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COUNTERINSURGENCY AND DEVELOPMENT POLES IN THE IXIL REGION  
OF GUATEMALA

Cultural Survival  
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The home of Guatemala's Ixil Indians is a relatively isolated, ruggedly mountainous territory ranging from 700 to 3,000 meters above sea level and encompassing approximately 2,300 sq. kilometers. It lies in the central sector of the Department of El Quiche, 85 kilometers along a gravel road north of its capital city, Santa Cruz del Quiche. The Ixil make up more than 90% of the department's total population of about 80,000 (the remaining 10% is composed of Quiche Indians and Ladinos).<sup>1</sup> In line with the general highland pattern, Ladino landholders control extensive tracts of the best agricultural land, of which coffee is the principal crop, while the Indians eke out a meager existence on small plots of corn, beans, and other staples. The Indians traditionally supplement this marginal subsistence routine by migrating each year to work the plantations on the southern coastal plain.

When the Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP) began filtering into the Ixil region from its northern bases in the Ixcán during the mid-1970s, it found ready converts among the oppressed Indians. Violence erupted in 1975-1976 with kidnappings and murders, and as the pace of insurgency moved on an upward curve the military responded swiftly with a brutal counterattack. The peak of violence came in 1982-1983 with the "scorched earth" strategy of President Efraín Ríos Montt. During

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<sup>1</sup> This figure is an estimate based on the 1973 census, which notes a population of just over 60,000 (see Coiby & van den Berghe 1977:199). See also Krueger & Enge 1985:30, which puts the 1980 population of the Ixil region at 82,000.

this period, the military systematically destroyed virtually all of the rural settlements surrounding the municipalities of Santa Maria Nebaj, San Gaspar Chajul, and San Juan Cotzal -- the three points of what is often called the "Ixil Triangle". Any survivors fled into the mountains, north to Mexico, or to urban centers.

### THE DEVELOPMENT POLE PROGRAM

In late 1983, in the wake of its comprehensive clean-up operations, the army launched what was to become its most extensive and coherent program of Development Pole villages (Manz 1988:99).<sup>2</sup> These Pole settlements, often called "Model Villages," are an important part of its "guns and beans" (fusiles y frijoles) counterinsurgency program.<sup>3</sup> In this scheme, villagers displaced by the violence and still in the area were carried back and resettled in the general area of their former residences. However, instead of resuming their traditional dispersed settlement patterns, they were forced to live in concentrated villages.

The military claims that these new villages effectively

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<sup>2</sup> There are presently six Development Pole areas in Guatemala (Manz 1988:254, ftnt. 131). These are: the Ixil region (El Quiche), Playa Grande (El Quiche), Chacaj (Huehuetenango), Chisec (Alta Verapaz), Senahu (Alta Verapaz), and Yanahi (El Peten).

<sup>3</sup> The military's development strategy, together with its "philosophical" underpinnings, is described in an elegantly produced document entitled Polos de Desarrollo: Filosofia Desarrollista.

combine the objectives "security and development." (At the entrance to the Model Village of Salquil, this strategy is symbolized by the statue of a tin man holding a shovel in one hand and a machine gun in the other.) From a security perspective, nucleated villages are more easily supervised and protected from guerrilla incursions. Armed villagers organized in Civil Patrols, which have ready backup from the army if necessary, are a central feature of village life in the Ixil region (Americas Watch 1986; Krueger & Enge 1985; Manz 1988). At the same time, according to the military, because the population is not spread out across the landscape, the people can be effectively supplied with government assistance. In short, these villages are designed for

those who, during months and even years, wandered starving, pursued, harrassed by fear, hunger, and illness, have found today, in their own territories -- where they have voluntarily decided to return -- a secure and comfortable place that is their own, so that in tranquility they can dedicate themselves to rebuilding their future (Ejercito de Guatemala 1984:vii).

In early 1985, as many as eight Development Pole villages had been built, or were under construction, in the Ixil area (Krueger & Enge 1985:30):<sup>4</sup> Acul, Tzalbal, Juil, Rio Azul-Pulay,

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<sup>4</sup> The Guatemalan Army and outside observers have attempted to classify the various villages within the Development Pole program as "completed," "under construction," "in transition," and so forth, and lists of villages set within these categories have appeared. However, these lists are invariably subjective and often misleading, although if taken as rough estimates they do give some idea of the general panorama of the Development Pole program.

Ojo de Agua, Salquil Grande, Bichibala, and Santa Abelina. By late 1986, the military's books listed as many as 17 Pole villages, although most of these were classified as "in transition." In truth, these "transitional" villages were little more than nucleated settlements rebuilt from local materials, together with occasional donated scraps of wood and corrugated iron roofing. Manz (1988:109) lists the following villages as having been defined by the military as "completed": Ojo de Agua, Bichibala, San Felipe Chenla (all in the municipality of Cotzal), and Acul, Tzalbal, Salquil Grande, Rio Azul-Pulay (in the municipality of Nebaj).

During our visit to the Ixil region in late 1986, the Development Pole program was obviously in a general state of stagnation. The military had run both security and development aspects of the program until the Christian Democratic government of Vinicio Cerezo took power in January of 1986. At that juncture, however, it passed responsibility for the development side (as well as all social services) over to the newly elected civilian government.

In this transitional period, the civilians had shown a singular lack of interest in and/or capacity for working with the Pole villages. Funds for the program were short. The Guatemalan economy was in sharp decline; and foreign donors, wary of bankrolling what everyone clearly recognized as a counterinsurgency strategy, were maintaining their distance. Left abandoned, existing Model villages were without adequate

services and their infrastructure was deteriorating. Local commerce had largely ground to a halt due to restrictions on movement within the area. Seasonal migration to the coastal plantations of the south, a prime source of income for the population, had been virtually stopped because of tightened security and forced participation in local Civil Patrols.

The Pole villages were not economically self-sufficient and had to be kept alive largely through the relief efforts of Evangelical and Catholic Churches (see also Manz 1988:104-119). Construction of new villages was paralyzed and no one talked of expanding the program geographically. In fact, villagers openly expressed their desire to return to their original home sites if the political climate continued along its present course toward greater tranquility.

#### **CURRENT MILITARY STRATEGY**

Peace, however, was not to be. Starting in September-October of 1987, the military in the Ixil area has been engaged in a concerted campaign to pull the remaining civilian population out of the mountains, bring them back to Nebaj for a short "reorientation," and then locate them in new Development Pole villages. In June, 1988, local military officials told us that army patrols in the area were changed at that time from mobile to permanent, and the number of soldiers involved was increased substantially. The military believes that the guerrilla will not

be able to maintain itself in the far northern tier of El Quiche and Huehuetenango without the support of the civilian population, which, among other things, produces the bulk of its food. To underscore the military's strategy, one of the officials in Nebaj repeated the well-known counterinsurgency metaphor about drying up the pond to get the fish.

To all appearances, the army has been very successful at pulling the "displaced" (desplazados), or internal refugees, out.<sup>5</sup> According to records kept at regional headquarters, 558 came through Nebaj during March, April, and May; other sources indicate that a minimum of 2,000-3,000 were processed in Nebaj during the initial months of the offensive. Just how they "come out" of the mountains is subject to several interpretations. Senior officers emphasize that virtually all of the refugees turn themselves in voluntarily, retreating from the mountains in groups of between 20 and 200, dressed in rags, sick, hungry, and fed up with the guerrilla. The military claims that the numbers have increased so dramatically of late largely because the refugees still in mountains have realized that life in the hands of the military is better than life on the run in the wilds. The military has mounted a steady program of propaganda in the form of pamphlet drops and loudspeaker broadcasts from helicopters.

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<sup>5</sup> In this article we use the term "refugee" to mean refugees living within Guatemala (as opposed to those living abroad). In Guatemala, the term refugiado generally refers to those living abroad, while the term desplazado ("displaced") refers to those inside Guatemala. We have not used "displaced" or "displaced persons" because in English it is awkward.

Some of the returned refugees have witnessed the better living conditions in Nebaj, and word of their experiences has seeped back into the mountains. All of this adds up to a powerful magnet, an official told us: "Imagine yourself, out there in the rain and cold, and you hear that there are food and clothes in Nebaj."

Whatever the official word may be, soldiers in the villages stated unequivocally that no, the refugees do not come out voluntarily. Virtually all of them are brought out by military operations in which large numbers of soldiers and Civil Patrol members move into an area known to harbor refugees, surround them, and bring them out. They generally take their captives to a field base, then ship them into Nebaj by helicopter. Indians in the Model Villages confirmed this, saying that they and essentially all the others they know about were captured and brought in.

Sometimes, in a variant on this pattern, only part of a family is captured. After staying in Nebaj for a month or so, the captured family members are allowed to go back into the mountains to bring out the rest of the family. Several different sources told us that captives do not attempt to escape and resume life in the mountains at this time, for the guerrilla would kill them. Because the guerrilla automatically suspects those who have been taken and have spent time with the military in Nebaj, those people must exercise extreme caution when they return to the mountains to retrieve other family members.

A picture of the character and quality of life in the mountains can only be assembled partially from bits and pieces of information. Apparently, between about 1983 and 1986 the military sent periodic search-and-destroy patrols into the mountains. Because the military pressure was neither steady nor intense, the refugees and their guerrilla companions lived in relative peace. The refugees lived in makeshift houses which the military periodically destroyed during sweeps, and planted crops. Before the Violence (or La Violencia, as the brutality that began in 1978 and continued steadily through 1983 is called) broke out, the sparsely populated mountainous areas put little pressure on the natural resource base. The land worked by the refugees was frontier and relatively fertile, and production was high. Commerce of cloth and clothes, medicines, salt (a very important item) and other goods filtered through the Model Villages on the periphery; and a fair number of the mountain-dwelling refugees made their way directly into the market of Nebaj.

People in the mountains often negotiated contracts with villagers to bring them specific goods. Security was fairly lax and the hinterlands were supplied, albeit meagerly. The military was not engaged in anything approaching systematic sweeps to round up refugees, and according to reports only occasional groups were defecting from the mountains. One person who had been involved with relief action during the early and mid-1980s remembered that a group of about 80 people came out in 1983;

then, some 8 months later, another group, this one of about 30 people, appeared. During the period between 1983 and 1986 very few groups came out of the mountains, and most of those who did consisted of about 15-20 people.

Then, beginning in 1986, the military began to tighten its grip around the mountains. Through Civil Patrol members and other informants, they virtually strangled all commerce from the villages. People carrying sacks of sugar and rolls of cloth out of Nebaj, Cotzal, and Chajul were now questioned carefully and were forbidden to take large amounts of produce to their home sites. On several occasions, the nuns in the area were prohibited from distributing quantities of clothes and food in the villages. Without medicines, cloth, and other basic goods, people in the mountains began to suffer.

In late 1987 the military offensive in the mountains began in full force. More soldiers were pumped into the region. The patrols were now stationed at fixed camps in the mountains and supplied regularly. Removal of the refugees was made top priority. These events marked the beginning of a full-scale effort to cut the guerrilla's support system by physically removing the civilian population.<sup>6</sup> After plotting the location of civilian groups through its network of informants, including people who had already been captured, the army went into the

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<sup>6</sup> No accurate estimates exist as to the number of refugees still in the mountains of the Ixil region. Fragments of conjecture suggest that probably fewer than 3,000-4,000, and perhaps as few as 2,000, refugees remain. We simply do not know.

mountains under cover of darkness and captured people while they slept. These surprise sweeps and round-up operations exerted steady pressure on the populace. Having suffered from periodic patrols over the years, the refugees in the mountains now have nothing approaching permanent dwellings, at least above ground. They live a seminomadic life in temporary shelters, or live in carefully concealed caves, which the soldiers still destroy when they happen upon them. The people in the mountains suffer acutely from salt deprivation and a variety of illnesses and have no access to medicines. They are unable to obtain any cloth and their clothes are in rags. Through these shortages, the military has placed a noose around the refugees and the guerrilla, and has simultaneously moved in to confront them directly with reinforced patrols.

#### **THE ARMY'S CHANGED TACTICS**

The present military offensive follows a different line from that of the early 30s. At that time, the "scorched earth" strategy dictated that soldiers penetrate the mountains, flush the people from their villages, and kill those unable to flee. In the long run, however, the army realized that this brutal policy served to strengthen the guerrilla by turning the people against the army. In a change of tactics, the army now attempts to win over the civilians through "humane" treatment. Instead of shooting them, soldiers on patrol concentrate on destroying only their shelters, clothes, implements, and food. In a May 1987

interview, Colonel Mario Enrique Morales, director of the army's S-5 (Civic Affairs) division, described this new strategy:

We now understand that we can gain more with civic action than with war. This represents a very profound change in the military mentality, in the Guatemalan Army; and in this we are being original, we are not copying models...we have done all of this by ourselves, without foreign advice. (AVANCSO 1988:53)

Officers in Nebaj said that they now explain to the refugees, by way of apology, that such actions are necessary in times of war. They want the guerrilla, they say, and this is the only way they can catch them -- their target is not the refugees, who have been misled by the guerrilla.

After they are rounded up and moved out in helicopters, the refugees are brought into Nebaj, registered, and housed in two long wooden buildings set behind the army headquarters, near the town's central plaza. (A small group arrived during our visit, all clothed in rags, thin, sick, and frightened.) The buildings are approximately 45 by 120 feet, are made of rough boards, roofed with sheets of corrugated iron, and have dirt floors. We were told that as many as 300 people were inside the buildings, most of them resting on beds made of boards and sticks.

The air inside was a cacophony of coughing and hacking and the crying of children; those in charge explained that virtually all of the arriving refugees were very sick, the major illnesses being bronchial disorders, amoebas, and typhoid fever. (As we spoke to military officials, a small procession entered the

compound with a child's coffin and disappeared into one of the buildings.) Over the past month, the Guatemalan government's Comision Especial para la Atencion de Repatriados y Desplazados (CEARD) has set up an operation for an additional 200 people (in very crowded conditions), all of whom are sent over by the military. The nuns housed nearby bring the newly arrived refugees clothes and food, supplied by CARITAS. As the recent flood of refugees has mounted, CEARD has begun construction of a new receiving center on the outskirts of town.

The military's Civic Affairs wing, the S-5, manages the ideological/psychological training for the refugees before they are relocated in Development Poles.<sup>7</sup> The refugees learn the National Hymn, the Hymn to the Soldier, and the practice of raising the Guatemalan flag at dawn and pulling it down at sunset. They come under a steady barrage of anti-guerrilla propaganda. The men are trained as members of the Civil Patrols. After as long as three months (although this period has most recently been shortened because of the flood of refugees coming through Nebaj), the refugees are relocated in what are termed pre-Development Pole villages which are on or near their original home sites. They can then resume farming the land they held before the Violence began, although they generally have to travel greater distances to reach their plots.

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<sup>7</sup> The S-5 has "promoters" working in the communities of the Development Poles. They assist with community improvement projects such as construction of schools and bridges. They also wear uniforms and carry guns, and it could easily be argued that their primary function is control of the civilian population.

By late 1986 the army had relocated refugees in as many as 17 nucleated villages, all of which were or would soon be set within the Development Pole program. According to a list circulated by the Ministry of Health in June 1988, there are nine "completed" Development Pole villages, 11 Development Pole villages "to be built", and an additional 12 "newly relocated villages" (Ministry of Health 1988).<sup>8</sup> Official counts say that these villages contain a total of 5,186 families. With an estimated five members per family, this brings the population of the Development Pole villages of the Ixil area to approximately 25,900. According to this list, which was presented in early June in Nebaj as part of an emergency relief program for the floods of needy refugees, these villages are (estimated no. of families in parentheses):

Development Pole Villages:

1. Acul (450)
2. Tzabal (315)
3. Pulay (140)
4. Rio Azul (127)
5. Ojo de Agua (100)
6. San Felipe Chenla (139)
7. Bichibala (115)
8. Juil (123)
9. Xolcuay (153)

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<sup>8</sup> This list is an updated version of a list compiled in January or February 1988, probably by the military. All of the same villages are noted and placed, with minor exceptions, in the same three categories. The main difference between the two lists is that the number of families in the "newly relocated villages" is higher in the more recent list. The maps are exactly the same in both reports. (See map, page 14a.)

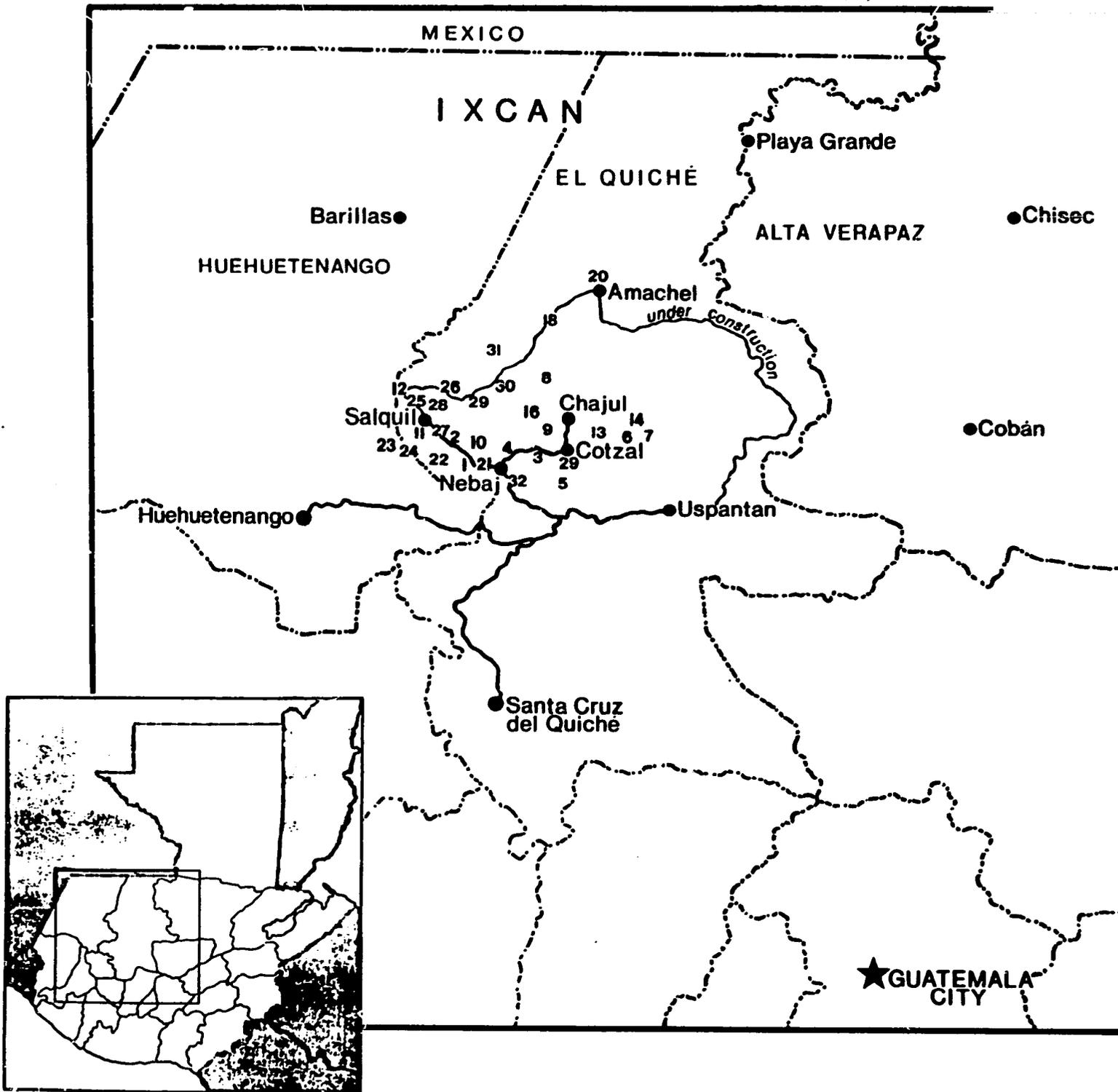
Development Pole Villages to be built:

10. Actzum'bal (257)
11. Salquil (500)
12. Palob (160)
13. Santa Abelina (350)
14. Chichel (56)
15. Asich (40)
16. Xix (79)
17. Ilom (450)
18. Chel (250)
19. Jua (50)
- 20 Amachel ("no data available")

Newly Relocated Villages:

21. Xebitz (136)
22. Janlay (83)
23. Parramos Grande (75)
24. Farramos Chiquito (50)
25. Quejchip (125)
26. Bicalama (250)
27. Xepiun (83)
28. Bijolom (100)
29. Cotzol (80)
30. Sumalito (90)
31. Ixtupil (54)
32. Las Violetas (206)

As the refugees continue to arrive in large numbers, more villages are being planned. Although the military directs and controls this entire process, it relies on the civilian government to provide services and assistance to the villages. This assistance has been slow at best, and military officials are open about their disdain for and frustration over what they consider the ineptness of "the bureaucrats." Government agencies appear to be dragging their feet, and the only non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the Ixil region are Evangelical and Catholic relief missions. All civilian activities are



- 1 Acul
- 2 Tzalbal
- 3 Pulay
- 4 Río Azul
- 5 Ojo de Agua
- 6 San Felipe Chentla
- 7 Bichibalá
- 8 Juil
- 9 Xolcuay
- 10 Actzum'bal
- 11 Salquíl
- 12 Palob
- 13 Santa Abelina
- 14 Chichel
- 15 Asich
- 16 Xix
- 17 Iliom
- 18 Chel
- 19 Jua
- 20 Amachel
- 21 Xebitz
- 22 Janlay
- 23 Parramos Grande
- 24 Parramos Chiquito
- 25 Quejchip
- 26 Bicalamá
- 27 Xepiun
- 28 Bijotóm
- 29 Cotzol
- 30 Sumalito
- 31 Ixtupil
- 32 Las Violetas

closely watched and tightly controlled by local military authorities.

#### CIVILIAN INVOLVEMENT IN DEVELOPMENT POLE COMMUNITIES

During the latter part of 1987 -- corresponding with the concerted military offensive to bring out the refugees -- the Coordinadora Multisectoral de Apoyo a Pobladores Triangulo Ixil (Multisectoral Coordinator of Support to the People of the Ixil Triangle) was created. Officially, the lead agency was the Ministry of Communications and Public Works; the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Development, the National Reconstruction Committee (CRN), and CEARD made up the Executive Committee. The purpose of this coordinating system was to provide the "beans" to complement the "guns" being supplied by the military. Although it keeps out of sight, there is no doubt in anyone's mind that the army is firmly in charge of the entire effort.

As an example of this effort, in June 1988 the Ministry of Health, in consultation with CEARD, the CRN, and the Red Cross, arrived in the Ixil region with the Proyecto SOS Nebaj. A few NGOs working with relief and elementary health care have also been asked to participate. As explained in this presentation:

In the face of the return of the refugees and/or the "displaced" a certain amount of human congestion has occurred in the receiving centers, and it has become necessary to take joint measures and actions to rebuild the Ixil communities. Due to this joint participation we are acting in a planned manner, but because of the growing demand in this problematic we must take

emergency action in the health sector to initiate or continue with community projects in the best manner (Ministry of Health 1988).

The justification for this effort is stated:

The development of the Democratization Process is basically grounded in the structural incorporation of the marginated population (Ibid.).

Through the SOS Project, comprehensive public health assistance is to be carried to eight of the newest villages being formed by the military.

In similar fashion, most of the other government ministries and their dependent agencies are to assist the Development Pole villages with a four-phase program of services and development. After refugees receive an initial supplement of food, clothing, and cooking equipment at the reception center, together with instruction in community organization and what is termed "democratic education," they enter "Phase I." This phase serves to provide basic (although temporary) infrastructure, as well as to continue community organization and democratic education, and provide assistance for widows and orphans. "Phase II," termed "Accommodation" (Conformacion), consists of evaluating the soils, local resources, and water supply and quality, after which a plan is drawn up for the physical layout of the community.

"Phase III" sees construction of the village -- streets, potable water systems, houses (each with a lorena stove), and "basic social infrastructure" in the shape of a school, "Church-

Temple," community center, health post, and recreation areas. "Phase IV," called "Consolidation and Socio-Economic Development," attempts to move villagers into agricultural production, handicrafts, cooperativism, marketing, and natural resource management (through reforestation and other conservation measures). Twelve government agencies are slated to assist in this phase.

The Pole villages are being created at a rapid rate. The financial burden for work already completed is no doubt high, and will increase substantially if the military manages to carry out its ambitious plans. Just where all of this money originates -- from international donors, most certainly -- is unknown.

We visited Bicalama, one of the most recently established villages, with a group of doctors from CEARD, the Ministry of Health, and the Red Cross who planned to spend several days administering health care. The village, located on an open mountaintop approximately three hours from Salquil Grande along a steep path, commands a wide panoramic view of the surrounding heavily dissected countryside, with a clear view of the backlands still controlled by the guerrilla. As we came up the mountainside toward the village a battle between the army and the guerrilla was in progress in a wooded area across a deep valley. Occasional rockets exploded and reverberated across the open spaces and the air was filled with the incessant rattle of machine-gun fire.

A hand-painted sign at the entrance to the village told us

that it had been founded in October 1987. According to official count, 250 families live in Bicalama. All of them were captured in the mountains, passed through Nebaj, and brought here, where temporary houses of poles and thick grass were built. Soon the families will be moved down the slope of the hill to another site where the military is preparing a Model Village. The current village is girded by a semi-continuous trench, in which some 50 young soldiers are clustered around small, crater-like stations roofed with sheets of corrugated iron. They have been here since the founding of the village, sleeping in the stations and eating canned food. Most of the time they simply stand guard, protecting the villagers from the guerrilla. Occasionally they team up with Civil Patrol members from the community to sweep through the mountainous territory spread out before them and to keep an eye on villagers farming the adjacent slopes. Bicalama is located on what must be considered the battle front, a strategic hamlet on an ever-expanding arc that the military is pushing northward.

Armed skirmishes of the sort we witnessed across the slope from Bicalama have been common, almost daily, occurrences in the Ixil region over the last several months. We were told that the main plaza of Saiquil Grande, located a little more than one hour from Nebaj along a well-graded gravel road, had been occupied briefly by a guerrilla force the week before. Driving along this road toward Nebaj one evening, we were met by a seemingly endless stream of more than 500 armed Civil Patrol members from several

villages, who were returning from a four-day joint excursion through the mountains. Trucks carrying supplies are frequently hijacked along the Santa Cruz - Nebaj road; during our visit the last vehicle on a convoy of seven trucks bringing medicines along this route disappeared.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, the army is making a concerted push to connect the Ixil region with the Ixcan of the north, as far as Playa Grande, by means of a network of roads. An important part of this network is a road extending out from Nebaj to connect most of the Model Villages within the Ixil Triangle in a loop that includes Salquil, Bicalama, Chel, Amachel, and Uspantan (see map). Although construction appears to be well under way, we have no precise information on when the roads will be completed; at this stage, a rough cut has been made through Bicalama. The roads will enable the army to move much more rapidly into the conflict areas, where they can set up and maintain more of the Model Villages and thus exert more direct control over the region. Access to the hinterlands at the present time is extremely difficult. A soldier in Nebaj told us, for example, that they could reach Amachel -- one of the current "hot" areas almost due north -- in 30 minutes by helicopter, or nine days on foot.

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<sup>9</sup> The military notes an increase in the number of hijackings of trucks carrying food and medicine, and claims that this is evidence that the guerrilla is in desperate need of supplies.

## SUMMARY AND COMMENTS

(1) In a concerted push, the military is bringing the refugees by force into the Nebaj area and setting them up in Development Pole villages. It is all a plan to get rid of the guerrilla: taking the water away from the fish, and relocating the civilian population in strategic hamlets on an ever-expanding periphery. Army officials are very open and clear about the nature of their counter-insurgency campaign, with its combined strategy of security and development. One officer said that they were currently involved in the latest refinement of the "guns and beans" strategy launched in 1982 by Rios Montt.

The present program differs from Phase I in that the civilian population is not being shot at and killed. They are now being rounded up and, after they are in the bag, treated relatively well: they are given clothes, food, health care, protection from marauding guerrilla. The military wants to win the hearts and minds (while still using a fair measure of intimidation) of the refugees. At least that is what they want to do. In their view, the primary problem is that "the bureaucrats" from the civilian government are so pathetically inept that they are incapable of providing the "beans" side of the equation in an orderly, coordinated fashion.

(2) From a strictly military standpoint, it seems apparent that in the Ixil region the army is winning the battle. They have

succeeded in choking the mountainous outback off economically, cutting the flow of commerce, and thus creating severe hardship for both the remaining refugees and guerrilla. The reinforced, more systematic sweeps through the mountains have been successful, bringing in what could amount to several thousand people since October, when the offensive began. We have no figures on the number of refugees still living in the mountains, but as the army pushes in roads and continues to saturate the northern country with armed patrols, it seems likely that most of those left will be pulled out by the end of the year. At that point, the guerrilla will have a very difficult time holding on in the area.

(3) Without claiming any clear understanding of what the Indian population of the Ixil region thinks of their current situation, it seems apparent that they are sick of being tossed back and forth like rag dolls from one group to the other. Among the guerrilla the refugees have been living a semi-nomadic life punctuated by fear and uncertainty, with the military sweeping through on a regular basis. They have suffered in the mountains, and the guerrilla is further away from victory now than in the early 1980s. At the present time, the people are being forcibly pulled out of the mountains and placed in Development Pole villages, and obliged to put in long hours patrolling their territory with heavy rifles. Their lives are tightly controlled, there is no freedom of movement, and their poverty is more acute

now than before the Violence erupted in the mid-1970s. Plain and simple, none of the alternatives is attractive. Realistically, the only alternative which exists at the present time is the military's Development Pole program. Like it or not, they must adapt to it, at least in the short run.

(4) The civilian government agencies involved -- CEARD, the Ministry of Health, etc. -- are being dragged into this business, whether they want to be there or not. Although the army argues that the root cause is "la subversion," it is the army that has brought the people in and placed them in the Development Poles. Now the army expects the civilians to come in and take care of them. First, there is tremendous political pressure on the civilian agencies to carry out orders from the military -- which in this case means working in the Poles. Second, the refugees are definitely in tremendous need of assistance, on all fronts. They need food, health care, materials to rebuild their homes, water systems, etc. etc. etc.

It is a real dilemma. On the one hand, the reality is that the Poles exist, and they will continue in place for some time. And the people are in need of assistance. On the other hand, collaboration with the army in its "guns and beans" program places the civilian government agencies -- as well as any cooperating NGOs -- squarely in the middle of a counter-insurgency program. Representatives of the various agencies are acutely aware of this dilemma, and it has no easy answer.

(5) What is the future of the Development Pole strategy? Let us suppose that the military manages to bring all or most of the refugees out of the wilderness and set them up in Pole villages, and the guerrilla is routed from the region. The most likely scenario at this point is that the guerrilla will slip across the Mexican border, regroup, and begin to filter back into northern Quiche (and Huehuetenango) when conditions permit. This means that after the military has consolidated power in the region, it must continue its protective presence there. If the army pulls back its vigilance, the guerrilla will slip in to fill the void. Thus the Poles will demand a continued military presence, on and on and on...

(6) The Pole villages are functional only in security terms, and this is over the short term. They are not economically viable units, and they will not become so in their present form. First, while concentrated villages might be best for security purposes, they are less than optimal in an economic sense. The rural people of the region have always lived in dispersed households, spread across the landscape, rather than nucleated villages. This is not merely a "cultural" preference. It allowed them to have fruit trees and gardens about the central house complex, as well as land for raising animals, and their farms were close by, within easy distance. Under the present arrangement they are so jammed together that they cannot have fruit trees and gardens, it

is difficult to raise patio animals, and they must often walk 3 to 5 hours to their farms.

Second, everything going into the Ixil region has been relief rather than development assistance, and this situation is unlikely to change in the near future. If we define "development assistance" as something which promotes independence, group action, and self-sufficiency, then it will not be seen, or even hinted at, while the military maintains such complete control over everything. Commerce in the region will remain effectively dead as long as restrictions on movement stay in effect. And it will be extremely expensive to run what is for all practical purposes a long-term welfare program to support the population.

(7) The Ixil Indians are not, by any stretch of the imagination, the "beneficiaries" of the Development Pole program.

Concentrated in villages, with their movements closely watched and controlled, they are little more than the military's strategic front in its struggle against the leftist guerrilla. Neither the military nor the civilians have made any attempt to understand the socio-economic dynamics of the Ixil region; and no one has made the slightest attempt to bring the Indians into the planning process. In the present political context, those in charge consider such matters irrelevant.

In every sense, the Ixil Indians are people who have totally lost their rights as human beings.

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