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# Guatemala Builds Strategic Hamlets

By Loren Jenkins  
Washington Post Foreign Service

NABAJ, Guatemala—Two years after taking to the mountains in a campaign against leftist guerrillas in the rugged Indian highlands, the Guatemalan Army is rushing to complete a network of strategic hamlets intended to end civilian support of the rebels.

The program, a culmination of the Army's counterinsurgency doctrine, establishes rigid control of an Indian population that has become a base of support in the leftist guer-

rillas' protracted war against successive military governments.

The hamlets are known here as "model villages" or merely "rebuilt towns," and the Army says they are part of an effort to extend modern services to the long ignored and isolated Indians. Church and human rights groups abroad have charged that the hamlets are modified "concentration camps."

The Army's Section of Civilian Affairs, which is in charge of "pacification" of the civilian populations in former rebel areas, has built 24 villages in four areas of the high-

lands that have been designated "poles of development." Another 55 are on the drawing boards, according to Col. Mario Enrique Paiz Bolanos, the head of the section.

Debate over the nature of the hamlets has increased with plans by the U.S. Agency for International Development to allot \$1 million of its \$52.5 million program in Guatemala for the construction of schools, roads and water facilities in "model villages."

The aid, U.S. officials here maintain, is to be given because of the  
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civilian economic merits of the towns, not their alleged strategic military significance. U.S. officials insist that the money is to go to the civilian reconstruction organization rather than the military. However, the military-run government dominates the civilian unit.

Col. Paiz, at his headquarters in Guatemala City, portrayed the hamlets in terms of providing the Indians—who are descendants of the ancient Mayans and who make up more than half of Guatemala's 7 million population—the food, shelter, security and work often denied in the past.

Paiz insisted that the towns were not being built for strategic purposes and thus could not be called "strategic hamlets" as were those that U.S. Green Berets organized in Vietnam. He said the object was to provide the Indians with their two most basic needs, "security and development."

But a four-day trip here in Quiche province, the center of one of the four "poles of development," makes clear that the towns have definite military purposes. The tour included visits to three of the towns and talks with officers and residents.

The hamlets have been built along new roads constructed by Army engineers to cut through the pine-forested mountains that heretofore had been impenetrable to the military vehicles that now can be seen here.

The hamlets of Acul and Tzabal have been erected over the ruins of towns of the same names that residents say were bombed, burned and bulldozed by the Army during offensives in 1981 and 1982 against the guerrillas that dominated the area.

While Indians traditionally live in scattered communities where fields alternate with adobe

houses over a vast expanse, Acul and Tzabal are concentrated collections of one-room, wooden houses with metal roofs. They are laid out on a neat grid of gravel streets, with street lights.

In short, a population that once lived scattered over a large expanse is now concentrated in easily guarded, and controlled, communities.

Next to the three towns visited were military garrisons that villagers said were the true authority. No actions could be taken without consulting the garrison commander.

Men were organized into civil defense patrols whose chiefs were responsible to the garrison commander, according to these accounts. He often pressed virtual work gangs to clear fields of fire, repair neighboring roads, help with fortifications or work on the construction of other hamlets under Army supervision.

Although Army officials insisted that no one was being forced to live in the towns or prevented from leaving them, all town residents queried out of hearing of Army civic-action teams said that they were forbidden to leave.

Some residents said the Army had regrouped them there since gathering them up in the hills during recent operations. Others said they had sought to reach government lines as a result of starvation, disease, guerrilla abuse, or, more recently, an offered government amnesty.

Virtually all of the villagers interviewed said they originally had fled to the mountains and lived with the guerrillas after the start of the Army offensives in 1981 that were said to have killed thousands of civilians caught in the fighting. The villagers also spoke of guerrillas killing hundreds of other civilians to prevent a return to government lines in the new villages.

The Army, according to these residents, is just as determined that no one leave the new

homes. "The Army says we have to remain here," said a 30-year-old sitting on a chair on the dirt floor of his house. "If anyone tries to leave here, they kill him."

"The Army is not bad as long as you follow orders," the man said, asking that his name not be used. "If you don't, they kill you."

As he spoke, almost all of the other men of Tzabal were outside of town, clearing land around a hill above it where about 300 soldiers have established a base.

The informant said he was in town because he was assigned communal chores. He said the men of the village of 1,890 residents had been working for the Army on the hillside for weeks without pay and without being able to devote enough time to grow their own food. He said their plots were meager and their families near starving.

"There is no work, no money and no food here," said a young civil defense patrolman on duty at the corner of Democracia Street and Clavellinas Avenue. "We were promised our own land here but so far we have not received anything beyond our houses."

The villagers did acknowledge, grudgingly, that many now have access to electricity and clean drinking water for the first time in their lives. But they said the price is to be regimented in communes by an Army that supervises their actions through ubiquitous civil-defense patrols.

Paiz, to make a point about the hamlets, read from the Army's "Manual of Counterinsurgency used by the Guatemalan military academy: "Countersubversive war is total, permanent and universal, and it requires the massive participation of the population like the subversive war it confronts . . . our objective is the population."

What the Army has done, Paiz said, is to turn Mao Tse-tung's theories of guerrilla warfare on their head. Instead of allowing the guerrillas to operate like fish in a sea of the civilian population, the fish have been separated by the Army having taken control of the population.