Four

An Aggressive Foreign Policy

In 1980, in Ronald Reagan's mind, communism and terrorism were the organically linked plagues of the age, and he had little time to lose in turning back this raging double-sided blight. American politicians had long referred to Communists as terrorists, and Reagan declared a "war on terror" during his presidency. He viewed the enemy structure as a coordinated worldwide menace that tied nonstate groups such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the African National Congress (ANC) to rogue governments, most of them socialist, in Nicaragua, Libya, Ethiopia, and elsewhere. And, as he saw it, the Kremlin's hand was ultimately pulling the strings behind this consortium. Conservative analysts described strategic "crescents" that served to link conflicts separated by thousands of miles. (One left-wing wag called this "the croissant approach to geopolitics."[1]) Reagan sought to confront the Communist-terrorist combine most aggressively on strategically peripheral fronts. He paid special attention to Central America throughout his presidency, working to prevent revolution in El Salvador and waging a barely covert war against the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.

On the strategically central issue of U.S.–USSR relations, Reagan put diplomacy in a deep freeze, instead making a U.S. military buildup his essential Soviet policy. He had run for the presidency in 1976 and 1980 arguing that the United States had become "number two" to the Soviet Union in military might and that he would make the United States number one.[2] Paradoxically, Reagan viewed the Soviet Union as both militarily superior and doomed to ultimate failure. Like Carter, Reagan saw communism as

an unnatural, immoral system that suppressed human desires for freedom and that would eventually collapse. However, there is no evidence of any master plan on Reagan's part to topple the Soviet regime. Richard Pipes, the Harvard historian who had led Team B during the 1970s (see chapter 2) and who worked at the NSC in 1981 and 1982, wrote privately, in March 1981, "*We must put the Soviet Union on the defensive.*"[3] But Pipes explained to an audience in 1982, "Now no responsible persons can have any illusions that it is in the power of the West to alter the Soviet system or to 'bring the Soviet economy to its knees.'"[4] The most that Pipes, one of the administration's hardliners on Soviet policy, hoped for was to encourage reform, not revolution. The idea was not to engineer the downfall of the Soviet state, but rather to increase stress on the Soviet system and slow its ascendancy, giving the United States time to regain its onetime strategic dominance.[5]

Aside from building up U.S. arms, Reagan's focus regarding the Soviet Union was a revivified propaganda offensive, designed to reassert the moral illegitimacy of state communism. The denial of freedom in Eastern Europe was the target of some of Reagan's most powerful rhetoric. In June 1982, he spoke to British parliamentarians in Westminster Palace. "From Stettin on the Baltic to Varna on the Black Sea," he observed, "the regimes planted by totalitarianism have had more than 30 years to establish their legitimacy. But none—not one regime—has yet been able to risk free elections." Turning a Marxist catchphrase on its head, Reagan predicted that "the march of freedom and democracy . . . will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ashheap of history."[6] From Britain, he traveled to West Germany; he visited West Berlin, and said of the Berlin Wall, "It's as ugly as the idea behind it."[7]

In the most controversial element of Reagan's rearmament program, the installation of new nuclear-armed missiles in Western Europe, he was merely fulfilling a pledge Carter had made to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies, one that would counter a new generation of missiles the USSR had placed in Eastern Europe. This planned deployment of Pershing II ICBMs and Tomahawk "cruise" missiles became a subject of sharp conflict in West Germany only after Reagan's election. Both the Social Democratic and Christian Democratic governments that ruled in Bonn in the early 1980s wanted the new missiles, but Reagan's bellicose image and apparent lack of interest in arms-control talks with

Moscow made it harder to welcome them. Richard Perle, assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, devised the "zero option," under which the United States would not deploy its new missiles if the Soviets would remove theirs. Perle thought arms-control agreements with the Soviet Union were folly, and the U.S. proposal was widely perceived as an effort to prevent serious talks from getting off the ground. No one thought the Russians would withdraw expensive new weapons. Reagan declared himself in favor of arms *reductions*, not arms control. However, he would consider reductions only in areas where, according to the administration, the Soviets held the advantage.

Reagan's arms buildup was indiscriminate, ranging from the goal of a six-hundred-ship navy and the deployment of newly developed MX intercontinental nuclear-armed missiles to the revival of the previously scrapped B-1 bomber, which was only rescued from congressional skepticism when the air force spread related subcontracts more widely across representatives' districts. Defense analysts noted that Reagan and Weinberger were setting exotically ambitious military planning goals, some of them incompatible or unrealistic. For instance, they sought the capability to attack Soviet ports. Any such scenario would require an enormous armada and prodigious air support, given the losses to be expected from Soviet homeland defenses, and would run a high risk of triggering a Soviet nuclear attack, an event that much of U.S. strategy was intended to prevent.[8] Despite the multiplication of weapons programs underway, at the end of March 1982, Reagan continued to state, "The truth of the matter is that on balance the Soviet Union does have a definite margin of superiority."[9]

Despite the supposed urgency of the huge buildup, political considerations sometimes trumped strategic ones, as the MX affair showed. Approved by Carter, this ICBM was to carry ten warheads and was to be mobile in order to thwart Soviet countermeasures. This design would close the "window of vulnerability" of which Reagan had warned. Yet Reagan was unwilling to locate the new missiles, as Carter had planned, in the deserts of Utah and Nevada—strong Republican states where opposition to the idea was fierce. Reagan eventually decided to put 50 of the missiles, at $320 million apiece, in existing, stationary missile silos, which negated the MX's purpose. The Soviets would have had to commit 9,200 missiles to destroy the 200 mobile MX missiles Carter had intended to

deploy; they would need only hundreds to target the smaller, immobile MX fleet.[10]

In spite of the strategic incoherence evident in some components of Reagan's buildup, many in America and elsewhere became concerned that Reagan was genuinely willing to fight a nuclear war. In early 1981, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* moved its famous "doomsday clock" from 11:53 to 11:56 p.m., reflecting heightened fears of superpower confrontation.[11] As if to confirm such apprehensions, Eugene Rostow, nominated to head the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, testified at his confirmation hearings that Japan "not only survived but flourished after the nuclear attack." A nuclear exchange in 1981 would be incomparably more destructive than the unilateral detonation of two fission bombs in 1945 had been. But Rostow remained sanguine. "The human race is very resilient," he said. Early in 1982, Deputy Secretary of Defense Thomas Jones made himself infamous with his comments that American civilization could recover a semblance of normalcy within four years after an all-out nuclear war. Americans would need to "dig a hole, cover it with a couple of doors and then throw three feet of dirt on top. It's the dirt that does it," he said.[12] In May 1982, Weinberger's first "Defense Guidance," summarizing the administration's military strategy, was completed. It called for preparations to fight a "protracted" nuclear war with the USSR.[13]

The public was appalled by such statements. Courting nuclear holocaust was not what those who had voted for a strengthened defense posture in 1980 had had in mind. Disarmament activists seized the opening they saw and launched a movement for a bilateral nuclear "freeze"—a halt to the deployment of new nuclear weapons by both superpowers. The notion had broad appeal. About one million people—in the largest political protest in U.S. history—massed in New York City in June 1982 to express support for the freeze and opposition to Reagan. During the summer, the pollster Louis Harris remarked on the "urgent hunger for peace" that his findings detected in the American public. The freeze proposal picked up momentum in the political mainstream: scores of U.S. senators and representatives endorsed it, as did city governments around the country. A freeze resolution seemed to have some chance of passage in the House. On Election Day in November 1982, pro-freeze resolutions were on the ballot in ten states and thirty-seven cities and counties around the country, and these succeeded almost everywhere,

garnering 60 percent of the votes overall in what was, arguably, the "largest referendum on a single issue in American history, covering about a third of the U.S. electorate." In May 1983, a freeze resolution passed in the House, 278–149, but failed in the Senate. The White House, alarmed, organized a concerted effort to derogate the freeze as irresponsible policy. The president initially responded to the freeze movement by charging that unnamed persons "who want the weakening of America and so are manipulating honest people" were driving it forward. But this tactic proved ineffective. So Reagan shifted course and, in mid-1982, began to affirm that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought."[14] Echoing the dynamics of the 1980 campaign, Reagan disarmed critics of his foreign policy more easily by professing his own desire for peace than by accusing them of disloyalty or stupidity.

Public relations aside, U.S. foreign policy was a shambles, the scene of debilitating closed-door infighting that Reagan showed little interest in stopping. While the president offered a determined face to the public, in private his top officials often found him uncommunicative or inconstant. One observer lamented, "Whoever gets in the back door to see the president can get the decision made his way."[15] Only Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) William Casey truly enjoyed Reagan's confidence, and this relationship of trust was cause for alarm. Casey's mumbling and Reagan's poor hearing, Casey's inclination to cut corners, which he would display in Lebanon (see chapter 10), and Reagan's susceptibility to Casey's dramatic schemes and interpretations of world events, were a recipe for disaster. Secretary of State Alexander Haig, warmly recommended for the post by his former boss Richard Nixon, was rebuffed in his efforts to gain presidential approval for the State Department's dominion over foreign policy. Haig's requests to see Reagan sometimes went unanswered. Frustrated, he mused aloud near the end of his eighteen-month tenure, "What am I, a leper?"[16] Haig failed to appear statesmanlike. At one point, he expressed his willingness to turn Cuba into "a fucking parking lot," a statement that may have heartened some on the right but did not appear to win Reagan's confidence.[17] The secretary's excitable temperament caused the president to withdraw. Pipes reflected the general view of Haig in the White House when he described him as "sinister, aggressive, a kind of Iago (except that [Reagan] would not play Othello, ignoring him

completely)."[18] Barely two months on the job, when Reagan was shot and almost killed in April 1981 (see chapter 3), Haig damaged himself by making a breathless, disquieting appearance in the White House, telling the assembled press corps, "As of now, I am in charge here, in the White House, pending the return of the Vice President," who was on a plane.[19] As for the NSC, Reagan chose Richard V. Allen, an obscure Californian, to coordinate the body as national security adviser and denied him, too, regular Oval Office access. Within a year, Allen resigned, embarrassed over murky ties to Japanese business and political figures. Reagan would appoint five more men to Allen's position during his two terms in office.[20]

Haig, at his first press conference after his confirmation, had made a bid to garner authority by echoing the conservative view that terrorism and world communism worked hand in glove. Terrorism should be the top priority of U.S. foreign policy, he said, replacing Carter's concern for human rights. The Soviet Union was guilty of "training, funding and equipping" terrorist groups, said the secretary. The *Economist* reported, shortly afterward, that "the state department and the somewhat startled intelligence agencies have been scrambling"—in vain, it turned out—"to provide evidence to support this new policy."[21] The links among terrorist groups were real, but the guiding hand of Moscow was imaginary. Haig had read galley proofs of *The Terror Network*, a new book by Claire Sterling, an independent journalist, which boldly made the argument for Soviet control of world terrorism. Haig, like Casey, preferred it to the findings of his own professional analysts.[22]

In 1980 and 1981, Claire Sterling was all the rage. *The Terror Network* was rushed into print by her publisher. The *New York Times Magazine* ran an excerpt in March 1981, following a *Washington Post* opinion piece in January in which Sterling summarized her argument.[23] Sterling claimed that rising terrorist groups in countries across the world were all linked through training camps and arms suppliers who were, in turn, cat's-paws of the Soviet Union. The middlemen were Cubans, Palestinians, and Libyans, who ran training camps in remote locales such as Soviet-allied South Yemen. Thus, the contemporaneous rise of violent groups as disparate politically as the West German Red Army Faction, the "Provisional" Irish Republican Army, Basque separatists, and others, was not a coincidence. This rising terrorist tide was a product of the USSR's policy

to demoralize "the West," according to Sterling. Pipes agreed with Sterling that evidence of a Soviet master plan to seed the free world with terrorism was elusive. But they brushed this detail aside. Terrorism simply looked, to them, like something Communists would orchestrate.[24]

In April 1981, a new Republican U.S. senator, Jeremiah Denton of Alabama—who had spent almost eight years as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam—convened hearings of a new Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism. The opening roster of witnesses consisted of Sterling, former DCI William Colby, and the writers Arnaud de Borchgrave and Michael Ledeen. With the exception of Colby, who distanced himself from the more lurid theories abounding, these were publicists with a flair for drama, suddenly elevated by circumstance into the company of national-security experts. When critics assailed Sterling's casual way with evidence, she complained, "I'm naked and alone out there in the middle and the stray shot is getting at me."[25] Ledeen, with a special interest in Iran, often wrote for newspapers about the Middle East. De Borchgrave, a former *Newsweek* war reporter, had switched to writing novels detailing the western media's suppression of news that incriminated Soviet misdeeds.[26] This notion was fantasy, as de Borchgrave's turn to fiction suggested. But he had his defenders. The *New Republic*, long a liberal public-affairs journal, under the leadership of publisher Martin Peretz gave both Ledeen and de Borchgrave a platform. To Peretz, what mattered was that de Borchgrave's "version of international reality is more true than that of the Institute for Policy Studies," a left-wing outfit sharply critical of U.S. foreign policy, "by far."[27] In 1986, de Borchgrave would resurface as editor-in-chief of the *Washington Times*, a newspaper created in 1982 by the Unification Church of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon, who wished to offer movement conservatives in the nation's capital a reliable alternative to the establishmentarian *Post*. Such figures circulated only in the movement-conservative social orbit outside the administration. Yet the president, like Haig and Casey, agreed with their view that Third World anti-Americanism was the respectable bedfellow of both Soviet intrigue and terrorist mayhem.

Reagan sought a "rollback" of socialist revolution in the Third World, a longstanding conservative position. To him, the Nicaraguan "Contra" forces, whom the United States funded and helped organize with the aim

of overthrowing the socialist Sandinistas, were like the Hungarian rebels who, left to their own devices by the United States, had been crushed by a Soviet invasion in 1956. Reagan would say of the Contras, "God bless them" for being counterrevolutionaries. He shared their convictions, and that, he said, "makes me a contra, too."[28] Reagan, partly in reaction to what he saw as rampant anti-Americanism in the Third World, took a series of actions as president that proclaimed a new U.S. unilateralism. He withdrew U.S. support for a treaty on the Law of the Sea, long in the making. The U.S. delegate to the World Health Organization cast the only dissenting vote from a new global code governing the marketing of infant formula. In 1984, Reagan removed the United States from UNESCO, the UN cultural organization.[29] He made Jeane Kirkpatrick—the least diplomatic of his diplomats—his ambassador to the United Nations. She had made a career of arguing that the United States should rely on rightist dictatorships in its Latin American policy. She gave this preference a moral gloss in a 1979 article, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," in which she argued that "authoritarian" states might reform themselves in the direction of liberal democracy—and thus were suitable clients—but that "totalitarian" states, by which she meant Marxist-Leninist ones, could not.[30]

Reagan's stance toward the Third World proved a consolation to his conservative supporters, disappointed at the lack of progress on abortion and school prayer. Evangelical Protestant missionaries fanned out across Central America in the 1980s, bringing aid and Bibles to people caught up in civil wars. They embraced far-right politicians such as the Salvadoran Roberto D'Aubuisson, whom the administration thought too blood-stained to be a suitable public leader, but whom television evangelist Pat Robertson called a "very nice fellow."[31] Members of Young Americans for Freedom chaperoned D'Aubuisson when he visited Washington; they wore t-shirts bearing the acronym of his political party, ARENA, which was closely linked to the "death squad" killings in his country.[32] In a weird echo of the guerrilla romanticism of the 1960s left, young Republican cadres traveled to Angola to have their pictures taken, guns aloft, with soldiers and leaders of UNITA, the right-wing army that was fighting, with funding from Washington, alongside South African forces against Cubans. Jimmy Swaggart, another television preacher, traveled

to Chile to praise Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship and involved himself in southern Africa, where Mozambique's leftist government accused him of aiding the rightist RENAMO guerrillas in that country.[33]

Conservative activists might go further than Reagan would in some of these proxy battles of the Cold War, but Reagan showed that he was willing to pick a fight if the right opponent presented itself. If Reagan were looking for a regime that embodied all the dangers he saw posed to America from the Third World, he found it in the Libyan state, avowedly socialist (and officially Islamic), run by Moammar Qaddafi. For almost ten years, the United States had accused Qaddafi of exporting revolution to other African countries and of training and arming terrorist groups. Libya also had become a major buyer of Soviet arms. In March 1981, after reports attributed the killing of a Libyan opposition figure in Chicago to Qaddafi's government, Reagan broke diplomatic ties with Qaddafi, and subsequently ordered aggressive overt and covert tactics against Libya. Reagan dispatched navy ships and planes to the Gulf of Sidra, in waters that Libya declared its own—a claim honored by few others. He knew that international law would be on his side if Libya sought to defend its broad claim of sovereignty with force against a U.S. challenge. On August 19, 1981, an encounter unfolded that could not have turned out better for Reagan if Hollywood had scripted it. Two U.S. jets engaged their Libyan counterparts in the air; one of the Libyan jets fired a missile at one of the U.S. jets, missing its target; the U.S. planes turned and destroyed both Libyan aircraft.[34] Reagan, who had approved the rules of engagement before the incident, greeted his staff the following morning by playacting the role of an Old West gunman, unholstering and firing imaginary pistols from his hips. Later that day, he appeared on board the USS *Constellation* and stated, "This is the rule that has to be followed—if our men are fired on, they're going to fire."[35] Subsequently, word leaked to the press that the White House believed Qaddafi had dispatched assassination teams inside the United States, targeting Reagan, Bush, and other White House officials. "The mystery of the assassination teams" deepened as Reagan's men then stated that Qaddafi had called off the threat; privately, U.S. intelligence judged the initial reports unreliable.[36] The administration urged that U.S. citizens leave Libya, and the United States forbade the purchase of Libyan oil. To Americans, Qaddafi would remain a menacing figure hovering behind the threat of terrorism.

The administration's perspective on the Middle East in general mingled concern over terrorism and Soviet influence. In September and October, the White House fought a grueling battle to keep the Senate from blocking the U.S. sale of advanced radar-equipped planes—dubbed AWACS—to Saudi Arabia, which Reagan and Haig viewed as a potential regional counterweight to Iran and Syria. American officials viewed Syria as a Soviet client state and saw both Iran and Syria as backers of international terrorism. Reagan had to overcome the opposition of pro-Israel groups and of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, to whom the Saudis were a hostile regional power. Reagan was viewed as staunchly pro-Israel; in 1977, he had echoed the claim, long made by some Israeli leaders, that, historically, "there was no nation called Palestine" whose rights could be violated. Thus, he surprised some with his determination regarding AWACS.[37] "The President would have done almost anything to avoid defeat on this," James Baker commented. Reagan clawed back commitments to vote against the arms sales from one Republican senator after another. He framed the issue as a test of his power over foreign affairs, telling them, "Vote against me and you will cut me off at the knees." After he prevailed, Reagan said the experience had been "like shitting a pineapple," an expression he favored for describing painful ordeals.[38]

Events in the Middle East were spiraling out of Washington's control. In October 1981, Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat was murdered by religious extremists enraged by his peacemaking with Israel. In December, Israel officially annexed the Golan Heights, territory it had occupied since wresting it from Syria in the "Six-Day War" of 1967. In June 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon. Reagan and Haig defended Israel's initial stated goal of venturing only forty kilometers into Lebanon, to eliminate PLO positions that could launch attacks against Israeli territory. Israeli Minister of Defense Ariel Sharon had made preparations and briefed Washington. Begin told his cabinet, "The hour of decision has arrived. . . . The alternative to fighting is Treblinka," citing a Nazi death camp, "and we have resolved that there would be no more Treblinkas."[39] When the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) expanded their attacks to target Syrian forces in Lebanon, shooting down twenty-three Soviet-made MiG jets without losing a single plane, few in Washington shed any tears. But when the IDF then raced more than eighty kilometers north of Israel's border, laying

siege to Beirut and aiming to oust the PLO from its stronghold, Reagan was surprised and upset.

An extraordinary series of exchanges between the two countries' leaders ensued. In July, the IDF cut Beirut's flow of electricity and fresh water. Reagan protested to Begin, and the water and power came back on. At one point, Sharon ordered heavy bombing that killed three hundred Lebanese. Footage of Israeli bombardment in and around Beirut damaged Israel's cause in the court of world opinion. Reagan phoned Begin and said, "Menachem, this is a holocaust." "Mr. President, I think I know what a holocaust is," came the inevitable reply. The bombing ceased for the moment.[40] Despite these behind-the-scenes strains, in strategic terms, Begin prevailed: the United States negotiated an evacuation of PLO forces by boat to Tunisia; Israel occupied a swath of southern Lebanon; and Israel's Lebanese allies in the Christian Phalange, a military-political movement with an avowed affinity for fascist ideology, gained the upper hand in Lebanon. The bloody drama was not finished before the Phalange, enraged over the killing of its leader, Bashir Gemayel, murdered between seven hundred and two thousand Palestinian refugees between September 16 and 18. The IDF, in control of the area, facilitated the carnage, letting the Phalange into the refugee camps, called Sabra and Shatila, and launching illumination flares overhead during the two nights of the massacre.

Many thought Haig had encouraged Sharon carelessly before the invasion, and the Lebanon mess of 1982 helped cost Haig his job. It was just a matter of when Reagan would fire him, which the president did in July. In April, Haig had lost a political battle after exerting himself in an effort to avert war over the South Atlantic islands that the Argentines called Las Malvinas and the British called their colony (the Falklands). Kirkpatrick, for her part, raised eyebrows by associating herself publicly with the Argentines as war approached. She viewed U.S. alliances with Latin American strongmen as more valuable than the "special relationship" with Britain. But Reagan felt a personal bond with Margaret Thatcher, who sent warships steaming toward the Falklands. Reagan did not share Kirkpatrick's Argentine partisanship. Nor did he forcefully support Haig's diplomacy. When the shooting started, Reagan got off the fence and supported Britain. The Argentines were used to torturing students and labor

activists, not to fighting a well-equipped, modern navy, and lost the war quickly.

The Argentines had mistakenly thought they could count on Washington to stay neutral, as Haig had appeared to want, particularly because the two governments had been collaborating quietly on a project of some importance to President Reagan. Military juntas and guerrilla movements had been waging asymmetric warfare for years across Latin America. In the 1960s and 1970s, conditions for the poor peasant majority in Latin America had worsened, as land ownership became even more concentrated in fewer hands. In Central America, the landless peasantry tripled in size in these decades.[41] Guerrilla movements sprang up almost everywhere from Guatemala to Chile; rightist *golpes* displaced wobbly civilian governments. The phenomenon of *los desaparecidos*, "the disappeared," followed: governments arrested, tortured, and murdered tens of thousands of actual and potential dissidents. All opponents of rightist regimes were targeted for elimination; all were labeled "subversives" or "communists." As the governor of Buenos Aires province summed up the Argentine junta's vision, "*First we will kill all the subversives, then we will kill their collaborators, then . . . their sympathizers, then . . . those who remain indifferent; and finally we will kill the timid*."[42] The Argentines saw themselves in the vanguard of the "dirty war" against the left, and took it as their mission to export their sanguinary methods to other lands. After Somoza's fall, the Argentine government brought defeated Nicaraguan soldiers to Buenos Aires for training in the hope of ousting the Sandinistas.

When William Casey took charge at the CIA, he learned of the Argentine-Nicaraguan operation and offered funding. "It takes relatively few people and little support to disrupt the internal peace and economic stability of a small country," he once remarked.[43] U.S. personnel would be two steps removed from the effort to bring down the Sandinistas. Carter had authorized modest covert funding for Nicaraguan opposition groups before he left office. By 1981, Nicaraguan and Cuban exiles were working together in military training camps in Florida, advertising for soldiers on Miami radio stations.[44] Now the U.S. government wished to begin funding a counterrevolutionary or Contra army. On March 9, 1981, Reagan signed a classified "finding"—a presidential directive authorizing a covert operation—which sanctioned bolder action in Central America.[45]

Further documents followed, expanding the scope of these activities. Casey felt little obligation to share the truth with the House and Senate Intelligence Committees, openly disdaining "those assholes on the Hill," as he called Congress. Shambling to the witness table to testify before the committees, unkempt wisps of white hair trailing behind him, sometimes speaking inaudibly, Casey was an unsettling spectacle. He told them that the money he requested to equip and train an exile Nicaraguan force was intended to interdict arms from the Sandinistas to leftist rebels in El Salvador. Congress granted $19 million in December.

Kirkpatrick said, "I believe Central America is the most important place in the world for the U.S. today."[46] Haig called the land bridge between continents a "strategic choke point" where Soviet influence was impermissible, but had difficulty explaining what of importance would be choked off there. He came closer to the point when he reportedly told Reagan, speaking of El Salvador, "Mr. President, this is one you can win."[47] The administration insisted El Salvador would not become another South Vietnam. "In no sense are we speaking of participation in combat by American forces," said Reagan. But El Salvador's attraction as a venue for U.S. intervention was precisely that it might replay the Vietnam War with a successful ending. The Christian Democrat José Napoleón Duarte was serving as a respectable figurehead for the Salvadoran government, while the military and security forces maintained links to assassination groups, or death squads, which murdered opposition activists with great brutality. Government forces routinely used rape as a method of terror. Corpses littered the roads and were piled at dumping grounds near the Pacific coast. In October 1980, security forces kidnapped en masse the leaders of the aboveground, democratic left, murdering over half of them. During the presidential transition period in Washington, the rebels of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) launched an offensive aimed at destroying the right-wing junta, but fell short. In Washington, Democrats and Republicans alike were frantic to prevent a socialist revolution. In January 1981, this ceased to be Carter's problem and became Reagan's. The Salvadoran right was overjoyed. "I knew Reagan was one of us," said one death-squad figure.[48] "I think the degree of commitment to moderation and democratic institutions within the Salvadoran military is very frequently underestimated in this country," remarked Kirkpatrick.[49]

In December 1980, the worst happened, from the perspective of a *norteamericano* government intent on supporting the Salvadoran regime. Three U.S. Catholic nuns and one lay worker—Ita Ford, Maura Clark, Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan—became civilian casualties of war. These women, inspired by "liberation theology," worked among the poor, teaching them to read and supporting them in their demands on their government for the bare necessities of life. This solidarity with the poor marked the women as communists in the eyes of the military establishment, and the National Guard decided to make examples of them. A guard squad, dressed in civilian clothing as ordered, stopped the van in which the four Americans were driving home from the airport in the capital, San Salvador. They took the women into the surrounding countryside, raped them, shot them, and buried them in shallow graves, where they were soon found. The killings sparked a storm of outrage. "'This time they won't get away with it,' Robert White"—Carter's ambassador to El Salvador—"was reported to have said as he watched the bodies of the four American women dragged from their common grave," wrote the author Joan Didion, "but they did, and White was brought home."[50]

The new administration in Washington defended the Salvadoran regime as best it could—by, it seemed, blaming the victims. Haig, answering questions about the churchwomen's murders, said, "I would like to suggest to you that some of the investigations would lead one to believe that perhaps the vehicle the nuns were riding in may have tried to run a roadblock or may have accidentally been perceived to have been doing so, and there had been an exchange of fire, and perhaps those who inflicted the casualties sought to cover it up."[51] Haig subsequently backed away from this utter fiction. "My heavens, no," he told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee the next day when asked if he was claiming the women had engaged in some kind of battle with Salvadoran security forces.[52] The embarrassment he caused the administration did not stop a key House appropriations subcommittee from voting, 8–7, to give a supplemental $5 million in military aid to the Salvadorans mere days later. Two Democrats, Jamie Whitten of Mississippi and Charles Wilson of Texas, joined the committee's six Republicans to approve the funds, foretelling the future of such aid requests. Mail to the state department ran 10-to-1 against the aid, and members of Congress reported similar imbalances.[53] Unpopular as the aid might be, few officeholders wished to

be held responsible if another Central American country "went red." El Salvador would receive $744 million in U.S. military aid between 1981 and 1983. Its counterinsurgency campaign would continue for ten years, with U.S. funding averaging more than $1 million per day, for a total of more than $3.5 billion.[54]

El Salvador policy threatened to come apart on January 27, 1982, when explosive stories appeared in both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* relating eyewitness accounts of a massacre, six weeks earlier, of several hundred civilians by Salvadoran troops—by a battalion specially trained by the U.S. Army, no less—in Morazán province, near the Honduran border. On March 3, Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Enders testified to Congress that he had no evidence of such a deliberate slaughter. Behind the scenes, the U.S. embassy in San Salvador knew more than Enders revealed. Reagan, to comply with the toothless conditions placed by Congress on Salvadoran aid, "certified" that San Salvador was making "adequate progress" in the field of human rights. Evidence to the contrary made no difference.[55] The journalists who had revealed the Morazán killings, Alma Guillermoprieto for the *Post* and Raymond Bonner of the *Times*, became targets of conservative criticism in the United States for "bias" against administration policy. The *Times* editor, A. M. Rosenthal, sympathetic to Reagan's policy, eventually recalled Bonner to New York, whereupon Bonner quit the paper, creating a small cause célèbre.

Some opponents of Reagan's policy began to build a continental network of resistance. Residents of Tucson, shocked to find that the U.S. government was deporting Salvadorans who had fled the horror of their homeland—sending them back to likely torture and murder—began to smuggle Salvadorans, and sometimes Guatemalans, across the border and to shelter the refugees in their homes. The government welcomed with open arms Cubans and others fleeing Communist regimes, while the Salvadorans had escaped a violent government for which Washington bore some responsibility. "Initially, I disbelieved our refugee's stories of personal peril, bestial treatment by the army, rampant murder of villagers, and persecution of family," one participant in the movement said. "It was too incredible to me. Eventually, I realized he was telling the truth. . . . It was very disturbing." Another said, "The crucifixion has taken

on new meaning for me: it is through suffering, I have learned from the refugees, that we learn compassion."[56] Churches of many denominations became involved in hiding refugees and helping them settle in the United States. Los Angeles and New Mexico declared themselves "sanctuaries," where authorities would not cooperate with federal efforts to find and deport Salvadoran refugees; over two hundred other state and local governments eventually followed suit. Organized groups began traveling to Central America, sometimes placing themselves in war zones in Nicaragua in the hope of preventing Contra attacks.

If official Washington regarded such citizen activities with derision, a succession of U.S. ambassadors on the scene in San Salvador found it impossible to ignore the violence of the government there. Reagan's first appointee to the post, Deane Hinton, gave a blistering speech in October 1982 before a prominent business gathering in San Salvador. He asserted that, in the civil war, perhaps thirty thousand Salvadorans had been "murdered, not killed in battle, murdered!" He denounced the "eloquent silence" of Salvadoran elites about the bloodbath and called the death squads a "Mafia." He intoned, "The gorillas of this Mafia, every bit as much as the guerrillas of Morazán and Chalatenango, are destroying El Salvador." Hinton's audience was shocked. He had cleared his speech with his superiors at the State Department, where George Shultz had replaced Haig (see chapter 6), but not with the White House. The internecine strife over foreign policy–making in the administration continued. Hinton was silenced. Two months later, Reagan himself made a trip to Guatemala; it was considered unsafe for him to travel to El Salvador. While there, he said the Salvadoran government's human rights record was improving and that his Guatemalan host, the recently installed strongman Efraín Ríos Montt, was "a man of great personal integrity" whose regime was getting "a bum rap" from human rights groups. Organizations such as Amnesty International condemned the Guatemalan government for its violence against its own people, so massive that many called it genocide.[57]

Shultz was still new on his job and, for the moment, the NSC was in the ascendant. Haig's former deputy at State, William Clark, a close confidant of Reagan, had been called to replace Richard Allen as national security adviser, even though Clark conceded that he knew little of foreign

affairs.[58] In late 1982, Clark, Casey, and Kirkpatrick appeared to control policy-making. They urged intensified efforts at counterinsurgency in El Salvador and insurgency in Nicaragua.

Several Contra forces were moving against the Sandinistas by this time. Casey elevated Duane Clarridge, a man of action, to command his Directorate of Operations' Latin America division. Miskitu Indians on the isolated Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, long estranged from the government in Managua and experiencing political repression at the new regime's hands, were ripe for recruitment; the CIA had done similar work with the Hmong in Laos. The major Contra forces operated from Honduras, which shared a long border with Nicaragua to the latter country's north. Someone was blowing up oil storage facilities and coffee mills in Nicaragua. Clarridge denied responsibility for the attacks. "Not ours. Checked it. Not ours," he told the committees on Capitol Hill.[59]

In December 1982, Democrats in the House threatened to cut off Contra aid. As a compromise, the House unanimously passed an appropriations bill amendment, authored by the chair of the Intelligence Committee, Edward Boland, Democrat of Massachusetts. This "Boland Amendment" stated that U.S. government funds could not be used "for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua." Arms interdiction remained a legitimate purpose of U.S. policy. The administration continued along its path as if nothing had changed.

In Reagan's first two years as president, he succeeded in resetting U.S. foreign policy on a newly aggressively rightward course. Carter had become more hawkish in his last year as president, but his support for the global right had been tempered by human rights concerns. Reagan, instead, almost embraced a no-enemies-to-the-right stance. Violent and ethically compromised regimes traditionally allied with the United States received fresh and unqualified support. After Reagan became president, his first state visit was from Chun Doo Hwan, president of the Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea), a key bastion of U.S. military power, home to about forty thousand U.S. troops. The ROK soon received new fighter aircraft from the United States, despite Chun's seizure of power in 1979–1980 and the spectacular wave of killings perpetrated by Korean security forces against protesters in the city of Kwangju in May 1980.[60] Reagan would nearly double the level of U.S. aid to Ferdinand Marcos, who had suspended democracy in the Philippines in 1972 and ruled as a dictator

since then. Reagan did not continue Carter's carping about Marcos's record of violence. In 1981, Reagan dispatched Bush to Manila, where Bush spoke of Marcos's "adherence to democratic principles."[61] Reagan traveled to New York in 1981 to visit Imelda Marcos, the Filipino first lady, who was on an American shopping trip. Ronald and Nancy Reagan both felt personally committed to the Marcoses. Gestures like these, both substantive and symbolic, combined with the Reagan administration's unwavering commitment to its indirect warfare against the Sandinistas and to massive aid to the Salvadoran government, made it clear in Washington and to the world that there was a new sheriff in town. Relations with the Soviet Union also had become frostier. Yet, by late 1982, there were indications already that Reagan realized he might have to temper his tone regarding superpower relations in light of popular anxiety over nuclear brinkmanship. In November of that year, Leonid Brezhnev, the longtime general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party and thus the head of state in the USSR, died and was replaced by Yuri Andropov. This rare change in leadership in Moscow raised modest hopes around the world that an opportunity now existed for a shift to mellower U.S.–USSR relations. Where the Third World was concerned, however, Reagan's hand reached for sharp swords.