

# American Crosshairs: Overview

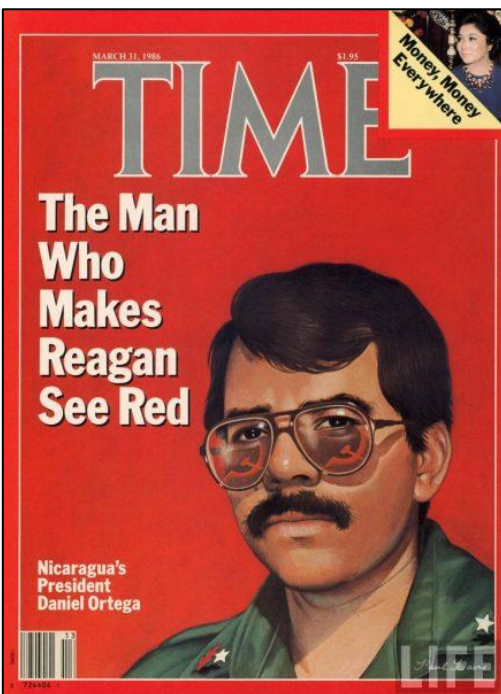
Central America sits at the crossroads of the Americas and in the crosshairs of rival global superpowers - a nexus of Cold War geopolitics, narcotrafficking, and neoliberal economics.

In this land of immense beauty and bountiful natural wealth, it's time to carve out your piece of the Central American Pie.



## The Setting

The *Central American Crisis* of the 1950s-1990s saw the rise of a diverse array of leftist factions aiming to break the US monopoly on power in the region by instituting a range of anti-US and anti-liberal political and economic reforms. After decades of armed struggle between leftist and rightist forces and the slow deterioration of order and government legitimacy, a series of military coups led to the rise of Military Junta governments. The Juntas were, by their own declaration, only temporary, with the goal of eventually passing the torch to a civilian government. In the meantime, there were roads to pave, foreign businesses to extort, and guerillas to defeat. These regimes also became pawns in the Cold War struggle between US interests and global capitalist forces and the Communist Bloc regionally dominated by Fidel Castro's Cuba. After a landslide electoral victory in 1980, the Regan Administration announced there was a new sheriff in town and launched a host of fervent anti-communist propaganda campaigns, covert initiatives, and lucrative economic and military aid programs.



But the often-dark relationship between the United States and the Central American nations is just one puzzle piece to consider when exploring these strange times and its even stranger bedfellows. The 1980s also witnessed the rise of cocaine trafficking, the popularization of the radical Catholic doctrine, *Liberation Theology*, the peak of the Latin American Debt Crisis(es), a diverse series of violent urban-rural conflicts, the resurgence of neoliberalism among elites, and the cresting of the romanticized leftist guerrilla resistance movements that began with the Cuban Revolution 25-years prior.

Join 15-55 other players in exploring the complex web of temporary alliances in this megagame of revolution in the face of global neoliberal economic and geopolitical pressures. In other words, while the revolution has triumphed, the economic, military, and political realities remain the same.

## Design Inspiration

The game design is heavily inspired by the Machiavellian political framework outlined in [The Dictator's Handbook](#) by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith which was nicely summarized by in the Youtube video, [Rules for Rulers](#), by C.P.G. Grey. It is recommended players watch the video in addition to reading the rules beforehand.

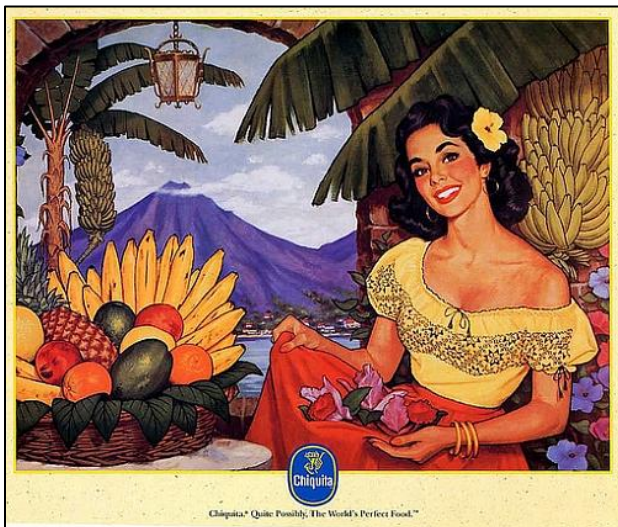
Additionally, the design borrows mechanics from the [Junta](#) board game and is thematically similar to the [Tropico](#) video game series published by [Kalypto Media](#), and to a lesser extent, the [Democracy](#) video game series published by [Positech Games](#).

Research literature to inform the historical background includes [Inevitable Revolutions](#) by Walter LaFeber and the excellently written, broad overview of Latin America, [Faces of Latin America](#) (4<sup>th</sup> edition) by Duncan Green and Sue Branford.

## What is a megagame?

Megagames combine the physical mechanics of board games with the fluid emergent gameplay of role-playing games with large player counts (generally 40-80 players). Players are encouraged to be creative but must act within the existing game mechanics and established setting. Megagames range in time length from two hours to entire weekends. A team of moderators coordinate the game, adjudicate rules, and make sure players have the best experience possible!

Two common examples of megagames are high school Model UN or the alien invasion megagame, [Watch the Skies!](#) For those who are unfamiliar, we highly recommend watching the [Shut Up & Sit Down playthrough of Watch the Skies!](#) Seriously. Watch it.



Many veteran gamers quickly observe that megagames aren't particularly different from existing LARPs (Live Action Role-Playing), large boardgame events, escape room events, simulations, or other previous events they've experienced. And they're right!

## Game Structure

The turn lengths will be roughly 35 minutes with most players having once-per-turn meetings or other responsibilities to attend to which will be outlined in their rules briefing. The timing of these meetings and responsibilities will be staggered to encourage intermingling of different players.

## American Crosshairs: Overview

The game revolves around newly established Military Junta governments – with players representing Ministers in the Junta governments and others representing foreign entities trying to influence the internal development of Central America by influencing which policies the Junta Ministers enact and which constituencies within the country are empowered.

**Constituencies** are agglomerations of diverse groups of people who have influence within the country and similar interests. Constituencies will not be represented by players. The twelve constituencies represented are:

Foreign Extractors	Middle Class Urbanites	Rebellious Paramilitaries/Guerillas	The Nationalist Colonels	Catholic Bishops	Students & Professors
Neoliberal Bankers	Rural Famers	Conservative Oligarchs	Indigenous Communities	Organized Labor	Women Activists



Constituencies have a “strength” value which represents the group’s influence in the country’s affairs as well as their engagement within the government. Junta Ministers will vote to pass policies which will affect the strength of constituencies, but a constituency’s strength can also be influenced by the actions of foreign entities. Additionally, every turn, Junta Ministers will meet to budget funds which will also affect the wellbeing of constituencies.

Be warned, after decades of violence and corruption, there is no expectation among Junta Ministers to be honest, good-faith negotiators when dealing with foreigners or each other. Junta Ministers have their own agenda(s) to pursue, including padding their family’s Swiss Bank Account in case of a rainy day.

## Player Roles

Player role signups will be available via google doc beforehand. Consult with lead organizer if you’d like to be on the same “team” with other player(s). The game structure unfortunately doesn’t lend itself to permeant alliances, but we’ll do our best to ensure that players looking to be friendly to each other are assigned roles that have at least some overlapping goals or plenty of interaction.

Role Category	# of roles	Description
<b>Junta Ministers</b>	5-24	4-6 Ministers per nation will form the Junta governments ruling over fictionalized Central American nations. Importantly these ministers, while ruling the country, are not on “the same team” in game mechanic terms.
<b>International “Intelligence” Agencies</b>	3-9	These players will represent the intelligence agencies of foreign powers which have a general disregard for national sovereignty of Central American nations. Their exact roles are classified from the other players as well as from each other.

## American Crosshairs: Overview

<b>Foreign Ambassadors</b>	2-4	These diplomats pressure Central American governments to enact policies beneficial to their home countries and have moderate authority to negotiate and endorse international agreements.
<b>International Corporations</b>	1-4	These are regional representatives of major international conglomerates looking to expand operations and protect their current investments from nationalization.
<b>NGOs</b>	0-4	Non-Government Organizations attempt to influence foreign and domestic internal policies and prefer the carrot to the stick to accomplish their (usually) altruistic objectives.
<b>Movement Leaders</b>	0-4	These roles have only minor game mechanics but provide ample role-playing and narrative potential which will be <i>gamified</i> <sup>1</sup> , as such they are recommended for megagame veterans or impassioned role-players.
<b>Media</b>	0-3	The News by default will be handled by the game moderators but media players often have the most fun in megagames. If any players are interested in being a member of the media, let the lead game organizer know. These roles are beginner friendly and generally less stressful.
<b>Reps. of Other Latin Nations</b>	0-12	Two or three players will work to further the national goals of their nations at home and abroad. Compared to the Central American Nations dominated by juntas, these Latin nations have no in-built mechanic to deliberate internal policy and are more cohesive by design. These roles will only be utilized at high player counts.

## Familial and Institutional Entities

Players do not represent individuals but instead entire political blocs or organizations who share common goals and governing philosophies. In the case of Junta Ministers, they can be considered as political parties, military cliques, business cadres, activist institutions, or familial dynasties. Other players may represent entire NGOs or foreign diplomatic services. This means that if a specific player is killed or otherwise incapacitated in-game, a different member of that political faction or entity will takeover (who is represented by the same player). Assassinations only have the effect of temporarily disrupting the activities of other players and should be considered as of limited use (although not entirely useless).



Tangentially, as a word of warning to bold players, assassination schemes and other conspiracies are unlikely to stay secret for long.

---

<sup>1</sup> The narrative or freeform initiatives undertaken by these players will have effect on the game mechanics and game currencies that will be adjudicated by the game moderators.

## Pre-Game Prep

After purchasing a ticket or otherwise RSVP'ing, players should sign up for a player role on [this google spreadsheet](#), which also contain links to the **rules briefing** for all roles. Players should read their rules briefing, and if-desired, procure an appropriate and culturally respectful outfit for the event (Tropical shirts and tinted shades are fine, sombreros and ponchos very likely aren't). A specific **role briefing** (which will outline player objectives) will be given to players at the beginning of the game but can be sent to players ahead of time upon request (except for intelligence agents). Don't hesitate to reach out to the lead organizer if there are any concerns or confusions about player roles, game rules, or anything else!

Please also watch the YouTube video, [Rules for Rulers](#), by C.P.G. Grey, which informs the game's design – specifically the game mechanics of the Junta Ministers and their non-player-represented constituencies. Last, please read [A Note on the Subject Matter and Expected Player Conduct](#) at the end of this document.

If you don't get around to reading the rules – don't worry, it will all be covered at the beginning of the game and during the first couple turns.

If applicable, be sure to pack food and water bottle. Since this game is a relatively short megagame, there will not likely be a lunch break.



## The Truth and the Media

The *Junta Moderator* of each country will be the ultimate arbiter on what's going on in their country. Other moderators will communicate with the Junta Moderators to make sure they're up to date. Large, multi-national news-worthy events will be announced over the microphone.



Importantly, moderators are under no requirement to tell players the whole truth but will inform them of what the entity they represent (e.g. the CIA, an NGO, a head of a congregation) would know in a given situation. *Junta Moderators* should be unhesitantly tapped for information by players and will answer all queries for information whenever they are not busy. Additionally, there may be media players who will gather information on their own and publish that information via diverse methods.

## A Note on the Subject Matter and Expected Player Conduct

This game takes place during a dark period of history characterized by the violence, genocide, and brutally violent political repression practiced by government and, to a much lesser extent, anti-government forces<sup>2</sup>. Out

---

<sup>2</sup> While guerilla and state forces both practiced terrorism and extrajudicial killings, the violence perpetrated by government forces was much more common and extreme by all conventional metrics. [A 1999 report by the UN-sponsored Historical Clarification Commission \(CEH\)](#) states that the US-backed Guatemalan government was responsible for 93 percent of the human rights violations committed during the Guatemalan Civil War, the guerrillas for 3 percent. 83 percent of the victims were Maya.

## American Crosshairs: Overview

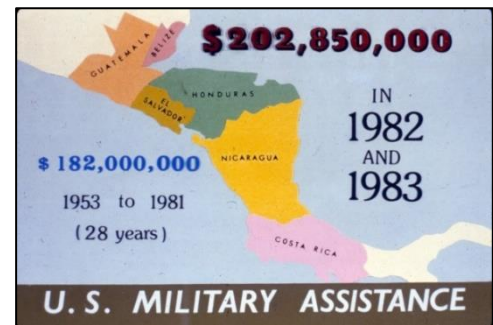
of respect for the victims of such atrocities, many of whom are still alive, we ask players to be self-conscious of their behavior and avoid reveling in the in-game violence.

This is admittedly a strange request for a game which asks players to take-on the role of Ministers in a Military Dictatorship or members of intelligence agencies which trained Death Squads. However, it's simply not the goal of the game design to reenact the brutal politically-motivated, ethnically-motivated, and religiously-motivated violence of the Junta regimes which emerged throughout Latin America in the 70s and 80s – but instead to explore (1) the complex web of global and local alliances of interest groups within the countries of Central America and (2) explore global (and internal) pressures faced by the newly established Junta governments who came to power through revolution and coups.

Violence and political activity will be mostly handled at the strategic level, which should deter players from tactically committing violent atrocities. Moderators will guide players when appropriate. While violence will be handled at the strategic level and not further detailed, players should be aware that pursuing violent strategies or deploying military forces may tacitly mean the armed forces are committing atrocities in order to accomplish their assigned objectives, depending on the broader context.

NGO, Ambassador, Media, and certain Movement Leader roles are less likely to be involved in violent repression. These roles are recommended for those who are made uncomfortable by the idea of roleplaying fictional but still violent and despicable megalomaniacs or worse.

There will be a brief history overview before and after the game to better ground the players in the broader historical context of the *Central American Crisis* and to inform the players as to the actual history. Please be respectful during these brief presentations.



## Thanks

The game was designed by Peter Nixon of Minnesota Megagames. Follow Minnesota Megagames on Facebook to learn about future events.

While the designer, Peter, is passionate about Latin American, and more specifically Central American, history and culture, he is **not** an expert. If there are important historical contexts or cultural factors which you think should be reflected in the game, or if you think the design could be tweaked to handle sensitive or cultural topics better, please reach out. Thanks to everyone who provided feedback as to the design and the historical background.

Thanks to all the moderators who make these games possible. Y'all rock – plain and simple.

And thanks to everyone who played! I hope you had a good time and learned a little bit more about the history and time period of Central America. Please leave your feedback in the provided player feedback forms.

