

Running Head: EL SALVADOR (1980-1992)

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El Salvador 1980s

United States involvement in El Salvador dates back to the 1970s during the Carter Administration, and was adopted by the Reagan Administration in the 1980s. The Reagan Administration saw El Salvador as an easy way for the Soviet Union to spread communism in Latin American countries. If the Soviet Union's influence was not contained and it would spread to other Central American countries, it would cause a security concern for the U.S. National Security in the United States.

The Reagan Administration decided to fight communism starting in El Salvador. A decision was made to halt the spread of Marxism in El Salvador. When Ambassador Deane Hinton was sent to El Salvador his mission was to ensure that communist guerillas were unable to take over the country. This mission was handed to Ambassador Hinton by the U.S. government, National Security and to some extent by the President

Riding on the heels of the Vietnam War, that was long, drawn out, and highly opposed, the Reagan Administration was given the tough job of addressing the people of the U.S. on the communist insurgency in El Salvador and the threat that it posed against the U.S. National Interest. Needing to increase the number of military advisors in the country. The White House agreed to provide the financial aid and the military personnel that was required.

The United States method in assisting the Salvadorian government to defeat insurgency will deviate from past attempts in that the U.S. will not commit ground troops like the Vietnam War. The Reagan Administration addressed the issue of sending military advisors to El Salvador on March 3, 1981. A compromise between the Reagan Administration and Congress concluded, and set a limit to the number of U.S. Advisors to 55. This first contingent to deploy consisted of five areas; they were MilGroup Staff at the U.S. Embassy, Mobile Training Teams, Naval

Training Team, Helicopter, and maintenance personnel, small unit-training teams, and Special Forces teams with the main mission of training the El Salvadorian Armed Forces (ESAF) in counterinsurgency operations. The mission of the American military advisors was to provide and concentrate on training Salvadorian units, provide material and equipment, and offer strategic advice and intelligence support. Since the support of the population is very important in defeating counterinsurgency, a focus of military activities also must support economic, political, and psychological ones intended to augment the authority of the government. “A counterinsurgency’s costs include money and casualties. The best way to keep these costs down was to reduce the number of deployed troops. Fewer troops cost less to deploy and thus limiting the number of Soldiers put in harms way”(Claessen, May-June 2007). In El Salvador, the number of troops committed was extremely low, as it was limited by statute to 55 U.S. advisors. “The 55-man limit also meant that many counterinsurgency operations, such as training the thousands of Salvadorian soldiers, would take place outside El Salvador, putting the activities out of insurgents reach”(Claeseen, May-June 2007). Because the U.S. trainers of those soldiers never deployed to El Salvador, they were never the targets of insurgency or the active minorities of the United States. The limit also forced the Salvadorian army to carry out the mission on the ground after the Mobile Training Teams train them. In preparing the El Salvador Armed Forces (ESAF) to protect their government and the people from future insurgency, needed steps were required. The first step for the United States military group was to reshape the El Salvadorian military to a professional force that would not only respect the human rights of the El Salvadorian people but also earn the respect needed to occupy the country. Next, was to increase the El Salvadorian force to be able to defeat the Faribundo Marti National Liberation (FMNL), and be competent on the battlefield. American military advisors wrote a National Campaign Plan

to assist the El Salvadorian Armed Forces. This National Campaign was design to shift the Salvadorian army to win the hearts and minds of the people, not chase the FMNL. This plan helped the El Salvadorian Armed Forces and Salvadorian Government reduce the support the Faribundo Marti National Liberation Front received from the population. The tide began to turn with the increased American aid. After the failure of the Faribundo Marti National Liberation Front offensive attack in 1981, it felt the power from the newly trained El Salvadorian Armed Forces. Fighting continued to take place between the years 1982-1985. By late 1985, the weak Salvadorian army no longer existed. The military was better equipped, trained, and toughened from years of fighting. They began to defeat the Faribundo Marti National Liberation Front, which no longer controlled the battlefield. This success was won in part by the U.S advisors who worked with the ESAF military and the abundance of U.S military support. With the government in no great threat and the El Salvador Armed forces and Faribundo Marti National Liberation Front worn down from 12 years of fighting, the Salvadorian government and Faribundo Marti National Liberation Front signed a United Peace Agreement that would officially end the war between the two warring countries. This agreement contributed to the cause with the aide of the U.S. military, more importantly, the 55-American military advisors.

By not sending in a large force of combat troops, the 55-military advisors were able to meet their goals against insurgent warfare. The advisors that were sent to defeat insurgency needed to be of the highest quality. The mission at hand was to make the Salvadorian government stable, able to hold its first free election, and build an army able to support the stability of its government. The human rights of the people were respected by the El Salvador Armed Forces, and all this was accomplished with no commitment of combat troops. American military advisors had rose to 150 towards the end of the war in 1992, but no Soldiers were

engaged in any combat fighting. The small contingent also ensured that there was no media attention. Credit this to the small contingent with no combatant troops available on the ground to provide security for the media. This kept the focus of the American people away from the mission in El Salvador, a task that was never accomplished in past U.S. involvements. While some may criticize the United States for becoming involved in El Salvador, they do not see the positive lasting impact that the aide and training they provided had on the country. Currently El Salvador has an inclusive democracy. The government is freely elected and answers to the collective will of the citizens. The effort put forward by the U.S. to train and stabilize not only the ESAF, but the El Salvadorian government must be continued or the work of the U.S. and its military will have been for nothing and the state of El Salvador will decline.

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