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Turning the Tide: U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Struggle for Peace (Chomsky Perspectives)

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6 Highlight(s) | 0 Note(s)

Yellow highlight | Location: 940

After the disappearance and murder of several USAID employees, Abrams conceded that some problems had arisen: "It has not gone from white to black...But the situation has clearly deteriorated."⁷⁴ The reports sampled above are from the period when the situation was still perfect. In the case of El Salvador, Abrams stated categorically that well-documented massacres, such as the one at Los Llanitos, had never taken place. Referring to this and another massacre by the Atlacatl Battalion at the Gualsinga river, where the toll may have reached several hundred, Abrams stated that "neither of them happened...there were no massacres in El Salvador in 1984." Abrams also claimed that the US Embassy, which "is in a better position than a newspaper which has a one-man bureau to investigate what is going on in El Salvador," always investigated such reports, and that his "memory is" that they did so in these cases, finding the reports groundless. The US Embassy denied investigating either massacre.⁷⁵ We return in chapter three to the interesting reactions of President Duarte, in these and other cases. It is small wonder that human rights groups have referred to the Reagan Administration as "an apologist for some of the worst horrors of our time."⁷⁶ Human Rights Secretary Abrams has become particularly notorious for his denials of human rights violations or apologetics for them, in Central America and Turkey particularly, and for his attacks, in the familiar style of his Stalinist models, on human rights advocates. In recognition of his achievements in protecting human rights, Abrams was placed in charge of Latin American affairs in the State Department.⁷⁷

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Reagan's devotion to human rights was clear before his accession to the Presidency, which permitted him to put it into practice. In 1978, when the mass murders of the Argentine generals had become an international scandal, he condemned the Carter Administration for raising a fuss about such trivialities: "In the process of rounding up hundreds of suspected terrorists, the Argentine authorities have no doubt locked up a few innocent people," he wrote: "This problem they should correct without delay. The incarceration of a few innocents, however, is no reason they should open the jails and let the terrorists run free." True to his commitments, he and Jeane Kirkpatrick quickly let the murderers know that such concerns were a thing of the past, after the 1980 elections.⁷⁸

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Let us begin with human rights. The relation between human rights and US foreign policy in Latin America has been studied by the leading academic specialist on the topic, Lars Schoultz. He investigated the relation between US aid and the human rights climate, finding that there is indeed a correlation: namely, US aid "has tended to flow disproportionately to Latin American governments which torture their citizens,...to the hemisphere's relatively egregious violators of fundamental human rights." Furthermore, the correlation is strong, includes military aid, and persists through the Carter period. This correlation remained strong despite the fact that support for the worst torturers and murderers was inhibited by human rights clauses that were added by Congress to US foreign assistance legislation "over the open and intense opposition of the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations." Furthermore, Schoultz shows, this correlation cannot be attributed to a correlation between aid and need.¹⁸⁷ This study might suggest that Kennan understated

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It is a noteworthy fact, not adequately stressed, that SDI was not motivated by military considerations; these were devised after the fact to justify a program undertaken on other grounds. The idea was proposed well before the President's surprise announcement of March 23, 1983, in a privately-funded study initiated by right-wing industrialists associated with the Heritage Foundation, with technical

advice from Edward Teller and General Daniel Graham, though Teller (who nonetheless supports SDI) noted that the USSR could overwhelm the proposed system at 1/10 its projected \$100 billion cost. A high-level Pentagon review dismissed the project, as did a congressional Office of Technology Assessment, George Ball reports. He comments that the project "was opposed until the last minute by [Reagan's] secretary of defense and other principal members of his government." Top Pentagon specialists were neither consulted nor informed, knew nothing of the proposal until the day before its delivery, and thus "had no major input," in the words of Richard DeLauer, the leading Pentagon expert on missile defense. The foreign affairs and defense spokesman of the British Social Democrat Party, Lord Kennet, notes that "there is no military demand for SDI in Europe, and before the president spoke there was no military demand for it in the United States"; "very senior British defense officials were briefed by very senior U.S. defense officials the day before the speech about its contents, and SDI was not part of it," a significant fact. Informed political circles in Britain, he says, know that the SDI speech was made before Reagan consulted his defense secretary or the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He also notes that previously the US "went to great pains to persuade the Soviet Union" that such a system would be "destabilizing, alarming, and so forth," and that the system will bring about the "absolutely terrifying" prospect of reliance upon computers and automatic decision-making, seriously increasing the likelihood of war. He also suggests that SDI might create the worst crisis in NATO's history because "we know SDI would be terribly damaging to our interests,"³⁶ though in fact, European governments and corporations will scurry to gain what opportunities for profit they can from this bonanza, with appropriate strategic theories sure to follow.

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For a variety of reasons, the device that best serves the needs of existing power and privilege is what is sometimes called "military Keynesianism": the creation of a state-guaranteed market for high technology rapidly-obsolescing waste production, meaning armaments. Their Keynesian advisers assured Truman and Kennedy that military production was unproblematic. Leon Keyserling endorsed the warlike—in fact, rather hysterical—conclusions of NSC 68, and Paul Samuelson informed President Kennedy that military spending, "if deemed desirable for its own sake can only help rather

than hinder the health of our economy in the period immediately ahead.”⁸³ Although Reagan professes a “conservative” ideology, in fact he and his advisers are committed partisans of Keynesian methods to stimulate production through the military system and to increase demand by cutting taxes. The recovery from the deep recession induced by the Reagan Administration was “a classical Keynesian recovery,” investment banker Felix Rohatyn observes, “stimulated by tax cuts and huge amounts of government spending—especially in the military area...”⁸⁴

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The purpose of these arms supply operations was to locate what are called “moderates”³³; that is, Iranian officers who are sufficiently “determined, ruthless, cruel” to be willing to kill 10,000 people in a military coup, as explained by Israel’s last Ambassador to Iran, Uri Lubrani, in 1982. Such a coup would, it is hoped, restore the Israel-Iran-Saudi Arabia alliance. In 1982, the Israeli Ambassador to the U.S., Moshe Arens, observed that Israel was providing arms to Iran “in coordination with the U.S. government... at almost the highest of levels” in the hope of establishing relations with Iranian officers who could carry out a military coup, or who “might be in a position of power in Iran” during the post-Khomeini succession. The same analysis was presented publicly in 1982—though kept from a U.S. audience—by other high-ranking Israeli officials, including David Kimche and Yaakov Nimrodi (both with longstanding Mossad connections), who are now identified as the earliest intermediaries in the 1985 operation of secret arms supply to Iran—perhaps its initiators. Israel’s leading journal, Ha’aretz, reports that “the truth, according to reliable [Israeli] sources,” is that the 1985 U.S.-Israel-Iran connections were proposed by David Kimche in order to overcome the negative effects of the Jonathan Pollard spy affair on Israeli-U.S. relations. Robert McFarlane testified in the Senate that David Kimche had initiated the idea of supplying arms.³⁴ Both Kimche and Nimrodi have recently expressed publicly the deep humanitarian commitments that impelled them to become involved in the efforts from 1985 to “rescue American hostages.” They have not been asked to explain when their conversion to humanitarian concerns took place, and why they abandoned the motives that they had expressed a few years earlier.

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