

Why Choose Peace?

The El Salvador Experience

**A Monograph
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Abstract

WHY CHOOSE PEACE? THE EL SALVADOR EXPERIENCE by MAJOR Michael C. Herrera, USAR, 40 pages.

Between the years of 1980 – 1992, civil war raged in El Salvador between the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), a Marxist revolutionary movement, and the government of El Salvador (GoES). This monograph answers the following question: What was the most significant catalyst that brought the two warring parties to the negotiating table at the Chapultepec Peace Accords in 1992? The United States government's foreign policy towards El Salvador between 1980- 1989, the war weariness of the Salvadorans, attempts of the Salvadoran government at reform, and the lack of unification of the FMLN all served as catalysts for peace negotiations between the FMLN and the Salvadoran government.

El Salvador is an excellent case study which one can analyze the resolution of internal conflicts within a state or society. Most of the conditions cited in this monograph were necessary but not sufficient in resolving the conflict in El Salvador. Therefore, these conditions are dependant variables that need to be developed in conjunction to successfully stop the civil war.

While the roots of El Salvador's civil war are not unique to the Latin American region, looking at what caused the war can demonstrate how it was resolved. There are two main conditions that influenced El Salvador's unstable history: 1) Economic disparity between the poor and the rich; and 2) political oppression by the oligarchy using the military institution. These two conditions contributed to a climate in El Salvador, that some experts propose, made civil war the inevitable outcome.

The two main external conditions that were by far the most influential conditions that sustained the warring for much of the conflict were United States foreign policy during the eighties and the counter policy of the aid for the FMLN from the Soviet Union, Cuba and Nicaragua. Without the external aid from either one of the sides, a more decisive victory may have resulted in favor of one of the sides.

The internal conditions that influenced the climate of peace include the real attempts at reformation that the Duarte government in El Salvador, with the prodding of the United States, began to implement. Another significant condition that this monograph discusses is the lack of FMLN unification. In addition, the war weariness and lack of mass mobilization and support to the FMLN had significant effects on the continuation of the war and the move toward peace.

The findings demonstrate how not one condition was the tipping point or the sole key to ending the war in El Salvador, but that they all play key roles to resolve the conflict. In context of El Salvador's civil war, this monograph identifies some general principles that one can apply to future case studies. The first principle is that the government in peril must be willing to change and address the ills of their society that causes the civil war. The second principle identified is external support for the government / denial of support for the insurgency is key in allowing the first principle to take effect. A third condition that one should develop is a national counterinsurgency strategy that comprehensively looks at the political, military and economic aspects of the nation at risk.

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Introduction

Between the years of 1980 – 1992, civil war raged in El Salvador between the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), a Marxist revolutionary movement, and the government of El Salvador (GoES). Many historians propose that the fall of the Soviet Union and the decline in military aid to the insurgency forced the FMLN to the negotiation table for peace talks with the government of El Salvador. This theory is too simplistic an explanation, there were a number of conditions that contributed to the climate for peace negotiations.

The FMLN and the El Salvadoran Armed Forces (ESAF) waged a brutal war that began with FMLN conventional offensives against the Salvadoran government forces. During the time of the civil war, the ESAF consisted of the regular army with the National Guard acting in rural internal security functions. After being defeated conventionally in 1981, the FMLN resorted to an insurgency. Clifford Krauss suggests that the defeat led to 12 long years of a dirty insurgency, which killed 75,000 and left 8,000 missing, which both sides being guilty of human rights atrocities.¹ These atrocities along with the loss of support from the communist government in Nicaragua and Cuba, ended in a stalemate with the ESAF. In 1992 in Mexico City, Mexico, both the FMLN and the Salvadoran government signed what is now known as the Chapultepec Peace Accords, finally bringing peace to a war weary nation. The peace accords worked to address reforms in the government in return for the FMLN to lay down their weapons. The *Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America*, also known as the Kissinger Commission report, succinctly and correctly states that “the tortured history of Central America [El Salvador] is such that neither the military nor the political nor the economic nor the social aspects of the crisis can be considered independently of the

¹ Clifford Krauss, *In Inside Central America*, (New York: Touchstone, 1991), 55

others.”² This demonstrates the complexity of the situation in El Salvador during the civil war. Today, El Salvador boasts the second most thriving economy within Central America.³ Nevertheless, it also has the second highest murder rate in the world right behind Jamaica.⁴

El Salvador is an excellent case study which one can analyze the resolution of internal conflicts within a state or society. This monograph sheds new light and adds a contemporaneous view at what popular history has reported in the past. In the resolution of civil war, there are no independent variables. Most of the conditions cited in this monograph were necessary but not sufficient in resolving the conflict in El Salvador. Therefore, these conditions are dependant variables that need to be developed in conjunction to successfully stop the civil war. The distinct qualities of El Salvador make it a model case in application to other countries that suffer from the same conditions. These conditions being: an oligarchy, which controlled the political, and economic landscape; brutal military repression of the population; a monocrop economy with a inextricable link to the global economy; and a disaffected well educated middle class. El Salvador serves as a model in the identification and understanding of conditions that will enable states in peril of or the midst of civil war to reconcile the warring factions and bring them back together into a durable and enduring peace.⁵ In 1993, Thomas

² Henry Kissinger. *Report on the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America* (Washington DC, January 1984), 4

³ Economist Intelligence Unit ViewsWire. El Salvador: Ten-year growth outlook. New York, July 13, 2007.

⁴ The Economist, Sun, sand and murder, January, 31 2008

⁵ The definition of “durable peace” references Michael Lund’s Curve of Conflict from Michael S. Lund. *Preventing Violent Conflicts: A Strategy for Preventative Diplomacy* (Washington, DC:USIP Press Books, 1996) Lund defines durable peace as “Durable (or Warm) Peace involves a high level of reciprocity and cooperation, and the virtual absence of self-defense measures among parties, although it may include their military alliance against a common threat. A ‘positive peace’ prevails based on shared values, goals, and institutions (e.g. democratic

Wickham-Crowley wrote a study on the conditions for social revolution in Latin America during the periods of 1956 – 1990.⁶ In this study, he cites five conditions that create a favorable environment for revolution comparing 28 examples of Latin American countries that had revolutionary movements at some point in their history. He lists these five conditions as, guerilla attempt; peasant worker support; guerilla military strength; the existence of a patrimonial regime; and the loss of United States government support. This monograph takes an opposite stance from Wickham-Crowley in that it looks at El Salvador from the other side of the looking glass and what allowed peace to break out using some of the same conditions. As Wickham-Crowley accomplished in his study, the findings from this case study of El Salvador develop generalizable principles in conflict resolution that may be used to either close ongoing civil wars in other areas of the world or even aid governments at risk of civil war.

This monograph answers the following question: What was the most significant catalyst that brought the two warring parties to the negotiating table at the Chapultepec Peace Accords in 1992? The United States government's foreign policy towards El Salvador between 1980- 1989, the war weariness of the Salvadorans, attempts of the Salvadoran government at reform, and the lack of unification of the FMLN all served as catalysts for peace negotiations between the FMLN and the Salvadoran government. The findings also answer the following supporting questions:

- What were the causes for revolution?
- What caused the formation of the FMLN?
- What was the organization of the FMLN/ESAF?

political systems and rule of law), economic interdependence, and a sense of international community.

⁶ This reference is taken from Todd Landman's book, *Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 116. Landman uses a table from Wickham-Crowley's study and adapts it to prove his point of how one can analyze particular data.

- What was US foreign policy in El Salvador during the conflict?
- What were the true sources of FMLN support during the Civil War?
- What were the motivations of the FMLN, the GoES, and the civilian population?
- What were the provisions of the peace accord?

This monograph is divided into five separate yet linked sections. The first section discusses the root of the civil war and the rise of the FMLN as the opposition to the ruling party. It is important to discuss this in the context of El Salvador because the grievances of the Salvadoran people are at the heart of the problem in the conflict. Without a good understanding of the main issues of the conflict, one cannot effectively analyze the motivations of the actors involved. The second section discusses the conflict itself and describes how each side fought the war with the resources they had and evolved with the external assistance of each side's sponsor. Looking at the actual conflict itself serves to help the reader better understand each side's goals and strategies and the goals of their external sponsors. The third section discusses the external conditions that support the move towards peace in El Salvador. This section of the monograph analyzes the involvement of the United States and the Soviet-bloc countries that had a key role in supporting the warring factions of Salvadoran society. In the fourth section, this monograph analyzes the internal conditions that were key in promoting the peace process. It looks at goals that the Government of El Salvador strived to achieve, the shortfalls of the FMLN's goals, and the absolute exhaustion of Salvadoran society during the civil war. The fifth section of this monograph discusses the outcome of the peace process and its lingering effects on Salvadoran society today.

This monograph is limited in scope to identifying the significant conditions that contributed to the end of the civil war. It uses various primary and secondary sources to

set the stage for the discussion of the significant conditions. It also investigates the current conditions of El Salvador and the true state of its stable peace.

There have been numerous writings on the subject of the Salvadoran civil war and the transition to a negotiated peace. Many of these works focus on the history of El Salvador and the roots of the conflict, the evolution of the actors during the conflict and finally the conditions that brought both parties to the negotiating table to develop a stable peace and a form of working democracy. Most of the writings about this period in El Salvador's history agree that the civil war was an inevitable outcome of the systemic social and economic problems that had plagued that country since the 1930s. Where they are divergent is what brought about the conditions for both warring factions to put aside their differences. Mario Lungo Uclés discusses that the FMLN used the military options as purely a means to get the Government of El Salvador (GoES) to negotiate for peace.⁷ Joaquin Villalobos, a former FMLN commander, refutes the fact that the FMLN suffered from a lack of support from the civilian population of El Salvador and from their communist supporters after the end of the cold war.⁸ Elisabeth Jean Wood shows how the sustained insurgency by the FMLN was able to force reform in the GoES that allowed the negotiations with the FMLN take place.⁹ There is also the common popular theory that the policies of the Reagan administration and the US supported counterinsurgency eventually contributed to the weakness of the FMLN's resolve and their unsuccessful "final" offensives in 1981 and 1989.

⁷ Mario Lungo Ucles, *El Salvador in the Eighties* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press: 1996)

⁸ Joaquin Villalobos, The Salvadoran insurgency: why choose peace?. <http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/engaging-groups/salvadorean-insurgency.php> [accessed August 10, 2007]

⁹ Elisabeth Jean Wood. "El Salvador's Path to Democracy." *In Forging Democracy from Below*, by Elisabeth Jean Wood, 25-107. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

This monograph analyzes the period of the civil war in El Salvador (1980-1992). This period lays the foundation and delineates the conditions for the beginnings of an amnesty, reintegration and reconciliation (AR2) process. While AR2 is not directly referenced, there is a thread that runs through this period that links to the future process of reconciliation between the GoES and the FMLN.¹⁰

¹⁰ The term of amnesty, reintegration, and reconciliation (AR2) derives from a series of articles in *Military Review* specifically the capstone article *The Armed Reconciler* (Military Review, November-December 2007) by Dr. Michael Mosser. This is also covered in a soon to be published article by Michael Herrera and Michael Nelson in *Military Review* named *Principles in Amnesty, Reintegration and Reconciliation: The Case for El Salvador*.

Roots of the Civil War in El Salvador

Political power is in the hands of the armed forces [who] use their power unscrupulously. They know only how to repress the people and defend the interests of the Salvadoran oligarchy.

Archbishop Romero
February 1980¹¹

To understand the root of any civil war one must have an understanding of the economic and political paradigms that were involved within that country. While the roots of El Salvador's civil war are not unique to the Latin American region, looking at what caused the war can demonstrate how it was resolved. El Salvador is the smallest of the Central American countries. It is mostly mountainous with very little arable land, which made it difficult to support an agrarian economy. It is also one of the most densely populated countries in the Americas with almost 800 persons per square mile.¹² El Salvador has had a tumultuous history; from Spanish colonization in 1522 to military oligarchy during the 1980s. There are two main conditions that influenced El Salvador's unstable history: 1) Economic disparity between the poor and the rich and 2) political oppression by the oligarchy using its military institution. These two conditions contributed to a climate in El Salvador, that some experts propose, made civil war the inevitable outcome.

Economic disparity between the poor and the rich has existed in El Salvador throughout most of its history. Economic and political domination rested with an elite ruling class of wealthy landowners. This landowning minority ruled over a majority of

¹¹ Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 131

¹² US Department of State, "Background Note: El Salvador," US Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2033.htm> [accessed November 19, 2007]

poor rural peasants. Victor Bulmer-Thomas notes that by the 1930s, only 10% of the population of El Salvador owned all of the land and there was virtually no middle class.¹³

Bulmer-Thomas also states that, even though this class stratum existed in other Latin American countries throughout the centuries, El Salvador was known as the poorest country in Central America. El Salvador's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from 1950 was equal to its real per capita GDP in 1982.¹⁴ This further exaggerated the economic disparity because the majority of the GDP money was in the hands of the elite landowners and their supporting military cohorts.

Another example that continued to keep the poor impoverished and the elite rich was the Salvadoran reliance on coffee exports. Coffee was the major export in El Salvador's economy. This reliance on a single export spelled fiscal failure for El Salvador. The reliance on the export of coffee made El Salvador susceptible to economic fluctuations based on world coffee demand. As demonstrated in 1969 when world coffee prices plummeted and further strained the impoverished nation.¹⁵

El Salvador's economic and political spheres are closely linked together. Those who controlled and benefitted from the economic policies were the same who controlled and benefitted from the political system. Diego Gantiva and Marco Palacios wrote that the government of El Salvador went through four distinct phases of rule since the 1800's: 1) complete control of the economic elite over the ESAF (1824-1930), 2) the era of military control of the government (1931-1979), 3) the provisional civil-military junta

¹³ Victor Bulmer-Thomas, "Economic Development Over the Long Run - Central America Since 1920." *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, (Nov. 1983), 276

¹⁴ Ibid., 276

¹⁵ Bobby Ray Pinkston. *The Military Instrument of Power in Small Wars: The Case of El Salvador*. (Monograph, Fort Leavenworth: School of Advanced Military Studies, 1996), 10

(1979-1984), and 4) the military under democratic rule (1984- present).¹⁶ The economic oligarchy made up of the wealthy landowners, also known as the “fourteen families”. These “fourteen families” were supported by the El Salvadoran Armed Forces (ESAF), which left the oligarchy free to rule the country with their own best interests in mind. Elisabeth Wood mentions that the El Salvadoran government consisted of “coalitions of economic elites and military hardliners [defending] labor-repressive institutions and practices until the civil war.”¹⁷

This coalition formed in response to a rise in economic pressures and new political liberal views. Enrique Baloyra-Herp calls this “reactionary despotism”.¹⁸ The oligarchy used the ESAF to repress the working population of *campesinos* to keep uprisings to a minimum, maintain relative stability, and assure order. This, along with an exclusive electoral process that was far from legitimate, caused further strife to the landless workers.

The political conditions in the 1930s led to uprisings and coups because of the repression and would change the rule of government from 1931-1979. A prime example of this repression and a catalyst for military rule was La matanza in the 1930s. La matanza or slaughter in English was the ESAF response to a worker uprising in 1932. In the 1920s world coffee prices took a sharp decline and the oligarchy of El Salvador took direct action in reducing real wages and employment thereby causing a worker insurrection. The El Salvador National Guard and regular army responded in brutal

¹⁶ Diego A Gantiva and Marco A Palacios. *The Peace Process of Colombia and El Salvador: A Comparative Study*. (Thesis, Monterey: Naval Post Graduate School, 1997),

¹⁷ Wood., 25

¹⁸ Enrique A Baloyra-Herp, "Reactionary Despotism in Central America." *Journal of Latin American Studies*, (1983), 295

fashion quickly putting down the uprising and killing over 17,000 workers.¹⁹ This further strengthened ties between the economic elites and the ESAF. It essentially paved the way for the military ruling the country and the oligarchy governing economic policy. The oligarchy would make the rules and the ESAF would enforce them. In turn, with this arrangement precluded any need for a legitimate judicial system and the repression could continue unabated until the rise of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the outbreak of civil war in 1980.

The FMLN was born in 1980, formed as an umbrella group of five left wing guerilla organizations and the Salvadoran Communist Party to fight the Salvadoran government. The Salvadoran rebels evolved due to deep anger from decades of dictatorship, which festered among the lower classes and frustrated the emerging middle class. Ambassador David Passage remarked at the distinct difference in the leadership of the FMLN and other Marxist guerrilla movements was its constituency. They were all remarkably well educated, "...unusual among guerrilla movements, the FMLN leadership was quite well educated; virtually all of the top leaders came from wealthy families and virtually all had studied at UCA (Universidad Centro-Americana). Several had advanced degrees."²⁰

With the support and influence of Cuba's Fidel Castro and in turn the Soviet Union, the FMLN formed to bring together these five disparate yet common aggrieved left wing guerilla groups with the help of the Salvadoran communist party under a united socialist revolution that advocated change in the Salvadoran government by force. The FMLN consisted of the following five groups each of which formed at different times: the Communist Party of El Salvador (1930s), Popular Liberation Forces "Farabundo

¹⁹ Wood., 31

²⁰ In an email discussion on 17 December 2007 with AMB David Passage, charged with affairs with the US Embassy El Salvador, regarding the civil war in El Salvador.

Marti" (FPL) (1970), the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) (1972), Resistencia Nacional (RN) (1975), and the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos (PRTC) (1976). While all five groups called themselves revolutionaries and socialists, they had serious ideological and practical differences, and there had been serious conflicts, even including in some cases bloodshed, between some of the groups during the 1970s. The chart below depicts the formation of the FMLN and the guerrilla groups that represented its constituency.²¹

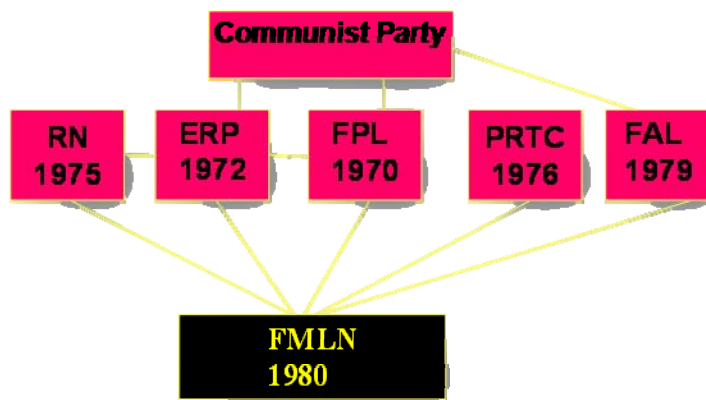


Figure 1: Formation of the FMLN

Cuba's revolutionary leader, Fidel Castro, coordinated the unification of the five organizations that formed the FMLN. Fidel Castro was the driving force with the assistance of the Sandinistas of Nicaragua and the backing of the Soviet Union to develop a cohesive revolutionary group that could topple the right wing Salvadoran government. Castro facilitated negotiation between the groups in Havana in December 1979, shortly after a coup led by the civil-military junta deposed the Salvadoran leader General

²¹ Dr. David Spencer, *El Salvador: Insurgency* (Presentation, April, 13 2007), 25

Romeo.²² According to Dr. David Spencer of the National Defense University, regarding the formation of the FMLN, Fidel Castro sent a representative to Nicaragua, called the heads of the five Salvadoran guerrilla groups to a meeting, and delivered an ultimatum. Castro told the Salvadorans that if they unified, Cuba was prepared to extend the weapons pipeline they had developed to El Salvador. If unification was not possible, Cuba would cut the Salvadorans off and offer the aid to the Guatemalans.²³

The FMLN demonstrates its roots in that it was named after the legendary rebel leader Farabundo Martí. Farabundo Martí was one of the principle leaders of the Salvadoran Communist Party. In 1932, Martí led an unsuccessful rebellion of workers and peasants after the devastating eruption of the Izalco volcano. In response, the military regime led by General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, who had seized power in a 1931 coup, launched an effective but brutal counterinsurgency campaign. Known as "La Matanza," this campaign saw the killing of some 30,000 people under the guise of being supporters of the insurgency.

On May 22, 1980, the success of negotiations led to the union of the major guerrilla forces under one flag. The FPL, RN, ERP and PCS created the Unified Revolutionary Directorate, or the Dirección Revolucionaria Unificada (DRU). The DRU consisted of three political commission members from each of these four organizations. The DRU manifesto declared, "There will be only one leadership, only one military plan and only one command, only one political line." Despite continued infighting, the DRU succeeded in coordinating the group's efforts and equipped forces. On October 10, 1980, the four organizations formed the Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional

²² US Department of State and Department of Defense. "The Soviet-Cuban Connection in Central America and the Caribbean". (1985), 32

²³ Spencer, 25

(FMLN). Looking at this history and constituency of the FMLN explains their lack of strategic and ideological unity.

Tommie Sue Montgomery remarks that the FMLN was dedicated to the armed revolutionary struggle against the GoES to install a democratic revolutionary government based on the Leninist ideal of democratic centralism.²⁴ The FMLN advocated a Marxist political approach in part because that ideology claimed to remedy perceived and actual socio-economic inequalities amongst the population. Even with the unification of the five parties, discord remained between them.

The basis for the Salvadoran civil war was the disparity between the haves and have-nots and enforced by an exclusive political system. All this in conjunction with the extreme repression by the ESAF of the population, are the true ingredients of a revolution. As this monograph shows, answering the root problems of the Salvadoran system can be a catalyst for eliminating civil war, as we shall see in the reform policies of the GoES in later sections.

The Conflict (1980-1992)

To beat an army it is not necessary to annihilate all its men, nor to capture all its arms, only to cause the collapse of its morale.

*Joaquín Villalobos
Commandante, People's Revolutionary Front (ERP)
1982*

On October 15, 1979, a civil-military junta staged a coup d'état and took control of the government from President Romero. This junta led by about 60 young officers of the ESAF, in conjunction with civilian members, wanted to end the repression, institute wide reforms throughout the country, and begin national elections,. They created a new

²⁴ Montgomery, 110

political body called the Permanent Council of the Armed Forces or Consejo Permanente de la Fuerza Armada (COPEFA). Cynthia Arnson states that they made a proclamation that “proposed: 1) to put an end to violence and corruption; 2) to guarantee the observance of human rights; 3) to adopt measures to bring about an equitable distribution of the national wealth, while at the same time rapidly increasing the gross national product; and 4) to channel the country’s foreign relations in a positive direction.”²⁵ The junta promised reforms away from the norms of the Romero government and enter a new age for the Salvadoran citizens. As Mario Lungo Ucles “They sought to remove the regime of General Romero and to introduce fundamental reforms intended to circumvent the increasing possibility of revolutionary war.”²⁶ What occurred was something entirely different. This marked the beginning of the modern Salvadoran civil war.

Even with the promise of sweeping reforms the junta had a hard road to travel to reach their goals. The right and left wings viewed the junta as a threat to their perceived goals and they would thwart the junta by any means necessary. In as much, the left wing guerillas of the ERP took control of a San Salvador slum neighborhood two days after the successful coup. The newly installed junta government responded to demonstrators, labor strikers and *campesinos* in force and killed 24 people.²⁷ The reform intentioned junta lost control of the army to far-right wing officers that intended to subvert the junta. This did not prove to be the reforms that the country was looking for.

The following table from the Department of Social Sciences Universidad de El Salvador report describes and compares the change in tactics by each of the warring parties.

²⁵ Cynthia Arnson, *El Salvador: A Revolution Confronts the United States* (Washington, DC: Institute for Policy Studies, 1982), 41

²⁶ Lungo Ucles, 17

²⁷ Krauss, 71

Figure 2: Changes in Tactics from 1980 – 1986

Changes in Tactics from 1980 - 1986		
Year	ESAF	FMLN
1980-1981	Operations carried out by small units.	In remote, mountainous areas, vanguard and rearguard units are organized to dislodge armed forces from fixed positions in Chalatenango, Morazan...
1982-1983	Mobile hunter battalions are utilized which employ “hammer and anvil” tactics	Creation and consolidation of zones of control under political fronts as new form of parallel power to create a new revolutionary order. Development of irregular warfare.
1984-1985	Formation of elite battalions, combined with the hunter battalions. Aerial bombing supports campaigns in the countryside. Helicopter transport system modernizes and makes the war more sophisticated.	Consolidation of the Revolutionary Army which adopts tactics of concentration to achieve large scale victories: attacks on infrastructure. Realization of the dialogue-negotiation process.
1986	Operations which entail total and prolonged warfare against the FMLN. United for reconstruction plan (90% political/10% military).	Development of “concentration-deconcentration” tactics on a nationwide basis. High operational mobility; greater qualitative growth. Continue campaigns directed at closing down the transportation system on the national level; sabotage of electrical energy stations. Reactivation of the dialogue-negotiation process.

This table demonstrates the changes in tactics and strategy that each side took during the conflict.²⁸ The changes in tactics by the ESAF after 1982 show the influence of USMILGROUP trainers on the organization and execution of operations of ESAF units. What this table demonstrates is the resilience and adaptability of the FMLN.

²⁸ Universidad de El Salvador, “An Analysis of the Correlation of Forces in El Salvador”, *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Autumn, 1987), 433

When the FMLN realized their initial strategy was not working they were forward thinking enough to change that strategy.

On 10 January 1981, just prior to President Reagan taking office, the Marxist insurgents began their “final offensive” in El Salvador. As with other insurgencies throughout history, the rebels believed a conventional defeat of the Salvadoran military would bring them into power.

Like the successful insurgency in Nicaragua, the FMLN hoped to launch a Nicaraguan, Frente Sandinista Liberación Nacional (FSLN), style final offensive. They also hoped a general uprising would occur during their offensive actions. In fact, no such event occurred. Essentially the FMLN had no support from the population. The FMLN could not sustain the initiative for more than three days, and the ESAF quickly reestablished control in all parts of the nation. During the early stages of the conventional engagements, the insurgents were a very capable fighting force that could take the fight to the ESAF. Yet, the government forces always had the edge over the guerrillas due to their airpower. While showing some successes, the FMLN was not able to counter American military aid, nor the ability of Salvadoran military to contain their forces, nor the lack of popular support. This continued and left the war at a stalemate in which no side could gain a decisive victory.

Due to the defeats, the rebels realized their insurgency was not yet prepared for a conventional military campaign, and they initiated hit-and-run guerrilla tactics against the Salvadoran industrial infrastructure, trying to bring down the government by destroying the economy. A captured FMLN document, stated that the next phase of the FMLN strategy was to move away from:

“the application of regular tactics , where massing of force was the determining condition ...we need to move to combine with certainty, regular and irregular tactics, conventional war and guerilla war...we must move to form guerilla units...to strike the enemy – in defense when he makes incursions in the

zones of control, as well as in the offense in his vital areas and his strategic rear.”²⁹

The new strategy showed the FMLN’s resilience and adaptability after underestimating the resolve of the ESAF and GoES. The FMLN strategy further described the new military tactics in the elements of: 1) Help strengthen the line of the masses; 2) Defend efficiently the conquered territories; 3) Impede the military strengthening of the enemy; 4) Prepare our forces to face intervention; 5) Wear down the enemy on a grand scale; 6) Take maximum advantage of our means of war, and 7) Create the conditions whereby our mobile force can strike strategic goals.³⁰ This laid out the FMLN’s strategy for employing a “prolonged war” mentality to attrit the ESAF until the FMLN can resurge for a more potent conventional action in the future. As was enacted in the fall of 1989. This shift entailed targeting and destroying the economic infrastructure of El Salvador to bring the government down a gain further support of the people. The combined report of the US State and Defense departments cites a guerilla radio broadcast from April 1983 where the FMLN stated: “Our forces will start sabotage against the dictatorship’s was economy during the next days.”³¹ The chart below from the same report shows the impact of the FMLN on the Salvadoran economy.

²⁹ Max G. Manwaring, *El Salvador at War: An Oral History of Conflict from 1979 insurrection to the Present* (Washington, DC, National Defense University Press:1988), 124-127

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 127

³¹ US State and Defense Department, 33

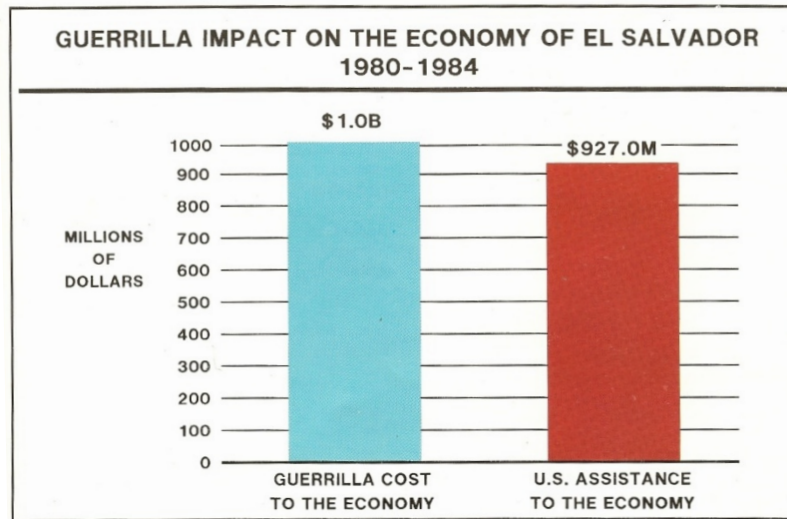


Figure 3: Impact of Guerilla Operations (1980 – 1984)

In the above chart we can see that the damage inflicted by FMLN operations between 1980 and 1984 cost the GoES exceeded what it received from US aid during the same period.³²

In November of 1989, the FMLN decided to launch its second “final” offensive. The FMLN leaders developed a course of action with the main objective of toppling the elected government of El Salvador, and to install a popular government thorough violent takeover. The offensive was to include the assassination of the newly elected President Alfredo Cristiani, his vice president, the President of the legislature, Head of the Supreme Court and other key Salvadoran leaders within the government. Together with the seizure of other key objectives, the FMLN believed that they could decapitate the GoES to easily wrest power from the Cristiani government and create a government of their own making. This offensive was the last ditch effort to force a decisive victory for the FMLN and prove to their sponsors of Nicaragua, Cuba and the Soviet Union that their continued support was not in vain. The Singlaub Report goes as far as to state that the

³² Ibid, 33

offensive "...was designed both to show the people of El Salvador the strength of the guerillas and to inspire a popular uprising."³³

Overall, the FMLN expected the offensive to reach a successful point of culmination within three days. In addition to their objective of decapitating the government, the FMLN planned a series of simultaneous attacks against key objectives around the country. After many weeks of preparation and infiltration into the capital and major cities of El Salvador the FMLN were ready to strike a devastating blow to the GoES. On the night of November 11, 1989, using a force of about 8,000 guerrilla fighters the FMLN launched attacks in the major cities of El Salvador. The focus was on the capital of San Salvador but the two main objectives were the "seizure or neutralization of the principle military headquarters, especially the First Brigade headquarters, the chief military unit defending San Salvador, and the Ilopango military air base."³⁴ The FMLN dedicated between 3,000 and 3,500 guerillas to attacking San Salvador with 700 committed to the attack on the First Brigade headquarters. The FMLN committed another 2,000 to attacking the air base in Ilopango. This "final offensive" failed.

Besides the lack of popular support, the FMLN defeat during the 1989 offensive was due in large measure to the increased capabilities of the ESAF. The Salvadoran army and air force neutralized most of the tactics the FMLN employed. The ESAF strategy in the case of San Salvador was to fix the FMLN forces main effort and flanking them with a supporting brigade, cutting off any line of retreat and attacking them from the rear. The army showed considerable constraint and realized the need to respond accordingly that would result in minimal civilian casualties and collateral damage to

³³ The Singlaub Commission Report, *The FMLN Offensive: Republic of El Salvador* (Alexandria, VA. The Free World Foundation:1990), 8

³⁴ Ibid., 9

infrastructure. The offensive lasted a total of six days, three days longer than the FMLN expected to be fighting and not with the expected outcome. The ESAF had successfully routed the FMLN offensive, regained control of any parts of the country that was in FMLN hands, and reconsolidated their positions in preparation for any counterattacks.

In the end, the FMLN were not able to achieve their key objectives during the offensive. They were unable to assassinate any of GoES key leadership, and there was no uprising of the people of El Salvador against the regime and join in the fighting against the ESAF. To the contrary, the Singlaub report states that the FMLN only succeeded in getting the local populace to turn against them due to their tactics endangering civilians, as was seen in the tactic of using civilians as human shields and commandeering civilian homes. In some cases, the civilian populace became informants for the ESAF and successfully collected intelligence about FMLN. “Most of the people...refused to help the FMLN in any way, including digging trenches, building barricades and so forth.”³⁵

As a result of the 1989 FMLN Offensive, the FMLN failed to achieved their objectives and also did not have the support of the local population. The FMLN lost a good portion of their military strength, materiel, and structure. This resulted in their loss of the ability to launch any significant military operations after 1989.

External Conditions that Contributed to the Peace Process

This section describes and analyzes the external conditions that contributed to bringing the peace process to fruition in El Salvador. The two main conditions that this section discusses are the United States foreign policy during the eighties and the counter policy of the external aid from the Soviet Union, Cuba and Nicaragua to the FMLN

³⁵ Ibid., 10

rebels. These were by far the most influential conditions that sustained the warring for much of the conflict. Without the external aid from either one of the sides, a more decisive victory may have resulted in favor of one of the sides.

US Foreign Policy (1979-1990)

We Americans should be proud of what we're trying to do in Central America, and proud of what, together with our friends, we can do in Central America, to support democracy, human rights, and economic growth, while preserving peace so close to home. Let us show the world that we want no hostile, communist colonies here in the Americas: South, Central, or North.

*Ronald Reagan
May 1984 ³⁶*

There is no doubt that the United States aid to El Salvador during the civil war played a crucial condition in ending the conflict and bringing about a stable peace. After the rise of the communist Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, United States policy makers decided that there should be no more Cubas within the region. During the 1980s, the GoES received a tremendous amount of military and economic aid from the United States to assist in combating the FMLN guerillas. The United States involvement in El Salvador escalated during the Carter Administration.

The seizure of power in Nicaragua in 1979 by the communist, Frente Sandinista Liberación Nacional (FSLN), sent a clear message to the United States that Soviet influences were taking hold. The Carter administration was the first to act in ensuring that the threat of communism did not spread into El Salvador. The administration had given aid with reluctance due to the human rights abuses that were occurring under the new civil-military junta that had just taken power in El Salvador. After weighing the looming danger of the communist threat in Nicaragua, the administration agreed to a modest aid package.

³⁶ US State and Defense Department, 1

Krauss states that initial aid to El Salvador under the Carter administration consisted of six Special Forces soldiers and \$300,000 in military aid. However, due to President Carter's initial reluctance the junta would not survive long enough to receive any benefits from it, "...most of the best people in the government had already resigned..."³⁷

After the 1981 FMLN final offensive, the Reagan Administration stepped up military and economic aid to the faltering junta. The new administration was alarmed by reports that military aid was being provided by the Soviet Union and Soviet Bloc countries to the guerrillas through Cuba and Nicaragua; the administration was also concerned about the prospect of "another Nicaragua" in Central America. In March 1981, it provided US\$20 million in emergency funds and US\$5 million in Foreign Military Sales (FMS) credits for new equipment and supplies for the Salvadoran Army. By 1982, the Reagan administration had more than doubled direct military assistance to El Salvador to US\$82 million. During the next four years, El Salvador received an average of US\$100 million annually in United States military assistance. The assistance levels peaked at US\$197 million in fiscal year (FY) 1984, then declined steadily, reaching US\$89 million in FY 1988. Total U.S. aid, both military and economic, to El Salvador topped out at US\$6 billion.³⁸ The United States also sent an additional 40 Special Forces trainers-advisers to El Salvador to train the first of four 1,000-man "rapid reaction" battalions, the Atlacatl Battalion.

Shortly thereafter, the United States Army trained the first group of 500 Salvadoran officer candidates in a general officer training course at Fort Benning, Georgia. The United States also began training Salvadoran NCOs in Panama. By late

³⁷ Krauss, 71

³⁸ El Salvador: A Country Study. <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-4315.html> [accessed January 2, 2008]

1983, the United States had trained 900 Salvadoran officers, or half the entire officer corps.³⁹

In 1983, President Ronald Reagan outlined the American foreign policy strategy towards El Salvador as “democracy, development, dialogue, and defense.”⁴⁰ President Reagan wanted to support democracy, reform, and freedom against dictators of both the left and the right in El Salvador. By development, President Reagan meant promoting economic recovery, social growth and equality. Reagan also wanted to foster a dialogue of democracy between the warring factions of El Salvador and defense providing “security against those who use violence against democratization, development and diplomacy.”⁴¹ The US military strategy for security in El Salvador was implemented through two broad based initiatives, developing effective counterinsurgency military forces and developing professional military institutions.

This strategy translated into the deployment of a maximum of 55 personnel to the United States Military Group in El Salvador, designated as trainers and forbidden to engage in any combat operations. In his occasional paper, Robert Ramsey states that the guiding principle for the U.S. military aid to El Salvador “...could be explained as KISSSS, ‘Keep it simple, sustainable, small, and Salvadoran.’”⁴² The plan was to reform, professionalize, and equip the ESAF with modern weapons and equipment. The 55 trainer advisors needed to change the ESAF from a “nine to five, 5 days a week

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Benjamin Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador: The Frustrations of Reform and the Illusions of Nation Building* (Santa Monica, CA. Rand:1991), 10

⁴¹ Ibid., 10

⁴² Robert Ramsey III, *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam and El Salvador* (Fort Leavenworth, KS, Combat Studies Institute Press: 2006), 85

garrison-bound army into an aggressive force.”⁴³ This proved to be a daunting task, but one the advisory team was prepared to tackle.

Led by Brigadier General Fred E. Woerner, the U.S. Southern Command sent a military strategy assistance team to El Salvador in order to assess the capabilities of the ESAF. At the time of the assistance team visit the overall strength of the EASF was 11,000 soldiers and officers. By 1989, the ESAF had grown to its peak of 56,000, and it was a far more formidable fighting force as compared to the previous decade. In General Woerner’s report he outlined the specific conditions that needed to be addressed to transition the EASF. These were 1) subordination of the officer corps to civilian authority; 2) the respect for human rights by the armed forces; and 3) the institutionalization of officer and non-commissioned officer professional development and become operationally effective.⁴⁴ The Woerner report was the beginnings of developing a national military strategy for the GoES.

With the change in FMLN tactics to more irregular warfare, the EASF was required to transform into a fighting force capable of responding to the emerging threats. The United States advisors felt that a more mobile and agile force with the ability to take to fight to the FMLN was necessary to improve the ESAF.

In addition to the military strategy, the United States attempted to persuade the GoES and ESAF that there was a need for economic and social reform. Ambassador Passage remarks that the US government had very clear ideas for El Salvador in the ways they could implement economic reform :

“We forced the GOES to enact reforms, including land, education, health services, dig wells, build roads and clinics, create jobs, bust apart the oligarchy’s stranglehold over coffee and rice and sugar production, shrimp

⁴³ Schwarz, 17

⁴⁴ Patrick Shaha, “Prospects for Peace in Colombia and the El Salvador Experience” (monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2000)

cultivation, and other key elements of the economy, tackle corruption. Of course this was going to be disruptive to the economy and society.”⁴⁵

US aid and advice to El Salvador was instrumental in keeping the GoES afloat under the stressful circumstances of the insurgency. The Soviets, Cubans and Nicaraguans were intent on exploiting the deplorable conditions in El Salvador to foment revolution. The next section of this monograph discusses just how the insurgency received aid from their external sponsors.

Foreign Aid to the Insurgency in El Salvador (1980 – 1989)

All of the demolitions that we policed up after the Ilopango raid in '82 had come out of Czechoslovakia. There was also Bulgarian, Hungarian, and East German equipment...I am sure you know that the bank rolling was being done in Managua
COL John D. Waghelstein,
Commander, U.S. Military Group in El Salvador, 1982-1983
23 February 1987⁴⁶

The insurgents in El Salvador were heavily dependent on external aid to finance, train and equip their revolution. Cuba and Nicaragua were more than passive supporters of the FMLN guerillas. The Soviets were also supporters of the guerrilla movement, funneling most of their supplies through Cuba.

The Soviets shipped military weapons and equipment from Vietnam to Cuba to Nicaragua and infiltrated into El Salvador via sea and land lanes. Weapons shipments made their way with boats through the Gulf of Fonseca between El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras. A great many of the weapons captured back by the ESAF revealed the origins of the FMLN arsenal. Many of the weapons captured bore markings of the FSLN, some from Venezuela and an even greater number of American weapons that

⁴⁵ Passage.

⁴⁶ Manwaring, 92

were traced back to Vietnam were found in the hands of the FMLN. The Kissinger commission report states that the Chairman of the Intelligence Oversight Committee said that “...persuasive evidence that the Sandinista government is helping train [Salvadoran] insurgents and is transferring arms and support from and through Nicaragua to the insurgents.”⁴⁷ The below graphic from the State department report, “The Soviet-Cuban Connection”, depicts these major supply routes.⁴⁸

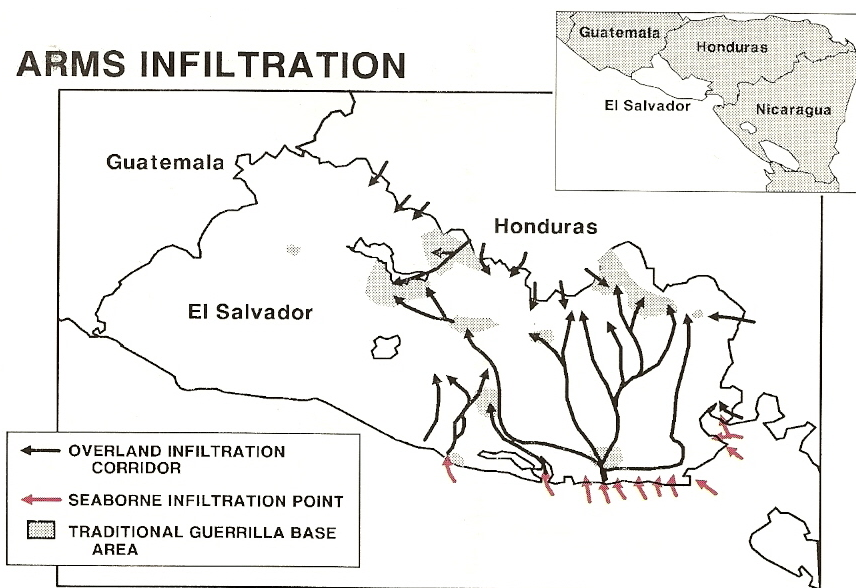


Figure 4: Arms Infiltration Routes

The Soviet demonstrated their commitment to the armed revolutions in Central America with the amount of weapons and armament they shipped to Latin America during this period. The Kissinger report cites that the Soviets arms shipments “grew from an average of 15,000 tons a year in the 1970s ... to 66,000 tons in 1981, about the same amount in each of the following two years.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Kissinger, 27

⁴⁸ State and Defense Department, 34

⁴⁹ Kissinger, 90

In addition to arms shipments and training, the FLMN also relied heavily on sanctuary in Nicaragua. The FMLN guerillas operated out of safe havens in the mountainous regions of Nicaragua and Honduras and crossed into El Salvador to conduct cross-border operations. The ESAF was not allowed to enter the sovereign territory of either nation and unable to take to fight to the guerillas. This sanctuary greatly enhanced the survivability of the FMLN guerillas.

The fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War helped to bring about the end to the insurrection in El Salvador. In 1989, the Soviets halted all shipments of military aid to Nicaragua and announced to the FMLN that economic aid would no longer be viable from the Soviet Union. The Soviets told the FMLN to seek aid elsewhere.⁵⁰ The flow of supplies slowly dried up, as Cuba could no longer afford to support the guerrillas without Soviet support. In addition, in 1990 the changes in the Nicaraguan government seriously affected the financial support for the FMLN. During the elections, the Sandinistas were ousted from power and a more moderate government was put installed with President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. The FMLN was hard pressed to continue “revolution” without the external support it received during the 1980s. With the continued successes of the ESAF and the lack of continued military and ideological support from the Soviets and Cubans, the FMLN turned to the United Nations for a resolution to the conflict.

Internal Conditions that Contributed to the Peace Process

This section describes and analyzes the internal conditions that lead to a negotiated peace in El Salvador. These conditions include the real attempts at

⁵⁰ Gantiva and Palacios, 133

reformation that the Duarte government in El Salvador, with the prodding of the United States, began to implement. Another significant condition that this monograph discusses is the lack of FMLN unification. In addition, the war weariness and lack of mass mobilization and support to the FMLN had significant effects on the continuation of the war and the move toward peace.

The Reformation

I have had to sacrifice some values of ideological thinking in order to provide the country and escape – a hope towards a better future. I am paying the political price today for the benefit of tomorrow.

*José Napoleón Duarte
President, Republic of El Salvador, 1984 – 1989
20 November 1987⁵¹*

As far as reforms of the GoES go, the most successful was in the changes in the political system. During the period of 1982-1989, El Salvador conducted six free and fair elections. The free elections provided the Salvadoran government more legitimacy than the FMLN. The GoES developed a new constitution in 1982 along with a national assembly to answer the concerns of the people.⁵² The GoES was able to put together broad-based coalitions from the right and middle elements of the country. In addition, a key issue that the GoES addressed, with the support of the United States, was land reform. Ambassador Passage remarked that: “While land reform ‘caused havoc with the fragile Salvadoran economy’, (a) that will always be the case with land reform, anywhere, but (b) it was critical to winning the support of the *campesino* class for the

⁵¹ Manwaring, 490

⁵² Spencer, 51

democratically-elected Salvadoran Government in 1982. It was also a critical element in the US decision, in 1980, to assist the GOES in combating the FMLN.”⁵³

Ambassador Passage stated in conversation that: “The lesson we preached (from the Embassy) to the Salvadoran military and security forces and to those who controlled Salvador’s economy, was that they had to change themselves so that the typical *campesino* and his family would begin to actively support the Government side rather than the guerrillas. In the end, they did: the FMLN never had the support of more than 15-20% of the population and even that began dropping once the military got out of politics, the 1982 constitution was enacted, Duarte was elected, and the reforms began.”⁵⁴ The more El Salvador became democratic the more the people were demobilized from the FMLN further eroding the FMLN support base.

The statements of a former FMLN commander even further evidence this. Joaquin Villalobos states that “ The democratic changes that took place before the Peace Agreement were partial and imperfect but felt tangibly by the insurgency. This gave credibility to the idea that working politically in a context of peace was more beneficial than continuing war.”⁵⁵ The FMLN willingness to accept that the GoES was genuinely implementing reforms to install a true democratic society in El Salvador was a great step towards achieving peace between the warring parties.

In March 1989, Alfredo Cristiani, a right wing candidate of the conservative party National Republican Alliance (ARENA), won the election for the Presidency of El Salvador. This at first seemed like a retreat from ongoing reforms in the country but holding true to his campaign promises, President Cristiani vowed to uphold the reforms

⁵³ Passage, December 17, 2007

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Villalobos.

and to continue to transform the government and “not witness a return to the old despotism.”⁵⁶ To promote his dedication to reform and change, President Cristiani in 1990 announced that he would again open peace negotiations with the FMLN to end the war. This continued push for reformation of the GoES made mobilization of the local populace by the FMLN even more difficult. In addition, the overtures of negotiations by the GoES were making them too difficult to ignore.

Divided They Fall

...each organization had its own idea of what that unity would mean and the methods to be used in achieving it.

*Juan Chacon
Member of Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR)
1980⁵⁷*

Even after the unification of the five disparate guerilla organizations in 1980, the FMLN was never truly united in what their strategic goals for the end of the war. The organization never synchronized amongst themselves what were the strategic goals and methods that they should employ to achieve them. Dr. Spencer remarks in his presentation “[These five factions] almost hated each other more than they hated the Salvadoran government.”⁵⁸ On the surface the FMLN projected unity but underneath the thin façade was something entirely different. Each of these five factions retained their separate ideologies, identities, doctrine and areas of operations. In each area of operation, the faction practiced certain autonomy in regards to how operations in the war would be carried out. In addition, there was still suspicion and extreme rivalries between the guerilla factions that more often than not turned into a deadly game of in-fighting.

⁵⁶ Simon Molina, “The Peace Process in El Salvador (1984-1990)” (strategy paper, United States Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA: 1996), 6

⁵⁷ Manwaring, 130

⁵⁸ Spencer, 25

This happened on several occasions took the lives of several FMLN commandants. With the failure of the second final offensive the FMLN had come to the realization that they would have to reevaluate their existing strategy and adapt to the changing times.

Joaquin Villalobos, a former FMLN commandante, states that this adaptability of the FMLN was inherent. Coming from such disparate groups to form one revolutionary organization was a daunting task to achieve without adaptability. Colonel Orlando Zepada, former C-2 for the EASF states that their leadership is a weakness of the FMLN. He states, "... the problem of leadership or caiquisimo between the five guerilla groups – FPL, FAL, FARN, ERP, and PRTC. They have never achieved unity of command. That is an internal weakness caused by their struggle for power."⁵⁹

War Without End?

Why doesn't God make a miracle and civilize our country? All that poor people like me can do is fly our white flags over our little houses, tend to our chickens and pigs, and pray.

*Maria Beltran,
Peasant of the village of El Barillo, 1987⁶⁰*

After 12 years of continuous civil war, the general populace of El Salvador began to suffer an extreme exhaustion to the constant conflict in their daily lives. Again Schwarz, in his Rand paper, states that after a decade of war "...most Salvadorans are not politically engaged in the war and dislike both the armed forces and the guerillas."⁶¹ The Salvadoran people were tired of the repression from both sides of the conflict and the loss of their livelihood and family members. During the conflict, about 75,000 Salvadorans

⁵⁹ Manwaring, 371

⁶⁰ Krauss, 57

⁶¹ Schwarz, 14-15

were killed and 8,000 went missing.⁶² The local populace held no love or support for the FMLN and resented the FMLN for bringing the war into their homes. The FMLN practiced regular kidnapping of the local people and used civilians as human shields during most of the irregular warfare phase of the war.⁶³ This showed how the FMLN did not garner the popular support it depended on to overthrow the Salvadoran government.

Looking at these three internal conditions it is still difficult to isolate a single issue that would push the GoES and the FMLN to the negotiating table. While looking at the war weariness of the population, one can say that that condition exists in any long-term conflict. Therefore, it is not sufficient in creating the environment for change in the conflict. The political reforms of the Duarte and the following Cristiani governments served to demonstrate to the Salvadoran population that their government had heard the woes and recognized the need for change. It was by far the most influential condition in ending the war but it was not the sole catalyst that brought the FMLN to the negotiating table.

The Peace Accords and Today

Soldiers, stand in horror, peace has arrived.

*Unnamed Venezuelan General, 1823*⁶⁴

After a series of peace talks sponsored by the United Nations (UN) since 1989, a final negotiated peace accord – the Chapultepec Peace Accords of 1992 – paved the way for negotiated peace between the warring parties. The Peace Accords had four major goals to achieve in order to resolve the conflict. “These were: stop the war through

⁶² Krauss, 55

⁶³ Ibid., 106

⁶⁴ Ricardo Guillermo Castaneda quotes this anecdote from a senior Venezuelan diplomat. Cited from Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, *El Salvador's Democratic Transition Ten Years After the Peace Accord*, (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2003), 1

political means; achieve a prolonged possible [sic] promoting democracy in the country; guaranteeing the respect of human rights; and, the reunification of Salvadoran society.”⁶⁵

The key provisions of the Peace Accords were a compromise between the two warring parties. The GoES had to fulfill the following provisions:

- Reform the military
- Establish a new national civilian police force
- Enact human rights reforms
- Enact political, economic and social reforms that included electoral, judicial and land reallocations
- The FMLN had to ensure that they demobilized, disarmed, and joined the political process as a legal political party. ⁶⁶

Given El Salvador’s history, it is not surprising that the civil war resolution brought mixed results, despite the oversight role of the UN. In the realm of military reforms dictated by the accords, all issues were resolved with relative success. Political reforms succeeded in creating the institutions necessary to enable democracy, but the participants exploited them to their own advantage, rather than that of the state. In large measure, economic reforms substantively changed Salvadoran domestic systems for the good, but the Salvadoran economic picture still has several obstacles to overcome.

Among the prerequisites for a transition to a peaceful society, the disarmament and demobilization of the FMLN took center stage. The United Nations declared this

⁶⁵ Ruben Oswaldo Rubio-Reyes, *The United Nations and Peace Operations in El Salvador*, (Carlise Barracks: US Army War College, 2000), 16

⁶⁶ United States Institute of Peace. *Peace Agreements Digital Collection El Salvador*, http://www.usip.org/library/pa/el_salvador/pa_el_salvador.html [accessed August 28, 2007].

process completed by 1993 without lasting violations by either side.⁶⁷ The demilitarization of the FMLN was a convenient way to end the military standoff and ensure that the civil war did not resume. It laid the foundations for the transition of guerilla forces into society. In exchange, the government forces were directed to assume a defensive stance against external threats and relinquish their role as a domestic law enforcer.⁶⁸ The accord also laid out how the ESAF would reform its officer corps and force structure.

The accords called for the ESAF to establish an ad hoc commission in which the ESAF would “self-purge” the officer corps of members involved with extra-legal killings during the civil war.⁶⁹ Furthermore, the accords directed ESAF to dismantle its covert intelligence service, National Guard, and Treasury Police while also reducing the size of the Army by 50%. In addition, the military had to fall under the control of civilian leadership. These measures met with various degrees of success. The ESAF never dismantled the National Guard and Treasury Police; the ESAF merely renamed them and transferred their entire structures into the regular army.⁷⁰ The army was reduced, however, and the ad-hoc commission removed complicit officers from the command structure. It took several years for the military to complete the transition of key governmental institutions to civilian authorities.

The accords also called for the reformation of the Policía Nacional (PN). It included the dissolution of the PN and the establishment of a new Policía Nacional

⁶⁷ Richard Stahler-Sholk, “El Salvador’s Negotiated Transition: From Low Intensity Conflict to Low Intensity Democracy.” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 36, no.4 (1994), 12.

⁶⁸ United Nations Blue Book Series. *The United Nations and El Salvador (1990-1995)*. New York: United Nations, Dept of Public Information, 1995.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Stahler-Sholk, 15

Civilista (PNC). The PNC was to be the “first time that internal security was separated from the military”.⁷¹ The makeup of the new PNC consisted of 60% of civilians who were not associated with the conflict, 20% from the old PN and 20% from the FMLN.⁷² This was a remarkable attempt at reintegration of the FMLN into the mainstream government.

The accords also focus discussion on the transition of the FMLN from an outlawed entity to a legal political party. In the demobilization and disarmament of the FMLN, the GoES hoped to reintegrate the FMLN guerrillas into mainstream Salvadoran society. Ambassador Passage reflected on this issue during one of his meetings with President Duarte in 1985:

“[When President Duarte] was planning his first face to face meeting with the guerrillas up at Las Palmas, in FMLN-held territory on the Honduran border, [I asked him] what he envisioned as a future for the FMLN if he was able to negotiate a peace.

He appeared somewhat startled, as though he hadn’t given it much thought beyond that they would relinquish their weapons and come down out of the mountains to rejoin civil society. No, I said, you have a force of approximately 30,000 men whose only known skill is fighting. What do you think they will do, what sort of work would they be likely to get in a society that already has between a 15-25% unemployment rate?

Thus was born the origins of his subsequent plan to incorporate them into the Army and Police (despite the strong reservations of army and police commanders) and creation of the Policía Nacional Civilista (PNC). Expecting them to come down out of the mountains and ‘find work’ is nonsense; there has to be some planning for job creation, either in the security forces or elsewhere.”⁷³

This shows the short sightedness of the GoES in beginnings of the conflict. With the assistance of the United States, the United Nations and the peace accords, the GoES developed an innovative solution to reintegrate the FMLN fighters into society

⁷¹ Ibid., 15

⁷² Ibid., 16

⁷³ Passage, December 17, 2007

meanwhile also addressing the problem of how to keep them employed after their demobilization.

In addition, the accords called for a comprehensive reform and redistribution of land in the country. No longer was the oligarchy to hold all of the land that drives the economy of El Salvador. The success of land reform has been mixed at best.

Today, El Salvador has come a long way from the days of the civil war. Ruben Zamora remarks that El Salvador has “overcome the state violence as the normal and predominant instrument for domination.”⁷⁴ Politics are no longer militarized. While the FMLN have been reintegrated as a new political party they have not had any major success at the national level. In contrast, the FMLN has garnered a significant support base at the local government level and members occupy mayoral positions throughout the country. Many number of former FMLN commanders have become mayors in their former areas of operation.

Conclusion

The civil war in El Salvador lasted twelve brutal years. Overall, while the significant aid that the United States and the communist bloc of Nicaragua, Cuba and the Soviet Union provided greatly enhanced the capabilities of the warring parties of El Salvador, they were not sufficient to tip the scales for one side over the other. The findings show that what brought a negotiated peace was a combination of a military stalemate coupled with the tangible reforms of economic and political policies of the later democratically elected Salvadoran governments that in turn cut off any popular support for the FMLN. Both the FMLN and GoES had no choice but to negotiate a peace

⁷⁴ Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, *El Salvador's Democratic Transition Ten Years After the Peace Accord*, (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2003), 7

settlement. The FMLN realizing that a military victory would not be possible became adaptable and was not rigidly attached to its ideology.

The findings demonstrate how not one condition was the tipping point or the sole key to ending the war in El Salvador, but that they all play key roles to resolve the conflict. If one condition emerged as prevalent, it is the answering the root causes of the conflict. By treating the illness of the system and its systemic problems and treating those problems, an actor can actually bring the conflict to a close stage off the conflict.

In context of El Salvador's civil war, this monograph identifies some general principles that one can apply to future case studies. The first principle is that the government in peril must be willing to change and address the ills of their society that causes the civil war. The second principle identified is external support for the government / denial of support for the insurgency is key in allowing the first principle to take effect. A third condition that one should develop is a national counterinsurgency strategy that comprehensively looks at the political, military and economic aspects of the nation at risk.

El Salvador demonstrates that it is extremely important for the afflicted government to address the issues and grievances of the disaffected constituency. In El Salvador, the GoES, even after the coup of the civil-military junta made an effort to begin the reform process. As demonstrated earlier, actors that did not advocate change in the government frustrated those attempts. The US Army's Counterinsurgency Manual, FM 3-24, states that a successful counterinsurgency divorces the insurgents from their support base. The GoES's willingness to reform lent it more legitimacy with the populace thereby divorcing the FMLN from them. To further support this claim, A.J. Bacevich,

states that “victory required first redressing the grievances of the Salvadoran people.”⁷⁵

As stated earlier, the FMLN was striving for a mass mobilization and uprising of the people of El Salvador, the GoES’s reform initiatives began to erode the FMLN’s support base. If the GoES could send the message to the population that life would be better with the government than with the revolutionaries it should follow that the population would side with the government.

The case of El Salvador further demonstrates that external support for the government in crisis is crucial to ending the insurgency’s capability to wage the civil war. On the other side, the insurgency must be denied external support. One of Wickham-Crowley’s key conditions for why revolution would not be successful is loss of support from the United States. This is also one of the key conditions in this model, continued support to the government in peril. The case of El Salvador showed how US involvement and support, both economic and military was key to aiding the GoES during the civil war. As stated earlier, the United States funneled over US\$6 billion into the economy and military of the GoES over the course of the conflict. Without this influx of aid to the government, the civil war in El Salvador could have ended up with a very different outcome.

The analysis of this case study shows that the development of an integrated approach to how countries care for their people. As with the case of El Salvador, we can see that a military option was not the factor that ended the war. It was more the factor of changing the government and Salvadoran society as a whole in favor of a direction that would benefit all parties that ended the war. Political, economic, military and social

⁷⁵ A.J. Bacevich et al. *American Military Policy in Small Wars: The Case of El Salvador* (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1988), 6

issues should be addressed as a whole to include the understanding of how they correlate to each other to achieve an effective solution to the country in peril.

El Salvador had a great deal of assistance from the international community in how it waged its civil war and how it ended its civil war. Actors within El Salvador had to make concerted efforts to end the war. On the GoES side they had to make the much needed reforms within the society that would address the grievances of the majority. The FMLN and its five disparate guerilla groups had to come to the realization that armed struggle was not the way that they could achieve a voice within the nation and pursued a different course. Ultimately, the warring parties found something they could agree upon and that was that the war had to end. Nevertheless, El Salvador as a whole had become the key actor in developing a cure to its ills.

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