

# Review of Gareau, *State Terrorism and the United States*

Donald K. Gutierrez

Frederick H. Gareau, *State Terrorism and the United States: From Counterinsurgency to the War on Terrorism*. Atlanta: Clarity Press and Zed Books, 2004, 296 pp.

## I

“WASHINGTON PUBLISHES AN ANNUAL LIST OF GOVERNMENTS THAT IT ALLEGES aid terrorists. Typically, this list contains a majority of governments of Arab states plus Iran, Cuba, and North Korea. This highlights the importance of how terrorism is defined. If state terrorism were included in the definition, Washington would have to include itself in the list” (Gareau, 2004: 15). *State Terrorism and the United States*, by Florida State University Professor Frederick H. Gareau, sets out to demonstrate that the United States, in carrying out state terrorism to win the Cold War, backed to the hilt savagely repressive right-wing regimes and dictatorships, resulting in the horrendous suffering, brutalizing, and murder of millions of human beings.

This is an extraordinarily damning indictment of a nation that has prided itself as being the beacon of liberty, freedom, and societal decency in the modern world. It is also stunningly ironic in view of how, especially under the current Bush administration, the United States has been foremost in identifying itself as the citadel of democratic antiterrorism, when the evidence assembled by Gareau and other researchers is that the opposite is the case—that the U.S. has inflicted a degree and scope of terrorism throughout some Third World countries that make anti-state guerrilla terrorism seem minor by comparison. More important, Gareau demonstrates with evidence from eyewitnesses, truth commissions, other observers, and terror victims that most individuals, groups, and organizations stigmatized as terrorists or insurgents were actually nonpartisans or people attempting to peacefully implement essential social reform in extremely corrupt societies.

Gareau defines terrorism as a consisting of “deliberate acts of a physical and/or psychological nature perpetrated on a select group of victims.... The overall purpose

---

DONALD K. GUTIERREZ is Professor Emeritus, Department of English, Western New Mexico University, Silver City, NM 88061 (e-mail: dongut@juno.com). He previously served on the faculty in the Department of English, University of Notre Dame. Of his six published books, the last one was on the short poems of Kenneth Rexroth. Since retirement in 1994, he has written mainly about issues of social justice.

of terrorism is to intimidate and coerce" (*Ibid.*: 14–15). He then poses three questions that structure his study: "Did the government being studied actually commit state terrorism? ...To what extent was the terror committed by states, and to what extent was it private terror committed by the guerrillas? ...Was the country that perpetrated the terror upon its own citizens actually supported by Washington? In what ways was this support provided?" (*Ibid.*: 19). After the introductory section are chapters on state terrorism and U.S. counterinsurgency training in El Salvador and Guatemala, and terrorism in Chile exercised by the Pinochet regime. Discussions of Argentinean state terrorism and torture, apartheid and terrorism in South Africa, and three massacres in Indonesia follow. The final section of *State Terrorism* presents what Gareau terms the Root Doctrine, as it was applied to Nicaragua, the Congo, and the Khmer Rouge, Washington's Middle East policy (which focuses on Iran and Israel's state terrorist treatment of the Palestinians), and George W. Bush's "War on Terrorism," dealing with the Afghanistan and Persian Gulf Wars.

Much of what happens in the four Latin American countries covered in the first chapters can be traced to the training in counterinsurgency methods received at 150 "schools" in the United States. The most notorious of these is the School of the Americas (SOA, now called The Western Hemisphere Institute of Security Cooperation). The SOA "has trained upward of 59,000 Latin American military personnel, policemen, and civilians" (*Ibid.*: 23). Some of these students were hardly inconsequential: 10 became presidents or dictators, 23 were defense ministers, and 15 were ministers of other departments.

Counterinsurgency is a broad, euphemistic term that disguises what results in extreme intimidation and repression of the poor in Third World societies. As the enormous wealth of the elite of these nations had been amassed at the expense of the majority of the populations in nations like El Salvador, and as the military and police institutions there have been closely related to the powerful land, banking, and business interests, the consequences were inevitable—extreme measures implemented to "adjust" the masses to their miserable lot. Anyone, any group that resisted or embodied disapproval of such control would be "terrorized"—he or she would be submitted to torture, maiming, or terrible death to exemplify a regime's absolute authority.

Latin American military officers, police chiefs, and others who eventually became politically significant attended the SOA to learn terrorizing counterinsurgency operations. Its rationale and pretense were to train state leaders to bring order and security to their countries and transmit democratic values from the U.S. to south of the border. In short, it indoctrinated law-enforcement personnel in the "crowd control" measures needed for stable economic investment and control by U.S.-based corporations in these societies. This goal could not be achieved if labor leaders, students, organized peasants, teachers, the religious, and others tried to introduce social reform into societies top-heavy with wealth and power. To prevent such reformism, Washington, through the SOA (among other channels),

stigmatized reformers and liberating forces as being communist or communist-inspired; as such, they needed to be exterminated. Guatemalan General Hector Gramajo Morales, in justifying the genocide in his country in the 1980s, said his government planned to improve the condition of two-thirds of civil society; the other one-third it would annihilate.

The commercial interests of the U.S. elite were thus allied to those of some Latin American nations through the terrorizing “muscle” of politicized armies and police, paramilitary units, and death squads. SOA military instructors hardly taught respect for due process, *habeas corpus*, and other civil liberties to mass killers like Gramajo, or to Guatemalan General Manuel Antonio Callejas y Callejas, who was responsible for the deaths and disappearances of thousands of Guatemalans. Between 1971 and 1976 in Bolivia, General Hugo Bánzer Suárez, another SOA graduate, “murdered 468 Bolivians, imprisoned...4,318 for their political beliefs and activities, deported 663, and tortured 100 who had survived their ordeal” (*Ibid.*: 23). Suárez’s portrait hangs in the SOA’s Hall of Fame. Father Roy Bourgeois, long the chief activist trying to close the SOA, put the whole matter concisely: “This [the SOA] is where the killing starts” (*Ibid.*).

What is Washington’s role in the government terrorism that was imposed in El Salvador and other Latin American countries? In 1962, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff defined insurgency so broadly that it ranged from passive resistance to guerrilla activities, with all of it branded as communistic. No middle ground existed. One was either for us or against us, with the latter including peasants ground down by the dominant interests or accused of sympathy with the guerrillas, liberation Catholic religious and lay people trying peacefully to alleviate the unrelenting poverty, or anyone critical of the regime. A brutally repressive policy was facilitated by a “Special Forces Manual entitled ‘Counter-insurgency Operations’ [that] eschewed ethical limits on counter-guerrilla warfare and reserved the use of terror as a legitimate tactical tool of unconventional warfare” (*Ibid.*: 29–30). The CIA had around 150 agents in El Salvador; by 1984, it was revealed that top Salvadoran officers “had been trained by the United States” (*Ibid.*: 31) and that many top members of the army, police, and paramilitary were being funded by the CIA. From those facts, and the 75,000 Salvadorans murdered and one-fourth of the population displaced by the Salvadoran authorities, Gareau concludes that “Washington trained the army in El Salvador for the repression it committed and subsidized the government while it was engaged in the repression” (*Ibid.*).

The trouble with terms like “repression,” “human rights abuses,” or even “excessive violence” is their abstractness. Their generality conceals such actions of government and the military as “impaling victims, amputating their limbs, burning them alive; extracting their viscera while still alive and in the presence of others,” keeping individuals mortally tortured alive for days, and “opening the wombs of pregnant women” (*Ibid.*: 46), atrocities drawn from selective list that occurred in Guatemala during the 1980s.

We know about the atrocities and *matanzas* (massacres) in El Salvador, Guatemala, Argentina, or Chile because of Truth Commissions, which were sometimes established slowly for fear of retaliation (an ongoing dread to this day). In El Salvador, the Commission received more than 22,000 complaints of major acts of violence that had taken place between 1980 and 1991. This violence included the now well-known **El Mozote massacre in 1981, in which over 900 individuals were systematically tortured and murdered, the majority of them children.** Ten of the 12 officers responsible for this incredible butchery were SOA graduates.

An extremely important finding that pervades these Truth Commission reports was the extent of institutional responsibility for the “abuses” of the population. The degree of involvement and responsibility is revealing and typical of all the countries analyzed in *State Terrorism*: the Salvadoran government, for example, was responsible for 95% of the atrocities, torture, and massacres, with the guerrillas accounting for *five* percent. Washington provided these lethal government institutions with six billion dollars of aid between 1979 and 1992. Gareau thus finds Washington guilty as an accessory before and during the fact for its financing and training in terrorism of state security forces, and as an accessory *after* the fact by concealing Salvadoran abuses by providing its government—and therefore its financial and landed elite—with diplomatic support. With minor variations, this disproportionate pattern of state versus guerrilla responsibility for terrorism characterizes all the nations analyzed in Gareau’s book.

## II

Though the Truth Commission in El Salvador elicited an immense number of complaints about violence, Guatemalans had twice as many—42,275. A United Nations Commission, which recorded the human rights violations in Guatemala, estimated 200,000 victims were killed outright or “disappeared.” Most victims, Gareau indicates, were civilians: “One fourth were women, who were often raped before they were tortured or killed, and many were children, who were also sometimes raped before they were tortured or killed” (*Ibid.*: 45). Over 80% of the victims were Mayans.

How could these military institutions and auxiliaries (paramilitaries, death squads, etc.) even perform the atrocities carried out in the Third World nations studied in *State Terrorism*? First, Gareau mentions the counterinsurgency training Washington transmitted to the armies of Guatemala, Nicaragua (the Contras), and elsewhere. This education included a brutalizing of sensibility in males that frequently came from the same class and ethnicity as their victims. Rigorous training featured de-individualization along the lines of severe punishment (including death) for disobedience. These new soldiers literally had their hands stained with the blood of victims to desensitize them.

The trainees were also forced to kill animals, eat them raw, and drink their blood. They were subjected to three days of instruction in torture techniques, pedagogic

methods acquired by their instructors from their SOA-educated superiors. Rules of engagement in war and in the handling of POWs have often been violated even in traditional wars between states. When a state in effect declares ideological war on its own population and receives instruction, funding, arms and technical assistance, and diplomatic approval from a superpower like the United States, there is little to restrict military and law-enforcement institutions from doing anything they want to a given sector of the population, especially if it is one like the Mayans, whom high-placed civilian and military officials have traditionally held in contempt.

According to the Commission in Guatemala, the most atrocities occurred with the knowledge or even at the bidding of the state. The only higher authority was Washington, which was intimately connected with the Guatemalan communications and intelligence institutions that, according to the Commission, perpetrated the mass savagery. Approximately three-quarters of a billion dollars in aid flowed to Guatemala from Washington from 1981 to 1990; President Reagan's virtual approval of the Guatemalan army's carnage also underlined Washington's support of Guatemalan state terrorism.

State violence in Chile resembled that in the Central American nations. Under General Pinochet's regime, "the military and the security forces tortured tens of thousands of Chileans" (*Ibid.*: 73), while the numbers of Chileans forced to flee was thought to be at least 20,000. Chile's intelligence organization, DINA, did much more than amass information. It was responsible for much of the worst state terrorization from 1975 to 1977. The United States was again complicit, with 1,437 Chilean military officers having attended the SOA. "DINA's specialty," claims Gareau, "was forced disappearances" (*Ibid.*: 77). The major roles played by President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger in destroying President Allende's government are well known, as is their sympathy with Pinochet's putsch.

A distinctive feature of Chile's state terror was the general apathy of the Chilean public to the savage human rights violations being executed under Pinochet. According to Gareau, a key reason for this was the media. Shortly following Pinochet's violent takeover, the government clamped down on the media, transforming it into a publicity and propaganda channel of the military.

Much of the state violence in Latin and Central America was based on an anti-communist crusade that was intensely encouraged by Washington. Central to this crusade was the identification of all forms of civil reform movements as communist, no matter how pacific or even anticommunist they actually were. This effective and malicious mislabeling enabled right-wing regimes from Chile and Guatemala to South Africa and Indonesia to stigmatize *any* resistance to, or criticism of, government rule and repression as insurgency and, worse, terrorism. Thus, when left-wing guerrilla movements did commit violence (including atrocities), it was termed "terrorism," whereas, according to Gareau, the far more widespread and ferocious terrorism of right-wing governments received the gentler label of "hu-

man-rights abuses,” which doesn’t convey the Guatemalan army training practice of decapitating village boys to toughen recruits.

To stop reform movements, communist or otherwise, Washington and its proxy governments around the world embarked on a campaign of terrorization that was largely shielded from the American public. Even *The New York Times* all too often misrepresented state terrorism as a liberating force, ushering a society into free enterprise and thus democracy.

Washington also funded Argentina’s state terrorism. Between 1960 and 1975, it offered Argentina’s government \$810 million in military aid. Counterinsurgency was the main purpose of the funds, evidenced by Argentine General Ramon Camps, chief of the notorious Buenos Aires province police force, who claimed that Washington “organized centers for teaching counter-insurgency techniques (especially in the United States) and sent out instructors, observers, and an enormous amount of literature” (*Ibid.*: 103). Between 1950 and 1979, over 4,000 members of the Argentine military received U.S. training, including two generals who were SOA graduates that later became Argentine dictators.

Though many Latin American terrorist states “disappeared” their victims, Argentina was unique in facilitating the disappearance by throwing live victims from airplanes into the ocean, slitting bellies so the victims would sink to the ocean floor. Argentina’s state terrorism was also overtly anti-Semitic in its treatment of Argentine Jews: “All kinds of torture would be applied to Jews, including “the rectoscope,’ which consisted of inserting a tube into the victim’s anus, or into a woman’s vagina, then letting a rat into the tube” (*Ibid.*: 97–98). Israel was a major supplier of arms to Argentina despite the overtly anti-Semitic character of Argentina’s Dirty War. And Washington’s Henry Kissinger gave the green light to the “forthcoming dirty war” (*Ibid.*: 108).

South Africa exemplifies the extent to which Washington would go in support of state terrorism: the U.S. assisted this anticommunist ally in the development and *use* of weapons of mass destruction. South Africa received the assistance of Belgium, Israel, England, and the U.S. to develop chemical and bacteriological elements of warfare including, among others, cholera, botulism, and anthrax. Pretoria’s chemical agents were used against Mozambiquan guerrillas. (Gareau’s authenticated charge highlights Washington’s hypocrisy considering its hysteria over Iraq, which it invaded to control its vast oil deposits.) That 83% of the opponents of the South African government were tortured apparently did not concern the White House, nor did Pretoria’s policy of apartheid (initiated in 1949).

Beatings (punching, kicking, slapping, either by hand or with implements) were the most common form of torture by the South African state, but forced standing was also frequently used (and is apparent elsewhere). A recent “Democracy Now” interview revealed that a British male working contractually in Saudi Arabia was falsely accused by the government of involvement in a bomb explosion. Kidnapped by Saudi security forces and incarcerated, his captors tortured, raped, and subjected

him to sleep deprivation by chaining him upright to the cell bars. Consistent with a White House legal counsel's determination that torture is constituted only by acts that lead to loss of limbs or threaten life, U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has stated that coercive techniques such as sleep deprivation and stress positions do not constitute torture. In the case of the British captive, though, after the third bout of sleep deprivation (which lasted some 11 days), he claims to have suffered two heart attacks, surely life-threatening symptoms.

Gareau then examines Indochina's state terrorism at length. From 1965 to 1970, the Indonesian government killed one million or a million and one-half Communist "suspects," "peasants who had alienated their landlords, apolitical persons denounced by their neighbors," and "religious elements the Muslims did not like..." (*Ibid.*: 148). Washington's support encouraged the widespread slaughter. The U.S. ambassador to Indonesia, Marshall Green, worried whether the Indonesian government would have "the courage to go forward against the PKI [the Communist Party of Indonesia]" (*Ibid.*). "Experts at the State Department knew that the PKI had neither the arms nor the will to resist.... Bluntly put, the Secretary of State under President Johnson [Dean Rusk] expressed his approval of the practice of state terrorism by the Indonesian army" (*Ibid.*).

After the Pentagon-supplied weaponry, intelligence, and communications apparatus wiped out the PKI, the U.S. and other Western powers re-created the financial and economic base of Indonesian society. Once democratically elected President Sukarno had been dislodged and replaced by General Suharto, huge investments from U.S. and European corporations flooded Indonesian markets—its reward for joining the Free World. During the period of ongoing genocide in Indonesia, the United States provided \$40 million in arms annually. Under President Ford, military aid to Suharto increased to \$140 million; the Carter administration allotted \$112 million. Summing up the White House's proxy financing and administration of genocide and torture in Indonesia from the mid-1970s through the Reagan era, Gareau quotes Gabriel Kolko on the scale of these war crimes: "No single American action after 1945 was as a bloodthirsty as its role in Indonesia, for it tried to initiate the massacre, and it did everything in its power to encourage Suharto, including equipping his killers, to see that the physical liquidation of the PKI was carried through to its culmination" (*Ibid.*: 149).

### III

In 1922, State Secretary Elihu Root set forth the rationale for U.S. state terrorism and its proxy terrorism through right-wing regimes. Root felt that a state, specifically, the United States, had the right to protect its interests abroad. That these interests were essentially economic and corporate has been traditionally camouflaged by various expressions of idealism that center on spreading democracy, freedom, and equality throughout the world. According to Root, certain countries could not fend democratically for themselves. They required the order and stability

that right-wing dictatorships could provide, which would win Washington's full backing. Latin American nations lacking such "stability" were simply invaded: "Prior to the Spanish-American War, the United States carried out 103 interventions; between the end of that war and the Great Depression, it sent troops to Latin America 32 times" (*Ibid.*: 163).

Gareau's next chapter deals with Washington's recent policies in the Middle East, focusing on the close relationship of U.S. administrations with Saddam Hussein from the early 1960s up to the first Gulf War. He reveals Washington's role in usurping Iran's democratically elected, popular Muhammad Mosaddeq and installing the Shah, resulting in decades of repression and torture under the SAVAK, Iran's secret intelligence service. President Eisenhower approved the CIA coup against Mosaddeq; thereafter, support for the tyrannical Shah came from Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter. Gareau also details Washington's support of Israel, including its failure to object to Israel's nuclear weapons program, its ethnic cleansing of Palestinian populations in 1967, and its involvement in the Lebanese Sabra and Shatila refugee camp massacre of over 2,000 Palestinians in 1982. Moreover, Washington provided Israel with \$53 billion in aid from 1948 to 1991, and from 1988 on, three billion dollars annually in military and economic assistance.

The chapter on "The War on Terrorism" offers insightful discussions of the U.S. war against Afghanistan and its second war against Iraq. Especially noteworthy is the chapter's coverage of **Guantánamo, which shows how counterinsurgency is transformed into counterterrorism in the sinister confines of a high-security prison full of terrorist "suspects" randomly picked up in street sweeps.** Gareau sees clear signs of psychological torture in Pentagon photographs of **Guantánamo detainees**: "The photographs 'showed some of the prisoners kneeling before their captors, their legs in shackles, bound in manacles, their mouths covered by surgical masks and their eyes blinded by large goggles with black tape'" (*Ibid.*: 198). Aside from the 350 suicide attempts in the first year and one-half at Guantánamo, the level of daily psychological sadism shown in photos gives the lie to statements by Donald Rumsfeld that these men are being treated humanely.

The final chapter, "Conclusions and Recommendations," intimates that Washington's aid to state terrorism in the cited nations was of such proportions that their governments might not have been able to unleash terrorism without it. Washington's proxy state terrorism also took the form of selling and giving away sizable amounts of ordnance. It exported "thumb cuffs, thumb screws, leg irons, and shackles" (*Ibid.*: 220) to nations with pronounced records of human rights violations (such as Bahrain, Bolivia, Colombia, Egypt, Israel, Mexico, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey). It also was generous in offering "electro-shock batons, cattle prods, shotguns, and shotgun shells" to over 105 nations. Washington has trained more than 100,000 military personnel from over 100 nations as part of its

IMET (International Military and Training Education program), thereby increasing the likelihood of massacres, from Guatemala to Indonesia.

Gareau exposes the selective hypocrisy of Bush's "War on Terrorism": "President Bush's resolve to capture the terrorists and bring them to justice is compartmentalized and exclusive. It does not include the members of the death squads in Guatemala, nor General Pinochet and Suharto and the other military officers, former state terrorists, who are enjoying their retirement with their families in their own countries or in the sunshine of southern Florida" (*Ibid.*: 230). They will not be exposed, let alone hunted down, creating the impression that the United States is harboring terrorists. Thus, by the logic used by Washington to justify attacking Afghanistan and Iraq for harboring terrorists or embodying terrorism, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Chile (among others) could feel justified in initiating a preemptive strike against Washington.

The principal thrust of *State Terrorism* is that there is a crucial need for a Truth Commission for the United States: "The public should be educated as to what its government has done" (*Ibid.*: 230). Were Americans to discover, for example, that Washington ignited the mass slaughter of over a million Indonesians to clear the ground for transnational corporate investment, their notion that the United States is only a force for good in the world would be jolted. Today, the media call attention to the frightening savagery of El Salvadoran gangs that are rampaging throughout the U.S.; they are inordinately cruel, murderous, and greedy. Yet the Washington and Wall Street elite, whose gang colors are white shirts, conservative blue ties, and \$500 three-piece suits, have activated an international policy extremely more sweeping and brutal than these street thugs. By outsourcing some of their terrorism, the bloodstains from their high-level decisions spill off their hands.

Gareau's Truth Commission for atrocities committed from safe command centers by the Nixons, Johnsons, Reagans, both Bushes, their various Cabinet members, and their mega-corporation allies is an essential first step toward a form of redemption in the American psyche. Without full disclosure, the U.S. state will become even more violent, corrupt, and arrogant, fatally ripe for a drift into radical dysfunction or into a totalitarianism that Americans have not imagined in their worst dreams.