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EL SALVADOR: WHAT'S NEXT?

INTRODUCTION

After receding from public attention, the policy of the United States toward El Salvador has recently reemerged as a contentious issue. Fundamental questions, including whether the U.S. should be involved in El Salvador at all, and if so, in what ways, are being debated. The fate of El Salvador hangs on the outcome of this debate.

The Reagan Administration is correct in perceiving the fate of El Salvador as important to U.S. security and in defending U.S. involvement in that country. At the same time, many critics argue that the U.S. should force the government of El Salvador to make a political deal with the radical totalitarian rebels prior to elections. This argument ignores the fact that the most likely result of such a policy would be the eventual takeover of power by forces allied with the Soviet Union. Clearly, there is need for a more coherent overall approach in dealing with El Salvador.

The Administration must rethink its policies regarding El Salvador, for both the near and the long term, and better coordinate whatever policies it decides to implement. In particular, the Administration must address the difficult issue of outside support for the rebel forces. The improvement of social, economic, and political conditions must continue to be a primary aspect of U.S. policy, but such efforts must be tempered by a realistic standard of judgment, understanding of historical and cultural constraints, and appreciation of the limitations on progress as long as the radicals' destructive violence continues unabated.

BACKGROUND

The current era of U.S. involvement with El Salvador began in the latter days of the Carter Administration. Although guerrilla activity had been increasing for some time, Jimmy Carter had maintained an embargo on military aid. After the guerrilla general offensive in January 1980, the Administration finally supported very limited military aid.

Reagan Administration policy toward El Salvador has passed through four phases. In the first, stern rhetoric by then Secretary of State Alexander Haig in early 1981, calling the rebels' activities part of a "well-orchestrated international communist campaign" and threatening to "go to the source" (Cuba), indicated that a firm U.S. policy was to be expected. Aid, in fact, was increased over Carter levels. The second phase stressed economics, with the introduction of the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) in February 1982. Although not confined to El Salvador, CBI had been inspired by the disorder in that nation.

The third phase began with the arrival at Foggy Bottom of Secretary of State George Shultz. Rhetorical attention to El Salvador noticeably diminished as Shultz delegated most responsibility for policy to the professional staff of the State Department. Policy seems to have been based on a hope that, if El Salvador were ignored, its problems would fade away. The current policy phase began in early February this year, when the Administration concluded that substantial additional aid was needed by El Salvador. This increased attention came very shortly after the return from the area of U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, who reported to the President that the situation was deteriorating.

In the FY 1983 Continuing Appropriations Resolution approved in December 1982, Congress appropriated only \$26.3 million in military aid (less than one-third the original Reagan request) and \$160 million in economic assistance for El Salvador. In March 1983, the Administration requested \$110 million more in military aid (\$50 million in supplemental FY 1983 funds and \$60 million to be reprogrammed from already appropriated FY 1983 funds) and \$67 million more in economic aid, for a grand total of \$136.3 million in military assistance and \$227 million in economic aid to El Salvador for FY 1983. Additional military and economic aid was requested as well for neighboring Honduras and Costa Rica.

Consideration of U.S. policy toward El Salvador raises two fundamental questions: Is there sufficient justification for U.S. involvement in El Salvador? Are there moral considerations that would compel the U.S. to limit or end its involvement, regardless of other considerations?

THE CASE FOR U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN EL SALVADOR

The fate of El Salvador is important to the U.S. for a number of reasons:¹

Historical: Even during relatively isolationist periods, the U.S. traditionally has had a strong interest in developments in the Western Hemisphere, particularly Central America. The now neglected Monroe Doctrine proclaimed that active (especially military) involvement of hostile outside powers in the Western Hemisphere is not acceptable to the United States.

Geopolitical: El Salvador is closer to Washington than is Los Angeles. More important, there is legitimate U.S. concern that the control of El Salvador by forces actively hostile to the U.S. would have serious impact on other nations in the area, which are now friendly to the U.S. At risk too is accessibility to the economically and strategically vital Panama Canal² and the political future of Mexico.

The threat to U.S. interests in Central America is serious. Nicaragua's army already is larger than the combined total of its neighbors, and there are plans to expand it to 200,000. (Brazil, with a population of 122 million, as compared to Nicaragua's 2.7 million, has an army of 182,000.) Nicaraguan airfields are being improved to handle Soviet warplanes, such as MIG-23s, and 25 Soviet M-54/55 tanks have already been received. Cuba has an army of 225,000 and increasingly powerful air and naval forces.

Cuba, Nicaragua, or any combination of Central American nations could not by themselves constitute a significant military threat to the United States. However, having to deal with them in time of crisis or conflict could cause a substantial diversion of U.S. resources from Europe or Asia.

Ideological/Political: The U.S. has a legitimate interest in encouraging the development of free political and economic institutions in other nations. The degree and nature of U.S. actions in pursuit of these goals must depend upon the specific conditions of the nation involved as well as on the extent of outside totalitarian involvement.

The primary rationale for opponents of U.S. military aid to El Salvador is the erroneous notion that the decisive aspect of the conflict in El Salvador at this time is the economic-political dimension. There is of course a significant "political" dimension.

¹ For an in-depth rationale for U.S. involvement, see Max Singer, "Can El Salvador Be Saved?" Commentary, December 1981, pp. 31-36.

² See W. Bruce Weinrod, "Security Implications of the Panama Canal Treaties," International Security Review, Fall 1979, pp. 203-269.

Certain political, social, and economic arrangements in El Salvador often strike the Western/democratic sensibility as, in some respects, unfair, and certain segments of the old governing elite and their allies are unappealing to many in the U.S. Other segments of the Salvadoran population, having become aware of the old inequities, have no doubt become dissatisfied with conditions that they accepted unquestioningly in the past.

However, the essential aspect of the conflict in El Salvador is the military dimension. "Unfair" social and economic conditions have existed in El Salvador (and, indeed, elsewhere) for a considerable period of time. This factor alone, therefore, cannot explain why substantial, sustained violence has recently emerged.

It is the addition of an extraneous factor--assistance and support from Communist nations--that has transformed the situation in El Salvador from a localized struggle into a major theatre of turmoil. The power of the guerrilla effort in El Salvador simply could not have been sustained without the significant direct and indirect intervention, via training and supplies, of outside Communist forces.³

Moreover, the terrorism and destruction employed by the radicals make a resolution of the political side of the situation extremely difficult, if not impossible. In other similar situations, it has proved difficult for an emerging force to build the infrastructure of free political and economic institutions in the presence of continuous terrorist attacks and economic sabotage.

The military dimension and the related East-West dimension of the conflict cannot be resolved by purely political means. The political problems will be extremely difficult to resolve as long as the forces sympathetic to Western principles are subject to attacks supported and sustained from outside the nation.

THE MORAL/HUMAN RIGHTS FACTOR

Critics of U.S. military aid argue that the government of El Salvador does not deserve military aid (or deserves less than requested) because of moral failings related primarily to human rights violations.⁴ Says Congressman Stephen Solarz (D-N.Y.),

³ The rebels have openly admitted receiving such aid; see David Wood, "Salvadoran Rebels Brag of Cuba Ties," Los Angeles Times, March 14, 1983.

⁴ For a detailed discussion of specific human rights cases, see Richard Araujo, "Congress and Aid to El Salvador," Heritage Foundation Background No. 173, March 23, 1982, and for an overview, see testimony of Monsignor Freddy Delgado, Chairman, Human Rights Commission of El Salvador, before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, March 17, 1983.

"I just find it hard to accept on moral and political grounds that we should give aid to a country that is killing its people."⁵

Morality in international politics regrettably must sometimes be a forced choice of lesser evils. Comparing the Salvadoran government with what would likely take its place should the totalitarian forces triumph, or with the current Nicaraguan regime, makes a strong moral case for providing the military assistance necessary to assure the survival of the current government.

For example, when a violation of human rights occurs in El Salvador, the government deplors it, accepts some degree of responsibility, and seeks to renew its efforts toward the elimination or reduction of such incidents. On the other hand, in those nations governed by the same forces with which the rebels in El Salvador have allied themselves, such violations are neither deplored nor even acknowledged.

What could be a more striking moral contrast: in El Salvador, the United States is seeking to encourage those forces that would end human rights abuses and move toward democracy; in Nicaragua, the Soviets and their allies support those forces that have created a quasi-totalitarian atmosphere and have blocked any move toward democratic political reforms. Not only did the Salvadoran rebels seek to block the earlier elections, they have pledged that "we will not participate in the [upcoming] elections. We will increase the war [and] see if any election day arrives."⁶

In El Salvador, as elsewhere, the leaders of the so-called right in many cases have accepted, albeit grudgingly, significant changes in the status quo, which directly reduce their political and economic influence. Unlike the radical left, these forces do not dismiss elections or their results as illegitimate simply because they have not achieved thereby everything they want. But where leftist extremists have taken control, there is no question of having the "moderate right" participate in elections, for the simple reason that there are no elections. As Morton Kondracke of The New Republic put it: "It is ironic that liberals who opposed U.S. policy in Vietnam because our side did not permit elections in 1954 now oppose U.S. policy in El Salvador because we are promoting elections." History's lesson is unambiguous on this matter. Quasi-democratic regimes can and do evolve into democracies, while Marxist-Leninist regimes, with their rulers backed by the Soviets, do not.

There are still occasional references made to the repressive "oligarchy" of El Salvador. Robert Leiken of the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies rationalizes

⁵ Lydia Chavez, "Congressman in El Salvador Finds the 'Reality' Elusive," New York Times, January 18, 1983, p. A12.

⁶ Associated Press wire, March 15, 1983 (12:26 EST).

sympathy with the insurgency by referring to the current El Salvador government as a "tyranny."⁷ Such a standard misjudges the nature of recent developments in El Salvador. While in the past there was such an oligarchy, the "oligarchs" have now lost much, if not all, of their power. The October 15, 1979, coup by reformist military officers resulted in the removal from direct political and economic power of much of the old oligarchy.

The radical left's claim to moral superiority weakens even more in view of its having rejected any attempt to work with the reformist government from the very start, though that government specifically stated it would implement elections, agrarian reform, and respect for human rights. The radical's leadership stated publicly at that time that the violent struggle would continue.

While remnants of the oligarchy undoubtedly are still struggling to avoid losing all influence, and some of the newer military leaders undoubtedly are insensitive to democracy and civil liberties, the frame of reference for evaluating the moral and political situation in El Salvador has been changed by the substantial routing of the old elite. This was most recently demonstrated on March 3, 1983, when the Constituent Assembly voted to continue the land reform program (Decree 207: Land to the Tiller), despite intense opposition from the "oligarchs."⁸

BLUEPRINT FOR U.S. POLICY

Military Aspects of Policy

1) Improved Military Tactics

Greater emphasis upon military training should have characterized U.S. policy in El Salvador long ago. At last, however, the Administration is moving in the right direction. By the end of the year, newly trained troops using more effective tactics could be helping to combat the guerrillas.

Among the approaches that can and should be utilized are: training infantry battalion leaders for each of Salvador's fourteen divisions; providing specialized training, including night maneuvers, for smaller 320-man units (known as "cazadores" or hunters), which would seek out guerrilla units, rather than merely reacting to their attacks;⁹ procuring more and better

⁷ Testimony of Robert S. Leiken before the House Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs, February 28, 1983, p. 36. Edmund Burke, in Reflections on the Revolution in France, was the first to delineate the difference between totalitarian revolution and the "rebellion" of true democrats.

⁸ For an evaluation of the land reform program, see William C. Doherty (AFL-CIO official), letter to the editor, New York Times, March 14, 1983.

⁹ While there have been specific problems with the Salvadoran army, their effectiveness was also hampered by the assignment of some units to preserve land reform efforts.

transport equipment for mobility; increasing the size of the army; increasing the size of the junior officer corps; and stressing leadership qualities, sensitivity to human rights, and civic action capabilities. Increased training for, and rapid promotion of, junior officers is particularly important. Gradual integration of all local and paramilitary forces into the central military command should be considered. Some corruption within the armed forces and weak leadership are currently facts of life. No easy solution to this problem exists, but it can be contained and minimized through the type of training and structural reorganization that U.S. guidance would provide.

Radical insurgencies, even abetted by outside Communist aid, can be blocked. Examples abound, including the Hukbalahaps in the Philippines and the Communist Party in Malaya (now Malaysia) and in Greece. In Latin America, insurgencies have been blocked in many countries, including Bolivia, Uruguay, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, and Venezuela. The latter case is most instructive, since an evolving democracy was able to fend off a totalitarian movement and has since become a stable democracy.¹⁰

2) Dealing with the Privileged Sanctuary

Can El Salvador's elected government stop the rebels so long as they receive outside assistance? How, exactly, does the Reagan Administration propose to inhibit or block the flow of outside support to the rebels? How, specifically, does it expect the government to put an end to the military or political dimension of the radical threat, if outside support is continually available at the option of the Sandinistas and subject to increase without real cost to them? Unless these questions are answered convincingly, doubts will continue as to whether the Administration has a real long-term strategy for dealing with the military aspects of the conflict, and efforts to gain public support will not be successful.

The answers lie in development of an Administration strategy for dealing with the outside support for the guerrillas. This strategy should be presented, in closed session to the appropriate congressional panels, as an integral part of the overall U.S. approach to the conflict. If they balk at this program, then there should be a reassessment of the U.S. role.¹¹ If Congress

¹⁰ For a discussion of the successful Venezuelan struggle with Communist insurgents, see Raymond Estep, "Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America: 1963-1975," Directorate of Documentary Research, Air University Institute for Professional Development, 1975, 31 pp.

¹¹ It would appear that recent developments in Nicaragua may in fact be consistent with the policies suggested here. It would be a mistake for Congress to totally block such activities. U.S. diplomacy also should demand that all factions in Nicaragua be represented in a new government determined through free elections.

were ultimately to block such activities, then Congress alone could be held responsible for continuation of the problems. It may well be asked why the U.S. should observe the self-imposed ground rules of international conflict that allow the Soviets to arm those seeking to overthrow forces friendly to the West, while the U.S. cannot take measures to end or raise the cost of such outside interference. And other options need to be considered, such as increased patrolling of the Gulf of Fonseca to block ships bringing in supplies; a multilateral or OAS force to block land, sea, or air infiltration of supplies. At a minimum, the U.S. should do everything possible to assist in the detection of outside infiltration.

3) Options for Ending Outside Involvement

As things now stand, the Soviets assist the totalitarian forces in El Salvador via their Cuban proxies at no cost to themselves. Means must be found to make the Soviets and Cubans bear some costs for their involvement in this situation, even if paid in other regions of the world.

For instance, there is no reason why the U.S. should not step up its minimal aid to the Afghan rebels. Although such a move is called for in any event, it would also be a signal to the Soviets that they cannot continue to stir the pot cost free. This is the type of quid pro quo that the Soviets understand perfectly well. As for Cuba, at an absolute minimum, Radio Marti should be approved, and the pressure on Cuban forces in Angola increased via support for the UNITA forces (which would require repeal of the Clark Amendment prohibiting such aid).

4) The Pitfalls of Gradualism

While Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger correctly counsels that the Salvadoran conflict should be resolved "at the lowest possible level of participation and conflict by the United States,"¹² there is danger that this could become a policy of gradual escalation. This means that the U.S. would increase its involvement only in reaction to moves by the other side, a policy that has been tried before and has failed. It results in protracted conflicts that totalitarian societies can sustain longer than democratic societies can. Instead of a policy of escalation, the U.S. must determine what needs to be done regarding El Salvador-- and do it.

Diplomatic Policy

1) External Peace Initiatives

For diplomatic, propaganda, and psychological reasons, the U.S. must pursue all avenues that would allow a peaceful resolution of the conflict, provided such actions do not undermine the legitimate government of El Salvador.

¹² Washington Post, March 14, 1983, p. A15.

Regional initiatives are appropriate. International involvement, especially by other Latin American democracies or via the Organization of American States (OAS), to supervise elections, assure the safety of all participants and factions, and help implement election results and to oversee an amnesty program could be very useful and should be encouraged.¹³ It is puzzling that such initiatives have not already been explored. The U.S. could also offer to end its direct military involvement if an effective multinational military task force were created to interdict the flow of weapons from outside Salvador.

Central American diplomatic initiatives calling for mutual withdrawal of U.S. and Cuban forces from El Salvador and Nicaragua respectively and for negotiations by the latter governments with their opponents, are a reasonable starting point for regional discussions. Other regional initiatives also may prove helpful. In any event, provisions for free elections in both nations are an essential part of any agreement. However, the U.S. must not become the prisoner of the priorities and interests of other states, which do not share Washington's international political and security responsibilities and do not have the capability to enforce agreements.

Regional security, too, should have high priority. If the private economic sector, the middle class, and emerging democratic political institutions in Central America were strengthened, and the local military capability to deal with Marxist-Leninist insurgencies at their low initial levels were increased, the likelihood of the need for massive U.S. involvement would be much lower.

2) Cooperation from America's Friends

The U.S. should seek improved cooperation from NATO allies. Not only is Central America important to U.S. security, which in turn is essential to the survival of a free Western Europe, but the establishment of more Soviet bases in the Caribbean area will lower U.S. capability in the event of crises in Europe or the Persian Gulf. It could cause a reassessment of U.S. strategic priorities, including overseas basing of U.S. troops.

¹³ Some congressional critics of U.S. policy have attacked such safety guarantee efforts even before they can be developed, thereby also giving the left a further rationale for not participating. For example, Senator Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) stated that "I don't think you'll find (the OAS) effective at all...Believe me, I wouldn't risk my life on the willingness of the OAS to guarantee my safety." Bernard Weinraub, "OAS Role Sought in Salvador Vote," New York Times, March 17, 1983, p. A10. There is precedent for OAS involvement in establishing and implementing election procedures; see, for example, Henry Wells, "The OAS and the Dominican Elections," Orbis, Spring 1963, pp. 150-163.

The U.S. at least must be able to depend on its allies not to publicly undercut its position; it also should expect its allies to stop helping Nicaragua by means of government controlled or subsidized financial transactions until the Sandinista junta stops aiding the Salvadoran rebels. This matter should be on the agenda of the May 1983 Summit, when the leaders of major Western nations meet in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Political Aspects of Policy

1) Internal Reforms

The United States must continue fostering democracy in El Salvador. It should support implementation of the Pact of Apaneca, which includes provisions for an amnesty program, as well as election security for candidates and the safeguarding of civil liberties. At the same time, the U.S. must develop realistic expectations as to what can be accomplished; it would be unprecedented if a fully functioning democracy were to be established under wartime conditions in a country where political culture and history do not provide strong support for democratic institutions.

Economic reform should be pursued. In particular, political appointees with experience in the private sector, rather than foreign aid bureaucrats, should be placed in charge of assisting agricultural and industrial development. Encouraging unrealistic expectations about the growth of a free economy and the development of stable economic institutions during this time of civil strife should be avoided.¹⁴

Only by encouraging the productive segments of El Salvador's economy can the country once again achieve economic growth. The failure to compensate landowners in the land reform program has forced many productive, talented people out of agriculture and led to the exodus and lack of production by other landowners who fear similar treatment at the hands of the program experts. Also, long-term political stability would be threatened if former landowners were to harbor grievances over compensation.

No reform is more crucial to assuring U.S. support than implementing the rule of law. Creating a judicial system that works, avoids corruption, and places no one above the law is the single development that would be most likely to solidify U.S. public support for aid to El Salvador. While the U.S. is providing training for military personnel, training should also be given to judicial and law enforcement personnel. The Reagan Administration's Project Democracy would be very appropriate for El Salvador and other areas of Latin America as well. The number of Central Americans studying in the U.S. should be greatly increased.

¹⁴ For discussion of the economic progress that has occurred, see Joseph P. Mooney, "El Salvador: True and False," Policy Review, Summer, 1982, pp. 54-57.

The U.S. should continue its vigorous encouragement of the observance of human rights by the Salvadoran government and its allies. At the same time, Congress should require that human rights certification take into account the activities of the Marxist-Leninist forces, in order that a fair and balanced assessment of the overall situation can be made.

2) Cautious Involvement in Internal Affairs

Outsiders rarely understand the nuances of internal political rivalries. Often groups or individuals openly backed by the U.S. or other foreign governments become tagged unfairly as puppets of that nation, thus reducing their effect within their own country. El Salvador is a sovereign nation; its people and leaders have pride in their own culture and customs. Washington should resist the temptation to become actively involved in deciding who should be El Salvador's leaders. At the same time, over a long period of time, some of the institutional reforms encouraged or sponsored by the U.S. will most likely result in personnel changes that the U.S. would like to see.

THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION AND U.S. POLICY

1) Priority Attention to El Salvador

Except for the earliest months of the Reagan Administration, El Salvador appears to have been overlooked by U.S. foreign policy machinery until quite recently, and the effort to present the case for U.S. involvement in El Salvador has seemed uncoordinated and contradictory. A mechanism is needed to ensure such coordination.

It is difficult to understand why the Administration suddenly decided to take serious notice of El Salvador in early February 1983. No crucial changes in the internal situation had taken place at that time. To compound the problem, the Administration has requested from Congress amounts ranging from \$60 million to \$110 million for aid to El Salvador. Clearly, the White House approach to El Salvador seems to have been confused.¹⁵

On the military side of the equation, too, questions must be raised concerning the approach in the early days of the Reagan Administration.¹⁶ Why, for example, has the Administration

¹⁵ Ironically, the person who appears to have been the catalyst for increased attention to El Salvador, U.N. Ambassador Kirkpatrick, was not even invited to a briefing for Secretary of State Shultz on Latin American issues held on November 19, 1982.

¹⁶ Along these lines, it does not make much sense for U.S. and Salvadoran officials to be openly describing upcoming areas of planned attack as they did recently, thus giving the guerrillas time to plan a counter-strategy. See "Salvadoran Plans 2-Track Campaign," New York Times, March 12, 1982, p. 1. Of course, this could have been a clever feint by these officials; unfortunately, there is nothing in the record thus far to indicate such a degree of cleverness by those pursuing this effort.

stayed under its own self-imposed ceiling on the number of advisers sent to El Salvador? Why has it taken over two years for the Administration to place radars in Honduras, which can track the aircraft resupplying the radicals?

The role of the State Department also raises troubling questions and is a source of confusion concerning the real Reagan policy on El Salvador. For example, there were reports of a State Department effort to open negotiations with the guerrillas using Spain as an intermediary, and recent indications that State Department officials told certain Senators that the Administration would accept a substantial reduction in its military aid request. Both reports subsequently were denied, but they compound the confusion as to what Administration policy is and who is in charge of it. Even when the White House is involved directly, policy is far from clear. After a White House official stated that the U.S. would take "all necessary measures" to prevent a radical takeover, a White House spokesman later hurriedly explained that this did not really mean "all" necessary measures.

What is needed is a full-time policy coordinator for El Salvador. Preferably, this would not be a Foreign Service Officer, but a special appointee fully in tune with the Reagan approach to foreign policy and backed by solid presidential authority.

2) Improve Public Awareness of Outside Involvement

The strongest argument for increasing U.S. assistance to El Salvador is that the rebels receive outside assistance and support.

The extent and nature of outside assistance to the rebel forces so far has not been made clear to a sufficiently wide audience. The State Department issued a "White Paper" on outside involvement in February 1981, but little was heard after that. The Administration can and should appeal to the American public's sense of fair play, as most Americans would endorse the principle of helping a popularly elected government defend itself.

Getting the truth to the American people requires two steps: (1) a declassification to the maximum extent possible of information relating to the nature and degree of outside support for the rebels; (2) a full-scale educational campaign by the Administration explaining why the U.S. must assist El Salvador. The long overdue installation of AN/TPS-43 radar systems in Honduras, which can pick up small aircraft infiltrating supplies, should prove helpful, provided the data are disseminated.

3) The Role of Congress

Even though it may be technically possible for the Administration to procure funds for El Salvador without going to Congress, this could prove counterproductive. Congress must share the responsibility. This would present the issue to the nation in the form of a full debate with visible up or down votes on

funding.¹⁷ Anything else would allow congressional critics of assistance to El Salvador to go on the rhetorical attack without ever having to take the responsibility for the consequences of failure to provide the necessary aid. In this way, a policy of providing support can and should obtain the approval of the Congress.

4) The Challenge of Negotiations

There is no reason for the U.S. to negotiate with the rebels. For one thing, there already is an on-going democratic political process in El Salvador, which provides the opportunity for universal participation. For another, there is ample international precedent for a governmental decision not to engage in discussions with certain other parties; neither Israel nor the U.S., for instance, negotiates with the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Nor does the U.S. currently recognize the governments of Vietnam or Kampuchea. There are times and circumstances when a refusal to talk can be considered normal political practice. Negotiating with the rebels would grant them de facto legitimacy; it could enhance their credibility and undermine the position of the government that U.S. policy supports.

And, once talks begin, many of the forces now urging such talks will begin to urge that the pro-U.S. forces make concessions so that the talks might "succeed." All the pressure will be from one side, since the totalitarians will have no such pressures placed on them by their patrons in Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Soviet Union.

It seems pointless for the U.S. to sanction negotiations whose only acceptable end, according to the rebels and their backers, would be to establish a political power balance prior to elections. In effect, the left is saying that, as a precondition to elections, it must have a predetermined position, no matter what the outcome of the elections. The Washington Post has aptly termed this "asking for the moon." It would make any election meaningless.

Even if a political agreement could be reached, is there reason to believe that the rebels would honor it? Not if history is to be trusted. When one side in an agreement is composed largely of those who have totally rejected the existing political,

¹⁷ With respect to the approval of the reprogramming of FY 1983 funds, which has until recently needed only the approval of the Senate and House Foreign Operations Subcommittees, the involvement of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee would seem also to call for a role for the Armed Services Committee which is in a better position to evaluate the requirements for military aid.

economic, and social order and have devoted their lives to this goal, it is unlikely that they will settle for less than total power. Because a democratic political culture encourages the belief that the other side will abide by the rules of democracy and fair play, El Salvador and the U.S. will tend to let down their guard after an agreement has been reached. The historical record is clear that power-sharing agreements between democratic and totalitarian forces almost always lead to the triumph of the totalitarian forces.¹⁸ Observes Flora Lewis, hardly a sympathizer with Administration policy: "Vietnam, Cambodia, any number of places should have taught us by now that die-hard opponents, seeking total power by force, don't negotiate and abide by compromise."¹⁹

Regardless of soothing comments by a few former participants in the Salvadoran political process, it is clear that those who control the guns are committed Marxist-Leninists. In their actions seeking to disrupt the March 1982 elections, and in their recent statements threatening "open regionalization" of the war and asserting that they are "friends of the governments of Cuba and Nicaragua," the rebel leadership in the field leaves no doubt where it stands.

CONCLUSION

The Reagan Administration finally appears to have realized the importance of El Salvador and the need for increased attention to its fate. The Administration's requested assistance package will meet the military, political, and economic requirements necessary to deal with the rebels' threat. Substantial reductions in this proposal would be most unwise. If Congress cuts off aid

¹⁸ For a specific case history of a Communist takeover of a coalition government, see Paul J. Maynard, "Negotiating Under Fire: Lessons from Laos," Wall Street Journal, March 29, 1983, p. 34. For a trenchant analysis of "why the worst get to the top" when totalitarians take power, see F. A. Hayek, The Road to Serfdom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), pp. 157 and 151.

¹⁹ New York Times, March 7, 1983, p. 15. For details on the Nicaraguan experience, see Richard Araujo, "The Nicaraguan Connection: A Threat to Central America," Heritage Foundation Backgrounders No. 168, February 24, 1982; and Statement of Adriana Guillen before the House Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs. See also Karen DeYoung, "There is a Red Menace in Latin America," Washington Post, March 3, 1983, p. B1. Former Sandinista Alfredo Cesar says, among other things, that he "now believes that Marxist-Leninists within the Sandinista leadership were lying when they promise a pluralistic, democratic government...and were waiting for the right moment to take over...." For discussion on the factions of the radical forces, see Alexander Kruger, "El Salvador's Marxist Revolution," Heritage Foundation Backgrounders No. 137, April 10, 1981.

to yet another set of U.S. allies, Congress must accept the ultimate responsibility.

Focus on the importance of El Salvador must be maintained. Time is not on the side of the U.S. because (1) democracies are not successful at sustaining protracted or ambiguous conflict involvement; and, (2) an insurgency is difficult to contain after the inability of the constituted forces to maintain order and make minimal economic progress have allowed it to reach a certain level.

Human rights certification will also come under renewed consideration in July 1983. If the certification process is to be continued, it must provide a way to take into account the violations of the insurgents, as well as the historical record of such insurgencies in ignoring human rights when they come to power. The importance of the military aspects cannot be underestimated. Is there an instance in history when a force dedicated to violent change has made political concessions unless its options for military victory had been foreclosed via military action?

In all the debate and discussion, one crucial fact is consistently overlooked--the current government's attempts to implement the very social, economic, and political reforms that any reasonable member of the democratic left in the U.S. or El Salvador could want.²⁰ The primary factor preventing or inhibiting the implementation of these reforms is the guerrilla's campaign of economic sabotage. The guerrillas are not fighting to make changes that the government refuses to make; they are fighting for political power.

If the situation in El Salvador is viewed from the perspective of the security interest of the United States, then there is an East-West element to the conflict, just as in the case of the Sandinistas' open alliance with Cuba and the Soviets. As a world power, the United States has no choice but to recognize and deal with the East-West aspects of the struggle, as it also seeks to ameliorate social and economic conditions.

A "political solution" based upon a pre-election power-sharing agreement would be a mistake. Policymakers must act upon conclusions based upon the best judgment about likely developments. History and logic indicate that a power-sharing arrangement with the radicals would most likely lead to their takeover of power.

Few, if any, congressional critics of U.S. policies argue for a total cutoff of aid. Probably because of the experience of Vietnam, there is no real sympathy expressed for the insurgents

²⁰ This is not to say that all such "reforms" are necessarily the most useful or fair that could be devised.

as such, but the rhetoric of the critics presents dangers. They are beginning to take their rhetoric seriously and are positioning themselves in a way allowing no out but full opposition of U.S. involvement in El Salvador.

The fundamental problems facing the Reagan Administration in dealing with El Salvador are external to its specific policies. These problems include the breakdown of the post-World War II foreign policy consensus, which accepted the necessity of U.S. marginal involvement in insurgency situations where U.S. interests were at stake; the impatience of a democracy and its difficulty in dealing with protracted conflict;²¹ the manipulation of symbols of "social justice" by Communist forces and their allies in a way that disarms many Western liberals; and the belief that differences can always be compromised through rational discussions. Whether the Reagan or any other Administration can successfully overcome these factors remains to be seen.

The final outcome in El Salvador is not yet predictable. It is predictable, however, that, if El Salvador falls to the Marxist-Leninists, the U.S. will be confronted with similar dilemmas elsewhere in Central America within a short time. At some point, all Americans concerned about the security of their nation will acknowledge the threat. By that time, this threat will have to be dealt with in ways and at a cost much more severe than would have been the case were the requisite will mustered now. As Irving Kristol has pointed out:

If we are prepared to allow a Castro-type insurrection to succeed in El Salvador because it is a poor, under-developed country, then we should be resigned to seeing similar insurrections achieve the same success in Honduras, Guatemala, Panama, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia and Lord knows where else. The "domino effect" doesn't operate automatically, but with our cooperation, it will surely occur.²²

It may be that the American public is not prepared to pay the price necessary to assure the opportunity for the people of El Salvador to evolve in a democratic manner. The challenge to the Reagan Administration is to alert the American people to the danger.

An Administration pulling in one direction and a Congress pulling in another is a formula for foreign policy disaster. The Administration has the duty and responsibility to make a credible case for U.S. assistance, to make military and political decisions

²¹ The classic analysis of this matter is Robert Strausz-Hupe et al., Protracted Conflict (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).

²² Irving Kristol, "What Choice is There in Salvador?," The Wall Street Journal, April 4, 1983, p. 16.

primarily upon what needs to be done, and to carry out those decisions in the most efficient and effective manner possible. It can do no more.

By giving the needed priority to El Salvador, the Administration has begun this process. The debate in the months ahead will determine whether it is allowed to carry out policies needed to maintain the possibility of political pluralism in El Salvador.

W. Bruce Weinrod
Director of Foreign Policy and
Defense Studies