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A Splendid Little War

Drawing the Line in El Salvador

William M. LeoGrande

In the midst of the presidential campaign, a skeptical reporter asked one of Ronald Reagan's foreign policy advisers whether he and his candidate really believed their own rhetoric about the communist menace in El Salvador. "El Salvador itself doesn't really matter," the adviser replied, "we have to establish credibility because we're in very serious trouble."

The Reagan Administration has moved quickly to establish that credibility by "drawing the line" against "communist aggression" in El Salvador.[1] During his first two months in the Oval Office, President Reagan fired the Carter Administration's reformist Ambassador to that country; launched a major political offensive in Europe, Latin America, and on Capitol Hill to convince anyone who would listen that the insurgency in El Salvador is "a textbook case of indirect armed aggression by the communist powers"; and moved to more than double both economic and military assistance to the beleaguered Salvadoran government.[2]

A nation of virtually no inherent strategic or economic interest to the United States, El Salvador has suddenly become a symbol—a vehicle through which the Reagan Administration hopes to set the tone, by dint of example, for its whole foreign policy. Because the war in El Salvador looks like an easy victory, it provides a perfect opportunity for the new administration to demonstrate its willingness to use force in foreign affairs, its intent to de-emphasize human rights, and its resolve to contain the Soviet Union. In short, the conflict in El Salvador is a splendid little war, made to order for an administration determined to repudiate much of its predecessor's foreign policy.

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1. The phrase "drawing the line" was first used by Secretary of State Alexander Haig when he briefed the Congressional leadership on the State Department's White Paper, *Communist Interference in El Salvador*, Special Report Number 80, February 23, 1981 (reported in *The New York Times*, February 18, 1981).
2. *Ibid.*

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There is no doubt that Ronald Reagan intends to vanquish the incipient regionalism of the Carter Administration's international outlook and restore globalism to its traditional place of pre-eminence in America's strategic thinking. Whether reality will be so amenable is less clear.

Human Rights in Central America: The Reformist Interlude

Jimmy Carter's decision to make the promotion of human rights a major objective of U.S. foreign policy was at once the most celebrated and excoriated of his international initiatives. From the outset, the policy was presented in moral terms—it was an approach to the world as good and decent as the American people themselves.

It was also intended to distance the United States from the brutal excesses of decaying autocracies, rather than wager the prestige and interests of the nation on their doubtful survival. It made more sense, according to Carter's analysts, to adapt U.S. policy to the currents of history than to try vainly to stem the tide. They argued that right-wing dictatorships bent on preserving anachronistic social orders make bad security risks; that the more they rely upon brute force to sustain themselves, the more rapidly they mobilize and radicalize their opponents. For the United States to enlist wholeheartedly in support of right-wing dictatorships would actually endanger national security; ultimately, such regimes would collapse, and an angry populace would bitterly recall—as it did in Iran—that the United States had sided with the tyrants. The Carter Administration believed that the best strategy for preserving national security was to help create pluralist democracies with relatively egalitarian social structures. Such states would tend to be culturally and philosophically closer to the United States than to the Soviet Union and, moreover, would be politically stable.[3]

Despite the complaints of Carter's conservative critics,[4] human rights were never allowed to overshadow immediate national security concerns of a more traditional kind. When crucial allies were involved (e.g., South Korea, the Philippines, the Shah's Iran), the issue of human rights was always muted. But in Latin America, where there appeared to be no immediate security threats in 1977, the human rights policy was applied full force. This was

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3. For an excellent description and evaluation of Carter's human rights policy by one of the participants, see Richard E. Feinberg, "U.S. Human Rights Policy: Latin America," *International Policy Report*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Center for International Policy), October 1980.
4. See, for example, Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," *Commentary*, November 1979, pp. 34–35.

especially true in Central America, where the four nations of the northern tier (Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala) were all ruled by military dictatorships notorious for their systematic repression. By reducing or terminating economic and military assistance to these regimes Washington sought to force them to improve their human rights practices.

The revolution in Nicaragua threw the Carter Administration's human rights policy into crisis. As stability slipped away in Nicaragua after the assassination of opposition leader Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, the objective of promoting human rights was forced once again to compete with the desire to preserve order. Washington could not bring itself to break completely with Somoza, but was equally unwilling to re-enlist wholeheartedly on the side of his increasingly brutal National Guard.[5] During the last eight months of the Nicaraguan insurrection, the unambiguous objective of U.S. policy was to prevent a Sandinista victory. Only the means for achieving this were at issue: should Somoza be forced out in favor of a government of moderates or should he be given the military wherewithal to defend himself, whatever the cost in bloodshed? The failure of policy in Nicaragua was the failure to actually select one strategy or the other. For nearly a year, leaders of Nicaragua's moderate opposition waited in vain for Washington to call for Somoza's resignation, while the Carter Administration persisted in the naive hope that it could somehow conjure up a reformed Somoza to reign over a stable Nicaragua.

The Sandinista victory in Nicaragua set in motion a full-scale review of U.S. policy toward Central America—a review aimed at devising a more effective strategy for preventing similar leftist victories in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. At issue was the question that had not been adequately addressed during the Nicaraguan crisis: how could the Administration reconcile its commitment to human rights with its desire to preserve political stability? Hardliners within the government argued that these objectives were inherently contradictory, and that stability ought to take precedence even at the expense of human rights. They argued for restoring military aid to the region's anti-communists—in essence, a return to the Kissingerian policy of supporting dictators so long as they were "friendly" ones.

Defenders of the human rights policy replied that military aid could not buy stability in the region and that Washington should instead press for

5. A more detailed explanation of this argument appears in William M. LeoGrande, "The Revolution in Nicaragua: Another Cuba?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Fall 1979), pp. 28–50.

progressive social and political reforms. As in the Alliance for Progress, evolutionary change was prescribed as the antidote to revolutionary upheaval. This option won the bureaucratic battle in Washington, and was put into effect almost immediately in an effort to avert the approaching civil war in El Salvador.

Carter and the Search for Order in El Salvador

For generations, the government of El Salvador served as the guardian of the landed oligarchy, suppressing by force of arms any challenge to the nation's rigid social order. The army seized power in 1932 in order to crush a peasant rebellion, which it did successfully at the cost of 30,000 lives. The military's monopoly on political power was retained for the next half century through alternating periods of modernization and retrenchment. But throughout these five decades, two political characteristics held constant: the policies of the regime never threatened the socio-economic foundations of oligarchic power and the military never allowed the political system to become so open that reformist civilians might actually win control of the government.[6]

The process of political polarization in El Salvador began to accelerate in 1972 when the Christian Democrats (PDC) led by Napoleon Duarte won the presidential election, but were cheated out of victory by the military's fraudulent counting of the ballots. In the wake of this electoral fiasco, the armed forces unleashed a wave of repression against the PDC which drove most of its leaders into exile. Despairing of the prospects for peaceful change, many rank and file Christian Democrats began looking to the radical left as the only viable opposition. The mid–1970s witnessed the rapid growth of both the guerrilla left and the "popular organizations"—grass roots community groups of urban and rural poor who enforced their demands for economic reforms by mass demonstrations and civil disobedience.

The rising tide of popular opposition prompted the military government of General Humberto Romero to enact, in 1977, the Public Order Law—a legal license to terrorize the population into silence. The Public Order Law instituted full press censorship, outlawed strikes, banned public meetings, and suspended normal judicial proceedings. Its effect was to demolish the

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6. William M. LeoGrande and Carla Anne Robbins, "Oligarchs and Officers: The Crisis in El Salvador," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 58, No. 5, (Summer 1980), pp. 1084–1103.

remnants of the centrist political parties, further polarizing the political situation. The clandestine guerrilla organizations proved to be beyond the reach of the security apparatus; the repression served only to bring them new recruits. The oligarchy and its extremist allies within the armed forces were terrified by the growing strength of the left and the government's inability to contain it. They undertook a private solution—the formation of the death squads, which proceeded to wage a campaign of assassination against priests, students, and trade union leaders.

By the summer of 1977, political order in El Salvador was decaying rapidly. Washington, armed with its new reformist strategy for the region, began pressuring General Romero to ease the strictures of his military rule and to initiate social and economic reforms to stem the growing strength of the revolutionary opposition. Romero refused and in October was ousted by progressive military officers who promised the sorts of changes he had resisted. The new junta quickly incorporated civilian leaders from the centrist opposition parties and even suggested its willingness to reach some sort of accord with elements of the radical left. The regime promised to create democratic institutions and to enact social reforms that would break the socio-economic dominance of the landed oligarchy. This government was a seemingly perfect vehicle for Washington's new regional policy of reformism; the Carter Administration quickly pledged to support it.

Unfortunately, the October junta proved to be incapable of carrying out its promises—a failure due largely to the internal politics of the Salvadoran armed forces and to the reticence of the United States to carry its support for reformism to its logical conclusion. While the Salvadoran military had traditionally governed in ways congenial to the oligarchy, it also had a tradition of allowing progressive officers to initiate modernizing reforms as long as they did not threaten the basic structure of the existing social order. The October coup was very much in this tradition, but the reforms it promised were more radical than those of the past. Whenever the progressive officers and their civilian allies proposed reforms of any significance, rightists within the armed forces blocked them as being too extreme. The result was paralysis of the government which could only have been overcome if the progressive officers had been willing to break with their rightist brethren and take full control of the ideologically divided military. This they were unwilling to do—partly because of institutional loyalty and partly because the United States was unwilling to stand behind them. Though Washington favored social reform, it balked at the October junta's willingness to bring elements of the

radical left into partnership with the government. The Carter Administration's strategy was to isolate the radical left politically, not to allow it to share power.

The October junta's paralysis demolished any hope of accord with the radical left, which proceeded to escalate its insurrectionary activities. The mere suggestion of real socio-economic change terrified the oligarchy, which in turn escalated its paramilitary terrorism. Amidst this spiral of political violence, the moderate civilians within the government sought a showdown with the officers, demanding that reforms be implemented and that the rightist Defense Minister, General José Guillermo García, be removed. The military refused, the civilians resigned, and the government moved sharply to the right. At this critical juncture, the United States did nothing to preserve the moderate reformist character of the government. In fact, despite this fundamental shift in the balance of political forces within the government, U.S. policy changed not at all. The Carter Administration continued to provide both economic and military aid to the regime, justifying its policy with claims that it was supporting a moderate centrist government under attack from extremists on both the left and the right.

Reform With Repression: Land Reform and the Rightward Shift of the Junta

Since January 1980, the moderation of the Salvadoran government has been more chimerical than real. The key difference between the junta formed in January and its predecessor lies in their strategy for resolving the nation's political crisis. While the October junta sought to create a political opening to the left, the January government has sought to defeat the left militarily. At the insistence of the United States, the government grudgingly undertook some social reforms, the most touted of which has been the agrarian program, but this strategy of "reform with repression," as Archbishop Oscar Romero characterized it, has been considerably more repressive than reformist.

Under the stewardship of Ambassador Robert White, the U.S. pursued four interrelated objectives during 1980:

—to pressure the government into implementing real social reforms designed to undercut the left's popular support;
—to urge the government to reduce the level of official terrorism by reining in its own security forces, even if that required the removal of some rightist officers;

—to protect the government from a coup by the extreme right; and
—to entice the moderate left away from its alliance with the guerrillas, thus opening the way for a negotiated settlement that would leave the radicals isolated on the political periphery.

By year's end, it was apparent that this reformist strategy had failed. The agrarian program, the cornerstone of an otherwise modest package of reforms, was at a standstill. The level of official violence had risen dramatically rather than subsiding, and there was no evidence whatsoever that the government was making any serious effort to curtail it or to bring its perpetrators to justice. The extreme right had not overthrown the government, but the government itself had moved so far to the right that its extremist opposition was quiescent.

The agrarian reform program had come to symbolize the moderacy of the Salvadoran government, but its progress offers a microcosm of the political dynamics blocking real social reform. Phase One of the program, promulgated on March 6, 1980, expropriated large landed estates (those in excess of 1,250 acres) and transferred them to the resident peasants to be run as cooperatives. This reform affected only 14.7 percent of the arable land, and many of these estates encompassed the least fertile farm acreage in the country. The implementation of Phase One was accompanied by a state of siege and carried out by the security forces who, with or without the consent of higher authorities, used it as an opportunity to conduct military operations against the peasants in regions with a history of leftist sympathies. Statistics compiled by the Salvadoran Catholic Church show that the flow of refugees and the number of peasants killed by security forces in 1980 were highest in those areas affected by Phase One of the reform.[7] An evaluation of the program prepared by AID notes that this violence has produced "an oppressive atmosphere of uncertainty, insecurity, and fear among the people on intervened farms throughout the country."[8]

Phase Two of the reform would nationalize estates between 250 and 1,250 acres, and distribute the land in the form of family farms. This phase would

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7. Legal Department of The Archdiocese of San Salvador, *Repression Carried Out by the National Army . . . The Military Corps of National Security . . . and Paramilitary Organizations* (San Salvador, 1980): Volumes 1–4.
8. This internal report, prepared by AID, is entitled "El Salvador: Agrarian Reform Organization Project Paper," July 25 1980. On the whole, the best assessment of the agrarian reform is the report by Laurence R. Simon and James Stephens, Jr., "El Salvador Land Reform: 1980-81: Impact Audit" (Boston: Oxfam America, 1981).

affect approximately one-third of the coffee *fincas,* which occupy the most productive acreage and have long been one of the principal sources of agricultural wealth. There are no plans to implement Phase Two in the foreseeable future, and U.S. officials concede that is unlikely it will ever be carried out.

Phase Three of the reform was enacted by Decree 207 on April 28, 1980. It gives all renters ownership of the land they work and has been optimistically described by its promoters as "self-implementing."[9] Designed by Dr. Roy Prosterman, Phase Three is named "Land to the Tiller," after Prosterman's earlier effort in South Vietnam, which served as a model for the Salvadoran reform. The AFL–CIO's American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) has been deeply involved in the implementation of Decree 207, and internal evaluations conducted for both AIFLD and AID indicate that the program is in shambles. Titles to the land have only just begun to be distributed and landlords have been evicting renters so they cannot claim titles. According to the AID report, forcible eviction by "private guards or national security forces" has been "widespread." Moreover, the reform is opposed and often actively obstructed by both the Ministry of Agriculture and the Institute for Agrarian Transformation (ISTA)—the two agencies charged with carrying it out. In May 1980, for example, the Minister of Agriculture suggested that Decree 207 be restricted to peasants who held written rental agreements—a condition which would have rendered over 80 percent of the renters ineligible. This proposal was not adopted, but such resistance to the reform from within the government prompted ISTA Director Rodolfo Viera to threaten to resign last year and lead his Salvadoran Peasants Union into opposition.[10] Shortly thereafter, Viera and two AIFLD advisors were assassinated.

Both the AID and AIFLD evaluations report that Decree 207 has had little effect. An AIFLD survey of beneficiaries of the reform found that 93.4 percent thought they were still renters rather than owners. While most respondents claimed to have heard of the decree, 89.6 percent did not think it had altered the ownership of the land they were renting, and 68.4 percent could not say when it would. By the terms of the decree, *all* these people now own the land they work, though almost none of them are aware of it. According to

9. Roy Prosterman and Mary Temple, "Land Reform in El Salvador," *Free Trade Union News,* Vol. 35, No. 6, June 1980, pp. 1–4.
10. *The Washington Post,* January 5, 1981.

the AID report, rental arrangements continue "as if the law had never been announced."[11]

Though the Salvadoran land reform has not significantly altered the socio-economic condition of the nation's 2.5 million peasants, it has nevertheless been, in a perverse sense, a success. From the outset, the principal objectives of the reform package were political rather than socio-economic. For the Salvadoran government, it was a way of satisfying U.S. demands for reform without alienating rightist officers like Defense Minister García who hold the real reins of power. For the United States, it was tangible "proof"—indeed, the only proof—that the government of El Salvador was truly as moderate and reformist as the Administration portrayed it. For if the agrarian reform is a sham or a failure, it is difficult to imagine on what grounds the Salvadoran government might qualify as either moderate or reformist. Certainly not in the political sphere. Ambassador White's hope of consolidating the position of the moderates within the government had even less success than the agrarian reform.

The Loosening Grip of the Moderates

The pivotal political issue over the past year has been whether the Christian Democratic civilians and the progressive military officers within the government could muster the influence to win control of the security forces away from the right. Such control would have allowed the moderates to remove extremists officers from command positions, punish those guilty of political murders, crack down on the death squads, and thereby curb the repression which took the lives of some 10,000, 80 percent of which were civilian deaths ascribed to state security forces.[12]

Not only were the moderates unable to restrain the security forces; they were unable even to maintain what little influence they had. The right-wing coup which Ambassador White labored so diligently to prevent occurred slowly, by degrees, not in the streets but in the high councils of the officers corps. As the rightist officers lost patience with reform, they slipped quietly into agreement with their more extremist compatriots, becoming convinced

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11. AFL–CIO, American Institute for Free Labor Development, "Preliminary Report: Survey of Beneficiaries of Decree 207."

12. This widely cited estimate of 80 percent originated with the Salvadoran Catholic Church (*supra* note 7). During the Carter Administration, State Department officials were willing to acknowledge in private that these were the most reliable figures available.

that the only way to meet the challenge of the left is with violence—however much violence that might take.

Over the past year, the rightist officers—the same officers who blocked the reforms of the October 1979 government—have consolidated their hold on power by reducing the Christian Democrats and the progressive officers to impotence. The steady stream of resignations by Christian Democrats over the last twelve months stands as testimony of the rightist character of the regime. Almost without exception, each letter of resignation has cited the intransigence of the rightists and the inability of the moderates to circumvent them.[13]

The progressive officers within the government have fared worse than the Christian Democrats. In mid-summer of 1980, the rightist officers began a campaign to systematically strip the progressives of their command positions, demoting or reassigning them to diplomatic posts.[14] Shortly thereafter, several of the most prominent progressives were assassinated by death squads, and in November their leader, Colonel Adolfo Majano, was finally removed from the five-member governing junta. Majano was later arrested and sent into exile. The progressive faction within the officers corps, which was powerful enough in 1979 to overthrow Romero's government, has now ceased to be a significant political force.

Without allies in the armed forces, the Christian Democrats serve at the pleasure of the rightist officers. The appointment last November of Christian Democratic leader Napoleon Duarte as president should not be mistaken for a significant realignment of political forces. The leadership shuffle that placed Duarte in the presidency left the senior military command basically intact, leading one diplomat to describe Duarte as an "adornment."[15]

Duarte may have his own agenda, but he does not have the political power to carry it out. This is apparent by his inability to act in his own interests: for example, Duarte can neither proceed with the agrarian program nor can he dismiss his military opponents. Like the agrarian reform, the restructuring of the government came at the insistence of the United States. The Carter Administration needed it to preserve the centrist image of its client in the wake of the murders of four North American religious women, and the Salvadoran officers acquiesced to it in order to mollify the State Department.

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13. Cynthia Arnson and Delia Miller, "Background Information on El Salvador and U.S. Military Assistance to Control America" (Institute for Policy Studies), June 1980.
14. *The Washington Post,* September 5, 1980.
15. *The New York Times,* December 14, 1980.

But the reorganization has not altered the structure of political power in El Salvador one iota. The government was and remains a rightist military regime with a civilian facade.

Nothing demonstrates this more clearly than the practices of the government itself. The violence of the security forces accelerated in 1980; despite the pleas and promises of the Christian Democrats, the reign of official terror was much worse than under the openly reactionary government of General Humberto Romero. So too, the atrocities committed by the death squads. Not one person has been arrested for the hundreds of murders of Salvadorans for which the extreme right took "credit" in 1980.[16] Officers on the extreme right who have been caught plotting against the government have not even been punished. Major Robert D'Aubuisson, who led a coup attempt last May, was arrested and then released after the officers corps voted not to place him on trial. The Vice-Minister of Defense, also implicated in the plot, was not even removed from his post.[17]

The Opposition of the Left

Despite U.S. efforts to portray the Salvadoran regime as a centrist government beset by both the left and the right, there are really only two sides to the conflict in El Salvador: the rightist government and its leftist opposition, which is no more a "Pol Pot" left than the government is "centrist." The opposition includes a broad, politically heterogeneous array of groups organized under the political rubric of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR), and the military command of the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN). The FDR unites middle class social democrats, Christian Democrats who have split from Duarte, professional associations, trade unions, and the popular organizations whose ideology is best described as a homegrown amalgam of Marxism and liberation theology. The FDR's President, Guillermo Ungo, was Napolean Duarte's vice-presidential running mate in the election of 1972.

The FMLN unites the various guerrilla armies which span the ideological spectrum of Marxism from Trotskyist to Castroist to orthodox Marxist–Leninist. Since early 1980, the FDR and the FMLN have pursued a coordinated

16. Two Salvadoran rightists were recently arrested however, for the murders of Rodolfo Viera and his two AIFLD advisors.
17. Vice Minister Carranza was eventually transferred in November 1980 as part of the government reorganization in which Duarte became President.

political, diplomatic, and military strategy to defeat the rightist government. This collaboration has resulted in a moderation of the guerrillas' socialist political program and the joint adoption of a social democratic platform for a revolutionary government modelled on the Nicaraguan example. The platform calls for radically redistributive socio-economic reforms, but promises an economic role for the private sector, the preservation of political pluralism, and a foreign policy of nonalignment.[18] The viability of such a program is by no means certain, but would depend, as in the Nicaraguan case, upon a host of internal and external circumstances.

The left clearly failed to create an irreversible military situation before Ronald Reagan entered the Oval Office, but the January 1981 offensive was hardly a great victory for government forces either. Though the guerrillas were unable to defend any of their initial territorial gains, they demonstrated their ability to launch coordinated assaults throughout the country and to operate with impunity in many rural areas. Never before had the various guerrilla groups demonstrated such a capacity for coordinated action. Indeed, the threat posed by the January offensive was severe enough to prompt the Carter Administration to radically reverse its own policy. Lethal military aid had been withheld from El Salvador since 1977 on human rights grounds, and $5.7 million in "nonlethal"[19] aid was suspended in November pending the outcome of the investigation into the murders of the North American missionaries. On the very eve of leaving office, the Administration restored the "nonlethal" aid and rushed an addition $5 million in lethal material to the Salvadoran armed forces, though the offensive was thwarted before the aid arrived.

Ironically, the Carter Administration's decision to restore military aid came on the same day as Carter's Farewell Address in which he offered a stirring rhetorical defense of his human rights policy. Nothing could have better symbolized the contradictions of Carter's policy in Central America. Ultimately, the Administration's commitment to social and political reform could not compete with Washington's traditional fear of leftist governments.

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18. The Platform of the Democratic Revolutionary Front is included as an appendix to Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, "El Salvador: A Revolution Brews," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (July-August 1980). See also, *The New York Times*, January 26, 1981.
19. The designation "non-lethal" must be understood in a technical sense rather than literally; it includes transportation and communications equipment essential for counter-insurgency warfare.

The current military situation appears to be one of stalemate: the left does not yet have the capacity to defeat the armed forces, but neither do the armed forces have the capacity to exterminate the guerrillas. The January offensive was by no means the final battle of El Salvador's civil war—more likely, it was only the opening shot fired. The future course of the war could well depend as much upon external actors as upon the domestic principals, and a great deal more than the tranquility of El Salvador may be at stake.

Regional/International Alignments

The conflict in El Salvador has never been a purely domestic affair. The long succession of rightist regimes there have always relied upon Washington's military and political support to help cow their opponents. As political strife escalated in 1980, so too did the level of international involvement, and no external actor was more prominent than the United States. In addition to providing nearly $100 million aid, Washington was intimately involved in the internal politics of both the Salvadoran government and its armed forces.

The United States has not been the only patron of the Salvadoran government; support from Venezuela and Costa Rica have been crucial for maintaining the regional legitimacy of U.S. policy. Venezuelan President Herrera Campins has lobbied hard within the international Christian Democratic movement to gain acceptance for Duarte's government, and Venezuela has provided considerable economic assistance to San Salvador. Venezuelan opposition leaders accuse their government of covertly shipping arms to the Salvadoran security forces, but Herrera Campins denies the charges. Costa Rica's Christian Democratic president, Rodrigo Carazo has also been supportive of U.S. policy and maintains cordial relations with Duarte's government, though Costa Rica does not have the resources to make any major material contribution to the conflict.[20]

Guatemala and Honduras are allies of the Salvadoran regime, a fact which the U.S. government has been less than eager to spotlight. Both nations are ruled by right-wing military governments which perceive the possibility of a leftist victory in El Salvador as a threat to their own internal security. Over the past year, both have sought closer ties with the rightist officers in the Salvadoran armed forces rather than with the government *per se*. During the

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20. *The Washington Post*, January 17, 1981.

left's January 1981 offensive in El Salvador, Honduran and Guatemalan forces were mobilized along the border, ostensibly to prevent the fighting from spilling across the frontiers. In effect, however, they were providing an anvil against which the Salvadoran military hoped to pound guerrillas. There were numerous reports, though unconfirmed, that some Honduran and Guatemalan units crossed the frontier to operate jointly with their Salvadoran allies.

Whether or not such reports are accurate, there is little doubt that the Guatemalans are predisposed to intervene in El Salvador if the left appears to be gaining militarily. The Guatemalan armed forces have a history of coming to the aid of the Salvadoran right in times of crisis (in 1932 and again in 1972), and the Guatemalan government has spoken openly of the need to halt the "communist tide" before it reaches Guatemalan shores. Finally, U.S. intelligence reports reveal that both the Guatemalan and Honduran governments are assisting in the creation of paramilitary groups within their territories, groups composed of former Nicaraguan National Guardsmen and anti-Castro Cubans whose objective is to wage war against communism on a regional scale.[21]

The left, too, has its international allies, among whom Mexico, Nicaragua, and Cuba have been the most vocal. Though Mexico has not formally broken relations with El Salvador, the Mexican government and ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) are firm supporters of Salvadoran leftists. Mexico City is the principal base of operations for the FDR's efforts to build diplomatic support.

Mexico and the United States are farther apart on the issue of El Salvador than on any other. Within hours of Reagan's election, President José López Portillo publicly warned the incoming Administration against intervention in Central America. Mexican protests escalated in January when the Carter Administration restored military aid to El Salvador; Foreign Minister Jorge Castaneda warned the United States to let the Salvadorans "solve their own problems," and PRI President Gustavo Carvajal promised that the party would support any people that "fights for its freedom." That same week,

21. This report, entitled "Dissent Paper on El Salvador and Central America," was circulated in Washington D.C. during November 1980. For a synopsis, see *The Boston Globe*, November 28, 1980. The report has a rather mysterious history. The State Department denies that it was an official dissent channel document, but several Department officials have told the author that the paper cites existing intelligence reports accurately. This suggests it was either written by analysts within the government or by someone with access to classified material.

25,000 Mexicans marched against U.S. intervention in El Salvador—the largest such demonstration in recent years.[22] In February, when General Vernon Walters travelled to Mexico City to present Washington's evidence of Cuban involvement in El Salvador, he was denied an audience with President Portillo. Portillo then followed Walters' visit with a speech in which he went out of his way to stress Mexico's close relations with Cuba, calling it the Latin American state "most dear" to Mexico.[23]

Mexican policy is based upon an assessment of Central American reality not so different from that of the Carter Administration. The Mexicans are convinced that the military governments of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras cannot long survive the growing demands of the poor for social change. Stability in the region therefore requires that these narrowly-based dictatorial regimes be replaced with popular governments willing to dismantle the oligarchic land-owning systems and distribute the benefits of development to a broader cross-section of the populace. While the Mexicans have no desire to see pro-Soviet Marxist–Leninist regimes predominate in Central America, they see fundamental change as inevitable and believe that strong international support for social democratic opposition elements offers the best hope for long-term stability. The Mexicans, unlike the Carter Administration, have not been afraid to carry this policy through to its logical conclusion, i.e., supporting the revolutionary oppositions in El Salvador and Guatemala. Based upon their experience of peaceful coexistence with Cuba, the Mexicans are confident that they can live cordially with whatever form of revolutionary government emerges.[24]

Mexico's view is widely shared within the Socialist International, which has provided financial assistance and diplomatic support to the FDR. A number of key European Social Democratic parties, including those in Germany, Sweden, Holland, and Norway, are on record as supporting the FDR and opposing any deeper U.S. military involvement in El Salvador. Sweden's support for the left has been so vocal that the Reagan Administration was moved to lodge a formal protest in February—the first such protest made to a West European nation since the war in Vietnam.

The breadth of the FDR's European support prompted Washington to launch a major diplomatic offensive on the continent in an effort to counter

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22. *The Washington Post*, January 25, 1981.
23. *The New York Times*, February 21, 1981.
24. For an excellent report on the Mexican position, see the interview in *The New York Times*, January 4, 1981.

it. Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Lawrence Eagleburger was dispatched to Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom to convince the allies that Cuban and Soviet arms shipments to the Salvadoran left constituted a "textbook case of indirect armed aggression" requiring a coordinated allied response.[25] He did not meet with stirring success. Most of the Europeans were unwilling to enter in the Administration's crusade against communism in El Salvador until the Administration provided more detail on how it proposed to respond. None of the Europeans were anxious to see the United States escalate its military involvement; all expressed support for a negotiated political settlement rather than a military solution.[26]

The role of socialist and radical states, especially Cuba and Nicaragua, has received great attention because of the State Department's report on "communist interference" in El Salvador. Up until the last few months of 1980, Cuban and Nicaraguan aid to the left was more political than military. Both states had openly endorsed the Salvadoran opposition and were routinely providing it with advice. Managua, like Mexico City, served as an important center of diplomatic and political activity for the FDR and FMLN, but U.S. intelligence could discern only a trickle of arms from Nicaragua to El Salvador. As late as September, 1980, Washington certified that the Nicaraguan government was not materially promoting the revolution in El Salvador and was therefore in compliance with the Congressionally-imposed condition for the release of $75 million in economic aid.

The Tide Turns: Presidential Transition and Communist Involvement

In the midst of the guerrillas' January offensive, the Carter Administration reversed itself, claiming that it had "compelling evidence" that Cuba, Vietnam, and the Soviet Union had begun channelling massive arms shipments into El Salvador via Nicaragua.[27] This sudden flood of arms, along with the exigency of the guerrilla offensive itself, were cited as justifications for the resumption of U.S. military aid to the Salvadoran armed forces. At the same time, economic aid to Nicaragua was suspended in an effort to force the Nicaraguans to close the arms conduit.

In February, the Reagan Administration released a White Paper docu-

25. This phrase is from the State Department White Paper, "Communist Interference in El Salvador," *op. cit.*
26. *The New York Times*, February 2, 1981.
27. *The New York Times*, January 1, 1981.

menting the charges initially levelled by Carter. Compiled from a variety of intelligence sources, the report argued that Cuba and the Soviet Union orchestrated the shipment to El Salvador of 200 tons of arms supplied by a number of socialist and radical Arab states.[28] Most of these arms were said to have been shipped through Nicaragua. While the report left little doubt that sizeable quantities of arms were in fact provided to the Salvadoran left by the socialist camp, the report was virtually silent about other supply channels, merely acknowledging in passing that they exist.

Whatever its accuracy, the White Paper is a quintessentially political document in that it was designed not so much to clarify the international dimensions of the Salvadoran civil war as to provide a justification for the Reagan Administration's determination to cast the issue of El Salvador in East–West terms.[29] This effort would have been seriously compromised had the Administration detailed the FDR's contacts with foreign social democrats as meticulously as it documented the FDR's travels within the socialist bloc, or if the report had explored the extent of arms shipments to the left from Panama and Mexico as well as from Cuba and Nicaragua. Even if every allegation in the White Paper is accurate, it still provides only a partial view of the complexity of international involvements in the Salvadoran civil war.

The White Paper serves effectively as a justification for the Reagan Administration's decision to escalate U.S. military involvement in El Salvador. Armed with the report, briefing teams were dispatched to Europe, Latin America, and Capitol Hill in a well-orchestrated effort to build domestic and international support for a change in U.S. policy. But the basic thrust of this new policy was determined long before the arms build-up described in the White Paper. Early in the presidential campaign, Reagan and his foreign policy advisors targeted Carter's human rights policy, especially as applied in Central America, as a major focus of attack. The insurgency in El Salvador was portrayed as resulting primarily from Cuban and Soviet subversion rather than domestic social and political conditions,[30] and Carter's strategy

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28. Department of State, "Communist Interference in El Salvador," *op. cit.*
29. In describing the implications of the White Paper, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs John Bushnell was explicit: "This outside interference dramatically changes the nature of the struggle in El Salvador from a national one to an international one with East–West dimensions." U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Statement before the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, House Committee on Appropriations, February 25, 1981.
30. National Security Advisor Richard Allen, for example, promised that a Reagan Administration would undertake "quick action against Fidel Castro's Soviet directed, armed, and financed marauders in Central America, specifically Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala," Latin America *Weekly Report,* November 14, 1980.

for achieving stability through reform was denounced as idealistic and foolish, merely aiding the cause of international communism.[31]

The Administration's new policy for El Salvador is one of keeping the left from coming to power, whatever the cost. Within days of assuming office, Reagan increased economic aid by 63 percent and began a full review of policy toward the Salvadoran government. Shortly thereafter, Ambassador White, who was closely identified with the Carter Administration's effort (albeit unsuccessful) to promote reform, was fired. He was replaced by Chargé d'Affairs Frederic Chapin, reassigned from the Defense Department where he had been preparing contingency plans for a major increase in U.S. military aid to the Salvadoran armed forces. Secretary of State Alexander Haig's pledge to shift the focus of U.S. policy away from human rights toward the battle against "international terrorism" was quickly followed by an announcement that U.S. aid to El Salvador would no longer be contingent upon either reforms or human rights.[32] The next day, Department of State's William Dyess tried to dispel the impression that the Reagan Administration was indifferent to reforms in El Salvador, but the after-thought served only to reinforce the obviously tertiary nature of the concern.

The likelihood that this new policy will have the effect of curtailing social reform and encouraging the terrorism of the security forces seems beside the point for the Reagan Administration. The parallels between El Salvador and Vietnam are not merely the constructs of the Administration's liberal critics. Reagan himself seems to see the light of victory in Vietnam at the end of the Salvadoran tunnel. The Administration appears to be less interested in El Salvador *per se* than in creating a symbol of U.S. resolve to use military force abroad and to get tough with the Soviet Union.[33] El Salvador provides what appears to be a geopolitically safe testing ground on which the United States can probe the depths of Soviet commitment to national liberation struggles, assess the cooperativeness of the allies, and begin to purge the national psyche of the "Vietnam syndrome" that Reagan has so denounced.

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31. See, for example, Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorship and Double Standards," *op. cit.*
32. The delinking of aid from reform issues was announced shortly thereafter by State Department Spokesman William Dyess, quoted in news reports of *The New York Times*, February 18, 1981. Alexander Haig's statement of this shift came in his press conference of January 28, reported in *The New York Times*, January 29, 1981.
33. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, February 14, 1981.

El Salvador and the Lessons of Vietnam

The parallels between El Salvador and Vietnam apply not so much to the military circumstances of the two cases, which are quite different, but to the way in which U.S. policy is unfolding. El Salvador, like Vietnam before it, is being transformed from an internal war into an international test of will between East and West. The domino analogy has been resurrected to characterize the nations of Central America, falling in chain reaction from El Salvador north to Guatemala and Mexico, south to Costa Rica and Panama. As candidate Reagan warned, "We are the last domino."[34]

Claims of an East–West confrontation distort reality in two ways—by making it sound as if the Salvadoran revolution is a Cuban creation, and as if it is a purely military struggle that can be won merely by countering the flow of arms from abroad. The revolution in El Salvador began long before the first Cuban arms shipments and it will not fade away if those shipments are halted. By failing to focus on the socio-economic causes of political turmoil, the Reagan Administration betrays a narrowly military conception of national security and a preference for using military means to manage political problems. Revolutions spring from deep social and political fissures in the very foundations of a society—problems that cannot be solved by simply throwing guns at them. Though massive fire-power failed to bring about victory in Vietnam, Administration policies reflect a considerable faith in the efficacy of arms.

By declaring El Salvador to be a test of will with international communism, the Reagan Administration is wagering U.S. prestige and credibility on the survival of one of the weakest, most brutal, and least popular governments in the hemisphere. A nation of virtually no inherent strategic or economic interest to the United States is thus cast, like Vietnam before it, onto the world's centerstage, and the success or failure of U.S. policy takes on implications it would never have otherwise. Once begun, the process of investing blood and treasure in this exemplary case provides its own rationale for incremental escalation.

Policymakers in Washington have already been seduced by the view that just a little more aid, a few more advisors, or one additional reorganization of the government will somehow produce success. Since January 1980, the

34. NBC News, White Paper, *The Castro Connection*, aired in October, 1980.

United States has been drawn almost imperceptibly into a position so totally identified with the Salvadoran government that to disassociate from it would be viewed as a radical change in policy.

American aid has not produced a strong, stable government; it has only fostered dependency. The Salvadoran economy is already comatose, surviving solely on the life support system of U.S. largesse. With the munificence of the United States as a crutch, the rightist military regime has no incentive to make the kinds of political concessions and compromises necessary to achieve a lasting peace. Large-scale military aid to the Salvadoran armed forces will not strengthen them; it will only allow them to continue to ignore political reality. The Reagan Administration promises that it will never send American troops to fight in El Salvador. But if, a year from now, the Salvadoran government is on the verge of collapse, as Saigon was in 1965, how will this Administration respond?

One of the clearest parallels between El Salvador and Vietnam is the way in which the Reagan Administration, and the Carter Administration before it, have waged the public relations war at home. The selling of the war began, as in Vietnam, with a natural effort to put the best possible face on U.S. policy. The Salvadoran government was described as "centrist" even as it engaged in repression worse than its "rightist" predecessor; the opposition was labelled a "Pol Pot left," even though it bore closer resemblance to the Sandinistas than to the Cambodians.

In mid–1980, the Carter Administration evolved a conscious policy of attempting to manage U.S. public opinion on El Salvador by encouraging media coverage favorable to the government. The objective, according to a dissent document purportedly prepared by foreign policy analysts within the Administration, was to prevent the creation of a positive image for the Salvadoran left of the sort enjoyed by the Sandinistas.[35] It was then that truth became hostage to policy; the Carter Administration began making public pronouncements sharply at variance with internal reports—on the effectiveness of the agrarian reform, for example.

The Reagan Administration has continued in this vein. Throughout 1980, Carter's State Department acknowledged that the right in El Salvador was responsible for the overwhelming majority of political murders. One official called the mortality statistics gathered by the Salvadoran Catholic Church "the best data we have." Reagan's State Department now claims that the

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35. See *supra* note 21.

guerrillas have been committing most of the atrocities, and the same official who acknowledged the veracity of the church's data in January now solemnly contends that the church's figures are unreliable because it sympathizes with the communists. Truth has indeed become the first casualty.

Despite strenuous efforts, the Reagan Administration's public relations campaign to justify American involvement in the Salvadoran conflict has not met with overwhelming success. Domestic opposition to the war is mounting and is already greater than was opposition to Vietnam at a comparable stage of the war. On May 3, 1981, some 25,000 people marched in Washington in an anti-war demonstration reminiscent of the 1960s. The Reagan Administration appears to recognize that it cannot sustain U.S. military involvement in El Salvador without the support of the U.S. public. What the Administration appears not to recognize is that public support cannot be manufactured by good public relations; it is inextricably tied to the nature of the conflict itself. A massive counterinsurgency effort against a popular insurgency inevitably requires widespread brutality against the civilian populace if it is to succeed. The lesson of Vietnam at home is that the people of the United States will not long tolerate a policy that necessitates such brutality.

The Reagan Administration's narrow military view of the domestic political situation in El Salvador is matched by its narrow geopolitical view of the conflict's international context and the implications of committing massive economic and military resources there. The Administration seems to believe it can confront the Soviet Union in Central America with relatively little risk—that the Soviets will retreat rather than try to match U.S. escalation in a region far from the areas vital to Soviet national interest. All this is true enough, but it by no means follows that a major U.S. economic and military commitment in El Salvador bears no serious cost. On the contrary, its cost is potentially immense.

The U.S.-Latin American Relations Angle

Reagan's policy places the United States on a collision course with Mexico at the very time that Mexico is unveiling a more activist foreign policy that seeks to extend Mexican influence throughout its "area of concern"—Central America and the Caribbean. While Mexico wants to maintain good relations with the United States, President López Portillo has repeatedly warned against the very policy Washington now seems intent on pursuing. A direct American intervention in El Salvador would demolish relations with Mexico

just when it has emerged as the most important Latin American nation for the United States.

Even Venezuela and Costa Rica, two principal regional supporters of the United States on the issue of El Salvador, could not suffer U.S. intervention in silence. In both countries, the social democratic oppositions have harshly criticized their ruling Christian Democratic parties for supporting the Salvadoran government. Deeper U.S. involvement will intensify that opposition and could easily lead those governments to begin distancing themselves from American policy. A direct U.S. intervention could cause their support to evaporate immediately. Indeed, the Organization of American States would probably condemn such an intervention with only a few nations dissenting.

American relations with Nicaragua would probably not survive a major escalation of U.S. involvement in El Salvador. The insurrection there has already become the principal flash point in bilateral relations, with the Reagan Administration charging that Nicaragua has served as a conduit for arms shipments to the FMLN, and threatening to cut off economic aid to Nicaragua in reprisal. Virtually all observers agree that a cutoff of aid would provoke a severe deterioration of U.S.–Nicaraguan relations, a rapid radicalization of domestic Nicaraguan politics, an unavoidable economic dependence on the Soviet Union, and an increased Nicaraguan role in El Salvador.

DIPLOMATIC COSTS OF INVOLVEMENT: EUROPE AND THE THIRD WORLD

The repercussions beyond the hemisphere of escalating U.S. involvement in El Salvador would be no less damaging. The cool reception encountered by emissaries sent to brief the allies on the Cuban and Soviet role in El Salvador suggests that Reagan will find little support for his policy in Europe. Most of the Western European states would probably be content to leave El Salvador to the United States, but if Washington continues to insist that events in El Salvador will determine whether the United States enters into arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union, the issue will cease to be one which the allies can afford to ignore.[36] Given the strength of European social democracy and its support for the Salvadoran opposition, Reagan may well find that his policy exacerbates tensions within the North Atlantic Commu-

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36. President Reagan said in February that the Soviet "invasion" of El Salvador would have to be "straightened out" before a resumption of arms control talks would be possible. See *The New York Times* coverage of February 28, 1981.

nity rather than forging a new unity and resolve to resist "communist aggression" in the third world.

In the third world, Reagan's policy of deepening U.S. involvement in El Salvador will undo most of the diplomatic gains accruing from Carter's human rights policy. Third world suspicions, focused in recent years upon the Soviet Union because of its interventions in Ethiopia and Afghanistan, would shift back to the United States if Reagan were to intervene directly in El Salvador. The Soviets have had the good sense not to stake their prestige or credibility on the Salvadoran left, so its defeat would damage the Soviet Union not at all. But the sort of commitment by the United States required to defeat the left (if that is possible at all) would damage U.S. relations with the rest of the hemisphere, strain the Western Alliance, erode U.S. prestige in the third world, and prompt a new wave of domestic recriminations in the United States itself. Not incidentally, it would hand the Soviet Union a custom-made sphere of influence argument to justify its policy in Aghanistan and Poland.

THE COSTS OF MILITARY INVOLVEMENT: TUMBLING INTO WAR

The military implications of Reagan's policy are even more sobering than the diplomatic ones. By siding with the right in El Salvador and justifying a deeper U.S. military involvement with claims of Cuban intervention, the United States, intentionally or not, lowers the barriers against direct intervention by Honduras and Guatemala. If massive U.S. aid can be justified as merely a necessary response to Cuban subversion, cannot Guatemalan or Honduran intervention be similarly justified? The Guatemalan government is faced with a major guerrilla insurgency of its own, and the Guatemalan left would surely respond to Guatemalan intervention in El Salvador by escalating its activities and extending its cooperation with the Salvadoran left. The Salvadoran war would thus become a transnational war of left against right in which national boundaries would cease to have any practical meaning.

The danger in Honduras is somewhat different since guerrilla forces there still number only a handful. But Honduras borders Nicaragua, and relations between the two states are strained because of attacks launched on Nicaraguan border areas by former National Guardsmen based in Honduras, and clashes between Honduran and Nicaraguan border guards. Guatemalan or Honduran intervention in El Salvador would be viewed by Nicaragua as a

clear and present threat to its own internal security. In such an atmosphere, the former Guardsmen might well try to provoke a conflict between Nicaragua and Honduras by launching a major border attack. If they should succeed, the whole northern tier of Central America would be engulfed by war.

Unfortunately, the danger does not end there. Nicaragua at war would be forced to turn to Cuba and the Soviet Union for major infusions of military aid. If the war were to go badly and Nicaragua were to call for Cuban troops to help defend Nicaraguan territory, Cuba would probably provide them, for the scenario would fit exactly the circumstances under which Cuba has in the past deployed combat troops abroad—at the request of a friendly government threatened by external attack. The arrival of Cuban troops amidst war in Central America would surely call forth a response by the United States—most probably a naval blockade. The stage might then be set for a re-enactment of the Cuban Missile crisis, but without the 3 to 1 U.S. nuclear superiority that is thought to have determined the outcome in 1962.[37]

Is There No Exit? Pursuing the "Zimbabwe Solution"

Ironically, all the actors in the Salvadoran drama profess to recognize the need for a political rather than military solution to the civil war. Thus far, the obstacle to negotiations between the government and opposition has been the conviction of each party that the other lacks sincerity. Such suspicions produce negotiating proposals which are so clearly unacceptable that they must be understood as propaganda ploys rather than as serious initiatives. Yet even these spurious overtures serve to place the combatants on record favoring some sort of negotiations, thereby opening the possibility, however remote, that an appropriate coalition of international actors might be able to devise a workable negotiating formula.

There is little doubt that most of the international supporters on both sides in the civil war truly desire a political solution, and several have been actively pursuing a way to get the process started. Social Democrats in Western Europe, led by the Germans and Swedes, have attempted to cast themselves

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37. Indeed, there is even a possibility that the Administration itself might seek to provoke such a superpower confrontation. Several Administration officials have suggested that the United States might act directly against the "source" of subversion in El Salvador, i.e. Cuba. See, for example, White House Chief of Staff Edwin Meese's comments reprinted in *The New York Times*, February 23, 1981.

and their Christian Democratic counterparts in Germany and Italy as intermediaries between the Salvadoran government and opposition, thus far to no effect. In Latin America, Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, Costa Rica, and even Nicaragua are also searching for an acceptable mechanism to initiate a dialogue.

Since there is no measure of trust whatsoever between the Salvadoran government and opposition, three necessary conditions must be met before negotiations can begin: 1) each side must be convinced that it has no hope of winning a military victory in the near term: 2) each must be certain that its opponent will not be able to gain military advantage during the negotiations themselves; and 3) each must be assured that the other will have to abide by the outcome of whatever political process emerges from a peace conference. Even then, substantial political pressure will probably have to be exerted by the international allies of both sides to bring them to the bargaining table.

The military stalemate that currently exists in El Salvador provides what may be the last opportunity for arranging a political solution, but it is fleeting. As the Reagan Administration begins to provide massive amounts of economic and military aid to the Salvadoran government, the armed forces there become increasingly convinced that their drive for military victory will be underwritten by Washington. By announcing that aid will no longer be tied to reforms or human rights practices, the Administration is sending the Salvadoran security forces the message, whether intended or not, that the United States will tolerate and abet whatever level of violence pacification requires. Instead of providing unconditional military support of the Salvadoran government, the Reagan Administration ought to be cooperating with European and Latin American efforts to convene a peace conference modelled loosely on the Lancaster House negotiations which produced peace in Zimbabwe.

Indeed, the role of the United States is crucial to meeting all the conditions necessary to launch such a conference. As the premier foreign source of material aid to the Salvadoran government, only the United States has the ability to restrain the Salvadoran Army's quest for military victory, to bring the Salvadoran government to the negotiating table, and to assure that it will abide by any agreements reached (on pain of a cutoff of aid). Germany, Mexico, and Nicaragua can probably bring the FDR–FMLN to the bargaining table, just as the "front line states" brought the Patriotic Front to the Lancaster House conference; only the United States can play the role of Britain by assuring the participation of the Salvadoran government.

Unfortunately, the Reagan Administration's determination to make El Salvador a global example of U.S. resolve probably makes negotiations impossible. Indeed, for Washington, they are counterproductive. It would hardly do to "draw the line" against communism in El Salvador and then fail to win a clear victory. The Reagan Administration gives every indication of believing it can "win" in El Salvador, even if it has to destroy the country in order to save it. As Washington maps this initial gambit in its game of global chess with the Soviet Union, it is Salvadoran pawns that stand in the front rank, about to be sacrificed.