

**Reagan's Foreign Policy and Human Rights:  
A Guatemalan Perspective**

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May 6, 2022

## Introduction

Upon receiving the Republican nomination for the Presidency in July of 1980, Ronald Reagan remarked that “the United States has an obligation to its citizens and to the people of the world never to let those who would destroy freedom dictate the future course of life on this planet. I would regard my election as proof that we have renewed our resolve to preserve world peace and freedom.”<sup>1</sup> This hopeful promise for a better world filled with peace and freedom was quickly broken after Reagan entered office in January of 1981, just a few months after his acceptance speech. When Reagan entered office in the early 1980s, the Cold War came to a head.<sup>2</sup> Worries over heightened Cold War tensions in the United States emphasized the defeat of communism and a defeat of communist countries.<sup>3</sup> Reagan believed that to eliminate the power of communist countries –which laid at the antithesis of the United States’ capitalist ideologies– it was of the utmost importance to ally with any anti-communist countries possible. In doing so, Reagan set his eyes on Central America as the seat of strategic importance to winning the Cold War.<sup>4</sup> Henceforth, crafting a foreign policy with various anti-communist Central American countries became a chief concern in toppling communist regimes in the region.

A country favored by the Reagan administration was Guatemala. The United States had a long history of involvement in Guatemala, dating back to 1954 when the Eisenhower administration toppled the previous government and established a figurehead for political

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Acceptance of the Republican Nomination for President,” Transcript of speech delivered at Dallas, Texas, July 17, 1980, <https://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/speeches/rhetoric/raccept.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Rasmus Sinding Søndergaard, *Reagan, Congress, and Human Rights: Contesting Morality in US Foreign Policy*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

control.<sup>5</sup> Beginning with the Eisenhower administration, there was significant interference in dismantling the Guatemalan government.<sup>6</sup> The launch of the Central Intelligence Agency's operation PBSUCCESS was a *coup d'état* which deposed Guatemalan President Juan Jacobo Árbenz on June 27th, 1954, and imposed Castillo Armas as a dictator and U.S. figurehead.<sup>7</sup> This intervention was done in the name of American financial gains and political control against communism during the beginning of the Cold War: this resulted in immediate bloodshed, corruption, and political repression.<sup>8</sup> By 1960, Guatemala erupted into a civil war that would last over three decades, which gave rise to a hellscape of violence, torture, the repression of political, agrarian, and labor movements, and death.<sup>9</sup> The Guatemalan Civil War, characterized by its brutality, disguised the genocide waged against the indigenous Mayan population, particularly in the rural countryside in the regions of Huehuetenango, Chimaltenango, Quiche, and Verapaces, which were the most impacted areas.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, American involvement led to decades of repressive and militaristic governments in Guatemala, political and racial polarization, and revolutionary upheaval that resulted in a civil war.<sup>11</sup> The Guatemalan Civil War not only resulted in the previously mentioned genocide, but also made the government increasingly corrupt and unstable, which led to constant changes in power and political instability.

After constant changes in leadership, years of civil war, mass repression of citizens, and genocide, the government of Guatemala was nearly destabilized and ready to collapse when José

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<sup>5</sup> Brian Loveman, *No Higher Law: American Foreign Policy and the Western Hemisphere since 1776*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 281.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 50. See also: Loveman, *No Higher Law*, 281.

<sup>8</sup> Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 53-55.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 55. See also: Loveman, *No Higher Law*, 282.

<sup>10</sup> Kate Doyle, "Justice in Guatemala," *NACLA Report on the Americas* (1993) 45, no. 1 (2012): 39.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 281. See also: Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 36.

Efraín Ríos Montt took power in March of 1982.<sup>12</sup> As a general of the Guatemalan military, Ríos Montt was the beneficiary of a *coup d'état* and became the dictator of Guatemala for seventeen short, turbulent months.<sup>13</sup> Caught in the midst of the Guatemalan Civil War, Ríos Montt was particularly well known for his policies regarding the suppression of the communist guerrillas, and wanted to eradicate any insurgence to his regime.<sup>14</sup> To obliterate the communist guerrilla insurgency, Ríos Montt implemented a scorched-Earth policy and a *Frijoles y Fusiles* program – known in English as “Beans and Bullets” – to bring about the destruction of his non-supporters.<sup>15</sup> The period in which Ríos Montt served as the dictator is now known to be a period of heightened deaths and state-sponsored killings in the Guatemalan Genocide; Guatemalans now refer to this period of history as *la violencia*, which translates in English to “the violence.”<sup>16</sup> After his relatively brief rule, Ríos Montt lost power in 1983 the same way that he gained it– in a military *coup d'état*.

Despite his gross human rights violations and worsening the Guatemalan Genocide during his dictatorship, Ríos Montt earned the support and respect of the American President Ronald Reagan.<sup>17</sup> Reagan, who viewed nearly all foreign policy relations through the lens of the Cold War, took a liking to Ríos Montt in his fight against the communist guerrillas.<sup>18</sup> In crafting a foreign policy in the midst of the Cold War, Reagan and his administration de-emphasized human rights pressures in favor of creating as many alliances as possible with other anti-

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<sup>12</sup> Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala Under General Efraín Ríos Montt, 1982-1983* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Kathryn Sikkink, *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 158-159.

<sup>15</sup> Doyle, “Justice in Guatemala,” 37.

<sup>16</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Lauren Frances Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations: Evangelical Influence On Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 145.

<sup>18</sup> Søndergaard, *Reagan, Congress, and Human Rights*, 41.

communist governments.<sup>19</sup> This belief in re-establishing friendly relations with any anti-communist government – particularly with authoritarianism regimes who were actively involved in perpetrating human rights violations– was known as the Kirkpatrick Doctrine.<sup>20</sup> The Reagan administration embraced the usage of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine, especially during Reagan’s first term in building foreign policy relations with many Central American countries.<sup>21</sup> The utilization of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine’s philosophy was a primary cause of Reagan’s relationship and alliance with Ríos Montt, for he believed that politically aligning with this anti-communist dictator would help bring an end to the Cold War. Simultaneously, Ríos Montt, who was a proclaimed born-again Evangelical, gained the support of various American Evangelical groups who wanted to help their Guatemalan “Brother in Christ.”<sup>22</sup> A lay preacher himself, Ríos Montt used his newfound Evangelical faith to gain transnational, ideological, financial, and political support in the United States.<sup>23</sup> Through years of careful design and planning, religious fundamentalists had become increasingly involved in right-wing conservative Republican politics, and became particularly intertwined with Reagan’s administration.<sup>24</sup> Known as the Religious Right, these religious fundamentalists gained cultural, social, and political power during the Reagan era.<sup>25</sup> Due to their increased power in the Reagan years, the Religious Right gained the lobbying power to support their Guatemalan “Brother in Christ,” and pushed for economic and military support to be reinstated to Ríos Montt’s regime.<sup>26</sup> American Evangelical

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<sup>19</sup> Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 149.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 161.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 149.

<sup>22</sup> Lauren Frances Turek, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ’: Evangelical Groups and U.S.-Guatemalan Relations during the Ríos Montt Regime.” *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 4 (2015): 719.

<sup>23</sup> Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations*, 7, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Frank Lambert, “The Rise of the ‘Religious Right’: The Reagan Revolution and the ‘Moral Majority’” In *Religion in American Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 190.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 216-217.

<sup>26</sup> Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations*, 14.

support from the Religious Right led to the restoration of financial and military aid to Guatemala, which largely assisted Ríos Montt's state-sponsored killings, the repression of the communist guerilla insurgency, and violence against the Guatemalan people.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, it will be argued that the Reagan administration's support for anti-communist dictators and the legitimization of the Religious Right demonstrated the perpetration and complicity of human rights violations under the dictatorship of José Efraín Ríos Montt in Guatemala. Through lobbying from the Religious Right and its adoption of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine's approach to embracing anti-communist dictatorship, the Reagan administration supported and proved complicit in José Efraín Ríos Montt's dictatorship in Guatemala from 1982 to 1983.

## Literature Review

Ronald Reagan's foreign policy practices in Central America have been widely discussed and debated by many historians who focus on the era. In the past decade, there has been a growing scholarship that researched Reagan's human rights policies, or lack thereof, in Guatemala. With particular attention paid to Reagan's foreign policy and relationship with the Guatemalan dictator José Efraín Ríos Montt, scholarship on the subject has remained fairly consistent across multiple accounts. Divergences in historians' opinions as to why there was a lack of human rights emphasis in Guatemala, what conditions led Reagan to support Ríos Montt's dictatorship, and the influence of the Cold War provided insight into an emerging body of research on Reagan's foreign policy and human rights.

Kathryn Sikkink, author of the monograph *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America*, discussed human rights issues in Guatemala and other areas of Latin America.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 14, 125.

<sup>28</sup> Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 4.

She argued that the Reagan administration “did not believe that human rights should be a part of foreign policy,” which is reflected in their attempt to remove human rights policies altogether.<sup>29</sup>

A crux to Sikkink’s claim is the Reagan administration’s close following of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine, which disregarded human rights policies as a reason to discontinue powerful alliances with authoritarian governments during the Cold War.<sup>30</sup> Sikkink demonstrated a socio-political methodology to show the human rights violations of Guatemalan dictator Ríos Montt and Reagan’s alignment with his regime, which exemplified the Kirkpatrick Doctrine’s use in shaping foreign policies on human rights.

Oppositely, the monograph *To Bring the Good News to All Nations: Evangelical Influence On Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Relations*, written by Lauren Frances Turek, made no mention of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine in explaining why the Reagan administration befriended Ríos Montt and abandoned human rights in foreign policy.<sup>31</sup> Instead, Turek maintained that during the Cold War, Evangelical groups were an incredibly important factor in forging alliances and shaping U.S. foreign policy.<sup>32</sup> Considering that Ríos Montt himself was an Evangelical, Turek analyzed that his relationship with the American Evangelical community was a cause of Reagan’s alignment with his regime.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, Turek’s article, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ’: Evangelical Groups and U.S.-Guatemalan Relations during the Ríos Montt Regime” provided a more in-depth view of the relationship between Ríos Montt and his Evangelical supporters in the United States.<sup>34</sup> The Evangelicals of the American Religious Right believed that Ríos Montt personified their fundamental belief in spreading salvation, which would

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>31</sup> Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations*, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Turek, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ,’” 689.

counteract his human rights violations because salvation was the ultimate human right.<sup>35</sup> Using a religious and political methodology, Turek's monograph and article provided a new outlook on the importance of Evangelical influences on U.S. foreign policy.

A more comprehensive overview of the trial of Ríos Montt in 2013, "Guatemala Prosecutes Former President 'Ríos Montt': New Perspectives on Genocide and Domestic Criminal Justice," by Susan Kemp, provided a deeper understanding of the Guatemalan Genocide that worsened under his dictatorship, and the human rights violations that occurred.<sup>36</sup> Another examination of Ríos Montt's trial, Kate Doyle's "Justice in Guatemala," also delved into the specific violations of his regime that resulted in his charges of genocide and crimes against humanity, with specific attention paid to the scorched-Earth policy and *Frijoles y Fusiles* strategy.<sup>37</sup> Both Kemp and Doyle used a methodology of legal studies to examine various acts of genocide under the perpetration of Ríos Montt. These articles differed from the previously discussed works, in that they focused purely on the trial of Ríos Montt and did not pay attention to the U.S. or Reagan's foreign policy relationship with Guatemala. However, despite lacking information on U.S. relations, these articles' detail of the human rights violations driven by Ríos Montt's dictatorship answered the question of why aligning with Ríos Montt was detrimental to Reagan's human rights foreign policy.

In conclusion, these secondary sources show a diversity of perspectives on Reagan's foreign policy in relation to human rights in Guatemala. Works such as that of Sikkink and Turek are representative of historical debates surrounding the reason behind the lack of human rights policy in Reagan's relationship with Ríos Montt. The other sources by Kemp and Doyle

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 719.

<sup>36</sup> Susan Kemp, "Guatemala Prosecutes Former President 'Ríos Montt': New Perspectives on Genocide and Domestic Criminal Justice." *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 12, no. 1 (2014): 133.

<sup>37</sup> Doyle, "Justice in Guatemala," 37.



discussed other relevant areas of research, such as what human rights violations took place under Ríos Montt's dictatorship. This body of research utilizes these secondary sources to establish the claims that Reagan's foreign policy in Guatemala –particularly in utilizing the Kirkpatrick Doctrine– and his legitimization of the Religious Right were both contributing factors to U.S. complicity in the Guatemalan Genocide. However, this research differs from past sources in that it combines the themes of foreign policy practices and the Religious Right for a more comprehensive overview to establish the argument that both were tools used to befriend Guatemalan dictator Ríos Montt in American Cold War self-interests and to perpetrate the Guatemalan Genocide.

### **Discussion of Primary Sources**

In terms of primary sources that shaped this body of research, there were distinctly three categories: Presidential speech transcripts, declassified documents from the United States Department of State, and archived newspaper articles. Speech transcripts by Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan were utilized to establish each president's personal and public attitudes on human rights in their foreign policies. Additionally, the declassified documents from the United States Department of State provided insight into the presidential administration's knowledge of what human rights violations occurred in Guatemala under Ríos Montt's regime. Lastly, archived newspaper articles were informative in regard to the public opinion of Reagan's foreign policy and relationship with Ríos Montt. Together, these primary sources outlined the arguments made concerning the purpose and place of human rights in Carter and Reagan's foreign policies, the American knowledge of Guatemalan human rights violations while Reagan pursued a renewed interest in Guatemalan alignment, and public opinion concerning U.S. foreign policy in

Guatemala. These Presidential speech transcripts, declassified documents from the United States Department of State, and archived newspaper articles were paramount to creating and supporting the thesis of this research concerning Reagan's human rights foreign policy in Guatemala.

### **Reagan's Philosophies on Foreign Policy**

During the Reagan administration, human rights became highly debated in his foreign policy because of its stark juxtaposition with the previous presidential administration, that of Jimmy Carter. While in office, Carter centered his foreign policy around human rights and institutionalized the issue by delimiting specific categories of human rights issues to guarantee their continuity.<sup>38</sup> Specifically, the Carter administration defined human rights in foreign policy in three ways: "the integrity of the person, the fulfillment of basic human needs, and civil and political rights."<sup>39</sup> In his inaugural address, Carter clarified that the United States' "commitment to human rights must be absolute," which initially demonstrated his dedication to addressing human rights in his policies.<sup>40</sup> Further, Carter declared that "our moral sense dictates a clear-cut preference for those societies which share with us an abiding respect for individual human rights," which he used to guide his foreign policy to befriend countries that respected human rights, and to sanction those that continually perpetrated human rights violations.<sup>41</sup> His administration cut military aid with many countries, but in the brevity of this context, it is important for one to be aware of his sanctions against Guatemala that ended both military and

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<sup>38</sup> Søndergaard, *Reagan, Congress, and Human Rights*, 1. See also: Hauke Hartmann, "US Human Rights Policy under Carter and Reagan, 1977-1981," *Human Rights Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (2001): 405. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4489339>.

<sup>39</sup> Hartmann, "US Human Rights Policy under Carter and Reagan," 405.

<sup>40</sup> Jimmy Carter, "Inaugural Address," Transcript of speech delivered at the West Front of the Capitol, Washington DC, January 20, 1977, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/inaugural-address-0>.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* See also: Glenn A. Mower, *Human Rights and American Foreign Policy: The Carter and Reagan Experiences* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 23.

financial aid to the country.<sup>42</sup> After a report by the U.S. State Department was released stating that there were numerous human rights violations in Guatemala in 1977, the Guatemalan government rejected U.S. military aid.<sup>43</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Carter administration discontinued military and financial aid to Guatemala because of an increase in killings and disappearances, in the name of sanctioning Guatemala's human rights violations.<sup>44</sup> Despite the military and economic sanctions, the Carter administration re-classified military supplies under a new name to continue shipments, and approved multiple loans to the Guatemalan government.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, although Carter publicly shaped his foreign policy around human rights as an issue of morality, it is observed that this was a façade that concealed the truth behind his insincere appearance. Nevertheless, the Carter administration was remembered for their moral beliefs in centering human rights in his foreign policy because of his public approach and beliefs shown to the American people.

Conversely, the Reagan administration did not view human rights as a moral dilemma, but instead as a geopolitical tool of furthering Western superiority by pointing out the inferiority and weakness of communist political systems across the globe.<sup>46</sup> He condemned Carter's human rights policies for having a lack of anti-communist authoritarian allies that could have aided the in the spread of American Cold War ideologies.<sup>47</sup> Reagan, who was more interested in furthering the American position in the Cold War, overlooked human rights violations and actively dismantled the morality of Carter's human rights policies.<sup>48</sup> While Reagan did believe that the

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<sup>42</sup> Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 137.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 139.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 25. See also: Hartmann, "US Human Rights Policy under Carter and Reagan," 421.

<sup>47</sup> Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 149.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

concept of human rights was morally “very much a part of our American idealism” and played an “important part” in his foreign policy, he stated that his “criticism of them, in the last few years, was that we were selective with regard to human rights.”<sup>49</sup> When he said this in 1981, prior to any heavy involvement in aiding Ríos Montt’s regime which began a year later, Reagan meant that the Carter administration was too strict with distancing the U.S. from possible authoritarian allies in the Cold War.<sup>50</sup> To expedite the dismantling of Carter’s human rights policies, Reagan politically realigned with anti-communist authoritarian governments, such as Guatemala, and stopped condemning their human rights violations to concentrate on the violations of communist governments, such as Nicaragua and Cuba.<sup>51</sup> In doing so, the Reagan administration embraced the Cold War philosophy of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine.

In essence, the Kirkpatrick Doctrine referred to the foreign policy beliefs of Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, who Reagan appointed to be the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.<sup>52</sup> Her premiere essay, “Dictatorships & Double Standards,” was originally published in *Commentary* magazine in 1979.<sup>53</sup> This essay is what shaped Reagan’s foreign policy, especially in his first term as president, with Central American relations.<sup>54</sup> Kirkpatrick’s “Dictatorships & Double Standards” clearly criticized the Carter administration’s “failure” of a foreign policy for losing potential necessary allies in the Cold War over the morality of his policies and human rights beliefs.<sup>55</sup> Kirkpatrick believed that “no problem of American foreign policy is more urgent than

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<sup>49</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Excerpts From an Interview With Walkter Cronkite of CBS News,” Transcript of an interview conducted at Washington, DC, March 3, 1981. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/excerpts-from-interview-with-walter-cronkite-cbs-news>

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 148.

<sup>52</sup> Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, “Dictatorships & Double Standards,” *Commentary Magazine*, November 1979. <https://www.commentary.org/articles/jeane-kirkpatrick/dictatorships-double-standards/>

<sup>53</sup> Kirkpatrick, “Dictatorships & Double Standards.”

<sup>54</sup> Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 149.

<sup>55</sup> Kirkpatrick, “Dictatorships & Double Standards.”

that of formulating a morally and strategically acceptable, and politically realistic, program for dealing with non-democratic governments who are threatened by Soviet-sponsored subversion.”<sup>56</sup> In this sentiment, Reagan still believed that there should be a moral sense to shaping his foreign relations, but that the strategic alignments with anti-communist authoritarian governments were of the utmost importance to furthering Western ideals and advancing against the Soviets in the Cold War. Through the lens of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine, Carter’s morality-centered human rights foreign policy had led to the disaster of losing traditionally friendly authoritarian American allies; it became the mission of the Reagan administration to undo Carter’s policy and disregard human rights practices in crafting his policies by re-establishing friendships with like-minded anti-communist authoritarian regimes.<sup>57</sup> Everything considered, the Kirkpatrick Doctrine saw that it was “neither morally necessary nor politically appropriate” to continue Carter’s sanction of friendly authoritarian allies on a humanitarian basis, and theorized that these anti-communist authoritarian regimes had the potential to evolve into democratic societies with the help of the United States.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, it became the responsibility of the United States and the Reagan administration to sanction only the communist governments that would continue to preserve their human rights violations, while ignoring the human rights violations of possible authoritarian anti-communist allies.

### **Human Rights Practices in Reagan’s Foreign Policy**

The first few years in office, Reagan’s foreign policy was almost entirely shaped by the Kirkpatrick Doctrine. In shaping human rights in his foreign policy, U.S. involvement in

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 149.

<sup>58</sup> Kirkpatrick, “Dictatorships & Double Standards.” See also: Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 157.

Nicaragua was incredibly influential in Reagan's interest in Central America. In 1981 when the communist party of Nicaragua, the Sandinistas, took control over the country, it was highly concerning for Ronald Reagan.<sup>59</sup> It was noted that "in Nicaragua, the Sandinistas were riding high and arrogant, popular at home and respected abroad. Not only the Russians and the Cubans, but even the French and the Mexicans were intruding in Central America, as if it were no longer part of the United States' sphere of influence."<sup>60</sup> Thus, the Nicaraguan takeover by the Sandinistas not only was a spread of communism, but an insult to the U.S. foreign policy and influence across the globe. Reagan, who was new to the presidential office at the time and pressured to deliver a stronger anti-communist foreign policy than his predecessor Jimmy Carter, stressed a severe anti-communist foreign policy in the Central American region that later would support the Guatemalan Genocide because of the aftermath and consequence of the Sandinista takeover of Nicaragua. In a Guatemalan context, when Reagan entered office in January of 1981, the dictator Fernando Romeo Lucas García was still in power.<sup>61</sup> Killings and oppression worsened under Lucas García's dictatorship, yet due to the philosophies of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine emphasizing Cold War alliances with any anti-communist government, Reagan was "looking for a way to repair relations with the military regime of Maj. Gen. Romeo Lucas Garcia."<sup>62</sup> After Lucas García lost power in the *coup d'état* that resulted in Ríos Montt's dictatorship, the Reagan administration continued to "improve ties" with Guatemala. It became clear that before and during Ríos Montt's regime in Guatemala that the context of the communist

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<sup>59</sup> Piero Gleijeses, "The Reagan Doctrine and Central America," *Current History* 85, no. 515 (1986): 401. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45315784>.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 401.

<sup>61</sup> Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 172.

<sup>62</sup> Warren Hoge, "Repression in Guatemala Increases As U.S. is Seeking to Improve Ties," *The New York Times*, May 3, 1981. <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/05/03/world/repression-in-guatemala-increases-as-us-is-seeking-to-improve-ties.html>

take-over of Nicaragua and the Kirkpatrick Doctrine were both vital in shaping Reagan's human rights foreign policy.

In practice, Reagan used the Kirkpatrick Doctrine to craft his human rights policy in Central America. The essence of Reagan's foreign policy can be split into the sections of his first and second terms. Jeane Kirkpatrick regarded Central America as the "most important place in the world for the United States" for strategic importance.<sup>63</sup> For the purpose of this research, further use of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine in Central America will be applied specifically to the case study of Guatemala in 1982-1983, under Ríos Montt's dictatorship. As was previously discussed, Ríos Montt's regime was known in Guatemalan history as *la violencia* because of the heightened level of state sponsored killings, violence, and repression under his authoritarian leadership that resulted in genocide and the height of all human rights violations throughout the Guatemalan Civil War.<sup>64</sup> While the battle between the authoritarian Guatemalan dictators and the communist guerrilla insurgency during the civil war was well known, the toll it took on the indigenous population was concealed by the U.S. government until 1996, when reports by the U.S. Department of State were declassified.<sup>65</sup> One report in particular discussed in late 1982 that troops of the Guatemalan government, led by dictator and general of the armed forces Ríos Montt, were "regularly guilty of massacres, rape, and mayhem."<sup>66</sup> This acknowledged that many U.S. officials in the Department of State – and by extension of that President Reagan's administration – knew about these atrocities and human rights violations, and pursued a relationship with Guatemala regardless.

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<sup>63</sup> Søndergaard, *Reagan, Congress, and Human Rights*, 37.

<sup>64</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 2. See also: Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 160.

<sup>65</sup> United States Department of State, Secret Report, *Guatemala: Reports of Atrocities Mark Army Gains*, 1982, National Security Archive.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

On a more personal level, Reagan developed a friendly relationship with Ríos Montt that affected American relations with Guatemala under the dictator's leadership. After a visit that spanned across many Latin American countries in early December of 1982, Reagan had some particularly admirable comments about Ríos Montt following their meetings and discussions about future relations between the two countries, which he said were "very fruitful."<sup>67</sup> In terms of his Latin America trip in general, Reagan remarked that "I think we really established some friendships—and mutual friendships. I feel very close to them, and I think they do to me."<sup>68</sup> With specific attention to Ríos Montt, Reagan did not acknowledge his role as an authoritarian dictator, instead addressing him only as President Ríos Montt.<sup>69</sup> Altering this language by addressing him as a president in and of itself was an attempt to downplay the truth of Guatemalan suppression under Ríos Montt's dictatorship. Additionally, Reagan went as far as to state that "I know that President Rios Montt is a man of great personal integrity and commitment" to democracy.<sup>70</sup> In Reagan's remarks, it appeared completely genuine that Ríos Montt was "totally dedicated to democracy in Guatemala," and Reagan famously stated that he was "inclined to believe they've been getting a bum rap."<sup>71</sup> Even newspapers that reported on this trip across Latin America believed that he was genuine, enthusiastic, and excited about the

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<sup>67</sup> Lou Cannon, "Latin Trip an Eye-Opener For Reagan," *The Washington Post*, December 6, 1982. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/12/06/latin-trip-an-eye-opener-for-reagan/8d880053-3bc6-49e3-af74-18f5b23c8ddd/>

<sup>68</sup> Ronald Reagan. "Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters on the President's Trip to Latin America." Transcript of a speech given at Air Force One, Washington, DC, December 4, 1982. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/question-and-answer-session-with-reporters-the-presidents-trip-latin-america>

<sup>69</sup> Ronald Reagan. "Remarks in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, Following a Meeting With President Jose Efrain Rios Montt of Guatemala." Transcript of a speech at San Pedro Sule, Honduras, December 4, 1982. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-san-pedro-sula-honduras-following-meeting-with-president-jose-efrain-rios-montt>

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Reagan. "Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters on the President's Trip to Latin America."



potential for his administration to help support newfound democracy in this region.<sup>72</sup> Reagan's deputy chief of staff, Michael K. Deaver, who accompanied him on the trip across Latin America, said that Reagan "seemed to have a chemistry with these people."<sup>73</sup> His speeches, interviews, news reports, and statements from inside his administration demonstrate that Reagan's belief in bringing democracy to Latin America was authentic.

However, it is important to note that things are never really all that they appear to be, and oftentimes there can be a great amount of deception in politics. Although Reagan outwardly portrayed that Ríos Montt would bring a better, more democratic Guatemala, the United States government was well aware of the atrocities that occurred under Ríos Montt's regime and concealed the truth of his period of *la violencia*. In his attempt to justify U.S. and Guatemalan relations to the general American public, Reagan concealed the truth of Ríos Montt's violence, suppression, and state-sponsored genocide. The United States Department of State's communications with the Guatemalan Embassy provided invaluable sources of information in regards to the atrocities of Ríos Montt's dictatorship. One report from late 1982 stated that entire rural villages were being relocated by the demands of the Guatemalan military, and "a scorched-Earth policy is then applied in the surrounding areas" of indigenous rural lands.<sup>74</sup> This scorched-Earth policy referred to the destruction and burning of indigenous villages who were believed to be associated with the insurgent guerrilla forces, and led to great harm of the indigenous population.<sup>75</sup> According to interviews that were conducted with indigenous Mayan survivors of the period of *la violencia*, "land is something Indians in Guatemala relate to in ways that

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<sup>72</sup> Cannon, "Latin Trip an Eye-Opener For Reagan."

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> United States Department of State, Secret Report, *Guatemala: Reports of Atrocities Mark Army Gains*.

<sup>75</sup> Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 57. See also: Anthony Lewis, "Abroad at Home; Howdy, Genghis," *The New York Times*, December 6, 1982. <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/12/06/opinion/abroad-at-home-howdy-genghis.html>.

transcend most Western notions of astute property management. For them, land is like the air and sunlight, a God-given resource... custom dictates that it be worked, protected, and passed onto offspring as a sacred gift.”<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the Guatemalan military relocating the indigenous Maya population off of their sacred lands and implementing their scorched-Earth policy stripped them of their livelihoods, culture, and sanctified ancestral ties. Fights between the guerrilla insurgency and the militia counter-insurgency, ordered by General Ríos Montt, were often taken out on the indigenous populations in the highlands where the guerrillas had previously experienced support for their cause; many villages were burned and destroyed by the Guatemalan military solely on the assumption that they were going to rally behind the guerrillas.<sup>77</sup> Many years later, investigations into Ríos Montt’s scorched-Earth policy declared that this constituted an act of genocide.<sup>78</sup> The aforementioned communications by the Department of State from 1982 acknowledge that members of the United States government and members of Reagan’s administration knew of Ríos Montt’s atrocities concerning the scorched-Earth policy. This information was concealed from the general American public and is characteristic of Reagan’s embrace of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine in embracing authoritarian anti-communist dictators, such as Ríos Montt, to further American Cold War interests regardless of human rights violations.

In addition to the scorched-Earth policy wreaking havoc in the rural Guatemalan countryside, Ríos Montt’s *Frijoles y Fusiles* program, here-on referred to solely as the English translation of his Beans and Bullets program, was another method of Ríos Montt’s cruelty and harm of the indigenous Mayan population. His campaign of Beans and Bullets promised two things: “‘Beans’ for the innocents and victims, and ‘bullets’ for the hardcore guerrillas who

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<sup>76</sup> George W. Lovell, *A Beauty That Hurts: Life and Death in Guatemala* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 6.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>78</sup> Doyle, “Justice in Guatemala,” 38.

ignored the government's offer of amnesty and refused to lay down their arms."<sup>79</sup> The Guatemalan government claimed that the goal of the Beans and Bullets program was to "feed and protect Indians in the highlands and war against the guerrillas," and "rallying the people in the areas of conflict to the government."<sup>80</sup> Under the threat of being killed or starved, the Beans and Bullets program successfully organized the indigenous populations into Civil Defense Forces, which armed the cooperating Mayan population and forced them into fighting against the guerrilla insurgency.<sup>81</sup> Participation in the Civil Defense Forces coerced the indigenous population to align and fight with the Guatemalan military, which disrupted working routines, removed people from field work, stifled mobility, and was resented by the indigenous men for these reasons.<sup>82</sup> Due to their separation from their fields, indigenous populations struggled to feed themselves and their families, which led to further dependence upon the food provided by Ríos Montt's cyclical campaign. Similar to the scorched-Earth policy, the Beans and Bullets program was also deemed an act of genocide because of the "enlightened repression of brutal military violence combined with population control, civic action, and development."<sup>83</sup>

Confidential Cables from the United States' Department of State made the Reagan administration aware of the Beans and Bullets campaign on multiple occasions throughout 1982,

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<sup>79</sup> United States Department of State, Confidential Cable, *Congressional Hearing on Guatemala*, F-2010-02000, Guatemalan Embassy, 1982, United States Department of State Virtual Reading Room. file:///home/chronos/u-8b8c483176bcb93acecc411149bf834c5edf07f6/MyFiles/Downloads/\_DOCUMENTS\_6-FY2014\_F-2010-02000\_DOC\_0C18632632\_C18632632.pdf

<sup>80</sup> United States Department of State, Confidential Cable, *1982 Annual Country Report on Human Rights Practices in Guatemala*, F-2010-02000, Guatemalan Embassy, 1982, United States Department of State Virtual Reading Room. file:///home/chronos/u-8b8c483176bcb93acecc411149bf834c5edf07f6/MyFiles/Downloads/\_DOCUMENTS\_6-FY2014\_F-2010-02000\_DOC\_0C18632617\_C18632617%20(1).pdf

<sup>81</sup> United States Department of State, Secret Report, *Guatemala: Reports of Atrocities Mark Army Gains*. See also: United States Department of State, Confidential Cable, *National Council of Churches Report on Guatemala*, F-2012-27869, U.S. Embassy, 1982, United States Department of State Virtual Reading Room. file:///home/chronos/u-8b8c483176bcb93acecc411149bf834c5edf07f6/MyFiles/Downloads/\_DOCUMENTS\_september2014\_F-2012-27869\_DOC\_0C05461966\_C05461966%20(3).pdf

<sup>82</sup> Lovell, *A Beauty That Hurts*, 12.

<sup>83</sup> Doyle, "Justice in Guatemala," 38.

but this did not prevent Reagan from his pursuit of aligning with Guatemala. The declassification of files from the Department of State also revealed that the Reagan administration was aware of the genocidal scorched-Earth policy and chose to pursue a personal and public relationship with Ríos Montt's Guatemala regardless of the human rights violations that ensued from this policy. Disregarding the concealed State Department's knowledge of both the state-perpetrated violence of the Beans and Bullets campaign and the scorched-Earth policy was characteristic of Reagan's foreign policy in regards to his beliefs on human rights and his acceptance of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine. Moreover, in providing aid and attempting to strengthen a relationship with Ríos Montt, the Reagan administration proved their complicity and their perpetration of the Guatemalan Genocide. This case study of Ríos Montt's Guatemala from 1982-1983 exemplifies the harmful foreign rights policy of Reagan.

After Ríos Montt was overthrown in 1983, Reagan's relationship with Guatemala, and his view of human rights in his foreign policy, were changed. In a broader sense, as Reagan approached and entered his second presidential term, he leaned away from his previous embrace of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine. In his second phase of human rights policies, Reagan focused on promoting democracy, especially in Central America.<sup>84</sup> As was previously mentioned, Ríos Montt lost power in 1983 to a military *coup d'état*. By 1985, the military organization that had taken power held democratic presidential elections in the country, from which Vinicio Cerezo Arevalo came into power.<sup>85</sup> The supposed democracy of Arevalo's presidency was questionable: "Whether or not Guatemala is a democracy in name only, two facts stand out: the Guatemalan guerrillas are now far weaker than they were in the early 1980's, and the United States Congress

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<sup>84</sup> Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 149.

<sup>85</sup> Gleijeses, "The Reagan Doctrine and Central America," 401.

no longer criticizes Reagan's Guatemala policy.”<sup>86</sup> To the Reagan administration, this exemplified the new human rights foreign policy of abandoning the Kirkpatrick Doctrine and promoting democracy. The actual democratic state of Guatemala was of little concern to the Reagan administration, because the appearance of democracy fit the mold of Reagan’s public appearance of promoting democracy in his new human rights campaign in his foreign policy. In discussing his foreign policy, Reagan admitted that his human rights practices were “blemished,” and that he had no “right to speak on these issues based on any claim to current perfection.”<sup>87</sup> Considering that Reagan personally and publicly supported the Guatemalan Genocide under Ríos Montt’s control in his foreign policy, it is evident that his human rights practices in Guatemala were blemished. In summation, Reagan’s shift in human rights foreign policy from relying solely on the Kirkpatrick Doctrine to promoting democracy in the region was an improvement in his second term but did not erase the damage that was sustained across Central America during his presidency.

### **The Importance of the Religious Right**

A surprisingly important influence in the American support for the oppressive and violent Guatemalan government of Ríos Montt was the American Religious Right. The Religious Right were a group of born-again Evangelical Christians who were known for their socially conservative and traditional values that focused primarily on family, education, and sexuality.<sup>88</sup> They aimed to restore America’s Christian heritage, and promoted a moral agenda to counter the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 401.

<sup>87</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks on Signing the Human Rights Day, Bill of Rights Day, and Human Rights Week Proclamation,” Transcript of a speech at Washington D.C, December 8, 1988. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-signing-the-human-rights-day-bill-rights-day-and-human-rights-week-proclamation-1>

<sup>88</sup> Lambert, “The Rise of the ‘Religious Right,’” 185.

disturbing cultural shift of the 1960s.<sup>89</sup> In the early 1970s, leading Evangelical Christians, such as Jerry Falwell, “built an institutional base that was now primed to mobilize its millions of followers for political action” by organizing a grassroots political movement that would “register voters, rally support for specific causes and candidates, and get out the vote.”<sup>90</sup> Utilizing new and exciting forms of media like televangelists, the Religious Right indoctrinated millions of supporters in a contemporary method, while preserving their traditionally conservative values.<sup>91</sup> Evangelical leaders gained so much traction by the mid-1970s that *Newsweek* magazine named 1976 “The Year of the Evangelical,” after their election of Jimmy Carter to the presidency.<sup>92</sup> Initially, the American Evangelical community supported Carter, despite him being a democrat, because he was a proclaimed born-again Christian.<sup>93</sup> After the Nixon presidency and the Watergate scandal when many Americans lost faith in their politicians, Carter’s born-again Christian faith led Evangelicals to believe that he was a morally sound candidate that would represent their values once he was in office.<sup>94</sup> Although Carter was a Christian, he was not a fundamentalist, which led to differing views from the Evangelical community in the areas of education and family matters, and ultimately resulted in their lack of support for Carter’s presidency.<sup>95</sup> Soon after, their disappointment in Carter and more liberal politicians pushed the Evangelical community to support the Republican party more broadly.

After the Republicans lost the presidency in 1976, politicians began to strategize on how to pull more voters onto their side: this resulted in the emergence of the Religious Right.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 189, 204.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 190.

<sup>91</sup> Rick Perlstein, *Reaganland: America’s Right Turn 1976-1980* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 469.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 466.

<sup>93</sup> Lambert, “The Rise of the ‘Religious Right,’” 191.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 199.

Capitalizing on conservative disgust in the country's moral dilemmas, right-wing politicians united the Evangelicals with the conservatives, and expanded the voting power of the Republican party while legitimizing the Religious Right.<sup>96</sup> This gave way to what some Evangelical leaders believed to be "the beginning of a political rebellion."<sup>97</sup> In the election of 1980, disappointment in Carter's administration led the Religious Right and Evangelicals to officially back Ronald Reagan for the presidency, and in addition to this victory, also voted twelve Republican senators into office and thirty-three Congressmen into the House of Representatives.<sup>98</sup> This was a true display of their newfound political power, and demonstrated the extent to which the Religious Right had the ability to influence American politics in the 1980s. While the Republican party generally supported the Religious Right, no one legitimized their power quite like Reagan.<sup>99</sup> Reagan's administration appointed many Evangelicals and allies of the Religious Right to high political offices like the Supreme Court, as well as supported issues of their moral and social agenda, such as opposing federal abortion spending, promoting school prayer, and restricting the rights of homosexuals.<sup>100</sup> In return, the Religious Right fused religion, capitalism, nationalism, and national security to firmly reinforce Reagan's anti-communist agenda and interventionist military action.<sup>101</sup> Overall, it was Reagan's legitimization of the Religious Right that led Evangelicals to have unprecedented power and political control in American politics: their power would soon influence Reagan's foreign policy, especially in Guatemala.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>97</sup> Rick Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 443.

<sup>98</sup> Lambert, "The Rise of the 'Religious Right,'" 190. See also: Thomas Russell Freure, *A Modern American Conservative: How Ronald Reagan Legitimized the Religious Right and Helped Reshape the American Zeitgeist* (Waterloo: University of Waterloo, 2021), 224.

<sup>99</sup> Freure, *A Modern American Conservative*, 227.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 228.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 228.

Following their rise to domestic political power, the Religious Right became critically intertwined in the United States' foreign policy. The Religious Right wanted to secure more Evangelical leadership across the globe to spread the word of God and His teachings, and found a so-called "Brother in Christ" in Guatemala.<sup>102</sup> During the *coup d'état* that resulted in his climb to power, Ríos Montt was an "academic administrator of [a] religious school," and had joined the Evangelical Church three and a half years prior to his dictatorship.<sup>103</sup> At a dinner with United States Congressmen, Ríos Montt "revealed that he believes he came to the Presidency of the Junta by the will of God and remains there as His personal emissary and victor, and will be removed whenever God pleases it."<sup>104</sup> In shaping his policies in Guatemala, such as the scorched-Earth policy or the Beans and Bullets program, Ríos Montt claimed that his "inspiration on policy matters came directly from the Lord and from his religious teachings."<sup>105</sup> Ríos Montt was an openly practicing born-again Evangelical in his office, and hoped that this would gain him support from American Christian churches in trying to spread his teachings.<sup>106</sup> Those who met the dictator believed that he was "sincere in his religious beliefs and well-intentioned," and because of the morals of his religion, they predicted that "human rights violations will all but disappear under the Junta administration" with proper foreign assistance.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Turek, "To Support a 'Brother in Christ,'" 689.

<sup>103</sup> United States Department of State, Confidential Cable, *Gospel Outreach Ministers Close to Rios Montt Visit*, F-2013-03356, Guatemalan Embassy, 1982, United States Department of State Virtual Reading Room, file:///home/chronos/u-8b8c483176bcb93acecc411149bf834c5edf07f6/MyFiles/Downloads/\_DOCUMENTS\_september2014\_F-2013-03356\_DOC\_0C05468282\_C05468282.pdf.

<sup>104</sup> United States Department of State, Confidential Cable, *Piedra/Cabraugh Visit: Impression of President Rios Montt*, F-2013-03356, Guatemalan Embassy, 1982, United States Department of State Virtual Reading Room, file:///home/chronos/u-8b8c483176bcb93acecc411149bf834c5edf07f6/MyFiles/Downloads/\_DOCUMENTS\_september2014\_F-2013-03356\_DOC\_0C05468283\_C05468283.pdf

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. See also: United States Department of State, Confidential Cable, *Gospel Outreach Ministers Close to Rios Montt Visit*.



In hearing these statements about his religious practices and traditional beliefs shaping his policies, the American Evangelical Christian community feverishly supported him in multiple ways, namely in funding his campaign and lobbying the United States Congress to reinstate the military aid that was taken away from Guatemala during the Carter administration due to human rights abuses.<sup>108</sup>

The Guatemalan “Brother in Christ” resonated with the American Evangelicals that comprised the Religious Right because of his faith and promises to spread traditional values, which the Religious Right wanted to spread across the globe.<sup>109</sup> In particular, they viewed him as a tool to introduce and spread Evangelicalism across the predominantly Catholic region of Central America.<sup>110</sup> However, the Religious Right believed that in order for Ríos Montt’s regime to succeed in spreading Evangelicalism, he would need proper funding in order to spread the Word of God.<sup>111</sup> Soon, they “lavished” Ríos Montt with financial support; the dictator bragged to U.S. Congressmen that “no bilateral economic aid from the U.S. government was necessary because American Christians would provide all that was necessary.”<sup>112</sup> This was surprisingly not an exaggeration – according to Ríos Montt, the Religious Right provided him with “\$1 billion in credits.”<sup>113</sup> In addition to the funding from Christian Evangelicals who supported his dictatorship, the Reagan administration also provided Ríos Montt with funding in the name of anti-communism.<sup>114</sup> In relation to shaping his human rights policies in Guatemala, Reagan stated

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<sup>108</sup> Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations*, 14. See also: Carter, “Inaugural Address.”

<sup>109</sup> Turek, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ,’” 689.

<sup>110</sup> Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations*, 137.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>112</sup> United States Department of State, Confidential Cable, *Piedra/Cabraugh Visit: Impression of President Rios Montt*.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the Quadrennial Convention of the International Longshoremen's Association in Hollywood, Florida,” Transcript of speech delivered at Hollywood, Florida, July 18, 1983. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-quadrennial-convention-the-international-longshoremens-association-hollywood>

that “human rights means working at problems, not walking away from them. Without the necessary funds, there's no way for us to prevent the light of freedom from being extinguished in Central America.”<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, it is safe to conclude that Ríos Montt was getting generously funded by both the Reagan administration, and the Religious Right that Reagan legitimized and gave power to. This financial support from the United States’ government and American churches both led to the great success of Ríos Montt’s political initiatives – such as the scorched-Earth policy or the Beans and Bullets program – and directly led a surge of state-sponsored violence that resulted in over 200,000 deaths, with victims mainly residing in the countryside and 85% of those affected belonging to the indigenous Mayan population.<sup>116</sup>

In terms of military assistance, the Religious Right played a large role in lobbying their Congressmen to overrule Carter’s sanction affecting military aid to countries with repeated human rights abuses.<sup>117</sup> Carter officially prohibited “military sales and assistance, development assistance, ... and multilateral loans” to Guatemala in 1977 due to their “consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights.”<sup>118</sup> Despite the knowledge that Carter privately continued the military and economic aid under different classifications, many members of Congress publicly refused to restore this aid to Guatemala.<sup>119</sup> However, because of the newfound power of the Religious Right and their desire to support their “Brother in Christ,” many Evangelicals lobbied Congress in support of reinstating military aid to Guatemala.<sup>120</sup> Initially, many members of Congress resisted the attempts to restore military aid.<sup>121</sup> However,

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 161, 181.

<sup>117</sup> Lewis, “Abroad at Home.”

<sup>118</sup> Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations*, 125.

<sup>119</sup> Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 137.

<sup>120</sup> Turek, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ,’” 690.

<sup>121</sup> Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations*, 125.

due largely to the previous appointment of thirty-three members of Congress to the House of Representatives by the newfound voting power of the Religious Right, the Christians acquired their intended result of military aid to Guatemala.<sup>122</sup>

Reagan himself was also in favor of resuming military aid to Guatemala to support Ríos Montt's brutal suppression of the communist guerrilla forces. During a question-and-answer session, Reagan was asked if he was leaning toward resuming military aid with Guatemala, to which he responded "I would think so."<sup>123</sup> With both the lobbying power of the Religious Right and the personal preferences of President Reagan, military aid was restored to Guatemala in 1981 with the sale of civilian helicopters that the Guatemalan government later used to fight against the guerrillas and innocent civilians.<sup>124</sup> Before the sale of helicopters to the Guatemalan government, U.S. officials asked "What evidence do we have that the helicopters and other equipment won't be used to slaughter innocent civilians?" to which Ríos Montt responded "such 'evidence' cannot be brought forth."<sup>125</sup> Ríos Montt suggested that the only use of this military equipment would be to fighting the communist guerillas, but in doing so, it also harmed countless indigenous peoples associated with the guerilla movement. Despite this statement, the U.S. sold "helicopters to provide lift and logistic support and a variety of items ranging from grenade launchers... communications equipment, road graders and bulldozers," and more.<sup>126</sup> Originally sold to the Guatemalan government for civilian aid, the helicopters given to Ríos Montt's regime were almost immediately dressed with weapons and used with military intent.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Fruere, *A Modern American Conservative*, 224.

<sup>123</sup> Reagan. "Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters on the President's Trip to Latin America."

<sup>124</sup> Christopher Dickey, "Guatemala Uses U.S. 'Civilian' Copters in Warfare." *The Washington Post*, January 23, 1982. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/01/23/guatemala-uses-us-civilian-copters-in-warfare/56da660d-f1ea-4a88-ba21-d86df34383b3/>

<sup>125</sup> United States Department of State, Confidential Cable, *Congressional Hearing on Guatemala*.

<sup>126</sup> United States Department of State, Confidential Cable, *Piedra/Carbraugh Visit: Impression of President Rios Montt*.

<sup>127</sup> Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 157.

This proved that there was never any intention by Ríos Montt or the rest of the Guatemalan government to use American military aid to prevent the harm of civilians. Contrarily, the aid provided to Ríos Montt was directly used in the perpetration of the Guatemalan Genocide. In summary, the Reagan administration and the Religious Right aided and abetted the Guatemalan Genocide by fundraising Ríos Montt's dictatorship and lobbying Congress to provide Guatemala with military support.<sup>128</sup>

## Conclusion

Henceforth, it has been concluded that Reagan's philosophies on foreign policy, the practices of his foreign policy, and his legitimization of the Religious Right illustrated American complicity and perpetration of the Guatemalan Genocide in Ríos Montt's Guatemala from 1982-1983. Reagan's presidential predecessor, Jimmy Carter, set the stage for the issue of the moralization of foreign policy. Carter's public foreign policy of political unalignment and sanctions of countries who demonstrated severe human rights violations, such as Guatemala, received harsh backlash in the context of the Cold War.<sup>129</sup> Many American conservatives, such as Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, viewed Carter's foreign policy as a "failure" for sanctioning and dismissing potential authoritarian anti-communist allies on the basis of human rights violations.<sup>130</sup> It was on the basis of Jeane Kirkpatrick, who established the Kirkpatrick Doctrine, that Reagan built his foreign policy.<sup>131</sup> In his first term, Reagan utilized the foreign policy philosophy of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine to realign with authoritarian anti-communist regimes

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<sup>128</sup> Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations*, 14.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>130</sup> Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships & Double Standards."

<sup>131</sup> Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 149.

regardless of their human rights violations, particularly in Central America, to further American interests in the Cold War.

In practice, Reagan's foreign policy was centered around preventing the spread of communism. The context of the Nicaraguan Revolution is extremely important to understanding Reagan's obsession with preventing the spread of communism in Central America. As a response to the Nicaraguan Revolution, Reagan became so fervent on preventing further communist grabs for power that it pushed him to use the philosophy of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine to realign with any anti-communist country, no matter their record of human rights violations.<sup>132</sup> This is what led to Reagan publicly support Ríos Montt, despite the dictator perpetrating the period of *la violencia* that was characterized by mass human rights violations and the Guatemalan Genocide. Some of Ríos Montt's most infamous campaigns in office, his scorched-Earth policy and Beans and Bullets program, were both later classified as genocide in international tribunals.<sup>133</sup> In spite of these genocidal policies that Reagan and his administration were aware of, Reagan not only publicly supported Ríos Montt's dictatorship, but also developed a friendly personal relationship with the dictator.<sup>134</sup> In his support of Ríos Montt, Reagan expressed his belief that the dictator would bring democracy to Guatemala after years of turmoil from the country's civil war.<sup>135</sup> With knowledge of Ríos Montt's genocidal campaigns against the communist guerilla insurgency, and by extension of that, the innocent indigenous people that shared the same region, Reagan chose to actively support Ríos Montt's dictatorship. After Ríos Montt lost power in a military *coup d'état* in 1983 and democratic elections were brought to Guatemala, Reagan's administration leaned away from their reliance upon the Kirkpatrick Doctrine in shaping foreign policy matters

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<sup>132</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 2.

<sup>133</sup> Doyle, "Justice in Guatemala," 38.

<sup>134</sup> Ronald Reagan. "Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters on the President's Trip to Latin America."

<sup>135</sup> Cannon, "Latin Trip an Eye-Opener For Reagan."

and was satisfied by the new supposed democracy in Guatemala because communism appeared to be defeated.

In addition to Reagan's public and personal support, the American Evangelical Religious Right had a large influence over supporting Ríos Montt's dictatorship and re-establishing military and economic support with Guatemala. After gaining religious traction in the mid 1970s and indoctrinating millions of Americans, the born-again Evangelical movement became affiliated with the Republican party after their disappointment in Carter's liberal social policies.<sup>136</sup> Reagan legitimized the Religious Right by appointing many Evangelicals to high U.S. offices after his election, which solidified the group's unprecedented political power.<sup>137</sup> Following their election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency and thirty-three members of Congress, the Religious Right became intertwined in American foreign policy practices. The Religious Right hoped to spread the word of God across the globe, and found a "Brother in Christ" in Ríos Montt, who was a born-again Evangelical.<sup>138</sup> Due to his faith, the Religious Right believed that human rights violations would decrease in Guatemala under Ríos Montt's control, when in fact, the period of *la violencia* only worsened.<sup>139</sup> Ríos Montt gained attention from the Religious Right by promising to spread the traditional values of the Evangelical faith in his policies. The Religious Right played a vital role in lobbying Congress and the President to restore military and economic aid to Guatemala to support Ríos Montt's Evangelical mission, to which they succeeded because of their domestic political power.<sup>140</sup> The funding and military sales provided to Ríos Montt, thanks to the lobbying from the Religious Right, immediately

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<sup>136</sup> Lambert, "The Rise of the 'Religious Right,'" 199.

<sup>137</sup> Freure, *A Modern American Conservative*, 227.

<sup>138</sup> Turek, "To Support a 'Brother in Christ,'" 719.

<sup>139</sup> United States Department of State, Confidential Cable, *Piedra/Cabraugh Visit: Impression of President Rios Montt*.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* See also: Freure, *A Modern American Conservative*, 224.

added to the genocidal repertoire of Guatemala; in economically and militarily supporting the fight against communist guerillas and spreading Evangelicalism, it lead to destruction and civilian death.

To conclude, the American complicity and perpetration of the Guatemalan Genocide was caused by the Reagan administration's philosophical and practical support for anti-communist dictators, in addition to Reagan's legitimization of the Religious Right and their increased political power. The utilization of the Kirkpatrick Doctrine to shape Regan's human rights attitudes in his early foreign policy directly correlated to increased violence and suffering in Guatemala because of American support for the genocide perpetrator Ríos Montt. Unprecedented lobbying power from the Religious Right was a significant factor in shaping U.S. foreign policy and supporting Ríos Montt. As a reminder, when Reagan accepted the Republican nomination for president, he stated "the United States has an obligation to its citizens and to the people of the world never to let those who would destroy freedom dictate the future course of life on this planet. I would regard my election as proof that we have renewed our resolve to preserve world peace and freedom."<sup>141</sup> In examining human rights in Reagan's foreign policy philosophies and practices, it becomes abundantly clear that Reagan's promise for a better world under his leadership was not fulfilled. During his presidency, "freedom" and the "course of life" in Guatemala were ignored in American political interests, and "world peace and freedom" were demolished.<sup>142</sup> Henceforth, utilizing a Guatemalan perspective in Reagan's foreign policy characterized Reagan as a disappointment in the arena of safeguarding human rights.

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<sup>141</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Acceptance of the Republican Nomination for President."

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

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