of President Jimmy Carter's inauguration in January 1977, congressional amendments had already brought about a total blockade in US military aid and weapons sales to Chile. Yet, it was the introduction of the human rights policy following Carter's inauguration that marked a shift from fractious relations between Chile and the United States to a relationship characterised by a complete divergence in opinion as to how best to wage the Cold War. The Chilean dictatorship understood Carter's human rights policy, which it branded an unacceptable form of imperial interventionism, as a direct attempt to undermine the anti-communist military dictatorships established in Chile and in its Southern Cone neighbours during the previous decade and a half.

In the Pinochet dictatorship's own reading of recent Chilean history, the coup of 11 September 1973 and subsequent installation of military dictatorship represented a success story in a decade characterised by the creeping expansion of communism worldwide. Chile was an inspiration to anti-communist 'freedom fighters' in Latin America and beyond, providing a model for those on the Extreme Right elsewhere who perceived themselves to be facing an analogous threat.[2] It was this model – of a particularly violent form of anti-communism – that was under direct attack from Carter's human rights policy. As the Pinochet dictatorship looked north at the political violence erupting in Central America from 1977 onwards, it was also this model – the recourse to a *pinochetazo*, followed by a transition to 'protected democracy', or *institucionalización* – that it sought to promote as a solution to the perceived existential threat that communist expansionism posed to the isthmus.

[2] I follow Sandra McGee Deutsch in distinguishing the Extreme Right from the broader 'Right' by their resolute opposition to 'egalitarianism, leftism, and other threatening changes, often through measures outside of the electoral realm'. In this context, the latter point – a willingness to resort to extra-judicial violence and deem it justified in the face of reform – was a vital factor uniting the Latin American Extreme Right. Sandra McGee Deutsch, *Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890–1939* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 4.

This article traces the history of Chilean involvement in El Salvador during the Carter years. In doing so, it plots the connections between two groups of actors physically separated by several thousand miles yet connected by the conviction that they were fighting the same ideological struggle. For these anti-communists, this struggle – the Cold War – was not defined by the bipolar competition between the two superpowers, but as a conflict between international communism and the 'Free World' or 'Western Civilisation'.[3] While these actors on the Extreme Right certainly understood the Soviet Union to be the headquarters of international communism and Cuba its chief agent in Latin America, this ideological struggle was not conceived in terms of inter-state competition. Rather, the 'communist' or 'subversive' threat was a transnational phenomenon, construed in political, religious and cultural terms; while the Soviet Union and Cuba were the principal state sponsors of international communism, 'subversives' were also present within the ranks of progressive Catholics, trade unionists, student organisers and gay and human rights activists worldwide.

Over the course of 1977–81, Chilean involvement in El Salvador intensified on a state-to-state basis – primarily through military ties and the provision of training – and through a more clandestine transnational network characterised by personal connections and non-state organisations. In framing this article around the Carter years, I argue that this period of unprecedented intensity in Chilean–Salvadorean relations must be understood in terms of the unique dynamics in US–Latin American relations generated by Carter's human rights policy. But other factors also influenced Chilean involvement in El Salvador. The Chile–Argentina dispute over the Beagle Channel in 1978 and the escalation of guerrilla violence in El Salvador from that year directly shaped the motivation and form behind Chilean support for Salvadorean anti-communists. The moderate-led coup in El Salvador in October 1979 and subsequent resumption of US aid transformed these dynamics again. The situation in El Salvador at the close of the Carter administration – where ostensibly anti-communist support from both the United States and Chile was directed to two competing visions of how best to combat the armed insurrection – reveals how the Pinochet dictatorship constituted a distinct

[3] For the Salvadorean Extreme Right's use of this language, see Aaron T. Bell, 'A Matter of Western Civilisation: Transnational Support for the Salvadoran Counterrevolution, 1979–1982', *Cold War History*, 15: 4 (2015), p. 525.

anti-communist model of governance that held an ideological influence reaching far beyond Chile's borders.

My analysis of Chilean–Salvadorean relations in this period makes three major contributions to the existing historiography. First, by beginning to establish the nature of the Pinochet dictatorship's involvement in Central America, this article is a vital addition to the literature on Chilean transnational anti-communist activity. It moves beyond the predominant focus on Operation Condor and demonstrates that Chile played an important and hitherto under-researched role in the conflicts that raged in Central America in the late 1970s and 1980s.[4] Second, by showing how both Chileans and Salvadoreans conceived of the Pinochet dictatorship as a distinct model of anti-communist governance established through a military coup, followed by a transition to 'protected democracy' – *pinochetazo* and *institucionalización* – this article contributes to the new historiography of the transnational Right that emphasises the diverse ideological projects that existed (and continue to exist) under the banner of the 'Right'.[5] In this respect, the case of Chilean involvement in El Salvador underscores the need to understand anti-communism not only as a reaction to communism but also as a complex, transnational way of interpreting reality, incorporating

[4] On Condor, see John Dinges, *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and his Allies Brought Terrorism to Three Continents* (New York: New Press, 2004); J. Patrice McSherry, *Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005). In this work, McSherry also explores Argentine involvement in Central America, a topic most comprehensively researched by Ariel Armony and Julieta Rostica: Ariel C. Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America, 1977–1984* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1997); Julieta Carla Rostica, 'La política exterior de la dictadura cívico-militar argentina hacia Guatemala (1976–1983)', *Estudios*, 36 (2016), pp. 95–119.

[5] See, for example, Martin Durham and Margaret Power (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Transnational Right* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Luc van Dongen, Stéphanie Roulin and Giles Scott-Smith (eds.), *Transnational Anti-Communism and the Cold War: Agents, Activities, and Networks* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

every aspect of society and powerful enough to connect actors across the region and beyond.[6] Finally, in its chronological framing around the Carter years, this article explores the unintended consequences of Carter's human rights policy in Latin America. It moves beyond existing studies that revolve around the genesis of this human rights policy and its effectiveness in reducing abuses, instead asking how the shift in inter-American relations that Carter represented affected Chilean foreign policy beyond the lens of US–Chilean relations.[7] In the case of Chile and El Salvador, the US human rights policy acted as a catalyst for clandestine transnational anti-communist collaboration that sought to compensate for the loss of US diplomatic and military support. While this loss of support did not signal an end to US hegemony in the hemisphere – indeed the Carter administration's continued ability to influence Salvadorean politics was a recurring feature in Chilean observations of the situation there – this temporary schism between the United States' and Latin America's anti-communist forces triggered an unprecedented period of transnational South–South collaboration which has so far gone unrecognised in the historiography.

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[6] I build directly on recent studies of transnational anti-communist networks in Latin America and on a global level. 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), pp. 523–48; Kyle Burke, *Revolutionaries for the Right: Anticommunist Internationalism and Paramilitary Warfare in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2018); João Fábio Bertonha and Ernesto Lázaro Bohoslavsky, *Circule por la derecha: percepciones, redes y contactos entre las derechas sudamericanas, 1917–1973* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones UNGS, 2016).

[7] For existing studies, see Patrick William Kelly, *Sovereign Emergencies: Latin America and the Making of Global Human Rights Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); William Michael Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere: Human Rights and US Cold War Policy toward Argentina* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013). By questioning the nature of US hegemony, this article also engages with work on the nature of the United States as a superpower in the 1970s. See Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

This article is the product of multi-archival research conducted across seven countries, with Chile and El Salvador among them.[8] The majority of the sources upon which this article draws directly are documents held in the archives of the Chilean foreign ministry. These sources have been supplemented with documents from the Biblioteca Nacional de Chile (Chilean National Library). In the United States government records and the holdings of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University proved important, as did documents held at the Centro de Documentación y Archivo para la Defensa de los Derecho Humanos (Documentation Centre and Archive for the Defence of Human Rights, CDyA) in Asunción, Paraguay.

Starting Points

By 1977, following four years of military rule and harsh political repression, the Chilean dictatorship was entering a new phase in its lifespan. Heralded by Pinochet's speech at Chacarillas in July that year laying out the regime's path towards a new form of 'authoritarian' and 'protected' democracy, this process of *institucionalización* witnessed the dissolution of Chile's infamous secret police, the Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional (National Intelligence Directorate, DINA) and civilians' entry into influential government posts, and would culminate in the 1980 constitution.[9] This domestic process was the vital context for the idea of a specific Chilean 'model' cited in reference to events in Central America, whereby the armed forces would carry out initial swift and uncompromising action – a *pinochetazo* – against perceived communist 'subversion' in order to establish control, followed by *institucionalización* – a reduction in repression and the transition towards a 'protected democracy' in which popular power was necessarily limited as a means to prevent

[8] This article addresses one aspect of a PhD project that explores the involvement of the Chilean and Argentine military dictatorships in El Salvador and Guatemala between 1977 and 1984 through the lens of transnational anti-communist networks.

[9] 'Discurso de Augusto Pinochet en cerro Chacarillas con ocasión del día de la juventud el 9 de julio de 1977', available at https://es.wikisource.org/wiki/Discurso_de_Chacarillas, last accessed 11 Aug. 2020; the 1980 constitution remains in place in Chile today and became a central target of the protests that erupted in October 2019. For a discussion of the process of *institucionalización*, see Carlos Huneeus, *The Pinochet Regime* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2007), Ch. 5.

a feared Marxist rise to power through the manipulation of the masses. Rather than a holistic export of the Chilean dictatorship, the Chilean model, as discussed here in the context of El Salvador, was construed in political (as opposed to economic) terms and reflected Chile's ongoing process of *institucionalización* at home.

Pinochet's speech at Chacarillas came six months after Carter's inauguration as president of the United States. Rather than a radical departure in US–Chilean relations, Carter's inauguration and the introduction of the human rights policy are best characterised as the final, yet critical, stage of a divergence in opinion as to how to fight the Cold War that surfaced mere months after the 1973 coup. Despite US complicity in the overthrow of the government of Salvador Allende, from as early as the first months of 1974 the Chilean junta made clear their conviction that it was they, not the United States, who were 'the ones stopping communism'.[10] The Pinochet dictatorship was dismissive of détente, the new era of 'peaceful coexistence' between the two superpowers established in the early 1970s. From Santiago, détente appeared to allow the advance of communism worldwide, a problem compounded by the unwillingness of the previous administrations of Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford (1969–77) to provide Chile with full military, economic and diplomatic support. Tanya Harmer has described the state of US–Chilean relations between 1973 and 1976 as that of 'fractious allies'; the Pinochet dictatorship was one of a handful of US anti-communist allies who were, by 1976, 'more papal than the pope'.[11]

From the Chilean dictatorship's perspective, Carter's human rights policy marked a final stage in the US dereliction of duty as leader of the free world, representing a direct attempt to undermine regional dictatorships and a failure to focus efforts on where the true 'subversive threat' lay.[12] In November 1977, Commander-in-Chief of the Chilean Air Force and member

[10] Tanya Harmer, 'Fractious Allies: Chile, the United States, and the Cold War, 1973–76' *Diplomatic History*, 37: 1 (2013), p. 111.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

[12] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Envía boletín de prensa no. 36', 6 July 1977. References headed 'EmbaSanSalvador' and 'EmbaGuatemala' are to be found in the Archivo Histórico del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Santiago, Chile (hereafter AMRE), Fondo Países,

of the ruling junta General Gustavo Leigh Guzmán contrasted the softening of the Carter administration's position on Cuba, a country 'that maintains a revolution that has never respected human rights', with its sending of officials to 'observe' the human rights situation in Chile and applying pressure to governments that were fighting to defend their people against 'terrorist subversion'. He went on to apply this criticism to the uneven application of the human rights policy among the United States' own allies: highlighting that the United States showed no concern about human rights violations in oil-producing countries, Leigh claimed that were Chilean copper as strategic for the industry of developed countries, nobody in Washington would worry about human rights in Chile either.[13] From this point of view, the human rights policy constituted a direct attack on the Latin American dictatorships' achievements in defeating communism, and, more than ever, the Pinochet regime was compelled to defend its record at home and promote it abroad. This conceptualisation 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 the Pinochet dictatorship perceived and responded to rising guerrilla violence in El Salvador in the subsequent years.

The El Salvador Connection

The relationship between Chile and El Salvador during the Carter administration was primarily of military rather than governmental ties, and this connection between militaries long predated September 1973. The first Chilean military mission arrived in El Salvador in 1905, and among its members was Carlos Ibáñez del Campo, who would become dictator of Chile in the late 1920s, and then elected president in mid-century.[14] This mission marked the beginning of a close relationship between the armed forces of the two countries. Between 1950 and 1957, overlapping with the second Ibáñez administration (1952–8), five Chilean

organised by the name of the country in which the embassy is situated (here, El Salvador and Guatemala) and year.

[13] EmbaGuatemala, 'Remite publicación aparecida en diario local', 22 Nov. 1977.

[14] General Manuel Torres de la Cruz, the Chilean ambassador to El Salvador, elaborated on this history at the Meeting of Chilean Ambassadors in the Americas. EmbaSanSalvador, 'Envía exposición reunión embajadores en América', 13 Feb. 1978.

military missions played a critical role in the foundation of El Salvador's Escuela de Guerra (Military Academy).[15] The establishment of a programme of military scholarships for Salvadoreans in Chilean military academies over the following years ensured that the Chilean military remained in high esteem among members of its Salvadorean counterpart, while a Chilean instructor remained in residence in El Salvador.[16] As levels of guerrilla violence and the perceived communist threat mounted after 1977, it was through this existing channel that Chilean support was primarily conducted, and in the provision of military training and supplies that Chilean assistance was most concrete.

Since the Pinochet dictatorship's inception, tackling its international isolation had been a central Chilean foreign policy preoccupation.[17] As the primary target of the international human rights movement in the mid-1970s, the dictatorship had already been subjected to unprecedented international scrutiny before 1977, both from a UN special commission and through the efforts of figures such as Senators Frank Church (Democrat, Idaho) and Ted Kennedy (Democrat, Massachusetts) in the US Congress.[18] While primarily driven by the

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[15] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Datos sobre El Salvador', 3 March 1977.

[16] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual enero', 6 Feb. 1978. In 2016, Humberto Corado Figueroa, a general in the Salvadorean army and former defence minister (1993–5), published an account of the Chilean army's activities in El Salvador. The book curiously skips over the entire period of the Salvadorean Civil War: the narrative drops off in 1978 and recommences in 1992: Humberto Corado Figueroa, *Ejército de Chile en El Salvador: historia de una centenaria relación de amistad y cooperación* (Santiago, Chile: Academia de Historia Militar de Chile, 2016). Corado Figueroa himself visited Chile while a captain as part of a military delegation in May 1981. EmbaSanSalvador, 'Envía curricula-vitae', 18 May 1981.

[17] Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores al Secretario General de Gobierno, 'Orientaciones respecto a la coordinación entre RR.EE. [Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores] y la Secretaría Gral. de Gobierno', 23 Aug. 1977, AMRE, Fondo Ministerios, vol. 482, Secretaria.

[18] Between 1974 and 1976, Church and Kennedy led successful efforts in Congress to curb military and economic aid to Chile on human rights grounds: Lars Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy toward Latin America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 255. Chile received particular attention following a congressional investigation into US complicity in the 1973 coup: see 'Covert Action in Chile, 1963–1973', Staff Report of the

human rights abuses committed by the dictatorship since September 1973, these broad initiatives were at least in part the result of the significant role played by Chilean exiles in the international human rights movement.[19] The dictatorship's ongoing struggle against international isolation due to its human rights record is the essential context in which to understand Chilean efforts to strengthen the relationship with El Salvador after Carter's inauguration.

While Carter's inauguration pitted US and Chilean interests in direct opposition, by placing all of Latin America's anti-communist dictatorships under the level of scrutiny that had been applied to the Pinochet dictatorship since 1973, the Carter administration also inadvertently created a constituency of like-minded regimes which were similarly affected. These regimes now held a direct stake in mitigating the impact of increased international human rights scrutiny and proved capable of organising against US policy in international forums, a fact acknowledged within the Carter administration.[20] It was in this context that the military dictatorship in El Salvador, under the presidency of Colonel Arturo Molina, and then General Carlos Humberto Romero from July 1977, was pinpointed as a natural anti-communist ally. Joining the governments of Brazil, Argentina, Guatemala and Paraguay in March 1977 in rejecting US military aid made conditional on human rights observations, the Salvadorean dictatorship had further ordered the immediate return of all Salvadorean military personnel

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Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, United States Senate (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1975).

[19] See Patrick William Kelly, 'The 1973 Chilean Coup and the Origins of Transnational Human Rights Activism', *Journal of Global History*, 8: 1 (2013), pp. 165–86.

[20] In October 1977, Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, recognised increased Latin American coordination against human rights initiatives in the UN and other international forums. Memorandum from Brzezinski to President Carter, 'Follow-up Letters to your Bilaterals with Latin American Leaders', 28 Oct. 1977, Argentina Declassification Project, Part 2. Material produced by the Argentina Declassification Project is accessible at https://www.intel.gov/argentina-declassification-project/records and https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/icotr/Argentina-Carter-Regan-and-Bush-VP-Part-2.pdf (both URLs last accessed 19 Aug. 2020).

undertaking training in the United States and Panama.[21] For Chilean observers, El Salvador was a regime that understood, like Chile, that the United States could not be relied upon as an ally in the anti-communist struggle. Moreover, in El Salvador Chilean diplomats saw a reflection of the Pinochet dictatorship's own narrative of Chile's struggle against communism and international scrutiny. In July 1977, the Chilean ambassador to El Salvador described how the Salvadorean government's attempts to combat the 'advanced form of terrorism' they faced at home had triggered a 'smear campaign' of human rights allegations from abroad that was similar to, if not as great as, that suffered by Chile since 1973.[22] A likeminded anti-communist regime, El Salvador was fertile ground for Chile's central foreign policy objective in 1977: addressing the international 'smear campaign' regarding human rights abuses.[23]

The primary tool employed by the Pinochet dictatorship to increase influence in El Salvador in 1977 and 1978 was the provision of scholarships for both military and civilian Salvadoreans to train in Chile. Identifying in March 1977 that Chile's existing military and professional influence was due in large part to the 'great number of professionals that have graduated from our universities', the Chilean embassy in San Salvador sought to make the necessary contacts in order to produce 'a stream of scholarship holders to Chile' and deepen this influence.[24] This attitude was clearly in keeping with the goal stated in the embassy's 'Plan of Action' for 1977: to obtain the maximum possible influence in El Salvador in order to 'dismiss all attacks against Chile' with particular attention to those relating to the 'slanderous supposed violations of human rights'. This plan also explains the dictatorship's

[21] On El Salvador's rejection of US aid see: Telex, EmbaSanSalvador to DIRELAME [Dirección de Relaciones Exteriores], [no subject], 16 March 1977; EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual marzo 1977', 11 April 1977.

[22] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual julio 1977', 8 Aug. 1977; EmbaGuatemala, 'Envía respuestas cuestionario', 28 Dec. 1976.

[23] Señor Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores to Señor Ministro Jefe del Estado Mayor Presidencial, 'Derechos Humanos', 18 Aug. 1977, AMRE, Fondo Ministerios, vol. 480, Presidencia.

[24] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Datos sobre El Salvador', 3 March 1977.

enthusiastic response to the request made by the commander-in-chief of the Salvadorean military for two further scholarships for police training in Chile in November that year.[25]

Matters closer to home made strong relations with the Central American dictatorships more pertinent to Chilean interests in 1978. In January, the long-running dispute between Chile and Argentina over the two countries' southern border in the Beagle Channel resurfaced, producing a rupture in relations between what might have been two natural anti-communist allies. Bringing the countries to the brink of war and back again over the course of 1978, this dispute was directly transposed onto diplomatic efforts in El Salvador. As Argentina and Chile competed for supporters in international forums, El Salvador held greater significance than its small size might suggest. Latin America's anti-communist dictatorships constituted just eight of 26 states within the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1978; excluding Chile and Argentina themselves, just six natural anti-communist allies remained. As one of this small pool of potential support for Chile, El Salvador assumed great importance.

Correspondingly, the Chilean embassy was tasked with 'emphasising, in every circle, at every level and every opportunity that presents itself, the absurd and illegal position of the Argentine government' regarding the Beagle Channel dispute. In this context the Chilean military continued to increase support for its Salvadorean counterpart.[26] Over the year, ten military scholarships for Salvadorean officers were granted across Chile's military academies, alongside the introduction of a Chilean instructor to provide training within El Salvador's Centro de Estudios de la Fuerza Armada Salvadoreña (Salvadorean Armed Forces Training Centre).[27] In a later report the Chilean ambassador to El Salvador made an unequivocal statement as to how this military aid was conceived: scholarships were 'without a doubt' granted as a means to win Central American loyalties in international organisations in the future.[28]

Reports from the Chilean embassies in Guatemala and El Salvador leave little doubt that competition with Argentina was central to efforts to draw closer to their dictatorships. In

[25] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Plan de acción 1977', 7 Feb. 1977.

[26] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Envía plan de acción 1978', 18 March 1978.

[27] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Envía exposición reunión embajadores en América', 13 Feb. 1978.

[28] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Evaluación anual y apreciación II semestre 1980', 25 Nov. 1980.

August 1978, the Chilean embassy in Guatemala reported the extensive circulation of international editions of the Argentine daily *Clarín.* Observing its contribution to the 'wide diffusion of the Argentine point of view on the ongoing negotiations' on the Beagle Channel, the ambassador emphasised that this diffusion was 'without doubt unfavourable for our own national interests'.[29] In response, the embassy suggested the regular delivery of international editions of *El Mercurio* – the principal regime-loyal Chilean newspaper – to Chilean embassies in the region.[30] This response, accompanied by the distribution of embassy-produced news bulletins and the targeting of high-level officials to solicit support for the Chilean cause, was enough to secure Chilean supremacy: in October 1978 the Argentine embassy in El Salvador admitted that the depth of Chilean influence in the Salvadorean military, the 'virtual political power' in the country, supplemented by the dominance of Chilean materials in the local press, made Salvadorean support for Argentina in international arbitration very unlikely.[31] This fact was celebrated by the Chilean embassy.[32] Fascinatingly, as the dictatorships in both Chile and Argentina began providing material aid to the Central American dictatorships in response to growing concerns about the communist threat, their own national interests in regional Southern Cone politics led to competition, rather than cooperation. Even as the possibility of open conflict over the Beagle Channel faded following the beginning of the papal arbitration process in December 1978, the two regimes continued to operate independently of one another in Central America.[33]

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[29] EmbaGuatemala, 'Edición internacional del diario "Clarín" de Argentina', 1 Aug. 1978.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] Cable secreto no. 256, San Salvador para conocimiento exclusivo S.E. [Su Excelencia] Señor Canciller, 12 Oct. 1978, Archivo Histórico del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto, Buenos Aires, Argentina, Dirección América Latina, AH/0009.

[32] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Remite exposición para reunión de embajadores y jefes de misión', 26 Dec 1978.

[33] See Armony, *Argentina*, for a comprehensive exploration of Argentine involvement in Central America. This was more focused on military operations, and, after 1979, Nicaraguan Contra forces in particular, while Chilean involvement in both Guatemala and El Salvador

Notwithstanding broad satisfaction with these efforts to secure Salvadorean support both in the case of the Beagle Channel and on the subject of human rights in international forums, Chilean diplomats continued to malign the Carter administration's human rights policy as the central obstacle to fostering a closer alliance with the Salvadorean military leadership. In a report written in December 1978 for the annual meeting of Chilean ambassadors, the ambassador to El Salvador ascribed the failure to schedule a mooted trip by President Romero to Chile to the repercussions of the human rights policy. Despite recognising the valuable support from successive Chilean military and technical missions, US pressure had inhibited the Salvadorean government from making concrete gestures of friendship; fighting for its own international reputation, the Salvadorean government 'did not wish to be labelled, as much internally as externally, as an unconditional friend of Chile' despite 'continuous manifestations of friendship and affection demonstrated on an extra-official level by those very same authorities'.[34] The Chilean dictatorship would increasingly turn to these extra-official, non-state mechanisms to conduct its foreign policy in El Salvador.

'Waves of Violence' – Anti-Communist Concern as a Driving Force

If alleviating isolation and disseminating the Chilean position in its dispute with Argentina remained the aims of Chile's foreign policy in 1978, there was nevertheless a tangible shift in how the Pinochet dictatorship understood El Salvador's position within the wider Cold War struggle that year. As the incidence of kidnappings, bombings and assassinations grew throughout 1978, reports from the Chilean embassy depicted an increasingly fraught situation in the country, describing a 'wave of violence' that security forces seemed incapable of controlling.[35] Official figures for guerrilla activity in El Salvador in 1978 recorded 188 assaults and 43 kidnappings or assassinations. While these numbers would rise from 1979,

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was more focused on the development of the Extreme Right, with military assistance concentrated in *carabinero* (armed police) training.

[34] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Remite exposición para reunión de embajadores y jefes de misión', 26 Dec. 1978. This report lists instances of Salvadorean support for Chile regarding the Beagle dispute in the OAS and in human rights cases in the UN.

[35] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual marzo 1978', 3 April 1978; EmbaSanSalvador, 'Actos de violencia', 3 May 1978.

1978 nevertheless represented a substantial increase on previous years: the combined total assassinations and kidnappings for 1977 (33) and 1978 made up 60 per cent of those recorded across the 1971–8 period.[36]

The international context was critical. In nearby Nicaragua, left-wing guerrillas organised under the banner of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front, FSLN) were making rapid gains in their armed struggle against the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza, including the Sandinista takeover of the National Palace in August 1978. Two months later, the Chilean embassy reported how Nicaragua was 'a cause for concern in all circles' in El Salvador, observing that events there would affect every country on the isthmus.[37] The likely repercussions of a Sandinista victory were obvious: it would 'facilitate, by way of example and by geographic conditions' the use of violent uprising 'as a means of [communists] arriving in power in the rest of the Central American countries'.[38] By 1978, Central America had become a vital battleground in the Cold War.

Chilean diplomats, moreover, continued to perceive guerrilla activity in El Salvador through the prism of the Chilean dictatorship's own history of 1973; events in the isthmus were understood as symptomatic of an international communist plot. Using the very language employed by the military to justify its actions in the wake of the coup, in May 1978 the Chilean ambassador described the possible existence of a 'Plan Z' in the country – a plan for armed insurrection to install a Marxist government.[39] Faced with the prospect of Central America falling to international communism, in June 1978 the Chilean foreign ministry began requesting regular updates on the 'internal situation' in El Salvador; political violence

[36] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Remite exposición para reunión de embajadores y jefes de misión', 26 Dec. 1978.

[37] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual septiembre 1978', 5 Oct. 1978.

[38] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Remite exposición para reunión de embajadores y jefes de misión', 26 Dec. 1978.

[39] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual mayo 1978', 5 June 1978; the supposed existence of a 'Plan Z' under the Allende government – to bring about communist domination – was a central part of the Pinochet dictatorship's propaganda effort in the wake of the September 1973 coup. No evidence has ever been found of its existence.

was increasingly understood as an extension of neighbouring guerrilla movements directed from Havana.[40] There was little doubt of El Salvador's significance in the Pinochet dictatorship's regional outlook.

Meanwhile, US foreign policy remained a central factor in the Chilean dictatorship's interpretation of Salvadorean events. Throughout 1978 the Salvadorean government remained at odds with Carter's White House, voting against US-sponsored human rights resolutions in the OAS and seeking to compensate for the abrupt end to US military aid and sales by seeking suppliers elsewhere.[41] As levels of guerrilla activity rose, the United States continued to apply human-rights related pressure, making future military aid to counter the insurgency conditional on a reduction in human rights violations.[42] At this stage, Chilean concerns about the situation in El Salvador revolved not around the scale of guerrilla activity, but the Salvadorean security forces' apparent inability to deal with it. Rather than pure ineptitude, Chilean diplomats ascribed this incapacity to international, specifically US, pressure, forcing security forces to stay their hand. Reports of ongoing violence were consistently accompanied by commentary on the impact of US policy on the Salvadorean government's ability to respond: the authorities 'feared taking repressive measures given the

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[40] Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores (hereafter MRE) to EmbaSanSalvador, 'Acusa recibo de Oficio de la referencia', 19 June 1978; EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual septiembre 1978', 5 Oct. 1978.

[41] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual julio 1977', 8 Aug. 1977.

[42] State Department officials visited El Salvador in May 1978 to investigate allegations of human rights abuse. US pressure was also instrumental in the Salvadorean government's invitation to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to visit in January; the Commission's damning report, published later in 1978, increased international pressure on the Salvadorean government. United States, Department of State, 'El Salvador Trip [Updated Draft of Account of Trip to El Salvador by DOS Officials Schneider and Shelton]', Memorandum, 16 May 1978, in Digital National Security Archive (DNSA): El Salvador: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1977–1984, accession no. ES00065, available via https://proquest.libguides.com/dnsa/elsal1977 (last accessed 20 Aug. 2020); Michael McClintock, *The American Connection*, vol. 1: *State Terror and Popular Resistance in El Salvador* (London: Zed, 1985), p. 192.

possibility of being denounced by the United States as violators of human rights'.[43] Although the security forces began to act with a 'firmer hand' in the face of escalating guerrilla action from June 1978, their behaviour remained 'cautious' in light of ongoing international scrutiny.[44] While the parallel guerrilla struggle in Nicaragua contributed to a concern about the strength of the Salvadorean guerrilla forces and the support they were receiving from outside the country, Chilean diplomats continued to cite US support for international human rights scrutiny as the greatest factor undermining Salvadorean security forces' ability to maintain stability in 1978.

As political violence in El Salvador increased rapidly in the first half of 1979, the 'subversive threat' represented by the Salvadorean Left became the dominant concern guiding Chilean foreign policy.[45] On 9 February, the Fuerzas Armadas de la Resistencia Nacional (National Resistance Armed Forces, FARN) attempted to assassinate Colonel José Eduardo Iraheta, Sub-Secretary for Defence and Public Security, a known hardliner and a close ally of the Chilean regime. This was one of four guerrilla attacks on the Salvadorean security services over nine days, and in his report on the attacks the Chilean ambassador described the incident as demonstrative of rising levels of 'subversion and terrorism' that were making 'effective

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[43] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual marzo 1978', 3 April 1978.

[44] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe I semestre', 30 June 1978; EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe II semestre', 14 Nov. 1978. The Chilean ambassador did not elaborate on the nature of this 'caution', but was likely referring to the continued presence of dissenting opposition organisations in El Salvador, such as the Asociación Nacional de Educadores Salvadoreños (Salvadorean National Educators' Association, ANDES) and the Federación Nacional Sindical de Trabajadores Salvadoreños (National Trade Union Federation of Salvadorean Workers, FENASTRAS), which operated with relative freedom in 1978 (at least compared to the levels of repression they faced in subsequent years).

[45] Precise figures for guerrilla activity in El Salvador in 1979 are difficult to come by. By this point, the Chilean embassy provided combined death tolls – the product of both left- and right-wing violence – reporting 406 assassinations as well as 'numerous' disappearances for which no exact figure existed, for the first half of 1979. This number represents almost ten times the 1978 figure for guerrilla assassinations and kidnappings combined. EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe I semestre', 10 July 1979.

control by the security forces increasingly difficult'.[46] The growing frequency of such incidents also revealed the increased coordination among El Salvador's various guerrilla groups, beginning a process of unification that would culminate in the organisation of the Left under the single banner of the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, FMLN) in October 1980.[47]

The Pinochet dictatorship viewed these developments against their regional and international backdrop. In instructions for General Arturo Vivero Ávila, the new Chilean ambassador to El Salvador, dated March 1979, the Chilean foreign ministry emphasised the importance of events in Nicaragua, where the FSLN were edging closer to victory over government forces. The vice-minister of foreign relations, General Enrique Valdés Puga, warned the new ambassador 'not to underestimate the danger that it would represent for El Salvador' if a 'Castroist' government were installed in Nicaragua, emphasising the serious implications these events would have on El Salvador's internal stability.[48] The Chilean dictatorship understood the entire Central American isthmus to be threatened by international forces of 'subversion' emanating from Cuba; this was its central concern in El Salvador subsequently.

Once again, Chilean policymakers perceived 'subversion' and 'terrorism' in Central America as intimately connected to their own domestic ideological struggle: from early 1979 the Chilean foreign ministry began requesting information regarding the presence of Chilean exiles in El Salvador.[49] This request was likely prompted by the knowledge that Chilean *Miristas* – members of the Chilean armed Left in exile – were fighting alongside the FSLN in Nicaragua from September 1978.[50] Although there is a little evidence of Chileans within

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[46] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual febrero 1979', 6 March 1979; EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informa sobre atentado a Subsecretario Defensa y otros actos terroristas', 12 Feb. 1979.

[47] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual febrero 1979', 6 March 1979.

[48] MRE to EmbaSanSalvador, 'Remite instrucciones', 2 March 1979.

[49] *Ibid.*

[50] '*Miristas'* are members of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Left Movement, MIR), Chile's largest far-left guerrilla group founded in 1965 and operating from exile during this period. On Chilean exiles in Nicaragua, see Victor Figueroa Clark,

FMLN ranks before 1981, it is significant that Chilean officials understood rising guerrilla activity in El Salvador as being rooted in the same ideological struggle in which the regime was engaged at home.[51] If these struggles shared common roots, it followed that the Chilean model could provide a common solution.

The Chilean foreign ministry continued to identify US policy as a major factor in this increasing instability. In those same instructions to the new Chilean ambassador to El Salvador in March 1979, Vice-Minister Valdés Puga attributed President Romero's 'moderate and cautious attitude' to reprimanding terrorists to the 'fear of being accused of violating human rights'. Despite the legal powers that the Salvadorean government had granted itself in the 1977 Ley de Defensa y Garantía del Orden Público (Law of Defence and Guarantee of Public Order) – which had given the government the right to arrest and detain anyone it judged to be acting against the 'national interest' – Romero 'did not dare take drastic measures that could be the object of censure by the US government'.[52] Indeed by the time Valdés Puga's instructions reached the Chilean embassy, Romero had bowed to international and domestic pressure and repealed the law.[53] The role of US policy in this decision was confirmed in an audience with Romero in June 1979, where the Chilean ambassador heard from the horse's mouth of the US State Department's great pressure upon the Salvadorean government not to 'take a hard line on the domestic front'.[54] The US preference for a softer line against the Left paired with moderate reform in line with the demands of the rapidly growing popular opposition contrasted sharply with what the Chileans

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'Chilean Internationalism and the Sandinista Revolution, 1978–1988' (Dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2011), pp. 95, 121, 298.

[51] On the presence of Chilean exiles fighting alongside the Salvadorean FMLN, see Javiera Olivares Mardones, *Guerrilla: combatientes chilenos en Nicaragua, El Salvador y Colombia* (Santiago: Ceibo Ediciones, 2017), p. 101.

[52] MRE to EmbaSanSalvador, 'Remite instrucciones', 2 March 1979.

[53] 'El Salvador to Repeal "Public Order" Law Cited as Tool of Repression', *The Washington Post*, 28 Feb. 1979.

[54] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual junio 1979', 5 July 1979.

believed to be the only commensurate response: the swift application of the full force of the security services.

One aspect of the Chilean response to these events over the first months of 1979 was the strengthening of existing military ties. This was a period of 'consolidation' of military exchanges, with 12 members of the Salvadorean armed forces travelling to Chile for training in the first half of 1979. Among them was a major, Julio César López Yanes, who would receive instruction at the Instituto Superior de Carabineros – Chile's police academy – indicating the increased focus on supporting the Salvadorean security forces in counterinsurgency measures.[55] However, as Chilean diplomats in El Salvador continued to highlight the security forces' need for military instruction in combatting urban and rural guerrillas, as well as the acquisition of arms and munitions, it was through less formal, more personal links that this support was discussed.[56] While the public institutional links between the militaries remained of importance to bilateral relations, business began to be conducted through personal connections with members of the military within government, as well as members of conservative organisations with extreme right-wing tendencies and sympathetic to the Chilean dictatorship as a model of development.

Jaime Guzmán's personal trip to El Salvador in February 1979 was an early sign of these connections between the Pinochet dictatorship and groups on the Salvadorean Extreme Right that lay beyond state and military hierarchies. As the most influential figure in the dictatorship after Pinochet himself, Guzmán was the central architect of the dictatorship's ideological base and primary author of the 1980 constitution. In El Salvador, Guzmán was hosted by the Asociación Nacional de la Empresa Privada (National Association of Private Business, ANEP), a pressure group funded by the Salvadorean business elite and a fierce opponent of land reform – a central demand of much of the Salvadorean political spectrum. It was from ANEP, and associated far-right groups such as the Frente Agropecuario de la Región Oriental (the Western Region Agrarian Front, FARO), as well as the Agencia Nacional de Seguridad Salvadoreña (the Salvadorean National Security Agency, ANSESAL) and the Organización Democrática Nacionalista (National Democratic Organisation,

[55] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual enero 1979', 5 Feb. 1979; EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual febrero 1979', 6 March 1979.

[56] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe I semestre', 10 July 1979.

ORDEN), its rural paramilitary arm, that the Salvadorean Extreme Right would coalesce into a cohesive political force in subsequent years. While the ostensible purpose of Guzmán's visit was the promotion of the Chilean developmental model, it is nevertheless significant that ANEP, rather than the Salvadorean government, facilitated the connection: personal links would assume increased importance after the October 1979 coup.

The following month, the aforementioned Colonel Iraheta, Sub-Secretary for Defence and Public Security and a known associate of the rightist organisations cited above, approached the Chilean embassy in a strictly personal capacity, requesting a trip to Chile to hold personal discussions with Pinochet concerning the situation in El Salvador and the potential for the Chilean government to support the armed forces.[57] A former scholarship holder to Chile who had spent a year as an assistant professor in the Salvadorean Academia de Guerra, Iraheta cited unofficial approval for his mission from President Romero and emphasised his admiration for the Chilean regime as a successful government in the face of a communist threat. The stated objectives of the visit were explicit: Iraheta sought Chilean help in the conversion of El Salvador's small Escuela de Policía (Police College) into 'something more professional in accordance with the needs of the present', wanted to enquire about the 'possibility of acquiring artillery munition and recoilless rifles', and wished to discuss Chilean offers to train El Salvador's military personnel.[58] Although the visit did not come to fruition until September, after the Nicaraguan Revolution in July 1979 – see the next section – it is nevertheless clear that from early 1979 the Chilean government was cultivating personal, non-state links to sympathetic individuals and groups in El Salvador; these same groups looked to Chile as a model for their counterinsurgency.

This shift towards transnational clandestine and, at least superficially, non-state ties is a reflection of how Carter's presidency altered the international system and correspondingly shaped the form of anti-communist support. While Carter's human rights policy did much to bolster international human rights scrutiny, in this instance rather than reducing human rights abuses it drove transnational anti-communist collaboration underground. Clandestine discussions such as those outlined here took place while the Chilean government's public

[57] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Solicita beneplácito visita subsrio. [subsecretario] defensa y seguridad pública de El Salvador', 5 March 1979.

[58] *Ibid.*

statements on events in Central America continued to emphasise the regime's commitment to non-intervention in other countries' affairs.[59] Similarly, the depth of the Pinochet dictatorship's concerns about events in Central America, and the nature of its response, were largely absent from the Chilean media, reflecting the success of its efforts to provide support to the Salvadorean military through clandestine channels.[60]

Changes to the Playing Field: the Nicaraguan Revolution and El Salvador's October Coup

As predicted over the first half of 1979, the Nicaraguan Revolution in July 1979 brought levels of violence – and concerns for regional stability – in El Salvador to new heights. In the face of the indisputable regional leftist guerrilla threat, the Chilean embassy perceived the Salvadorean security forces to be paralysed for fear of denunciation in the OAS and by the US State Department, thus allowing an outburst of street demonstrations, the occupation of churches and the rising incidence of kidnap and assassination.[61] The months after July 1979 marked an intensification of the unofficial links between the Chilean dictatorship and extreme right-wing individuals sympathetic to Chile within the Salvadorean government forged beyond the reach of international scrutiny.

Colonel Iraheta departed for Chile on 7 September 1979, accompanied by his chief, Minister for Defence and Public Security, General Federico Castillo Yanes. The pair were followed

[59] See, for example, 'Posición chilena ante el conflicto', *El Mercurio*, 20 June 1979, Hoover Institution Library and Archives (hereafter HILA), Hernán Sallato Cubillos Papers, Box 3.

[60] Interest in events in El Salvador and Central America more widely in the Chilean media appears to increase after 1979 from almost no coverage before. Right-wing publications reflected the regime's conviction regarding US responsibility for the instability in Central America ('Tras la marea sandinista: Momentos difíciles en El Salvador', *Qué Pasa*, no. 442, 4 Oct. 1979, BN); dissident magazines, such as *Hoy*, reported on the internal politics of the new ruling junta (see 'El Salvador: rebelión de moderados', *Hoy*, 17–23 Sept. 1980, BN). However, coverage remained sparse and shows no awareness of Chilean involvement in the region.

[61] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual septiembre 1979', 3 Oct. 1979.

four days later by the Salvadorean Foreign Minister, Dr José Antonio Rodríguez Porth.[62] Identified by the Chilean foreign ministry in March 1979 as a key ally for Chile in El Salvador, Rodríguez Porth, too, was associated with groups on the Salvadorean Extreme Right: he had negotiated on behalf of ANEP in the successful effort to defeat the 1976 agrarian reform proposals and travelled to Washington DC as part of an ANEP-sponsored delegation to defend the results of El Salvador's fraudulent elections in 1977.[63] Given its unofficial nature, documentation from Rodríguez Porth's visit is scarce, with Chilean diplomatic correspondence stating only that his motive for travel was 'strictly confidential' and would 'touch upon topics of bilateral interest'.[64] However, the telex from the Chilean embassy confirming the details of his visit came within a minute of another from the Chilean ambassador reporting an audience in the Salvadorean Foreign Ministry, where Rodríguez Porth had confirmed the Salvadorean government's intention to increase spending on military personnel and armed forces equipment.[65]

These clandestine connections to individuals within the Salvadorean government, however, were short-lived. The military coup on 15 October 1979 in El Salvador fundamentally changed the make-up of the country's government, and correspondingly its international position, particularly in relation to the United States. Led by young, moderate army officers, the coup established a five-man ruling junta composed of military and civilian members, including prominent figures from the popular opposition movement, chief among them Guillermo Manuel Ungo. Gaining the almost immediate backing of the US State Department and the liberal-leaning Catholic Church headed by Archbishop Óscar Romero, the junta

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[62] *Ibid.*

[63] MRE to EmbaSanSalvador, 'Remite instrucciones', 2 March 1979; Aaron T. Bell, 'Transnational Conservative Activism and the Transformation of the Salvadoran Right, 1967–1982' (PhD Dissertation, American University, Washington, DC, 2016), p. 144. *Ibid.*, Ch. 4, provides a detailed overview of the Salvadorean Right's successful opposition to the 1976 agrarian reform proposals.

[64] Telex, EmbaSanSalvador, 'Viaje ministro RR.EE. del Salvador [sic]', 4 Sept. 1979.

[65] Telex, EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informa arribo a Stgo. [Santiago] ministro RR.EE. El Salvador', 31 Aug. 1979; telex, EmbaSanSalvador , 'Reunión jefes estado El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras', 31 Aug. 1979.

announced a radical programme that included nationalisation of banks, land reform, and greater state control of the export crop sector.[66] Meanwhile, the new government immediately sought to distance itself from rightist groups operating both within and outside of the state. With mass retirement imposed on the upper echelons of the military hierarchy (14 generals alongside 46 colonels – almost the entirety), right-leaning military men were removed from across the government, including two of Chile's recent clandestine visitors, Colonel Iraheta and General Yanes.[67] ORDEN was disbanded, and the leader of the Extreme Right faction within the military, Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, lost his position, with the anti-subversive intelligence operation he operated, ANSESAL, closed down.[68] The almost complete reshuffle of the cabinet led to the ejection of Foreign Minister Rodríguez Porth, the third secret visitor to Chile that autumn, completing the severing of the government's visible links to the Extreme Right, and with it the personal and more clandestine connections fostered by the Pinochet dictatorship.[69]

For the Pinochet dictatorship, the coup and composition of the subsequent government led to a direct loss of influence. Compared to the staunch anti-communism of former President Romero, those making up the new government were, according to the Chilean ambassador's alarmist reports, 'communists, Christian Democrats, centrists, socialists …' with a strong church influence who would open the door to groups of the Extreme Left acting with force.[70] Blame for the coup lay with external actors: relentless US pressure concerning human rights, the 'subtle but efficient actions taken over many months by the government of Venezuela and the Christian Democrats of that country', alongside the pressure of the Catholic Church headed by Archbishop Romero had all contributed to the weakening of the previous regime.[71] These countries' involvement was deemed evident in the swing in Salvadorean foreign policy

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

[67] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Envía exposición embajadores', 18 Dec. 1979.

[68] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual octubre 1979', 5 Nov. 1979.

[69] *Ibid.*

[70] *Ibid.*

[71] *Ibid.*

toward their outlook, marking a departure from previous sympathetic stances towards the Southern Cone dictatorships and opposition to the Carter administration's human rights initiatives.[72] The coup marked a realignment in US–Salvadorean relations, as aid soon began to flow back into the country and US Ambassador Robert White became an influential advisor to the junta; correspondingly, Chilean diplomats acknowledged their immediate loss of political influence.[73]

Despite the new junta's professed reformist principles, the armed Left – quite correctly – took it to be a US-hatched government, and increased protests.[74] On the other hand, extreme right-wing factions, now purged from government, unleashed autonomous 'countersubversive' measures, convinced the new government was unfit to act against the ongoing communist insurgency. The result was a huge increase in political violence, with 9,000 Salvadoreans killed in the year following the coup; Archbishop Romero, assassinated by right-wing death squads under orders from D'Aubuisson in March 1980, was the most high-profile victim.[75] As 1979 drew to a close, the Chilean ambassador reported that 'violence, subversion, kidnap, terrorism and assassination reign in El Salvador'; the country was 'at the forefront of violence and subversion in Central America' where 'Marxists' operating under any number of disguises had taken the initiative, with their influence continuously growing.[76]

In these months, Chilean diplomats continued to perceive the situation through the lens of their narrative of the Chilean experience of the early 1970s, frequently contextualising subversive activity in those terms. In November 1979, the ambassador described how 'as happened in Chile under the last government, here it is occurring; the university students are wholly dedicated to political activism and subversive actions, supported by their teachers'.

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[72] The new government ended diplomatic relations with South Africa and voted against Chile in its dispute with Bolivia over access to the Pacific. EmbaSanSalvador, 'Envía exposición embajadores', 18 Dec. 1979.

[73] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual octubre 1979', 5 Nov. 1979.

[74] Crandall, *The Salvador Option*, p. 127.

[75] *Ibid*., p. 128.

[76] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe mensual diciembre 1979', 31 Dec. 1979; EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe II semestre, apreciación anual', 13 Nov. 1979.

The economic story was the same: similar 'to the phenomenon that occurred in Chile under the previous government', Marxist activity had produced a flight of capital, banks, and business in general, the closure of industries, the emergence of a black market, and rapidly rising inflation.[77] As in their own history of Chile under the Allende government, El Salvador was the target of international communism, and events there were of international significance. The following month, in December 1979, the Chilean 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'. For Chilean policy in El Salvador, the ambassador argued, it was these ideological tendencies that 'in bilateral politics play, and will play in the short and medium term, a role of first importance'.[78]

By the close of 1979 the threat of left-wing revolution was the central preoccupation in Chilean–Salvadorean relations and Central America the principal arena of the Cold War. With its closest allies outside of government, the Pinochet dictatorship focused on non-state mechanisms and military connections to continue its support for the Salvadorean Extreme Right, who saw the Chilean model as the correct response to the 'subversive' threat. Emphasising the pivotal role of the armed forces in Central American politics, the Chilean embassy remained focused on retaining Chilean influence through existing links to the military and security forces, convinced that, although isolated from government politicians, military relations had 'not changed in the fundamental sense'.[79] A month after the coup, the ambassador raised the possibility of cementing this influence through a mission to organise the training of Salvadorean security forces under one roof (a topic of discussion on Colonel Iraheta's pre-coup trip in September), as well as an increase in provision of scholarships to Chile for officers at every level of the security forces.[80]

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[77] *Ibid*.

[78] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Envía exposición embajadores', 18 Dec. 1979.

[79] *Ibid.*

[80] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informe II semestre, apreciación anual', 13 Nov. 1979.

Events in Salvadorean domestic politics in early 1980 slightly mitigated the loss of Chilean political influence after the October coup. A move led by right-wing elements within the military to limit the scope of the structural reforms of the first Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno (Revolutionary Junta Government, JRG) in late December 1979 led to its collapse in early January, with the resignation of all three civilian members alongside the majority of the cabinet. The second JRG that followed was less reformist in its composition, with the entry of the Partido Demócrata Cristiano (Christian Democratic Party, PDC) to the Salvadorean government and the solidification of the positions of two leading conservative (and pro-Chile) voices from within the armed forces: Defence Minister General José Guillermo García and then head of the National Guard, Colonel Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova.[81] The establishment of the second junta opened a chasm between the US-supported Christian Democrat faction and the more combative anti-communist group backed by the military.[82] Despite the political orientation of the second JRG, it remained a negative factor in Chilean evaluations of El Salvador's situation in 1980. The presence of Christian Democrats in government drew comparisons to Chile's own recent past: Chilean Christian Democrat leader Eduardo Frei Montalva's presidency (1964–70) had preceded Allende's election, and PDC votes had played a crucial role in the subsequent congressional approval of Allende's victory. In the dictatorship's view, Christian Democracy was thus considered one step away from communism.[83] Chilean embassy officials made these fears explicit in their assessment of the situation: an April 1980 report describing the 'potentially explosive' conditions in Central America emphasised how the state of affairs had been 'aggravated yet more by the ostensible intervention of the United States relating to human rights'. Unstinting US support for the Christian Democrats was 'opening the door to Marxism in Central

[81] Bell, 'Transnational Conservative Activism', p. 171.

[82] Crandall, *The Salvador Option*, p. 129.

[83] Suspicions about Christian Democracy as an instrument of communism had been voiced long before Allende's election and became incorporated into the dictatorship's historical narrative after 1973. See, for example, Fabio Vidigal Xavier da Silveira, *Frei, el Kerensky chileno*, 4th edn (Buenos Aires: Cruzada, 1968); Marcelo Casals Araya, *La creación de la amenaza roja: del surgimiento del anticomunismo en Chile a la 'campaña del terror' de 1964* (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2016), Ch. 5.

America' while the Pinochet dictatorship remained convinced that its methods to overcome communist subversion were transferable to the Central American context.[84] In the words of the Chilean ambassador to El Salvador, Chile was 'a visible example of peace, tranquillity, labour freedom and economic and social development for all the countries of Central America, and especially for El Salvador'.[85]

Rooted in this conviction of the applicability of its own experience, alongside the continued maintenance of military links, the Chilean embassy in San Salvador sought to promote Chile's 'political process and the economic development achieved' in the country. This project had the intention of 'informing, representing, observing and obtaining support for our country on all fronts of action, in order to achieve a thorough knowledge of the true image of our current economic and social development, of its internal stability and political development' so as to 'bring together both nations for the benefit of their own activities derived from international activities'.[86] While these aims were partially rooted in the dictatorship's long-term goals of fostering a more positive international image, in the context of the discussion of the situation in El Salvador and Chile's role in supporting the armed forces there is little doubt the dictatorship genuinely believed it had valuable advice to give to those who were receptive to a 'Southern Cone' solution to the ongoing conflict in El Salvador.

The Salvadorean Extreme Right and Transnational Anti-Communist Networks

In focusing on non-state mechanisms to foster relations with the Salvadorean Extreme Right, the Pinochet dictatorship intersected with a wider transnational anti-communist movement. Undertaken largely outside of the official business of Chile's embassy, Chile's connections with the development and institutionalisation of the Salvadorean Extreme Right can be gleaned from the memoir of David Ernesto Panamá Sandoval, a founding member of the Frente Amplio Nacional (National Broad Front, FAN), and its successor organisation, the

[84] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Plan de acción 1980', 28 April 1980.

[85] *Ibid.*

[86] *Ibid.*

Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (Republican National Alliance, ARENA), the party of El Salvador's Extreme Right founded in 1982.[87]

Conscious of the possibility of a US-sponsored coup (which followed days later), individuals from disparate organisations on the Salvadorean Extreme Right had begun organising in earnest in early October 1979. From its inception, this undertaking had transnational dimensions. At its core was Panamá Sandoval, leader of the small, inexperienced extreme-right group the Movimiento Nacionalista Salvadoreño (Salvadorean Nationalist Movement, MNS) and, crucially, nephew of Mario Sandoval Alarcón, leader of the Guatemalan Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (Movement for National Liberation, MLN) and former Guatemalan vice-president (1974–8). A heavyweight in global anti-communism, Sandoval Alarcón held senior positions in the World Anti-Communist League (WACL) and its Latin American chapter, the Confederación Anticomunista Latinoamericana (Latin American Anti-communist Confederation, CAL); this involvement had taken him from Washington to Taiwan and across the Southern Cone, speaking and building connections at the League's conferences.[88] Through these conferences, and as vice-president, Sandoval Alarcón had proven to be a 'great friend of Chile' and the most significant pro-Chile voice in Guatemala. Sandoval Alarcón made annual trips to the Southern Cone – more frequently after leaving government – and by 1980 he had been decorated with Chile's highest military honours.[89]

Following the approach by his nephew in October 1979 and in the wake of the coup of that month, Sandoval Alarcón put the MNS in contact with the now infamous D'Aubuisson, recently discharged from the army and de facto leader of El Salvador's rapidly multiplying

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[87] David Ernesto Panamá Sandoval, *Los guerreros de la libertad*, 2nd edn (San Salvador: self-published, 2008).

[88] Sandoval Alarcón received congratulations from the CAL following his election as vice-president in 1974; he travelled to the Southern Cone (primarily, Paraguay and Chile) on an almost annual basis during the mid-late 1970s, attending WACL/CAL conferences there (in Asunción in 1977/9 and Buenos Aires in 1980) as well as in Taiwan (1977 and 1981) and Washington DC (1978). Alarcón's activities within WACL and CAL are well documented in files held at HILA (Kyril Drenikoff Papers, Box 60), and in the CDyA.

[89] EmbaGuatemala, 'Responde cuestionario', 25 April 1977.

death squads.[90] Together the two assembled FAN, uniting figures from ANEP, two right-wing women's organisations, the Asociación Salvadoreña de Industriales (Salvadorean Industry Association, ASI) and members of the recently-dissolved ORDEN, among others. Opposition to agrarian reform and belief in the need to apply an iron fist against the 'communist subversion' united these organisations. FAN members shared the Chilean dictatorship's outlook on the Salvadorean government: as early as the 1977 elections, the far-right FARO had issued a stark warning about the dangers of Christian Democracy, citing the Chilean example as proof that Christian Democrats were little more than a cover for communist subversives intent on destroying democracy from within.[91] Needing to convince the armed forces to break their pact with the PDC and bring the junta's structural reform initiatives to a halt, the Extreme Right cultivated an alternative supply of military and political support akin to that offered by the United States, which held the fragile armed forces–PDC coalition in place.[92] In search of this support, they travelled south. Utilising Sandoval Alarcón's connections, in March 1980 three members of the FAN, Panamá Sandoval among them, toured the Southern Cone dictatorships.[93]

In Chile, the group were 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). 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'.[94] There is little doubt that these clandestine trips were with the knowledge of – and likely directed by – the Chilean dictatorship. On the one hand, the Chilean dictatorship responded to the October coup and ensuing rising violence through more traditional foreign policy mechanisms with increased support for the beleaguered Salvadorean military. On the other, the advent of a US-supported Christian Democrat government in El Salvador had driven the

[90] Panamá Sandoval, *Los guerreros de la libertad*, p. 49.

[91] Bell, 'Transnational Conservative Activism', p. 135.

[92] *Ibid.*, p. 198.

[93] Panamá Sandoval, *Los guerreros de la libertad*, p. 49.

[94] *Ibid.*

Pinochet dictatorship's allies outside of the formal apparatus of the state, and into opposition. If previously Chile had been supporting a government that shared its ideological opposition to US interventionism, from October 1979 it was now working with its allies outside government to oppose that same US policy.

These connections between the Chilean dictatorship and the Salvadorean Extreme Right were thrown into sharp – and relatively public – relief on the occasion of D'Aubuisson's attempted coup in May 1980. Although the coup itself failed in its principal aim of seizing control of the Salvadorean government and the conspirators were arrested by officers under the command of moderate junta member Colonel Adolfo Majano, from this point on the PDC remained in power only in name. With Majano facing widespread rebellion from conservative elements within the armed forces, D'Aubuisson and his allies were released from imprisonment within days, and shortly afterwards progressive officers began to be removed from positions of influence within the government and armed forces, culminating in the ousting and exile of Majano himself in December 1980. Without the support of the armed forces, the reform programme was halted with immediate effect, and was eventually formally rescinded. The conspirators had succeeded in curtailing reform efforts and neutralising the PDC and progressives in the military. In the months that followed, state violence increased exponentially, with civilian casualties in turn driving the swift radicalisation and unification of the armed Left.[95]

The May coup bore traces of the growing web of connections between the Salvadorean Extreme Right, the Pinochet dictatorship and other transnational right-wing actors. Made up largely of former army officers ejected from their positions in October 1979, among the coup plotters was none other than long-time ally of Chile, former Sub-Secretary for Defence and Public Security Colonel Iraheta.[96] In a clandestine interview following the coup D'Aubuisson expressed his high esteem for the Chilean government, with accompanying reporting citing the March 1980 FAN trip to the Southern Cone and stating that the group had received

[95] Bell, 'Transnational Conservative Activism', p. 221.

[96] 'Frustrado golpe de estado en El Salvador', *El País*, 2 May 1980.

'ideological and economic support' there.[97] Elsewhere in the media, supporters of the government were quick to highlight D'Aubuisson's connections to the US conservative movement, revealing parts of the wider anti-communist network organising in opposition to Carter's foreign policy. US Ambassador White pointed to FAN's links to wealthy Salvadorean exiles living in the United States, while the Salvadorean press named prominent supporters in Congress, including Senators Strom Thurmond (Republican, South Carolina), Richard Stone (Democrat, Florida), S. I. Hayakawa (Republican, California) and Harry F. Byrd Jr (Independent, Virginia).[98] These individuals were firmly enmeshed in the wider conservative movement and had almost all, at various stages, been involved in campaigns for greater US support for anti-communist governments and groups from Chile to Angola.[99]

These connections point to the way in which the Pinochet dictatorship used the transnational anti-communist network to promote its model of governance, with adherents in both hemispheres. In El Salvador, it continued to seek to foster an image of itself as a model for the successful defeat of communist insurgency. While the October coup made this goal difficult within government, the dictatorship had found a receptive audience among those on the Extreme Right. In his report on D'Aubuisson's statements post-coup, the Chilean ambassador to El Salvador described how there were those in El Salvador who 'continuously speak of a "*pinochetazo*" in the sense of imposing an exclusively military government in order to impose order, act firmly against subversion and bring about the structural changes that the country requires'. The ambassador attributed this positive impression of Chile to D'Aubuisson's public declarations, which had appealed to the Centre and the Right 'making them aware that the Southern Cone countries' position and solution would be correct for the resolution of the Salvadorean case'.[100] Despite the October coup and the strength of the US

[97] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Continúa información sobre entrevista clandestina a Mayor D'Aubuisson', 27 May 1980.

[98] The Christian Democrat mayor of San Salvador, Julio Adolfo Rey Prendes, also published a statement in *Prensa Gráfica* linking FAN to the Southern Cone. EmbaSanSalvador, 'Informa sobre intento golpe de estado', 13 May 1980.

[99] See Burke, *Revolutionaries for the Right.*

[100] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Continúa información sobre entrevista clandestina a Mayor D'Aubuisson', 27 May 1980.

commitment to the PDC, there remained significant pockets of admiration for Pinochet's Chile in the Salvadorean military and society. The political influence of these admirers was at least partially restored in the wake of the failed May 1980 coup and strengthened once more following Colonel Majano's departure from the junta and subsequent exile in December that year. Enmeshed in the wider transnational anti-communist network, the Pinochet dictatorship would continue to use these connections to increase its influence and bolster its reputation in El Salvador, while providing support to likeminded anti-communists in Central America more widely.

End Points: The 1980 Presidential Elections and Carter's Departure

Members of FAN visited Chile once more in September 1980, during the trip that the delegation, this time headed by D'Aubuisson himself, made to the CAL conference in Buenos Aires.[101] A crucial venue for the Latin American Extreme Right, the conference was a forum for the discussion of Southern Cone perspectives on, and intervention in, the ongoing conflicts in Central America. By this point, the upcoming US election was also the focus for concern. The Pinochet dictatorship's perspective had not changed: as in early 1977, in mid-1980 the United States remained the greatest threat to the regional anti-communist struggle, while El Salvador had become that struggle's central battleground. At its core, the Chilean government believed the problem lay in Carter's basic misunderstanding of the communist threat and how to deal with it. Despite massive US military aid to El Salvador after the October coup, the Carter administration's commitment to land reform and the civilian presence in government, coupled with its refusal to publicly sanction all-out military counterinsurgency, convinced Chilean diplomats that US foreign policy continued to undermine the anti-communist struggle and empower guerrilla forces.[102]

In July 1980, the Chilean ambassador to El Salvador spelled out this perceived 'fundamental contradiction' within the Western bloc during the Carter years. 'The world anti-communist

[101] Panamá Sandoval, *Los guerreros de la libertad*, p. 95.

[102] For an idea of the scale of US military aid to El Salvador after October 1979, in the six months after the coup Washington provided more military aid to El Salvador than during the entire Military Assistance Program (MAP – the principal source of US military aid, active between 1950 and 1969): Crandall, *The Salvador Option*, p. 154.

leader', he claimed, was, as a result of his actions, 'the ally of Marxism'. Carter's approach was 'arbitrary, one-sided and unobjective', and sought to impose democracy without 'respecting the life cycle of the states' in which 'democracy is suspended temporarily, precisely to realign that same democracy'.[103] This justification – that a period of authoritarianism was essential to create the proper conditions for 'democracy' to flourish safely (without a 'communist' threat) – lay at the core of the Pinochet dictatorship's own ideological justification for a 'protected democracy' at home, as well as its support for what it understood to be similar anti-communist dictatorships abroad. Without a change of US administration, the prospect of El Salvador falling to communism and taking with it 'the fate of all of Central America' followed by Mexico, Venezuela, and even eventually the Southern Cone, was considered very real by the Pinochet dictatorship.[104] It is a fascinating counterfactual proposition that despite the local disputes that fractured Southern Cone anti-communist unity in the late 1970s, the Chilean ambassador went on to suggest that if Carter's foreign policy approach continued, 'it would seem important to consider, on the part of the South American governments, the study of a coherent policy to confront communism' to balance against the consequences of US policy.[105] Although the United States' international influence and the reach of the international human rights movement made open dissent an illogical option in the late 1970s, behind closed doors the Pinochet dictatorship remained convinced of the detrimental impact of Carter's human rights policy on the anti-communist struggle in Central America and worldwide and worked hard to oppose it.

While Crandall's work has shown that the policy of Ronald Reagan's administration in El Salvador did not mark as radical a departure as Reagan's fiery rhetoric during the 1980 presidential campaign might have suggested, US intervention in support of Contra forces in Nicaragua and apparent willingness to confront communism on a global level appear to have been sufficient to end Chilean ideas of Southern Cone extraterritorial collaboration and alleviate fears of an imminent communist revolution in El Salvador.[106] Yet while 1977 can be accurately pinpointed as the beginning of the escalation of Chilean engagement, January

[103] EmbaSanSalvador, 'Envía apreciación sobre América Latina', 16 July 1980.

[104] *Ibid.*

[105] *Ibid.*

[106] Crandall, *The Salvador Option*.

1981 was not its end. Continued US support for the PDC – and that party's close victory in maintaining executive power in 1982 and 1984 – left space for the Salvadorean Extreme Right's international connections to continue beyond the state, embedded in the larger transnational anti-communist network that coalesced around Central America in this period.[107] On one occasion in 1982 these connections were utilised to solicit 10,000 rifles from the Chilean government to arm the reformed paramilitary group, ORDEN, a transaction that took place explicitly 'behind the Salvadorean government's back'.[108] While this article focuses on Chilean–Salvadorean relations within the context of the unique inter-American dynamics generated by the Carter administration's human rights policy, the story of Chilean aid to the Extreme Right in El Salvador does not fit neatly within the parameters of the presidential term; much more remains to be researched regarding the dynamics of Latin American anti-communist involvement in Central America during the conflicts of the 1980s.

Conclusion

It is clear that the Carter presidency profoundly altered the dynamics of inter-American relations. For the Pinochet dictatorship, Carter's human rights policy represented a direct attack on the Southern Cone dictatorships' records against 'subversion' and threatened the stability of anti-communist governments across the hemisphere. In this context, that is, in the absence of US support, the guerrilla threat in El Salvador presented an opportunity for the Pinochet dictatorship to promote its own anti-communist model – *pinochetazo* followed by *institucionalización* – as a solution. If Chilean involvement in El Salvador was initially driven by national interest and the need to combat Chilean isolation, as Chilean concerns over the Beagle Channel dispute declined from late 1978, concern over guerrilla activity in El Salvador rose conversely, soon becoming the defining factor in Chilean–Salvadorean relations. In response, the Chilean armed forces provided concrete support, with the offer of increasing numbers of scholarships to their Salvadorean counterparts for training in Chile's

[107] Scott Anderson and Jon Lee Anderson identify the September 1980 CAL conference in Buenos Aires as a turning point in El Salvador's integration into the global transnational anti-communist network: *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, 1986), pp. 204–5.

[108] EmbaGuatemala, 'Informa interés en compra de fusiles', 30 March 1982.

academies and exploration of the possibility of Chilean assistance in expanding countersubversive training on Salvadorean soil. The means by which these links were forged – increasingly through extra-official clandestine visits – demonstrates how the ascendant human rights movement and associated international scrutiny altered the form taken by Chilean foreign policy, driving these acts of anti-communist support underground.

Two major events in 1979, the Nicaraguan Revolution and the October Coup in El Salvador, served to solidify Chilean opposition to US policy aims. The former convinced the Pinochet dictatorship of the dangers posed by US policy – standing by as communism spread in the region – while the latter placed Chilean allies outside of Salvadorean ruling circles, embedding Chilean–Salvadorean relations deeper into the wider transnational anti-communist network. To these actors, Chile served as a model for anti-communist victory; in both San Salvador and Santiago recent Chilean history was deemed a didactic example for anti-communists across Latin America who faced a common transnational communist threat. This episode in Chilean–Salvadorean relations demonstrates how the anti-communism that underpinned the Pinochet dictatorship was fundamentally international in outlook – granting it influence far beyond Chile's borders – and powerful enough to forge transnational connections across the continent. Salvadoreans on the Extreme Right seized upon the '*pinochetazo*' as a solution in their own ideological struggle.