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THE EVOLUTION OF UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD CENTRAL AMERICA

BY

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THE EVOLUTION OF UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY  
TOWARD CENTRAL AMERICA

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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ABSTRACT

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United States foreign policy has exerted significant influence on Central American nations, often with profound effect in the region. US policy varied greatly between 1977 and 1992. It was affected not only by significant events unfolding in the region during that time, but by the manner in which policy was determined and implemented by the US leadership. The last three US presidents were selected for scrutiny because their diversity in political orientation, focus and execution of foreign policy demonstrate a near full spectrum of approaches and results. A comparative analysis is made of US foreign policy toward Central America during the Carter, Reagan and Bush administrations in order to develop a framework for US policy in the future.

## INTRODUCTION

The political interest in Central America and the attention given to Central America by United States political leaders have risen and fallen largely according to agendas set in our own government. US foreign policy has exerted great influence on Central American nations, often with profound effect. That influence has varied historically based on changes in ideology, political and economic capacity, and foreign policy execution. This comparative analysis of US foreign policy toward Central America will focus on the past fifteen years, or three presidencies, in the attempt to develop a framework for US policy in the future.

To put US foreign policy into context, a brief review of long-standing national interests as defined by Washington, is appropriate. In the most general terms, continuing US interests can be summarized as follows:

Security interests - rising from geographic proximity and defined as keeping the hemisphere free from the influence of hostile powers.

Political interests - based upon traditional ties and the region's effect on the world position of the US, these include a preference for supporting governments sympathetic to the US global strategic position and a commitment to guard against instability in the region.

Economic interests - based upon the presence of resources and levels of trade, US interests include continued access to strategically important raw materials, activity of investors and

exporters, and promotion of private commerce. Historically economic interests were not accorded the priority of security or political interests.<sup>1</sup>

This is by no means an exhaustive list of interests, nor is it the most recently updated. National interests change to respond to situations and to administration priorities. This list is one that has stood the test of time, is officially validated and is useful to our purpose based upon past and continued applicability. While the fundamentals of national interests remain valid, the objectives and strategy for their accomplishment may vary in a rapidly changing world.

I have selected the last three US presidents for scrutiny because their diversity in style, focus (both geographic and issue) and execution of foreign policy demonstrate a near full spectrum of approaches and results. Subsequent to a review of foreign policy between 1977 and the present, which includes policy-making and the effect of the leaders who guide the process, I will offer concerns and recommendations for the future.

## UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY 1977-1992

### Carter Administration 1977-1981

President Carter's limited international experience and one term as governor of Georgia afforded little opportunity to formulate a world view. As a member of the Trilateral Commission in the early 1970's he learned the language of liberal internationalists and the terms of transnationalism, but his understanding of these political positions was shallow. He is

said by many to have an item-by-item or engineering intellect.<sup>2</sup> His political outlook was shaped by the Vietnam experience, the conclusion that the world was multipolar and a perception that the Soviet threat was somehow reduced.<sup>3</sup> In reality the 1970's saw the collapse of world markets for agricultural products and fossil fuel create financial havoc. When commodity markets collapsed and national revenues fell, interest payments became onerous. By 1976, two of every three Latin Americans lived under authoritarian governments. These changing perceptions and realities lent support to the belief that international economic and political stability would be improved by increased social justice in the Third World. Coming to office with a human rights orientation, while not dismissing communism, Carter advocated containment thereof by combining human rights with détente and multipolarity.<sup>4</sup>

Cyrus Vance began drafting a Carter foreign policy plan before the election, and shortly after taking office Carter directed every agency which dealt with Latin America to review US policy toward the region. With one exception, all submitted that considering the region as "our sphere of influence was no longer appropriate in an increasingly interdependent world in which nations seek to be active and independent partners."<sup>5</sup> All parties agreed on the need for a new approach. Carter added human rights to their agenda and said that US policy toward Latin America would fit within a consistent framework of global socioeconomic issues because he viewed change in Central America as the natural evolution of the political and economic institutions in the region.

In a United Nations (UN) speech, President Carter committed

to put relations with Latin countries on a constructive basis, recognizing the "global character of the region's problems."<sup>6</sup> He announced a new course of policy in a speech to the Organization of American States (OAS).<sup>7</sup> New policy would be derived from idealism rather than tradition or improvisation. The driving force behind developing policy would be the democratic mission of the US--providing a noble cause with which the public could identify. Such rationalization of policy by democracy places great demands on diplomacy as a means to execute. At the same time policy makers risk great disappointment if democracy is not achieved.<sup>8</sup>

President Carter applied his belief that the Cold War was over and that the Third World had emerged from the periphery to the center. New US policy toward Central America was a unique mixture of Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy and Kennedy's Alliance for Progress--i.e., Carter pledged to avoid intervening militarily and to work with the Latins to improve economic, social and political conditions in the Americas. In addition he recognized the decline of US hegemony and the emergence of regional power. Lastly there was the expressed intent to abandon symbols of predominance in the region.<sup>9</sup> Translated into policy goals, the new approach took on recommendations of Sol Linowitz, a scholar named by Carter to serve as Panama Canal Treaty negotiator. Linowitz is said to have had "more to say about US policy toward Latin America than anyone in the administration except the President."<sup>10</sup> Policy goals included rapprochement with Cuba, active promotion of human rights, and a campaign to ratify and implement the Panama Canal

Treaty--the last of which would become an arduous and politically draining task. Policy goals related to Cuba and the Panama Canal received the active unequivocal support of not only Linowitz but Secretary of State Vance. All were not agreed on this new approach nor was the focus in issues consistent within the administration. Admiral Stansfield Turner, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), said that the administration had no major interests in Central America--only in Mexico and Panama. Odd, that the Director of the CIA did not seem to recognize that Central America lies between the two exceptions. Other administration officials, both government and military, reluctantly redefined the national security policy based upon the belief that US leadership in the world was declining.<sup>11</sup>

Even the very basis of this new political thinking, the human rights policy, received uneven support and inconsistent application. The implementation was carried out with surprising naiveté. Full diplomatic recognition of nations was based upon their having an elective government, exclusion of military from government, and inclusion of a human rights vision.<sup>12</sup> Consistently applied, this formula for recognition could have seriously limited US-Latin American relationships. To further complicate the issue, the human rights policy lacked leverage and became a policy with few positive incentives. Whole countries or governments received what seemed to be indiscriminate condemnations, thereby producing numerous backlashes to the policy. In spite of haphazard and inconsistent policy execution, there were improvements. The use of torture as an instrument of power declined somewhat, a number of political prisoners were freed and lives surely were saved. In

the final analysis, accomplishments were considered modest when compared to the effort expended and costs incurred.<sup>13</sup> By 1980 Carter's human rights and social justice emphasis in foreign policy was challenged abroad and widely perceived as an indication of limited vision or weakness at home.<sup>14</sup>

President Carter's intent to normalize relations with Cuba was another policy which raised questions about his strength as a leader. Consistent with his north-south view of issues and strong belief in the power of diplomacy, Carter began relaxing US-Cuban relations early in his term.<sup>15</sup> He opened an interest section in Havana (as Castro did in Washington), lifted travel bans, made agreements on fishing rights, and discussed trade and release of political prisoners. He seemed somewhat charmed by Castro.

The greatest test of the Carter policy toward Central America was in Nicaragua. He refused to prop up President Somoza because of human rights abuses and the leftist Sandinista revolution took over in 1979. Unwilling to revert to containment policies of his predecessors, even when US sentiment was adamantly against "another Cuba," Carter chose to use ambitious social reform. When his reformist strategy failed, he recognized the Sandinista government and maintained relatively normal, albeit troubled, relations through 1979 and much of 1980. He even pledged to support Nicaraguan sovereignty and provide aid for reconstruction. This brought accusations of weakness in the face of revolutionaries.

In 1980, the guerrilla groups in El Salvador which began as an armed leftist resistance formed a unified military command, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), and a coalition

of civilian supporters, the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR). Although Carter downplayed the evidence that the Sandinistas were actively supporting the FMLN, he established a new military strategy of containment of revolutionary processes in the region. The policy was to support established governments with military aid for national security reasons based on social reform and respect for human rights.<sup>16</sup>

The first evidence of serious intention to end the "US sphere of influence" was Carter's commitment to the Panama Canal Treaties. Though usually ineffective in battles with Congress, Carter led the administration through seven months of congressional debate until ratification of the Treaties in 1977 became the major foreign policy achievement for Carter. Ratification improved the Latin American perception of the US due to this demonstrated willingness to shed the image of "colonial power."<sup>17</sup>

Even with this foreign policy success early in the administration, Carter's democratic decisionmaking and consultative process appeared as uncertainty and vacillation on critical issues and therefore deterred efficient policy formation. One author described foreign policy-making in the Carter administration as a "sincere, but desperate meandering search, resembling a pathfinder without an azimuth."<sup>18</sup> The policies for the region are described as a "mix of high principle, human compassion, belief in negotiation and reluctance to intervene in leftist revolutions...aimed at rebuilding the image of the US."<sup>19</sup>

From the Latin American perspective, the reputation of the Carter administration was not good due to omissions; specifically,

there was no action (only rhetoric) on economic concerns and no attempt to deal with the Nicaraguan situation. The administration had good intentions, but little effect. Latin America was excluded from strategic concerns and independent regimes were abandoned to possible ploys or subversion by international communist movements.

Foreign policy in the Carter administration was dominated by liberal policies at a time when the country seemed to be leaning toward more conservative views. The potential for a succession of revolutions in the United States' backyard was highlighted by the new government in Nicaragua. Both Congress and the American public began to question the ability of the administration to effectively deal with crises. Conservatives considered President Carter and his foreign policy team to be "soft on Communism, weak on defense, and wishy-washy in defending US interests."<sup>20</sup>

#### Reagan Administration 1981-1989

The situation in Central America and the incumbent's struggle to deal with it were things for which campaign managers are grateful. As part of Ronald Reagan's "standing tall" campaign rhetoric, he was critical of the Carter administration's weaknesses in foreign policy and the "communist subversion in Central America," He contended that Central America belonged to the Free World whose distinguishing characteristic was "anti-communism", not necessarily democracy.<sup>21</sup> Reagan asserted that the US, as leader of the Western World, was on the decline and Carter had not avoided or reversed that trend.

Following the Presidential election in November 1980, several

prominent conservatives formed a group called the Committee of Santa Fe to recommend a new foreign policy for the incoming Reagan administration. Regarding Latin America, the Committee urged strengthening security agreements in the region and renewing military assistance programs. Reagan used the Santa Fe Document to express his new conception:

America's basic freedoms and economic self-interest require that the United States be and act like a power of the first order. The crisis is metaphysical. America's inability or unwillingness either to protect or project its basic values and beliefs has led to the present nadir of indecision and impotence and has placed the very existence of the Republic in peril....It is time to seize the initiative. An integrated global foreign policy is essential.<sup>22</sup>

Reagan believed the crisis in Central America to be a textbook case of Soviet aggression and part of a grand strategy for global hegemony. He was determined to restore the image of the US and strengthen the forces of freedom. To characterize the two adversaries, he said:

"I have long believed that this anointed land (the US) was set apart in an uncommon way; that a divine plan placed this great continent here between the oceans to be found by people... who have a special love for faith and freedom.

The USSR is an evil empire; the focus of evil in the modern world...the force behind all the hot spots in the world today."<sup>23</sup>

Upon election of President Reagan, the incoming administration believed the key to restoring US hegemony and countering the perception of the US as a superpower in decline was to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy. The new east-west orientation was articulated by Reagan's hard-line foreign policy team of Secretary of State Alexander Haig, Assistant Secretary for

Latin American Affairs Thomas Ender and UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick. They differentiated between right-wing authoritarian dictators and left-wing totalitarian regimes. They advocated returning to the philosophy of 1823, that Latin America is a border region where foreign encroachments would not be tolerated.<sup>24</sup> Castro was seen as a Soviet proxy and an executor of the "Soviet-Cuban plan." Having been successful in Nicaragua, the communists now targeted Guatemala and El Salvador as the next client states with Honduras as a transit route for resupply. The administration believed that previous US policies proved to be incapable of dealing with the Soviet-Cuban expansion in Central America, and had contributed to the destabilized friendly governments in Latin America and the decline of US power in the region.<sup>25</sup> The US public was supportive and the Congress showed a growing willingness to view Central American conflicts from the new east-west perspective. Containment gave way to "rollback" and determination there would be no more Cubas. The challenge to deal with the penetration of Soviet imperialism in the region was visioned as a hemispheric problem with long-term, far-reaching consequences. The administration's response to the challenge was the Reagan Doctrine.

Though not fully developed until 1985, the Reagan Doctrine emerged as a foreign policy statement with the common theme of prevailing in political and military competition with the Soviet Union. It focused on Central America in order to support "people who have made their own decision to stand and fight rather than see their culture and freedoms quietly erased."<sup>26</sup> US support, according to Reagan, "should be given not only out of historic

sympathy for democracy but in the interest of national security." He called Nicaragua "a Soviet ally on the American mainland only two hours flight from our borders" and advocated denying the Soviet Union a "beachhead in North America."<sup>27</sup>

In his April 1983 speech before Congress, Reagan claimed that US security interests worldwide were threatened by unrest in Central America. From the conservative perspective of the Reagan administration, national security can be preserved only by gaining absolute political, ideological, and military dominion throughout the region. He advocated containment through the use of military means (both US and Latin American) more than reform. A second component was to involve the CIA as part of official public policy. The administration proposed the CIA's support of counter-revolutionary armies.<sup>28</sup> There was, therefore, a resurgence of CIA activities abroad and of covert operations backed by Presidential findings.

The US military also grew in stature and numbers during the Reagan administration due, in part, to a willingness to use military aid as an instrument of foreign policy and the emphasis on military solutions to problems. Reagan defined Central America and the Caribbean as our "third border," worthy of protection, military training, covert activity and even intervention. However the prominence of this military strategy created fear of another Vietnam and some reluctance on the part of Democrats in Congress to support every request for military aid. Reagan usually prevailed, successfully promoting his policies by persuasion, pressure and/or implication. "The Great Communicator" often captured the mood of the American people and pressured Congress to

follow the wishes of their constituents or he simply implied that reluctance to support military aid to combat subversion came from those who were soft on communism.<sup>29</sup>

A major departure from the previous administration was US foreign policy toward Cuba. The Reagan administration needed Castro as a symbol of communist expansion into the hemisphere. Discovery of the presence of a Soviet brigade in Cuba gave credence to Reagan's anti-communist agenda and brought an end to the budding US-Cuban relations. Interest sections were closed; restrictions on US travel to Cuba reimposed; negotiations begun by Carter were discontinued; and fishing, navigation and boundary agreements were not renewed. In an attempt to keep the resistance that Reagan believed to be present in Cuba informed, in 1985 he established Radio Martí. Named for a Cuban liberator, the station's purpose was to broadcast the truth about the Castro government to the Cuban people.<sup>30</sup>

Reagan linked the growing revolution in El Salvador to Cuban/Soviet intervention and acted quickly to strengthen the existing policies and the means to support them. Containment by social reform, respect for human rights and aid to the host country became containment by any means. The US openly supported the Salvadoran military with advisors and training, sharply increased aid and emphasized Nicaragua's role as the conduit for arms and assistance to the rebels. Support to El Salvador was to prevent its becoming the next communist victory in the hemisphere.

Reagan's conservative anti-communist philosophy and determination to protect our "third border" from further intrusion resulted in his waging a crusade like campaign to rid Nicaragua of

its Sandinista government. He pushed support for the Contra resistance by taking his appeals to both the American people and Congress. His personal efforts and dedication to the Contra effort were unwavering. He authorized covert action through presidential findings, revived gunboat diplomacy and even dodged negotiated peace attempts. This put President Reagan in continuous disagreement with President Arias of Costa Rica over the Guatemala Peace Accords, a regionally negotiated peace process, rather than support for the Contras. Arias' plan focused on democratization with an approach of "politics is the art of the possible." Reaganites were wedded to the idea that the Contras would win soon, while Arias knew of no one in Central America who thought they could, even with US support.<sup>31</sup> No compromise outcome was acceptable to Reagan who thought that anything short of victory, defined as removal of the Sandinista government, constituted defeat of his policies. He feared a regional diplomatic effort would produce an agreement which left the leftist Sandinistas in power.

The President's Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) of 1982, primarily an aid and trade policy, excluded Cuba and Nicaragua consistent with his political theme of an east-west struggle. CBI was designed as a means of countering communist backed revolution through comprehensive trade, investment and aid policies focused on Central America and the Caribbean as one strategic region. Capital investment increased in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and several Caribbean nations; however the ultimate objective of CBI was security, not necessarily economic development.<sup>32</sup>

Reagan's deeply-ingrained Cold War perspective dominated inter-American relations. He was accused of lecturing to both Central America and the US Congress, usually about the Contras, and failing to listen to the very nations he was determined to protect. The administration ignored changes in the international system which diminished the US's ability to control events. Reagan became frustrated by the limited ability to exercise control over Central American politics.<sup>33</sup> He often relied upon rhetoric to accomplish foreign policy goals. The content of Presidential speeches seemed more important than his policy decisions--or worse, was taken as decision. Reagan's speeches revealed a bell-shaped learning curve. There were costly omissions--such as attention to Central America's economic development, debt crisis and misery--indicating he was being badly served by his advisors. The administration confused domestic political rhetoric with international reality. Repeatedly, it was evident that advisors did not do their homework. Examples included terming the Contras winners, though there was no military victory; considering the peace process dead before the Guatemala Accords were signed; and, of course, misjudging Noriega's staying power in Panama.

Policy toward Central America was one of the most controversial foreign policy issue of the 1980's, yet Reagan delegated the policy-making authority to multiple subordinates. The time came when there was no unified administration view or consensus. Advisors were inconsistent and often divided among themselves as to what course of action to take. Competition and division became well-publicized and were most common between State

Department liberals and Reagan loyalists. Secretary of State (SECSTATE) Haig was at odds with presidential advisors Baker and Deaver; Haig also competed with Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Weinberger. UN Ambassador Kirkpatrick and National Security Advisor (NSA) William Clark disagreed with Haig over Central American policy formation. The administration was sending mixed messages on Central American policy. There was confusion in Washington about the policy and in Central America about US intentions. In light of this lack of consensus and to gain support for his policies, Reagan appointed a bipartisan commission, The Kissinger Commission, to analyze the crisis in Central America and recommend appropriate policy to ensure democracy there.<sup>34</sup> The Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America (or Kissinger Report) attempted to alert Congress and the US public that the critical region of Central America should be a foreign policy priority. This judgement was based on the potential threat to our national security caused by instability, revolution and communist subversion in our area of concern and influence.<sup>35</sup> The Kissinger Report was published in January, 1984--after the Grenada intervention, during the wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador, and before attempts to remove Noriega from Panama and to democratize Haiti.

Despite a surge in elected governments between 1982 and 1986 and growing US aid to the region, ill-conceived policies and ugly rhetoric gave the US a bad guy image. US policy in Central America angered many Latin Americans and contributed to a resurgence of pan-Latin nationalism. The Group of Eight, which

evolved out of the Contadora Peace Process and includes most major Latin American nations, saw a callousness on the part of the US toward southern neighbors and advocated US attention to general Latin American interests. Though nationalism is not necessarily bad, it posed a greater challenge for the next administration; it must find more civil ways of relating to neighbors whose growing assertiveness caused them to be less inclined toward the dictates of the US.<sup>36</sup>

To further complicate foreign policy-making for both the Reagan and Bush administrations, the crisis in Central America spread to Panama. Though Cuba and Nicaragua were involved, the primary cause for concern was internal--a military dictator whose concern for democracy, human rights, social welfare and political freedom of the citizens was second to his quest for and love of power and money. US citizens were being harassed and intimidated, and the US government was scorned or blamed for every problem in Panama. Reagan had worked closely with Noriega to support the Contras, but quickly turned on him when he was indicted. Noriega's defiance of Washington brought on embargo, froze assets and put Panama Canal revenues in escrow.

#### Bush Administration 1989-1992

Central American policy played a smaller than anticipated role in the election of 1988. Candidate Bush skirted the Contra issue and, while sharing basic beliefs and goals of Reagan, took a less ideological stance than his predecessor. The principal difference between the Reagan and Bush approaches to Central America is the degree of importance attributed to the region.

Rather than it being the focus of a tough foreign policy, President Bush consciously deemphasized Central America on the US foreign policy agenda. It was his goal to move foreign policy on to what he considered more important issues and regions. He seemed to consider problems in Central America as holdovers from the previous administration and having less intrinsic significance, in spite of the number of them. He inherited problems in almost every Central American nation--i.e., an incipient civil war in El Salvador; the consolidation of a Marxist, anti-American regime in Nicaragua; lagging economic and political development in Honduras and Costa Rica; increasing violence in Guatemala; and a repressive military dictator in Panama. President Bush's desired solutions to the problems in Nicaragua and El Salvador were virtually unchanged from Reagan's. Policy remained tied to containment of communism, opposition to radical change, and a willingness to intervene in the name of stability and national security.<sup>37</sup> Central America's more subordinate place in the Bush administration's priorities meant he was unwilling to pay a high political price to achieve the solutions. The approach would also be more pragmatic.

Foreign policy in the Bush administration would be founded on the principles of diplomacy, democracy, and multilateral solutions to regional problems. Multilateral solutions suggested cooperation and even negotiated settlements. Bush was open to new ideas and people with different views. Central American policy would surely be tested by spiraling inflation, rising debt, social instability and revolutionary activity--and possibly, the instability, uncertainty and growing independence of Latin

American governments. Latin leaders wanted to be heard; Bush listened to their concerns and pledged to work in good faith with Central American leaders to carry out the peace pact reached by the region's presidents.<sup>38</sup> Already democratic Latin leaders had developed three accords to deal with problem areas.

New regional issues needed multilateral attention and presented challenges for US policy. The insurgency in El Salvador was expanding and becoming more violent. The drug war was in the forefront for the US public. Debt crisis complicated by inflation and social disorder plagued several Latin nations. Finally, migration from Central America and illegal immigration to the US was growing.<sup>39</sup> SECSTATE Baker attended a meeting with Latin American leaders in March 1989 where he presented the administration's first major address on the region. He spoke of cooperation to combat drugs, debt and social problems in Central America and ensured them that the US was "committed to work with Latin and Central American democratic leaders to translate the bright promise of the Esquipulas agreement into concrete realities on the ground."<sup>40</sup> The speech indicated a welcomed interest in consulting the region. In Secretary Baker's words:

"We need each other now as we have never before... Latin America's democratic leaders are reaching out to the United States to offer a new partnership...I am here on behalf of a new President... with our answer: We are reaching back to you."<sup>41</sup>

It also suggested that the primary foreign policy actors were to be the Department of State and the White House--no more competition between the National Security Council (NSC) and State evident in recent policy-making.

Another prominent goal of President Bush was to rebuild a foreign policy consensus in the administration. There were growing inter-American concerns, such as trade, drugs, resource development, environment and public health; and he recognized that consensus among advisors and cooperation with Congress would better serve both the US and Latin America. He actively sought a truce with Congress by avoiding the most controversial issues that had plagued Carter and Reagan. Bush demonstrated a willingness to compromise with Congress rather than neglect, persuade or berate its members. Compromise was even possible for actions related to Nicaragua, El Salvador and Panama. He requested humanitarian aid for Contras rather than controversial aid for military operations. The fact that Bush and Baker conferred with Congress and treated it like an equal branch of government defused much of the bitterness. Needing bipartisan Congressional support for Central American foreign policy, President Bush appointed a long-time Democrat, Bernard Aronson, as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. Aronson had no experience in diplomacy or policy-making, spoke no Spanish, and brought with him no expertise on Latin America. His principal asset was ease in dealing with Democratic Congressmen; secondly, he was interested in Central America and had helped lobby Congressional Democrats in favor of Contra aid.<sup>42</sup>

Aronson's appointment in May 1989 left only one position in the national security bureaucracy unfilled--that of the senior Latin American specialist on the NSC. These delayed appointments reflected a lower relative priority for Latin American affairs and gave the impression of declining interest in the region--in

apparent contradiction to the message Baker gave Latin leaders only two months before. Bush's cautious approach to foreign policy toward Latin America was interpreted as benign neglect. It may also have been a cooling off period to allow the new administration to set priorities. More likely there was an attempt to focus the administration on some crucial hemispheric issues such as international debt and narcotics trafficking, which had grown more serious while unattended.

Bush attempted to reconceptualize hemispheric thinking as an alternative approach for foreign policy. He envisioned linking the hemisphere more closely together in a common effort to confront the challenges of an increasingly competitive global economy. The first step toward addressing the debt crisis was Secretary of the Treasury Nicholas Brady's initiative in March 1989 which encouraged financial institutions to reduce the debt of countries which make market reforms and which alter spending to improve fiscal status. The Brady Plan involved the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to improve loan negotiations and return balance of power to the debtor nation. Little more than a year later President Bush proposed the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative (EAI) to reduce trade barriers, encourage private investment and reduce official debt--all steps which do not require large US investments. EAI promotes economic growth through trade and investment liberalization rather than aid.<sup>44</sup> In President Bush's words, its purpose was "to encourage and support market-oriented reforms and economic growth" to build "the first fully free hemisphere in history."<sup>45</sup> In May 1991, Congress authorized fast-track trade negotiations requested by the

administration as an incentive to lower trade barriers. Negotiations began immediately to establish a North Atlantic Free Trade Area (NAFTA) for Mexico, Canada and the US. In the first ninety days of authorization, the ground work was laid for negotiating free trade with fifteen Latin American countries--a decidedly positive step toward the President's vision of a free trade zone for this hemisphere.<sup>46</sup>

The most recent initiative of the Bush administration narrows the geographic focus to Central America but expands the issues to include democracy and peace as well as economic development. The Partnership for Democracy and Development (PDD) proposes a consolidated effort by the existing Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member nations, the Central American nations and key international institutions to support Central America's economic and democratic development.<sup>47</sup>

Although President Bush was determined to broaden the focus of foreign policy toward Latin America, both geographically and onto regional issues, Central America remained the most politically troubling area and issue. Polls confirmed the US public's concern about US involvement in Central America and the threat of another protracted war. SECSTATE Baker was concerned about the President's standing in the polls. The President wanted a more low-key policy and a more pragmatic approach. The selection of Brent Scowcroft as National Security Advisor seemed to support the President's intentions. Scowcroft's reputation was that of a highly professional, non-ideological, efficient manager of foreign policy who worked from behind the scenes. He significantly scaled back the policymaking function of NSC, and

focused on analysis and advising the President. His appointment seemed to facilitate consensus within the administration.

Diplomacy as a foreign policy tool in Nicaragua, often used as a cover story by Reagan, became a reality. In addition to keeping the Contras as a viable military pressure on the Sandinistas, Bush's objectives included mounting a multifaceted diplomatic strategy designed to force the Sandinistas to hold free elections and supporting internal political opposition to challenge the Sandinistas in a campaign. His more measured approach seemed to sell well in Congress and with Central American leaders who also pushed for elections and an end to the insurgency affecting the region. Bush monitored the military aspects while making diplomatic inroads; after the surprise election of Violeta Chamorra, the administration lifted sanctions and pledged economic assistance.

Conditions in El Salvador became more complicated after a democratic election in that the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA), the far right party long associated with El Salvadoran death squads, won over the US-backed Christian Democratic Party. US policy had supported reform for a decade, and Congress and the administration feared a return to repression by the Cristiani government and Salvadoran Army. The Army's killing of Jesuit priests confirmed the worst fears, but was offset by Cristiani's investigation and arrest of those responsible and by one of the strongest FMLN offensives to date. The administration continued its support for the democratically-elected Cristiani government. As confidence in a Salvadoran military victory over the leftist guerrillas waned, negotiated settlement became more palatable.

Again the administration compromised and supported a peace process including negotiations with "communist" elements.<sup>48</sup>

Another Central American problem on which President Bush seemed less likely to compromise was that of Panama. Like Reagan, he felt that the only viable solution was the ouster of Noriega, the self-appointed military dictator. Also like Reagan, neither he nor his foreign policy advisors seemed to know how to accomplish that objective. The Bush administration's initial policy towards Panama was to do virtually nothing until after the presidential election scheduled for May 1989. This benign neglect was another indication of the relatively low priority Central American policy held in the administration. If time was available for the region, officials dedicated it to Nicaragua and El Salvador. It was also clear that where Panama was concerned there was not the consensus President Bush wanted. Department of State advocated the US military ouster of Noriega from early in the crisis while Department of Defense (DOD) favored the Panamanian solution with US support. CIA agreed with DOD, Congress was sharply divided and NSC abstained. Both Presidents Reagan and Bush were decidedly against military intervention throughout 1988 and into the fall of 1989. Even after the election was nullified by Noriega and opposition candidates beaten before TV cameras, the US State Department had no new plan. Economic sanctions imposed by Reagan were tightened but many exceptions were made. More security troops were sent to Panama to exercise US rights of movement under the treaty. As harassment and injuries to US personnel increased and confrontations with Panama Defense Forces (PDF) grew more common, Washington only increased the rhetoric.

President Bush repeatedly called for Noriega's removal by the PDF or resignation, but admitted he was frustrated at the impotence of US efforts to accomplish either. The Latin American Group of Eight, the European Community, the OAS and many individual nations responded to the US push for condemnation of the election fraud and of Noriega's regime. But in the face of his staying power Washington repeatedly backed off from the hard line to only demanding Noriega resign as commander of the PDF. In the absence of State Department action, Congress ruled it would not confirm a Noriega-appointed administrator of the canal and DOD began a noncombatant evacuation of military dependents.<sup>49</sup> In spite of calling for a Panamanian solution, Washington fumbled efforts to assist a coup attempt in October 1989. Congressional criticism of Bush's inept foreign policy and his personal lack of fortitude increased. In December, the killing of a US citizen, albeit the third to die in the crisis, prompted the order for military intervention. The operation had been planned and rehearsed since June and was considered a success militarily. More relevant to this discussion of policy, the intervention in Panama was an example of one member of the national policy triad compensating for the ineptitude of the other two.

Politically, the invasion was a success in Panama and the US in that it rid one of its brutal dictator and the other of its president's "wimp factor" and Congressional critics. Most of the rest of the world condemned the invasion. Formal condemnation came from every nation in Latin America (except El Salvador), the UN and the OAS. President Bush, the pragmatist, looked at results--92 percent of Panamanians strongly supported the action

and 75 percent of the American public said it was justified.<sup>50</sup> Bush, the politician, called other leaders in the hemisphere to hear their concerns about US intervention. He responded by saying:

I am well aware of how our friends south of our border, including my friend President Salinas, look at the use of American force anywhere...So I'm concerned about it. I think it's something that's correctable because I think they know that I have tried a lot of consultation, that we have exhausted the remedies in this particular case of multilateral diplomacy...if there is damage, I can repair it, we can repair it.<sup>51</sup>

Cuba played a much larger role in the formation of foreign policy toward Latin America in the Carter and Reagan administrations than in the current one. President Bush did not see Cuba as a direct threat to the US and dealt with Castro's support of communism in Central America in his US-USSR dealings.<sup>52</sup> As Soviet sponsorship of Cuba declined, economic strife increased and as popular discontent grows, Castro internalizes. The policy of the US now is to support Cuba's isolation.

Keeping in mind that Central America was not a priority for the Bush administration's foreign policy, there were hemispheric issues he intended to address, such as the drugs, debt, social disorder and migration. His proposal of a regional strategy to combat narcotrafficking has in fact been in the form of bilateral agreements with four individual countries. Mexico has since rescinded its agreement. On the economic issue, the administration started strongly, but failed to follow through with much more than rhetoric. By success or luck, democracy prevailed over social disorder in Nicaragua, Panama, and finally El

Salvador. The issue of migration from Central America seems to have been shelved, but could become a campaign issue based upon the Haiti experience. The foreign policy-making process appears to be working more smoothly. However, there are serious omissions in Central American policy and Baker's performance was termed "pathetic" by Foreign Policy Review. President Bush's pragmatic style was well received by Congress but got mixed reviews in Latin America. His attempt to expand the focus hemisphere-wide is promising.

### COMPARATIVE SUMMARY

As initially posited, the political orientation of the leader, focus of the administration's policy, and manner in which it is executed differ widely among recent presidents--even between members of the same political party who have served together. Though the review of each administration has illustrated those characteristics by discussion of the events, the following compendium presents them by category outside the cause-and-effect relationship of the specific event:

a. Political Orientation

1. Carter, a Democrat by party affiliation, viewed himself as a liberal internationalist. He was not concerned with the strategic struggles between superpowers, rather with social (and economic, according to him) reform. In a word, his orientation was one of idealism.

2. Reagan admitted to being a staunch conservative. He was leader of the Republican Party's right wing. He was

ideological and actively anti-communist. His orientation might be characterized by the term, dogmatism.

3. Bush considered himself a moderate. He was the scion of the East Coast Republican establishment. He had a strategic outlook, but without the ideological bent. The term for Bush's orientation: pragmatism.

b. Focus, by issue and geography

1. Carter's unquestionable priority was human rights, followed closely by social equality and democracy. He viewed the issues from a north-south perspective. Late in his tenure, containment became an issue. Geographically, he focused first on Panama and, to a lesser extent, Mexico. He related to other countries only in response to events.

2. Reagan's unwavering focus was the rollback of communism and security. He maintained an east-west view of the issues and the world. He was interested in promoting democracy. Geographically, he could see only Central America--primarily Nicaragua and El Salvador.

3. Bush focused on diplomacy, democracy and regional issues such as drugs, debt, migration and environment. In his regionalist approach, economic issues have also taken precedence. Though events required a geographic focus on Panama, El Salvador and Nicaragua, he prefers a hemispheric focus and has a special interest in Mexico.

c. Foreign Policy execution

1. Carter's idealistic view of the world affected both policy-making and its execution. His human rights policy was naive and inconsistently implemented. Policies applied in Cuba

and Nicaragua earned him the reputation of a weak leader. Though Congress perceived him as passive, his greatest accomplishment was ensuring their ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties. Often appearing indecisive and lacking aggressiveness, his policy-making was considered sincere but convoluted. The Latin perception of foreign policy execution was not good; Latins considered it biased and fraught with omissions.

2. Reagan's hardline anti-communist philosophy and east-west view of the world guided policy formulation and execution with mixed results. The perception of the US improved, along with the defense structure, and Reagan gained favor with the US public. However the aggressive implementation of this policy in Nicaragua resulted in indictments and attention diverted from other issues. He delegated foreign policy formulation to advisors deeply divided on issues and made decisions by public speeches. He lectured Congress and Latin leaders, rather than negotiating with them and was criticized in the region for failure to address the other vital issues.

3. Bush's lowered priority toward Central America caused some uneasiness, but his quest for foreign policy consensus and focus on regional issues was positive. His willingness to compromise and negotiate gained favor with Congress and Latin leaders. Diplomacy got desired results in Nicaragua and El Salvador but caused costly delays in Panama. Economic initiatives have been well received; but little progress has been made in the drug war, migration or environment. Latin perception is favorable on a personal basis although they fear interventionism. Even so the Panama intervention did gain favor with the US public.

## CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The effectiveness of US foreign policy extends beyond the expression of US national interests and the policies to support them. The process by which foreign policy is formulated and means by which it is communicated and executed weigh more heavily in determining foreign relations between and among nations. This relevance of process and implementation is particularly pertinent in Latin America, where culture dictates that the manner in which an action is performed can be more important than the action itself.

There are several concerns for the future--some made more prominent by recent world events:

- The US may fail to recognize the intrinsic importance of Latin America or, conversely, may place unrealistic expectations on Latin nations.

- US policy-makers may not maintain two-way interaction at all levels.

- Considering the overwhelming influence and power of the US over Latin America during the Cold War, we may automatically assume the leadership role and expect Latins to listen.

- The US may adopt an isolationist policy.

On more concrete terms, the following concerns apply:

- Treaties may be amended or selectively implemented.

- The US may abandon or fail to support struggling democracies we helped to create.

- The US may assume a police role in the region.

- Latin America will continue not to be afforded equal political and economic priority with Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

Whether or not these concerns are heeded, the US leadership will continue to pursue national interests and policy toward our neighbors to the south. Although the wording or priority may have been adjusted to more accurately reflect ongoing situations, the basic interests in the region have not changed significantly in the fifteen-year period examined. In his statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Aronson recently defined the long-term national interests of the United States as:

--A region governed by democratic governments responsive to their peoples' needs and respectful of their human rights.

--Political stability, where conflicts are resolved through peaceful negotiation and not through violence.

--Stable economic growth which includes the poor and marginal sectors of society.

--A hemisphere free of the scourge of drug trafficking.

--Policies and practices which protect the environment both to safeguard human health and conserve resources for future generations.

--Effective international cooperation to deal with the post-Cold War agenda of arms control, nuclear non-proliferation and regional security.<sup>54</sup>

Those may be reworded into the basic three areas of interest --political, economic, and security, as always. The unavoidable reality is that the US political, economic, and security interests in Latin America are increasingly forming a seamless web. In the

past, as previously stated, political and security interests took priority over economic.<sup>55</sup> In the future, objectives in the political and security areas of interest will be impossible to achieve unless economic aims are realized.

With that premise and the changing make-up of the world in mind, recommendations for more viable foreign policy follow:

- Adopt a multilateral rather than bilateral approach.
- Relate to sovereign nations as equals.
- Involve international organizations in seeking solutions to common challenges.
- Reorient foreign assistance programs and aid.
- Use arbitration and negotiation.
- Seek to maintain democratic governments in operation and functioning at the highest possible political, economic, social and security terms.
- Encourage or sponsor a common effort to confront challenges of the increasingly competitive global economic environment.
- Seek reform and recovery of the economies in the region.
- Endeavor to keep local conflict to a minimum, whether internal or between regional nations.
- Offer direct assistance in regional counternarcotics efforts.

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#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>2</sup>Dario Moreno, US Policy in Central America: The Endless Debate (Miami, Fl: Florida International University Press, 1990), 25-32.

<sup>3</sup>Robert E. Biles (ed), Inter-American Relations: The Latin Perspective (Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1988). 31.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Feinberg, Central America: International Dimensions of Crisis (New York, NY: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1982), 60-67.

<sup>5</sup>Robert A. Pastor, "The Carter Administration and Latin America: A Test of Principle" in US Policy Toward Latin America: A Quarter Century of Crisis and Challenge John D. Martz, (ed.) (Lincoln, Ne: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 67-69.

<sup>6</sup>Jimmy Carter, Text of speech at the UN, New York Times, 18 March 1979, A10.

<sup>7</sup>Jimmy Carter, "The US Policy Towards Latin America." Address to the Organization of American States, Washington, DC, 15 April 1977.

<sup>8</sup>Molineu, 136 and 161.

<sup>9</sup>Moreno, 30-32.

<sup>10</sup>Alan Howard, "The Real Latin American Policy." The Nation (15 October 1977), 365.

<sup>11</sup>Nora Hamilton and Jeffrey A. Frieden, (ed), Crisis in Central America: Regional Dynamics and US Policy in the 1980's (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1988), 4.

<sup>12</sup>Howard J. Wiarda and Harvey F. Kline, (ed), Latin American Politics and Development (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1990). 72.

<sup>13</sup>Larman C. Wilson, "Human Rights in US Foreign Policy: The Rhetoric and the Practice" in Interaction: Foreign Policy and Public, Donald C. Piper, (ed), (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1983), 178-208.

<sup>14</sup>Biles, 32-37.

<sup>15</sup>Feinberg, 60-61.

<sup>16</sup>Hamilton, 98.

<sup>17</sup>Richard Newfarmer, From Gunboats to Diplomacy: New US Policies for Latin America (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 30.

<sup>18</sup>Bruce D. Larkin, Vital Interests: The Soviet Issue in US Central American Policy (Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1988), 12-18.

<sup>19</sup>Michael J. Kryzanek, US-Latin American Relations (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1990), 75.

<sup>20</sup>Margaret D. Hayes, "Not What I say, but What I Do: Latin American Policy in the Reagan Administration" in US Policy Toward Latin America: A Quarter Century of Crisis and Challenge John D. Martz, (ed) (Lincoln, Ne: University of Nebraska Press, 1988) 98-99.

<sup>21</sup>Frank McNeil, War and Peace in Central America: Reality and Illusion (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Co, 1988), 120.

<sup>22</sup>Committee of Sante Fe, "A New Inter-American Policy for the Eighties", (Washington, DC: Council for Inter-American Security, 1980). 1-2.

<sup>23</sup>Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Foreign Policy and the American Character." Foreign Affairs, Fall 1983, 1-16.

<sup>24</sup>Thomas M. Leonard, Central America and the United States: The Search for Stability (Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 1991). 179-180.

<sup>25</sup>Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," Commentary, November 1979, 34-45.

<sup>26</sup>William R. Bode "The Reagan Doctrine." Strategic Review, Winter, 86, 21-29.

<sup>27</sup>Ronald Reagan, Address to the Nation, Washington DC, 16 March 1986.

<sup>28</sup>Hamilton, 78-80.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid, 37-39.

<sup>30</sup>Molineu, 73-77 and Kryzanek, 205.

<sup>31</sup>McNeil, 178-81.

<sup>32</sup>Molineu, 123-24.

<sup>33</sup>Newfarmer, 33.

<sup>34</sup>Hamilton, 41-42.

<sup>35</sup>Molineu, 223.

<sup>36</sup>McNeil, 181 and 205.

<sup>37</sup>Kryzanek, 233-39.

<sup>38</sup>Moreno, 148.

<sup>39</sup>Kryzanek, 91-94.

<sup>40</sup>James Baker III "Address to the Carter Center of Emory University's Consultation on a New Hemisphere Agenda." Atlanta, GA, 30 March 1989, (Press Release 56, Washington, DC, Department of State, n.d.)

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Robert A. Pastor, "The Bush Administration and Latin America" Journal of InterAmerican Studies, Fall, 1991, 7-8.

<sup>43</sup>Linda Robinson, Intervention or Neglect: The United States and Central America Beyond the 1980's (New York, NY: Council on Foreign Relations, Inc, 1991), 156.

<sup>44</sup>Bernard W. Aronson, "US Policy and Funding Priorities in Latin America and the Caribbean for FY92" US State Department Dispatch, 18 March 1991, 192-3.

<sup>45</sup>George Bush, Remarks on submitting legislation to Congress to implement the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative, 14 Sep 1990, Washington, DC: Office of the White House Secretary.

<sup>46</sup>Pastor, 23-24.

<sup>47</sup>Aronson, 189.

<sup>48</sup>Robinson, 57-106.

<sup>49</sup>General Frederick W. Woerner, USA (Ret). Interview by author, 6 December 1991, Boston, Mass.

<sup>50</sup>J. Brooke, "US Denounced by Nations Touchy About Intervention." New York Times, 21 December 1989, 14.

<sup>51</sup>George Bush "Transcript of Bush News Conference on Noriega and Panama." New York Times, 6 January 1990, 8.

<sup>52</sup>Robinson, 166-67.

<sup>53</sup>Molineu, 176.

<sup>54</sup>Bernard Aronson, Statement before the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, Washington, DC, 15 April 1991.

<sup>55</sup>Molineu, 9-11.

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