Science & Society, Vol. 51, No. 3, Fall 1987, pp. 314-338

THE ANATOMY OF STATE TERROR: CHILE, EL SALVADOR AND BRAZIL

JAMES PETRAS

STATE TERROR IS AN INTEGRAL PART of the class struggle. While there are "arbitrary" and random acts by pathological individuals, the structure and direction of state terror is defined by the political interests it serves (Stohl and Lopez, 1984; Herman, 1982). The *level of intensity* and the *target* of state terror have a specific political purpose: to defeat the attempt by the organized peasantry and working class and burgeoning popular social movements from changing the ownership of property and distribution of wealth.

A second and related purpose of state terror is to destroy all of the democratic representative political and social institutions. The dismantling of political institutions resulting from installation of state terrorist regimes is what has caught the attention of most liberal analysts. While the abolition of representative institutions is intimately related to the reign of terror against the popular social movements, they are not identical. This becomes obvious from an examination of the differential levels of violence applied to the two sets of structures: the social movements, particularly those directed toward restructuring society in a more equitable way, suffer a vastly greater intensity of terror. While thousands of trade union militants and grass roots peasant activists are murdered, many political leaders are exiled, jailed, escaped or are merely proscribed. The closer the political leadership is identified with class-anchored social movements, the more likely it will suffer the same violent attacks, independent of their class origins. On the other hand, leadership pertaining to pro-

scribed parties representing property groups, while subject to coercion are more likely to survive physical destruction, enduring exile and political proscription.

The meaning of *state-terrorist action* cannot be understood in terms of specific short-term context (particular violent activities); nor can it be understood as an autonomous political act. Rather, state terror is best understood as part of a broad historical context in which terrorism is purposefully directed toward the creation of a political economic structure (accumulation model) and a specific set of inter-state relations (subordination to U.S. hegemony). The framework for analyzing state terrorism must be sufficiently comprehensive to capture the dynamic interrelationships between state activity, the accumulation process and the projection of hegemonic power. More specifically, state terror can be periodicized to include:

1) the initial period of extermination and destruction of social movements, popular institutions and regimes;
2) the consolidation and institutionalization of the state terror network and the recomposition of the socio-economic forces in command of the accumulation process;
3) forcible implantation of the new accumulation process (maximum use of terror to contain any threats to "investor confidence"); the promotion and channeling of investment loans by major corporate collaborators (the widespread use of torture, disappearance and death squads to dissuade wage laborers from protesting growing inequalitites); violent measures to contain the contradictions engendered at the social and political level;
4) deepening economic crises lead to divergent responses from the local and international terror networks: the decomposition of the state terrorist regime and the revival of social movements lead to an *escalation* of terrorism or a tactical retreat. In the latter case electoral systems are juxtaposed over the terror apparatus, which retreats and reconsolidates for future reactivation.

The growth and proliferation of state terror networks in Latin America are closely related and in most cases subordinated to an ongoing global terror network. Washington has become the center for the organization of a variety of institutions, agencies and training programs providing the expertise, financing and technology to service client-state terrorist institutions.

The international state-terror network has been promoted by all administrations — Republican and Democratic — and has served as a significant foreign policy tool in several inter-related policy areas:

1) sustaining client regimes by improving the capacity of their repressive apparatus to destroy political and social movements (Brazil after the 1964 military coup, El Salvador after 1979);
2) providing assistance and direction to terrorist sectors of the state apparatus to de-stabilize popular regimes (Chile during the Allende period).

Core-state terrorism has elaborated several key organizational and ideological concepts that now routinely accompany state terrorist activities:

A) organizing cooperative activities between the repressive apparatuses of state terrorist regimes to facilitate joint ventures in establishing regional hegemony (El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala);
B) incorporating "third parties" into political contexts where domestic opinion prevents overt collaboration with local state terrorists (U.S. promoting Israeli-Argentina ties in Central America in the 1970s);
C) developing and promoting *"death squads"* within the security forces as means of obscuring the responsibility of the terrorist state for the acts which it commits (Nairn, 1984a; Nairn, 1984b).
D) developing and promoting the "disappearance" of political opponents in order to neutralize international pressure by lowering the number of political prisoners.

The global state terror network emerged along with the growth of global capital expansion. More specifically, the expansion of international capital has had a *disintegrative effect* on the cohesive bonds sustaining many third-world countries. The local dominant classes — oriented toward establishing links from above and the outside — have not been able to create and sustain new vertical linkages. The *absence of hegemony* and the increasing levels of class conflict led "core" state and local ruling classes to rely on military repression. The *long-term, large-scale* nature of

capital movements, however, required systematic and *sustained repressive activity*. The oligarchy-military-repressive state machinery was inefficient and geared to corruption at the expense of effective counter-insurgency. The new terror network involves systematic information collection, total warfare tactics affecting civilians and combatants and high technology firepower; these are among the key changes introduced by the special training missions of the imperial terror state. The routinization and bureaucratization of state terror accompanied and facilitated the inflows and outflows of foreign capital. Effective state terror against the social movements became one of the major factors creating investors' confidence in previously conflictual regions.

Parallel organizational forms and institutional linkages take place between economic and repressive apparatuses. Joint ventures between local and multinational capital are accompanied by collaborative efforts between the police and military forces: insofar as capitalist exploitation has become international, national systems of repression have declined, and the international state terror system has gained ascendancy.

Increasingly the traditional restraints embodied in international law, in the Geneva Agreement, the World Court and the United Nations are explicitly rejected by the imperial center in favor of unilateral terrorist actions: international air piracy, and mining of international shipping routes and national harbors, accompany public funding of mercenary terrorist forces in Central America, South Africa and South Asia. The implementation of bilateral terrorist policies between the center and client state has given way to efforts to formulate global terrorist policies involving European and Asian powers in concerted terrorist actions against adversary regimes and movements. While this new attempt to create a multilateral state terrorist structure under the direction of the U.S. has not been endorsed in Europe, it still represents a clear indication of the increasing scope and importance that state terrorism has gained in U.S. policy-making.

The *resurgence of imperial state terror on a global level* coincides with the *relative decline of economic levers* in imperial foreign policy. Core-state policy makers increasingly rely on *state terror networks and policies* as compensatory mechanisms in the face of an increasingly diversified world economy. No longer able to impose its

will through global economic boycotts or blockades, no longer able to force allies to abide by its economic commands, the *U.S. imperial state has sought to secure through state terror what it has been unable to achieve through the economic marketplace.*

The world economic crisis had a profoundly corrosive effect on the internal cohesion of state terrorist regimes because of their deep structural linkages to the world market. The crisis resulted in fissures within the ruling bloc, and even the repressive apparatus: the period of outward growth papered over the massive and pervasive corruption and transfer of capital to overseas accounts. The added financial burdens accompanying the crisis exposed the wholesale pillage of civil society by the terror state, setting in motion a new wave of mass popular social movements, which the existing terror apparatus demonstrated an incapacity to repress.

The strategic concern of the managers of the imperial terror network is to preserve the state apparatus by sacrificing the titular head of the client regime in order to reform and reinvigorate the state's capacity for repression against the social movements. The imperial state, aided by its mass media, propagates the notion that the object of the popular social movements is merely to depose a political personality (Duvalier, Marcos) and not to transform the socio-political system, including the armed forces. The imperial state and its media publicize the role that the state plays along with the military in the removal of the dictator to gain democratic credibility, while insuring the continuity of the state-terror apparatus.

Rising social movements and a declining state-terrorist client present a serious problem to the managers of the imperial terror network. The challenge is to recompose the terror network by co-opting a new stratum of pliable civilian politicians willing to legitimate a newly reformed and more professionally efficient state terror machine, and to repress the social movements with rigor and discipline. The problems faced by imperial state managers in this period of "transition" and mass confrontation are numerous and difficult: the incumbent ruler may resist displacement in order to save the apparatus; the displacement of the ruler may lead to internal divisions among contending factions leading to disintegration of the apparatus; the civilians that ascend to government may resist following the imperial direc-

tives concerning the continuity of military structures, terror, etc.; finally, the social movements may overtake the civilian/military substitute congenial to the core state terror managers and proceed to create an independent regime.

The crises of state terrorist regimes and the rise of social movements had led paradoxically to the *destabilization* of the international terror network and its *reinforcement.* To the degree that social movements are coherently organized and possess an alternative political leadership and program capable of breaking linkages with the international terror network, consequential changes are possible; but so are the possibilities of direct U.S. military intervention. In the absence of a political leadership capable of replacing the incumbent terror regime, the political changes induced by the new imperial political proxies threaten to unleash a new and more virulent form of state terrorism. Operating under the mantle of "elected civilians," the reconstituted and more efficient terror apparatus, heavily funded by the imperial state, will increase the level of terror. In the following section this paper will focus on analyzing the application of state terrorism in three distinct contexts:

1) the use of state terrorism against organized democratic workers and neighborhood council movements in Chile as a means of reconstituting a hierarchical elitist class order and re-establishing U.S. hegemony;
2) the organization and pervasive use of terror against the mass social movements with extensive grass roots support in El Salvador as a prelude for organizing demonstration elections to recompose a U.S. client state;
3) the use of state terror in Brazil to dismantle a populist regime and atomize its supporters as a prelude to promoting a model of accumulation based on the reconcentration of income toward the upper classes and the multinational corporations.

Chile: From Worker's Councils to Social Movements

Chile during the Allende years (1970-1973) was the Latin American country with the most highly developed forms of democratic representation: direct elections of factory councils managing factories in the "social sector." A detailed study of the

workers' council movement describes their success in transforming and organizing production and distribution (Espinosa and Zimbalist, 1978).

Throughout the country, self-managing councils displaced private owners and managers, replacing the typical hierarchical structure and management prerogatives with new "horizontal" forms of direct consulatation with the direct producers. The experience of direct democracy had a profound impact on workers' consciousness. The patterns of participation in production destroyed the entire managerial mythology of the "inevitable necessity" of authoritarian control and unequal rewards based on different levels of responsibility. This profound experience would make any attempt to "return the workers to their previous subordinate position" extremely difficult within any democratic framework based on persuasion. The military dictatorship's systematic application of state terror against the worker-participants in the council movement was designed to eradicate any consciousness, continuity or communication of this experience within the working class.

The use of systematic terror against the councils was first and foremost wholeheartedly supported by the former owners, who retook possession of the factories. The terror and the subsequent mass firings of workers were mutually reinforcing processes to reimpose the authoritarian hierarchical structure. Far from being the "natural order," under the impetus of revolutionary mobilization the vertical system of domination had come to be seen as unnatural: incompatible with the recognition by labor that it could run factories without bosses. The reconstitution of this unnatural order required mass terror: only through the sustained use of force and violence were prerogatives of management reestablished.

Management feared, not only the *past* experience of production without bosses, but the *memory:* the *future* possibility that the workers would at the first opportunity revert toward the council system. This perpetual "insecurity" accounts for the sustained support for state terror among the employers. Their continued identification with the regime of violence, torture and disappearance was the best guarantee that "it would never happen ever again, the nightmare": the direct producers successfully operating the factories without the employers.

The scope of state terror far exceeded the workers' council-controlled factories, however: it embraced whole neighborhoods and a broad array of occupational groups in the cities, towns and countryside. Peasant victims were found in mass lime graves in the countryside; workers' bodies were strewn at busy bus stops or floating down the Mapocho; students dropped from helicopters disappeared into the Pacific: 30,000 dead, many times that number arrested and tortured. The fundamental reason for the terror was the proliferation of social movements through Chile in the decade preceding the coup, particularly during the Allende years (Smirnow, 1979). Every conceivable group in society was organizing: land squatters invaded unused land to obtain a site to build homes, marched for titles, demanded the right to participate in house design; women from poor neighborhoods organized and marched against shortages, speculators, retail hoarders; peasants occupied estates, preventing landlords from sabotaging production and decapitalizing farms prior the expropriation; factory zones organized coordinating committees to facilitate regional mobilization and defense of their interests; popular municipalities established common councils to coordinate activities.

The proliferation of mass popular movements provoked counter-mobilization from the Right Wing and its paramilitary forces. Commercial groups, privileged professional associations, and transport owners organized boycotts, and sought to paralyze the distribution systems. Financed in large part by the CIA, the purpose of elite mobilization was to provide a pretext for a military takeover to carry out the war against the social movements which they were incapable of defeating.

The social movements politicized vast numbers of Chileans, bringing participatory democracy to every household, village, barrio and meeting place. Civil society had in its totality assumed the tasks of making the state "redundant"; except that the state — more particularly, the military and the marginalized ruling class — did not fatalistically accept being relegated to the dust bin of history.

When a ruling class finds its very *existence threatened,* it retaliates with all of the resources of terror at its disposal; every brutal measure, every execution is justified, in the name of survival of Western Civilization.

The mass nature of state terror and its *sustained* application was directed at destroying the all-inclusive social movements and de-politicizing the populace: in a word establishing the total dictatorship of the state over civil society. The process of reestablishing the hierarchical principle in all areas of social life — in schools, municipalities, farms, factories, clinics — required the systematic persecution of all representatives of the social movements: neighborhood leaders were picked up by the secret police, doctors were shot, cooperatives dismantled, colonels appointed to direct the universitites.

Permanent militarization, institutionalized secret police, routinized torture reflected the regime's belief in the *depth of the resistance* to the new hierarchical order. A single violent seizure of power (the Pinochet coup of 1973) was not sufficient to wipe out the collective consciousness of the popular participants in the social movement. Repeated acts of violence were needed to terrorize the populace: the resort to permanent purges and the institutionalization of terror in the form of secret political police (DINA-CNI-military intelligence-state organized death squads) were the result of the regime's recognition of its incapacity to totally uproot and destory popular sensibility to democracy.

The collapse of the "free market" economy in 1981-82 and the subsequent defection of key elite sectors from the regime coincided with a new wave of social movements. The new social movements reflected the deep structural changes that had taken place under the dictatorship's free market policies. The massive growth of unemployment (over 25% of the labor force) and underemployment, combined with the precipitous decline in living standards (Echeverria, 1984; Ruiz-Tagle and Urmeneta, 1984) led to the growth of urban neighborhood-based mass movements alongside of and in some cases eclipsing the trade unions as centers of mobilization and resistance to the dictatorship. The new movements have a greater degree of autonomy from the traditional party structures, engage the whole community and entire households and are led by rank-and-file leaders.

Faced with this new form of opposition, the regime has shifted its terror tactics toward massive military occupations — with armored cars, helicopters and combat formations — of entire zones of popular mobilization. The state terrorists act as if

they are invading a foreign country. The analogy is apposite: the self-organization and self-mobilization of the social movements, with their common kitchens, extended solidarity, have formed a "state within a state," the state of the popular social movements adjacent to the official state of the terrorist apparatus.

While it is clear that the regime has the power to physically occupy and take over the physical terrain of the "other state," it has lost any and all semblance of authority, most clearly manifest upon their departure: the new authority of the movements inmmediately reassert itself. The regime has lost entire densely populated regions to the burgeoning social movements; it can dominate but it cannot govern.

The fundamental fact that has emerged in the present conjuncture is the declining effectiveness of mass terror; several mass arrests, involving routinized use of terror, have failed to diminish the level of mobilization, mass demonstrations, capacity for street fighting. The crucial factor here is the emergence of a new generation of unrooted and unempolyed youth who have grown to political maturity under dictatorial conditions without any prospects for employment and therefore without affiliation with the traditional political parties and trade unions. Not having been socialized to respect legal norms, toughened by the struggle for daily survival, the young urban poor are most responsive to the confrontatist style of the new social movements, and have been in the forefront of the street fighting with the Federal Police *(Carabiñeros)* in the poorer neighborhoods. The regime rules today through a "state of siege"; still, the movements prepare for a new round of confrontations. The efforts by the Christian Democrats, the Right Wing, and the Social Democrats to pressure the U.S. into securing a negotiated transfer of power has failed — and, as a consequence, the influence of the social movements increases and defines the course of struggle against the dictatorship. Once again, the state terror apparatus prepares to unleash its formidable army of forces. The Supreme Court released three senior officers convicted of kidnapping and torturing three polical prisoners; the Chilean Human Rights groups report a sharp increase in kidnapping, disappearances and torture. As the axis of the antidictatorial struggle shifts from the conciliatory traditional political parties to the consequential social movements, terror once again reemerges

as the key element in regime rulership. It also sets the stage for the most decisive challenges to the Pinochet dictatorship.

El Salvador: State Terror and the Politics of Extermination

El Salvador has a history of state terror going back to 1932, when General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez massacred 30,000 peasants and workers in the course of instituting a regime of terror that lasted for 12 years. The continuous use of terror throughout the subsequent decades was calibrated to the level of popular opposition. Weaker movements have evoked selective state assassinations.

During the past decade (1976-1986), however, state terror reached unprecedented levels: over 60,000 civilians have been slaughtered by the U.S.-financed and -directed terror apparatus (Chomsky, 1985). To understand the dynamics of contemporary state terror we must examine the political and economic roots of the crises that precipitated the violence.

U.S. Alliance with the Modernizing Oligarchy. The period between the early 1950s and the mid- 1970s witnessed a major effort to integrate and deepen El Salvador's participation in the world market. Large infusions of capital from multinational banks financed infrastructure to facilitate the flows of capital, the expansion of marketing networks and the growth of large-scale commercial agriculture (Barry, Wood and Preusch, 1982). Private and state loans from the U.S. financed urban power and transport facilities to facilitate the entry of labor-intensive manufacturing investment, taking advantage of large pools of low-paid labor. Multinational capital invested in agribusiness enterprises and light manufacturing. The "modernization" of Salvadorean capital took place within the parameters of the existing rigid class and state structure: oligarchs were converted into entrepreneurs: tenant farmers were reduced to landless wage laborers. The displaced rural population and artisans were not absorbed in industry but were concentrated in the cities and towns as an army of unemployed or semi-employed street vendors — the "self-employed." Workers employed in the new manufacturing enterprises were paid a subsistence wage and denied social benefits and trade union rights. Increased mechanization and productivity in the export-oriented farms

decreased employment opportunities, and was accompanied by greater concentration of ownership and income. The dynamic expansion of the Salvadorean economy was accompanied by greater social polarization, extending from the countryside to the cities, factories and school rooms.

Underlying this process of polarized modernization was a historical compromise between the U.S. state and the Salvadorean oligarchy. Washington was recognized by the oligarchy as the hegemonic power in the region: to be followed unconditionally in matters affecting U.S. regional and global interests in all the international forums. Moreover, the Salvadorean elite followed Washington's economic prescriptions: an open door to investment and minimum regulation over capital. In exchange the U.S. provided economic and military aid to facilitate the accumulation of oligarchical wealth and to strengthen its repressive apparatus.

Social Movements and the Challenge to the Traditional Allies. By the early 1970s the process of polarized development engendered the growth of social movements in the countryside and cities. Peasant unions, trade unions, community and church-based movements, school teachers, health workers, postal workers, journalists, and rural cooperatives began to appear, demanding land, better wages, democracy. From the early 1970s to 1980 El Salvador experienced an unprecedented wave of popular participation despite continuing regime repression.

Hundreds of thousands of Salvadoreans participated in demonstrations, community organizations, Christian "base community" consciousness raising activity, factory occupations, petition campaigns. The traditional opposition parties — the Christian and Social Democratic parties — still hoping for honest elections, were by-passed. The social movements rejected the cesspool of fradulent elections and the official political structure controlled by the military dictators. Street parliaments appeared everywhere: in churches, in factories, in movie houses, by the streams where washerwomen gathered. The new participatory structures led by the rank-and-file challenged the fundamental hierarchical principles of both the elite and the opposition. A tumultous popular democracy was blossoming within the shell of the repressive dictatorship.

The social movements posed a fourfold challenge to the very

foundations of the U.S.-oligarchical alliance: The *democratic challenge* based on self-mobilizing popular movements threatened military oligarchical rule and the capacity of the U.S. to control political agendas. The *social challenge* to the concentration of ownership of land, banks and trade threatened the source of wealth, power and prerogatives of the large landowners, their U.S. agribusiness partners and the multinationals exploiting cheap labor. The *nationalist challenge* threatened U.S. hegemony by proposing an independent, non-aligned foreign policy backed by a diversification of economic, diplomatic and political relations. The *socialist challenge* threatened to undermine the externally oriented model of accumulation and shifted priorities, including redistribution, toward lower income groups and the expansion of the internal market.

The proliferation and geometric growth of the social movements engendered profound fissures in the major institutions: splits appeared in the church, the universities, and to a much lesser degree within the army and oligarchy. Important sectors of the university and church supported the burgeoning social movements: the rector of the University Rafael Menjivar, the Archbishop of El Salvador Oscar Arnulfo Romero, the large landowner and former Minister of Agriculture Enrique Cordova Alvarez, the reform officer Colonel Adolfo Majano. The driving force behind these elite fissures was the burgeoning social movements.

With the victory of the Nicaraguan Revolution, new impetus was given to the social movements: the left was an overwhelming majority in the streets. One account describes El Salvador in September 1979:

> Every inch of every wall in downtown San Salvador was covered with graffiti proclaiming 1980 as the year of El Salvador's liberation. Demonstrations against (General) Romero (the ruling dictator) took place almost daily. . . .
>
> The demonstrators chanted: If Nicaragua triumphed El Salvador will triumph too. The People's Leagues occupied the labor ministry demanding the release of 500 politicial prisoners; FAPU led wildcat strikes and work stoppages in factories across the country; the BPR held its national congress in a movie theater in downtown San Salvador. And guerrillas attacked the National Palace. (Armstrong and Shenk, 1982.)

The scope of the popular movements — their inclusiveness — is best described in this account of a demonstration on January 22, 1980:

> The demonstration stretched . . . twenty blocks. There were columns of state employees, organized slum dwellers, factory workers, electricians, teachers, and endlessly, the farmworkers and peasants who had slipped through the roadblocks to enter the capital before dawn. *(Ibid.)*

The military opened fire on the peaceful protest, killing 67 and wounding 250. It hasn't stopped firing since, with military repression accompanied by elections, "agrarian reforms," civilian presidents — because the democratic social movements represented a threat to U.S. hegemony, to oligarchical rule, to military power and enrichment.

Modernization of the Terror Apparatus: Total War Against the Social Movements. The growth of the social movements, the multiple challenges, the fissures within the traditional institutions, the victory of the popular movements in neighboring Nicaragua — and the incapacity of the local client regime to contain them — led Washington toward a strategy of *modernization of the terror apparatus.* The strategic goal of destroying the social movements was to be "legitimated" (sold to the U.S. and European public) through two devices; a power-sharing scheme, including civilians and the state terror apparatus; and an agrarian reform program, which would create a social base for the repressive regime. The policy of upgrading the terror apparatus was initiated and sustained by the Carter Administration, despite the fact that four U.S. religious workers were raped and murdered by the Armed Forces of the client regime as the aid was being delivered. This small fact illustrates Washington's singleminded commitment to strengthening the repressive apparatus.

A great deal of writing about this period (1979-1980) has mistakenly characterized it as a period of "reformism and repression." In fact, this is the period when the machinery of terror was prepared for the "final solution": the mass slaughter of tens of thousands of grass roots activists who made up the body and soul of the social movements. It took five years (1980-1985) of continuous daily killings throughout the country to empty the streets and villages of the social movements, and to produce

those peaceful-as-a-cemetery processions of people waiting to vote . . . for those who presided over the terror.

It is useful to trace the process by which El Salvador was transformed from a country of burgeoning social movements on the verge of creating a democratic regime to a nation of terror and elections (Petras and Morely, 1981).

In 1979 the collapse of the traditional alliance was imminent; the existing traditional military dictatorship was incapable of containing the social movements; and the U.S. public was unwilling to support U.S. military intervention or aid to a right-wing dictatorship. The Carter Administration sought to divide the opposition and strengthen the right-wing military by promoting a power-sharing formula. The idea was to co-opt a powerless civilian junta, promote and publicize it as a reformist change over the previous dictatorship and *to secure approval in the U.S. for increasing funding for the terror apparatus.* By personalizing the issue of terror in the person of the previous incumbent dictator (Romero), Washington was able to sustain and strengthen the terror apparatus which remained intact. The "Reform Junta" of October 1979 was immediately pressured by the social movements to respect human rights: the civilian Junta members were impotent to contain the U.S.-backed military and its daily assassinations. As the first "left of center" Junta was replaced by moderate Christian Democrats in January, Washington was able to begin its efforts to supply the military and promote the myth of a centrist-reformist regime. As state terrorism mounted, the last remnant of the reformist Christian Democrats abandoned the government and fled the country; they were replaced by the Duarte faction, a minority in a party which lacked any substantial influence in the social movements.

With Duarte providing a civilian cover, Washington escalated its commitment to state terror. Washington's state terrorist apparatus played an essential role in torture/interrogation, and in organization of the military/death squad activity. Testimony from a former West Point graduate and ex-commander in the Salvadorean army, who served as a translator for U.S. advisors, reveals that U.S. instructors taught terror techniques in a class of interrogation, knowingly and actively collaborating and funding military officers who were commanded by top military officials to routinely engage in death squad ac-

tivities in order to kill "people who just don't agree with the official line" (Nairn, 1986).

The class character of the state terrorist activity is revealed by this self-confessed death squad leader.

> Death Squad Officer: "Also the rich people — the leading citizens of the community — traditionally have a great deal of input. Whatever bothers them, if they got someone who just came into their ranch or their farm and they consider them a bad influence, they just send a messenger to the commander.
>
> [Q. What would be done?]
>
> Death Squad Officer: Normally the person would be eliminated.... Department 5 [military intelligence] ... keeps tabs on people such as labor leaders, opposition political leaders. Most of the missions that S2 [military intelligence] sends you on have to do with civilians — not military.
>
> [Q. These are missions to do what?]
>
> Death Squad Officer: Eliminate civilians. (Nairn, 1986.)

The civilian fringe presided over by Duarte provided the denial that the death squads were in fact disguised military officials carrying out routine orders from the military command with the full backing of Washington. With Duarte as a cover, state terror went on a massive bloodletting: hundreds of trade union leaders were murdered, thousands of peasant activists and coop members, scores of teachers and hundreds of students, professors and journalists — over 10,000 killings in 1980 alone — a figure that was approximated or surpassed over the next five years. As U.S. military aid and involvement increased, the death toll escalated. The correlation was not spurious. Washington introduced helicopter gunships that fired thousands of rounds a minute, decimating the countryside, and trained and encouraged elite battalions to pursue the guerrillas and their supporters more aggressively. The traditional corrupt Salvadorean army was modernized, and the kill ratio increased dramatically — particularly of the leaders of the social movements. By the end of 1981 the urban movements were decimated; unable to engage in movement politics, the activists had the choice of fleeing the cities and joining the guerrillas, or leaving the country. The guerrilla movement grew from 2,000 in 1979 to 10,000 in 1984;

refugees numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Whole villages, each with hundreds of peasants, were slaughtered. Reagan provided a new impetus, pouring over one billion dollars into the terror apparatus over the next five years, adding 50,000 victims to the Carter total.

The modernization of the Salvadorean terror apparatus by its international benefactors was accompanied by the organization of periodic elections. The interrelationship between state-terror and elections is an important one: state terror destroyed the social movements that had isolated the military-Duarte-oligarchy fringe and had provided an alternative setting for democratic politics. The U.S.-promoted elections secured the financing of the terror apparatus by the U.S. Congress, the support of European State terror served to atomize many previously active Salvadoreans by destroying all forms of free association. It reimposed political machines run by elites and state-backed caudillos. It imposed politics by fiat, austerity programs. State backed trade unions funded by the U.S. state and staffed by the AFL-CIO bureaucracy (the American Institute for Free Labor Development) sought to provide the appearance of popular support.

The key element in the organization and operation of state terror was the destruction of *local grassroots opinion leaders* who were the backbone of the political education and mobilization of the majority of the population. State terror was armed with "lists" of local activists in church-promoted base communities, locally elected coop leaders, the washerwomen who criticized privileged military officials, and self-educated rank-and-file trade union leaders who criticized Duarte's labor policy These were the "subversives," the targets of the U.S. advisors and their military counmerparts. The guerrillas suffered few casualties; they were armed and capable of defending themselves. U.S.-Salvadorean state terror was aimed at securing a military political victory: reestablishing the traditional alliance under U.S. hegemony that was threatened by the democratic social movements of the 1970s.

Given the small size of the country, Washington was able to sustain the terror apparatus, independently of its total lack of popular support, with its billion dollar grant. The flight of the oligarchy with its capital to Miami (two billion dollars) left the U.S. as the only basis for sustaining a bankrupt economy, a

disintegrating social order, a corrupt military. The millions bought a modernized military machine, floated the economy, and temporarily contained the collapse of the oligarchy — through mass terror.

Critics of state terror have unfortunately contributed to depoliticizing the nature of the killing. By emphasizing the arbitrary nature of terror, and by focusing exclusively on innocent women, children and old people to elicit humanitarian support, they have obscured the fact that the main targets were democratically active working people. In a perverse way, by stressing the non-political nature of the victims, these humanitarian critics inadvertently give license to the state terrorists to kill politically active citizens, and create the basis for the political charades that are rightly dubbed "demonstration elections."

The truth of the matter is that whtle numerous non-political people are killed, the bulk of the victims have been politically active in the social movements, and rightfully so. It is only because of the predominance of a minority terrorist regime that political opposition is defined as subversion and subject to assassination.

The massive scope and permanent nature of state terror in El Salvador is explainable by the tremendous degree of popular participation and the comprehensive changes which are envisioned. The incapacity of the current regime to come to grips with the most elementary needs of the population leads to the reproduction of the social movements, even under conditions of mass terror. Nothing better illustrates the isolation and self-serving nature of the U.S.-Duarte-military regime than the reemergence of social movements in 1986 — including the rupture of the state-sponsored Christian Democratic trade unions with the regime and their alliance with an independent trade union federation. On February 21, 1986 over 50,000 workers, students and farmers defied Duarte's ban on marches and the threats of the military-death squads to demand an end to the economic austerity plan *(Philadelphia Inquirer, 1986)*. It was the largest demonstration in El Salvador since 1980, when 250,000 staged a march. The revival of the autonomous mass movements signals the vitality of the popular classes; yet it is also likely that Washington's military advisors and their Salvadorean counterparts will crank up the terror machine.

The El Salvadorean experience illustrates the proposition that intensive and extensive state terrorism is directly related to the U.S. and the oligarchy's attempts to undermine profound and comprehensive grass roots organizations and practices and reestablish a rejected hierarchical social order and U.S. hegemonic power.

Brazil: Terror, Growth and Crisis

The once much publicized Brazilian "economic miracle," which lasted less than a decade, was based on:

a) violent illegitimate seizure of political power by the military;
b) the institutionalization of violence through an extensive and intensive system of military-police controls throughout civil society;
c) the systematic use of terror to contain popular discontent, to disarticulate mass organizations and to destroy guerrilla resistance;
d) the elaboration of the National Security ideology to justify the State's "permanent state of war" against autonomous class or nationalist movements.

Dictatorial rule in Brazil manifested itself in two styles: the erosion of political freedom for the traditional parties and electoral system through a series of "institutional acts" that eventually emptied the political institutions of all substantive activity; and the use of violence, kidnappings and torture against working-class, peasant and urban movements.

The centrality of violence in establishing and preserving the regime was an essential ingredient in the restructuring of the economy and society to foster capital accumulation "from above and the outside." The central target of state terror was the destruction of the laborist-populist-nationalist movements and state regimes which fostered redistributive measures, regulated foreign capital and sought to extend electoral participation to the disenfranchised illiterate peasantry. The close linkages between the national-popular state and the social movements were a product of the Vargas policies of stimulating national development based on an expanding internal market. The growth and expansion of the social movements of the sixties, however, began to exceed the boundaries of traditional paternalistic populism through

the growth of autonomous Christian base communities, peasant land occupations, and "new left"-led trade union and conscript military organizations. The populist regime's shift in policy from allocating resources to the landowners, multinational corporations and foreign banks to the funding of nationalized and public enterprises, as well as its proposals for agrarian reform, were the principle causes for the violent seizure of power by the military.

The goal of the military regime was the dismantling and reversal of the populist-nationalist institutions and policies, and the savaging of the popular movement. To provide a facade of legality, the military delegated the role of terror to the "death squads," which were then described as acting independently of the state. While death squads were put into operation earlier in the Dominican Republic subsequent to the U.S. invasion of 1965, Brazil introduced the practice into South American terrorist politics.

The level of terror in Brazil was commensurate with the level of independent mass mobilization. As a significant part of the movement had been closely linked with the nationalist-populist state, its overthrow led to a precipitous decline in movement activity. Hence state violence initially in Brazil was substantially more localized than was the case in Chile. The major focus of state action was the intervention in and penetration of civil society — the trade unions, universities — and the demobilization of active urban movements.

This process of state violence and intervention provided the groundwork for the establishment of a new model of capital accumulation which deliberately re-concentrated income at the top; depended on external financing and large-scale foreign investment; and dismantled much of the nateonalist regulatory and social welfare machinery. Atomization at the bottom was a necessary precondition for concentration at the top. State terror was the midwife of this transformation.

The dynamics of this system — its deliberate promotion of "polarized growth" — led to the proliferation of autonomous and "spontaneous" movements during the late 1960s. The renewal of social movements, particularly movements independent of the old populist apparatus, was seen by the military rulers as a threat to the emerging accumulation model. Utilizing their total control over the state apparatus, they deepened and extend-

ed the scope of state terror, reaching unprecedented levels of human rights violations during the period 1969-1972. Massive sweeps of lower-class areas, kidnapping, torture, and disappearances by the police and military, in uniform and as civilian death squad participants, created the "order and stability" to enable the economy to grow at its double-digit rate. Insofar as the growth process embraced substantial sectors of the local bourgeoisie and middle class, the regime of state terror was tolerated if not legitimated — in the eyes of the new consumers of Volkswagens. The destruction of the independent movements and the economic boom led to a decline of consequential opposition, and hence a relative decline of regime terror, although the machinery and personnel remained in place.

The weakening of the dictatorship and its capacity to utilize terror was a consequence of several factors: the onset of the economic crises during the late 1970s and the growing disenchantment of the local middle class and industrialists; the emergence of a large concentrated working class in the new industrial zones and its organization independent of the traditional populist politicians; and the reemergence of urban social movements, particularly Christian base communities.

Under the impact of market-induced economic chaos and disorder — runaway debt payments, skyrocketing inflation, negative growth rates — the terror apparatus began to experience political fissures: cleavages emerged between military sectors favoring a negotiated transition to civilian rule with a military veto, and hardline military officials who sought to escalate the terror in order to contain the challenges. Two factors facilitated the ascendancy of the negotiator faction. The first was the existence of a large pliable group of traditional politicians who would accommodate the military on major issues of concern (refrain from reforming military structures, abjure prosecution of human rights violators, continue payments to the international banks, oppose changes in the socio-economic system). The second was the growth of the popular social movements and their potential for radical changes. The negotiator faction argued that revival of terrorist policies in time of deepening crises would increase the polarization and extend movement support, laying the basis for more radical changes which *would* adversely affect the institutional power of the military.

The transfer of government from military to civilian rule was consummated with minimum effects on the strategic institutions involved in the establishment of the terror apparatus. Not a single torturer, death squad officer, or commander involved in the disappearances has been called to account by the new conservative civilian regime. On the contrary, the military retains strategic leverage over the political regime and has been able to promote its socioeconomic interests through the civilian regime. As one writer noted: "Now, ten months after the change of government, the price of avoiding any serious military-civilian friction during the country's transition to democracy is evident: the armed forces continue to enjoy enormous political power and in some crucial areas, even an implicit right of veto." The account further elaborates on this power: "...the growing list of matters in which senior military commanders have intervened, either publicly or privately, includes a wave of strikes, a proposed land redistribution, an amnesty debate in Congress, diplomatic relations with Cuba and preparations for a new constitution..." (Riding, 1985). On the other hand, the President has been engaged in public relations activities designed to enhance his standing with the military and to "legitimize" their new roles in society — while relying on the military to counter the pressures from the popular movements.

The demise of the economic model and the sociopolitical isolation of the military led to a deterioration of the regime and a tactical retreat. The state terror apparatus, however, remains latent and intact. The rise of the new social movements, no longer tied to and dependent on the populist state apparatus, introduces a new variable in the political picture. As the movements continue to grow and to articulate effectively the interests of the large majorities adversely affected by the regime's policies, the terror apparatus has again begun to be activated. The large landowners, abetted by the military, have organized armed groups which have killed hundreds of peasant land squatters in the interior. Military and police contingents have been involved in repressing the rising number of strikes, as well as in the sacking of food transport.

The hiatus in state terror between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s reflects the destruction of the old movements and the emergence of the new. The conflicts engendered by the *continuity*

of the state apparatus and the pursuit of policies promoting the interests of international banking, large landowners and corporate interests in a period of deepening crises can once again set in motion the machinery of state terrorism. Faced with mounting demands, state terror can become the vehicle to atomize the collective movements and facilitate the imposition of the burden of the crises on the backs of the poor.

The ebbs and flows of state terrorism reflect two sets oj factors: (1) the completion of tasks — the physical destruction of enemies; (2) the exhaustion of political support. In the first case the terror regime, having run out of victims, can then be heralded as having "moderated" its policies. In other words the human rights improvements proclaimed by Reagan/Abrams are the results of the circumstances where the kill ratio has exceeded the capacity of the opposition to reproduce itself. The absence of opposition has been recast as an improvement of the regime.

In the Brazilian context the policy of "decompression" and *"abertura,"* initiated by the military in the mid-1970s, followed the wholesale violation of human rights of the previous decade. Having decimated the social movements, the regime was willing to accept a restricted parliamentary opposition.

The second factor, "political exhaustion," defines a regime which has used up its policy instruments without successfully coping with far-reaching and deep-seated structural problems and which lacks the capacity to develop new policies and directions. In the case of Brazil, faced with a 100 billion dollar debt, triple-digit inflation and negative growth rates, the military was unable to extricate the country from its downward spiral. Its efforts to secure external funding, to pursue IMF authored austerity programs, and to promote exports, among other measures, failed to stem the slide into economic chaos.

The convergence of political exhaustion and successful extermination of popular movements set the stage for the military conversion from overt to latent terror and eventually to a negotiated transition to civilian rule.

Conclusion

The best way to summarize our discussion is through a set of propositions.

1) *State Terror and Social Movements:* The level of intensity of state terror varies according to the density of social organization in civil society and the level of self-mobilization. In two of our cases (Chile and El Salvador) the extensive networks of autonomous social movements led the regimes to engage in prolonged and high levels of terror. In the other case (Brazil) localized and state-promoted social movements suffered intense mass terror periodically, followed by selective terror through the official and unofficial machinery of the state.

2) *State Terror and Accumulation:* State terror, followed by prolonged and extensive growth incorporating the middle classes and following the destruction of mass opposition, results in a shift from mass overt terror to selective covert terror — the case of Brazil (1971-1980). Unsuccessful implantation of the new economic model leads to continuously high levels of terror — including permanent purges — and the growth of a permanent warfare mentality among the elite of the terrorist apparatus (Chile and El Salvador). The lack of successful implantation of the new model of accumulation can be the result of different factors: (1) unfavorable socio-political terrain — the incapacity to destroy the social movements (El Salvador); (2) successful destruction of the mass movements but in an unfavorable international economic context and with internal structural failings inherent in the model (Chile).

3) *State Terror and Redemocratization:* Destruction of opposition and short-term successful implantation of the economic model, followed by a generalized crisis adversely affecting a broad array of former collaborators (Brazil, 1980-1985), creates the basis for the tactical *retreat* of the state terrorist forces, what can be described as "redemocratization which secures the machine guns." Unsuccessful implantation of the model and deepening crises widen the gap between the regime and its enemies, turning the regime inward for survival, polarizing the nation against the state terrorist regime (Chile, El Salvador). Unable to sustain itself on the basis of internal political influence, the involuted regime relies heavily on external financing, the external state terror network, to sustain itself. The massive resources of the U.S. terror and financial network provide a vast flow of financial and military resources to subsidize the state terrorist machine, independently of its disastrous political-economic performance. Integration

with and subordination to the U.S. network provides the state terror apparatus a degree of independence from the local power structure, particularly in small countries like El Salvador.

State University of New York
Binghamton

REFERENCES

Armstrong, Robert and Janet Shenk. 1982. *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution.* Boston: South End Press.

Barry, Tom, Beth Wood and Deb Preusch. 1982. *Dollars and Dictators.* Albuquerque: The Resource Center.

Chomsky, Noam. 1985. *Turning the Tide.* Boston: South End Press..

Echeverria, Magdalena T. 1984. *Enfermedades de los Trabajadores y Crises Economicas.* Santiago, Chile: Academia de Humanismo Cristiano.

Espinosa, Juan and Andrew Zimbalist. 1978. *Economic Democracy: Worker Participation in Chilean Industry (1970-1973).* New York: Academic Press.

Herman, Edward. 1982. *The Real Terror Nework.* Boston: South End Press.

Nairn, Allan. 1984a. "Behind the Death Squads." *The Progressive,* May.

Nairn, Allan. 1984b. "Senate Report Says CIA Created Ties to Salvadorean Death-Squad Figures." *Philadelphia Inquirer,* September.

Nairn, Allan. 1986. "Confessions of a Death Squad Officer." *The Progressive,* March.

Petras, James and Morris Morley. 1981. "Supporting Repression: U.S. Policy and the Demise of Human Rights in El Salvador, 1970-1981." In *The Socialist Register 1981.* London: The Merlin Press.

The Philadephia Inquirer. February 22, 1986.

Riding, Alan. 1985. "Passing Muster in Brazil: President Woos Army," *New York Times,* January 23, 1985.

Ruiz-Tagle, Jaime and Roberto Urmeneta. 1984. *Los Trabajadores del Programma del Empleo Minimo.* Santiago, Chile: Academia de Humanismo Cristiano.

Smirnow, Gabriel. 1979. *The Revolution Disarmed: Chile 1970-1973.* New York: Monthly Review Press.

Stohl, Michael, and George Lopez, eds. 1984. *The State as Terrorist.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.