

CONFRONTING TROUBLE IN
THE BACKYARD:
Washington and Central America

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- WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE: THE AMERICAS WATCH REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND U.S. POLICY IN LATIN AMERICA.* Edited by CYNTHIA BROWN. (New York: Pantheon–Random House, 1985. Pp. 281. \$8.95 paper.)
- CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE WESTERN ALLIANCE.* Edited by JOSEPH CIRINCIONE. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985. Pp. 283. \$26.50.)
- THE CENTRAL AMERICAN CRISIS: SOURCES OF CONFLICT AND THE FAILURE OF U.S. POLICY.* Edited by KENNETH M. COLEMAN and GEORGE C. HERRING. (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1985. Pp. 240. \$30.00 cloth, \$9.95 paper.)
- CENTRAL AMERICA: CURRENT CRISIS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS.* Headline Series. By JORGE I. DOMINGUEZ and MARC LINDENBERG. (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1984. Pp. 80. \$3.00.)
- TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE FOR CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN.* Edited by GEORGE IRVIN and XABIER GOROSTIAGA. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985. Pp. 273. \$27.50 cloth, \$12.50 paper.)
- CENTRAL AMERICA, THE REAL STAKES: UNDERSTANDING CENTRAL AMERICA BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE.* By LESTER D. LANGLEY. (New York: Crown Publishers, 1985. Pp. 280. \$15.95.)
- THIRD WORLD INSTABILITY: CENTRAL AMERICA AS A EUROPEAN-AMERICAN ISSUE.* Edited by ANDREW J. PIERRE. (New York: New York University Press, 1985. Pp. 156. \$18.50.)
- CENTRAL AMERICA IN CRISIS.* Revised edition. By the WASHINGTON INSTITUTE TASK FORCE. (Washington: Washington Institute for Values in Public Policy, 1984. Pp. 277. \$9.95.)

A situation of fundamental and far-reaching political crisis has existed in Central America since the 1970s. The region is marked by almost every sort of violence possible: civil war, territorial disputes, East-West competition, subversion from abroad, coups, terrorism, and large-scale social unrest. The focal points of crisis are, in different ways, El Salvador and Nicaragua. But Guatemala could become a focal point

again, as it was until relatively recently, and Honduras could be drawn in as well. Richard Millett observes, "For the United States, the risk is that its policies are militarizing Honduras, undermining its fragile democracy and increasing internal conflict. The attempt to promote stability could actually create instability."¹ Only Costa Rica seems relatively immune from these misfortunes.

The term *crisis* is shorthand for an amalgam of events in Central America: in Nicaragua, the Sandinista ouster of the Somoza regime and the installation of a government that has moved progressively left, developing strong ties with the Soviet Union, other Eastern European countries, and especially Cuba; in El Salvador, political violence; in Honduras, the Contras, who are bent on ousting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua; and generally, actions by various external actors to influence or exploit the crisis. The U.S. government is intensely interested in the outcome of events in Central America and is deeply engaged in those events.

Beyond these facts, one encounters controversy. In fact, on reading the works under review, as well as the larger literature on the crisis, one wonders if the various authors are really addressing the same phenomena. Because of the diversity of views expressed within the several edited volumes, this essay will not employ the usual book-by-book approach. Instead, it will attempt to extract contending answers to three basic questions: What U.S. interests are at stake in Central America? What is the origin or nature of the crisis? What policy can best address the crisis and advance U.S. interests?²

U.S. Interests in Central America

Many of the sources under review do not address the matter of interests, a remarkable omission because that issue is the necessary starting point in any determination of what the United States should do and why. Apparently, the assumption is that those interests are so obvious as to require no discussion. Actually, that is not the case. In *Central America: Current Crisis and Future Prospects*, Jorge Domínguez and Marc Lindenberg do address interests. They argue that the United States has only a limited objective interest in the region—the Panama Canal, which falls outside the definition of Central America being used here. These authors note, however, that the United States has a number of subjective interests in Central America, that is, interests imputed by Washington: keeping nuclear weapons out of Central America, keeping hostile forces out of Central America, halting subversion, and promoting democracy and development.³ Xabier Gorostiaga's "Towards Alternative Policies for the Region" (in the collection he edited with George Irvin, *Towards an Alternative for Central America and the Caribbean*) says of

U.S. interests in Central America, "It is clear that geopolitical considerations predominate" (p. 17).

Several of the authors point to another imputed U.S. interest—the issue of U.S. credibility worldwide. Credibility is treated at length and persuasively by Eldon Kenworthy in "Central America: Beyond the Credibility Trap," his contribution to *The Central American Crisis: Sources of Conflict and the Failure of U.S. Policy*, edited by Kenneth Coleman and George Herring.⁴ Domínguez and Lindenberg also speak of credibility. Gorostiaga too declares, "The Right in the U.S. sees the region as a test case for restoring American credibility in the eyes of the world" (Gorostiaga and Irvin, p. 19). He also observes that the Reagan administration and its supporters see "any threat to U.S. interests in the Third World as a more general political and military threat and, ultimately, as a threat to the capacity of the United States to maintain its world leadership role" (p. 19).

The thrust of the U.S. government's concern with credibility is that credibility severely deteriorated during the Carter administration and therefore must be restored. Central America is viewed as the "backyard" of the United States, where Washington has traditionally exercised its power to prevent developments deemed undesirable or threatening. The current Central American crisis involves various developments—a leftist government in Nicaragua, leftist insurgents in El Salvador and elsewhere, and Cuban-Soviet manipulations perceived by the United States, or at least the Reagan administration, as threatening. Some administration officials believe that if the United States does not act decisively to counter these developments, others (allies of the United States as well as its adversaries) will perceive the United States as a sort of "paper tiger." Other countries, it is contended, would view the United States as a country whose international commitments and pledges cannot be taken seriously because the United States could not or would not manage matters in tiny, nearby Central America. After all, this reasoning goes, if Washington cannot or will not work its will in Central America, why should anyone believe that it can or will do so in defending Berlin, allies in the Middle East, or anywhere else?

One expression of credibility concerns is found in the Kissinger Commission Report: "Beyond the issue of U.S. security interests in the Central American-Caribbean region, our credibility worldwide is engaged. The triumph of hostile forces in what the Soviets call the 'strategic rear' of the United States would be read as a sign of U.S. impotence."⁵ To negotiate an agreement with Sandinista Nicaragua and then coexist with it if possible, to encourage the Contadora endeavor, or to seek power-sharing solutions in El Salvador would be counterproductive to the larger U.S. interest of its global credibility. From the credibil-

ity perspective, such actions would indicate weakness or lack of resolve on Washington's part. By contrast, backing the Contras, getting rid of the Sandinista regime or at least compelling it to sever ties with Cuba and the USSR and reorient its political system, and helping crush the left in El Salvador and elsewhere in the region all would demonstrate U.S. resolve in Central America and in general.

But as Kenworthy says, "Scanning the globe for relevant audiences, it is hard to find evidence that confidence in Washington's leadership has grown in response to Central American policies designed to foster that confidence" (p. 132). Much evidence supports Kenworthy's conclusion. Two examples are found in essays by two Western Europeans, Fernando Morán's "Europe's Role in Central America: A Spanish Socialist View" and Alois Mertes's "Europe's Role in Central America: A West German Christian View." These essays are included in Andrew Pierre's *Third World Instability: Central America as a European-American Issue*. Some of the contributions to Joseph Cirincione's *Central America and the Western Alliance* also provide support for Kenworthy's view. For example, Michel Tatu's "Europe, the United States, and Central America: A Nest of Misunderstandings" identifies U.S. handling of the Central American crisis as a test for Washington, but not the test posited by the credibility perspective: "Europeans see the situation in Central America as a sort of test for American policy, but what kind of test depends on what I call the 'political sensibilities.' Some Europeans see this situation as a test for the United States of its capacity to handle North-South relations, to handle relations with the Third World countries in an area close to the United States" (Cirincione, p. 114). The prevailing Western European view is that the crisis in Central America ought not be viewed through East-West lenses, as the Reagan administration tends to do.⁶ Wolf Grabendorff's essay in the Cirincione collection, "The Central American Crisis: Is There a Role for Western Europe?," correctly observes that the bottom line among European U.S. allies is that Washington should not intervene militarily in Central America. Such an intervention might well precipitate a severe crisis in the Western Alliance, one at least as great as that created by the Suez incident of 1956. In the European view according to Mertes, U.S. credibility—and, more broadly, Western credibility—can be demonstrated or proved only if the United States disengages its support from the traditional elites of Latin America, champions the cause of social justice, and takes other courses of action in Latin America that will eliminate the opportunity for the Soviet Union and its allies or proxies to exploit the situation and gain influence in the region.⁷

One last alleged kind of U.S. interest in Central America needs to be mentioned—the issue of "control" over Central America. Walter

LaFeber, in *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, contends that the United States has long had just such an interest, although the country may no longer be able to maintain it.⁸

Origins and Nature of the Central American Crisis

Observers of the Central American crisis generally agree that the origins of the crisis in Central America are political and economic and that forces external to Central America are involved. But observers diverge substantially in their choices of which factor or set of factors to target. Basically, two interpretations of the origins of the crisis contend for adherents.

One conceptualization targets external actors as substantially the cause, the view subscribed to by the Reagan administration. It emphasizes the involvement of Cuba and, somewhat more indirectly, the USSR. In this conceptualization, Sandinista Nicaragua is treated as a contributor to the crisis in aiding and supporting leftists in El Salvador and elsewhere in the region by providing them with training and arms.⁹ None of the works under examination fully develops this conceptualization of the crisis, but a few touch on it. In the Cirincione volume, Department of State official James Michel's "Defending Democracy" states: "We have had five years to determine what is happening. It is obvious that the overwhelming majority of Central Americans want democracy. They are clearly capable of working and even fighting for it. Equally Cuba and the Soviet Union are attempting to turn Central America's travails to the disadvantage of both Central America and the United States" (Cirincione, p. 56).¹⁰

Cocontributor Edward Luttwak, in "The Nature of the Crisis," would undoubtedly concur with Michel. The conceptualization of "external actors" has been expressed repeatedly in statements and documents of the Reagan administration.¹¹ This perspective is also expressed in the Kissinger Commission report: "In Nicaragua the revolution that overthrew the hated Somoza regime has been captured by self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninists. . . . The Sandinista Directorate has progressively put in place a Cuban-style regime, complete with mass organizations under its political direction, an internal security system to keep watch on the entire population, and a massive military establishment."¹² Carter's National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, in his contribution to the Cirincione collection, "Strategic Implications of the Central American Crisis," places the crisis, albeit not necessarily its origins, in the framework of East-West confrontation: "What clearly makes the Central American problem much more difficult for us is its relationship, whether we like it or not, to the American-Soviet rivalry. The

existence of Cuba, in fact the Marxist cast of much of the Central American revolution, automatically makes the Central American problem part of the larger American-Soviet confrontation" (Cirincione, p. 105). Elsewhere, Jiri and Virginia Valenta declare: "While the revolutionary turmoil in the [Caribbean] basin would not simply disappear were the Soviet Union and Cuba to withdraw their support, their disengagement would render the crisis much more manageable. . . ."13 Michael Erisman does not subscribe to this conceptualization of the crisis but describes it superbly: "While recognizing that the [Caribbean] Basin has been experiencing some unsettling economic problems, . . . adherents [of the external subversion explanation] insist that the root cause of its political instability is Cuban/Russian agitation which is designed to overthrow moderate-conservative governments and replace them with radical left-wing regimes, thereby tipping the global power balance toward the communist bloc and contributing to an international environment inimical not only to America's general interest, but also to its very survival."¹⁴

The external cause conceptualization either ignores or glosses over a number of important points. First, it places the crisis firmly in an East-West, rather than a North-South, context. As a result, the North-South aspects of the crisis receive secondary attention. Granted, the Reagan administration perceives economic problems in Central America and extends development assistance. But it emphasizes the military aspects of the problem and military aid—to security forces in El Salvador and Honduras and backing for the Contras. Second, this conceptualization fails to address fully the complexities of the situation, particularly the important fact that revolutionary situations are not created by external actors, although they may be aided by such actors. Third, it disregards the fact that large numbers of U.S. allies view the Central American situation very differently. Fourth, it risks a grave East-West confrontation; and it risks driving the Nicaraguan regime fully into Cuban and Soviet hands, where it was not, at least initially—the very outcome that Washington does not want.

Fifth, this conceptualization ignores important, if unpleasant, realities as noted by Robert Pastor's "Redefining the Strategic Challenge," in the Cirincione collection. The United States is perceived as "culprit" by those in Central America who oppose the status quo. The United States has supported that status quo and exerted its influence through the elite. Consequently, the United States has become the target of verbal assault by those seeking to overturn the status quo. Further, and understandably, U.S. models and prescriptions are not acceptable to those who reject the status quo. Sixth, the conceptualization is not based on a careful assessment of Cuban and Soviet willingness or

ability to sustain the new Nicaraguan government, or similar governments elsewhere in Central America should they emerge. It is far from clear that such willingness and ability exist.

All of this argument is not to deny that the United States has significant and legitimate security concerns in Central America. In particular, establishment of Soviet military bases is not tolerable, a point made by several contributors to the volumes under review.¹⁵ Herring and Coleman's "Beyond Hegemony: Toward a New Central American Policy," in their edited work, contend that the best way for the United States to protect its security interests in Central America is to assure revolutionary governments that Washington will not seek to interfere as long as they present no threat to the United States.

The other conceptualization of the crisis focuses on Central America itself. The consensus of several of the authors under review is that the causes of the crisis are internal to Central America (see the Washington Institute Task Force's revised *Central America in Crisis*; Pastor's essay in the Cirincione collection; Domínguez and Lindenber; and Michael Webb's "Economic Opportunity and Labor Markets in Central America," Billie De Walt's "The Agrarian Bases of Conflict in Central America," and Kenneth Coleman's "The Consequences of Excluding Reformists from Power," in the Coleman and Herring collection). According to this conceptualization, the causes are rooted in centuries of Central American history marked by political elites who have been both repressive and unresponsive and a huge gap between the tiny minority with wealth and power and the vast majority with little or nothing.¹⁶ But this conceptualization does not attribute the crisis simply to poverty and repression. Such an interpretation would not be very convincing because such conditions have obtained for centuries without creating the kind of situation that now exists.¹⁷ Rather, the cause is a mix of internal economic and political factors that, when they coalesced in the 1970s, brought about a breakdown of both the political and economic systems of Central America. As Pastor observes, "The region's problems stem from the rapid population growth; the poor distribution of the benefits of growth . . . ; and the obsolete political-military institutions that blocked the path to political power by representatives of the emerging middle and working classes" (Cirincione, p. 83).¹⁸

To summarize this analysis of the crisis, Central America experienced impressive economic growth during the 1960s and even into the early 1970s, over 5 percent per year. The growth was not evenly distributed, however, because some sectors advanced much more than others. When the period of growth ended, inequality—both economic and social—was as great or greater than when the period began. Those who benefited from the growth were those who were already better off. The urban poor (the urban unemployed and underemployed), the urban

working class, and the *campesinos* did not benefit. When the period of growth ended, the urban working class was relatively worse off and the urban poor and the *campesinos* were absolutely worse off. The *campesinos* had lost their public and communal lands—lands traditionally reserved for them—to commercial, export-oriented organizations.¹⁹

Most of the growth took place in the urban industrial sector. During the period of industrial expansion, industry became progressively more capital-intensive rather than labor-intensive. Industrial growth was slowed dramatically after the Central American Common Market was disrupted by the 1969 war between El Salvador and Honduras. Consequently, those displaced from the rural areas by the commercialization of agriculture found in the cities a situation little different from what they had escaped—no employment opportunities. Frustration and alienation understandably mounted.

Other challenges also arose. Central America experienced massive population growth, about 3 percent per year. By the 1970s, urban labor had become organized and militant, a sufficiently critical mass to demand accommodation by the political system. So too did a portion of the rural and formerly rural population. Additionally, the 1970s brought a series of negative developments in the international economy—the huge petroleum price increase, inflation, recession, reduced prices for primary products, high interest rates, and the general downturn in the Western economy. Although these external developments did not create the Central American crisis, they exacerbated the situation.

According to this line of analysis, these factors go far, although not the full distance, in explaining why breakdown and crisis occurred. Another determining factor involved is the nature of the Central American political systems, which (save for Costa Rica since 1948) are fragile, largely uninstitutionalized, and highly personalistic. Within such systems, political violence and instability are common, almost normal. The violence that tends to be a part of the Central American political process has most often been directed against groups that either challenged or were perceived as challenging the status quo. In this kind of political environment, fear of societal disorder has led to authoritarian politics that are determined to resist any challenge to the regime or the status quo. As is well-known, the armed forces have played a significant role in the Central American political process; and the military, like the oligarchy, is devoted to perpetuating the status quo for all times. The two are allied in what Luis Maira terms a “political marriage.”²⁰

Contrary to what one first might think, these political systems do have the demonstrated capacity to accommodate new political groups—that is, to allow new groups access to the political system and a share of its benefits. But accommodation has been forthcoming only when the new groups have demonstrated a power capability or potential sig-

nificant enough to make their continued exclusion from the political system inappropriate or unreasonable. Further, such new groups must agree to abide by the prevailing "rules of the political game" and to accept the continued existence of all who are already part of the political system. From those unwritten rules, certain modes of behavior follow, as Howard Wiarda explains: "If a new group is not accommodated even after demonstrating its power capability . . . , then it may have locally sanctioned ground to launch an armed insurrection. If, however, the newer groups are unwilling to coexist with the older groups and seek to destroy them altogether . . . , then strong action may be taken against the rebels."²¹

Just such a situation came to prevail in Central America. New groups demanded access to the political system and a share of its benefits; they were large enough to demand accommodation. But they were prepared neither to accept the established rules nor to coexist with recognized political groups. To have done so would have meant perpetuating the lengthy status quo. The new groups sought instead to overturn the status quo. The established political groups in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua were neither willing nor able to accommodate the new groups, and political violence on both sides resulted. In short, the political contest in Central America became a zero-sum struggle, with each side endeavoring to win and to displace the other side, to destroy it completely.²²

U.S. Policy Alternatives

The question facing the United States since the earliest moments of the Central American crisis has been what to do in response to it. Just as analysts disagree over U.S. interests in Central America and the origins of the crisis, they disagree as to what course the United States should follow.

Abraham Lowenthal's "The United States and Central America: Reflections on the Kissinger Commission Report," in the Coleman and Herring collection, establishes four options open to Washington in coping with the crisis in its "backyard." They are the present approach being enacted by the Reagan administration; deeper U.S. involvement in the crisis; a passive stance toward Central America; and engagement based on a careful determination of the most fundamental U.S. interests in Central America and the protection or promotion of those interests.

Continuation of the current U.S. policy is based on what Erisman aptly characterizes as the art of "confrontation psychology."²³ This option entails U.S. government support for security forces in Central America, except those in Nicaragua, and U.S. economic and military

assistance. It aims at a military solution and the elimination of forces of a Marxist-Leninist nature or even those that appear to have such leanings. Another prominent feature of this option is the harassment—directly through the mining of Nicaragua’s harbors and a trade embargo and somewhat indirectly by supporting the Contras—of the Sandinista regime. One of the many faults with this approach is identified by contributors to Cynthia Brown’s *With Friends Like These*—the violation of human rights by some Central American regimes supported by the United States. This outcome adds to the already substantial anti-Yankee sentiment existing in Central America and Latin America in general.

The second option is to engage more deeply in Central America. This choice would emphasize that the United States should side with the forces of change and commit itself to helping bring about fundamental change in Central America. As Lowenthal envisions it, this option would entail Washington’s rejecting the status quo and committing the country to back—verbally and materially—economic, social, and political development that would transform Central American society. To date, no U.S. administration has been willing to move decisively in this direction. A radically different version of deeper U.S. engagement is represented by Luttwak’s “The Nature of the Crisis” in the Cirincione collection. Luttwak supports the thrust of the Reagan administration’s approach but is not wholly satisfied with it, viewing it as better than nothing but less than optimal. He appears to favor a much deeper U.S. military involvement to deal with the current Nicaraguan situation and leftist insurgents elsewhere in Central America.

The third option is to take a passive stance, in effect, to disengage from Central America. This option prescribes that Washington allow events in Central America to take their course while the United States addresses other issues. This approach seems to have been described by William LeoGrande: “The alternative to the policy that Reagan and Kissinger envision for Central America is one that would truly extend the right of self-determination to the people of the region, even if their choices are not always comfortable to Washington.”²⁴ Lester Langley embraces this option in *Central America: The Real Stakes*. He argues that the United States does not understand Central America or the nature of the problems there, which are largely beyond the ability of the United States to solve. For those reasons, Langley recommends that the United States ought to stand back and allow Central America to resolve the crisis on its own. But standing back runs counter to the long-established tradition of U.S. foreign policy toward the Central American region. Moreover, this option might endanger legitimate U.S. interests in Central America.

The fourth option, which Lowenthal describes as the “best way” of approaching the crisis, is to construct a cautious definition of the

basic U.S. interest in Central America. That is, “to assure that no bases, offensive facilities, or strategic weapons are introduced by the Soviet Union or on its behalf into the border region of the United States” (Coleman and Herring, p. 213). This option would also entail U.S. support for Central American economic and political development, support that would honor the sovereignty and uniqueness of the Central American countries. The result would be that the United States would not attempt to dictate the direction of such development, which would rest with Central America. Lowenthal does not mention the possibility, but this fourth option might well involve Washington’s acceptance of a power-sharing solution in El Salvador (so long as power sharing did not compromise the basic U.S. interest) and, perhaps, genuine negotiation with the Sandinista government of Nicaragua. Each option has its costs, political and otherwise, but this fourth option may well involve the fewest costs and most effectively secure the long-range interests of the United States.

NOTES

1. Richard Millett, “Praetorians or Patriots? The Central American Military,” in *Central America: Anatomy of Conflict*, edited by Robert S. Leiken (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984), 83.
2. This essay does not consider Belize and Panama as part of Central America. Recently independent Belize, despite its being geographically part of Central America, is in orientation much more a part of the Commonwealth Caribbean. Panama, often treated as a Central American country, is historically and geographically more South American than Central American.
3. Also, see Jorge I. Domínguez, *U.S. Interests and Policies in the Caribbean and Central America* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1982). Other identifications of U.S. interests in Central America are to be found in *The Report of the President’s National Bipartisan Commission on Central America* (New York: Macmillan, 1984), 45; Howard J. Wiarda, *In Search of Policy: The United States and Latin America* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1984), 24–25; and Margaret Daly Hayes, “Coping with Problems That Have No Solution: Political Change in El Salvador and Guatemala,” in *Confrontation in the Caribbean Basin: International Perspectives on Security, Sovereignty, and Survival*, edited by Alan Adelman and Reid Reading (Pittsburgh: Center for Latin American Studies and University Center for International Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 1984), 38. In addition, see Hayes’s *Latin America and the U.S. National Interest: A Basis for U.S. Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview, 1984). The interests identified in these sources are generally in line with those cited by Domínguez and Lindenberg. All lists concur that keeping hostile powers out of the region is the paramount U.S. objective.
4. The article is an updated version of Kenworthy’s paper published in *World Policy Journal* 1 (Fall 1983):181–200.
5. *The Report of the President’s National Bipartisan Commission on Central America*, 111.
6. Many other students of the Central American crisis agree, among them: James Chace, *Endless War* (New York: Vintage–Random House, 1984); Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983); and most, if not all, of the contributors to *Trouble in Our Backyard*, edited by Martin Diskin (New York: Pantheon–Random House, 1983), and *The Future of Central America: Policy Choices for the U.S. and Mexico*, edited by Richard R. Fagen and Olga Pellicer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983).

7. One part of that prescription would be difficult for Washington to implement, if it decides to do so. It is through the traditional elite that the U.S. has exerted its influence in Central America and Latin America generally. See *U.S. Influence in Latin America in the 1980s*, edited by Robert Wesson (New York: Praeger, 1982), especially the introduction.
8. Some of the contributors to Diskin's *Trouble in Our Backyard* and Fagen and Pellicer's *The Future of Central America* would agree with LaFeber, as would those who subscribe to an explicitly *dependista* interpretation of U.S.–Latin American relations.
9. To be sure, some who posit external actors as the cause do not have Havana and Moscow in mind. They point to the United States as a substantial, although not exclusive, cause. One example is Luis Maira, who writes: "One should not underestimate the degree to which the current crisis in Central America relates directly to prolonged U.S. government support for authoritarian regimes in the area, despite signs of their obvious illegitimacy, exhaustion, and disintegration. The present situation was reached only after a series of endogenous democratization and modernization projects had been derailed by the regimes of force in the sixties and seventies. Washington did nothing to impede this." See Luis Maira, "Reagan and Central America: Strategy through a Fractured Lens," in Diskin, *Trouble in Our Backyard*, 39.
10. This statement is yet another instance of the Reagan administration's rhetorical excess concerning Central America. It is highly unlikely that "the overwhelming majority of Central Americans want democracy." The fact is that the overwhelming majority of Central Americans have no experience with democracy, never having lived under a democratic government nor studied democracy as a political theory. After years of political turmoil, the vast majority of Central Americans probably do not want to fight for anything but want instead to be allowed to live their lives in peace. Further, it is far from clear when Washington speaks of democracy in the context of the Central American crisis whether it uses the term as generally understood in the United States or as a "code word" meaning "friendly to the United States." Although U.S. government officials at times speak of democracy, elections, and pluralism in reference to Central America as if those concepts have the same meaning there as in the United States, very often, they do not. For an excellent discussion of what such concepts mean in Central America and in Latin America generally, see Glen Dealy, "Pipe Dreams: The Pluralistic Latins," *Foreign Policy* 57 (Winter 1984–85):108–27.
11. See statements by the president, the secretary of state, and other administration officials concerning Central America in the *Department of State Bulletin* from January 1981 on. This conceptualization of the crisis was previously enunciated by Ronald Reagan in his 1980 campaign for the presidency.
12. *The Report of the President's National Bipartisan Commission on Central America*, 36.
13. Jiri Valenta and Virginia Valenta, "Soviet Strategy and Policies in the Caribbean Basin," in *Rift and Revolution: The Central American Imbroglia*, edited by Howard J. Wiarda (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1984), 198. That claim either deliberately plays down the realities of the Central American crisis or reflects a lack of proper understanding of them. The engagement of Cuba and the USSR in the Central American crisis inevitably complicates the situation and its resolution. Even with those actors removed, however, a complex, knotty situation would remain that would not be markedly easier to resolve.
14. H. Michael Erisman, "Colossus Challenged: U.S. Caribbean Policy in the 1980s," in *Colossus Challenged: The Struggle for Caribbean Influence*, edited by H. Michael Erisman and John D. Martz (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982), 20.
15. It is a point made by others, including Cole Blasier in *The Giant's Rival: The USSR and Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 154.
16. A summary examination of the historical roots of the contemporary Central American crisis can be found in Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., "The Rise and Decline of Liberalism in Central America: Historical Perspectives on the Contemporary Crisis," *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs* 26 (Aug. 1984):291–312.
17. The emergence of political violence and internal war in Central America followed closely the sequence described by T. R. Gurr in *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton

- University Press, 1970). He posits the following sequence: first, the development of discontent or alienation within society; second, the politicization of that discontent; and third, the politicized discontent is manifested in violent action directed against political objects and political actors.
18. It is a conceptualization that various others formulate. See Roland H. Ebel, "The Development and Decline in the Central American City State," in Wiarda, *Rift and Revolution*, 70–104; Roland H. Ebel, "Political Instability in Central America," *Current History* 472 (Feb. 1982):56–59, 86; Howard J. Wiarda, *In Search of Policy: The United States and Latin America* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1984); and Howard J. Wiarda, "The Central American Crisis: A Framework for Understanding," *AEI Foreign Policy and Defense Review* 9 (1982):2–7.
 19. On this point, see the observations of Thomas P. Anderson, "The Roots of Revolution in Central America," in Wiarda, *Rift and Revolution*, 7–8.
 20. Luis Maira, "The U.S. Debate on the Central American Crisis," in Fagen and Pellicer, *The Future of Central America*, 88.
 21. Wiarda, "The Central American Crisis," 5.
 22. This explanation of why a situation of political crisis prevails in Central America is dealt with extensively in James D. Cochrane, "Perspectives on the Central American Crisis," *International Organization* 39 (Autumn 1985):755–77.
 23. H. Michael Erisman, "Contemporary Challenges Confronting U.S. Caribbean Policy," in *The Caribbean Challenge: U.S. Policy in a Volatile Region*, edited by H. Michael Erisman (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 6.
 24. William LeoGrande, "Through the Looking Glass: The Kissinger Report on Central America," *World Policy Journal* 1 (Winter 1984):283.