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Junta Geopolitics 1979: Argentina's Cóndor Building Archive and Central America's Dirty War

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Abstract

In 1979, Argentina's military Junta deployed counterinsurgency experts, known as "dirty warriors" for their inhumane methods, to Central America in "Operation Charly." Their mission was to confront guerrilla factions emerging regionally after the Nicaraguan Revolution. During hostilities that raged into the 1990s, right-wing "death squads" murdered hundreds of thousands of people. Scholars have demonstrated that the US Government, the CIA, and its Special Forces bear much responsibility. Due to departing the conflict earlier, the Argentine role is often treated as a footnote, a trifle compared to US involvement.

This article counters that, despite redeploying upon the Junta's 1983 collapse, Argentine "dirty warriors" significantly shaped the violence Central America experienced. It further argues that deliberate geopolitical analysis and ambition prompted the Junta's decision to deploy these figures. To support these arguments, it combines existing evidence with recently recovered classified Junta documents.

Keywords: geopolitics; counterinsurgency; revolution; Nicaragua; Argentina

Geopolítica de la Junta 1979: El Archivo del Edificio Cóndor de Argentina y la Guerra Sucia de Centroamérica

Resumen

En 1979, la Junta Militar de Argentina desplegó expertos en contrainsurgencia, conocidos como "guerreros sucios" por sus métodos inhumanos, a

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Centroamérica en la "Operación Charly". Su misión era confrontar a las facciones guerrilleras que surgían en la región tras la Revolución Nicaragüense. Durante las hostilidades que se extendieron hasta la década de 1990, los "escuadrones de la muerte" de derecha asesinaron a cientos de miles de personas. Los académicos han demostrado que el gobierno de Estados Unidos, la CIA y sus Fuerzas Especiales tienen gran responsabilidad en estos hechos. Debido a su retirada temprana del conflicto, el papel de Argentina a menudo se trata como una nota al pie, una insignificancia comparada con la participación de EE.UU. Este artículo sostiene, sin embargo, que a pesar de replegarse tras el colapso de la Junta en 1983, los "guerreros sucios" argentinos influyeron significativamente en la violencia que experimentó Centroamérica. Además, argumenta que un análisis geopolítico deliberado y la ambición impulsaron la decisión de la Junta de desplegar a estas figuras. Para apoyar estos argumentos, combina evidencia existente con documentos clasificados de la Junta recientemente recuperados.

Palabras claves: geopolítica; contrainsurgencia; revolución; Nicaragua; Argentina

On March 24, 1976, a military Junta seized power to eradicate "subversion" from Argentina in a state-terror campaign called the "*Guerra Sucia*," or "Dirty War."[1] Taking power amid spiraling domestic chaos, Junta forces annihilated thousands, including, but not limited to, dissidents and guerrilla revolutionaries. After declaring "victory" in Argentina, the regime deployed officers to Central America in 1979. Their mission—to confront a *revolución sin fronteras*, a revolution without borders, during which guerrilla movements operated in several countries (Armony, 1997). Fast forward to October 2013. A janitor discovered a collection of Junta documents in the basement of *Edificio Cóndor*, Argentina's Air Force headquarters. These files and other incriminating papers were presumed destroyed amid the regime's downfall in 1983.[2]

This article analyzes the content of the *Cóndor* building documents to demonstrate that geopolitical analysis played a decisive role in the regime's Central American intervention. I argue that these analyses prompted the dictatorship's decision to deploy troops to Nicaragua, paving the way for regional bloodshed to skyrocket once Washington took charge of counterguerrilla efforts

1 The Junta command structure utilized one dictator and a representative from each of the Armed Forces' three branches. This essay falls primarily under the Junta's initial composition, led by Army General Jorge Rafael Videla from 1976 until 1981. His branch representatives were Army General Roberto Eduardo Viola, Navy Admiral Emilio Massera (succeeded by Admiral Armando Lambruschini in 1978), and Air Force General Orlando Agosti. Viola became dictator in 1981 and Army General Leopoldo Galtieri took control later that year. The final Junta leader, Army General Reynaldo Bignone, assumed power in 1982. Despite restructuring, regime adherence to counterinsurgency was constant because the military's doctrine had emphasized this warfighting technology since the 1950s. As senior officers, Junta leaders had some two decades of counterinsurgency training and experience.

2 When I visited the *Edificio Cóndor* archive in 2015, documents were available in person. They are not the same documents found in a six-book series of Junta *actas*, meeting minutes, at www.argentina.gob.ar. The archive's physical address is included in this article's references. Cameras were forbidden and time constraints precluded recording every piece of data from hundreds of documents. A major loss this process incurred was each document's Spanish-language title, though identifying document numbers are listed in their reference entries.

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during Ronald Reagan's presidency. Contemporary journalism, additional Junta papers, declassified US files, and Argentine scholarly contributions help contextualize this information.

The bulk of my analysis pertains to three documents summarizing a series of Junta meetings that transpired in 1979, shortly after the Nicaraguan Revolution. The exact way these events looked, including precise attendance, is undeterminable from the documents. Junta leaders and assorted staff officers attended, as is common among Western military "command and staff" meetings. The file dated July 23, 1979, indicates that the Junta ordered the Argentine Armed Forces to conduct geopolitical analyses regarding Marxism's gains and plans (Junta Militar 1979a). The archive did not contain Air Force or Navy assessments. On September 6, the Army's analysis was considered (Ejército Argentino, 1979). Four days later, the Junta convened for a final assessment (Junta Militar, 1979b).

Prior to delving into the recovered papers, a literature review sets the stage. Prominent topics include Cold War Latin America's revolutionary violence, long-term military repression in Argentina, Junta psychology, how all three shaped extreme views, and the resultant human costs.

By the 1970s, a revolutionary flame that ignited years earlier burned in Latin America. After dictator Fidel Castro aligned Cuba with Moscow in 1961, the rift between the region's left- and right-wings became an abyss. Anticommunist regimes seized power in South America to confront revolutionaries inspired by the Cuban example. Dictatorships in South America's Southern Cone, Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile were responsible for tens of thousands of deaths.

In 1976, Argentina's Junta was led by officers with years of training in confronting guerrillas. Their regime killed more than other Southern Cone dictatorships. Estimates suggest that upward of 30,000 Argentines fell victim. A secret Chilean document that surfaced after the Argentine regime's demise indicated that Buenos Aires reported a death toll of over 22,000 people by 1978. The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) notes that, aside from guerrillas, victims included "students, educators, trade unionists, writers, journalists, artists, left-wing activists, members of the clergy, and alleged sympathizers of anti-regime elements and their families" (Arancibia, 1978; Central Intelligence Agency, date uncertain).

The Junta endeavored to "purify" Argentine political thought rapidly, and the first years of their Dirty War saw the most violence. State security forces subordinated to military command nationwide, supplemented with criminals, comprised the dirty warrior corps. The regime relied on generalized fear to shock society into compliance. State forces typically kidnapped their targets, sometimes in broad daylight, to publicly demonstrate the fate awaiting dissidents. Arrested suspects were generally hauled to secret detention centers, then interrogated, tortured, and usually murdered. To obscure the whereabouts of Junta victims, regime agents routinely "disappeared" their

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victims' corpses. The cadavers of suspects, who had been dumped alive from air transport over the Atlantic Ocean, eventually began washing ashore on South American beaches (Verbitsky, 1996; Moyano, 1995).

The Junta declared its state-terror campaign, the "Process of National Reorganization," necessary to restore order. Argentina had experienced escalating political violence since several guerrilla movements manifested in the late 1960s. The largest was the nationalist *Montoneros*, founded by radicalized Catholic university students. These progressive Christians were followers of Argentina's late president, the nationalist, anti-imperialist, and populist Juan Domingo Perón (1895-1974). Argentine guerrilla outfits formed after years of military interventions in the national political process, including coups, palace coups, closed elections, and the military-enforced proscription of Perón and Peronism (as his ideology is known), since 1955. In addition to radicalized nationalists, the Junta hunted Marxists and others. They generally considered guerrillas and their sympathizers beyond rehabilitation (Junta Militar, 1980; Junta Militar, 1983; Gillespie, 1982; Moyano, 1995; Mazzei, 2012).

In 1980 and 1983, the regime attempted to exonerate itself in public statements. They argued that the "subversive" threat forced their hand, minimized the extent of their brutality, lied frequently, and declared their "Process" a triumph in a "Third World War," the "war against subversion." Before these declarations, a November 1976 report to the US State Department provides insight in English. It covered talks between US Ambassador Robert D. Hill and the Junta's Minister of Planning, General Ramón Genaro Díaz Bessone. The report reveals a Junta interpretation of the Cold War as a defense of Western civilization against atheist Marxists who pursued global domination by subverting nations piecemeal (American Embassy in Argentina, 1976; Junta Militar, 1980; Junta Militar, 1983).

Several scholars evaluate the psychology behind Junta extremism. Geoffrey Green indicates that such leaders were not raving lunatics but figures often considered "gentlemen," to borrow from famed Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges. Several Junta leaders called themselves pious Christians. Green argues that seemingly civilized, brutal leaders not only abounded regionwide during the Cold War but also historically (2015 Louis, 2015; Borges, 1976). While the lived experiences of many Latin American populations support his argument, it fails to explain why the Junta deployed troops to Central America.

Marguerite Feitlowitz explored Junta psychology by focusing on modality. *Lexicon of Terror* transports readers into a dizzying setting where state agents donning civilian attire leaped out of "ominous Ford Fairlanes without license plates," whisking people off the street in broad daylight. Meanwhile, the regime's dissociative public messaging presented these dirty warriors as "noble victims" forced by the circumstances to act against their will. With graphic detail, Feitlowitz counters that these men often derived sadistic pleasure from their work (1998).

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Feitlowitz analyzes the Junta's vocabulary, its use of Nazi rhetoric and symbols at secret detention centers, and regime views on subversion. Marxism was characterized as a disease that contaminated minds through false promises. As officers trained in national defense, Junta leaders felt obligated to oppose this foreign infectant. Per this mindset, their Dirty War purged the "illness," subversive political thought, from the body, Argentine society (Feitlowitz, 1998). Considering the Junta believed they "won" in Argentina, we start understanding why they exported repression–to prevent subversive thought from reinfecting Argentina.

Marina Franco examines how Argentina's repressive apparatus progressed amidst the Peronist Restoration (1973-March 1976). This government, led by Perón until his July 1974 death and then his widow Isabel, targeted "subversion" broadly rather than strictly against Marxists. Their administration delved into clandestine and paramilitary operations and organizations. Franco contends that we cannot ignore the Peronist role in escalating violence because of how Peronism's popularity affected public perceptions (Franco, 2012). Without wading into the intricacies of the Peronist Restoration or its break with the *Montoneros*, I agree. This outcome was tied to persistent political violence, which tested Perón's authoritarianism and campaign pledge to restore order.

In 2016, the Universidad Nacional de La Plata published a compilation on the Argentine military's repressive apparatus. The tome provides updates on the "forms, practices, devices" used to prosecute state terror, how they evolved over time, and the effects (Águila et al.). More recently, *La Represión Militar en la Argentina (1955-1976)*, or *Military Repression in Argentina*, considered the militarization of law that preceded and enabled the Argentina's Dirty War. This work is valuable because perpetrators, including Junta members, clung to legalities to excuse their acts, yet military leaders compelled these laws to exclude state repression from prosecution (Pontoriero, 2022).

Relating to this essay's international concerns, scholars have identified how the Peronist administration began Argentina's repression of subversives abroad. In early 1974, Deputy Chief of the Argentine Federal Police, Alberto Villar, hosted a meeting of security personnel from neighboring states in Buenos Aires. While the conference emphasized multilateral intelligence sharing among Southern Cone states, J. Patrice McSherry and Pierre Abramovici suggest this multilateral collaboration transitioned into direct action via *Operación Cóndor* by 1975, an operation I will address (Menjívar and Rodríguez, 2005, Chapter 2; Abramovici, 2001).

Daniel Mazzei's *Bajo el Poder de la Caballería: El Ejército Argentino (1962-1973)*, or *Under the Cavalry's Power: The Argentine Army*, identifies how the military's long-term motives included upholding liberal capitalism, which pertains to this essay's international aspects. Free trade policies had powered Argentina's economy for decades but failed to extend prosperity to the masses, who demanded reform. In response, Peronist nationalist economics and

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populism generated a huge social movement, which the military's dominant liberal faction loathed. The officers opposed progressive socioeconomics and nationalist economics, were social conservatives, and claimed their violence, executed to uphold liberal capitalism, preserved "Western civilization" (Koch, 2020; Green, 2015; Mazzei, 2012; Robben, 2005).

Economics helps explain why the Junta persecuted Peronism but not its Central American intervention, which happened after the temporal scope of Mazzei's monograph. Many oversimplify the Cold War as a capitalism-versus-Marxism struggle, but nationalism was a wild card. While Junta leaders made their careers persecuting populist nationalism, their decisions to annihilate political foes were linked to a sustained Cold War influence.

Mazzei and Estaban Pontoriero demonstrate the Argentine Armed Forces' adherence to French Counterinsurgency (FRCOIN) theory, an unconventional military strategy to confront revolutionary warfare. It posited that guerrillas, all of them, pertained to a Marxist plot, overseen by Moscow, to subvert capitalist nations individually. With this, we see a foundation for the Junta's geopolitical perspectives and how their "Process" related to them. Geopolitics linked to FRCOIN theory were also prevalent in Bessone's talks with the US ambassador in November 1976 (American Embassy in Argentina, 1976; Mazzei, 2012; Pontoriero, 2022).

Comprehending why nationalism was villainous in FRCOIN theory and among Argentine military leaders benefits from additional information. The first step in subversion campaigns is ideological penetration, which helps recruit local support. Starting in 1958, French officers teaching in Buenos Aires warned that Marxists infiltrated nationalist movements, when expedient, by appealing to unfulfilled national aspirations. According to these instructors, these organized and prepared Marxists would foment revolution and then impose their system on society amid the ensuing chaos (Koch, 2020).

Past humiliation influenced the French military's condemnation of nationalism. In the First Indochina War (1946-1954), Marxist *Viet Minh* cadres led a nationalist peasant army to victory over French colonizers. According to Roger Trinquier, the most prominent FRCOIN theorist in terms of international impact, Western militaries must adapt. He recommended torture to locate subversives, who must be "annihilated" lest they regroup after "winning" new "hearts and minds" (Trinquier, 1961/1985).[3]

Due to the *Viet Minh* experience, Trinquier and French instructors in Argentina painted nationalism as dangerous. According to this perspective, *Viet Minh* cadres had hoodwinked uneducated nationalists with lies and half-truths. This Marxo-nationalist conflation informed Argentine counterinsurgency

3 My archival research at the Argentine Army Library and the private officers club (*Círculo Militar*) library reveals that FRCOIN theory was core doctrine from 1958 until the Junta's 1983 collapse.

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doctrine from the late 1950s until 1983, boosting the military's anti-Peronism agenda (Koch, 2020).

The notion that contagious Marxists infiltrated nationalist movements meant they had infected Peronism. FRCOIN theory insisted subversives must be annihilated, but targeting subversion militarily is complicated because such thoughts hide in people's heads and easily traverse political borders. While the former explains the regime's reliance on torture to extract actionable intelligence and the high death toll, the latter concern impacted the Junta's decisions to deploy counterinsurgency agents abroad twice.

The initial expansion of the Argentine dirty war abroad was *Operación Cóndor* (Operation Condor), set in the world of international espionage. By 1975, *Cóndor* was a multi-state intelligence-sharing and assassination program enabled by the CIA. Anticommunist regimes in Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay were founding members, though additional South American governments participated in subsequent years. Through multilateral coordination, *Cóndor*'s secret agents hunted and murdered "subversives" on three continents, including a car bombing in Washington, DC. The Junta continued Argentina's participation in *Cóndor* upon seizing power (McSherry, 2005).

The Junta flew solo on its second international campaign, *Operación Charly*, or Operation Charly. It is alternatively known as *Operación Centroamérica* (Operation Central America), where it transpired. The regime sent dirty war experts, mainly intelligence officers, to the region to confront subversion.[4] Political scientist Robert P. Hager, Jr. underplays Argentine ties to the initial scene of conflict, Nicaragua's Contra War (1979-1990), arguing that this civil war erupted in response to failed policies (1998). Hager's argument is ironic. The war began shortly after the Nicaraguan Revolution in mid-1979. The new government, riding a wave of popular appreciation after ending decades of tyranny, was only beginning its reforms. This timeline begs the question, had policies failed so miserably in a matter of days as to provoke civil war?

Published a year prior, Ariel Armony argues that Argentina's deployment of dirty warriors to Central America accelerated the Contra War's onset. The Junta sent counterinsurgency experts to Nicaragua before and after its 1979 revolution. Armony asserts that these deployments were an outcome of how the Junta conceptualized ideological penetration and the Cold War's stakes. Having trained Nicaraguan security forces locally for two years, Argentine officers in the country rapidly organized personnel from the toppled dictatorship around anticommunist ideology rather than objections to nascent policies (Armony, 1997; Menjívar and Rodríguez, 2005, Chapter 3).

Armony notes the presence of Argentine revolutionaries in Nicaragua, figures who escaped the Dirty War, which Lucrecia Molinari elaborates upon (1997;

4 This article's main body analyzes *Operación Charly* in greater detail.

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Molinari, 2024). Junta leaders worried subversive exiles in Central America might leak into Argentina unless "annihilated," per FRCOIN theory. As much was transpiring in 1979, when many *Montoneros* returned in a disastrous attempt to rekindle a popular struggle against the regime (Uncos, 2012). However, *Cóndor* assassins already hunted subversives abroad. Why then *Charly*? This essay reinforces Armony's argument with more recent sources.

Some *Charly* investigations focus upon actions on the ground, revealing more about how and where Argentine dirty warriors operated. Forensics experts and anthropologists examine mass graves and cadavers, exposing the cruelty with which counterinsurgents acted (Weld, 2014; Al Jazeera English, 2022). Pablo Uncos's master's thesis in international relations, "Between Guerrillas and Military Advisors: Argentina and its Cold War in Central America," provides a lengthy report (2012). *Página 12*, an Argentine investigative news outlet, argues that Argentine military personnel deployed as a "foreign legionary force" under CIA orders. This nomenclature pertained to an interview with the head of CIA operations in Central America during this era, Duane Clarridge (*Página* 12, 2016).

I question *Página 12*'s finding. Structurally, "foreign legions" are organized expeditionary units, whereas Buenos Aires deployed individuals in special operator roles. These Argentines advised, trained, and led local forces, which adhered to FRCOIN theory's recommendation to enlist indigenous personnel (Trinquier, 1961/1985; Galula, 1964/2006). Secondly, Argentine dirty warriors coordinated with CIA operatives in Central America's jungles but were not there at the agency's request. They were already there on Junta orders. Third, it seems many CIA actions during the early days of Central America's *revolución sin fronteras* were rogue. Jimmy Carter's presidency, which designated human rights a primary concern, was still active. High-level coordination typically precedes the sort of intercontinental arrangement that *Página 12* described, but these two governments were at odds. *Cóndor* building documents reinforce that *Charly* was a Junta operation, not a favor for Washington. This essay does not endeavor to diminish the CIA's role in Central America but to ensure that the Junta's responsibility is not lost amid larger debates about Washington's Cold War policies.

Overall, our understanding of *Charly* remains immature but is improving. Several considerations explain why this theme remains in its youth despite decades having passed. Guerrillas and counterinsurgents alike value operational secrecy. The theme's violent nature is pertinent, as the guilty rarely divulge their crimes, and their murdered victims cannot testify. Investigators face threats from counterinsurgents who often still enjoy impunity, though the passage of time slowly mitigates this concern while also obscuring other information. Finally, incriminating records were often destroyed; *Cóndor* building files are anomalous. This article considers why the Junta ordered Argentina's intervention in Central America by analyzing these files. This process returns agency to the Junta, along with culpability.

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Global Geopolitical Analysis, 1979

Multi-Polar World

As 1980 neared, the Junta evaluated an unwelcome turn in global politics. They saw a world drifting from superpower bipolarity, a defining Cold War characteristic, in favor of returning to a "multi-polar" order (Junta Militar, 1979b). In the latter, developed nations act as regional hegemons. In the twentieth century, this formula resulted in various states vying for ever greater reach in and beyond their region, culminating in two world wars.

In 1979, the global context was different. Decisionmakers in Buenos Aires believed the world was engulfed in the Third World War, and their wartime mindset affected policy. Two factors impacted the Junta's planning amid fretting over the world's strategic reorganization, the Trilateral Commission, and an unrelenting distrust of Marxism. The Commission was a think tank comprising top business figures from North America, Western Europe, and Japan. Its founder was banker David Rockefeller, Jr. (1915-2017), a surname notorious in twentieth-century Latin America.[5] The Commission intended to resolve the economic and military challenges materializing as interdependence consolidated among those economic zones.

The Junta blamed the Commission for the ongoing restructuring of global politics. According to their analysis, the leading capitalist nations left Latin America and other regions to fend for themselves in a global *lucha contra subversión* (LCS, struggle against subversion), as they called the Cold War. From the regime's perspective, the Commission's gravest miscalculation was not abandoning the LCS but adopting a conciliatory tenor toward Marxism. These officers believed the wealthy capitalists wanted to avoid superpower warfare for obvious reasons but also hoped Moscow could become a partner. Ironically, the Junta began selling agricultural products to the Soviets in 1980, an affront to the Carter Administration's grain embargo (Junta Militar, 1979b; Lundborg, 2017).

The Junta's analysis suggested the Commission wanted technological cooperation with the Soviet Union to displace antagonistic competition. In this scenario, collaboration would become détente's successor, allowing economies worldwide to flourish in a peaceful setting. Unimpressed, the Junta accused the Commission of selfishly shoring up its interrelated strategic and financial positions (Junta Militar, 1979b).

As the LCS was the regime's *raison d'etre*, working with Moscow was inexcusable… until they did. While the Junta believed dirty war "cured" Argentina of subversion, they reckoned it had been but one of many theaters of operations in Marxism's quest for global domination. The dictatorship harbored no illusion that restoring order in Argentina equated to the global LCS's finality.

5 David's brother, Nelson Rockefeller, long guided US policy toward Latin America and was vice president to Nixon, who help Chile's military topple its democratically elected socialist leader, President Salvador Allende, in 1973.

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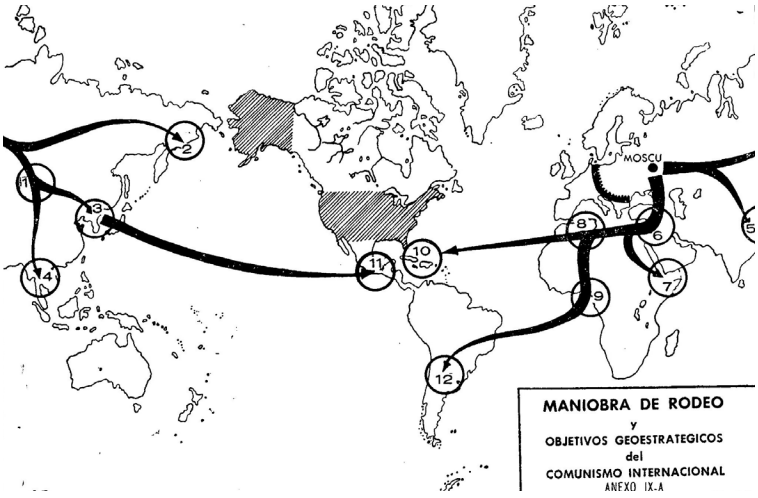
Junta's Views on Unitary International Marxism

Central to Junta's geopolitical analysis was blinding hatred and distrust of Marxism. They saw it as a monolithic force controlled by the Kremlin that would scheme until it controlled the world. This was a nightmarish scenario. Westerners saw the Soviet Empire colonize Eastern Europe after the Second World War. Since 1945, authoritarian Marxist systems had also arisen in China, Vietnam, and, later, Cuba. By 1979, it was common knowledge that Marxist Russian and Chinese regimes had massacred millions.

The Junta believed the Kremlin sponsored most attacks on capitalist governments, a conclusion borne of lengthy roots. Nearly two decades prior, an influential Argentine officer and government minister tied Soviet expansionism to traditional Russian imperialism. Shortly after the Cuban Revolution adopted a pro-Soviet alignment, General Osiris Villegas used a map to depict what he called Moscow's plan for world conquest in *Guerra Revolucionaria Comunista*, or *Communist Revolutionary Warfare*. Thick in FRCOIN geopolitical perspectives, his map specified where the Soviets had applied, and would apply, efforts to make gains in the global balance of power (see Map 1) (Villegas, 1962/1963). The staying power of Villegas' analysis will be apparent as this article continues.

Map 1: Moscow's geopolitical roadmap for global dominion, according to Argentine General Osiris Villegas



Source: Villegas, 1962/1963

The Junta's 1979 geopolitical assessment posited that Moscow abused its uniquely privileged position to instigate subversion abroad after it conducted geopolitical analysis. However, the regime reported that the Kremlin was shifting gears in response to the United States' less assertive disposition under Carter. The regime stated that the Soviets concocted "neocommunism" to flip states and global opinion toward Marxism as the world order evolved (Junta Militar, 1979b; Ejército Argentino, 1979).

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Neocommunism: Temporary Compromise for Uncompromising Domination

The Junta presented neocommunism as subterfuge, insisting perfidious methods and "terrorism's tactical input" would continue underpinning Marxist strategy while certain Marxist politicians adopted more convivial stances. Army analysts asserted that this neo-communist "double attitude" helped Marxism to remake itself into a seemingly moderate force. They claimed this method exploited the "post-industrial" bloc's "disinvolvement" in global politics, a reference to the Junta contention that the Commission's goals equated to acceptance of a multi-polar world order (Junta Militar, 1979b; Ejército Argentino, 1979).

The Argentine regime described neocommunism as a scheme to secure commerce and vital resources as the interests of developed capitalist nations receded in developing economies. Army representatives noted that this strategy strove to move countries closer to Marxism incrementally, again reflecting FRCOIN theory's enduring influence. Another supposed goal was Marxism's integration into mainstream politics, which would allow it to subvert additional nations (Junta Militar, 1979b; Ejército Argentino, 1979).

The Junta denounced open democratic elections as ideologically tainted, even subversive, because they helped Marxists obscure their true intentions to appear moderate. The *Cóndor* building documents claimed this explained a Kremlin decision to infiltrate "populist" electoral bodies in targeted countries (Junta Militar, 1979b; Ejército Argentino, 1979). This deduction corresponded to the military's conviction that populist political chaos rendered nations vulnerable, which pertained to the military leadership's hatred for Peronism.

According to army analysts, Moscow's acceptance of neocommunism allowed duplicitous forces to make evolutionary reforms in non-communist countries by manipulating democracy. This conclusion suggested a general, but not complete, transition from revolutionary violence, which would help neo-communist politicians appear mainstream. The army argued that while the neo-communist formula would not grant control of the "means of production," a tenet of Marxism, it normalized radical left-wing ideology among electorates (Ejército Argentino, 1979).

Doubling down on disdain for voting, the Junta interrogated Western European social democracy, as represented by leftist parties that promoted progressive socioeconomics. The regime saw this as an example of how neo-communist policies ensconced themselves within established democracies, which only augmented the Junta's trepidation. This point indicates that while the dictatorship considered Europe a party to the self-serving Commission, they also saw the region inducing its own demise (Junta Militar, 1979b; Ejército Argentino, 1979).

After considering Europe, the Junta assessed that neocommunism allowed Marxist agents to tailor their politics regionally, championing specific policies

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with popular support in each location. Army strategists added that neocommunism allowed nations to enter the Marxist order without committing to the Soviet Bloc militarily (Junta Militar, 1979b; Ejército Argentino, 1979). In this socialist-not-Soviet scenario, developing nations could prioritize consolidating nascent socialist systems rather than preparing for conflict with the capitalist order.

International Marxism or Socialism Nationally?

Before proceeding, I will analyze the Junta's view on Moscow's acceptance of socialist nations avoiding Soviet-bloc military alignment. Wittingly or not, the Junta perpetuated the myth of global Marxist unity, which exaggerated the threat, to rationalize their "Process." Seemingly out of place, the Junta's explanation of the socialist-not-Soviet phenomenon was a response to a popular, alternative Argentine interpretation that called the "Process" into question.

Argentina's former president, Juan Perón, articulated a nuanced explanation of the socialist-not-Soviet phenomenon. A winner of three democratic elections, the recently deceased nationalist was a geopolitical expert who enjoyed widespread popularity in Argentina. An anti-imperialist, Perón believed nations adopting socialism without tying their fates to Moscow evinced that the developing world desired neither liberal capitalism nor Soviet Marxism, but progressive socioeconomics (Perón, 1953).

According to Perón's "*Tercera Posición*" (Third Position) theory and vision for a postimperial world, he believed the socialist-not-Soviet phenomenon exhibited humanity's aspirations for a more spiritual "third way." The "third way" was a compromise position to resolve antagonisms between the superpowers' bipolar ideologies and the imperialism they spawned. He called this model *socialismo nacional* (nationalist socialism, not Nazism), a non-aligned, pacifist disposition that responded to enduring calls for progressive socioeconomics without compromising sovereignty. The popular leader made this theory central to his worldview, as expressed in a series of books, speeches, and other sources produced over decades (Perón, 1953, 1968).[6]

A glaring example that belied the myth of worldwide Marxist unity was the Sino-Soviet split, which saw the two states engage in combat over disputed borders in the late 1950s. The Chinese were not alone in rejecting Moscow. Autonomous socialist models existed in Yugoslavia, most decolonized African nations, and in Ba'athism, an authoritarian pan-Arabic socialist movement. These governments often accepted Soviet assistance, especially military aid.

Clinging to their less nuanced view, the Junta considered Perón's interpretations of Marxism and the Cold War naïve, even dangerous. Junta leaders held a binary interpretation of the Cold War common to Western military strategists, either capitalism or Marxism would prevail eventually. The Junta's geopolitical

6 The cited sources are among the most elaborated examples of Perón's anti-imperialist views.

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assessment asserted that Marxism was gaining in the global balance of power as nations shunning the capitalist West succumbed to subversion individually. The Junta suggested similar fates awaited the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), comprised of states that prioritized national objectives and eschewed strategic alignment with either superpower (Junta Militar, 1979b; Ejército Argentino, 1979).[7]

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The Junta believed neocommunism sought to subvert African, Asian, Latin American, and European nations incrementally –and less obviously– as détente seemingly approached the sort of peaceful coexistence desired by the Trilateral Commission. Buenos Aires contended that Marxism would remain perfidious through neo-communist chicanery. In this sense, the Junta believed that the Commission was misguided because the West's bane had not disappeared–Marxist subversion was still directed by Moscow, and the Russians still sought world dominion. As the next section argues, this sentiment impacted the Junta's decision to send experienced counterinsurgents to Central America.

Geopolitical Analysis: Latin America, 1979

Junta's analysis of neo-communist mechanisms in Latin America clarifies how the regime interpreted Marxism's regional remodeling. They singled out manipulation of social democracy as the biggest threat facing the "Process" and Latin America. The regime outlined Marxism's multi-faceted strategy to discredit anticommunist regimes and subvert the region:

– Demand elections, mobilize domestic and international opinion, force confrontation with dictatorships
– Criticize ill-defined labor policies to win support from (unspecified) "internationalist" organizations
– Use the "taxed definition" of a "people's document," a petition signed by numerous sectors of society, to elicit Catholic Church intervention in "certain," also unspecified, aspects of the LCS
– Highlight refugee and exile testimonies to provoke international outrage
– Indirectly support terrorism and destabilization in media campaigns that manipulate the "undefined and politicized concept" of human rights to "distort" what was really happening in Argentina (Junta Militar, 1979b)

The Junta claimed neo-communist lies appealed to widespread Latin American desires for a more autonomous and prosperous future while other Marxist

7 Many NAM states decolonized during the Cold War and rejected Western liberal capitalism after decades spent languishing under Western subjugation. Today, the NAM has 120 member-states.

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elements secretly toiled to deliver the region to Moscow. The regime noted that propaganda agents infiltrated labor, universities, and "traditional populist movements," which was another jab at Peronism (Junta Militar, 1979b; Ejército Argentino, 1979). Given the broadness of the political persecution they unleashed in Argentina, these officers likely had a laundry list of Latin American social movements that they despised, but at least one was ecclesiastical.

One supposed permutation of neocommunism particularly perturbed the Junta—progressive Catholicism. They considered it a third prong of trickery tailored to Latin America, though its roots sprung from Rome. In the early 1960s, the Catholic Church hoped to revitalize its appeal through large-scale reforms at Vatican II (1962-1965). In Latin America, a region plagued by stark income inequality, a radical interpretation emerged in "Liberation Theology." This movement of progressive clergy preached that no one ought to have to wait until ascending to heaven to experience a decent existence and that it was a Christian duty to help the impoverished, per Christ's example. In this vein, many Liberation Theologians attempted to reconcile Marxism's emancipatory promises with Christianity. Some even joined guerrilla outfits, like Colombia's Camilo Torres, whose martyrdom later influenced the *Montoneros*. In Argentina, these clergy aligned mostly with Peronism's spiritualist social justice platform and became regime targets (Gutiérrez, 2023; García, 1970; Torres, 1966). The Junta viewed neocommunism's manipulation of religion in Latin America cynically, hinting that Moscow would ban religion after consolidating dominion (Junta Militar, 1979b). As such, killing left-wing priests was seen as a military duty.

Latin America Adrift in the Multi-Polar World Order

The Junta's inference that Washington had quit the LCS prematurely carried implications for Latin America, which they considered unstable. The *Cóndor* building files explained instability, referencing social inequality, economic deterioration, border disputes, human rights controversies, and Soviet-Cuban ideological penetration. Regarding South America, the Junta suggested Brazil was "liberalizing" despite being ruled by a counterinsurgency regime established in 1964 with Washington's backing. The army registered concern that capitalist Venezuela was maneuvering to lead the Andino Pact, a trade union comprising South America's northern states (Junta Militar, 1979b; Ejército Argentino, 1979). Worries that Caracas might become a leader in a multi-polar world order likely motivated the Junta to amplify its efforts.

The Junta labeled the Southern Cone steadfast in the LCS. They praised its anticommunist regimes, partners in *Operación Cóndor*, for having eradicated communism in their territories. The regime's geopolitical files also suggested that anticommunist dictatorships were the only force opposing Moscow's plans for Latin America (Junta Militar, 1979b; Ejército Argentino, 1979). The dictatorship concluded that Kremlin attention had shifted northward to avoid Southern Cone resistance.

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According to Buenos Aires, Moscow targeted Central America and the Caribbean for subversion. This geopolitical assessment suggested that Marxist victory there would isolate South and North America from each other, a condition made possible by the latter's LCS absenteeism. The Junta indicted Cuba for helping Moscow, particularly, but not only in the Caribbean. Nicaragua's new revolutionary government was identified as the Soviets' mainland foothold (Junta Militar, 1979b; Ejército Argentino, 1979).

Impetus to Intervene: Junta Analysis of the Nicaraguan Revolution

In July 1979, the Nicaraguan Revolution ended the dictatorial Somoza dynasty, which the Junta worried opened doors for Marxism to subvert a region Moscow coveted. Two years prior, Admiral Emilio Massera visited the Somoza dictatorship. He had been the Junta's first naval commander and was nominally responsible for foreign affairs. Army staff officers guided much of the Junta's "military diplomacy." Junta notes explained that Massera's task was demonstrating "brotherhood" with a fellow Latin American government. Cultivating economic, military, and state cooperation were priorities (Junta Militar, 1977; Molinari, 2024).[8]

The Argentine Armed Forces had long seen Central America as a probable LCS flashpoint. After Massera's visit, the Junta offered Nicaraguan troops counterinsurgency training in Argentina, granted Somoza loans, and sent experienced counterinsurgents to advise Managua. Molinari notes that "approximately" six officers were deployed, but the precise number is secondary (2024). Those specialists advised Nicaragua's embattled dictatorship, which had been fighting the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN, Sandinista National Liberation Front) insurgency for years.

Founded in 1961, the FSLN took inspiration from the anti-imperialist sentiments sweeping through the developing world by the 1960s. Its namesake, the nationalist Augusto Sandino (1985-1934), led an iconic guerrilla movement against a US Marine Corps occupation starting in 1927. He kept assailing the Somoza regime after the North Americans departed in 1932. Two years later, Dictator Anastasio Somoza invited Sandino to ceasefire talks but assassinated him, which made the guerrilla leader a martyr (Menjívar and Rodríguez, 2005, Chapter 3).

In many ways, pre-revolutionary Nicaragua was a microcosm of the region's plight. After decades of autocracy, repression, and scant economic opportunity for most, many blamed the United States for the ills their societies endured. One may argue that Washington did what was necessary to contain Marxism, but as Sandino's case illustrates, this trend predated the Cold War. After appointing itself the hemisphere's "regulator" in the 1904 Roosevelt

8 Naval officers tended to be socially conservative, "free market" liberals. Massera was nationalistic and took charge of the Argentine Navy under the Peronist administration he later helped depose in 1976. Massera is remembered for his unfettered ambition and torturing suspected subversives personally (Molinari, 2024).

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Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, Washington breached Latin American sovereignty on dozens of occasions with anti-democratic coups, support for dictators, military occupations, and other forms of intimidation (Schoultz, 2018; Roosevelt, 1904).

The maxim "he may be a scoundrel, but he's our scoundrel," which violates the democratic ideals enshrined in the United States' founding documents, was often employed to excuse US support for autocrats. In Nicaragua, Somoza's *Guardia Nacional* (GN, National Guard) were the regime's praetorians against challenges to the family's lengthy tyranny and ties to Washington. The US Marine Corps organized and trained the GN during its late 1920s occupation of Nicaragua (Menjívar and Rodríguez, 2005, Chapter 3). More training was forthcoming.

After the Cuban Revolution turned Marxist in 1961, US President John F. Kennedy added asymmetrical warfare, or counterinsurgency, to military doctrine. Such content was available to Latin American militaries at the US "School of the Americas," then located in the Panama Canal Zone (Commandant of the US Army School of the Americas, 2000). North American training was considered desirable, and officers with career potential also received training at various facilities, including those in the United States. Special Forces A-Teams also deployed to provide localized training in Latin America. Compliance with liberal capitalism was generally a prerequisite to access US training. Nationalist governments, including democracies, tended to be denied such opportunities, though the Carter Administration modified this pattern (Gill, 2004; O'Shaughnessy, 2010; School of the Americas Watch, 2019, 2020a, 2020b).[9]

President Jimmy Carter, a devout Christian, hoped to reverse the trend of US support for compliant tyrants. His administration disapproved of dirty war methods in Argentina, leading to reductions in US training and aid in 1977. Furious, the Junta retorted that it would accept no US aid, and Argentine relations with Washington plummeted (Editorial Board, 2021).

In early 1979, Carter discontinued aid to the Somoza dictatorship on human rights grounds. By this time, the FSLN had popular support and a strategic advantage. It was a diverse guerrilla movement dominated by leftists, including Marxists but also moderate factions, united to expel the Somozas and their American backers from Managua. The dynasty fell on July 17, 1979. On July 23, the Junta ordered the analyses that produced the *Cóndor* building's geopolitical surveys. Many Western strategists, including Carter, feared the establishment of a pro-Soviet state because Moscow and Havana had armed FLSN guerrillas (Reed, 2020; Junta Militar, 1979a).

Upon taking power, the Sandinistas did not usher in Marxism, and democracy would come. Flush from victory, brimming with anti-imperialist zeal, and

9 For example, Peronist Argentina was not allotted training slots. Once free-marketeers ran Argentina again, Argentine troops returned to the School of the Americas and other US training facilities. In 1978, the Carter administration cut such aid in a response to the Junta and its methods.

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aware that Washington rejected FSLN leadership, the Sandinista regime continued accepting such aid. Though the situation was still unfolding, northern strategists concluded that their fears of "another Cuba" had materialized in Managua. There, leftists eager to establish a socialist state forced moderates and other opposition out of their coalition despite FSLN pledges to the contrary. The Sandinista government nationalized leading economic sectors, which capitalists loathed, including those in Buenos Aires' corridors of power. Facing international scrutiny, the Sandinistas promised to hold elections after their system consolidated, which occurred in 1984. The Sandinistas won seventy percent of the vote amid high turnout. International observers reported that the election was free and open (Whitman, 1984; BBC, 1984).

The Junta believed Nicaragua epitomized neocommunism's two-pronged strategy of appealing to democratic ideals while waging an insurgency. Though the *Cóndor* building papers did not elaborate on specific "violations," examples of FLSN actions contextualize the Junta's stance. The Sandinistas smuggled Russian and Cuban arms to guerrilla factions in neighboring states, further destabilizing the region. The leftist regime also permitted guerrillas to cross Nicaraguan borders during tactical retreats against counterrevolutionary forces (Reed, 2020; Brands, 2012; Zimmerman, 2000).

Using anti-imperialism as its fulcrum, the Sandinista government exported emancipatory ideology regionally. *Radio Sandino* was founded for this purpose, and foreign guerrillas contributed to its broadcasts. Some contributors were Marxists, but others were Peronist *Montoneros*, which had been Argentina's largest guerrilla faction before the "Process" made them priority targets, and an uncertain number fled abroad (Molinari, 2024; Confino, 2023; García, 2018; Gillespie, 1982).

Some *Montoneros* found sanctuary in Nicaragua, including a guerrilla leader, Mario Firmenich (b. 1951), and were eager to learn from FSLN successes. Fernando Vaca Narvaja (b. 1948), another *Montonero* who later became Argentina's Public Works Minister, worked for the Sandinista Army's intelligence sector. In 1979, *Montoneros* leadership decided to take the armed struggle for political change back to Argentina. The regime was prepared and decimated them. However, certain exiles had stayed in Central America to continue learning and aiding incipient insurgencies in the region's *revolución sin fronteras*. The Junta document slammed *Montoneros* in Nicaragua for revealing that Buenos Aires supplied Somoza with rocket batteries and how "four" Argentine advisors trained his counterrevolutionary forces (Molinari, 2024; Confino 2023; Junta Militar, 1979b; Ejército Argentino, 1979).

The army document notes that *Radio Sandino* and other state-backed sources touted "national liberation" as the path toward "breaking the colonial chains" that Latin American anti-imperialists blamed for development woes (Ejército Argentino, 1979). Cuba's *Prensa Latina* had been transmitting similar messages throughout Latin America since 1959. At this point, discussing how colonialism was relevant despite the region having decolonized the century prior is prudent.

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Though Latin America won political independence from Spain and Portugal, many argued that capitalist imperialism trapped the region in semi-colonial relations as exporters of raw materials. In semi-colonialism, foreign interests eager to extract local resources bribe local elites, whose political pull shapes laws favorable to those interests. The needs of the masses get neglected, which incites popular resentment. In Central America, the culprits were primarily North American, private and government sectors, which often collaborated. Since Washington's imperialist turn in 1898, the "assistance" it offered Latin America had not spurred meaningful economic development and often proved detrimental to the region's common folk (Schoultz, 2018; Grosfoguel, 2000).

The Price Central America Paid for Junta Ambitions

Having identified the threat in Central America, the Junta measured neocommunism's progress. They criticized Costa Rica and Panama for accepting the Sandinistas and aiding and abetting the FSLN as it consolidated power. The Junta noted that El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, all bordering Nicaragua, were destabilizing amid surging subversive activity. Indeed, guerrilla campaigns were emerging throughout the region's *revolución sin fronteras* (Junta Militar, 1979b; Ejército Argentino, 1979).

The Junta resolved to act in *Operación Charly*, which remains a murky topic. Argentine intelligence officers deployed to fight guerrillas in Central America. By name, *Charly*'s precise start date is unclear. I attribute this to the "mission creep" phenomenon, or a growing set of responsibilities common to foreign interventions. As discussed, the initial deployment of Argentine counterinsurgents to Nicaragua started after Massera's 1977 trip to Managua. The 1979 collapse of the Somoza dictatorship incited geopolitical concerns that prompted the Junta's decisions to expand its regional presence and, seemingly, authorize more direct participation in repression.[10]

While ousting the Sandinistas was an unfulfilled *Charly* objective, the Junta took Central America's *revolución sin fronteras* seriously. As mentioned, they saw subversion as a contagious ideological illness that political borders do not stop. At the Conference of American Armies hosted in Bogotá, Colombia, in November 1979, the Junta announced it would expand its footprint in Central America. Hence, its small nucleus of dirty warriors operating in Nicaragua grew in size, mission scope, and operational area. Argentine counterinsurgency experts collaborated with the CIA, right-wing "death squads," and anticommunist dictatorships in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras throughout the Junta's remaining years in power (Geib, 1983; Balerini, 2018; Rostica, 2022).

The regime in Buenos Aires was ready to prove itself and thought highly of its LCS experience, as did the Latin American Anticommunist Confederation,

10 The Junta avoided issuing incriminating orders on paper, preferring vagaries to shift blame to the individuals doing the regime's bidding.

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a World Anticommunist League affiliate. The Junta also considered Nicaragua subversion's regional epicenter. That *Montoneros* were operating there sweetened the pot, but the geopolitical documents treated them as a complication within the larger problem. In the Junta's opinion, the region had been "infected" by subversive thought independent of the *Montoneros,* and the dirty war was the antidote (Junta Militar, 1979b; Ejército Argentino, 1979; Secretary of the Junta, 1980).

In the weeks after the Somoza dynasty fell, Argentine officers in Nicaragua organized, trained and led counterrevolutionary, or "*Contra*," forces. These Argentines used their established rapport with surviving Somoza's defunct GN members to fill *Contra* leadership positions. Disgruntled indigenous groups, like the Mosquito nation, helped fill the ranks as foot soldiers (Geib, 1983; Reed, 2020; Balerini, 2018; Armony, 1997). These formations, which emerged on a regionwide basis as Argentine officers worked with the other anticommunist regimes, earned the title "death squads" for their murderous ways, which I will soon describe. Despite Carter's human rights concerns, Argentine officers received CIA assistance. The tumult in Central America did not boost Carter's re-election bid.

In 1980, the United States chose the staunchly anticommunist Ronald Reagan. Washington assumed control of the LCS in Central America after his inauguration. The CIA and US Special Forces maintained ties with Argentine counterinsurgents already operating in the area, who remained involved at Buenos Aires' direction. The Junta even abused its control of Argentina's international customs office by flying arms on *Aerolíneas Argentinas* to Iran secretly, part of the Iran-Contra Scandal that scarred Reagan's legacy (Calvi, 1983). In 1982, Argentina's disastrous invasion of the *Islas Malvinas*, or Falkland Islands, led to the regime's collapse. Democracy returned to Argentina, and its military participation in Central America ended.

Despite the Junta's downfall, widespread dirty-war suffering in Central America dragged on into the 1990s. Nicaragua's revolutionary government was bogged down fighting Argentine-trained *Contras* for years, slowing progress. The Pentagon made Honduras, which had a minuscule guerrilla presence, its staging area for a vicious counterinsurgency campaign. Regionally, right-wing figures killed hundreds of thousands. The region's disinherited indigenous populations, whose communal norms shared some overlap with Marxism, were heavily targeted. In Guatemala, state-sponsored death squads liquidated 440 villages, murdering or disappearing an estimated 240,000 people, almost four percent of the pre-war population. El Salvador experienced the second-highest number of deaths and disappearances at 83,000 people, roughly two percent of its pre-war population. At the El Mozote massacre alone, Salvadorian troops slaughtered over 800 civilians. Overall, right-wing forces were responsible for roughly ninety percent of the deaths incurred during Central America's *revolución sin fronteras* (Weld, 2104; Grandin, 2011; Grandin, 2006; Menjívar and Rodríguez, 2005).

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Even Catholic clergy were not spared by dirty warriors who claimed to defend Christianity from Marxist atheism. This irony pertained especially to high-profile clerical murders in El Salvador, which translates to "The Savior." In 1980, a death-squad sniper assassinated Archbishop Óscar Romero as he conducted mass. His "crime"? Preaching against violence and social injustices was commonplace during that country's warfare. Years later, Salvadorian death squads slaughtered several Jesuit priests, whom anticommunist hardliners deemed suspect because some preached Liberation Theology (Brockett, 2005).

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The *Edificio Cóndor* papers clarify that the Junta pounced on a perceived power vacuum to make Argentina a leader in a multi-polar world. They also believed that the ongoing global LCS would determine the composition of those poles and that dirty war was crucial to preventing Marxist domination. Questions linger over how much of this related to delusions of grandeur and cynicism versus cold calculations to confront a threat that did exist but was poorly understood and routinely exaggerated.

Conclusion

In Buenos Aires in 2015, I attended human rights trials against notorious dirty warriors, including the "Blond Angel of Death," Alfredo Astiz (b. 1951). The scene was somber, secured by armed guards, and open to the public. It was a respectful setting, aside from Astiz exiting the courtroom to answer a cellular phone call. Witnessing the proceedings, my mind repeatedly returned to the Junta's documents I was investigating, but the human element is paramount. During a recess, I chatted with a co-ed group of *Montoneros* who managed to avoid the Junta's deathly grasp. While pleased to see justice being served, they recounted terrible experiences until the trial resumed. The legal procedures reawakened traumas, but they appreciated the attempt to ensure perpetrators of dirty war were punished after controversial post-Junta pardons.

The discovery of the *Edificio Cóndor* files, which I had the honor of being the first anglophone to review while conducting doctoral research, further elucidates the nature of Argentina's Junta. The archive's contents confirmed that, by 1979, the regime's exhaustive list of potential enemies included social democracy, election campaigns, populism, some priests, all guerrillas, and any sympathizers, all of which they painted as infected by subversion. Returning agency to the Junta through analysis of their meeting notes also amplifies their guilt and their subordinates' guilt. To explain this, I focused on the archive's geopolitical content, which was organized into global and regional analyses.

Globally, the Junta saw a world engaged in a shadowy war against subversives directed by Moscow. They believed the Kremlin sought to increase its

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sphere of influence through deceitful "neocommunism," a faux-moderate front designed to seem palatable in Western democracies. Making matters worse, they felt the traditional anticommunist bulwark, the United States, had abandoned the global LCS to secure its own interests. The Junta believed Argentina's and the West's salvation relied on anticommunist collaboration and counterinsurgency.

While focusing on Latin America, the Junta saw an opportunity for Argentina to become a leader in the multi-polar world order they believed was forming. The *Cóndor* building files illustrate how geopolitical analyses influenced policy. In particular, the Nicaraguan Revolution prompted analysis that resulted in the Junta's decision to send dirty war to Central America. The presence of *Montoneros* in Nicaragua was a bonus, but a side note in the *Edificio Cóndor* documents. The *revolución sin fronteras* was the primary threat. Through defeating "international Marxism" in Central America, the Junta hoped to demonstrate Argentina's readiness for leadership in global affairs. These conclusions do not exonerate Washington from guilt in the murders of hundreds of thousands of Central Americans.

The Junta's long-term military presence in Nicaragua became a bridge for US operations in Central America under Reagan, and Argentine officers experienced in the dirty war were the engineers who built this bridge. Believing the Cold War to be the Third World War and recognizing the region's strategic value, the Junta began cultivating ties in Nicaragua by 1977. By the time Nicaragua's revolution ran, the dictator and his praetorians out of Managua two years later, Argentine dirty warriors had ties to *Guardia Nacional* troops. They transitioned surviving GN figures into death-squad leaders.

By the time Reagan lifted restraints on US operators in Central America, Argentine-trained cohorts were ready for dirty war, a modus operandi that Argentine instructors demonstrated personally. Local "anticommunist" forces were critical because, no matter how Reagan felt, the US Congress and public had a scant appetite for counterguerrilla campaigns after years of costly struggle in the jungles of Vietnam. In conclusion, the Junta's geopolitical analysis prompted their intervention, which played an enormous role in determining the grizzly outcomes of Central America's Dirty War.

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