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EL SALVADOR

PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS ASSESSMENT

FEBRUARY 4, 1988

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This Technical Report was prepared under the provisions of Amendment #1 to Task Order 723 and Task Order 823, Low Intensity Conflict Cell Support. These Task Orders are in accordance with the provisions of Contract No. DABT60-86-C-1360. The report was prepared by Max G. Manwaring and Courtney Frisk, both of the BDM Management Services Company (BDMMS), for the Small Wars Operational Requirements Division, J-5, USSOUTHCOM, Republic of Panama. The sources for the assessment were current available unclassified reports and literature, taped interviews conducted by Dr. Manwaring in El Salvador and in-country data collected during visits with personnel from the MILGROU, Brigade level staffs, the El Salvadoran general staff, and the U.S. Embassy. All transcriptions and translations were accomplished by Allison E. Letzer. The views represented in the report are those of the authors and do not represent the official views of the Department of Defense or the Department of State.

PREFACE

The insurgent war in El Salvador is a prime example of the most common threat to democratic interests in the modern world--that of low intensity/high probability conflict. One critical aspect of that war, for both sides, is its psychological dimension where the legitimacy of the opposing sides is brought under direct attack.

Dr. Max Manwaring and Mr. Court Prisk of BDM Management Services Corporation in support of USSOUTHCOM have done a superb job in preparing this assessment of psychological operations (PSYOP) in El Salvador. Their analysis highlights the critical role that PSYOP plays in this kind of conflict. In this paper the authors weave the words of various participants in PSYOP into an articulate narrative which describes many lessons learned in this war.

Having recently conducted a separate evaluation of the El Salvadoran Military and associated U.S. support, I must say that although PSYOP in El Salvador has come a long way since it began in 1982, the requirement for significant improvement still exists. Both the Salvadorans and the North Americans supporting them are working toward this end. Their single greatest accomplishment is that they have built a relatively sophisticated and effective PSYOP system in the C-V of the Joint General Staff. Their greatest weakness is that the system functions sporadically when it attempts to link the national with the operational level.

I believe that reading this brief assessment will be time well spent. The sincerity of the participants' own words impels greater attention to this important aspect of the war for men's minds. Hopefully this study will lead to both improved PSYOP doctrine as well as a better application of current doctrine in meeting the challenges posed by these low intensity/high probability conflicts.



MARC A. CISNEROS
Brigadier General, USA
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SALVADOR PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS ASSESSMENT

PURPOSE

The primary purpose of this assessment is to outline the necessary components for success in the War of Information and the actual aspects of Psychological Operations (PSYOP) within the context of the struggle in El Salvador. It is objective oriented and threat based, and focuses on the strategic and operational levels of concern. It stresses the general climate of feeling -- on the part of key North American and Salvadoran (government and insurgent) players -- that was found during the period from October 1986 to March 1988. In that sense, it is a snapshot of the PSYOP situation in El Salvador during that time. (SPEC)

THREAT AND OBJECTIVES

The fundamental questions posed by the requirements of war -- "What is the mission?" "How are we going to accomplish it?" "Who is going to command and control it?" -- must be supplemented by two preparatory queries. They are -- "What is/are the threat/threats?" And, "What are my government's objectives in this conflict?" Instead of reacting ad hoc to each separate crisis as it arises in any given situation, senior leaders and staffers can begin to see the problem as a whole and develop the long-term measures necessary for success.

The Threat. In an insurgency such as that in El Salvador there is the overriding question of the moral right of a governing regime to exist. The root causes of insurgency are long-standing political, economic, and social injustice. Until it is perceived that these issues are being dealt with fairly and effectively, the threat of overthrowing a government is real. Thus, the "war for the right to govern" is fundamental in this type of "small war". This is an indirect approach to bringing down a regime, but it is the essential nature of the threat from an insurgency -- and, it is primarily political and psychological.* Here the primary center of gravity is the perception of disenfranchisement, poverty, and lack of upward mobility. A counterinsurgency campaign that fails to understand this and responds only to "enemy" military forces is bound to face seemingly insurmountable problems.

*Interview with Dr. Guillermo M. Ungo, President of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR), 1981 to date. It was conducted in Panama City, RP, 11 December 1987 by Max G. Manwaring.

Objectives. The national security strategy of the United States has evolved over the past several years from a singular emphasis on "human rights" to a broader, more comprehensive approach. As it relates to Latin America, it stresses three strategic objectives -- democracy, economic development, and security.* In short, the presumed end-state of current United States security strategy calls for morally legitimate governments in the Western Hemisphere. In turn, this strategy has been subsumed in the national security objectives of the Duarte administration in El Salvador.** But, victory in the "war for moral legitimacy" depends to some degree on the popular commitment (i.e., NATIONAL WILL) to employ the resources necessary to attain national security objectives.*** Thus, the effectiveness of efforts to secure these objectives would depend to some extent on the level and adequacy of related informational support; e.g., PSYOP at the strategic and operational levels as well as the tactical.

EL SALVADOR IN THE CONTEXT OF THREAT AND OBJECTIVES

The instrument of national power that directly affects the national will is Psychological Operations. PSYOP influence the national will of friendly, neutral, and hostile forces and societies. They do so by influencing the thoughts and actions of targeted groups so that those groups choose to support, rather than oppose, national policies and objectives. Additionally, at any level, PSYOP may be conducted to facilitate military operations, to reduce interference by noncombatants, and to obtain the cooperation of the civilian populace. As such PSYOP seeks to support the achievement of the political, economic, and social, as well as military objectives of governments.**** And, logically, they are necessary to any successful counterinsurgency effort.

*NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY OF THE UNITED STATES, (The White House, January 1988), pp. 3-4; and, 25-26.

**Interview with President José Napoleón Duarte, President of the Republic of El Salvador, 1985 to date. It was conducted in San Salvador, El Salvador, 20 November 1987 by Max G. Manwaring.

***FM 33-1, PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS, (Washington, DC: HQ, DA, July 1987), p. 1-1.

**** Ibid., pp. 1-1 to 1-4.

PSYOP at the Strategic Level. While recognized as important in conventional warfare, the informational element of insurgency war gains a special significance. Its purpose in this type of conflict goes beyond maintaining esprit and producing propaganda. In insurgent warfare it becomes the means which stresses and assists in developing a partnership among the government, the armed forces, and the people in building something worth defending. In these terms, both psychological operations and public diplomacy must endeavor to gain support for the system from a largely uncommitted or only marginally supportive civil population, and to reinforce the loyalty and support of friendly international forces. Thus, strategic psychological operations are conducted to advance broad or long-term objectives designed to create a favorable psychological environment for military operations. The target audience would normally be local, regional, and global in nature.* **

In El Salvador, the entities actively engaged in the conduct of these efforts include the President of the Republic, himself; a small civilian organization working out of the Casa Presidencial; the ministry of Culture and Communications; the Armed Forces Press Committee (COPREFA); and, the C-V staff of the Estado Mayor (Joint General Staff).

* Ibid., pp. 1-4.

** The statements made below which deal with the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of PSYOP effort are based on taped interviews with several players in the Salvadoran conflict. These interviews took place over the period from October 1986 through March 1988, and include but are not limited to: President José Napoleón Duarte, General Adolfo Blandón, Colonel C. R. López Nuila, Colonel Oscar Campos Anaya, Colonel Sigifredo Ochoa, and Colonel Orlando Zepeda. "North Americans" include: Ambassador Edwin G. Corr, Major General James R. Taylor, Colonel John C. Ellerson, Colonel James J. Steele, Colonel John D. Waghelstein, Major Henry Black, and Major H. T. Anders. We also interviewed Dr. Guillermo M. Ungo, and former Comandantes Miguel Castellanos and "Ernesto". A C-V Spokesperson and a C-V Staff Assistance person are also included. Transcripts of these interviews may be found in SCJ5 (SWORD) and the Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, PA. We use this method of "footnoting" as a means of protecting specific individuals who probably would not have been as candid as they were if they had known they would be quoted directly.

For his part, President Duarte has conducted various tours of the United States and Western Europe. He has also involved himself and his close family and friends in an effort to influence the heads of other Latin American states (e.g., President Sanguinetti of Uruguay) through a personal public diplomacy campaign. Finally, Mr. Duarte has written a book entitled: Duarte: My Story, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons), 1986.

Likewise there is a concerted effort by the civil organization in the Presidential Residence to support the President in his activities. This support has been designed to modify the opinions, emotions, attitudes, and ultimately the behavior of national and international target audiences in favor of national objectives. Judging by the increase of outside support for the Salvadoran government and the subsequent decrease in support for the insurgents from Western European, Latin American, and "North American" sources, these efforts have been successful. There are, however, no measures of effectiveness being applied to validate that judgment; and, no institutional apparatus to evaluate, to capitalize, or to ensure continual success at this level when administrations change.

At the same time, we have no evidence that there has been a nationally coordinated institutional effort, or that the Ministry of Culture or COPREFA activities focus on anything but their own institutional agendas. Reportedly, these entities are reluctant to move from Public Affairs tasks to PSYOP. Lastly, the C-V's charter is such that he tends to go beyond specifically military concerns. As a result, the C-V is somewhat constrained from dealing with broad, long-term, national objectives outside the confines of El Salvador, and to some extent the military itself.

From the evidence available the conclusions are that at the strategic level PSYOP is personality dependent and consists of the individual, ad hoc, piecemeal, and uncoordinated efforts of four or five major players. Some of the players seem to think that PSYOP is a strictly military operational concern, and others seem to think that the military must stay within certain well-defined parameters. Clearly, the idea of partnership in the struggle for national survival and the role of PSYOP in it is not well understood. Moreover, we see little evidence which indicates that 1) there is adequate analysis being conducted to determine what is needed; 2) there is any effective pre-testing of ideas or products to determine appropriateness for targeted audiences; and, 3) there is any post-testing of results to determine the degree or level of success. What we do see tends to be reactive rather than pro-active. As an example, President Duarte's trips to the United States and to Western Europe were designed to counter the adverse propaganda of the FDR/FMLN and its international supporting organizations. Finally, we see little or no follow-through, a lack of long-term programs; and, no central coordinating organization with a charter to generate a synergistic effect in supporting the national strategy.

In El Salvador, the informational war at the strategic level -- the effort to create the WILL to commit global as well as national resources necessary to win the war against the insurgents -- is not yet institutionalized.

The following excerpts from either published material or recorded interviews provide a small sample of individual government and insurgent views regarding the problems of organization and coordination of the PSYOP effort, and understanding PSYOP as a major force multiplier in the struggle to maintain or to remove a given regime.

President Duarte's comments are instructive as they relate to the lack of a central organization designed to deal with strategic level PSYOP. They are made in the context of what he considered the "lowest point for the Junta government".

LOWEST POINT FOR THE JUNTA GOVERNMENT

President José Napoleón Duarte*

"Overall, we were being crushed under the avalanche of international press coverage. We had been totally unprepared for it. If there had been some structure to handle the press, some capacity to investigate charges and demonstrate what was true or false, we might have done better. Mixed together were lies and truths, omissions and exaggerations. The government became isolated. Other countries withdrew their ambassadors and closed down their embassies. The lowest point for the Junta government came in August, 1981 when France and Mexico gave diplomatic recognition to the FDR-FMLN as a representative political force."

Next, a close military associate of President Duarte, Colonel López Nuila, argues that "soldiers always think that military actions are most important and that 90% of the effort should be ours. Well, that's wrong. There is a need to "understand that this type of war is fought on diverse fronts".

* José Napoleón Duarte, Duarte: My Story, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), 1986. (President of El Salvador, 1984 to Present.

WE MUST UNDERSTAND THAT THIS TYPE OF
WAR IS FOUGHT ON DIVERSE FRONTS

Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila*

"We must realize that this type of insurrection must be fought on diverse fronts. Our biggest mistake as military men, is to assume that there is a quick and rapid solution to this war, and that all we need to do is change a few tactics here and there. But this is simply not the case. This type war is so new and it's so politically inclined that its entire framework is very different. We must take political actions in order to consolidate a political front among the people. We have been able to accomplish this by focusing on democratic values and human rights.

In dealing with the economic aspects of this war our goal is to provide the people with the essential fundamental ingredients to survive. When you can control the stomachs, the hearts and minds will follow. With respect to the diplomatic aspects of the war, in order to maintain the support of the entire world, it is fundamental that we manifest our activities in this country to be legitimate and our enemy's activities as illegitimate. Not to say that we are performing superbly. We still have a long way to go for that, but it hasn't been because of any lack of will or knowledge on our part.

There is a definite need for propaganda techniques, internally and externally. People must know what is really going on, not only with respect to the activities of the government and armed forces but also what the enemy's real intentions and motivations are. That is fundamental. Of course when I speak of propaganda I'm referring to the

* Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, Vice-Minister of Public Security for El Salvador, 1984 to date, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 17 December 1986, 29 June 1987, and 23 September 1987.

psychological aspects of it. It is fundamental to influence an individual psychologically; thus, a psychological war. First, it is necessary to implant doubts in people's minds and then implant certain principles and concepts in them.

We've talked about the political and economic war. When making reference to a social war we must consider first that, regardless of the existence of moderately rich towns, there are always some sections that are traditionally marginal. This situation usually occurs in Third World countries where there are cases of extreme poverty. This is the situation in El Salvador. Unfortunately, in the past the more powerful economic sections of this country did not recognize it and were only conscious about benefiting personally. They never considered sharing their wealth with those who needed it the most. We must definitely focus on the social aspects of this war. The state must take responsibility for offering a good education and public schools should be as good as private schools. They should also concentrate on providing good medical attention and again, public hospitals should be as good as private ones. In order to keep people happy, there must be good communication services as well as public services and transportation services. In sum, the people should be provided with ideal living conditions.

We, the military, are doing the best we can to provide all of these services. Certainly we are the ones at the front and risking our lives, but we could not manage without the other factors of this war I've already mentioned. If we didn't have a political project we would have lost the war. If we didn't have at this moment an economic project to help and improve the living conditions of the needy, we could lose this war. If we had maintained ourselves in a state of isolationism and not reestablished international relations with other nations, with international organizations and private organizations, we would be in a very difficult situation. If we had not alerted our people about the current situation in Nicaragua -- the fact that there is a Marxist political project in that country and El Salvador is returning to a stable democratic

country -- we would also be in trouble. Then, we've had to emphasize on our people that there are two types of revolutions -- a Marxist revolution -- and a democratic revolution. Let's wait and see which wins. Our countries are both the same. The Nicaraguans are the same as the Salvadorans. We eat the same, drink the same, think the same way, speak the same way. Then we have the opportunity to demonstrate to the world that where there's a will there's a way and where there is a true conviction to winning we can reestablish true democracies. All of these factors are equally as important.

We as soldiers always think that military actions are most important and that 90% of the effort should be ours. Well, that's wrong. The effort must be equal. If you take 100 and divide it by 6, the result is the total military effort that must be made. The less military effort is made, the less casualties, destruction, violence and danger there is. That is fundamental."

On the other hand, the insurgents show a sophisticated understanding of PSYOP. In this connection, a captured document attributed to Joaquin Villalobos eloquently expresses the role of propaganda (i.e., PSYOP) in revolutionary strategy. Explicit throughout the document is the holistic nature of Marxist-Leninist strategy: that to mobilize is to organize, to organize is to propagandize. In its fullest sense, this document should be seen as a device to mobilize the masses and to undermine the legitimacy of the government. Also, this document should be seen as something of a model for understanding the PSYOP instrument in "revolutionary" war.

GUERRILLA PROPAGANDA AS PART OF THE EQUATION

CAPTURED FMLN DOCUMENT*

"The prospects of our struggle to strengthen the organization and its revolutionary consciousness depend upon the political power of the Farabundo Martí

* From "Concerning Propaganda: Our Line of Propaganda," (Document Presented by the Popular Revolutionary Army at the meeting of the Command of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, July 1984), in The Comandantes Speak: The Military Strategy of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, translated and edited by Gabriel and Judith F. Marcella, Department of National Security and Strategy, U.S. Army War College, March 1987, pp. 3-8.

National Liberation Front. Equally, the creation of favorable conditions to counter and defeat North American military intervention are intimately related with the level of politicization of the popular sectors and their integration into the revolutionary movement

The achievement of these objectives, in addition to the execution of the organizational tasks, [is] an important part of the effort to convince the masses of their immediate work and of their great strategic objectives.

In other words, the strategic task of organizing the masses implies at the same time propagandizing them. Both are basic tasks of the revolutionary militant. We can state that he who does not know how to make propaganda does not know how to organize. The foregoing is meaningful from the perspective that the activist or cadre who does not concern himself with making use of the technique of communicating clearly and simply to the masses the causes of the revolutionary struggle and its great objectives, and with reaching their conscience, motivating them and in this way adding human force to the process, is simply limiting and wasting his energies.

Propaganda in its various forms multiplies the effects of concrete organizational work. Graphic or written propaganda offers the advantage that the ideas last for a long time, and can reach everywhere, including the enemy. In any case the correct combination of propaganda with direct organizational efforts by each activist will multiply the concrete political results.

Our work or propaganda should be clear about which concrete elements should be the focus of our political messages. These should indicate clearly the concrete tasks of the masses and the expression of their principal aspirations, economic as well as political, short as well as long term.

The central aspects of our propaganda are:

- a. Propaganda to awaken class consciousness.

- b. The great aspirations of the people: the greatest program.
- c. Concrete political tasks.
- d. The struggle for immediate justice and reforms.
- e. The development of the war.
- f. Propaganda against the enemy army

This aspect plans to demonstrate to the masses that the origin of the current political and military confrontation in our country lies in the existence of two groups with different and irreconcilable class interests. On the one hand are the imperialist North Americans and the millionaire oligarchs - the high expression of the dominant class, combined with their followers and defenders, - and on the other are the workers (laborers and peasants) and the people in general.

We seek to awaken the masses' consciousness about their situation in the social structure and to motivate them to join the group that corresponds to them: the Revolutionary Movement. Class propaganda has great power, it has an enormous influence on the points of view it originates, since it is based on the objective reality of the country.

All the enemy plans that are based on superficial and weak reasoning are disarmed; for example, the foreign origin of the war and the FMLN, the defense of democracy by the Army, etc.

The graphic use of the terms 'rich' and 'poor' or 'the Army of the rich' and 'the Army of the poor' makes our ideas understandable and awakens sympathy among the masses who have not had direct contact with our forces.

The same result is generated by pointing out the exploitation of the workers - along with its consequences of misery and humiliation, as the fundamental cause of the differences between the rich and the poor.

To support these assertions we must use concrete data and statistics which prove precisely the validity of our class arguments and indicate the abysmal contrast of the conditions of life (health, education,

housing, family income, wealth, etc.) between the people and the oligarchs, and the landowners.

Class propaganda has an important formation effect upon the population, as well as upon our internal structures which also hear it and have to diffuse it. It arouses such clarity and motivation that it provokes radicalism, class hatred, willingness to fight and spirit of sacrifice.

Similarly, propaganda has the power to affect the Army troops, who are doubly exploited and oppressed. It can awaken their conscience, weaken their morale and break up the ideological work of the enemy, which is based on false and abstract arguments. With the increase of our class focus in the propaganda against the enemy, Monterrosa has made public defensive declarations that state that the Armed Forces do not defend privileged minorities, reflecting the explanation that he must give to the troops to keep them fighting.

From this focus on classes arises the opposition from the middle sectors or those who have expectations from the 'promises' made by the regime [the government]. These advances are the result of the struggles of the Revolutionary Movement - the small apparent social and economic achievements of some sectors are the outcome of the revolutionary efforts sustained in a profound and radical way. The policies of the regime were implemented to counter these efforts and not to carry them forward. As long as the struggle of the people for justice did not come close to taking power, these banners [political symbols] remained forgotten, or better stated, condemned.

Class propaganda as consciousness raising should have an important place in our work. It is the key which will open the door for us to win over the masses. However, we must be careful not to fall into blind radicalism, into a political vision which denies the role of other political forces and social sectors in the struggle, and denies their participation in the revolutionary political program.

Political objectives constantly appear in different ways in the struggles of the people through the decades and generations. These objectives have become permanent aspirations which are present in the conscience of the masses, especially among those who are to some degree politicized and who represent an important portion.

Our revolutionary war is sustained by historical claims for justice which possess an extraordinary attraction and following. We must multiply this force by massive diffusion of propaganda. They are all contained in our great program (document of the FMLN, program of broad participation or document of the society which we will construct from the revolutionary school) whose contents we must propagandize massively and each one of its points must be fully explained.

At the same time, to simplify almost to the level of slogans, we must tell the masses that the central objectives of the struggle of the FMLN are 'the conquest of a popular democracy' (as a synthesis of the political transformations), the realization of the great economic changes, a true Agrarian Reform, for a country without oligarchs, for an army as defenders of the revolutionary conquests and national independence.

Principal aspects of the program have more direct ties with the conditions of life of various sectors of the population. This allows us to propagandize some of the concrete points which comprise these principal aspects and which have an important value and general sense of justice for the masses.

For example, the economic and social transformations imply resolving the grave problems of education, housing, health, identifying the revolutionary struggle with the resolution of those problems, and giving immediately to the masses an exact idea of the achievements of the revolution.

These achievements in health, education, and housing have particular value for the marginal sectors and the peasants who until now are the most neglected in that respect.

The problem of realizing the true Agrarian Reform acquires a special importance for the peasants because since in addition to planting the possibility of having access to the land in conditions no longer oppressive, it solves what now constitutes a source of frustration, given the demagogic and incomplete agrarian reforms of successive regimes; asserting the graphic claim 'the land will belong to the person who works it' makes understandable one of the principal banners of struggle which can mobilize the 60 percent of the Salvadorean people who live on the land.

Moving to another aspect of the revolutionary program we can affirm that the problem of power in propagandistic terms can take two different forms: that of the struggle 'for a Government of the people and the workers,' which reflect the fundamental interests of the greatest importance within the revolutionary program, and which, stated in that way in current conditions, will have a great effect on the conscience and organization of the masses and on their interests. On the other hand, the form 'Government of Broad Participation' corresponds more properly not to a concept, but to a concrete pragmatic proposal, already known, for the purpose of convincing other social and political forces that within the revolutionary program there is political space for their participation.

The formula of the Government of broad national participation is not meant for propagandistic purposes, but as a direct instrument for alliances and political agreements with other forces. Both formulas (revolutionary program and program of Broad Participation) are not contradictory, they are two different propaganda focuses of the problem of power, articulated in different environments, in order to make the process of [taking] power converge on two essential and complimentary factors -- the masses and the political alliances."

The success of this approach is seen in the fact that the FDR/FMLN has maintained sufficient outside support to generate a more-or-less continuous military effort from the end of 1981 to the present. During this period, although decreasing in numbers, the insurgents have been able to organize, train, and logistically support units that remain capable of mounting major attacks at times and places of their own choosing. Given the relatively poor support given to the insurgency on the part of the Salvadoran people, this is remarkable. It can only be explained in terms of the extremely high level of external support enjoyed by the FDR/FMLN. Dr. Guillermo M. Ungo,

President of the FDR, explains succinctly that "FMLN efforts enjoy great support in all parts of the world" -- including the United States.

FMLN EFFORTS ENJOY GREAT SUPPORT
IN ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD

Guillermo M. Ungo*

"FDR-FMLN efforts have received the deepest international support from a broad range of countries in both the capitalist and the socialist worlds -- from Cuba, France, Mexico, Nicaragua, Sweden, and Third World countries. The FDR-FMLN is not a social democratic movement seeking assistance only from the Socialist International, nor a communist movement seeking support only from Cuba. The FDR-FMLN has sought broad-based support to guarantee its nationalist and nonaligned position. The FDR-FMLN understands very well that to reconstruct El Salvador, aid from many sources will be required, especially from the Western world. FDR-FMLN nonalignment is, consequently, a position of principle, of necessity, and of political convenience. The FDR-FMLN wants to have friends, not enemies or masters.

The struggle for democracy in El Salvador enjoys great popular support in all parts of the world. Even in the United States important sectors of the population have a better understanding of the situation of the Salvadoran people and the reason for their political and armed struggle than does the U.S. Government. It is the people of many countries and not their governments who actively support the guerrillas and provide material aid such as money, medicine, and clothing."

These are the views of a few of the principle actors in the Salvadoran drama. They correspond to the general climate of feeling we found in El Salvador over the past year and a half, and amplify the lessons learned.

PSYOP at the Operational and Tactical Levels. Operational psychological operations are conducted to achieve mid-term objectives in support of campaigns and major operations. The target audience would normally be local and regional in nature. Tactical psychological operations are conducted to achieve

* Dr. Guillermo Manuel Ungo, "The People's Struggle," Foreign Policy, (Fall, 1983), p. 51-52, (Political Leader of the FPL).

immediate or short-term objectives in support of tactical commanders. The target audience would normally be the military force in direct opposition.*

These are the views of a few of the principle actors in the Salvadoran drama. They correspond to the general climate of feeling we found in El Salvador over the past year and a half, and amplify the lessons learned.

The C-V, the individual Brigades appear to be exercising the PSYOP responsibility at these levels. The C-V tends to concentrate on the enemy military force, but has developed programs directed at the general civil population, the civilian supporters of the insurgents ("masas"), and Salvadoran military. The C-V also supports the Brigades to the extent that "lead time" and resources are available. The Brigades are almost autonomous, and -- depending on the Commander -- focus on regional and tactical targets.

In any case, there are various efforts ongoing at any given time designed primarily to influence the enemy, and to a lesser extent other targets. A sample of recognized successes would include: a national counter-mine campaign centered around a poster showing a young female victim on crutches and asking "What about her human rights"; Radio Cuscatlán -- which has been ranked between third and seventh in terms of popularity of radio stations in El Salvador -- is considered another success at the national level; a money for arms effort has netted a substantial number of young defectors and their weapons; a newspaper for members of the armed forces is being printed on a monthly basis and is thought to be quite popular with the troops; and, support for ongoing military operations such as PHOENIX 14 has been deemed successful. Perhaps the most effective PSYOP campaign at the operational level revolves around the defection of such ex-Comandantes as Miguel Castellanos and "Ernesto". Finally, the general PSYOP effort has resulted in large numbers of insurgents allowing themselves to be captured, turning themselves in to government forces, or simply fading out of the movement. By any measure, this has got to be termed a success.

Despite these recognized successes, as at the strategic level, PSYOP at the operational and tactical levels is personality dependent (e.g., the C-V and the Brigade Commanders), and consists of ad hoc, piecemeal, and the uncoordinated efforts of a number of players. Although, there is a campaign plan, it fails to integrate effective PSYOP support into military operations or national objectives. There is no unity of effort among the various players. There is reportedly a lack of coordination within the PSYOPS organizations. Few people seem to talk with each other. PSYOP is a one-man show at each level of command and within commands.

* FM 33-1, op. cit.

Efforts of the PSYOP staffs in El Salvador tend to center around obtaining new equipment, filling out reports, and attending meetings. Thus, as at the strategic level, there is little or no analysis to determine appropriate requirements; rare pre-testing of concepts or products to insure the intended audiences will find them acceptable; and, in nearly every case, no post-testing or follow-through of results. And, ideas and products are often not based on timely intelligence. One does what has been done before -- because it has been done before; or, one does something because it is the "Chief's" idea. At the same time, what is done tends to be reactive as opposed to pro-active to "enemy" efforts. As examples, young men and boys are targeted -- after they become insurgents. Or, more specifically, "How can we respond to the allegations that we don't want to win the war?"

In fine, PSYOP remains unsold and unused as a really potent force multiplier, even after eight years of insurgent war.

A rethinking of the PSYOP effort appears to be in order. As an example, Colonel James J. Steele acknowledges the progress made to date, but argues that a new focus will be required for broader success.

PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS AND CIVIC ACTION

Colonel James J. Steele*

"There is an interest in PSYOP [Psychological Operations] and civic action within the Salvadoran armed forces that's far greater than anything that we saw in Vietnam. It's an integral part of what they're doing. The idea of getting people to defect is central to the plans of every brigade. They are training Psychological Operations experts for every unit. We've played a role in that process, and I think it's one of the things that we can really be proud of. They're putting out a lot of leaflets. They're using loud speakers. They're using radio spots very effectively. It hasn't always been that way. I think we played a role in that education process, but they've seen the results that's come from successful psychological operations and that's been an impetus to what has been done.

* Colonel James J. Steele, Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1984 to 1986, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 October 1986; and, in Monterey, California, 5 November 1986.

They've put some good people into the program. The guy in charge of psychological operations who just [February, 1987] turned it over, was truly an evangelist. I can recall that he got up and gave a briefing -- this was after a guy named Miguel Castellanos, who was one of the political leaders of the FPL. They initiated a campaign around him. They put out posters, they put him on the radio, they put him on television, and he also helped them with their PSYOPS campaign. For example, it changed the whole approach on how they would deal with the guerrillas and deal with their supporters. For example, if you look at some of the early posters and early leaflets, it would be addressed to 'terrorists,' and then it would give the message. He said, 'That's ridiculous! If you call someone a terrorist, you've immediately turned them off. They're not even going to read your message. Call them compañero, or compa. That's what their fellow guerrillas call them. Present it that way and then get your message across. To the extent that you can make your propaganda look something like theirs, you'll get them to read it.' Well that didn't sit well with all elements within the Salvadoran military. I can remember sitting in a meeting. President Duarte was there, the whole high command, all of the brigade commanders, some of the departmental commanders, and the C-V was giving a briefing on Psychological Operations. He started by saying -- he was describing the campaign which revolved around Miguel Castellanos -- 'Now I know that there are a lot of you out there who don't agree with what we're doing. You don't like the idea of glorifying Miguel Castellanos, who is a former guerrilla, former terrorist, and so on. And you don't like the way we have changed some of the posters and leaflets, in terms of the way that we address the guerrillas, but I really don't care what you think. This message is not for you, it's for them! What we're trying to do is to get them to defect. We're not trying to make you happy. I know that some of you have said that it looks like what we are trying to do is get Miguel Castellanos elected as

* CPC, a periodic meeting between the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Southern Command and the U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador.

President.' There were a few snickers from Duarte. Then he said, 'That's not what we're trying to do. What we are trying to do is to use Miguel Castellanos and use this message to discredit the guerrilla organizations internally.' Now you don't find that kind of animosity. There's been an education process and every brigade commander (some obviously better than others) is on board with psychological operations.

But, with the reduction of the number of insurgents there is another problem -- we're getting down to a more hard core element. They're less susceptible to psychological operations. It probably means then, that they have to focus more on them in an indirect way. In other words, focus on masas, family members, because they're probably the only way that you will get to these guys. You can talk to them directly with propaganda with probably very little effect. But, if you can convince people in their family that the situation has changed, and that what they went to the mountains for five or six years ago has happened, really, in some respects, they've won. Then, you may get them to come in. That's where they have to be increasingly focusing their attention in the years ahead."

Nothing has taken place since Colonel Steele made the above observations to obviate the need to reexamine the organization, priorities, and resources allocated to the PSYOP program and the War of Information. The evidence we have indicates that 1) the C-V concentrates primarily on the enemy military force, and 2) mid-term objectives and specific military operations are conducted more often than not on an ad hoc basis by the Brigades. Thus, the War of Information -- the success of which relies on PSYOP -- is not being won or lost. Like the overall war, it is stalemated.

IN THE BEGINNING THEY TOOK NO PRISONERS

C-V SPOKESPERSON*

"The decision was made to start psychological operations and it was part of this whole process of change. The main target was enemy forces. The Salvadorans themselves put out the first message to these people. Since they were new at this, my opinion is that they were not very good. For example, they would address the guerrillas as terrorists. When I first came to El Salvador in '84, it still was almost an unwritten rule that you could not call the guerrillas, guerrillas. You could not use the term guerrilla here within Army publications or Army audio/visual material. They were terrorists. They had to be called terrorists. They were not insurgents, they were not revolutionaries, they were terrorists. There is a legal reason. Everybody harped back on the legal reason, saying well we don't want to recognize them as a belligerent force, and basically we just want to treat them as criminals, as bands of criminals. Well, that's fine except these bands of criminals at that time, were taking over major towns in the interior, were overrunning cuartels and furthermore by any kind of analytical definition, they were not just terrorists. They had an infrastructure, they had a political movement. They had organized mass support. They had all the indicators that they were a genuine insurgent movement. An interesting evolution has happened, nowadays, [in September '87] more than ever the term terrorist fits these guys. Because of the things they are doing now -- the mining, the transportation barriers, where they machine gun even Red Cross ambulances. Now they really are acting like terrorists. Its interesting that in the days when they were really acting like insurgents, the Army insisted on calling them terrorists and now when the Army is more willing to call them by a variety of terms, more and more they have become real terrorists. . . .

* C-V Spokesperson, name and position withheld by request of the individual and with the concurrence of responsible U.S. and Salvadoran officials, interviewed in San Salvador, El Salvador, 28 September 1987.

Now we are in 1987, and the guerrilla forces are smaller now than they were before. That is due to defections, that is due to casualties, that is due to Army operations, that is due to the difficulty of recruitment, so there is a variety of factors as to why you have a smaller guerrilla force than you had before. However, this guerrilla force that you have now, I would say, is more effective and more committed than the one you had before. Most of the guerrillas were still in the movement, have now been through all the different crises. They have been through this whole process, they have been in the war now for seven years and now these guys have already adjusted themselves psychologically to prolonged popular war. They have accepted the need to abandon the large columns and operate in small units.

Furthermore, the progress of democracy now, in this country seems to be stalemated. The Christian Democratic Party itself had all kinds of internal struggles. Duarte does not have the charisma that he once had. He has lost it I would say. He is not seen as a national leader who embodies the popular will any more. He is seen as just another politician with all sorts of problems. There is widespread dissatisfaction across the board with the Christian Democratic Government. To the extreme of, even within the party, having serious internal conflicts. The democratic elections and the coming of Duarte on the scene was at one time a great morale depressor for the guerrillas. Now that factor is removed. Now they see Duarte as gradually weakening. They see the whole democratic process as weakening. They see the economic problems of this country as working in their favor.

The psychological attitude of the guerrillas has changed. You don't have all the forced conscripts you had in there. If they were forced at one time, by now they are convinced. They are comprometidos [compromised]. Plus you have people who really have no other alternative. Unemployment is at its highest rate ever in this country, so if a guerrilla does turn himself in, what is he going to go back to? One of the things that worked to our favor in '84 and '85 was the hope that things were going to improve. Now, everybody thinks that

things are going to get worse. I am not just talking about guerrillas, I am talking about conservative parties, the Christian Democratic Party, everybody. They just see the economic, social and political situation of this country as going downhill. They see Duarte as a political failure. All this motivates the remaining guerrillas to stay in the movement. They are saying, 'Maybe our commanders are right. Maybe if we just hang in there, in the end we'll triumph. Maybe this prolonged popular war will work out to our advantage.' In the absence of any kind of viable alternative for these people if they do turn themselves in -- they are going to stay with the guerrillas until they die. Plus, a lot of people like being guerrillas. Its a lot better than being a peasant, earning a dollar a day or whatever it is."

Conclusion. It must be remembered that it is men and women who lead, plan, execute, and support any given conflict. As consequence, a major concern must be individuals. Leadership and public opinion are particularly important. They are of even greater importance in "revolutionary war". If appropriate psychological operations and public diplomacy efforts are not being used to neutralize subversives, and to develop civil support for military action against them, logic and experience indicate that the conflict will continue indefinitely. In El Salvador, PSYOP at the operational level requires greater consideration, coordination, and the highest priority in the present and future counterinsurgency efforts.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Effective PSYOP requires the establishment of international, national, regional, and tactical capabilities that include utilization of all elements of the media. Moreover, it requires a first-rate public relations effort at all levels. In the Salvadoran context, these actions require the rethinking and reallocation of priorities and resources. While some significant progress has been made in increasing PSYOP capabilities, there is not a coordinated program and plan to wage an informational war.

In El Salvador, the PSYOP component of the war against subversion is understood in the rhetorical sense. But, that rhetorical understanding has not been translated into an operational program. Even with an increased effort to develop a more coordinated program -- including public diplomacy -- this component has not been adequately pursued at the strategic and operational levels, and is one of the more significant failures of the counterinsurgency.

For real success, senior leaders must be able to answer three fundamental questions relating to War of Information goals: 1) "What objective is this effort directed to?" 2) "Upon what solid intelligence is this effort based?" 3) "Where is this effort as a part of an integrated campaign plan?"

The present realities of the conflict in El Salvador seem to suggest that the War of Information and the use of PSYOP/Public Diplomacy is perceived as a lesser important aspect -- one which is pursued on an ad hoc basis in reaction to specific enemy initiatives. Some individual commanders some staffers, and some programs stand out as exceptions, but not many -- and too few.