CHAPTER II

U.S. INTERVENTIONIST POLICIES IN CENTRAL AMERICA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
The U.S. intervention in Central America has become a part of life of the people of Central American region. The United States has intervened with armed forces in Central America over 30 times and a total of 70 times in all of Latin America since 1850.¹

For a long time South America has remained a dark continent, though this epithet is used for Africa. Even today much is not known about this continent. Even in this dark area, some areas are darker than others. In this category comes the small states of Central America which are also known as 'Banana Republics'. For more than a century these countries have been suffering ferocious exploitation both by the local oligarchies and the U.S. corporate interests. Each was dependent on the other for the joint exploitation of the resources and manpower offered by this isthmus of seven countries - Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Central America and Panama.²

Following independence from Spain in 1821, the Central America countries passed through various phases of oligarchy, authoritarianism, and liberal democratic tradition. Except

29

for a confederation of the Central American States during
1924-38, by and large, these small countries were ruled by
elites or oligarchic groups during the 19th century and first
half of the 20th century. To be more accurate, the period
from 1890-1930, is characterized as oligarchic rule. "A small
group of families controlling the most productive land
constituted the dominant elite. Export-oriented growth
generated pockets of modernization and higher living
standards in the urban areas. But the middle class remained
weak".

The period of the 1930s was viewed as a "terribly
disruptive" one in Central America with new dictatorship
appearing in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua.

"While they typically ruled with strong arm methods,
they also often represented previously excluded middle
classes. Having restored order, these dictators encouraged
some economic development and social modernization, and they
enjoyed a degree of popularity - at least for a time."

In Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, during 1960s
and 1970s unparallel increase in corruption, greed and

(Delhi), vol. 6, no.1-9, 1985, p.3.
4. Hufford, n.1, p.75.
5. ibid., p.75.
repression was recorded resulting into the polarization of the societies.

The history of intervention in Central America is rooted in the Monroe Doctrine. The doctrine was named after the then President of the United States. It was declared in 1823 to check the growing threat of European imperialism. 'America for Americans' was the slogan of President Monroe which gave the illusion to the people of the continent (South American) that north (North America-USA) is going to defend them against any armed intervention from the outside.

In the same year (1823) the major five Central American countries - Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa-Rica, formed a confederation which lasted till 1838. This confederation was a great hurdle for U.S. intervention. Immediately after the break-down of the confederation, the United States turned its greedy eyes towards the untapped resources of Central America.

Before going further, it would be pertinent to briefly describe about the countries of Central America. There are seven countries - Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Central America and Panama, in this region.

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But mostly five countries are considered as the constituents of the Central American region. These five countries—Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Costa-Rica were once the members of the Central American confederation. Secondly, the Kissinger Commission appointed by President Ronald Reagan in 1983 on Central America, dealt with these five countries of Central America. Thirdly, the Arias peace plan which won the Noble Peace Prize, also took note of these five countries and gave a plan to resolve the imbroglio of Central America. In fact, out of these seven countries, Panama has its own history, which is different from these five Central American countries. Moreover, Panama remained a proxy of the United States from the very beginning. Belize, more or less, remained isolated. Being a very small country (Belize), the United States never felt threatened, so far as its national interest is concerned.

The focus of our study therefore, would be on the five members of Central American Confederation i.e. Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Costa-Rica. Nicaragua has been described in details in the next chapter, obviously the case history of four Central American countries i.e. Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Central America will be focussed upon in the present chapter. Moreover, major interventionist incidents in the countries of Central America are being analysed here which took place after the post second World War.
As mentioned earlier, the Central American isthmus remained a natural prey of the United States' interventions. Puppet regimes that played in tune with the U.S. interests were set up and toppled at will by the 'Big Brother', the United States, whenever they failed to perform efficiently their job. One thing should be made clear, that the United States interest in this region is not a recent one. Seshadri identifies the beginning of these interests, in a big way, since the time when Ferdinand de Lesseps dug the Panama Canal to link the Atlantic with the Pacific in order to facilitate the United States trade route links. Since then the surrounding small countries were always the targets of American intervention which was aimed at keeping the zone safely under its control. Even before this, the United States adventurer, William Walker conquered the Nicaraguan territory in 1855, and reintroduced slave trade to supply these slaves to the United States growing demand. These shameful acts of the United States interventions clearly show the malafied intention of America since the very beginning. The country which revolted in 1776 against the oppressive colonial rule, for the freedom, rights and democracy for its people, did totally contrary to the countries of Central America. The so called savior of democracy - the United States, played havoc with the basic rights of the people of the region.

If the economic interest of the United States is analysed, we find that only 7% of the total population of Latin America inhabits in the Central American region, and less than 2% of the total the United States exports and imports travel between the region. Therefore, Central America cannot be considered to be of economic interest to the United States or anyone else in the medium term. The most obvious explanation for the United States interest is therefore strategic rather than economic. Here, it's important to note that the United States' Central American policy is a part of emerging neo-conservative global strategy. This strategy comprises the following principles:

(1) Foreign policy and defence policy are inextricably linked;

(2) The United States must re-establish the military power, it supposedly lost in order to gain superiority on all military levels in all areas of the world;

(3) External defense, in all areas and countries, must always be considered in the light of the East-West conflict;

(4) The United States must regain its leadership of the "free world", and

The ends justify the means, even if the war is the means. 9

The above explanation is suffice to show the present problem in Central America. Let us have a look over the geopolitical and military situation of Central America. Geographically, this region is strategically located in the South of the United States. Being very close to the United States, this area has remained a major factor in influencing the foreign policy of America. This region is inhabited unevenly. Guatemala accounts for one-third of the total population of five Central American countries, and Costa Rica hardly one-tenth of the total. The total population of these five countries was 21.6 million in 1983. The average annual growth rate of these countries was around 3 per cent during 1971-83. This growth rate was not even in all these countries. Nicaragua recorded 2.4% which was minimum, and Honduras 3.2% which was maximum. Almost half of the population is urban and literacy rate of this region averaged around 70% in 1983. El Salvador is the most densely populated country in the region, having 200 inhabitants per sq. km.

The GDP (Gross Domestic Product) rates of the Central American countries have been tardy and even negative during the last few years. The decade of sixties and seventies showed an average annual Gross Domestic Product rate of around 6% for the region. It was negative during 1981-83.\(^\text{10}\)

Due to the domestic conflicting situation of these countries, the United States manipulated the scene and continued its assistance to the pro-US groups - whether governing or opposing. The conflicting situation in the region is also the product of the U.S. interventionism. How the democratic and the popular movements were crushed with heavy hand by the United States will be discussed in this chapter. Before any particular case study, a comparative US military help to the Central American countries will be useful to present here. The following table describes US military assistance after the post second World War era.

\[^{10}\text{Chawla, n.3, p.4}\]
Table - 1

U.S. Military Assistance to Central America (1945-84)
(Millions of US Dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Guatemala</th>
<th>El Salvador</th>
<th>Honduras</th>
<th>Nicaragua</th>
<th>Costa Rica</th>
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<td>1950-60</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945-63</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
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<td>1970</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
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<td>82.0</td>
<td>31.2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
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Table - 2

UNITED STATES AID TO CENTRAL AMERICA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. El-Salvador</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>196.5</td>
<td>128.2</td>
<td>132.6</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Honduras</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Guatemala</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Costa Rica</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Militarization of Central America" (Managua: Centre for International Communication, 1986), p.9

* Data from Keesings Contemporary Archives (Bristol: 1988), p.35896.

These tables show the military help, given to the governments of Central America. It is to be noted that in spite of this official help, enormous aid was given to topple the anti-US regimes. This happened with the 'Contras' in the case of Nicaragua and similarly with other countries. In order to check the US trained Contras, Nicaragua took help from international organisations which resulted into growing debt trap. By the end of the year 1982 $ 11.5 billion was the amount of debt on these countries.11

The Bipartisan Commission Report (Kissinger Commission Report) and the Reagan administration argue that the crisis

11. ibid., p.5.
in Central America originates in Moscow and Havana which now operates through Managua. However, saying that the Sandinista led government in Nicaragua is exporting revolution, is similar to argue that France was responsible for the U.S. revolution. Moreover, the crisis of Central America finds its roots in the policies of America which were being pursued at the time when the Soviet Union was not a threat as a Communist State.  

Carlos Fuentes, the Mexican diplomat and scholar, in a Harvard Commencement address, in 1983, asked his audience, "How can we (the US and Latin America) live and grow together on the basis of such hypocrisy?"

He further asked: "Why is the United States so impatient with four years of Sandinism, when it was so tolerant of forty-five years of Somocism? Why is it so worried about free elections in Nicaragua, but so indifferent to free elections in Chile? And why, if it respects democracy so much, did the United States not rush to the defense of the democratically elected President of Chile, Salvador Allenda, when he was overthrown by the Latin American Jaruzelski, General August Pinochet?"  


13. Hufford, n.1, p.77
Taking into account the present scenario of the crisis in Central America, two reports regarding the region to be discussed. The first, was Santa Fe-Document and the second, the Kissinger Commission Report. When Ronald Reagan came into power in 1981, America had lost Nicaragua during the Carter administration. At the same time insurgent forces of Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN) - FDR had gained popular support in El Salvador. President Reagan was hellbent to crush these popular movements.

The "Santa Fe Document", released in 1980 by the Council for Inter-American Security is considered to have been the blueprint for the White House policy on Latin America. The report emphatically asserts that "Detente is dead". The authors severely criticised the foreign policy of the Carter administration and warned that the position of the United States had weakened vis-a-vis the Soviets in Latin America. Roger Fontaine, one of the authors and Reagan's principal advisor for Central America, sums up the Santa-Fe Committee's posture saying:

"Armed minorities supported mainly by the Cubans are attempting to destabilize the Central American regimes to the point that I believe the possibilities for democracy as we know it will be cancelled, excluded. I believe, we must do something similar to the Truman Doctrine". 
Roger further explains that, "A Truman Doctrine means that we are going to give these countries - such as El Salvador and Guatemala - a good treatment, and more economic aid that they are receiving in the short-term, particularly in the case of El Salvador. A kind of combination of things that we did at the beginning of the 1960s with the Alliance for Progress and what the Truman Doctrine did for Greece and Turkey during the 1940s". 14

This document presented the problem as a creation of the East-West Confrontation, thus ignored, rather concealed the real cause of the present imbroglio.

President Reagan campaigned against the Carter administration for losing Nicaragua out of the U.S. monopoly. In order to get the funds sanctioned from the congress, President Reagan ordered for the appointment of Bipartisan Commission. Consequently, the Kissinger Commission was appointed in 1983, which presented its report on 10 January, 1984. Here, it would be worthwhile to mention that the Kissinger Commission presented the crisis of the region as a product of East-West confrontation. William Leo Grande says,

"It (The Report) would serve as Sugar Coating to congress to swallow the bitter bill of deeper U.S. involvement".  

The report does not propose an alternative to the present U.S. policy towards Central America. Rather, it inserts itself neatly within the framework of the U.S. military strategy. It is within this context that the Commission's proposals for El Salvador and Nicaragua, the most critical countries, must be understood. The Report implicitly proposes an increase in destabilizing activities against the Sandinista government and further U.S. military intervention.

Moreover Henry Kissinger's conduct of the enquiry itself was hardly serious. He spent in all eight hour in Nicaragua, six of them with opponents of the regime.  

Now, let us have a look on the recent developments in the region. In 1981, when Ronald Reagan became President of the United States the revolutionary movements in Central America had gained popular support. In Nicaragua, the Sandinista government was formed with the popular backing.


The National Guards which was a loyal army of Somoza rulers fled away in the border areas of Honduras. Similarly in El Salvador, guerrilla groups had united to form the FMLN (Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation). Both in El Salvador and Guatemala, the revolutionary forces were threatening the status-quo. These activities posed a sharp challenge to the oligarchic elites of Central America and to the regional control traditionally exercised by the United States. There were charges and counter charges by the United States and the regional regimes regarding the developments in the region. Between these charges, the episode of Iran-Contra affairs appeared on the international scene to unveil the real and nefarious character of America. 17

Oscar Arias, the President of Costa-Rica, proposed a plan in 1989, known as the 'Arias-peace-plan', to resolve the crisis of Central America. The plan was accepted by all the members, following the provisions of which, the Sandinista government had given concessions to the Contras and opposition. The point is not of concessions and relaxations, but the issue of confrontation lies somewhere in the mal-administration, repression, socio-economic backwardness and popular demand against the United States puppet regimes who had been ruling the region since the inauguration of Monroe

Doctrine. Unless and until the people's demands are not responded properly, these types of revolutions insurgencies and counter-insurgencies are bound to occur.

In the 1980s, where Central America is concerned, diplomacy has been relegated to a secondary role in achieving the U.S. foreign policy goals, while military strategy predominated. Serious negotiations are not even considered by the United States, except on a rhetorical level. After the Vietnam debacle and Bay of Pigs fiasco, America has created a Rapid Deployment Force in order to tackle any problem with a quick and heavy force and armaments. Moreover, a specialized force has been created to protect the U.S. interests in Central America, with its headquarter at Florida. 18

Now, focus will be on the U.S. interventionist machinations towards these countries. The case study of all the four countries will be analysed one by one.

**Gautemala**

In the post Second World War period, Gautemala was the first test of Washington's commitment to checkmate what it believed was growing communist influence through covert military intervention and the protection of American economic

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interest in Latin America. The punishing power of the "Collective defense" doctrine, unilaterally implemented, was shown to have greater relevance to the U.S. policy than the non-intervention principle. Speaking several years later, Eisenhower recalled 'a very desperate situation...in Central America, and we had to get rid of a communist Government which had taken over, and our early efforts were defeated by a bad accident and we had to help, send some help right away"19 He was referring to a CIA-operation to overthrow the government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman.

The threat that Arbenz was believed to pose for American interests in Latin America was his inauguration of a social revolution. Elected in 1950, Arbenz, in a much more concerted way than his predecessor, Juan Jose' Arevalo, took hard decisions aimed at the privileged classes and foreign capital that dominated the economy. Departing from the age-old tradition of ruthless dictatorship, Arbenz sought to set up political and economic system - through constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties, the legalization of trade unions, literacy and school programmes, political party competition (including the communist party, the PGT legalised in 1952), and most important, the Agrarian Reform Law of 1952.

Guatemalans in the early 1950s, especially if they lived in rural areas, experienced a new dignity as well as purely economic betterment. The U.S. interest got a jolt when the Arbenz government, through the 1952 law, expropriated the idle banana plantation land belonging to the United Fruit Company, the major American invester in Central America. In March 1953, Arbenz expropriated 2,34,000 uncultivated acres of land, offering as compensation $ 6,00,000 worth of 25 years bonds, based on the company's own earlier valuation of its land for tax purposes. The United Fruit Company rejected the bonds, valued at about $ 1.2 million, and, with the support of the U.S. State Department demanded $ 15 million. At the same time a massive public relations campaign was launched by the United Fruit Company propagating the benefits that had accrued to the Guatemalan economy on account of the United Fruit Company. A major thrust of the propaganda campaign was that communism was taking over in the Western Hemisphere.

It is questionable whether Guatemala under Arbenz was communist controlled, or posed a serious threat to the


security of the United States as declared by the US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles while persuading the Organization of American States to pass such a resolution. \(^\text{22}\)

"Guatemala was far from adopting a government economy or social system. She was receiving no aid from the Soviet Union or indeed had any relationship with the communist bloc. Arbenz was actually using the communist to help administer a continuation of the moderate reformist programme of Arevalo, who was a rather strong anti-communist. Arbenz's programme of nationalization was neither more rapid nor more onerous than those of other non-communist countries of Latin America and Asia". \(^\text{23}\)

**US steps to Overthrow Arbenz**

In the traditional pretext to contain the United States communism in Guatemala which according to the United States would jeopardize the sovereignty and independence of the American states; the Eisenhower administration decided to arrange a coup in late 1953, to overthrow the Arbenz regime.

**Appointment of Ambassador Peurifoy to Guatemala** in October, 1953, was the first step of the Eisenhower Administration's

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plan to get rid of Arbenz. He was diplomatic coordinator and State's on-the-spot liaison with the CIA. Carlos Castillo Armas, an army colonel trained in the United States, who had gone into exile in Honduras after the failure of the coup in 1950, was chosen to lead the attack. Armas entered into an agreement with Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, that provided for free election in Guatemala after the coup. The CIA plans known by the name of "Operation Diablo" became known to Arbenz who published these as a clear threat to Guatemala's of a U.S. sponsored attack supported by Guatemala's neighbours in violation of the charter of the Organisation of American States (OAS).

Mutual defense assistance agreements

The second step of Washington was the conclusion of mutual defense assistance agreements with Nicaragua and Honduras in April and May 1954. A army headquarter was set up in Honduras and later a training centre on Momotobito, a

Volcanic island off Nicaragua, supplied by Nicaragua's President Somoza. The Czech arms shipment to Guatemala which arrived on 15 May by a Circuitous route was consequently interpreted as posing a direct threat to neighbouring countries. It gave a pretext to the United States to send arms to Nicaragua.

The bombing and the overthrow of Arbenz

On 18 June, Armas led his band of 150 exiled mercenaries across the border from Honduras, US pilots flying four P-47 Thunder-bolts were bombing Guatemala city. On 22 June two of its bombers were destroyed by US Arbenz government. Eisenhower heeded to Allen Dulle's, the CIA Director, advice to provide additional bombers, knowing "from experience the important psychological impact of even a small amount of air support". On 27 June, Arbenz surrendered, Colonel Carlos Enrique Diaz took over the government for a short period. But he made some indiscreet remarks about the mercenary invaders and promised to fight them. It was followed by another CIA air raid and brought another change of government. On 8 July Castillo Armas, became the new President of Guatemala. The US Secretary of State, John


Foster Dulles interpreted the whole situation "being cured by the Guatemalans themselves". In the words of Richard Barnet, the downfall of Arbenz was "the direct result of the defection of the army under the stimulus of a foreign invasion financed and directed by the United States." In the next two years, 90 million dollars poured into Guatemala to shore up the Armas government. Armas returned the United Fruit Company's expropriated land and abolished the tax on interest and dividends to foreign investors, a reform which saved the United Fruit Company a great amount. The police system under Armas was almost entirely oriented towards countering subversion and communist attack, at its core, an intelligence system set up by the United States. His National Committee for Defence against Communism launched a campaign, jailing without charge or trial a great number of persons named under the "Black List" which mainly constituted pro-Arbenz and pro-communist people. After 1958, The Guatemalan government passed under the Presidency of General Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes. The Military Police was expanded enormously and fully integrated into the regular force of

27. ibid., pp. 165-83.
30. ibid., p.32.
internal security system, which mainly focussed upon counter-guerilla operations. Under the excuse of anti-communism, the country was militarized to a high degree. After the fall of Feuntes in 1963, the army in the next three elections insisted that all candidates should be military men to avoid the civilians to claim for Presidency. As Manuel Colom Argueta, the distinguished Guatemalan politician, observed shortly before his own assassination: "It is very comfortable to have a disposable President who can be traded in every four years for another 'democratically elected' one". 31

The successive governments of the 1970s were characterised by high levels of corruption, the use of repression as a mechanism to maintain social control, and electoral fraud. The Guatemalan army's counter insurgency strategy in 1980-85 period led to violence and terror throughout the length and breadth of the country. A great many atrocities were committed against politicians, journalists, labour organizers, educationists and peasants suspected of aiding the guerrilla movement. With the passage of time, this violence was directed more and more against the members of the indigenous community (Indian community). The

most famous killing took place at Panzos on 29 May, 1979, when Indians marched from El Duiche into the town to protest against the seizure of their lands. In July 1980, political killings occurred at the rate of twenty a day. The State politicians Manuel Colom Argueta and Alberite Fuentes were assassinated in 1979 by the death squads directly linked to the military.

Between 1980 and 1985 the Guatemalan army implemented its counter-insurgency strategy. A military coup in March 1982 brought General Efrain Rios Montt to power who was subsequently overthrown in the August 1983 coup that brought General Oscar Mejia Victores to the presidency. A politico-military strategy laid out in Guatemala army's "National Plan for Security and Development" was implemented through operations in three phases: 33

1. Victoria 82: a predominantly military phase, entailing an offensive against the principle guerrilla fronts, their strategic forces, and their civilian support base.

2. Firmeza 83: a military phase continuing the offensive against the guerrilla forces while also incorporating

32. Haward, n. 31, pp.117-119.

population control by concentrating the people in strategic hemlets.

3. **Encuentro Institucional 84 and Estabilidad 85**: the predominantly political phase in which electoral processes were initiated to provide for the election of a civilian government in an effort to re-establish political legitimacy.

Under the presidency of Mejía Víctores elections for the National Constituent Assembly took place in 1984, and the general elections in 1985 resulted in the election of a civilian President, Viricio Crezo of the Christian Democratic Party. It is maintained that the elections were held in the context of repeated and gross violations of human rights and of army control of a substantial part of the electorate; it also noted the high levels of abstention (including disqualified and blank ballots).[^34]

The substitution of a civilian President for a military general in Guatemala, in fact, did not resolve any of the country's basic dilemmas. The inauguration of new civilian administration gave Reagan administration an additional evidence to support its claim that there is massive trend towards democratization in Latin America. Reagan's continuing support to these so-called democratic/civilian governments in

[^34]: ibid., p. 165.
Central America is a pretext to support the counter insurgencies in Guatemala. The enormous economic and military aid to the earlier rulers, military or civilian, was a policy which was being pursued by the Reagan administration since 1981. To quote an incident of the aid sanctioned by the President Reagan reveals the shameful act on his part to aid counter-insurgencies someway or the other:

In September 1982 during the congress debate Elliot Abram, then Head of the State Department's Human Rights Division, charged the General Fernando Romeo Lucas Garcia's government with waging "a war against the populace". A US diplomat in Guatemala provided the details: "We knew perfectly well that they were raiding villages and taking out all the males from fourteen up, trying their hands behind their backs, torturing and killing them".35

How Reagan was involved?

This fact however was unknown to the Congress. Quietly behind the scene, Reagan administration had been presiding over the delivery to General Lucas' army of a large quantity of military goods. This huge aid exceeded in value those received from abroad by any Central American nation. Some of these deliveries were illegal, all were contrary to

congress's express intent to withhold lethal aid to Guatemala. 36

Though Reagan claims the establishment of democracy in the country after the 1986 elections in which Vinicio Cerezo was made the President, still the insurgency looms large over the country.

HONDURAS

Though the history of the U.S. intervention in Honduras is an old one, but in the 1980s, ever growing presence of the U.S. army in the country shocked the peace loving people of Central America and for that matter everyone irrespective of his/her country or continent. The Reagan administration had selected Honduras to be its chief ally in this embattled region and began a military build up in the country in preparation for increasing U.S. intervention in the region. Joint U.S.-Honduran military exercises became a constant feature of the Pentagon strategy in Central America and under the cover of these exercises tons of U.S. military equipments - radar stations, communication equipments, air crafts, troop quarters, and transport vehicles were brought into Honduras.

The present study proposes to trace the U.S. interventions in Honduras since 1823 - the year Monroe

36. ibid., p.22.
Doctrine was declared. The study also proposes to trace historically the U.S. connection with Honduras in overthrowing Arbenz's government Guatemala in 1954. The present chapter also endeavours to analyse the charges levelled by the United States against the region and the rationale behind enormous military buildup to promote the so-called democratic institutions in Honduras. Moreover, the study would comprehend the views of human rights subcommittee on refugee problem in Honduras and the views of various leaders, statesmen and academicians.

Since the early days of Central American independence, Honduras has had the tragic fate of being frequently used as launching area for troops attacking a neighbouring country. As explained in the foregoing pages, Honduras was one of the five members of Central American Confederation during 1824-38. But in 1838 Honduras broke-off from the United Republics of Central America. There were attempts to reestablish the federation. The major cause of this disintegration was the English and North-American interventions and to some extent the internal factions who wanted to gain power for their petty selfish interests.37

America remained behind the scene until 1906, when war was in progress with Salvador and Honduras against Guatemala. America tried to use its good offices to manipulate the situation. Another overt U.S. intervention came in 1911 through the U.S. Banana Company officials and mercenaries. In this intervention Honduran President Miguel Davila was overthrown. It is important to note here that despite frequent U.S. interventions in its democratic politics, Honduras played a marginal role in the U.S. strategic plans in the region. In 1930s the United States under the Presidentship of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who adopted Good Neighbour Policy towards Latin America, stressed the need to develop strong local dictators who would follow the U.S. policies without the presence of U.S. troops.

From early 1930s until the mid 1940s, most of the Central American countries were dominated by dictators: General Jorge Ubico in Guatemala; General Maximilio Martinez Hernandez in El Salvador, and General Tiburcio Carias Andino in Honduras.


The United States signed its first military treaty with Honduras in 1946. Immediately after this treaty U.S. started military training schools in Honduras as a part of programme to create a professional armed force. Guatemala was the first country to be intervened by the U.S. after the second World War. In 1954, the year Guatemala was attacked by CIA forces, a mutual assistance agreement was signed with Honduras in the month of May. An army headquarter was set up there. President Arbenz of Guatemala was overthrown. The following day Mr. Diaz was made the President who spoke against the U.S. forces, and was subsequently dethroned. On 8 July, 1954, Armas was made the President to serve the U.S. interests. This has been explained under the case study of Guatemala.

The decades of 1960s and 1970s were more or less peaceful. In 1969, there was a one hundred hour war between El Salvador and Honduras.

The decade beginning with 1980 was totally overshadowed by U.S military presence here. Through U.S. manipulations General Alvarez Martinez was made the head of Honduran army. He was made General through the tactics of U.S. State Department.40

After this, major development took place in setting up the U.S. bases in Honduras. Airfields, radar stations, sophisticated aircrafts, training centres and huge military ammunition were given to Honduras. Honduras became the Centre of U.S. military exercises. In order to justify the tremendous military buildup in Honduras since 1979, U.S. State and Defence Department officials have argued relentlessly that Honduras is under the threat of an attack by the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.41

Poverty-racked Honduras is hardly a flourishing democracy. Nothing is flourishing - except the American financed military establishments. Contrary to the Reagan's claims that U.S. has made democracy possible in Honduras, it has brought to the country a major military buildup.

Moreover, America efforts to make Honduras a base to fight against the Nicaraguan government and insurgents of Guatemala and El Salvador, Reagan administration has worked assiduously to build what the press dubbed the "iron triangle", namely, the coordination of armed forces of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador.42


American aid to Honduras in 1984 amounted to a record of $250 millions. Hondurans angrily pointed out that, despite the aid, much of the cost of the intensified training of their army at America's behest comes out of their own national pocket. It needs severe cuts to meet desperately needed health, housing and educational problem.

Hondurans feel that they have been and are being "used by the United States for its own purposes"; as a respected businessman said to a visitor, "If you are going to use us, at least you ought to pay for it". 43

Despite the increasing aid coming from the United States, demand is still increasing. It is because of the payments made regularly to maintain the US military build up. Recently 'Big-Pine' series have created insecurity in the minds of the people of this region. Now the question is not how much more aid Honduras will get but how much longer the American administration will be able to "use" Honduras to carry out its policies in Central America.

John Oakes, a former senior editor of the New York Times concludes, "Honduras is being used as a linchpin to carry out our (American) policies. We have "used" it (until recently) to train Salvadoran officers, whom Honduras hate

and fear more than they do the Sandinistas. (It is because of the fact that the Honduran army have in their memory the freshness of the incident of 1969 when the country's army was defeated by the El Salvador on border issue). We are using it as a base from which it conducts military operations against the Nicaraguan Government and intelligence operations against the Salvadoran rebels. We are using it by pouring in our own soldiers and material to support a succession of large-scale maneuvers on the Nicaraguan border. We are using it in a way that could foreshadow a permanent American military occupation of Honduras, whether Hondurans like it or not. 44

Allen Nairn traces the development of the U.S. policy and the military buildup in Honduras since 1981. The author identifies four reasons for huge military buildup.

1. To defeat/check the guerrillas in El Salvador.

2. To use Honduras as a base for stepping up Contra raids into Nicaragua.

3. In order to use Honduras as a platform for a U.S. buildup designed to intimidate the Sandinistas and Cuba.

44. ibid., pp. 290-91.
4. To keep Honduras as an eventual guarantor of regional stability, using its Air-Force (already Central America's largest) and Army to serve as successor to Somoza's National Guard.45

In the beginning of 1980s 'Operation Falcon's Eye', a naval maneuver was organised which was followed by a series of 'Big Pine Operations'. 'Big Pine I' marked the emergence of Honduras as an open U.S. surrogate in Central American geopolitics. It sent a clear signal to Nicaragua, Cuba and El Salvadorean guerrillas, and was a pretext for leaving behind equipment and facilities for the use of the contras, who were by now operating openly from Honduran soil. The same year (1983) Alverez, (Pro-US army general of Honduras) visited Washington in May and signed an agreement to open the Regional Military Training Centre (CREM) for Salvadorean troops. These pacts and incidents further deteriorated the situation of the region.46


46. ibid., pp. 295-96.
How does the military buildup in Honduras effect the Honduran people? "The psychological effect on the Honduran society of this buildup has been severe. Many feel that Honduras has been occupied. Peasants have written to Pope John Paul II saying that they are being prepared for war and that wherever they go they see warplanes and combat vehicles. Others feel that they are living like foreigners in their own land...."; explains Leydo Barbieri, a Honduran who is an associate of the Washington office on Latin-America. 47

Besides these evidences, there is a growing opposition of the U.S. presence in Honduras. The people of Honduras have been protesting against the U.S. presence since the time U.S. started using Honduras as a permanent base. Honduras was used against Guatemala in 1954, it is being used against Nicaraguan government and El Salvadorean guerrillas. On May Day, 1984, about 100,000 people filled the streets of Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula with signs demanding the ouster of U.S. troops. 48


A brief description of the 'Big-Pine Series' would be helpful to expose the character of the U.S. militarization of Honduras. This "Big Pine" (Ahuas Tara) series began in 1983. Big Pine I was started on 1-7 February, 1983. This manoeuvre involved 4,000 Honduran soldiers and 1,500 U.S. troops. It was an "offensive" exercise. Its real objective was the utilization of the US Rapid Deployment Force, which is trained for the interventions in the region. 'Big Pine II' (Ahuas Tara II) started in August 1983 and lasted in February 1984. After it 'Granadero 1' started from 1 April to 20 June 1984. It was followed by 'Naval Manoeuvres', 'Readex Manoeuvres', 'Gulf of Fonseca' (vigilancia Costera)-26 April to 7 May 1984, 'Ocean Venture 84-20 April to 6 May, 1984 and so many other programmes of such nature. 49

It would be sufficient to say here, that the people of the region are suffering from an insecurity trauma. Sophisticated U.S. weapons have endangered the life of the people. Even the Hondurans are against the U.S. presence in the country. The U.S. presence in the region is just an excuse of checking growing communism and threat to the democracy of the region. In fact, the U.S. has had been manipulating the political systems of the region in order to protect its strategic and economic interests.

49. Cordova and Bermudz, no.42, pp. 635-638
The chronology of major events (Appendix-I) gives an overview of the happenings in the country.

**El Salvador**

El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America. The country has got 21,000 sq.km. land area and a population of 4.5 million. This country is densely populated. Like other countries of the region, Salvador is primarily dependent upon agriculture.50

It is a fact that all the nations of the region, even Costa Rica, have oligarchies which exploited the power for their own purposes, but no oligarchy ever was so entrenched as that of El Salvador. People protested against these family rulers in 1932, which seriously curtailed the power of the oligarchy. The problem started when the people deprived of their traditional lands by the coffee growers of the Western part of the country launched a massive uprising. These peoples - mostly landless labourers were assisted by the Communist agitators. In December, 1931, Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez had captured power of the country through a coup. He crushed the movement, in which 10 thousand or more were shot dead. This incident made people so frightful that they did

not dare raise their voice in the following four decades. It also put the military in the saddle politically.

From that time on, until Duarte assumed the presidency of the Junta in 1980, every chief of the state was a soldier. A curious bargain was made between the military and the oligarchy, giving one the reigns of power, the other economic control. This system worked as long as there was enough to go around for the civil elite and the military elite and as long as the country was prosperous enough to quench the greedy oligarchs. The first real crack in the system began after the Honduran-El Salvadoran war of 1969. This caused heavy loss to Salvadoran economy as Honduran government pushed the Salvadoran workers off the country numbering in thousands. Since then these people are fighting for employment, shelter and bare necessities of their life. In 1972, through a massive fraud at the polls, General Molina was duly installed. A group of young army officers, not so much anxious for democracy as desirous to take advantage of the situation to get themselves ahead, then staged an abortive coup in which Duarte became involved. In 1977 elections General Carlos Humberto Romero became the President. These fraudulent elections caused many to despair of peaceful change. The Marxist firebrand Salvador Cayetano Carpio launched his guerrilla movement, and soon several other bands joined him. Before these organisations, people in El Salvador and Honduras were fighting individually for their existence.
These people started insurgencies against the brutal government. The killings took new forms and reached unprecedented levels. The counter-insurgency programmes were launched successively by Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua and claimed tens of thousands of lives by the mid 1970s. Till 1979, over 100,000 Salvadoreans and Guatemalans have been assassinated or put to death by their governments. Since 1981 El Salvador's Sampul and Lempa rivers along the Honduran border are remembered for the days they ran red with the blood of machine-gunned 'would-be refugees'.

The guerrilla movements organised after the 1972 election could have been contained, but these aroused another dangerous phenomenon i.e. the mass popular organisation. The BPR and the United Popular Action Front (Frente de Accion Popular Unided, FAPU) together represented perhaps as many as two hundred thousand Salvadorans. By 1979, assassination and terrorism by the government itself and those seeking to topple it were the daily occurrences.

After a great fight amongst various aspirants for power, Jose Napoleon Duarte emerged as the head of new Junta.

51. ibid., pp. 326-42, and K. Seshadri, "United States Prop to Puppet Regimes", World Focus (Delhi), vol. 6, no. 1-9, 1985, pp. 16-17.

52. Larry Hufford, "Promoting Democracy in Central America: The U.S. Policy of Deceit", Current Perspective on Peace and Violence (Finland), vol. 6-8, 1983-85, pp. 77-79.
American had great expectations from Duarte that he would be able to control the situation. But there had become a situation of civil war in the country. Between 1980 to 87, 60,000 citizens had lost their lives.53

One need not go into the type of regime that El Salvador enjoys. It would be sufficient to quote the letter written by Archbishop Romero to President Carter of America. He begged of Carter that if he really wanted to defend human rights; he should stop intervening economically, diplomatically or use any pressure against the people who were fighting for their destiny. The regime in Salvador was in the hands of unscrupulous militarymen who repressed the people and supported the oligarchy. The people were struggling for their fundamental human rights. This was the verdict of a dignitary of the church. But that did not matter, and a few weeks later Romero was murdered.54

President Reagan declared the election of 1984 as 'democratic' in El Salvador in which Jose Napoleon Duarte became the President. It is another example of a facade of


democracy. The United States has greatly increased aid to El Salvador as a result of Duarte's elections. Yet the press in the U.S. today often carries stories of how Duarte is essentially powerless. 55

As explained, there are many opposition groups who are resorting to guerrilla activities. Since the last few years Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) has become an active guerrilla group. America has levelled it as Marxists-Leninist and connected with the Sandinistas of Nicaragua. Under these pretexts, America has poured enormous money in the country. The country has received over 50 per cent of military aid to Central America since 1981. Military aid to Salvador was less than $5 million for the entire period from 1950 to 1970, but in 1982 alone its military aid culminated to $63.5 million. Besides direct aid, since 1980, the U.S. armed forces personnel have also been deeply involved in running the counter insurgency war. The Kissinger Commission had recommended $400 million to Salvadoran military for 1984 and 1985. 56


At present, the civil war situation is still hovering over the region. The U.S. administration has been pouring huge amount to maintain the "democratic" government in the country. Under the garb of democracy thousands have lost their lives. The solution of the problem does not seem through the military repression. Rather, a healing touch can be given by bringing drastic economic and social changes. The fraudulent elections and reforms would not give permanent peace to the country.

Costa-Rica

The country has a different history, more or less, peaceful, unlike other countries of the region. The country is not much larger than El Salvador, and is inhabited by 2.2 million persons. It is not densely populated as is the case with Salvadaor. There are no large land-holdings in the country; contrary to the other neighbouring countries. The country has continued the tradition of democratic governments since 1948.57 With this brief introduction, a case history of U.S. intervention is being discussed here. This case is different from the earlier ones, discussed in the preceeding pages. The case happened in the mid-fifties of the present century. The CIA agents, thought it necessary to intervene

in the politics of Costa Rica, for the only fault on the part of the country's government for recognising the right of asylum in Costa Rica for communists and non-communists alike. Costa Rica was running the democratic system peacefully since 1948. Jose Pope Figueres, the moderate socialist became the President of the country in 1953 through a fair and open elections. CIA intervened to overthrow President Figueres, immediately after his statement recognising asylum to the foreigners.

Figueres had emerged as a national hero after his persistent efforts to fight against the forces which had been denying to see Otilio Ulate as President of the country in 1948. Otilio had won the presidential elections of 1948. The right-wing forces which had served the U.S. interests earlier, did not allow him to assume power. Figueres organised his guerrilla gang to fight against the right wing forces and succeeded ultimately in installing Otilio as the President of the country in 1949. In 1953, Figueres became the President of the country. Ulate organised an opposition movement against his former ally, Figueres. CIA took no time to manipulate the scene. CIA agents joined with Ulate is an attempt to overthrow Figueres. In March, 1954, Senator Mansfield cited a newspaper report to the effect that a CIA man was caught red handed in tapping of the telephones of Figueres. The CIA was opposed to the Figueres' policy of granting shelter to all kinds of political elements from
other countries. The CIA adopted two fold strategy to overthrow President Figueres. Stirring up trouble within the Communist Party of the country and, attempting to link Figueres with the Communists.

The second strategy could not bear fruits but the first one created problem in the Communist Party of the Country. The CIA agents planted a letter in a newspaper with the malafied intentions of outwardly relating the secret connections with the Hungarian revolution. President Eisenhower of America pressurized Figueres to step down in 1958.58

There are no details of the incident of U.S. manipulation, but it is clear that whenever any government denied to dance upon the U.S. fingers, CIA intruded the country and mended the situation of their (U.S.) liking.

Since then Costa-Rica is not actively involved in the conflicts of the region. Obviously, the Central American imbroglio has given a set back to the country's economy. In order to improve the situation, President of the country, Oscar Arias Sanchez proposed an Asian Peace Plan, the details of which have been mentioned in the case history of Nicaragua.

58. Wise and Ross, no.26, p.166.