



# GUATEMALA UPDATE

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## HOW TO RESUSCITATE A CADAVER

On October first of this year a secret meeting took place in Guatemala between the Ministers of Defense from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Costa Rica, as well as the North American military chief from Panama's Canal Zone. On the agenda of the meeting was the reactivation of the defunct Defense Council of Central America (CONDECA). The history of this mutual self-defense council goes something like this: In 1960, the Central American militaries--made very nervous by the example that the young Cuban Revolution had on the people of Central America and knowing that the hunger, misery and repression would culminate one day in a confrontation, possibly armed--set out to create a mechanism that would serve to maintain the power status quo. At the same time CONDECA would protect the rapidly growing foreign capital that was flowing into Central America during the fruitful decade of the 60s when the newly formed Central American Common Market offered a favorable investment climate to primarily North American business interests.

Under the CONDECA agreement the armies of Central America would come to the assistance of any country of the region which was invaded by a foreign nation (read: CUBA). Fully realizing that this scenario was all but impossible, the Defense Council of Central America defended the militaries' interests from the fury of their own people who were becoming more and more vocal in demanding their rights.

CONDECA remained intact for nearly 20 years but was largely ineffectual; no action was taken during the so-called "Soccer War" between El Salvador and Honduras in the 1970s nor when the Nicaraguan people won their liberty after many long years of struggle and sacrifice. It was, in fact, the fall of Somoza that sounded the death knell for CONDECA. Without any function whatsoever, it became an unburied cadaver to the oppressed people of Central America.

But the situation has changed dramatically in the last few years. Nicaragua is now a free country governed by popular and democratic will. In El Salvador and Guatemala the armed struggle has advanced significantly, and the people of Honduras are every day organizing to shake off the exploitation that has turned their humble and impoverished country into a United States army base. Not surprisingly, the Central American oligarchy is terrified that the respective militaries will be unable to protect its privileged position. Thus, the resurrection of CONDECA in the October meeting.

The Council provides the means through which the Reagan Administration can funnel military aid to Guatemala over the objections of Congress which has shown increasing abhorrence to the counterinsurgency tactics of "scorched earth" and other blatant attacks against Guatemala's indigenous population. By mutual agreement, Salvadoran soldiers can be trained closer to home in nearby Guatemala; in exchange the Salvadoran army will share its military hardware provided by U.S. taxpayers. CONDECA will also establish the mechanism for launching an invasion of Nicaragua.

Ten days following the coup which placed him in office, Defense Minister and new leader of Guatemala, General Mejia Victores, made this declaration to the press: "Only the United States can give real help in defeating the guerrilla movement in the region...The Contadora group does not have anything to do with Central America. The U.S. position in Central America is the correct one...The Nicaraguan government represents a threat not only to Guatemala, but to the entire continent."

(In the first 40 days of the Mejia government, 75 civilians have been assassinated by the military and paramilitary forces, 35 people have disappeared or been kidnapped, more than 90 soldiers and guerrillas have died in combat).

Sources: Enfoprensa, FDCR (Democratic Front Against Repression) Bulletin, GNIB (Guatemalan News and Information Bureau)