

U.S.-Israeli-Central American Connection

By Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi

Central America over the past ten years has been in the throes of war, with Israel a party to this war. What is Israel up to in Central America, and why has it become involved in such a distant war? A closer look at the details of Israeli, and U.S., involvement, to the extent they are known, will establish their significance.

Within the impoverished region of Central America the numbers and technology in terms of modern arms are almost irrelevant. It is a region that is underdeveloped and poor not only in relation to its standard of living, but in regard to military technology. In the whole of Central America, there are less than 150 tanks, compared with about 10,000 in the Middle East. Five hundred rifles, one transport airplane, several jets in Central America make a huge difference in the art of death and oppression. Anyone wanting to interfere in the violent struggles in this region can do so without substantial investments. A few millions may mean the arming of thousands of fighters, as in the case of the contras. According to one observer: "Central American armies are very small . . . They do not

need much modern weaponry. Light weapons, a few helicopters and a few transport airplanes can change the

military picture completely in countries where the military is usually busy suppressing internal rebellions."¹

Guatemala

In the midst of endless misery and cruelty, Guatemala stands out as one Central American country where those in power have been fighting those

without power, using an unusual degree of ruthlessness and bloodiness. Over the years, numerous reports of the true realities of Guatemala have



Dr. Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, professor of psychology at Haifa University, is the author of a forthcoming book on Israel's relations with the third world.

About This Issue

Why does the U.S. Government enlist Israel to funnel arms to Central American regimes whose human rights violations keep the U.S. Congress from sending military aid directly? Why do these regimes prefer Israeli to American advisers? And, what does Israel gain from playing the U.S. proxy in a region half a globe removed from the Middle East?

Israeli Professor Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi is one of the world's leading authorities on his country's involvement in the third world. In this issue he documents the extent to which an ever more eager Israel serves as America's iron fist in Central America.

Charles Kimball, the National Council of Churches representative for the Middle East, reviews Robin Wright's

new book, *Sacred Rage: The Crusade of Militant Islam*, on page 14. For details on obtaining this and other books on the Middle East at substantial discount prices, see page 15.

In our December issue, readers of *The Link* will be introduced to a man who loves to ask questions about the Middle East.

John F. Mahoney,
Executive Director

been harsh in their judgment.²

Those who carry out the deliberate policies of endless killings there proclaim their indebtedness to Israel, not only as the source of their hardware, but as the source of their inspiration. Israel has become the main support of the Guatemalan regime, as attested to by both Romeo Lucas Garcia and Efraim Rios Montt.³ It was Efraim Rios Montt, the born-again former dictator of Guatemala, who explained his easy takeover in March 1982 by saying that "... many of our soldiers were trained by Israelis."⁴ In 1981 the chief of staff of the Guatemalan Army, who praised Israel for its support to the regime, declared ... that "the Israeli soldier is the model for our soldiers."⁵

Since 1975, Guatemala has received arms from the United States, Israel, France, Switzerland, Taiwan, Italy, Belgium and Yugoslavia. Israel and Taiwan have been the most active in training Guatemalan officers, who often travel to both countries.⁶ Israel

became Guatemala's largest arms supplier in the early 1970's, and earned a monopoly position after the United States stopped supplying arms to Guatemala in 1977, when Guatemala turned to Israel for military aid.⁷

In November 1977, the Guatemalan Army replaced its old U.S.-made Garand M-1 rifles, with Galil rifles produced in Israel. This was part of a program, which will replace all equipment used by the army with Israeli equipment.⁸

During 1975 Israel carried out its first major arms deal with Guatemala, delivering 11 Arava planes, artillery pieces and light weapons.⁹ Between 1977 and 1981, Israel was the Guatemalan generals' sole supplier. In 1980 the Guatemalan Army was equipped with 15,000 Galil rifles. Israel also delivered large quantities of Uzi submachine guns, 10RBY-MK1 armored cars, grenade launchers and 3 Dabur patrol boats.¹⁰ There have been several reports about an industrial

plant, built with Israeli help in the city of Coban, which has been producing ammunition for Galil rifles and Uzi submachine guns, together with an armored vehicle, of Israeli design, known as "Armadillo."¹¹

One shipment of Israeli arms to Guatemala received unwanted publicity in 1983, and revealed the reality of the Israeli arms export business. On December 22, 1983, U.S. customs officers in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, discovered during a routine check that four containers carried by the Israeli ship, Zim-New Orleans, listed as containing "general freight," actually contained 12,000 rifles.¹² The shipment, sent by Eagle Exports of Ashdod, Israel, were on their way to Guatemala.

The most unusual aspect of the story was the rifles themselves—Mausers 7.62mm rifles, a model that dates back to 1899. First made in Germany, the model was so successful, that it was manufactured in several other countries. The Mauser 99 was used by the German Army in the two world wars. In 1948, a shipment of them was sent to Israel from Czechoslovakia, and the rifles became the standard light weapon of the Israeli Army during the war of 1948-49 and for years afterwards. In the 1960's and 1970's the Mauser 99s were replaced by the Uzi, the Israeli-made submachine gun, the Belgian-made F.N. automatic rifle, the American-made M-16, the Soviet-made AK-47 Kalachnikov, and the Israeli-made Galil. The old Mauser rifle, declared too obsolete even for basic training, was put in storage. Then, in 1983, the Israeli Defense Ministry decided to sell these obsolete weapons to Guatemala.

The story of the Florida flap was brief, and had a happy ending. Guatemalan President Oscar Humberto Mejia Victores announced that the weapons were indeed on their way to Guatemala, where they would be used in basic training for the army. The United States Government did not stand in the way of an arms deal between Israel and Guatemala, two of its allies, and the story was soon forgotten.¹³

One significant aspect of the Israeli involvement in Guatemala, mentioned by numerous sources is the presence of Israeli advisers, who are not just

instructors, but are directly involved in counter-insurgency activities.¹⁴ "During the time when U.S. military aid to Guatemala was cut off. . . Israel sold a variety of military equipment to the Guatemalan Army and Israeli advisers – some official, others private – helped Guatemalan internal security agents hunt underground rebel groups."¹⁵ Israel had been aiding the Guatemalan military regimes through the supply of arms, computerized information centers and ground radar equipment, in addition to directly engaging in counter-insurgency campaigns against the Indian communities.¹⁶

Israeli advisers in Guatemala have also been working with the secret police, the notorious G-2. Advisers from Chile and Argentina have joined the Israelis in training the secret police in interrogation techniques.¹⁷ An important part of the Israeli contribu-



tion to the efficient Guatemalan counter-insurgency offensive has been the development of a computerized system for the processing of police data. According to some reports, 80 percent of the Guatemalan population are covered by this system, with names and other details stored in the collective memory of the computer. The system is maintained and operated by Israelis. Some sources have claimed that a computerized system, installed by Israelis, is capable of tracking "suspicious activities" by noting excessive electricity consumption overnight in a particular building.

According to guerrillas, the computerized system has been used to provide lists of names for the right-wing death squads. Utilization of computers in counter-insurgency follows the Israeli experience in using the same technology to control the occupied territories. In one specific deal, retired Gen. Avigdor Ben-Gal, who was involved in selling military hardware and software to third world regimes, sold a computerized communication system known as I.C.C.C. to Guatemala.¹⁸

Israel is not the only counter-insurgency supplier in Guatemala. "According to Guatemalan opposition sources, the government is being helped in sophisticated counter-insurgency techniques by advisers and experts from Argentina, Chile, Israel and the United States as well as by former agents of the late Nicaraguan dictator, Anastasio Somoza."¹⁹ After the Falkland War of 1982, Argentina ended its involvement.²⁰

Guatemala has been the focus of outside intervention in the region, as faraway powers show intense concern about its future. Involvement of the international right-wing alliance in Guatemala has been described as follows: "There are close ties with Argentina and Chile. Israel has traditionally supplied arms, and now South Africa is helping build a weapons factory. Taiwan has the second-largest diplomatic mission and provides technical aid."²¹ According to the Israeli State Television evening newscast of March 7, 1982, both Israel and South Africa were supplying arms to the government of Guatemala.

Israel has offered Guatemalan participation in a variety of civilian training programs, run by the Foreign Ministry's International Cooperation Division and focusing mainly on agriculture.²² Much has been made of the supposed Israeli involvement in the large-scale pacification program, initiated by the government to transform the native Indians of the highlands. *Latin American Regional Reports* quotes one of the leaders of the program in the Western highlands, Col. Eduardo Wohlers, who said, "The model of the kibbutz is planted firmly in the minds of my officials. I think it would be fascinating to turn our

highlands into that kind of system."²³ The program is similar to the well-known United States "pacification" program in Vietnam.

Guatemalan leaders have indeed been inspired by the Israeli kibbutz, and they are trying to establish cooperative communities among the Indians of the highlands. There is, however, little similarity between the kibbutz, a voluntary socialist commune, and the "strategic hamlets" being created by the Guatemalan Army in the highlands. These highland communities are based on a communal household and communal agriculture, clearly more efficient than traditional farming. According to the report ". . . women cook for the entire community in a newly built communal kitchen and leave their children in a daycare center so that, according to military planners, they can become 'productive' members of society. A communal hall for organized adult and youth educational civic activities has been built . . ." This is indeed a remarkable restructuring of communal life for the Indians, but it is not a kibbutz, a voluntary organization, led by its own members. What is happening in Guatemala is clearly directed from above. The founders and members of the kibbutzim in Israel are light-years removed from the cultural traditions of the Guatemalan Indians. As a social experiment, what is being done in Guatemala is quite unusual, and it should be closely watched in the future.

The close contacts between Israel and Guatemala's military juntas have been discussed widely in the Israeli media. On January 25, 1982, Israel State Television carried a British report on conditions in Guatemala. The announcer in Jerusalem referred to the regime in Guatemala as a "right-wing dictatorship," guilty of atrocities, and added that both Israel and Argentina were arming this regime.

One of the most amazing documents about the Israeli involvement in Guatemala is a short story, written as a first-person account by an Israeli operative in an unnamed Central American country. Stationed at the Israeli Embassy and working with a Colonel Garcia, the hero, who is involved in fighting "Indian terrorists,"

expresses his guilt and rebels against his superiors. He finds himself identifying with the terrorists, and this means the end of his career in the Israeli foreign service. The story includes references to the computerized intelligence systems, and allusions to the similarities between actions against the Palestinians and actions against the "terrorists" in Central America. Since it was presented as a work of fiction, the story was not censored.²⁴

One writer who visited Guatemala City as a guest of the Unification Church commented on the ever-present Galil rifles and Uzi submachine guns.²⁵ Another journalist who attended a "media conference" in Guatemala, also organized by the

Unification Church, reported on the visible Israeli support for the regime, as well as the regime's visible enthusiasm for Israel.²⁶ On July 8, 1983, Israeli State Television carried a report on Guatemala, which showed Israeli light weapons to be the standard equipment of the army. An Open Letter to the People and Government of Israel, asking them to stop their support for the regime in Guatemala, was sent on February 16, 1983 by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, and by Servicio Paz y Justicia en America Latina (signed by Adolfo Perez Esquivel), to the Israeli Government. The letter was ignored by both the government and the Israeli media.

vadoran Air Force the best in Central America.²⁹ Israel agreed to sell to El Salvador 49 planes, which included 18 1950's vintage French-made Ouragan jet fighters, 6 Fouga Magister jet trainers, and 25 Israeli-made Arava transport planes, usable for both military and civilian purposes. The planes were all delivered by 1975, and the deal was considered a major one by Central American standards. The Ouragans were the first fighter jets in Central America.

Israel's role in El Salvador was prominent between June 1977 and November 1979, when United States aid was cut off. United States military aid to El Salvador was stopped in 1976, "... when U.S. authorities caught Salvadoran officers selling surplus weapons to North American gangsters."³⁰ El Salvador then adopted Israel as its main source of military aid.

In 1977, El Salvador was targeted by the Carter Administration as a "human rights violator." Before the United States could declare a termination of military aid, El Salvador found a new source of such aid in Israel.³¹ Israel played an official role in the channeling of United States aid to El Salvador, when it agreed in 1981 to give El Salvador \$21 million, to be refunded by the United States.³²

Eighty percent of arms imports to El Salvador during the 1970's came from Israel, but after the United States resumed arms sales to El Salvador in 1980, Israel became its second largest supplier.³³ Reports on the use of Israeli-made napalm bombs by the Salvadoran Air Force were verified by Salvadoran Air Force Col. Rafael Bustillo, who indicated that the bombs were purchased in the late 1970's.³⁴

Salvadoran army officers have often expressed their admiration for Israel. One cited example is Sigifredo Ochoa, who "... credits his training in Israel and by Israeli advisers in El Salvador in the mid-1970's for his military development. His personal rifle is an Israeli Galil."³⁵ Right-wingers in El Salvador, exemplified by Roberto D'Aubuisson and Col. Sigifredo Ochoa, often mentioned Israel and, to a lesser extent, Chile, Taiwan and South Africa as their models, the

El Salvador

Most of the people of El Salvador "... remain lost in the dust of poverty and war."³⁷ They are obviously in need of a savior, or at least a change, but change is slow in coming, and the oligarchy, with the help of the United States, is very much in control.

Relations between El Salvador and Israel have been described as follows: "Today, one would be hard pressed to find five countries in the world which support the Salvadoran regime. The United States under Ronald Reagan is at the head of the list of supporters ... In this honorable company, one can find Guatemala, a huge concen-

tration camp masquerading as a state; one can also find the State of Israel."³⁸

The cover of *Newsweek*, dated March 16, 1981, carried the headline "Storm over El Salvador" and a picture of a guerrilla holding an Israeli-made Uzi, which shows that Israeli weapons do change hands in El Salvador, as in other places. On February 8, 1982, *The Jerusalem Post* carried a picture of Juan Ramone Medrano, a guerrilla leader in El Salvador, speaking to his troops while armed with an Israeli-made Galil rifle.

The first major agreement with El Salvador was signed in 1973, when Israel undertook to make the Sal-



societies they would like El Salvador of the future to be like.

Allegations about Salvadoran military being trained in Israel, and Israeli military advisers in El Salvador, were made as early as 1979 by Shafik Handal, Secretary General of the Salvadoran Communist Party.³⁶ Israeli advisers have been active in El Salvador, offering training in counterinsurgency activities.³⁷

Arnoldo Ramos, representative of the Salvadoran Democratic Revolutionary Front, claimed that Israel had 50 military advisers in El Salvador.³⁸ Another source put the number at 100.³⁹ During 1977-1979 when Israel

was most active, there was also Israeli involvement in training counterinsurgency teams, known as the death squads. Francisco Guerra y Guerra, former Undersecretary of the Interior in the Salvadoran Government in 1979, reported in an interview that Israeli intelligence advisers were working with the notorious ANSESAL death squads, and such advisers have been stationed in El Salvador permanently.⁴⁰ A computerized system of intelligence and record keeping, similar to the one in Guatemala, is said to be in operation in El Salvador.⁴¹

In 1979, Ernesto Liebes, Israel's honorary consul in San Salvador, was

kidnapped and killed by the guerrillas. Rebel leader German Cienfuegos declared that the consul was considered a "war criminal" because of his involvement in the sale of Israeli planes to El Salvador. In November 1979, when guerrillas kidnapped South Africa's ambassador, they demanded severing all government links with Jerusalem and Pretoria, and recognition of the PLO. A month later the Israeli Embassy was hit by a bomb.⁴²

In May 1982, Joaquin Antonion Aguilar, a representative of the Democratic Revolutionary Front of El Salvador, visited Israel and met with a variety of groups and individuals. Aguilar asked the Israelis he met to influence their government to stop its support for the regime. Naturally, the people he met belonged to opposition groups, which are no more popular with the government of Israel than the Democratic Revolutionary Front is with the government of El Salvador, and so the meetings did not lead to a change in Israeli policies.⁴³

On August 2, 1982, a high level delegation from El Salvador arrived in Israel. Headed by Ernesto Magana, the son of El Salvador's president, it included two government ministers. The delegation met with Prime Minister Menachem Begin, and reportedly discussed economic aid.⁴⁴ The delegation told Begin during the meeting about the decision to move the Salvadoran Embassy to Jerusalem. Reportedly Begin embraced Ernesto Magana upon hearing the good news.⁴⁵

Comment on Israeli and Salvadoran expectations for the increase of Israeli aid to El Salvador followed the move of the Salvadoran Embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem in April 1984.⁴⁶ Such expectations were specifically attributed to Alvaro Magana, provisional president of El Salvador.

Events in El Salvador were twice the subject of actions by Israeli Knesset opposition members in 1984. In March of that year, Shulamit Aloni and Amnon Rubinstein declined an invitation to visit El Salvador as observers for the general elections.⁴⁷ In October, two well-known members of the Zionist left opposition, Victor Shemtov and Yossi Sarid, sent a telegram to President Jose Napoleon Duarte,

Courtesy of Newsweek



congratulating him "... On his historical initiative for reconciliation with the labor unions [sic] in his country, after five years of civil war." The telegram also said, "We want you to know that in Israel many are looking up to your brave and responsible leadership, which shows itself capable of rising above the sediments of the past and to devote itself to dialogue and understanding. Would it be that your initiative will inspire leaders in our region, of all countries, who are

able, if they want and dare, to end bloodshed and start a new age of prosperity and peace."⁴⁸

Davar in Tel-Aviv carried on December 22, 1981 a letter to the editor signed by 144 agricultural high school students near Tel-Aviv. The letter protested Israeli arms sales to El Salvador—an unusual occurrence in Israel, indicating nevertheless that Israel's military contacts in Central America are known even to high school students.

Honduras

Honduras has the distinction of being the poorest country in one of the poorest regions of the world. Israel has played a crucial role in developing the Honduran Air Force, now the strongest in Central America, through the sale of rebuilt French-made Dassault Super-Mystere B2 jets, equipped with American-made engines, and through the training of Honduran pilots by Israeli pilots sent to Honduras.

The sale of Super-Mystere jets first began in 1976. These jets, originally built in the 1950's, are considered obsolete today. The first super-sonic jet

fighters in Central America, they are considered sophisticated for the region. Since 1977, Israel has also sold Honduras 12 Marcel Dassault Super-Mystere B2 jets, 3 Arava transport planes, and a Westwind jet transport, giving it lead air power in the region.

Israel was interested in selling Israeli-made Kfir jet fighters to Honduras but that move was blocked by the United States, since the engines in the Kfirs are American-made General Electric J-79s, and the United States has the authority to block such sales. In addition, Honduras ground forces have



Owen Franken/SYGMA

been equipped with Israeli-made Galil rifles and Uzi submachine guns, and both the air force and ground forces are reported to have Israeli advisers.⁴⁹

Contacts with Honduras received much attention in December 1982, following a visit there by Ariel Sharon, Defense Minister of Israel. "During my brief stay, I could take advantage of the opportunity to sign agreements of a military nature with Honduras, as well as some agreements on agriculture, health and cultural assistance," said Sharon at a news conference in Tegucigalpa.⁵⁰ The Sharon entourage included Gen. David Ivri, commander of the air force, and Gen. Aaron Beit-Hallahmi, director-general of the Defense Ministry. Sharon reportedly signed a military accord, including weapons deliveries and training by Israeli advisers, and visited military bases, and also visited Contral units on that occasion.⁵¹

On his return to Israel, Sharon announced that an Israeli military mission would visit Honduras.⁵² The Sharon visit occurred only two days





Ariel Sharon and Gustavo Alvarez review Honduran troops during Sharon's visit to Honduras in December 1982.

after the visit of President Ronald Reagan, and according to a government functionary in Honduras, "Sharon's trip was more positive. He sold us arms. Reagan only uttered platitudes, explaining that Congress was preventing him from doing more."⁵³

Sharon was invited in 1982 not by the Honduran Government, but by the commander in chief of the armed forces and strong man Gustavo Alvarez Martinez, who had told the world about his admiration for two great modern generals: Irwin Rommel and Ariel Sharon.⁵⁴ The Sharon visit reciprocated a secret visit to Israel by Gen. Alvarez Martinez in July 1982.⁵⁵ The major arms deal, envisioned by Sharon during his visit to Honduras, apparently did not materialize, because of the Hondurans' lack of hard currency.⁵⁶ Sharon's aides proposed to Honduras a rearmament program worth \$200 million, while the impoverished country could offer only \$1 million.⁵⁷

Israeli involvement in Honduras has

continued to reach the headlines since 1982. On May 13, 1983, *Maariv* (Tel-Aviv) reported that the Israeli ambassador to Honduras and Guatemala, Moshe Dayan, said that Israel would supply Honduras with arms in any emergency. (Within the next year,

there would be reported threats against the lives of Israeli military advisers by an underground organization in Honduras.⁵⁸) Honduras has also received military advisers from Argentina and Chile.⁵⁹

Nicaragua Under The Somozas

Nicaragua was under partial or complete American control between 1856 and 1979. Occupation by U.S. forces between 1912 and 1933 gave way to a National Guard.

Since 1936 members of the Somoza family have headed the National Guard and owned much of the country.

Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the last private owner of Nicaragua, was a typical Latin American dictator straight out of countless films and novels about the corrupt regimes headed by military men replaced in rapid succession. The Somoza family, however, stayed in power for 43 years. As Somoza's



regime came under more and more resistance from the Nicaraguan people in the late 1970's, by 1977 the country was in the throes of a full-scale civil war.

Although sketchy reports of an arms deal between Israel and Nicaragua were reported in 1975, Israel did not become a major arms supplier until 1978, when the United States decided to stop supporting the Somoza regime. Then Israel became the main, and ultimately only, supplier. Contacts with Somoza after 1975 were intimate and leisurely enough, for a visit to Nicaragua, and a personal meeting with Somoza, by Israel Galili, inventor of the Galil rifle.⁶⁰

In 1978 there was a complete cutoff of all military and civilian aid by the United States. Israel and Argentina filled the gap until Somoza's last day.⁶¹ According to U.S. sources, after the United States stopped all aid to Somoza in the fall of 1978, Israel became his main and only arms supplier. The arms and equipment delivered included 500 Uzi submachine guns, 500 Galil rifles, ammunition, flak jackets, trucks, mortars and four patrol boats. The Israeli Government denied these reports.

In the last six months of the Somoza regime, Israel continued to supply the National Guard with new equipment, ammunition and arms. The Israeli press reported, on June 26, 1979, that Israel-made Arava planes were being used to bomb the poor neighborhoods of Managua.⁶² Following many press

reports on the use of Israeli arms by the National Guard, and television films that clearly showed the presence of such arms in Nicaragua, the matter was raised in the Knesset by Amnon Rubinstein, a member of the Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee for the Shinui party (a small, "liberal" centrist group). Rubinstein on June 28

announced that Israeli arms were no longer being supplied to Somoza; other sources indicate that the supply lines were open right up to the last minutes of the Somoza regime.

According to some sources, the United States Government, under President Jimmy Carter, asked Israel to stop supplying Somoza.⁶³ As the Sandinista forces made their way toward Managua during the summer of 1979, they captured large quantities of brand-new Israeli arms and equipment. Following takeover, they found a substantial supply of Galil rifles, sent to the National Guard during the summer.⁶⁴ One picture, circulated worldwide, showed the first Sandinista delegation to Cuba presenting Fidel Castro with a Galil rifle.

The Sandinistas announced at the outset that they would honor all of the nation's debts. There was one exception: \$5.1 million, owed to Israel and Argentina for arms delivered to Somoza in his hour of need, remains on the books to this day.⁶⁵

The Contras

A brief history of the contras by one sympathetic American observer suggests that: "Until the United States came along, the contras could hardly be considered a threat to Managua. In the years following Somoza's downfall, small bands of former national guardsmen operated along the Honduran border, making hit-and-run attacks inside Nicaragua. The Somocistas, as they were known, were demoralized and poorly organized. The United States set about forcing the various factions to unite under a central command, while the CIA began recruiting students, farmers and other civilians to beef up the force. Then,

early this year, the F.D.N. was established to serve as a respectable political front group for the contras."⁶⁶ Several contra organizations, such as ARDE, FDN, FARN, enjoy support from the United States and other countries in the form of money, arms and military training.

Given its support to the Somoza regime, it is not surprising that Israel has been active in supporting the contras. When the CIA was setting up the contra organization in 1981, the Mossad was also there, carrying out the training and support for the first units. Commandante Eden Pastora, based in Costa Rica and one of the contra leaders,

refused direct CIA aid, though not direct Israeli aid, despite the obvious connections. The first advisers and trainers to the contras in Honduras in 1981 were members of one of Israel's leading commando units.

Evidence of Israeli support for the contras has come from four sources: Nicaragua, the United States, the contras themselves, and Israel. Nicaragua first stated its concern about Israeli involvement with the contras during the December 1982 visit to Honduras by Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. This visit took place during the first stage of the American buildup in Honduras.⁶⁷ Since then, Nicaragua has consistently reported on Israeli support for the contras in several forms. Nicaragua's president, Daniel Ortega, mentioned Israeli military advisers and Israeli financial support in an interview with an Israeli journalist. SIAG, an information service based in Managua, reported in 1984 that Guatemalan right-wing organizations, together with the embassies of Israel and Taiwan, have been involved in money transfers to the contras.

Indications of Israeli support for the contras from official United States sources first appeared in July 1983 when "Senior Reagan Administration officials" mentioned that "Israel, at the request of the United States, has agreed to send weapons captured from the Palestine Liberation Organization to Honduras for eventual use by Nicaraguan rebels. . . . The arms shipments, which began recently, include artillery pieces, mortar rounds, mines, hand grenades and ammunition."⁶⁸

Both Israel and Saudi Arabia received requests from the CIA to provide the contras with financial aid. While Saudi Arabia has turned down this request, Israel (with considerably more limited financial resources) " . . . provided some type of well-concealed financial assistance to the U.S.-backed guerrillas. . . . According to U.S. sources, the Israeli assistance reportedly totals several million dollars and appears to be reaching the contras through a South American intermediary."⁶⁹ Israeli officials, however, have denied having any financial ties with the contras.⁷⁰

One writer determined that Israel

first supplied arms to the ARDE in July 1983, while another spoke of "knowledgeable sources both inside and outside the U.S. Government . . ." who believed that " . . . Israel would help U.S. allies in Central America if Congress cuts military assistance."⁷¹ A third report indicated that "several major U.S. allies - including Israel, Taiwan, South Korea and possibly Saudi Arabia - are secretly helping to support the contras. . . . [the] source with direct access to U.S. intelligence information said."⁷² According to the latter report, Israeli aid consisted of military hardware and military training. All three reports, based on U.S. sources, observed that Israeli aid to the contras (or any such aid from other parties) enabled the Reagan Administration to circumvent the Congressional ban on direct U.S. aid.

By March 1985, Israel had increased its aid to the contras "within recent months."⁷³ Israel charged the contras \$230 for every Soviet AK-47 rifle captured in Lebanon, and also provided the Soviet RPG-7 grenade launcher, for an undisclosed amount.⁷⁴ Contra leaders in Honduras, according to some observers, asked Taiwan, Israel and Japan for financial aid and training, while Reagan Administration officials mentioned Israel among several countries, along with Argentina, Venezuela, Guatemala and Taiwan, as contributing money to the contras.⁷⁵

When the United States could not help the contras officially and directly, El Salvador, Honduras and Israel stepped in and replaced what was missing.⁷⁶ Assistance to the contras given by Israel, Argentina (under the Galtieri junta), and possibly Taiwan and Thailand was " . . . all encouraged by Washington. These are stopgaps; the bulk of any assistance must come from Washington itself."⁷⁷ References to the " . . . fencing of aid through such U.S. clients as Honduras, El Salvador and Israel . . ." point to direct military assistance to the contras, in addition to other aid from private American groups.⁷⁸

Reports circulating from Costa Rica indicated that Eden Pastora and his group were enjoying Israeli aid in the form of weapons and military advisers.⁷⁹ A leader of the contra group,

Nicaragua Democratic Force (FDN), based in Honduras and led by Adolfo Calero, former president of Coca-Cola in Nicaragua, also alluded to the possibility of aid from Israel. An unnamed leader of the group has said that "The largest Nicaragua rebel group plans to ask Israel for aid because Congress has failed to authorize any further CIA expenditures . . . We need a government. We think the Israelis would be the best, because they have the technical experience."⁸⁰

Enrique Bermudez, another contra leader in Honduras, said on the NBC Television News on April 23, 1984 that his group was receiving weapons from the Israeli Government. Not too surprisingly, Israeli officials denied this report.⁸¹

Another leader of the FDN, Edgar Chamorro, told *Time*, May 7, 1984, that his group has received weapons from Israel. *Time* also reported on that occasion that "Israeli intelligence experts helped the CIA train the contras and retired reserve Israeli Army commandos have been hired by shadowy private firms to assist the rebels. 'The Israelis,' says a U.S. intelligence expert, 'know how to run a secret operation.'"⁸²

Official Israeli policy has always been to deny any contacts with the contras, or to decline comment when more specific questions of aid to the contras were raised. One published article, however, contained an admission by Victor Harel, a spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C., that (1) Israeli arms might have reached the contras, and (2) "retired Israeli military personnel might be working in the region."⁸³ Numerous reports from Israeli sources mention either joint planning by the United States in Israel, or operations in Central America, or of American pressure on Israel to support the contras.

According to one account the United States demanded overt and covert Israeli support for U.S. activities against the Sandinista Government.⁸⁴ In return, the United States would bankroll Israeli activities in other parts of the third world.

The issue of Israel support for the contras was raised in the Knesset by MK Muhamad Miari on November 14,

1984. MK Miari wrote to Knesset Speaker Hillel, proposing to put this topic on the agenda for urgent discussion. Hillel turned down the request.

Since Shimon Peres became the Prime Minister of Israel in the fall of 1984, it is estimated that Israeli arms

supplies to the contras have become ten times greater.⁸⁵ One eye witness saw captured contra weapons, including an AK-47 rifle, an RPG-7 grenade launcher and a Galil rifle, and heard reports of Israeli advisers with the contras.⁸⁶

Korea, Argentina, Panama, Venezuela, Japan and Spain. As one of the countries supplying Costa Rica with "internal security" aid, Israel officially offered police and anti-terrorist training, while Argentina provided both hardware and advice.⁸⁷ Israel has also specifically aided in the building of an electronic fence on the border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua, begun in 1982.⁸⁸ Israel additionally became the main supplier of small arms to Costa Rica, not only training the Costa Rican anti-terrorist unit, but also presenting the Costa Rican police with 500 Galil rifles as a gift of friendship.⁸⁹

On the political economic front, the Costa Rican ambassador to Israel in 1983, Karen Olson Beck, was quoted as saying that U.S. Jewish leaders, at the request of the Israeli Government, met with President Monge to discuss Costa Rica's debt renegotiation in the United States. Costa Rica was subsequently able to arrange a rescheduling program for its foreign debts.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica, presently an oasis of tranquility, may very well become an integral part of the region's conflicts. Although the country has no army, it does depend on a 5,000-man civil guard.

police. Israel reached an agreement with Costa Rica, whereby it would sell Costa Rica military equipment and offer counter-insurgency training. This was accomplished during a visit to San Jose by Israeli Foreign Minister Shamir in October 1982.⁹⁰

Since 1974 Costa Rica has received military aid from Israel, Taiwan, South



Relations between Costa Rica and Israel became closer following the beginning of the administration of President Luis Alberto Monge, former ambassador to Israel, in May 1982. Thus, Costa Rica was the first country to move its embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem in 1984.

In 1982, plans were announced to upgrade the Costa Rican National Guard and would include purchasing Israeli weapons and using Israeli advisers to train the force. Israel reportedly agreed to deposit \$7 million in the Costa Rican Central Bank, and to encourage United States Jews to take their vacations there.⁹¹ In addition to help with economic problems, Israel would supply arms and counter-insurgency training to the Costa Rican

What Does Israel Do for Central American Regimes?

As we look back to the history of significant Israeli involvement in Central America during the past ten years, the change seems clear. In 1975, Israel entered the region as a seller of arms. A decade later, Israel is a committed party in the regional struggle, and some might even speak of an active Israeli intervention. Israeli arms and military advisers are present, according to a journalist with close ties to the United States Government, because "The arms and trainers are being used to combat antigovernment insurgents in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Costa Rica."⁹²

One figure offered as a total value

of Israeli arms sales in the region in 1984 was \$22 million.⁹³ Although relatively small, the figure may be both realistic and significant in terms of the whole region. Several reports of discussions involving Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras center on the revival of CONDECA, a joint military command for the three countries. The uniformity of weaponry, all made in Israel, used by the three armies, and the uniformity of communication systems of the same origin, would be important factors in the viability of the new CONDECA.

Some of the military hardware sold by Israel in Central America was not

made in Israel. French-built jets, the Marcel Dassault Ouragan and the Marcel Dassault Super-Mystere B2, were sold to El Salvador and Honduras when they became too obsolete for the Israeli Air Force. Forementioned Mauser-99 rifles, made in Germany, were sold to Guatemala after they too became obsolete. Soviet-made arms captured during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 were sold in Central America because Israel had no use for them.

What Israel can offer Central American regimes, and what very few countries have developed, is electronic anti-guerrilla equipment. This includes ground radar systems, which can track both human beings and vehicles moving at ground level. It also includes electronic fencing, sensitive to any attempted penetration.

What we find among many military men in Central America is a real admiration for Israel and for the Israeli military, whom they see as tough, efficient and "unencumbered by issues of human rights."

One writer has mentioned "Personal connections between retired high-ranking Israeli officers and the generals of the region . . ." "94 Such personal connections after an officer has retired grow out of a close working relationship before retirement, and these obviously do exist. Often . . . many former officers have been traveling through Central America offering their personal services as anti-terrorist consultants, permanent advisers, trainers, and even as simple bodyguards."⁹⁵ This phenomenon is also a reflection of Israeli activities in the region. Israeli mercenaries arrive in the area as the result of official contacts.

Another reason for the interest displayed by Central American regimes is the strong pro-Israeli lobby in the United States, which can do wonders for a reactionary third world regime in the dangerous waters of U.S. public opinion. Accordingly there are the ". . . hopes in the Salvadoran Government that the influential pro-Israel lobby in the United States will lend a discreet hand in Congressional debates over the wisdom of administration policy on Central America . . ."⁹⁶

Other right-wing regimes, including

South Africa, Taiwan, Brazil and Argentina, have been active in promoting U.S. interests in the form of military aid to right-wing regimes in Central America. Argentina (under the military regime) and Taiwan, which has the second largest embassy in Guatemala—after that of the United States—are mentioned as two countries whose involvement in the region may be greater than Israel's. Honduras has also had military contacts with Taiwan, South Korea and Argentina.⁹⁷

The pattern was quite clear in Nicaragua under Somoza, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. Argentina (under the military regime between 1976 and 1984) played a major role as a U.S. proxy in the region. Argentine military advisers have done counter-insurgency work in El Salvador and Guatemala, and army officers from

these countries have been trained in Argentina. All this has changed, of course, with the beginning of the Alfonsín Administration in Argentina in 1984.

The aid offered by the international right-wing to the contras is another case in point. The same predictable group of countries rushed to help the CIA operation against the Nicaraguan Government, including, in addition to Israel, right-wing regimes in Central America, Taiwan, Argentina (until 1982) and Chile. The Argentines were active in the training of the contras in 1981-1982, but, following the Malvinas War of 1982, Argentina refused to continue in this role. One Nicaraguan official said then that "It seems reasonable to presume that Israel will now take over Argentina's role."⁹⁸

Israel As America's Proxy

Israel's involvement in Central America has been a collaborative venture with the United States. In November 1981, both countries signed a Memorandum Concerning Strategic Cooperation Between the United States and Israel. Part one of this memorandum dealt with military cooperation between the United States and Israel in areas "outside the east Mediterranean zone," and the third part called for arms sales to "third" parties.⁹⁹

Only once, in 1981, has the United States admitted to a direct and explicit request to Israel to help a Central American country; that request came from Secretary of State Alexander Haig and the country in question was Guatemala. Otherwise, U.S. officials admit only to a "convergence of interests."¹⁰⁰

Clearly, though, the United States regards whatever Israel does in Central America as "help" in securing U.S. foreign policy goals. As one high State

Department official, speaking off the record, put it: "We've indicated we're not unhappy they are helping out."¹⁰¹

A meeting between the Israeli ambassador in Washington, Meir Rosenne, and then Ambassador-at-Large Vernon Walters is said to have taken place in early 1984.¹⁰² Walters, former CIA deputy director and now U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, reportedly asked for greater Israeli involvement in "defending the free world" on the Central American front, and Rosenne is said to have concurred. Israel's role in Central America is indeed crucial for the United States, which cannot offer direct and open military aid to states like Guatemala, because of those countries' blatant human rights violations. But Israel can and does offer such aid, as it does in other regions of the world where the United States cannot operate directly, e.g., Rhodesia, South Africa and Iran.

This last point was made clear to Israelis in a 1983 *Ha'aretz* article presenting the Israeli establishment's point of view of the 1981 Memorandum of Understanding: "The revival of the agreement now will have its most practical implications not in the Middle East, but in Central America and in Africa. . . In fact, this aspect of cooperation was the only one to be energetically pursued during the last two years. . . The director-general of Israel's foreign office, David Kimche, concentrated on this subject in most of his talks during his visit to Washington during the summer. The Americans need Israel in Africa and Latin America also because of the problems experienced by the U.S. administration when it comes to getting Congress to ratify all its far-reaching programs, and, of course, its military activities. . . In Central America, which is now the main focus of U.S. activities, the U.S. administration has long wanted to use Israel as conduit for military and other aid."¹⁰³

And in Israel the United States has found a more than willing proxy. Indeed, in some cases the initiative for Israeli involvement in third world "troublespots" has come from Israel and not the United States. This was the case in April 1983, when the director-general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, David Kimche, arrived in Washington with a grand plan for an Israeli "assistance program" in Africa, Asia and Latin America, financed by the United States. From Israel's point of view such a plan makes much sense: it gains contacts in the third world, and becomes a more indispensable ally for the United States.

This obviously was the reason, according to the Hebrew daily, *Maariv*, that Israel's Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir proposed the Strategic Co-operation agreement in Central America to Secretary of State George Schultz in 1982.¹⁰⁴ Shamir reportedly suggested cooperation in Costa Rica and other countries in Central America, "where the United States is trying to stop the spread of Communist revolutionary movements." According to the article, a similar suggestion had been made a year earlier, but the Americans were cool to the idea for financial reasons. A 1983 *Washington Post* arti-

cle claimed that the Begin Government had for some time sought to play a security role in Central America in cooperation with the United States, and it quoted Israeli officials as saying that "they would be willing to act as a U.S. proxy in areas where Congressional restraints or human rights concerns raise obstacles to direct U.S. aid."¹⁰⁵

One of the topics said to have been discussed during Kimche's visit to Washington in 1984 was the setting up of a fund for Israeli aid projects in Central America and Africa. These projects, according to the Israeli journalist U. Benziman, included "military training, personal protection of leaders, and agricultural training."¹⁰⁶ The fund was supposed to have been discussed by Kimche and Lawrence Eagleburger of the State Department, but the State Department denied the Benziman report. Shortly thereafter, Benziman reported that Kimche was now scheduled to meet in Washington on April 27, 1984 with Langley Motley, of the State Department, to discuss joint projects in Central America.¹⁰⁷

To the questions, Do the Israelis really identify with U.S. policies? Do they

see the world as the United States sees it?, the answer has to be a qualified yes. Judging from the Israeli media, the view of the third world from Jerusalem is almost identical with the view from Washington. President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua is consistently referred to in most of the Israeli press as "president" Ortega, while Mobutu and Marcos suffer no quotation marks around their titles. Analyses of the Central American situation, if they appear in the press at all, reflect the U.S. point of view. One cannot avoid the impression that most of the Israeli press is solidly behind the regimes in Central America, and solidly against any radical movement in the region.

As other commentators have noted, there is a similarity between Central America and what is happening in Lebanon. In Lebanon, as in the Central American countries, the United States has tried to keep in power oligarchies at war with their people. What Israel and the United States are up to is the "Lebanonization" of Central America. And in this symbiotic venture Israel is, as one analyst aptly described it, "the arm of the United States."¹⁰⁸

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Book Views

Sacred Rage: The Crusade of Militant Islam

By Robin Wright

Linden Press (Simon and Schuster), 1985,
288 pp., \$16.95

By Charles Kimball

In the nearly seven years since the Iranian revolution, few phenomena have so captured U.S. media attention as the actions of militant Muslims in the Middle East. Even so, most Americans have a poor understanding of the dynamics at work in the various Middle Eastern countries. Robin Wright's new book, *Sacred Rage*, is an important and timely contribution which goes a long way in explaining some of the groups rooted in the resurgence movement within Islam.

Many readers will recognize the author as the seasoned journalist who has reported for CBS News, the *Sunday Times* of London, *The Washington Post*, and, most recently, *The Christian Science Monitor*. Others will recall her frequent appearances on national TV during the TWA hijacking incident this past June. Unlike many who offered "instant analysis" on Lebanon and the diversity within the Shiite community, Wright reflected a knowledge borne out of her years in Beirut; her comments were measured, thoughtful and constructive. *Sacred Rage* continues in this tradition.

The focus of the book is what Wright terms "the crusade of militant Islam." The text is punctuated with personal experiences, anecdotes and quotations from key figures. She covers a lot of ground—from Iran to Morocco—though the most detailed treatment centers on Shiites in Iran and Lebanon. In the first four chapters, the reader will learn a great deal about major actors, the diversity within the Shiite communities, and various political,

economic and religious forces at work in the region.

The chapters on Kuwait and Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Egypt examine the major uprisings that have threatened these governments. There is much here that will be "news" to the general readers. The section on Israel details the wrenching experience of occupation and fighting in southern Lebanon. Recent uprisings in Tunisia and Morocco are treated in much less detail while events in Jordan, Algeria, Libya and among the Palestinian movement are mentioned only briefly.

The final chapter surveys U.S. options in the face of the defiant movements within Islam. Quoting liberally from a variety of Middle East specialists, Wright builds a case for a moderate policy of gradual rapprochement with Iran, "the symbol and the heart of militant Islam."

Throughout the book, Wright cites contemporary Muslim sources and recognized authorities from academe. Interestingly, she refers four times to journalist Edward Mortimer's excellent work, *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam*. This 1982 publication, though slightly dated, deserves a much wider reading than it has enjoyed.

Wright's analysis makes intelligible some of the undercurrents in the troubled Middle East. A number of significant insights and observations are woven into the fabric of the text. While she attempts to trace the influence of Iran throughout the region, Wright concludes that the roots for most of the tumultuous developments are indigenous and not due to "Iranian mischief." She discusses the critical factor of discontent among Muslim youth, noting that well over half the population in most Middle Eastern countries is under 21. And, she underscores the function of religion as an outlet for political opposition in these societies.

The book also includes considerable

basic, introductory information about Islam, a religious tradition that remains poorly understood in the West. A brief glossary of terms and an up-to-date bibliography add further to the value of the work. Wright, however, is a journalist, not an Islamicist. When she ventures into the realm of Islamic history and theology, she is on less firm ground. Substantial issues are sometimes noted briefly and, therefore, oversimplified. Key terms like *jihad* and *fundamentalism* deserve a more thorough introduction and explanation. Although the term fundamentalism is often applied to the Islamic resurgence movements by the Western media, most Islamicists and Middle East specialists find this term too loaded and, thus, misleading. In fairness to the author, this reviewer worked from advanced uncorrected proofs which did not include the full footnote entries. It is quite possible that she has included more detailed explanation of critical terms in the footnotes.

As a foreign correspondent, Wright exhibits a bit of a flair for the dramatic. Each chapter (and some sub-sections) begins with a bombing, hijacking or another terrorist incident. For some, this style will detract from the important substance of the book. At the same time, her easy-to-read, non-academic style is undoubtedly the best way to draw a large audience into a more sophisticated understanding of contemporary Middle East developments.

Wright is courageous for having taken on this vast and fluid topic. She has accomplished her task admirably and provided the best overview to date on the "crusade of militant Islam."

Rev. Charles A. Kimball is director of the Middle East Office of the National Council of Churches of Christ, located in New York City.

Books To Order

New Selection

□ Robin Wright, *Sacred Rage: The Crusade Of Militant Islam*, Linden Press (Simon and Schuster), 1985, 288 pp., \$16.95. Focusing particularly on the Shiites of Lebanon and Iran, the author, an accomplished journalist, provides substantive information on the political resurgence of militant Islam through analysis, insight and experience as a Beirut-based correspondent from 1979 to 1984. Our price, \$11.75. See review, page 14.

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□ Amnon Kapeliouk, *Sabra and Shatila: Inquiry into a Massacre*, Belmont, MA: Association of Arab-American University Graduates, 1983, 89 pp., \$5.95. Documentary of the massacre which has come to symbolize the total horror of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Our price, \$4.00.

□ Mohamed el-Khawas and Samir Abed-Rabbo, *American Aid to Israel: Nature and Impact*, Brattleboro, VT: Amana Books, 1984, 191 pp., \$8.95. Historical review of U.S. aid to Israel, public and private, since 1949. The book also reproduces the full uncensored version of the U.S. General Accounting Office's 1983 report, "U.S. Assistance to the State of Israel." Our price, \$5.95.

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All correspondence should be addressed to: Room 771, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115. (212) 870-2336.



Americans for Middle East Understanding, Inc.
Room 771, 475 Riverside Drive
New York, NY 10115