

BURDEN OF THE COLD WAR: THE GEORGE H.W. BUSH ADMINISTRATION  
AND EL SALVADOR

A Thesis

by

SEBASTIAN RENE ARANDIA

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2010

Major Subject: History

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## ABSTRACT

Burden of the Cold War: The George H.W. Bush Administration and El Salvador.

(December 2010)

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At the start of the George H.W. Bush administration, American involvement in El Salvador's civil war, one of the last Cold War battlegrounds, had disappeared from the foreign policy agenda. However, two events in November 1989 shattered the bipartisan consensus on US policy toward El Salvador: the failure of the FMLN's largest military offensive of the war and the murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter by the Salvadoran military, the FAES. Despite more than one billion dollars in US military assistance, the war had stalemated, promoting both sides to seek a negotiated political settlement mediated by the United Nations. The Jesuit murders demonstrated the failure of the policy of promoting respect for democracy and human rights and revived the debate in Congress over US aid to El Salvador.

This thesis argues that the Bush administration sought to remove the burden of El Salvador from its foreign policy agenda by actively pushing for the investigation and prosecution of the Jesuit case and fully supporting the UN-mediated peace process. Using recently declassified government documents from the George Bush Presidential Library, this thesis will examine how the Bush administration fundamentally changed

US policy toward El Salvador. Administration officials carried out an unprecedented campaign to pressure the FAES to investigate the Jesuit murders and bring the killers to justice while simultaneously attempting to prevent Congress from cutting American military assistance. The Bush administration changed the objective of its El Salvador policy from military victory over the guerrillas to a negotiated political settlement. The US facilitated the peace process by pressuring the Salvadoran government and the FMLN to negotiate in good faith and accept compromises. When both sides signed a comprehensive peace agreement on January 16, 1992, the burden of El Salvador was lifted.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The transition from the Cold War to the post-Cold War era transformed the international system. The United States emerged victorious from the Cold War as its former communist adversaries dissolved and proxy conflicts in the Third World ended. Historians and political scientists have analyzed how the George H. W. Bush administration handled the key events of the post-Cold War era: the collapse of the Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the Persian Gulf War.<sup>1</sup> However, scholars of this period in American foreign policy have ignored the end of the Cold War in Latin America. The literature on the Bush administration's Latin America policy focuses overwhelmingly on the Panama crisis and the subsequent invasion in December 1989.<sup>2</sup> One subject that is lacking in this scholarship is El Salvador. This thesis will

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This thesis follows the style of *Diplomatic History*.

<sup>1</sup> On all three subjects, see James A. Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992*, with Thomas M. DeFrank (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995); George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998); William C. Wohlforth, ed., *Cold War Endgame: Oral History, Analysis, Debates* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003). On the collapse of the Soviet Union, see Michael R. Beschloss and Strobe Talbott, *At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993); Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007). On the reunification of Germany, see Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). On the Persian Gulf War, see Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Gary R. Hess, *Presidential Decisions for War: Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, and Iraq* 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> On the Bush administration's Panama policy, see Bob Woodward, *The Commanders*; Guillermo de St. Malo Arias and Godfrey Harris, *The Panamanian Problem: How the Reagan and Bush Administrations Dealt with the Noriega Regime* (Los Angeles: Americas Group, 1993); Michael Grow, *U.S. Presidents and*

examine how the end of the Cold War shaped the evolution of the Bush administration's El Salvador policy.

The Central American nation of El Salvador was one of the last Cold War battlegrounds. El Salvador descended into civil war in 1980 between the Salvadoran government and Marxist-Leninist insurgents known as the *Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional* (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front or FMLN). The Jimmy Carter administration sought to prevent a leftist revolution by providing economic and military assistance to the Salvadoran government. The Ronald Reagan administration escalated American involvement in the Salvadoran civil war. A FMLN victory, the administration contended, would lead to communist domination of Central America and shift the global balance of power to the Soviet Union. Opponents of Reagan's policy in Congress, however, argued that the US was supporting a government and military with terrible human rights records and feared that El Salvador would become "another Vietnam." From 1981 to 1984, they sought to condition and cut the administration's requests for economic and military aid to El Salvador. Both sides agreed in 1984 to a bipartisan consensus policy based on democracy, human rights promotion, and El Salvador's security from leftist and rightist extremists. By 1989, El Salvador had received over \$4 billion in US economic and military aid.

In 1989, the George Bush administration ignored El Salvador and focused on events in Europe, most importantly, relations with the Soviet Union and the collapse of

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*Latin American Interventions: Pursuing Regime Change in the Cold War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008). For an overview of the Bush administration's Latin America policy, see Meena Bose and Rosanna Perotti, eds. *From Cold War to New World Order: The Foreign Policy of George Bush* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), part IV.



communism. Two dates are crucial to understanding why El Salvador reemerged on the Bush administration's foreign policy agenda: November 11 and 16, 1989. On November 11, the FMLN launched its largest military offensive of the war. Although the offensive failed to achieve its objective of overthrowing the government, both the Salvadoran government and FMLN recognized that the war had stalemated and that only a negotiated political settlement mediated by the United Nations would end it. On November 16, the Salvadoran military murdered six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter and covered up the crime by blaming the guerillas. The Jesuit murders demonstrated the failure of US policy of promoting respect for democracy and human rights and renewed the debate in Congress over US aid to El Salvador.

The literature on US policy toward El Salvador focuses overwhelmingly on the Carter and Reagan administrations, specifically, the years from 1979 to 1984. This literature can be organized into three categories: the battles between the Reagan administration and Congress, democracy and human rights promotion, and the US military advisory effort.<sup>3</sup> The majority of scholars and former diplomats who have

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<sup>3</sup> The best work on the debate in Congress over US policy toward Central America is Cynthia J. Arnson, *Crossroads: Congress, the President, and Central America, 1976-1993*, 2nd ed. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993). See also, William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), Shaw Sullivan, "The Reagan Administration and El Salvador, 1981-84: Bureaucratic and Domestic Politics Revisited." *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement* 8 no.2 (Summer 1999): 33-57. On democracy and human rights promotion, see Thomas Carothers, *In the Name of Democracy: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America in the Reagan Years* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Mark Peceny, *Democracy at the Point of Bayonets* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); Elizabeth J. Harris, "Minions or Mavericks? United States Ambassadors and Human Rights Policy in El Salvador" (Master's thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2000). On the US military advisory effort, see A.J. Bacevich and others, *American Military Policy in Small Wars: The Case of El Salvador: Special Report, 1988* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, Inc., 1988); Benjamin C. Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador: The Frustrations of Reform and the Illusions of Nation Building*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1991; Michael Childress, *The Effectiveness of U.S. Training Efforts in Internal Defense and Development: The Cases of*

written about the Bush administration's policy toward El Salvador agree that the events of November 1989 led to a change in the policy and the end of the Salvadoran civil war. However, few examine the Bush administration's El Salvador policy comprehensively. Political scientist William M. LeoGrande focuses on the debate in Congress over US aid and the peace process but ignores the Bush administration's private campaign to pressure the Salvadoran government and military to resolve the Jesuit case.<sup>4</sup> In his book on the Bush administration's foreign policy, political scientist Steven Hurst also marginalizes the administration's role in the investigation and prosecution of the Jesuit murders and in the peace process.<sup>5</sup> Hurst argues that "the Bush administration's inattention and tardiness in responding to change in the Third World led to policies that were reactive, frequently ill thought through and at the mercy of congressional critics."<sup>6</sup>

The most comprehensive studies of the Jesuit murders were written by human rights organizations or scholars who had a personal connection to the murdered Jesuits.<sup>7</sup> Martha Doggett criticizes the Bush administration's handling of witnesses and investigative leads but does not discuss the pressure applied by the administration on its

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*El Salvador and Development* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1995); Richard Duncan Downie, *Learning from Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War* (Westport: Praeger, 1998); John D. Waghelstein "Military-to-Military Contacts: Personal Observations – The El Salvador Case." *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement* 10 no. 2 (Summer 2001): 1-45; Kalev Sepp, "The Evolution of United States Military Strategy in Central America, 1979-1991," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, ch. 23

<sup>5</sup> Steven Hurst, *The Foreign Policy of the Bush Administration: In Search of a New World Order* (London: Cassell, 1999), 135-137.

<sup>6</sup> Hurst, *The Foreign Policy of the Bush Administration*, 143.

<sup>7</sup> Martha Doggett, *Death Foretold: The Jesuit Murders in El Salvador* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1993); Teresa Whitfield, *Paying the Price: Ignacio Ellacuría and the Murdered Jesuits of El Salvador*. Ignacio W. Ochoa, "El Salvador 1989: The Two Jesuit Standards and the Final Offensive," (Master's thesis, San Diego State University, 2003).

ally. Using declassified US government documents, Teresa Whitfield presents an almost impartial analysis of the administration's efforts to bring the killers to justice. The literature on the Salvadoran peace process is more extensive than the previous two subjects.<sup>8</sup> However, few scholars and participants have examined the peace process from the perspective of the Bush administration. Relying on US government records and recent interviews with US officials, Diana Villiers Negroponte has the most detailed account of the administration's involvement in the peace process. She argues that the administration was one of the key actors that facilitated the end of the civil war.

This thesis is one of the first scholarly works to use primary source documents regarding the Bush administration's El Salvador policy from the George Bush Presidential Library. These documents reveal previously unknown discussions about the Jesuit murders, the debate in Congress, and the peace process and contribute to a more balanced account of the El Salvador policy that builds upon previous scholarship. In addition, this thesis also utilized two electronic databases: two collections of US government documents related to El Salvador from the Digital National Security

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<sup>8</sup> See Joseph G. Sullivan, "How Peace Came to El Salvador." *Orbis* 38 no.1 (Winter 1994): 83-98; *The United Nations and El Salvador, 1990-1995*, The United Nations Blue Book Series, vol. 4 (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1995); Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace: A Secretary-General's Memoir* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Tricia Juhn, *Negotiating Peace in El Salvador: Civil-Military Relations and the Conspiracy to End the War* (London: Macmillan, 1998); Alvaro De Soto, "Ending Violent Conflict in El Salvador" in *Herding Cats: Multiparty Mediation in a Complex World*, eds. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1999), 349-385; Diego Arria, "Bringing Leverage to the Peace Process in El Salvador and Central America," in *Leveraging for Success in United Nations Peace Operations*, eds. Jean E Krasno, Bradd C. Hayes, and Donald C.F. Daniel (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 55-80; Marrack Goulding, *Peacemonger* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Diana Villiers Negroponte, "Conflict Resolution at the End of the Cold War: The Case of El Salvador, 1989-1994" (PhD diss. Georgetown University, 2006); Teresa Whitfield, *Friends Indeed?: The United Nations, Groups of Friends, and the Resolution of Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007).

Archive and the El Salvador Collection available at the US Department of State Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room.

What follows is an examination of how the events of November 1989 facilitated the transition from a Cold War to a post-Cold War policy toward El Salvador. Chapter II discusses US-Salvadoran relations from 1961 to 1989 in a Cold War context and the evolution of democracy, human rights, and military policies toward El Salvador. This chapter also discusses the battles between executive and legislative branches of the US government over American economic and military assistance. Chapter III focuses on how the administration pressured the Salvadoran government and military to investigate the Jesuit murders and prosecute those responsible while simultaneously attempting to prevent Congress from cutting aid to El Salvador. Chapter IV examines the role of the Bush administration in the UN-mediated peace process. This thesis argues that the Bush administration removed the burden of El Salvador from its foreign policy agenda by actively pressing the Salvadoran government and military for the resolution of the Jesuit case and fully supporting the UN-mediated peace process.

## CHAPTER II

“THE ISRAEL OF CENTRAL AMERICA”: THE UNITED STATES AND EL  
SALVADOR, 1979-1989

Unlike most of Central America, the United States had little economic, military, and political influence in El Salvador in the early twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> El Salvador did not experience a “banana war” between 1898 and 1934, the period of US economic and military interventionism in the region.<sup>10</sup> To understand how El Salvador became what *New York Times* correspondent James LeMoyne called in February 1989, “the Israel of Central America—a country no American President can afford not to support,”<sup>11</sup> it is necessary to start with the establishment of the military dictatorship. Military rule began when *la Fuerza Armada de El Salvador* (El Salvador Armed Forces or FAES) under General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez overthrew civilian reformist president Arturo Araujo in December 1931.<sup>12</sup> Outraged at the military’s consolidation of power, the *Partido Comunista de El Salvador* (Communist Party of El Salvador or PCES) launched a three-day peasant revolt against the dictatorship in January 1932. In response, the FAES in cooperation with oligarchs killed as many as 30,000 peasants and workers

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<sup>9</sup> Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), ch.1.

<sup>10</sup>For more information on the “banana wars,” see Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars: United States intervention in the Caribbean, 1898-1934*, rev. ed. (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2002).

<sup>11</sup> James LeMoyne, “Guns of Salvador,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 1989.

<sup>12</sup> Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 35. All US government documents on policy toward El Salvador use the English abbreviation, ESAF, when discussing the FAES. When referring to the Salvadoran government, these documents use the abbreviation Government of El Salvador, GOES.

including the PCES' leader, Augustín Farabundo Martí.<sup>13</sup> This event is known in Salvadoran history as *La Matanza* (The Massacre).<sup>14</sup>

Between 1932 and 1979, a military-oligarchy alliance governed El Salvador. Political scientist William Stanley argues that military rule transformed El Salvador into “essentially a protection racket state: the military earned the concession to govern the country (and pillage the state) in exchange for its willingness to use violence against class enemies of the country’s relatively small but powerful economic elite.”<sup>15</sup> Every president during this period was a FAES officer who protected the interests of the “Fourteen Families” who controlled El Salvador’s economy. The FAES consisted of military forces (the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force) and public security forces (the National Guard, the National Police, the Treasury Police, and the Territorial Service).<sup>16</sup> The FAES was governed by the High Command, a group consisting of the minister and deputy minister of defense, the chief and deputy chief of the *Estado Mayor General de la Fuerza Armada* (Armed Forces General Staff), the commanders of the Air Force and several Army brigades, and the directors of the public security forces.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 36-37.

<sup>14</sup>See Thomas P. Anderson, *Matanza: El Salvador's Communist Revolt of 1932* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971); Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, Erik Ching, and Rafael A. Lara-Martínez, *Remembering a Massacre in El Salvador: The Insurrection of 1932, Roque Dalton, and the Politics of Historical Memory* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007); Jeffrey L. Gould and Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness: Revolution, Repression, and Memory in El Salvador, 1920-1932* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup>William Deane Stanley, *The Protection Racket State: Elite Politics, Military Extortion, and Civil War in El Salvador* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 6-7.

<sup>16</sup>The public security forces maintained order and stability in rural and urban areas. Brian J. Bosch, *The Salvadoran Officer Corps and the Final Offensive of 1981* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 1999), 19.

<sup>17</sup>Philip J. Williams and Knut Walter, *Militarization and Demilitarization in El Salvador's Transition to Democracy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 104.

The 1959 Cuban Revolution fundamentally changed US policy toward Latin America. Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro's commitment to spreading communist revolution throughout the Western Hemisphere transformed Latin America into a critical Cold War battleground. To combat communist aggression and subversion, President John F. Kennedy launched the Alliance for Progress on March 13, 1961. This policy of massive economic and social assistance programs was based, according to historian Stephen G. Rabe, on "the belief that the key to stability and anticommunism was democracy, economic growth and development, and social change."<sup>18</sup> Influenced by modernization theory, the Kennedy administration viewed progressive, modern, democratic governments and societies as the key to winning the Cold War in Latin America.<sup>19</sup>

The Alliance for Progress strengthened US-Salvadoran relations. Although El Salvador faced no internal security threats during the 1960s, it received more Alliance for Progress funds than any other Central American nation.<sup>20</sup> The Alliance for Progress resulted in increased foreign investment, high economic growth rates, and the creation of new industries. The Lyndon Johnson administration upheld El Salvador as a model

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<sup>18</sup> Stephen G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 196. On Alliance for Progress, see also Michael D. Gambone, *Capturing the Revolution: The United States, Central America, and Nicaragua, 1961-1972* (Westport: Praeger, 2001); Jeffrey F. Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> For a history of modernization theory, see Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> El Salvador received a yearly average of \$14.36 million in Alliance for Progress funds from 1962 to 1967. K. Larry Storrs, *El Salvador Highlights, 1960 - 1990: A Summary of Major Turning Points in Salvadoran History and U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service, March 13, 1990, 1.

country for the policy.<sup>21</sup> However, the Alliance for Progress inadvertently contributed to the wealth and power of oligarchs who manipulated the funding to their advantage. The military dictatorship implemented no major economic or social reforms to address issues such as malnourishment or land inequality.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the 1969 “Soccer War” with Honduras worsened peasant life by displacing hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans. By 1970, the Alliance for Progress had failed to achieve its objective of a moderate democratic government in El Salvador.

US military policy toward Latin America shifted from hemispheric defense against external threats toward internal security and counterinsurgency.<sup>23</sup> Starting in 1961, the US focused on advising and equipping Latin American armed forces to defeat leftist rural and urban insurgencies and promote the goals of the Alliance for Progress. The Kennedy administration viewed Latin American militaries as a force for social and economic reform.<sup>24</sup>

US military advisors and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) trained the FAES in civic action and counterinsurgency and helped established a new security apparatus. A paramilitary force, *Organización Democrática Nacionalista* (National Democratic Organization or ORDEN), was created to gather intelligence on communist subversives in rural areas. By 1979, ORDEN had over 100,000 members. ORDEN

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<sup>21</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 175.

<sup>22</sup> LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, 176-177.

<sup>23</sup> On US military assistance to Latin America, see Willard Foster Barber and C. Neale Ronning, *Internal Security and Military Power: Counterinsurgency and Civic Action in Latin America* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1966); Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World*, 128.



operated under the new intelligence organization, *Agencia Nacional de Seguridad Salvadoreña* (Salvadoran National Security Agency or ANSEAL). Alleged subversives were targeted and killed by ORDEN, ANSEAL elite units, the National Guard and starting in the 1970s, by *escuadrones de la muerte* (death squads) composed of plainclothes military and police personnel.<sup>25</sup> The security apparatus established under the Alliance for Progress increased the effectiveness of state repression in El Salvador.

El Salvador faced a revolutionary crisis during the 1970s. The expansion of the export-crop economy increased the concentration of land ownership, landlessness, and unequal income distribution.<sup>26</sup> A coalition of three center-left political parties led by the social democratic, anticommunist political party, *Partido Demócrata Cristiano* (Christian Democratic Party or PDC) challenged the dictatorship through the electoral process. The coalition's candidate, José Napoleón Duarte of the PDC, won the 1972 presidential election but the military overturned the results.<sup>27</sup> Duarte was exiled to Venezuela and did not return to El Salvador until 1979. The election convinced many Salvadorans that only revolution could end the protection racket state. Five political-military organizations, composed of mostly peasants and influenced by Marxism-Leninism and Catholic liberation theology, emerged to challenge the dictatorship.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 54-56.

<sup>26</sup> Hugh Byrne, *El Salvador's Civil War: A Study of Revolution* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), 18-22.

<sup>27</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 62-64

<sup>28</sup> The five guerrilla groups are the *Fuerzas Populares de Liberación* (the Popular Forces of Liberation or FPL), *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (the People's Revolutionary Army or ERP), *Fuerzas Armadas de Resistencia Nacional* (the Armed Forces of National Resistance or FARN), the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (*Partido Revolucionario de Trabajadores Centroamericanos* or PRTC), and the *Partido Comunista de El Salvador* (Communist Party of El Salvador or PCES). Byrne, *El Salvador's Civil War*, 33-42.

These guerrilla groups focused on overthrowing the government through armed struggle, by creating mass popular organizations, and organizing peasants and workers. Non-violent leftist groups composed of activist clergymen, students, and peasants were also organized to protest the dictatorship. The situation in El Salvador deteriorated further with the fraudulent victory of General Carlos Humberto Romero in the 1977 presidential election. Romero escalated state violence against members of the Catholic Church and the guerrilla organizations. The guerrillas responded with kidnappings of Salvadoran and foreign businessmen, assassinations, and bombings.<sup>29</sup>

The Catholic Church faced a wave of repression in the late 1970s. The Society of Jesus at the campus of the *Universidad Centroamericana "José Simeón Cañas"* (José Simeón Cañas Central American University or UCA) in San Salvador spoke out against the dictatorship on behalf of poor peasants and the oppressed. As a result, according to scholar Teresa Whitfield, the university was targeted by rightwing groups, the Salvadoran military, and the press as “a hotbed of Marxist ideas where the minds of the Salvadoran youth were ‘poisoned’ and guerrilla operations plotted.”<sup>30</sup> Fliers circulated with the message “Be a Patriot! Kill a Priest!” The first priest to be killed during the revolutionary crisis was Salvadoran Jesuit Rutilio Grande who was shot on March 12, 1977. The next month, Father Alfonso Navarro was killed.<sup>31</sup> Other priests were exiled, expelled, tortured, and arrested.

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<sup>29</sup> Byrne, *El Salvador's Civil War*, 44-46.

<sup>30</sup> Whitfield, *Paying the Price*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 84-93.

The Jimmy Carter administration made the promotion and defense of human rights a fundamental tenet of its foreign policy. According to historians David F. Schmitz and Vanessa Walker, Carter's commitment to human rights and a foreign policy based on moral values represented a break from the previous thirty years of American foreign policy that focused on the containment of the Soviet Union.<sup>32</sup> The issue of human rights weakened ties between the Carter administration and El Salvador. In early 1977, President Romero renounced all US aid when the Department of State criticized El Salvador's human rights record and announced that aid would be cut to countries with patterns of human rights violations.<sup>33</sup>

The integration of human rights into US foreign policy has its origins in the Congressional hearings and human rights legislation of the early 1970s. Starting in 1973, the House Subcommittee on International Organizations and Movements chaired by Democratic Representative Donald Fraser held hearings on human rights violations committed by right-wing authoritarian regimes that received US economic and military aid such as Chile.<sup>34</sup> The subcommittee's key recommendations for human rights legislation outlined in the March 1974 report *Human Rights in the World Community: A*

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<sup>32</sup> David F. Schmitz and Vanessa Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights: The Development of a Post-Cold War Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History* 28 no.1 (January 2004):119-120. On the Carter administration's human rights policy, see Lars Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy toward Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986); Victor S. Kaufman, "The Bureau of Human Rights during the Carter Administration," *Historian* 61 no.1 (1998): 51-67; Hauke Hartmann, "U.S. Human Rights Policy under Carter and Reagan, 1977-1981," *Human Rights Quarterly* 23 no.2 (2001):402-430; Mary E. Stuckey, *Jimmy Carter, Human Rights, and the National Agenda* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Kathryn Sikkink, *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 140-141.

<sup>34</sup> Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 65-69.

*Call for U.S. Leadership* were passed by Congress in 1975 and 1976. Congress prohibited security and economic assistance to countries that violated human rights and established the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs and the position of Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs in the Department of State.<sup>35</sup>

Since 1976, the US has implemented its bilateral human rights policy through initiatives such as private diplomatic discussions, human rights training for security forces, sanctions, and military intervention.<sup>36</sup> However, political scientist Kathryn Sikkink argues that a bilateral human rights policy “did not mean that human rights took precedence in foreign policy decisions. It simply meant that diplomatic staff accepted that human rights issues were now part of the policy calculus...Human rights concerns frequently lost out to...competing perceptions of national security interests...and the preservation of smooth bilateral relations.”<sup>37</sup> The prioritization of human rights and national security interests would become the most important dilemma of US policy toward El Salvador across three administrations.

The year 1979 was marked by a series of setbacks for American global power. From the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 to 1979, the Soviet Union’s intervention in Third World conflicts undermined détente and contributed to the deterioration of superpower relations. In addition to the crises in Central America, 1979 saw the fall of the US-backed Shah of Iran in February, the seizure of the US Embassy and 52 hostages

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<sup>35</sup> Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 69-72.

<sup>36</sup> Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 206.

in Tehran in November, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late December.<sup>38</sup> The mishandling of these crises contributed to the perception that the Carter administration was weak on national security.<sup>39</sup> US-Soviet relations reached a breaking point with the invasion of Afghanistan. By January 1980, according to historian Melvyn P. Leffler, détente was dead and the Cold War had been resurrected.<sup>40</sup>

The Nicaraguan Revolution was the catalyst for the overthrow of President Romero. On July 19, 1979, the Marxist-Leninist *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (Sandinista National Liberation Front or FSLN) overthrew the Somoza family dynasty that had ruled Nicaragua since 1937.<sup>41</sup> The FSLN was the second successful Latin American revolutionary movement of the Cold War. The Salvadoran officer corps and Carter administration officials feared that a similar revolution could occur in El Salvador.<sup>42</sup> A group of young reformist officers and civilians forced Romero to leave El Salvador in a bloodless coup on October 15, 1979. The dictatorship was replaced with a five-person civilian-military junta known as the *Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno* (Revolutionary Government Junta, or JRG).<sup>43</sup> From 1979 to 1982, four juntas governed El Salvador. The juntas implemented numerous reforms including a three-phase agrarian

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<sup>38</sup> On the Carter administration's responses to the crises of 1979, see Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), ch. 16-20. For an excellent analysis of Third World conflicts from 1975 to 1980, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> Julian E. Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security from World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), ch.12.

<sup>40</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 336.

<sup>41</sup> On the Nicaraguan Revolution, see Robert A. Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua*. Rev. ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002).

<sup>42</sup> Bosch, *The Salvadoran Officer Corps*, 27. Soares, Jr., "Strategy, Ideology, and Human Rights," 78-81.

<sup>43</sup> Bosch, *The Salvadoran Officer Corps*, 28.

reform plan, nationalizing the banks, and abolishing ANSEAL, but also declared a state of siege in March 1980.<sup>44</sup> Social democratic and leftist political groups joined in April 1980 to form the *Frente Democrático Revolucionario* (Democratic Revolutionary Front or FDR). This center-left to left coalition carried out general strikes in June and August that shut down the country.<sup>45</sup>

The Cold War transformed El Salvador into “the Israel of Central America.” The Carter administration paid little attention to El Salvador until 1979 when the Nicaraguan Revolution triggered fears of communist domination of Central America.<sup>46</sup> Although the Sandinistas had limited support from Cuba and none from the Soviet Union, Carter’s officials feared Nicaragua would become “another Cuba” and export communist revolution across the region.<sup>47</sup> Despite these fears, the Carter administration provided material support to the Sandinistas’ literacy campaign in 1980.<sup>48</sup>

Following the October 1979 coup, the Carter administration supported the juntas in order to prevent another leftist revolution, “another Nicaragua.” Todd Greentree, a former Foreign Service Officer who served in El Salvador during the 1980s, outlined the Carter administration’s El Salvador policy: “... supporting reforms that would reduce the

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<sup>44</sup> ANSEAL was replaced by the *Dirección Nacional de Inteligencia* (National Intelligence Directorate or DNI). Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 136-140.

<sup>45</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 111.

<sup>46</sup> A search of the Public Papers of Jimmy Carter showed that President Carter made two statements regarding the situation in El Salvador. “Meeting With President Carlos Humberto Romero of El Salvador Remarks to Reporters Following the Meeting,” September 8, 1977; “Meeting With Brigadier General Juan Alberto Melgar Castro of Honduras Remarks to Reporters Following the Meeting With the Chief of State of Honduras,” September 8, 1977. Public Papers of Jimmy Carter, The American Presidency Project <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/index.php> (accessed October 19, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> John A. Soares, Jr., “Strategy, Ideology, and Human Rights: Jimmy Carter Confronts the Left in Central America, 1979–1981,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8 no. 4 (Fall 2006): 57-91.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew J. Kirkendall, *Paulo Freire & the Cold War Politics of Literacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 138.

appeal of the left and build the government to reign in the security forces, fending off coup attempts from the right, and building the political center by isolating radicals on both extremes. These goals amounted to nothing less revolutionary than transforming El Salvador itself.”<sup>49</sup> Like the Kennedy and Johnson administration’s goals under the Alliance for Progress, the Carter administration sought to establish a centrist government by supporting democracy, economic growth, and reforms in El Salvador.

The extreme right unleashed a terror upon El Salvador that exceeded *La Matanza*. According to political scientist Hugh Byrne, exiled Salvadoran oligarchs in Guatemala and Miami, Florida, allied with right-wing military officers to carry out “a ‘dirty war’ against all those suspected of supporting the left and moving to regain power by attempting military coups against the civilian-military juntas.”<sup>50</sup> Death squads, led by former National Guard Major Roberto D’Aubuisson, seized, interrogated, tortured, and killed thousands of Salvadorans with impunity.<sup>51</sup> D’Aubuisson used his experience and contacts in ORDEN and ANSEAL to organize death squads such as the *Ejército Secreto Anticomunista* (Secret Anticommunist Army) and the *Brigada Maximiliano Hernández Martínez* (Maximiliano Hernández Martínez Brigade).<sup>52</sup> According to the human rights organization Americas Watch, the FAES and death squads targeted the labor force,

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<sup>49</sup> Todd Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention: Insurgency and Counterinsurgency Lessons from Central America* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2008), 81.

<sup>50</sup> Byrne, *El Salvador’s Civil War*, 57.

<sup>51</sup> Julie Mazzei, *Death Squads or Self-Defense Forces? How Paramilitary Groups Emerge and Challenge Democracy in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 16. Americas Watch, *El Salvador’s Decade of Terror: Human Rights since the Assassination of Archbishop Romero* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 21-27.

<sup>52</sup> Mazzei, *Death Squads or Self-Defense Forces?* 168-176.

Catholic Church officials and religious workers, political parties, the media, students, teachers, humanitarians, and human rights monitors.<sup>53</sup>

Right-wing assassins murdered Archbishop of San Salvador Oscar Romero, an ardent critic of the military, on March 24, 1980 while he celebrated mass. Romero's death and the massacre during his funeral procession on March 30 prompted international condemnation of the violence in El Salvador. When D'Aubuisson was arrested in May 1980 for plotting a coup, documents were seized linking him to Romero's assassination.<sup>54</sup> D'Aubuisson was released days later but a 1993 United Nations human rights report declared that "[he] gave the order to assassinate the Archbishop and gave precise instruction to members of his security service, acting as a 'death squad,' to organize and supervise the assassination."<sup>55</sup> The armed forces and death squads were responsible for the overwhelming majority of the estimated 9,000 to 15,000 Salvadorans killed in 1980.<sup>56</sup>

The JRG faced a growing leftist insurgency in 1980. In October 1980, the five guerrilla organizations joined to form the *Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberacion Nacional* (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front or FMLN) in honor of Augustín Farabundo Martí.<sup>57</sup> The FDR allied with the FMLN to form a revolutionary coalition.

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<sup>53</sup> Americas Watch, *El Salvador's Decade of Terror*, 27-46.

<sup>54</sup> Stanley, *The Protection Racket State*, 201-203.

<sup>55</sup> *The United Nations and El Salvador, 1990-1995*, The United Nations Blue Book Series, vol. 4 (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1995), 354.

<sup>56</sup> Congressional Research Service, *Comparison of U.S. Administration Testimony and Reports with U.N. Truth Commission Report on El Salvador* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 1993), 4-5; Stanley, *The Protection Racket State*, 206; Byrne, *El Salvador's Civil War*, 63.

<sup>57</sup> On the FMLN, see Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, ch. 4; Cynthia McClintock, *Revolutionary Movements in Latin America: El Salvador's FMLN and Peru's Shining Path* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998); Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003)



The five factions agreed to unification as a condition for Cuban and Nicaraguan military aid and training.<sup>58</sup> During 1980, the FMLN received weapons, training, and money from Cuba, Nicaragua, Vietnam, and other communist countries.<sup>59</sup>

National security interests ultimately took precedence over human rights when the Carter administration resumed military aid to preserve and reform the FAES as an institution.<sup>60</sup> In February 1980, the US began providing non-lethal military aid and training to leverage the FAES to reduce human rights violations and end death squad activities.<sup>61</sup> Human rights violations dramatically increased in 1980 as the FAES systematically repressed the political left, mass organizations and the five guerrilla groups. According to historian John A. Soares Jr., the Carter administration was aware of the FAES' terrible human rights record but asserted that "[h]uman rights would be served in the long run by dealing with the immediate strategic challenge posed by the growing strength of revolutionary movements in Central America."<sup>62</sup> On February 17, Archbishop Romero wrote a letter to Carter arguing that US military aid would increase state repression. The administration made a concerted effort to convince Archbishop Romero to support the JRG in the weeks before his assassination, even contacting Pope John Paul II to pressure him.<sup>63</sup> US Ambassador to El Salvador Robert White, one of the State Department's strongest advocates for human rights, supported the \$5.7 million in

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<sup>58</sup> José Angel Moroni Bracamonte and David E. Spencer, *Strategy and Tactics of the Salvadoran FMLN Guerrillas: Last Battle of the Cold War, Blueprint for Future Conflicts* (Westport: Praeger, 1995), 3-4.

<sup>59</sup> Bracamonte and Spencer, *Strategy and Tactics of the Salvadoran FMLN Guerrillas*, 4-5.

<sup>60</sup> Raymond Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit: U.S. Policy and El Salvador* (New York: Times Books, 1984), 208-209.

<sup>61</sup> Byrne, *El Salvador's Civil War*, 61-62.

<sup>62</sup> Soares, Jr., "Strategy, Ideology, and Human Rights," 89.

<sup>63</sup> Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 250-255.

non-lethal military assistance but opposed the Department of Defense's proposal for the deployment of US military advisors. He did not want the advisors to associate with extreme rightists in the FAES. However, he did allow US military personnel to train 300 Salvadoran officers in human rights in Panama.<sup>64</sup>

El Salvador drew further international outrage with the rape and murder of three American nuns and a Catholic layworker by National Guardsmen on December 2, 1980.<sup>65</sup> After the murder of the four American churchwomen in December 1980, Carter suspended US aid to El Salvador and sent a presidential task force to investigate the murders. When the task force did not find evidence linking senior junta officials to the murders, Carter restored economic aid on December 12.<sup>66</sup> The next month, National Guardsmen shot and killed two American advisors from the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) and their Salvadoran colleague at the Sheraton Hotel in the capital, San Salvador.

After months of preparation, the FMLN launched the "Final Offensive" to overthrow the JRG on January 10, 1981 throughout El Salvador. The political-military strategy consisted of a nationwide military offensive with a simultaneous national strike and defections from the FAES to the FMLN.<sup>67</sup> In response, Carter, in one of his last acts as President, announced \$5 million in lethal military aid, the first since 1977, to El Salvador on January 14, 1981. By the end of the month, the offensive was a military and political failure. The FMLN made several crucial mistakes, most importantly,

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<sup>64</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 44-45.

<sup>65</sup> Americas Watch, *El Salvador's Decade of Terror*, 35.

<sup>66</sup> Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 256-257.

<sup>67</sup> Bracamonte and Spencer, *Strategy and Tactics of the Salvadoran FMLN Guerrillas*, 17-20.

underestimating the strength and unity of the Salvadoran officer corps.<sup>68</sup> Political scientist William M. LeoGrande contends that the Carter administration failed to prevent the civil war because it relied on a reformist political center that was too weak to confront the extreme left and extreme right.<sup>69</sup>

The Ronald Reagan administration implemented a hard-line El Salvador policy. From 1977 to 1980, Reagan, the Republican right, and neoconservatives criticized the Carter administration for its emphasis on promoting human rights and not combating alleged Cuban and Soviet aggression in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>70</sup> Republicans argued that Carter's mishandling of the crises of 1979 and the renewed Cold War left US national security vulnerable to Soviet expansionism in the Third World. Once in power, anti-communist hard-liners reoriented the El Salvador policy toward a military solution that abandoned human rights promotion. On March 2, 1981, the administration provided \$25 million in military aid to El Salvador, \$20 million of which were approved without congressional approval, and increased the number of US advisors to 55.<sup>71</sup>

The Reagan administration argued that El Salvador was a vital US national security issue. Reagan's first Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, focused the administration's attention to El Salvador in January 1981, according to LeoGrande, because it appeared "politically defensible, military winnable...geostrategically advantageous... [and it] seemed like an ideal place for a showdown [with the Soviet

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<sup>68</sup> Bosch, *The Salvadoran Officer Corps*, ch. 7-9.

<sup>69</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 50-51.

<sup>70</sup> Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), ch.8.

<sup>71</sup> Shawn Sullivan, "The Reagan Administration and El Salvador, 1981-84: Bureaucratic and Domestic Politics Revisited," *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement* 8 no.2 (Summer 1999): 38.

Union].”<sup>72</sup> According to political scientist Lars Schoultz, Central America became a “symbol of U.S. power and resolve. Day after day, week after week, the Reagan administration said that Central America is the place where the United States had to stop Communism from swallowing up U.S. allies.”<sup>73</sup> A FMLN victory, administration officials emphasized, would undermine the credibility of the US and shift the global balance of power in favor of the Soviet Union.<sup>74</sup>

The domino theory also influenced the Reagan policy toward Central America.<sup>75</sup> The Reagan administration emphasized that the FSLN and FMLN were manifestations of Soviet and Cuban aggression in Central America. Nicaragua was the first “domino” to “fall” in Central America to communist expansionism and El Salvador was next. The domino theory, political scientist Jerome Slater asserts, exaggerated the role of external aggression in Central America, the relationship between revolutionaries in Nicaragua and El Salvador, limited US policy options to covert action or military intervention, and overestimated the threats to US national security.<sup>76</sup> Opponents of Reagan’s El Salvador policy contended that the global balance of power argument and domino theory had been used to justify the Vietnam War.<sup>77</sup> The administration was aware of the pervasive fear of

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<sup>72</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 80-81.

<sup>73</sup> Lars Schoultz, *National Security and United States Policy toward Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 274.

<sup>74</sup> Schoultz, *National Security and United States Policy toward Latin America*, 274-280.

<sup>75</sup> Political scientist Jerome Slater defined the domino theory as the theory “that the United States must take decisive action to prevent a communist victory in small country A, in itself of little or no economic or strategic significance to American interests, for the fall of that country would set in motion a chain of events that would lead inexorably to communist takeovers in geographically contiguous countries B, C, D, and so on throughout an entire region.” Jerome Slater, “Dominos in Central America: Will They Fall? Does It Matter?” *International Security* 12 no. 2 (Autumn 1987), 105.

<sup>76</sup> Slater, “Dominos in Central America,” 107-130.

<sup>77</sup> Schoultz, *National Security and United States Policy toward Latin America*, 280-282.

escalated US involvement in the Salvadoran civil war but according to LeoGrande, when it “insisted that El Salvador would not become another Vietnam, more people who had never heard of El Salvador began to worry that it would.”<sup>78</sup>

The Soviet Union did not intervene in the Salvadoran civil war. Scholar Danuta Paszyn argues that “contrary to the Reagan administration’s propaganda, the Soviet Union, even in the pre-Gorbachev period, paid only lip service to the Salvadoran revolutionary struggle.”<sup>79</sup> Central American analysts in the Soviet Union recognized that conditions existed for armed struggle in El Salvador but the FMLN lacked the necessary unity to overthrow the government.<sup>80</sup> As a result, the Soviet Union did not provide the FMLN with military aid and training. Furthermore, the relationship between the FMLN and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was marginal and most of the five factions were anti-Soviet.<sup>81</sup>

The other component of the Reagan administration’s Central America policy was the rollback of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. The US cooperated with Argentine military government in the early 1980s to organize and train anti-Sandinistas forces known as *Contrarevolucionarios* (Counterrevolutionaries or Contras).<sup>82</sup> Publicly,

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<sup>78</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 102. For comparisons between El Salvador and Vietnam, see George C. Herring, “Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Uses of History,” in *The Central American Crisis: Sources of Conflict and the Failure of U.S. Policy*, eds. George C. Herring and Kenneth M. Coleman (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1985); David H. Petraeus, “El Salvador and the Vietnam Analogy,” *Armed Forces Journal International* 124 (February, 1987): 41-45; Thomas G. Paterson, “Historical Memory and Illusive Victories: Vietnam and Central America,” *Diplomatic History* 12 no.1 (January 1988): 1-18.

<sup>79</sup> Danuta Paszyn, *The Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change in Central America, 1979-90: Case-Studies on Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 106.

<sup>80</sup> Paszyn, *The Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change in Central America*, 94-95.

<sup>81</sup> Paszyn, *The Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change in Central America*, ch.6.

<sup>82</sup> On Argentina’s involvement in counterrevolutionary activity in Central America, see, Ariel C. Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America, 1977-1984* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1997).

the Contras were an interdiction force that would stop arms shipments from Nicaragua to the FMLN. Secretly, their objective was to overthrow the Sandinistas. The Reagan administration faced strong Congressional opposition to its requests for humanitarian and military aid to the Contras in 1982 and 1983. Congress passed a \$24 million cap on funding for the Contras in December 1983. When the funds ran out in the spring of 1984, the CIA was expected to end its support for the Contras. However, the Reagan administration established an illegal system to circumvent Congress and continue funding the Contras from 1984 to 1986. The operation was made public in October 1986 and followed by the revelation that the administration had sold arms to Iran to secure the release of hostages in Lebanon and diverted the money from the arms sales to funding the Contras. The Iran-Contra scandal nearly led to the demise of the Reagan administration.<sup>83</sup>

Jeane Kirkpatrick, Reagan's Ambassador to the United Nations, shaped the administration's human rights policy toward El Salvador. Kirkpatrick had argued in an influential 1979 *Commentary* article that the US should support anticommunist authoritarian regimes with poor human rights records because unlike revolutionary communist regimes, they could transform themselves through progressive liberalization and democratization.<sup>84</sup> Carter's human rights policy, she asserted, had alienated

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<sup>83</sup> On the Reagan administration's support for the Contras, see James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Robert Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990* (New York: Free Press, 1996). On the debate in Congress over US policy toward Nicaragua, see LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*. On the Iran-Contra scandal, see Peter Kornbluh and Malcolm Byrne, ed., *Iran-Contra Scandal: The Declassified History* (New York: New Press, 1993).

<sup>84</sup> Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships and Double Standards" *Commentary* 68 no. 5 (November 1979): 34-45.

authoritarian regimes friendly to the US, most notably, Iran and Nicaragua, and contributed to their downfall. In the early 1980s, the Reagan administration, guided by what Sikkink called the “Kirkpatrick Doctrine,” ignored human rights violations and reestablished relations with Latin American military governments.<sup>85</sup>

The Reagan administration made little effort to pressure the Salvadoran government and FAES to reduce human rights violations. According to Thomas Carothers, who served in the State Department’s Office of the Legal Adviser during the 1980s, administration hard-liners blamed the FMLN for much of the political violence and despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, argued that the FAES had no connection to the right-wing death squads. Furthermore, they argued that burdening the FAES with human rights concerns undermined its war-fighting capabilities.<sup>86</sup>

In response to widespread opposition to its El Salvador policy from Congress, the American press and public, the administration publicly shifted from a hard-line anticommunist policy to a democracy promotion policy in July 1981.<sup>87</sup> Democracy and free elections became the administration’s political solution to ending the civil war.<sup>88</sup> The administration revived the Carter policy of supporting a centrist democratic government in El Salvador. The Duarte-led PDC received millions of dollars for the March 1982 elections for Constituent Assembly which would choose a provisional

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<sup>85</sup>Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 148-155.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas Carothers, *In the Name of Democracy: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America in the Reagan Years* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 23-24.

<sup>87</sup> Mark Peceny, *Democracy at the Point of Bayonets* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 121.

<sup>88</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 127.

president and draft a new constitution.<sup>89</sup> The elections would demonstrate to Congress the legitimacy of the Salvadoran government and its transition to civilian rule.<sup>90</sup>

A PDC victory was jeopardized in 1981 when D'Aubuisson founded the rightist, anticommunist political party *Alianza Republicana Nacionalista* (Nationalist Republican Alliance or ARENA).<sup>91</sup> According to scholar Richard A. Haggerty, “[t]he FDR refused to participate in the elections, citing fears for the safety of possible candidates, the lack of proper political conditions, and the inordinate influence of the United States. It maintained that negotiations between the FMLN-FDR and the government should precede the holding of elections.”<sup>92</sup> The FMLN intimidated voters and disrupted voting across the country. The PDC gained a plurality in the Constituent Assembly but an ARENA-led coalition raised the possibility that D'Aubuisson would be elected provisional president. To prevent a rightist victory, US Ambassador to El Salvador Deane R. Hinton spent weeks negotiating a pact between the political parties and the military to create a national unity government. A crisis was averted as D'Aubuisson became president of the Constituent Assembly and PDC candidate Álvaro Magaña was elected president.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 158-159.

<sup>90</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 156.

<sup>91</sup> D'Aubuisson had established ties with the US Republican Party hence the use of the word “Republican.” Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 157. According to historian William A. Link, D'Aubuisson had a close relationship with Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) who “...describe[d] him as ‘courageous anticommunist’” and dismissed accusations that D'Aubuisson was connected to the death squads. William A. Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 246-251.

<sup>92</sup> Richard A. Haggerty, “Historical Setting” in *El Salvador: A Country Study*, ed. Richard A. Haggerty. 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Dept. of the Army, 1990), 44.

<sup>93</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 160-164.



Congress unsuccessfully attempted to condition aid based on El Salvador's human rights record. The administration's democracy promotion policy failed to win the support of liberal Democrats who focused on human rights violations and the lack of reform. They raised these issues with the passage of Section 728(d) of the International Security and Development Cooperation Act of 1981 in late December 1981. Known as the "certification requirement," this bill required the administration to certify to Congress 30 days after enactment of the bill and every 180 days that the Salvadoran government was making progress in human rights, controlling the FAES, economic and political reforms, free elections, negotiations to end the war, and the investigation of the murdered American churchwomen and AIFLD advisors.<sup>94</sup> The certification requirement would determine if the Salvadoran government received US aid. Between February 1982 and July 1983, four certification hearings were held before the House Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs.<sup>95</sup> According to scholar Cynthia J. Arnson, the definition of "progress" undermined Congress' ability to condition US aid during the certification process: the definition was ambiguous and "the administration possessed superior information about events on the ground and therefore a greater ability to manipulate information to its advantage."<sup>96</sup> The State Department's methodology for determining

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<sup>94</sup> K. Larry Storrs, *El Salvador Aid: Congressional Action, 1981-1986, on President Reagan's Requests for Economic and Military Assistance for El Salvador*, Congressional Research Service, March 18, 1987, 6.

<sup>95</sup> The first hearing was held from February to March 1982. The second took place in August 1982. The third was held in February 1983 and the fourth in July 1983.

<sup>96</sup> Arnson, *Crossroads*, 89.

progress, the subject of harsh criticism during the hearings, hid the fact that there was little or no progress on any condition.<sup>97</sup>

Frustrated at the Salvadoran government's lack of progress on the cases of the murdered Americans, its inability to stop the death squads, or engage in dialogue with the FDR-FMLN, Ambassador Hinton used his October 29, 1982 speech to the American Chamber of Commerce in San Salvador to denounce the extreme right. He declared in front of Salvadoran oligarchs that 30,000 Salvadorans had been "murdered, not killed in battle, murdered" by "the Mafia" and that US aid would be cut unless the level of human rights violations decreased.<sup>98</sup> The White House rebuked Hinton for his speech and fired him in the spring of 1983.

The deteriorating situation in El Salvador in 1983 pushed the administration to return to a hard-line policy.<sup>99</sup> After recovering from the Final Offensive, the FMLN carried out successful large-scale operations in 1982 and 1983, inflicted heavy FAES casualties, and controlled large areas of the country.<sup>100</sup> A December 1983 State Department analysis of the military situation stated that the FMLN "[had] built up momentum which, if allowed to go unchecked, [would] undermine the government's

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<sup>97</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 152-158. On the methodology used by the US Embassy in San Salvador, see Gloria Valencia-Weber and Robert J. Weber, "El Salvador: Methods Used to Document Human Rights Violations," *Human Rights Quarterly* 8 no. 4 (November 1986): 731-770. On the processes and procedures State Department used in preparing annual country reports on human rights practices, see U.S. General Accounting Office, *Human Rights: State Department's Commitment to Accurate Reporting Has Increased*, GAO/NSIAD-90-224, September 26, 1990. For a State Department report on human rights reporting in El Salvador during the civil war, see "Report of the Secretary of State's Panel on El Salvador," July 1993, *El Salvador: War, Peace, and Human Rights, 1980-1994* collection (hereafter cited as El Salvador, 1980-1994), Digital National Security Archive (hereafter cited as DNSA).

<sup>98</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 178-180.

<sup>99</sup> Peceny, *Democracy at the Point of Bayonets*, 135-140.

<sup>100</sup> Byrne, *El Salvador's Civil War*, 85-88.

ability to maintain morale and cohesion necessary to sustain a military effort in the field and to retain popular support.”<sup>101</sup> In summary, the FAES was losing the war. However, Congress still limited administration requests for increased military aid. Congress approved half of Fiscal Year (FY) 1983 military aid from reprogramming and supplemental requests, limited military aid to \$64.8 million FY 1984 and FY 1985 and capped the number of U.S. military advisors at 55.<sup>102</sup> Reagan sought to divide Democratic opposition by establishing in July 1983 the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America chaired by Henry Kissinger.<sup>103</sup> Although the commission recommended in January 1984 increased military aid conditioned on human rights progress, it failed to establish a bipartisan consensus in Congress over Reagan’s El Salvador policy.<sup>104</sup>

Hinton’s replacement, US Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering convinced the Reagan administration to make a concerted effort for the first time to pressure the Salvadoran government and military to reduce human rights abuses and end right-wing death squad activities.<sup>105</sup> Like Hinton, Pickering used his speech to the American Chamber of Commerce on November 25, 1983 to condemn the death squads.<sup>106</sup> Although the certification process did not lead to aid cuts, on November 20, 1983 Reagan pocket vetoed the extension of the certification requirements for another year, an

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<sup>101</sup> “El Salvador: The Military Situation: [Brief Survey of War from June through November, 1983],” December 2, 1983, *El Salvador: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1977–1984* collection (hereafter cited as *El Salvador, 1977-1984*), DNSA.

<sup>102</sup> Storrs, *El Salvador Aid*, 11-14.

<sup>103</sup> LeoGrande, 237-240.

<sup>104</sup> Arnson, *Crossroads*, 147-148.

<sup>105</sup> Peceny, *Democracy at the Point of Bayonets*, 142-144.

<sup>106</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 228.

action that undermined Pickering's campaign. He persuaded the administration to send Vice President George Bush to confront senior FAES officers in December 1983.<sup>107</sup> Bush offered to request an increase in military aid if the FAES carried out the required actions before January 10, 1984, the day Congress reconvened. These actions included the expulsions of dozens of officers and civilians linked to death squad activities, the arrest of National Guard Captain Eduardo Avila, one of the officers involved in the planning of the murder of the two AIFLD advisors, and the start of the trial of the National Guardsmen accused of killing the four churchwomen.<sup>108</sup> Dated January 20, 1984, a CIA intelligence memorandum stated that Avila had been arrested and death squads killings decreased the month after Bush's visit but "several Army commanders with past death squad associations...were appointed to new leadership positions."<sup>109</sup> Three years after their arrest, five National Guardsmen were found guilty in May 1984 of murdering the four American churchwomen.

Congressional opposition to US aid to El Salvador peaked in the spring of 1984. Based on the recommendations of the Kissinger Commission, Reagan requested on February 3 over \$300 million in supplemental FY 1984 aid: \$178.7 million in military aid, \$90 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF), and \$40 million for development aid. He also requested \$132.5 million in military aid, \$210 million in ESF, and 131.1

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<sup>107</sup> Thomas Pickering and Moisés Naím, "The FP Interview: Mr. Diplomat," *Foreign Policy* no. 125 (July-August 2001), 32.

<sup>108</sup> "Vice President Bush's Meetings with Salvadoran Officials," December 14, 1983, *El Salvador: War, Peace, and Human Rights, 1980-1994* collection (hereafter cited as *El Salvador, 1980-1994*), DNSA.

<sup>109</sup> "El Salvador: Dealing with Death Squads," January 20, 1984, *El Salvador, 1980-1994*, DNSA.

million in development aid for FY 1985.<sup>110</sup> Opponents of Reagan's El Salvador policy attempted to impose strict conditions on the aid requests.

Reagan personally intervened in the debate over US aid to El Salvador by delivering speeches before Congress and the American public in 1983 and 1984. He used the global balance of power argument and domino theory and threatened to blame his opponents if Central America fell under communist domination.<sup>111</sup> According to Robert A. Pastor, Director of Latin American and Caribbean Affairs on the National Security Council during the Carter administration, Reagan effectively used fear to influence the debate:

[wh]en Reagan said the national security of all the Americas was at stake in Central America, his critics feared he was going to war, and his supporters hoped he would. Both were wrong. All Reagan was doing was trying to scare Congress into supporting his program. In his memoirs, he wrote that he never intended to send troops to Central America, and that is probably true.<sup>112</sup>

Reagan achieved decisive victories when moderate and conservative Democrats sided with him and voted for nearly all of his FY 1984 supplemental requests and placed mild conditions on his FY 1985 requests.<sup>113</sup>

The turning point of the debate in Congress was the 1984 Salvadoran presidential election. The two main candidates were Duarte and D'Aubuisson. Although the administration had supported the PDC in the March 1982 elections, it feared that a victory by either candidate in 1984 would prevent the formation of a unified

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<sup>110</sup> Storrs, *El Salvador Aid*, 16.

<sup>111</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 212-218.

<sup>112</sup> Robert A. Pastor, *Exiting the Whirlpool: U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Latin America and the Caribbean*, Rev. and expanded 2nd. ed. (Boulder: Westview Press 2001), 78.

<sup>113</sup> Storrs, *El Salvador Highlights, 1960-1990*, 7-9.

government, provoke a military coup, and lead to aid cuts. Secretly, the administration preferred the traditional conservative *Partido de Conciliación Nacional* candidate Francisco Guerrero.<sup>114</sup> When Guerrero was eliminated in the first round of voting, the administration supported Duarte in the May 6 runoff election. Duarte defeated D'Aubuisson and became El Salvador's first elected civilian president since 1931.<sup>115</sup> Duarte's victory, according to Arnson, was the key to achieving bipartisan consensus over US policy toward El Salvador: "Duarte's announced commitment to reform, combined with his electoral mandate from Salvadoran voters, translated into a virtual political imperative in Washington to 'give Duarte a chance.'"<sup>116</sup> After having been denied the presidency in 1972 and sent into exile until 1979, Duarte's second chance to lead El Salvador had arrived. From 1985 to 1988, Congress approved administration's requests for economic and military assistance and set softened conditions on the assistance.<sup>117</sup> By 1989, US aid to El Salvador totaled \$4.45 billion, making El Salvador the fifth largest recipient of US aid during most of the 1980s.<sup>118</sup> When a bipartisan El Salvador policy was achieved, the Reagan administration and Congress focused their attention toward US support of the Contras. US involvement in the Nicaraguan civil war became the most controversial issue of the second half of the 1980s.

The Reagan administration made little effort to end Central America's civil wars through negotiated political settlements. According to LeoGrande, hard-liners opposed

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<sup>114</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 246-248.

<sup>115</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 183.

<sup>116</sup> Arnson, *Crossroads*, 162-163.

<sup>117</sup> Storrs, *El Salvador Highlights, 1960-1990*, 7-9.

<sup>118</sup> Congressional Research Service, *El Salvador, 1979-1989: A Briefing Book on U.S. Aid and the Situation in El Salvador*, April 28, 1989, 25-30.

negotiations between the Salvadoran government and the FDR-FMLN, “over ‘powersharing’ (that is, giving the guerrillas or their civilian allies any role in the government)” because they believed negotiations constituted a defeat for El Salvador and the US.<sup>119</sup> In order to placate critics of Reagan’s policies, Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs Thomas O. Enders proposed in 1983 a “two –track” policy for Central America. The first track consisted of economic and military aid to the Salvadoran government. The second track involved the promotion of a regional peace process to end the wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Hard-liners contended that Ender’s proposal would prevent military victory. Reagan fired Enders along with Ambassador Deane Hinton in May 1983. He was replaced by neoconservative Elliot Abrams. After these firings, the Reagan administration made no attempt to facilitate negotiations in any Central America conflict.<sup>120</sup>

Without consulting the Reagan administration, President Duarte announced on October 8, 1984 before the UN General Assembly that he was willing to engage in dialogue with the FMLN. With reluctant support from the US, Duarte met with FDR delegates and FMLN *comandantes* (commanders) for the first time on October 15 in the town of La Palma. These talks were mediated by the Catholic Church but failed to produce a political settlement as the FMLN refused to lay down their arms and participate in the democratic process and Duarte opposed powersharing. Both sides met

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<sup>119</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 188-189.

<sup>120</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 188-198.

again on November 30 in Ayagualo but Duarte did not attend. These talks also ended in failure as both sides made extreme demands.<sup>121</sup>

Latin American leaders took action to end Central America's wars through political solutions. In January 1983, the foreign ministers of Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela met on the Panamanian island of Contadora to discuss a peace initiative for Central America.<sup>122</sup> On September 9, 1983, these four countries collectively known as the Contadora Group, convinced Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua to sign a document outlining 21 economic, political, and security objectives for the region such as democracy promotion and ending the use of national territory to destabilize other states.<sup>123</sup> This document formed the basis for future peace agreements.

From June 1984 to June 1986, the Contadora Group and a Support Group of Latin American nations developed three drafts of a peace treaty, the Contadora Act. The Contadora Group focused its efforts on ending the war between the Sandinista government and the Contras in Nicaragua. United Nations official Alvaro de Soto contended that the Contadora Group failed to reach a definitive peace agreement during this period because the 21 objectives were overly ambitious and it excluded all insurgent groups from the peace process. Furthermore, the Central Americans felt patronized by the four foreign ministers.<sup>124</sup> The Reagan administration publicly supported the Contadora peace process but hard-liners covertly worked to undermine any peace treaty

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<sup>121</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 187-189.

<sup>122</sup> For more information on the Contadora process, see Jack Child, *The Central American Peace Process, 1983-1991: Sheathing Swords, Building Confidence* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), part 2.

<sup>123</sup> Child, *The Central American Peace Process*, 174-177.

<sup>124</sup> De Soto, "Ending Violent Conflict in El Salvador," 353.



with the Sandinistas.<sup>125</sup> In 1986, UN Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar and de Soto discussed the possibility of UN participation in Central America as part of a joint effort with the Organization of America States (OAS). However, Pérez de Cuéllar dropped the UN-OAS proposal in late 1986 in the face of opposition from the Reagan administration and the Contadora Group.<sup>126</sup>

The Contadora process stalled until Costa Rican President Óscar Arias convened a summit meeting of the Contadora Group in San José, Costa Rica on February 15, 1987. His peace proposal, the Arias Plan, built upon previous Contadora drafts but emphasized democratization in Nicaragua and the end of aid to the Contras.<sup>127</sup> After months of lobbying for support of his peace plan in the US, Latin America, and Europe, Arias convinced the presidents of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua to sign the Esquipulas II Accord in Guatemala City, Guatemala on August 7, 1987. Esquipulas II was a procedure for establishing peace in the region through measures such as national reconciliation, free elections, an end of aid to irregular forces and insurgent movements, and an international verification commission to enforce compliance.<sup>128</sup> Arias received the Nobel Peace Prize in December 1987 for his efforts to bring peace to Central America. In response to the Esquipulas II Accord, the Salvadoran government and the FDR-FMLN held peace talks on October 4, 1987 at the Vatican mission in El Salvador. Both sides presented and rejected the same demands as in

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<sup>125</sup> For a detailed discussion on how the Reagan administration obstructed the Contadora process, see LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, chs. 16 and 19.

<sup>126</sup> Negroponte, "Conflict Resolution at the End of the Cold War," 265-268.

<sup>127</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 505-510.

<sup>128</sup> Child, *The Central American Peace Process, 1983-1991*, 178-184.

October and November 1984 but agreed to establish two commissions, one to seek cease-fire arrangements and another to guarantee compliance with Esquipulas II.<sup>129</sup> The FMLN broke off peace talks scheduled for November 4 in Mexico after the killing of the country's senior nongovernmental human rights official on October 26.<sup>130</sup> Peace talks did not resume until February 1989.

The US military advisory effort was an important component of the Reagan administration's El Salvador policy. Under the direction of a US Military Group, 55 US advisors trained the FAES to fight the FMLN and respect human rights and democracy.<sup>131</sup> The USMILGP Commander managed the security assistance program and was subordinate to the US ambassador and the Commander in Chief of United States Southern Command in Panama. The US Embassy, USMILGP, the Salvadoran government and military cooperated to design a political-military strategy to win popular support by clearing areas of guerrillas, providing security, and carrying out government social and economic development.<sup>132</sup>

US military assistance transformed the FAES into a more capable fighting force. Teams composed mostly of US Army Special Forces, instructed FAES battalion and brigades in conventional and counterinsurgency strategies and tactics and subjects such as intelligence, logistics, and communications.<sup>133</sup> Strict rules of engagement, however,

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<sup>129</sup> Lindsey Gruson, "Duarte Calls Cease-Fire; Rebels Say No," *The New York Times*, October 7, 1987.

<sup>130</sup> James LeMoyné, "2 Sides Still Far Apart In El Salvador Conflict," *The New York Times*, November 4.

<sup>131</sup> On the origin of the 55-advisor limit, see U.S. General Accounting Office, *El Salvador: Extent of U.S. Military Personnel in Country*, GAO/NSIAD-90-227FS, July 9, 1990, 10-11.

<sup>132</sup> Downie, *Learning from Conflict*, 136-142.

<sup>133</sup> Richard Duncan Downie, *Learning from Conflict: The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War* (Westport: Praeger, 1998), 134-136. On the role US advisors at the brigade level, see Cecil E. Bailey, "OPATT: The U.S. SF Advisers in El Salvador," *Special Warfare* (December 2004):18-

prevented them from being allowed in or near combat situations.<sup>134</sup> Americans trained Salvadorans in El Salvador, the United States, Honduras, and Panama. The size of the FAES increased with the creation of new counterguerrilla units. The largest of these new specialized units were the light infantry battalions, the *Battalion de Infanteria Reaccion Inmediata* (Immediate Reaction Battalions or BIRI). The Atlacatl, the first of five BIRIs, was trained in El Salvador by a single team of advisors in March 1981.<sup>135</sup> In addition to the advisory effort, the US provided the FAES with M-16 rifles, ammunition, boots, battle dress, field gear, helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, heavy weapons, and tactical intelligence.<sup>136</sup> US assistance and training increased the size of the FAES from 11,000 in 1979 to 56,000 by 1990.<sup>137</sup>

US advisors actively promoted respect for human rights and democracy. They provided human rights training, emphasized respect for democratic principles, and taught the proper treatment of civilians and captured combatants as described by the Geneva Convention.<sup>138</sup> In addition, the FAES received human rights training from its own officers, a government human rights commission, and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Although US advisors were not legally required to report human rights

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<sup>134</sup> “Terms of Reference: [Restrictions on U.S. Military Personnel in El Salvador],” March 6, 1981, El Salvador, 1977-1984, DNSA.

<sup>135</sup> Downie, *Learning from Conflict*, 134-135.

<sup>136</sup> A. J. Bacevich et al, *American Military Policy in Small Wars: The Case of El Salvador: Special Report, 1988*. (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey’s International Defense Publishers, Inc., 1988), 28-31.

<sup>137</sup> Robert B. Ramsey III., *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador*. (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 85. “El Salvador,” *The Military Balance* 89 no. 1 (1989): 193.

<sup>138</sup> Geoffrey Lambert, Frank Pedrozo, and J.S. Roach, “Interview: Special Forces in El Salvador,” *Special Warfare* (October 1993): 37. Cecil E. Bailey, “OPATT: The U.S. SF Advisers in El Salvador,” *Special Warfare* (December 2004): 25-26.

violations, Standard Operating Procedure stated they were to stop any violations and if unable to, report the violation to the Commander.<sup>139</sup>

Human rights violations by government forces and death squads decreased after 1983. There were fewer cases of severe torture, massacres of civilians, and indiscriminate killings through aerial and artillery bombardments by government forces.<sup>140</sup> US Embassy statistics showed that the monthly averages for death squad killings declined from 750 in 1980 to 64 in 1984 to 17 in 1989.<sup>141</sup> Human rights abuses by the FAES in the second half of the 1980s received less attention, Americas Watch argued, because “when comparisons to the early 1980s [were] invoked, the current level of abuses seem[ed] low. This [was] known as improvement...[C]omparisons permit[ted] much of the world to see the current levels of abuses as a tolerable human rights situation.”<sup>142</sup> Scholars Philip J. Williams and Knut Walter argued that US advisors can take some credit for this decline but it was more likely the result of political expediency and the fact that there were fewer potential targets.<sup>143</sup> Benjamin C. Schwarz, a former foreign policy analyst at the RAND Corporation, contends that the advisory effort did not lead to an attitudinal change: “the armed forces retain[ed] an almost uncanny ability to turn citizens into enemies. Continually reverting to their old ways, they commit[ed]

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<sup>139</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *El Salvador: Extent of U.S. Military Personnel in Country*, 5.

<sup>140</sup> Americas Watch, *El Salvador's Decade of Terror*, 17-18, 52-62.

<sup>141</sup> “Report on the Situation in El Salvador April 1, 1990-October 1, 1990,” El Salvador Collection, U.S. Department of State Electronic Reading Room.

<sup>142</sup> Americas Watch, *El Salvador's Decade of Terror*, 63.

<sup>143</sup> Williams and Walter, *Militarization and Demilitarization in El Salvador's Transition to Democracy*, 144. For a contrarian view of the role of US advisory in reducing human rights violations, see John D. Waghelstein, “Military-to-Military Contacts: Personal Observations – The El Salvador Case,” *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement* 10 no. 2 (Summer 2001): 1-45.

abuses with a regularity that squander[ed] whatever goodwill they manage[d] to engender.”<sup>144</sup>

Despite human rights and democracy promotion efforts, moreover, US-trained units carried out abuses and atrocities throughout the war. The worst atrocities were carried out by the most feared US-trained FAES unit, the Atlacatl BIRI. The Atlacatl’s brutality was first displayed at the largest massacre of the war at El Mozote. During a search and destroy operation, the Atlacatl commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Domingo Monterrosa, entered the village of El Mozote in northeastern El Salvador on December 10, 1981. For the next three days, the Atlacatl systematically detained, tortured, raped, and murdered almost 800 civilians in El Mozote and surrounding villages.<sup>145</sup> During the first certification hearing in February 1982, the Reagan administration, despite witness testimony and evidence provided by *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*, dismissed allegations of a massacre as FMLN propaganda.<sup>146</sup> No Atlacatl officers or soldiers were punished for the El Mozote massacre. Furthermore, Monterrosa was praised before his death in October 1984 as one of the most effective practitioners of counterinsurgency doctrine in El Salvador.<sup>147</sup> The Atlacatl was also responsible for the deaths of hundreds of civilians in other atrocities including three massacres between

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<sup>144</sup> Benjamin C. Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, 24.

<sup>145</sup> Mark Danner, *The Massacre at El Mozote: A Parable of the Cold War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), ch. 3-5.

<sup>146</sup> Danner, *The Massacre at El Mozote*, ch. 6-7.

<sup>147</sup> Danner, *The Massacre at El Mozote*, 142-154.

November 1983 and August 1984.<sup>148</sup> The Atlacatl's blatant disregard for human rights culminated in its final atrocity, the Jesuit murders on November 16, 1989.

The *tanda* system undermined American efforts to professionalize the Salvadoran officer corps. *Tanda* refers to a graduating class of officers, on average 20, from the four-year *Escuela Militar Capitan General Gerarado Barrios* (Captain General Gerardo Barrios Military Academy) in San Salvador. According to scholar Brian J.

Bosch, *tanda* members

had in common a feeling of strong loyalty to their institution, which automatically meant to them loyalty to the nation. This conviction is revealed in a translation of their credo: 'The Republic shall live as long as the Army shall live.' In practice, they became part of a powerful force within El Salvador's body politic. The young men joined an organization that was considered immune from the law and was accountable to no one but themselves.<sup>149</sup>

Human rights abusers, corrupt and incompetent officers were not punished and were protected from prosecution by their fellow *tanda* members.<sup>150</sup>

The civil war shifted in favor of the FAES in 1984. The FAES conducted aggressive large-scale sweeps and bombardments of FMLN-controlled areas. However, civil-military operations designed to isolate the FMLN and win popular support for the government had limited success.<sup>151</sup> Despite massive American military assistance, the FAES continued to face problems such as a lack of coordination between the branches, poor operational planning, incompetent leadership, and difficulties maintaining

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<sup>148</sup> Americas Watch, *A Year of Reckoning: El Salvador a Decade After the Assassination of Archbishop Romero* (New York, NY: Americas Watch Committee, 1990), 158-159.

<sup>149</sup> Bosch, *The Salvadoran Officer Corps*, 3-4.

<sup>150</sup> Williams and Walter, *Militarization and Demilitarization in El Salvador's Transition to Democracy*, 144-147. Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, 18-22.

<sup>151</sup> Byrne, *El Salvador's Civil War*, 130-132.

equipment.<sup>152</sup> Although the FMLN lost significant combat strength after 1984, it adapted to increased FAES combat effectiveness by implementing a war of attrition strategy known as Prolonged Popular War. This strategy, composed of platoon-sized operations and economic and infrastructure sabotage, resulted in greater human rights violations. The FMLN killed four US Marines in a San Salvador café and assassinated municipal officials and right-wing leaders. Its use of land mines led to high civilian casualties.<sup>153</sup> The Embassy under Edwin G. Corr, US Ambassador from August 1985 to August 1988, emphasized guerrilla abuses and attempted to discredit claims of government abuses made by victims and human rights monitors.<sup>154</sup> The CIA stated in a February 1989 Special National Intelligence Estimate that the direction of the war favored the FAES but predicted the war would continue for another three to five years.<sup>155</sup>

In the aftermath of the Iran-Contra scandal, the George H. W. Bush administration sought to rebuild bipartisan support in Congress for US policy toward Central America. Bipartisan consensus would remove Central America from the foreign policy agenda and allow the administration to focus without distractions on the Soviet Union. James A. Baker III stated that his first priority as incoming Secretary of State was this task.<sup>156</sup> According to *The New York Times* correspondent Mark A. Uhlig, the administration had recognized that “Central America has become a subject of high

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<sup>152</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *El Salvador: Military Assistance Has Helped Counter but Not Overcome the Insurgency*, GAO/NSIAD-91-166, 23-25.

<sup>153</sup> Americas Watch, *El Salvador's Decade of Terror*, 64-70.

<sup>154</sup> Americas Watch, *El Salvador's Decade of Terror*, 127-132.

<sup>155</sup> “El Salvador: Government and Insurgent Prospects,” February 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>156</sup> James A. Baker III, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992*, with Thomas M. DeFrank (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 42.

political cost and minimum political benefit.”<sup>157</sup> Negotiations between the administration and Congress concentrated on the peace process in Nicaragua. To show the administration’s commitment to bipartisanship, Baker selected Bernard W. Aronson to replace Elliott Abrams as the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. Aronson’s key credential according to Baker was that he was a Democrat who supported aid to the Contras.<sup>158</sup> After three months of negotiations, the Bush administration and Congress signed the Bipartisan Accord on Central America on March 24, 1989. In addition to expressing “support of democracy, peace, and security in Central America,” both sides agreed to provide humanitarian aid to the Contras and support democratic elections in Nicaragua. The bipartisan accord did not even mention the Salvadoran civil war.<sup>159</sup>

The Bush administration did not focus its attention in 1989 on the Salvadoran civil war because it had inherited a status quo El Salvador policy. The battles between the Reagan administration and Congress in the early 1980s resulted in a bipartisan policy based on a commitment to democracy, human rights, and El Salvador’s security from leftist and rightist extremists.<sup>160</sup> Administration officials did not consider El Salvador a vital national security issue. They avoided the rhetoric of the global balance of power argument and domino theory in favor of pragmatic and realist language when describing

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<sup>157</sup> Mark A. Uhlig, "The World; Central America Faces New U.S. Policy: The Cold Shoulder. (Week In Review Desk)," *The New York Times*, February 3, 1991.

<sup>158</sup> Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 51.

<sup>159</sup> “Bipartisan Accord on Central America,” March 24, 1989, Public Papers, GBPL, [http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public\\_papers.php?id=230&year=&month=](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=230&year=&month=).

<sup>160</sup> “Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on President Bush's Telephone Conversation With President-Elect Alfredo Cristiani of El Salvador,” March 22, 1989, Public Papers, George Bush Presidential Library (hereafter cited as GBPL)

[http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public\\_papers.php?id=218&year=&month=](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=218&year=&month=).



US policy toward El Salvador. They spoke of El Salvador as a fragile democracy and not a Cold War battleground. The National Security Council held no meetings on El Salvador during the entire term.<sup>161</sup> The administration conducted no National Security Reviews and issued no National Security Directives regarding El Salvador.<sup>162</sup> El Salvador briefly reemerged as a national security issue in November and December 1989. The NSC Deputies Committees held meetings on El Salvador on November 21, December 6, and December 9, 1989.<sup>163</sup> The last two meetings discussed recommendation that the US establish a limited naval presence off the Salvadoran coast. Documents on these three meetings remain heavily redacted. The Policy Coordination Committee regularly addressed US policy toward El Salvador after November 1989 and developed policy options for the NSC to consider.

US-Salvadoran relations entered a new phase in 1989 when ARENA won its first presidential election. On March 19, 1989, ARENA candidate Alfredo Cristiani defeated Fidel Chávez Mena of the PDC in El Salvador's second presidential election since October 1979. Following its losses in the 1984 presidential election and the March 1985 Legislative Assembly elections, ARENA sought to improve its domestic and international image by selecting as party leader a moderate with coffee industry ties and who according to the CIA "was untainted by charges of corruption or connections to

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<sup>161</sup> "NSC Meetings-George H.W. Bush Administration (1989-1993)," GBPL, [http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/nsc\\_meetings\\_1989-1992-declassified.pdf](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/nsc_meetings_1989-1992-declassified.pdf).

<sup>162</sup> "National Security Directives-George H.W. Bush Administration (1989-1993)," [http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/nsd\\_list.pdf](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/nsd_list.pdf).

"National Security Reviews," <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/nsr.php>

<sup>163</sup> "NSC/DC Meetings-George H.W. Bush Administration (1989-1993)," GBPL, [http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/nsc\\_and\\_dc\\_meetings\\_1989-1992-declassified.pdf](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/nsc_and_dc_meetings_1989-1992-declassified.pdf).

death squads or rightwing extremism.”<sup>164</sup> Cristiani’s victory finished the Salvadoran government’s *derechización* (shift to the right) that had begun in March 1988 when ARENA became the majority party in the Legislative Assembly and municipal governments. A major goal of US policy toward El Salvador since the Carter administration had been the establishment of a centrist government. The Duarte administration’s failed economic policies and rampant corruption undermined this policy goal and led to the PDC’s defeat.<sup>165</sup>

The Salvadoran government’s shift to the right was accompanied by the rise of the 1966 *tanda* within the FAES senior leadership. Led by Colonel René Emilio Ponce who graduated first in his class, this 47-member *tanda* was known as the *Tandona* (“Big Class”).<sup>166</sup> The *Tandona*’s large size resulted from a High Command decision to accept a larger than average class in 1963 to offset a 1961 decision to not accept any cadets in 1962.<sup>167</sup> Colonel Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, President Duarte’s Minister of Defense and a 1957 *tanda* member, facilitated the *Tandona*’s ascendancy. When filling High Command positions in 1988, Vides Casanova broke the traditional system of promotion by skipping over officers from the 1963 and 1964 *tandas* for *Tandona* members, many of whom were combat veterans. The positions in the High Command not filled by the *Tandona* officers were the Minister of Defense and Commander of the

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<sup>164</sup> “El Salvador’s Cristiani: Still Struggling with Credibility,” January 16, 1990, folder El Salvador - July-December 1989 [1], Latin American Directorate Files, GBPL.

<sup>165</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 190-211.

<sup>166</sup> According to Bosch, until 1989, the original name of the 1966 *tanda* was *Sinfonica* because it was large as a symphony. Bosch, *The Salvadoran Officer Corps*, 5. On the *Tandona*, see Arms Control and Foreign Policy Caucus, *Barriers to Reform: A Profile of El Salvador's Military Leaders*, May 21, 1990; “[Excised] Priority Tandona Politics--"Ponce Is Not the; Tandona" (Bio Data),” February 22, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>167</sup> Bosch, *The Salvadoran Officer Corps*, 116-117.

Air Force.<sup>168</sup> Vides Casanova lobbied incoming President Cristiani to appoint Ponce as Minister of Defense instead of General Juan Rafael Bustillo. Cristiani compromised by appointing General Rafael Humberto Larios as Minister of Defense and Ponce as Chief of Staff. By June 1989, the *Tandona* had a disproportionate influence within the FAES.

Cristiani's victory provoked the first debate in Congress since 1984 over US aid to El Salvador. In an April 6 letter, 24 members of Congress urged Bush to "to request President Cristiani to distance himself from Roberto D'Aubuisson's reign of terror by disbanding the death squads and bringing them to justice" and expressed concern "that the ARENA victory [would] lead to polarization of the warring parties and death and alienation of the citizens who are caught in the middle."<sup>169</sup> When Cristiani met with members of Congress in Washington in mid-April, he insisted that D'Aubuisson was no longer the face of ARENA and that he would seek a political solution to end the war.<sup>170</sup>

Less than a month after the signing of the Bipartisan Accord on Central America, Democrats attempted to restrict US aid to El Salvador. On April 13, Democrats on the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs added to HR 2655, the fiscal 1990-91 foreign aid authorization bill, provisions that limited military aid to \$85 million and imposed conditions similar to the 1981 certification requirement.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Williams and Walter, *Militarization and Demilitarization in El Salvador's Transition to Democracy*, 135-137.

<sup>169</sup> "Letter from Gerry Sikorski to President Bush," April 6, 1989, "folder El Salvador, Nancy Bearg Dyke Files, GBPL.

<sup>170</sup> John Felton, "Cristiani Asks U.S. Officialdom For Benefit of the Doubt," *CQ Weekly Online*, April 15, 1989, <http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR101405896> (accessed August 24, 2010).

<sup>171</sup> John Felton, "Cristiani Asks U.S. Officialdom For Benefit of the Doubt," *CQ Weekly Online*, April 15, 1989, <http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR101405896> (accessed August 24, 2010).

Congress and the Bush administration were unable to reach an agreement over restrictions by June 6 when the provisions were modified. The most contentious provisions required advance approval from four committees before aid could be spent. The stalemate in negotiations ended when both sides agreed on June 13 to allow Congress to block aid to El Salvador only through a joint resolution over a presidential veto.<sup>172</sup> The House passed HR 2655 on June 29 but had removed nearly all of the provisions on El Salvador.

The debate over El Salvador shifted to the Senate in September. Democrats on the Senate Appropriations Committee included in the fiscal 1990 foreign aid appropriations measure, HR 2939, an amendment cutting military aid from Bush's request of \$97 million to \$85 million with conditions attached. The amendment was rejected on September 20 by the Senate including Senator Christopher J. Dodd (D-CT), one of the strongest critics of US policy toward Central America during the 1980s. Dodd opposed the provision because he believed it would undermine Cristiani whom Dodd believed was committed to reform and peace. With Dodd's support, the Senate raised the military aid limit to \$90 million.<sup>173</sup> The Senate passed HR 2939 on September 26 with no restrictions on US aid.

The Bush administration approached US-Soviet relations with realism and prudence. Administration officials were skeptical that the leader of the Soviet Union,

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<sup>172</sup> "Compromise Over Power," *CQ Weekly Online*, June 17, 1989, <http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR101406540> (accessed August 24, 2010).

<sup>173</sup> John Felton, "Senate Rejects Conditions On Aid to El Salvador." *CQ Weekly Online*, September 23, 1989, <http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR101407393> (accessed August 24, 2010).

General Secretary of the Communist Party Mikhail Gorbachev, was trustworthy or a true reformer. Despite the constructive relationship that had developed between Reagan and Gorbachev in the late 1980s, Bush's foreign policy advisors including Secretary of State Baker and National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft insisted the Cold War was not over.<sup>174</sup> At the start of the term, the administration conducted a three-month foreign policy review, known as "the pause," of US-Soviet relations. The review produced a report that contained no specific policy initiatives and presented an ambivalent analysis of Gorbachev's reforms.<sup>175</sup> After the NSC conducted a more exhaustive analysis, Bush presented his foreign policy goals in a series of four speeches in April and May 1989. His commencement address at Texas A&M University on May 12 outlined the administration's policy toward the Soviet Union, "beyond containment." This policy, according to historian Christopher Maynard, "recognized that the Soviet Union was in the midst of change, but it challenged the Soviet Union to demonstrate with actions their commitment to Gorbachev's principles."<sup>176</sup>

The Bush administration challenged the Soviet Union's commitment to the policy of *novoe politicheskoe myshlenie* ("new thinking"). Presented by Gorbachev in February 1986, "new thinking" emphasized according to Paszyn, "the demilitarization of regional conflicts and the search for political solutions based on a balance of interests[,]...not viewing regional conflicts through the prism of East-West... [,and]

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<sup>174</sup> Christopher Maynard, *Out of the Shadow: George H.W. Bush and the End of the Cold War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 14-15.

<sup>175</sup> Maynard, *Out of the Shadow*, 15-17

<sup>176</sup> Maynard, *Out of the Shadow*, 21.

opposing the export of revolution.”<sup>177</sup> However, “the biggest thorn in US-Soviet relations [in 1989],” Scowcroft stated, “remained in Central America where the Soviets still supported their client Nicaragua and, through it and Cuba, the guerrillas in El Salvador.”<sup>178</sup> Throughout 1989, CIA intelligence reports and weapons and ammunition captured by Salvadoran military and police forces indicated major Cuban and Nicaraguan arms shipments to El Salvador.<sup>179</sup> The administration argued that the arms shipments demonstrated that Soviet Union was not pressuring its client states to stop supporting the FMLN.<sup>180</sup>

The year 1989 transformed US-Soviet relations.<sup>181</sup> In the spring and summer of 1989, Gorbachev refused to intervene as democratic revolutions toppled communist governments in Eastern Europe.<sup>182</sup> Bush contacted Gorbachev in July after recognizing that Gorbachev’s inaction demonstrated his commitment to peace and reform. Both sides

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<sup>177</sup> Paszyn, *The Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change in Central America, 1979-90*, 65.

<sup>178</sup> George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998), 134.

<sup>179</sup> “Briefing on Cuban Support for FMLN,” September 15, 1989, folder El Salvador - July-December 1989 [5], Latin American Directorate Files, GBPL. See also, “Increased Shipment of Nicaraguan M-16s to the FMLN,” folder El Salvador - July-December 1989 [5], Latin American Directorate Files, GBPL; “El Salvador: Insurgents Refitting with East Bloc Arms,” April 27, 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA; “Nicaragua: Continued Commitment to Regional Subversion,” September 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>180</sup> “Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on Soviet Policy in Central America,” April 5, 1989, Public Papers, GBPL,

[http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public\\_papers.php?id=276&year=&month=](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=276&year=&month=); “Interview With Latin American Journalists,” October 25, 1989, Public Papers, GBPL,

[http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public\\_papers.php?id=1089&year=&month=](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=1089&year=&month=).

<sup>181</sup> On the year 1989, see Jeffrey A. Engel, ed. *The Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Revolutionary Legacy of 1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>182</sup> Maynard, *Out of the Shadow*, 36-38. On the Soviet response to the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe and the fall of the Berlin Wall, see William Taubman and Svetlana Savranskaya, “If a Wall Fell in Berlin and Moscow Hardly Noticed, Would It Still Make a Noise?” in *The Fall of the Berlin Wall*, ed. Jeffrey A. Engel.

agreed to their first face-face meeting at the island of Malta on December 2-3.<sup>183</sup> When the Berlin Wall fell on November 9 and the Soviet Union did not intervene, Bush's reaction was criticized as detached and uninspired. However, he recognized that this momentous event, if handled carefully, could lead to the peaceful resolution of the Cold War.<sup>184</sup>

As the world celebrated the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Bush administration was reminded that the Cold War in Central America was not over. On November 11, 1989, the FMLN launched its largest offensive of the war. After years of preparation, over 2,000 fighters launched coordinated attacks inside San Salvador. The FMLN's strategy, the Strategic Counter-Offensive, called for the occupation and fortification of neighborhoods and the assassination of the President and other senior civilian and military leaders. The FMLN sought to inspire the population to join an insurrection against the government.<sup>185</sup> However, the offensive failed militarily as the assassination teams did not kill any leaders, the FAES removed the guerrillas from the neighborhoods, and Salvadorans refused to support a popular insurrection. By early December, the FAES had pushed the majority of fighters outside the city resulting in over 2,000 fighters and 500 government soldiers dead.<sup>186</sup>

The size and audacity of the offensive exposed the weaknesses of the FAES.

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<sup>183</sup> Maynard, *Out of the Shadow*, 38-41.

<sup>184</sup> Maynard, *Out of the Shadow*, 41-46.

<sup>185</sup> Bracamonte and Spencer, *Strategy and Tactics of the Salvadoran FMLN Guerrillas*, 33-35.

<sup>186</sup> "El Salvador: The FMLN; After the November 1989 Offensive," January 26, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA. The casualty numbers are from U.S. General Accounting Office, *El Salvador: Military Assistance Has Helped Counter but Not Overcome the Insurgency*, 16.

Bush administration officials described the FMLN as desperate and insisted that the offensive did not threaten the Salvadoran government but on November 16, Cristiani requested arms and ammunition to replenish depleted stocks.<sup>187</sup> On November 21, FMLN fighters stormed the Sheraton Hotel, located in one of San Salvador's wealthiest neighborhoods, trapping OAS Secretary General João Baena Soares, 12 US Army Special Forces personnel, and 17 civilians. Bush and his advisors discussed possible actions to end the siege and even deployed a small contingent of the elite counterterrorist unit Delta Force to prepare for a rescue operation.<sup>188</sup> However, the FMLN fighters ended the siege and slipped away on November 22 even though the hotel was surrounded by the Salvadoran military.<sup>189</sup> An April 9, 1990 State Department cable revealed that contrary to public statements made by State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler, the US had negotiated with the FMLN "to help ensure the safety of U.S. military trainers who were trapped in the hotel."<sup>190</sup> The Defense Attaché stated in a December 9 cable that young officers reportedly demanded that Cristiani remove senior officers who displayed poor leadership and other failures or else they would revolt against said officers.<sup>191</sup> The FAES, according to Schwartz, had failed to pursue and destroy retreating guerrillas thus missing an opportunity to end the war.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Clyde H. Farnsworth, "U.S. Calls Attacks in Salvador Desperate Acts.(Foreign Desk)," *The New York Times*, November 13, 1989.

<sup>188</sup> John M. Goshko and Ann Devroy, "Bush Confers With Top Security Aides; Officials Refuse to Discuss Possible U.S. Actions; Attack Condemned as 'Terrorism,'" *Washington Post*, November 22, 1989.

<sup>189</sup> David Hoffman and Patrick E. Tyler, "GIs Quit Salvadoran Hotel After Rebels Slip Away; Bush Contradicted On Rescue Report," *Washington Post*, November 23, 1989.

<sup>190</sup> "Wischnewski Consultation," folder El Salvador (General) Jan-June 1990 [4], William T. Pryce Files, GBPL.

<sup>191</sup> "Subordinates Reportedly Disgusted with Senior Leadership," December 9, 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>192</sup> Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador*, 21-22.



On the morning of November 16, 1989, assailants murdered Father Ignacio Ellacuría, five other Jesuits, their housekeeper, and her daughter on the campus of the UCA in San Salvador.<sup>193</sup> The FAES stated that the FMLN was responsible as evidenced by Soviet-made AK-47s left at the crime scene and FMLN graffiti spray painted on the walls of the university.<sup>194</sup> The revelation that the FAES had murdered the Jesuits and covered up the crime would shatter bipartisan consensus over the El Salvador policy.

The November 1989 offensive increased tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union over Central America. In his speech to the OAS on November 13, 1989, Secretary Baker accused the Soviet Union of undermining “new thinking” and the Central American peace process through its military aid shipments to Cuba and Nicaragua.<sup>195</sup> The issue of Soviet military aid further strained superpower relations when a Cessna 310 carrying 24 SA-7 surface-to-air missiles and other weapons crashed on November 25 in southeastern El Salvador.<sup>196</sup> Yuri Petrov, the Soviet ambassador to Cuba, confronted Fidel Castro in late November 1989 about the SA-7 missiles. Castro denied any Cuban involvement in the delivery of Soviet weapons to El Salvador via Nicaragua.<sup>197</sup> Yuri Pavlov, the head of the Soviet Foreign Ministry’s Latin American Department, contended that the missile shipments “[were] a clear betrayal of the Soviet

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<sup>193</sup> The five Jesuits were Armando López Quintana, S.J., Joaquín López y López, S.J., Ignacio Martín-Baró, S.J., UCA Vice-Rector, Segundo Montes Mozo, S.J., and Juan Ramón Moreno Pardo, S.J. The housekeeper and her daughter were Julie Elba Ramos and Celina Mariceth Ramos, respectively. Doggett, *Death Foretold*, 335.

<sup>194</sup> Whitfield, *Paying the Price*, 80-81.

<sup>195</sup> John M. Goshko, “Baker Accuses Soviets of Abetting Salvadoran Strife; Arms Aid to Leftist Guerrillas Called ‘Incompatible With the New Thinking’ in East Bloc,” November 14, 1989, *Washington Post*.

<sup>196</sup> “Spot Commentary on El Salvador: Anti-Aircraft Missiles,” November 25, 1989, folder El Salvador (General) Jan-June 1990 [7], William T. Pryce Files, GBPL.

<sup>197</sup> Yuri Pavlov, *Soviet-Cuban Alliance, 1959-1991* (Coral Gables: North-South Center Press, University of Miami, 1996), 150-151.

policy in the area of the widely supported negotiation process. Unable to influence this policy, Castro resorted to outright deceit, misleading Petrov and trying to dupe Gorbachev and [Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard] Shevardnadze.”<sup>198</sup>

President Bush raised the issue of arms shipments to the FMLN at the Malta summit. On November 27, Cristiani sent a letter to Bush urging him press the Soviets to end military shipments to Nicaragua.<sup>199</sup> The same day, he visited Ambassador William Walker and “request[ed] that U.S. naval vessels make an overt show of force in the Pacific Ocean, both in international and Salvadoran waters...[to] deter further Nicaraguan intrusion into El Salvador territory” and end the further internationalization of the conflict.<sup>200</sup> On the first day of the Malta summit, December 2, Gorbachev insisted that the Soviet Union had stopped weapons shipments to Cuba and Nicaragua and stated “...we need mutual understanding. We don’t want bridgeheads in Cuba or Central America. We don’t need that. You must be convinced of that.”<sup>201</sup> Following the Malta summit, according to Pavlov, the State Department and Soviet Foreign Ministry began

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<sup>198</sup> Pavlov, *Soviet-Cuban Alliance*, 151.

<sup>199</sup> “Transmittal of Letter from President Cristiani to President Bush,” November 28, 1989, El Salvador Collection, U.S. Department of State Electronic Reading Room.

<sup>200</sup> “Request for Show of Force,” November 28, 1989, folder El Salvador - July-December 1989 [3], Latin American Directorate Files, GBPL. Walker commented that Sandinista involvement in El Salvador’s civil war fully justified Cristiani’s request. The NSC PCC recommended that the US deploy a small naval task force for several purposes but primarily to provide radar coverage. “PCC Recommendation—El Salvador Deploy Small Naval Task Force,” folder Latin American Directorate El Salvador July-December 1989 [2], GBPL. Three weeks after Cristiani request, Walker expressed disappointment with the Bush administration’s slow response. “USG Demonstration of Support for Cristiani,” folder El Salvador July-December 1989 [2], Latin American Directorate Files, GBPL. The recommendation was last discussed in a December 29 PCC meeting. “Agenda for El Salvador PCC December 29,” folder El Salvador July-December 1989 [1], Latin American Directorate Files, GBPL. A search of *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and available primary documents from this period suggest that a US naval task force deployment never occurred.

<sup>201</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation: First Expanded Bilateral Session with Chairman Gorbachev of the Soviet Union,” folder Summit at Malta December 1989: Malta Memcons [1], Condoleezza Rice Files, GBPL.

exchanging ideas on how to bring peace to Central America and end Cuban interventionism in the region.<sup>202</sup> The Malta success ended in success as Bush and Gorbachev established a strong personal relationship. “The key accomplishment of Malta,” according to Scowcroft, “was the exchange on almost every topic of mutual interest, which made clear the attitudes of each on a whole series of issues. This gave us a much more reliable indicator of the perils and opportunities we faced.”<sup>203</sup> The events of 1989 transformed the international system and made possible the end of the Cold War in 1990.

November 1989 marked the turning point of US policy toward El Salvador. The FMLN offensive failed militarily but succeeded politically. The CIA argued in a January 1990 memorandum that the FMLN had won the war of domestic and international perceptions. Domestically, the offensive “shook the faith of many Salvadorans—particularly those directly affected by the fighting—in the government’s ability to provide for their security.” Internationally, the Jesuit murders “evoked memories of the rampant human rights abuses of the early 1980s and cast the government as ineffectual at best, and, at worst, openly repressive.”<sup>204</sup> The offensive shattered the assumption that the FAES was making progress against the FMLN. Government forces did not appear to be any closer to winning the war. Billions of dollars of US assistance since 1980 had led to military stalemate.

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<sup>202</sup> Pavlov, *Soviet-Cuban Alliance*, 213.

<sup>203</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 173.

<sup>204</sup> “El Salvador: The FMLN; After the November 1989 Offensive,” January 26, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

The Bush administration now faced the burden of supporting a Cold War ally in the emerging post-Cold War era. Efforts to promote respect for human rights failed with the Jesuit murders which according to LeoGrande, “symbolized the core problem of El Salvador: the military had no respect for the rule of law, and civilian political institutions had no way to hold it accountable.”<sup>205</sup> Human rights would again divide the executive and legislative branches in the debate over US military to El Salvador. The Bush administration would confront one of its most difficult challenges: pressuring the Salvadoran government and armed forces to investigate the Jesuit murders and bring the killers to justice.

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<sup>205</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 571.

## CHAPTER III

## THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION, CONGRESS, AND THE JESUIT MURDERS

Despite the Bush administration's efforts to remove Central America from its foreign policy agenda, the Jesuit murders renewed the debate over US policy toward El Salvador. Human rights violations committed by the FAES again became a divisive issue in Congress. Despite its limited interests in human rights promotion, the Bush administration could not ignore the political costs of the Jesuit murders and US aid to the FAES. In his presidential memoir, Bush outlined his approach to human rights:

There is resentment on the part of many foreign leaders when they deal with the United States, a notion that we arrogantly consider ourselves perfect while they still have far to go. Indeed, we often do seem to lecture and confront other nations publicly on issues such as human rights. For that reason I went out of my way to be careful in questioning foreign leaders or diplomats about their countries' internal affairs. I had no hesitancy in telling them of our commitment to human rights, but I tried to avoid becoming the pedantic lecturer.<sup>206</sup>

However, in order to remove the albatross of El Salvador, the Bush administration lectured the Salvadorans about human rights for nearly two years. This chapter will examine how the Bush administration's promoted the resolution of the Jesuit case but how the Salvadoran officer corps undermined and obstructed it.

Starting in the mid-1980s, the US promoted the "new case" theory of human rights in El Salvador. This theory postulated that the Salvadoran government and military would respond differently to new human rights violations because they "(A)

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<sup>206</sup> Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 7. On the Bush administration's human rights policy, see David P. Forsythe, "Human Rights and US Foreign Policy: Two Levels, Two Worlds," *Political Studies* 43 (1995): 124-126; Sikkink, *Mixed Signals*, 181-193.

recognize[d] and accept[ed] the importance of this issue to [the] present assistance relationship [with the US]; and (B) ha[d] been given the technical and human resources to investigate, assign responsibility and prosecute wrongdoers when a violation occurs.”<sup>207</sup> Theoretically, the Salvadoran government and military had recognized the importance of human rights through diplomatic initiatives such as Bush’s visit in December 1983 and training by US military advisors. The second component of the new case theory focused on reforming El Salvador’s weak judicial system by providing funding and training for the investigation and prosecution of human right violators. The mishandling of the AIFLD and American churchwomen cases by the Salvadoran judicial system demonstrated the need for reform. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) was the lead agency in the bilateral justice program, the Judicial Reform Project, established in July 1984. USAID, the State Department, and the Justice Department supported efforts to review and modernize El Salvador’s laws, provided judicial training, and trained prosecutors and justices of the peace.<sup>208</sup> The Judicial Reform Project’s most relevant initiative to the new case theory was the Commission on Investigations comprised of the Special Investigative Unit and the Forensic Unit. Formed in July 1985, the SIU and the Forensic Unit were highly-trained teams of Salvadoran investigators, paralegals, and forensic technicians, mostly active-duty military, who conducted comprehensive investigations of a variety of crimes.<sup>209</sup> These

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<sup>207</sup> “USG Response to Deterioration in Human Rights Situation in El Salvador,” January 7, 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>208</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Efforts to Improve the Judicial System in El Salvador*, GAO/NSIAD-90-81, May 29, 1990, 20-27.

<sup>209</sup> U.S. General Accounting Office, *Efforts to Improve the Judicial System in El Salvador*, 27-38.

two units, managed by a FAES colonel, investigated old and new human rights cases such as the assassination of Archbishop Romero, the San Sebastián massacre, and the Jesuit murders.<sup>210</sup>

The passage of the October 1987 amnesty law hindered American and Salvadoran judicial reform efforts. Esquipulas II, which President Duarte had signed in August 1987, contained a provision for general amnesty.<sup>211</sup> The Legislative Assembly approved on October 27 amnesty for all political and related common crimes committed before October 22, 1987 including the AIFLD case. Although intended to promote national reconciliation, the law undermined the new case theory by preventing investigations and prosecutions of prior human rights abuses except the assassination of Archbishop Romero.<sup>212</sup> Since the majority of human rights abuses were committed by government forces, Americas Watch argued that the amnesty law “reinforc[ed] the sense of military impunity... [and] contributed to an increase in political killings by government forces and death squads in the months that followed.”<sup>213</sup>

After years of improvement, the human rights situation in El Salvador began to deteriorate in 1987. The US Embassy tracked an increase in murders by the FAES and death squads starting in May 1987 and stated that “[f]or the first time in years, blindfolded bodies are again beginning to appear in San Salvador with their hands tied behind their backs.” The Embassy believed that the increase in political killings was

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<sup>210</sup> K. Larry Storrs, *El Salvador--Legal System, Judicial Reform, and Major Human Rights Cases Involving the Military*, Congressional Research Service, March 23, 1990, 9-23.

<sup>211</sup> Lindsey Gruson, “Amnesty Law Passed in El Salvador,” *The New York Times*, October 29, 1987.

<sup>212</sup> Americas Watch, *El Salvador’s Decade of Terror*, 87-88. The Romero case had been exempted due to pressure from the Roman Catholic Church.

<sup>213</sup> Americas Watch, *El Salvador’s Decade of Terror*, 87.

most likely due to the end of the state of emergency decree in January 1987: “[t]he military [was] convinced that without the ability to detain people for more than 72 hours it [was] useless to arrest people and turn them over to the courts.”<sup>214</sup> Ambassador Edwin Corr reported to the State Department in June 1988 that the Salvadoran officer corps refused to cooperate with the judicial system’s investigation and prosecution of human rights violations committed by government forces: “the officer corps circles its wagons when faced with human rights scrutiny. In part from a skeleton-in-the-closet syndrome that keeps one officer from tattling on another for fear that each accused will become an accuser until all the long-buried secrets are unearthed.”<sup>215</sup> The deteriorating human rights situation prompted Secretary of State George Schultz to meet with senior Salvadoran officers on June 30, 1988. Unlike Vice President Bush’s visit in December 1983, Schultz did not threaten to cut aid but according to a June 24 briefing memorandum “describe[d] why abuses [were] wrong and counterproductive... The primary objective [was] to get the ESAF to investigate cases thoroughly and rapidly and to punish the violators.”<sup>216</sup> Schultz emphasized that the increase in political killings was the only issue that would threaten the bipartisan consensus in the US Congress.

Appointed US Ambassador to El Salvador in August 1988, William Walker advocated the new case theory. Walker had supported human rights promotion since its integration into US foreign policy. According to *Washington Post* correspondent Lee Hockstader, when Walker served as political counselor in El Salvador in the mid-1970s,

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<sup>214</sup> “Human Rights in El Salvador,” June 29, 1988, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>215</sup> “Post Reporting Plan: Military’s Response to Human Rights; Accusations,” June 29, 1988, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>216</sup> “Briefing Memorandum for SecState,” June 24, 1988, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.



he criticized the State Department's handling of the case of an American citizen murdered by the Salvadoran military.<sup>217</sup> A month after his return to El Salvador, Walker would face the first major human rights case of his term: the San Sebastián massacre.

On September 21, 1988, 10 guerrillas were killed and one soldier was wounded in a FMLN ambush on the Jiboa antiterrorist infantry battalion of the Fifth Brigade near La Cebadilla in the district of San Sebastián. However, witnesses and the Salvadoran press reported that the ambush was actually a massacre of civilians. The confusion over the details of this high-profile case prompted Ambassador Walker to dispatch a fact-finding team to the site of the killings on September 24.<sup>218</sup> According to the military's version of the incident, the Jiboa battalion was escorting eight guerrilla detainees to a helicopter landing zone when the FMLN ambushed the patrol with mines and rifle fire. The ambush resulted in the deaths of all eight detainees and two attackers. However, the fact-finding team's survey of the site led it to question whether an ambush actually occurred. The team could not understand, for example, "why were there no cartridge casings in the areas from which the FMLN supposedly fired at the patrol?"<sup>219</sup> The Embassy's Defense Attaché summarized three conflicting versions of the incident from brigade commander Colonel José Emilio Chávez, chief of the Intelligence Department of the Fifth Brigade, Major Mauricio de Jesus Beltran, and two soldiers.<sup>220</sup> These versions only produced more questions about what happened. An examination of nine bodies by

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<sup>217</sup> Lee Hockstader, "Our Man in El Salvador, Upbeat Amid the Crisis," *Washington Post*, December 19, 1989.

<sup>218</sup> The fact-finding team consisted of the public affairs officer, political counselor, Army attaché, and USMILGP personnel.

<sup>219</sup> "Embassy Visit to Site of La Cebadilla Killings," September 28, 1988, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>220</sup> "Ambush Near La Cebadilla," October 13, 1988, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

investigators revealed that “all contained bullet wounds, seven with powder burns that indicated they were shot at very close range.”<sup>221</sup> This and other evidence collected by the SIU and Forensic Unit led the Embassy to conclude in an October 8 cable to the State Department that the 10 people were most likely summarily executed.<sup>222</sup>

The US stressed the importance of a full investigation of the massacre to Salvadoran civilian and military leaders. In a December 13, 1988 meeting with Salvadoran Foreign Minister Ricardo Acevedo, Walker argued that a lack of progress in the investigation increased Congressional scrutiny of US assistance to El Salvador and threatened the credibility of the Salvadoran government.<sup>223</sup> The military, however, remained committed to the ambush story. Walker asserted in a January 7, 1989 cable to Secretary Schultz that the stalled investigation of the massacre demonstrated the failure of the new case theory because Duarte had not followed through on multiple assurances to pursue evidence even if it lead to the military.<sup>224</sup> Walker contended that “the Embassy and the Department must act now, and with all the leverage we can muster” to advance the investigation.<sup>225</sup>

The Bush administration applied pressure on the FAES to resolve the stalled investigation. On February 3, 1989, Vice President Dan Quayle visited El Salvador and

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<sup>221</sup> “San Francisco/La Cebadilla Killings: Exhumation and Embassy; Efforts to Push for Investigation,” October 8, 1988, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>222</sup> “San Francisco/La Cebadilla Killings: Exhumation and Embassy; Efforts to Push for Investigation,” October 8, 1988, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>223</sup> “Ambassador and FonMin Acevedo Discuss Political; Ramifications of La Cebadilla Killings,” December 15, 1988, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>224</sup> “USG Response to Deterioration in Human Rights Situation in El Salvador,” January 7, 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>225</sup> “USG Response to Deterioration in Human Rights Situation in El Salvador,” January 7, 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

delivered two speeches to two groups of senior FAES officers. Using language similar to Ambassador Deane Hinton's October 1982 speech to the American Chamber of Commerce, Quayle emphasized the gravity of the San Sebastián massacre and the damage it could have on the military's reputation: "Let me be clear about this. I am not talking about civilian casualties accidentally inflicted in the heat of battle between military forces. These are inevitable in war... What you are being accused of... is cold-blooded execution and conspiracy to cover up murder."<sup>226</sup> The San Sebastián massacre was a test case, Quayle asserted, of their commitment to democracy and human rights. Following Quayle's speeches, Walker presented a list of actions required of the FAES. This list included full cooperation with the SIU, the relieving of command of Chávez, Beltran, and another officer, and the establishment of a special military board of inquiry to address FAES accountability. The FAES carried out all of these actions except that it merely transferred the three officers.<sup>227</sup> Within one month of Quayle's visit, soldiers involved in the massacre confessed that Beltran "planned and executed the operation which was intended as an assassination mission against the ten suspected... [FMLN] collaborators."<sup>228</sup> A military board of inquiry, the Special Honor Commission, identified on March 9, 1989 Beltran and eight other military personnel as responsible for the

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<sup>226</sup> "Vice President Quayle's Remarks to ESAF San Salvador, Friday, February 3, 1989," folder El Salvador. Armed Forces Leaders, Dan Quayle Vice Presidential Records, GBPL; "Remarks by Vice President Quayle to Military Officers, San Salvador, Friday, February 3, 1989," folder El Salvador, February 3, 1989, Remarks to Military Officers, Dan Quayle Vice Presidential Records, GBPL.

<sup>227</sup> "VP Quayle Visit to El Salvador: Impact on Military and Human Rights," February 8, 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>228</sup> "Breakthrough in La Cebadilla Investigation--Part XX," March 1, 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

massacre of ten civilians and its cover-up.<sup>229</sup> The soldiers were arrested and brought before a civilian court. Colonel Chávez, a *Tandona* member, was cleared of any wrongdoing.

Despite the efforts of the Judicial Reform Project, El Salvador's judicial system failed to bring the perpetrators of the San Sebastián massacre to justice. In May 1990, a judge released all but Major Beltran and ruled SIU evidence inadmissible "because the unit [was] not an auxiliary organ to the court." This action and similar ones in other human rights cases involving the FAES led the Embassy to conclude in a May 12, 1990 cable that "El Salvador's judicial leaders have neither the integrity nor the political will to effect the reforms."<sup>230</sup> By the end of the civil war, Beltran was still awaiting a trial. The Bush administration would encounter even greater resistance from the Salvadoran military to investigate the most notorious human rights case in El Salvador since the assassination of Archbishop Romero: the Jesuit murders.

Before his death, Father Ignacio Ellacuría was one of the most influential figures in El Salvador. Ellacuría, a Spaniard who arrived in El Salvador in 1949, was a theologian and philosopher at the UCA. Ellacuría and the Jesuits were denounced during the 1980s as communists and subversives.<sup>231</sup> The UCA, located near the Military Academy and the *Estado Mayor Conjunto de la Fuerza Armada* (the Estado Mayor or Joint Command of the Armed Forces), was bombed by rightwing organizations and was searched by the FAES for evidence of guerilla activities.

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<sup>229</sup> "Findings of the Special Honor Commission in the San Sebastian Case," March 14, 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>230</sup> "The Salvadoran Judiciary: Reversing Justice," May 12, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>231</sup> Doggett, *Death Foretold*, 301-311.

He advocated dialogue to end the war and served as an unofficial mediator between the Salvadoran government and FMLN. When the FMLN kidnapped President Duarte's daughter in September 1985, Ellacuría helped negotiate her release along with that of 23 mayors in exchange for the release of political prisoners and wounded FMLN fighters held by the government.<sup>232</sup> Walker met with Ellacuria as recently as March 16, 1989. During the meeting, Ellacuría "stressed he had seen a positive change in U.S. policy...[pointing] specifically to Vice President Quayle's message on human rights and the U.S. response to the FMLN's initial peace proposal."<sup>233</sup> In August 1989, President Cristiani consulted with Ellacuría to discuss possible arrangements for dialogue with the FMLN the following month.<sup>234</sup>

The Jesuit murders provoked domestic and international outrage. The FMLN denied responsibility and blamed Cristiani and the senior FAES leadership. The funeral mass for the six Jesuits on November 19 was attended by Cristiani and his wife, religious and government representatives, students, Walker and his public affairs officer, and thousands of Salvadorans.<sup>235</sup> In response to the murder of five Spanish-born Jesuits, the Spanish government suspended aid to El Salvador, demanded a complete investigation, and called for a cease-fire and peace negotiations.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Whitfield, *Paying the Price*, 297-303.

<sup>233</sup> "Ambassador's Meeting with UCA Rector Ellacuria," April 5, 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>234</sup> Whitfield, *Paying the Price*, 335-341.

<sup>235</sup> "Ambassador Attends Ellacuria Funeral," November 20, 1989, El Salvador Collection, U.S. Department of State Electronic Reading Room.

<sup>236</sup> "Outrage and Disgust: GOS Condemns Assassination of Jesuit Priests in El Salvador," November 20, 1989, El Salvador Collection, U.S. Department of State Electronic Reading Room; "Demarche on Spanish Policy Toward El Salvador," November 22, 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

The Bush administration stated on November 16 that it “condemn[ed] in the strongest possible terms the outrageous murder[s].”<sup>237</sup> However, at a fundraising luncheon for Republican senatorial candidate Lynn Martin in Chicago, Illinois, on November 20, two protestors interrupted Bush’s remarks by shouting “Why are we killing people in El Salvador?” and “In the name of God, stop the repression in El Salvador! In the name of God, stop the repression in El Salvador!” When asked why the US supported the Salvadoran government, Bush responded by emphasizing Salvadoran democracy: “...President Cristiani told me on the phone that they will do everything they can to bring to justice, whether they're from the right or the left, those who wantonly murdered those priests. But we must not pull our support away for a freely elected democratic government in Central America.”<sup>238</sup> In a letter to President Bush, the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities condemned the murders as “deliberate attempts to destroy the leadership of the prestigious university and to silence it as a voice of peace and justice in El Salvador.” The association called upon Bush to insist on a full investigation and to protect the UCA and other educational institutions in El Salvador.<sup>239</sup> Before adjourning for 1989, the House of Representatives and Senate adopted resolutions on November 20 and 21, respectively, condemning both the FMLN offensive

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<sup>237</sup> “Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on the Murders at the University of Central America in El Salvador,” November 16, 1989, Public Papers, GBPL,

[http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public\\_papers.php?id=1208&year=&month=](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=1208&year=&month=)

<sup>238</sup> “Remarks at a Fundraising Luncheon for Senatorial Candidate Lynn Martin in Chicago, Illinois,” November 20, 1990, Public Papers, GBPL,

[http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public\\_papers.php?id=1234&year=&month=](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=1234&year=&month=)

According to Teresa Whitfield, the first protestor actually “Why are we *killing* [italics added] priests in El Salvador?” Whitfield, *Paying the Price*, 81.

<sup>239</sup> “The Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities Letter, December 7, 1989,” folder El Salvador July-December 1989 [1], Latin American Directorate Files, GBPL.

and the Jesuit priest murders and stating that US aid to El Salvador would depend on a complete investigation and prosecution of the killers.<sup>240</sup>

In the first days after the murders, available evidence indicated the culpability of the Salvadoran right. Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs Bernard Aronson said before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on November 17 that he did not know who the killers were but “[w]hat my gut tells me is that they were murdered by the right.”<sup>241</sup> The Embassy reported on November 19 that evidence showed that the killings were plotted during a November 15 meeting of D’Aubuisson and his followers within the ARENA leadership. In a meeting reminiscent of the one when he ordered the assassination of Archbishop Romero, D’Aubuisson directed his followers “to clear the UCA nest of ‘subversives.’” The lack of definitive information on the meeting, however, made Walker reluctant in “ask[ing] Cristiani to declare all-out war on D’Aubuisson.”<sup>242</sup> In a meeting with Walker on December 4, D’Aubuisson flatly denied the accusation by asserting “that he of all people had the most to lose from the murder of the priests. He supported questioning all the military personnel who were in the area at the time and agreed that polygraphs should be used.”<sup>243</sup>

Outside observers blamed the FAES. Lucía Barrera de Cerna, a UCA housekeeper, told the Spanish embassy on November 22 that she had seen five men in

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<sup>240</sup> John Felton, "Hill Sidesteps a Confrontation Over Continuing Arms Aid," *CQ Weekly Online*, November 25, 1989, <http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR101408026> (accessed May 12, 2010).

<sup>241</sup> Helen Dewar and Ann Devroy “Hill Democrats Warn El Salvador About Aid,” *Washington Post*, November 18, 1989.

<sup>242</sup> “Ellacuria Assassination,” November 19, 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>243</sup> “Jesuit Priests: Investigative Progress Report,” December 10, 1989, folder El Salvador July-December 1989 [2], Latin American Directorate Files, GBPL.

military uniforms in the UCA in the morning of November 16. Cerna and her family were flown to Miami, Florida, in late November, for four days of interrogation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Cerna recanted her story but claimed she was pressured to do so.<sup>244</sup> Americas Watch sent Secretary Baker a letter on November 17 claiming that the military was responsible because government forces had searched the UCA in the days before the murders.<sup>245</sup> Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas said in sermon before the funeral mass for the Jesuits, without offering any evidence, that “[t]here is a vehement presumption that the priests' killers were elements of the armed forces or were working closely with them.”<sup>246</sup> In a November 21 letter to *The New York Times*, former US Ambassador Robert White contended that the FMLN offensive “came as a gift, an opportunity [for the military] to wipe out not only insurgents but also priests, labor union organizers, peasant leaders and thousands of poor citizens who support change.”<sup>247</sup> On December 1, Walker accompanied by SOUTHCOM Commander in Chief General Maxwell R. Thurman spoke privately with the FAES High Command. Walker stated that Bush, Baker, and Aronson had personal interest in the investigation. Aware of the fact that outside observers blamed government forces, Walker warned that if the FAES did not fully support the investigation and prosecution of the killers regardless of their background, Congress could end US aid to El Salvador when it reconvened in January

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<sup>244</sup> Doggett, *Death Foretold*, 218-221.

<sup>245</sup> Elaine Sciolino, “KILLING OF PRIESTS DENOUNCED BY U.S. (Foreign Desk),” *The New York Times*, November 17, 1989.

<sup>246</sup> Lindsey Gruson, “Salvador Bishop Links Military To Killing of 6. (Foreign Desk),” *The New York Times*, November 20, 1989.

<sup>247</sup> Robert White, “Salvadorans Die, Bush Dawdles,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 1989.



1990. Thurman added that “an investigation of this nature is a test of courage for the institution.”<sup>248</sup>

The SIU made costly errors in the first two months after the murders. According to Martha Doggett of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, the SIU failed to pursue key investigative avenues. Witnesses informed the SIU that the Atlacatl Battalion, the most notorious FAES unit of the war, searched the UCA on the night of November 13 and was in the area on November 15-16 but the SIU did not interview any Atlacatl officers or soldiers until mid-December.<sup>249</sup> When Atlacatl personnel were interviewed, they gave contradictory testimony on the location of the unit in the days leading up to murders.<sup>250</sup> During the offensive, the UCA and the surrounding area were placed under the control of Military Academy Director Colonel Guillermo Benavides, a *Tandona* member. Benavides also had operational command of several FAES units including the Atlacatl. However, the SIU did not question Benavides until January.

The turning point of the investigation came on January 2, 1990 when a US military advisor alleged that the FAES was responsible for the Jesuit murders. On December 20, 1989, Colonel Carlos Avilés told US Army Major Eric W. Buckland that Colonel Benavides had confessed to SIU Executive Director Lieutenant Colonel Manuel Antonio Rivas that he ordered the Atlacatl to murder the Jesuits. Rivas then withheld the information from the SIU. Buckland, however, did not share this information with his superior officers as required by Standard Operating Procedure until January 2 because

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<sup>248</sup> “The Importance of the Jesuit Case Emphasized to the High Command,” December 5, 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>249</sup> Doggett, *Death Foretold*, 78.

<sup>250</sup> Doggett, *Death Foretold*, 85-88.

Avilés told him that Benavides could not be arrested until the investigation was completed.<sup>251</sup> He did tell his sister in a telephone call and a December 25 letter and he also shared the information with another US advisor on December 28.<sup>252</sup> Without informing Walker who was in Washington at the time, USMILGP Commander Milton Menjivar confronted FAES Chief of Staff Colonel Ponce on January 2 and told Buckland's story. Ponce denied any knowledge of the story and so did Avilés when Ponce called him into his office. In Washington on the same day, Walker said to Representative John Joseph ("Joe") Moakley (D-MA) that FMLN fighters wearing FAES uniforms could have killed the Jesuits and that there was no definitive evidence that military was responsible.<sup>253</sup> Walker's comments are difficult to explain because he stated in a November 17 CIA memorandum analyzing potential suspects that available evidence "[made] it extremely difficult to envision the assassination as acts of an FMLN hit squad."<sup>254</sup> Buckland's allegations led to Cristiani publicly announcing on January 7 that elements of the military were responsible for the murders and that he established a military Honor Commission to investigate. On January 13, Cristiani announced that the Honor Commission had named nine suspects: Benavides, four lieutenants, and four enlisted men (including one deserter). On January 18, Judge Ricardo Zamora charged the nine defendants with murder in a civilian court.<sup>255</sup> Had it not been for Buckland's

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<sup>251</sup> The Jesuit Case-A Possible Break in the Case," January 8, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>252</sup> Doggett, *Death Foretold*, 223.

<sup>253</sup> Robert Pear, "SALVADOR EVIDENCE ESCAPED U.S. ENVOY. (Foreign Desk)," *The New York Times*, January 16, 1990.

<sup>254</sup> "Killing of Dr. Ignacio Ellacuria," November 17, 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>255</sup> Doggett, *Death Foretold*, 101-124.

testimony, the SIU would have continued to blame the FMLN and the conspiracy behind the Jesuit murders would never have been uncovered.

The Jesuit murders were a major failure of the US military advisory effort. The three lieutenants that led the seven-man Atlacatl commando unit that murdered the Jesuits had received years of training by Americans.<sup>256</sup> Even more damaging, before the Atlacatl was transferred to the Military Academy on November 13, it had received three days of training by US advisors. The Atlacatl personnel confessed to the SIU that Benavides had given the order to kill the Jesuits around 11:30 p.m. on November 15. Subsequently, the commando unit entered the UCA, encircled the Jesuit residence, took five Jesuits outside, and forced them to lie on the ground. After an unknown amount of time, they shot the Jesuits. The sixth Jesuit, the housekeeper and her daughter were killed inside the house. Before the commandos left the university, they wrote FMLN graffiti on the doors and walls and staged a battle by spraying the walls with machine gun and assault rifle fire, rockets, and grenades. The operation lasted between 1:00 a.m. and 2:30 a.m.<sup>257</sup> The actions of the nine defendants and their superior officers would become a heavy burden for the Bush administration for almost two years.

The Jesuit murders galvanized Democrats and Republicans in Congress to cut US military aid to El Salvador. They questioned the rationale for supporting the FAES as the Cold War neared a peaceful resolution. Like the Bush administration, critics of the El Salvador policy, believed El Salvador no longer held the strategic importance as it had during the early 1980s. On February 8, Senator Dodd introduced legislation that would

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<sup>256</sup> Doggett, *Death Foretold*, 329-334.

<sup>257</sup> Doggett, *Death Foretold*, 64-71.

withhold 50 percent of FY 1990 military aid and established a new certification requirement. The aid would be released if the FMLN refused to participate in peace negotiations or launched another offensive.<sup>258</sup> On the same day, General Thurman stated to the Senate Committee on Armed Services that he believed the FAES could not defeat the FMLN and that only negotiations would end the war.<sup>259</sup> Meeting on February 25, 1990 with Colonel Ponce, Vice President Quayle, accompanied by Walker and Senator Joseph Biden (D-DE) and Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN), stressed that unless the FAES made progress in the investigation, Congress would oppose the Bush administration's request for aid to El Salvador.<sup>260</sup>

Starting in April 1990, Bush administration officials attempted to negotiate a bipartisan agreement on US policy toward El Salvador. In contrast to the Reagan administration, the Bush administration was willing to listen to Congress. This conciliatory approach was necessary to remove the burden of El Salvador and avoid another battle between the executive and legislative branches over the issue. The administration had recognized that El Salvador was a political liability. Both sides agreed that the US should support a negotiated political settlement between the Salvadoran government and the FMLN but disagreed on whether to cut US aid. According to an April 11, 1990 NSC document on bipartisan negotiations, the Bush administration was willing to cap military aid at \$85 million and condition the release of

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<sup>258</sup> "SECTION NOTES: Hill Members Urge Salvador To Solve Rights Cases," February 17, 1990, *CQ Weekly Online*, <http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR101408569> (accessed May 12, 2010).

<sup>259</sup> Michael R. Gordon, "General Says Salvador Can't Defeat Guerrillas. (Foreign Desk)," *The New York Times* February 9, 1990.

<sup>260</sup> "Vice President Quayle's Meeting with Col Rene Emilio Ponce and Col Juan Orlando Zepeda," February 27, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

funds on Salvadoran performance in areas such as the peace process, progress in the Jesuit murder case, and judicial and military reform.<sup>261</sup> This approach, the document stated, would “reinforce President Cristiani’s authority over [the] military... [and would] bring maturity to Salvadoran governmental institutions and Armed Forces.” The administration contended that an immediate cut in US aid would weaken the government’s position in the peace process. Secretary Baker presented the proposal to 40 representatives and senators the same month.<sup>262</sup>

The interim report of the Special Task Force on El Salvador, released on April 30, 1990, presented a bleak image of the Jesuit case. On December 6, 1989, House Speaker Thomas Foley (D-WA) appointed a task force composed of 19 Democratic Representatives led by Joe Moakley. The mandate of the Special Task Force was to monitor the Jesuit murder investigation and examine related issues. The Special Task Force visited El Salvador in January, February, and April 1990 and interviewed American and Salvadoran officials. The Special Task Force concluded that SIU’s greatest failure was not considering the possibility of higher level involvement in the murders. Furthermore, the Special Task Force blamed the FAES for the stalled investigation and stated that the Salvadoran judicial system was still too weak to handle the Jesuit case.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> “Bipartisan Negotiations on El Salvador,” April 11, 1990, folder El Salvador – (General) January-June 1990 [5], William T. Pryce Files, GBPL.

<sup>262</sup> Clifford Krauss, “Baker Presses Lawmakers to Back A Strategy of Talks in El Salvador.(Foreign Desk),” *The New York Times*, April 14, 1990.

<sup>263</sup> “Interim Report of the Speaker's Task Force on El Salvador,” April 30, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

Negotiations between the Bush administration and Congress broke down in mid-May over the House Democrats' linkage of the El Salvador issue to \$720 million in emergency aid requests for Panama and Nicaragua in a supplementary spending bill. The emergency aid was intended to support the post-war reconstruction and emerging democratic institutions of both countries. According to *Congressional Quarterly Weekly* reporter John Felton, Bush accused Democrats of using linkage to "[hold] aid for the new democracies in Central America 'hostage.'"<sup>264</sup> Democrats dropped the linkage on May 17 because they believed that the House would support a provision cutting aid to El Salvador in HR 4636, "Fiscal 1990 Foreign Aid Supplemental Authorizations/Military Aid." On May 22, 1990, the House debated HR 4636. Moakley and John P. Murtha (D-PA) sponsored an amendment that capped military aid to El Salvador at \$85 million and cut 50 percent of FY 1990 and FY 1991 military aid. Moakley delivered an emotional speech to convince the House to support the amendment: "Enough is enough... The time to act has come. They killed six priests in cold blood. I stood on the ground where my friends were blown away by men to whom the sanctity of human life bears no meaning - and men who will probably never be brought to justice."<sup>265</sup> The House adopted the amendment but moments later rejected HR 4636. According to Representative Dave McCurdy (D-OK), moderate and Southern Democrats sided with Republicans because

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<sup>264</sup> John Felton, "Carrots-and-Sticks Policy Yields Possible Truce on the Hill," May 5, 1990, *CQ Weekly Online*, <http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR101409165> (accessed May 12, 2010).

<sup>265</sup> John Felton, "House Fires a Warning Shot Over El Salvador Policy," May 26, 1990, *CQ Weekly Online*, <http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR101409401> (accessed May 12, 2010).

they “want[ed] to change policy toward El Salvador but in a ‘bipartisan’ way, through negotiations with the administration.”<sup>266</sup>

House Democrats recovered swiftly after the defeat of HR 4636. On June 27, 1990, the House overwhelmingly passed HR 5114, “Foreign Assistance and Related Programs Appropriation, 1991,” with provisions identical to the Moakley-Murtha amendment. The release of the withheld funds was conditioned on FMLN political and military actions. Aid would be cut off completely based on Salvadoran government and military actions including an incomplete investigation of the Jesuit murders.<sup>267</sup> HR 5114 would punish both sides for not negotiating in good faith. The passage of HR 5114 heralded a battle between the Bush administration and the Senate.

Senior FAES officers obstructed US and Salvadoran efforts to bring the nine defendants to trial and uncover the extent of the conspiracy surrounding the Jesuit murders. In a cable to the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Embassy Defense Attaché asserted the Jesuit case strained the *Tandona* because “many officers [were] not ready to allow a fellow classmate [Benavides] to go to jail.”<sup>268</sup> The High Command, composed almost entirely of *Tandona* officers, sought to delay the Jesuit case from going to trial as long as possible. One example of how the FAES stalled the investigation was the destruction of the logbooks of entries and exits to the Military Academy on November

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<sup>266</sup> John Felton, “House Fires a Warning Shot Over El Salvador Policy,” May 26, 1990, *CQ Weekly Online*, <http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR101409401> (accessed May 12, 2010).

<sup>267</sup> Pat Towell and Sheldon P. Yett, “House Passes Spending Bill After Shifting Priorities,” June 30, 1990, *CQ Weekly Online*, <http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR101409724> (accessed May 11, 2010).

<sup>268</sup> “[Excised] Priority Tandona Politics—‘Ponce Is Not the; Tandona’ (Bio Data),” February 22, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

12-16, 1989. These logbooks would have allowed the SIU to track the movement of the Atlacatl commando unit assigned to the Military Academy. When Judge Zamora requested the logbooks in March 1990, Military Academy officers responded that the records were misplaced but admitted in June 1990 that the logbooks had been burned less than a month after the murders.<sup>269</sup> Whitfield attributed the military's lack of accountability for the Jesuit murders to the military-oriented El Salvador policy:

The Salvadorans had been told that their country was on the front line for the fight against international communism and that the national security of the United States was at stake. Over the years many had, not surprisingly, come to believe that they were fighting and dying for the United States and that it was the United States that should be grateful to them. Pressure smacked of betrayal. And then again, the army had been threatened and pressured before, endlessly; experience had taught that there was nothing to fear, that fighting the war was the first priority and when necessary, the aid would follow.<sup>270</sup>

This sense of institutional entitlement only made the burden of El Salvador heavier.

The lack of progress in the Jesuit case frustrated the US Embassy. In an April 7 cable to the State Department, Walker argued that “[t]he [US Government] is the only institution that can turn things around. If we want a continuing and thorough investigation there are certain questions which have to be asked. There are people who have to be interrogated and the system energized to be bold and inventive. Our goal is not to seek a scapegoat but to require that the system function and be respected.”<sup>271</sup> To energize the investigation, Walker and Embassy staff compiled a list of twenty questions and four initiatives to be presented to Cristiani, Ponce, Larios, and other senior officials. Many of the questions focused on the events at the Military Academy on the night of

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<sup>269</sup> Doggett, *Death Foretold*, 147-151.

<sup>270</sup> Whitfield, *Paying the Price*, 272.

<sup>271</sup> “Jesuit Case: An Assessment,” April 7, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.



November 15-16. Furthermore, they also addressed rumors that Benavides was part of a conspiracy involving the High Command. For example, “Was Col. Benavides authorized to issue orders at his own discretion or was he required to seek higher approval?” By July 1990, Walker “believe[d] the time ha[d] come to tell Ponce as bluntly as possible that the present charade cannot continue.”<sup>272</sup> With approval from the State Department, Walker and Chargé d’Affaires (Deputy Chief of Mission) William Dietrich delivered two demarches to Colonel Ponce on July 6 and July 19, respectively.<sup>273</sup> The purpose of these demarches was to press Ponce and the High Command to take the initiative and finally resolve the case.<sup>274</sup> Ponce insisted that the High Command was cooperating and that there was no conspiracy.

The Bush administration did not threaten to withhold military aid until the August 1990 revelations of a massive conspiracy within the Salvadoran officer corps. On August 12, 1990, the Embassy learned from a senior military source provided by Moakley’s staff delegation that on November 15 the High Command made a deliberate decision to kill the Jesuits. Furthermore, Ponce took credit for the decision, hundreds of officers knew the truth and maintained silence, and Cristiani did not act on this information.<sup>275</sup> In response to these allegations, Walker and the Country Team recommended in an August 14 cable to the State Department withholding millions of

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<sup>272</sup> “Demarche to the Armed Forces,” July 2, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>273</sup> The State Department’s approval for the demarches is in “Demarche to the Armed Forces,” July 6, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>274</sup> Walker and Dietrich’s talking points are in “Demarche to the Armed Forces,” July 2, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA. On the July 6 demarche, see “Demarche to the Armed Forces,” July 2, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA. On the July 19 demarche, see “Demarche to the Armed Forces,” July 27, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>275</sup> “The Jesuit Case: Another Big Jolt,” August 13, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

dollars in remaining FY 1990 military assistance “that [would] not greatly affect the ESAF’s basic ability to fight the war but [would] cause inconvenience.”<sup>276</sup> Secretary Baker informed the Embassy in an August 17 cable that the Bush administration had decided to privately withhold the remaining \$19 million in FY 1990 military assistance until the FAES cooperated actively and fully with the investigation.<sup>277</sup> The \$19 million consisted of the Foreign Military Sales of armored cars, ammunition, uniforms, and weapons spare parts.<sup>278</sup> The administration also stated it could not support Ponce as Cristiani’s choice for Minister of Defense unless he fully cooperated in the Jesuit case.

The Embassy delivered a second set of demarches to Cristiani and the High Command. When Walker and Dietrich met with Cristiani on August 17, Cristiani insisted that he believed the military wanted to solve the murders.<sup>279</sup> Accompanied by Colonel Menjivar, Walker presented the same talking points to the High Command on August 20. Walker stressed that they “had a responsibility both moral and institutional to bring the truth to light. Its failure to do so was costing it supporters while fostering internal divisions. The damage would continue to get worse the longer [they]...refused to act.”<sup>280</sup> In response to accusations of a conspiracy, Cristiani and the entire High Command appeared before the Salvadoran Supreme Court on August 20 pledging to

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<sup>276</sup> “Jesuit Case: Proposed Measures to Evaluate Information,; Increase Pressure on ESAF,” August 14, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>277</sup> “Jesuit Case: Increasing the Pressure on GOES and ESAF,” August 17, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>278</sup> “El Salvador Security Assistance,” August 16, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>279</sup> “Ambassador’s Demarche to President Cristiani on the Jesuit Case,” August 18, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>280</sup> “Ambassador’s Demarche to ESAF High Command on Jesuit Case,” August 21, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

cooperate with the investigation by testifying about the November 15 meeting.<sup>281</sup> Ponce assured Walker in a private meeting that once he became Defense Minister, he would deal with the Jesuit case and make changes in the FAES leadership. A Defense Department memorandum described Ponce as “the only person in the Salvadoran system capable of providing the necessary breakthrough [in the Jesuit case]... and that he must now choose between protecting his friends and continued funding for the ESAF.”<sup>282</sup> After Cristiani named Ponce Defense Minister on September 1, however, he showed little initiative pursuing the truth.

The Jesuit murders created antagonism within the Salvadoran officer corps toward the *Tandona*. Before Ponce became Defense Minister, many captains, majors, lieutenants, and lieutenant colonels from lower *tandas* criticized Ponce for not resolving the Jesuit case and removing corrupt *Tandona* officers.<sup>283</sup> These actions caused overwhelming officer dissatisfaction because they “[brought] the institution into disrepute and humiliation.”<sup>284</sup> According to the Embassy’s Defense Attaché’s interviews of Salvadoran officers, the officer corps believed that the *Tandona* was responsible for the decision to murder the Jesuits and the cover-up.<sup>285</sup> One senior Salvadoran officer stated that “[a]ny *Tandona* watcher should not have been surprised by this irrational,

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<sup>281</sup> Doggett, *Death Foretold*, 161.

<sup>282</sup> “Visit of the Salvadoran MOD,” September 25, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>283</sup> “Dissatisfaction in the Officer Corps over the Failure of Chief of Staff Ponce to Resolve the Jesuit Case and Remove Corrupt and Incompetent Senior Officers,” folder El Salvador (General) Jul – Dec 1990 [7], William T. Pryce Files, GBPL.

<sup>284</sup> “Dissatisfaction in the Officer Corps over the Failure of Chief of Staff Ponce to Resolve the Jesuit Case and Remove Corrupt and Incompetent Senior Officers,” folder El Salvador (General) Jul – Dec 1990 [7], William T. Pryce Files, GBPL.

<sup>285</sup> “Part 37 in Jesuit Series--Young Turk Talks Turkey on; Tandona and Jesuit Case,” August 27, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

murderous act. It is the fruition of years of systemic abuse and arrogance.”<sup>286</sup> Ponce also faced pressure in early October, the CIA learned, from two other *tandas* and D’Aubuisson to resolve the Jesuit case and purge the FAES of corrupt and incompetent *Tandona* officers.<sup>287</sup>

The Bush administration recognized that it would have to accept cuts in US aid in order to achieve a bipartisan El Salvador policy. On July 12, 1990, Aronson presented to House Democrats a proposal that withheld up to 15 percent of \$85 million in FY 1991 military aid for six months. The proposal also withheld another 15 percent if the FMLN contributed to a negotiated political settlement.<sup>288</sup> Military aid would be completely cut if the Salvadoran government did not negotiate in good faith or if the military launched a coup. The proposal was developed by the State Department the previous month and had the support of the Defense Department and NSC staff. NSC Director for Latin American Affairs David A. Pacelli stated in a memorandum to Scowcroft that “the obligations on the Salvadoran government are tough but not impossible. We think it is unlikely that the guerrillas could meet their obligations, and if they did, a 15 percent military aid drop would be worth it.”<sup>289</sup> However, House Democrats, particularly Moakley, criticized the

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<sup>286</sup> “Part 36 in Jesuit Series--ESAF ‘Graybeard’ Talks Turkey on; Tandona and Jesuit Case,” August 27, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>287</sup> “Military Pressure on the Minister of Defense to Resolve Jesuit Murder Case and Address Corruption in the Salvadoran Military,” October 3, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>288</sup> Carroll J. Doherty, “EL SALVADOR: Administration Unveils a Plan For Deal on Aid Conditions,” July 14, 1990, *CQ Weekly Online*, <http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR101409838> (accessed May 12, 2010).

<sup>289</sup> “U.S. Military Aid to El Salvador,” June 15, 1990, folder El Salvador – (General) January-June 1990 [1], William T. Pryce Files, GBPL.

administration's proposal for not cutting a higher percentage of aid and not conditioning a complete aid cut on progress in the Jesuit case.<sup>290</sup>

In early August, Senators Dodd and Patrick J. Leahy (D-VT) presented a proposal that capped FY 1991 military aid to El Salvador at \$85 million and withheld 50 percent of that aid. The Dodd-Leahy proposal would prohibit all military aid if the Salvadoran government did not meet one of five conditions including a complete investigation and prosecution of the Jesuit case. If the military launched a coup, all American economic and military assistance would be terminated. The 50 percent of withheld military aid would be released if the FMLN did not meet one of five conditions. The Dodd-Leahy proposal punished both the Salvadoran government and FMLN for not participating in peace negotiations or not negotiating in good faith. The proposal gave President Bush the ability to determine and report to Congress if the Salvadoran government or FMLN did not meet their five conditions.<sup>291</sup> Cristiani made a four-day visit to Washington in September to lobby Congress to not support the aid cuts. His pledge to resolve the Jesuit case, however, did not sway any opinions.<sup>292</sup>

The Dodd-Leahy amendment was attached to HR 5114 "Fiscal 1991 Foreign Appropriations Bill/El Salvador" on October 10 prompting the Bush administration to

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<sup>290</sup> Carroll J. Doherty, "EL SALVADOR: Administration Unveils a Plan For Deal on Aid Conditions," July 14, 1990, *CQ Weekly Online*, <http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR101409838> (accessed May 12, 2010).

<sup>291</sup> "Summary of Dodd/Leahy Bill Reducing and Conditioning Military Assistance to El Salvador, August 2, 1990/ Proposed Changes to the Dodd/Leahy Bill," folder El Salvador – (General) July-December 1990 [6], William T. Pryce Files, GBPL.

<sup>292</sup> Clifford Krauss, "El Salvador Chief Lobbying to Stop U.S. Aid Cuts.(Foreign Desk)." *The New York Times*, September 24, 1990; Clifford Krauss. "Salvadoran Chief, in U.S., Vows to Solve Jesuit Case.(Foreign Desk)." *The New York Times*, September 25, 1990; Clifford Krauss "Congress Resists El Salvador's Chief on Aid Cuts. (Foreign Desk)," *The New York Times* 29 September 29, 1990.

launch an intensive lobbying campaign in the days leading up to the vote on October 19. Baker, Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence A. Eagleburger and Aronson made telephone calls and sent personal letters urging Senators to support an alternative weaker Republican amendment.<sup>293</sup> Bush threatened to veto the bill if it contained the El Salvador amendment. The administration's lobbying efforts failed as the Senate overwhelmingly voted for the Dodd-Leahy amendment. According to *Congressional Quarterly Weekly* reporter Carroll J. Doherty, Dodd said the vote "illustrated how 'fed up' senators are with the ongoing violence. Leahy added that, in spite of the vote, there is no sympathy for the left-wing FMLN guerrillas who oppose the government. 'The feeling is 'a pox on both your houses,' Leahy said."<sup>294</sup> The Senate passed the final version of HR 5114 on October 27. Bush did not veto the bill because it contained \$6.7 billion in debt relief for Egypt, a key US ally during the Persian Gulf Crisis. The passage of HR 5114 demonstrated that the administration was more focused on handling a post-Cold War foreign policy challenge than supporting the Salvadoran military.

FMLN actions in the winter of 1990-1991 prompted the Bush administration to restore military aid to El Salvador. On November 20, 1990, the FMLN launched its largest offensive since November 1989 and introduced SA-14 surface-to-air missiles. In response, Walker recommended on November 26 removing the hold on the \$19 million in FY 1990 military assistance despite the fact that FAES had still not

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<sup>293</sup> Clifford Krauss, "Administration Is Lobbying To Dilute El Salvador Aid Cut," *The New York Times*, October 17, 1990.

<sup>294</sup> Carroll J. Doherty, "Aid to El Salvador Slashed," October 27, 1990, *CQ Weekly Online*, <http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR101401817> (accessed May 12, 2010).

cooperated fully with the murder investigation.<sup>295</sup> The Bush administration accelerated the delivery of \$48.1 million in military aid including \$37.5 of the \$42.5 million of FY 1991 aid not withheld by HR 5114.<sup>296</sup> On January 2, 1991, the FMLN shot down a US liaison helicopter carrying three US servicemen and executed the two survivors. Bush determined and reported to Congress that the FMLN had violated one of the five conditions. As a result, he authorized the release of the \$42.5 million in withheld military aid on January 15. However, he delayed the delivery for 60 days to encourage peace negotiations.<sup>297</sup> When the 60 days passed, Bush delayed the release again because he feared that the release would trigger another debate in Congress over US policy toward El Salvador.<sup>298</sup> Embassy officials warned the Salvadoran government and military in January 1991 that the Bush administration and Congress would not forget about the Jesuit case. In a third series of demarches, they repeatedly emphasized that the stalled investigation had to be resolved.<sup>299</sup>

When the release of withheld military aid had no effect on the investigation, relations between the Embassy and FAES reached a breaking point.<sup>300</sup> According to USMILGP Commander Mark R. Hamilton, Ambassador Walker proposed in early

<sup>295</sup> "Administrative Hold on FY90 Military," November 26, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>296</sup> "SECTION NOTES: El Salvador Given Aid On Rushed Schedule," December 15, 1990, *CQ Weekly Online*<http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR101402191> (accessed May 12, 2010).

<sup>297</sup> "EL SALVADOR: Bush Releases Aid After Killings," January 19, 1991, *CQ Weekly Online* <http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR102402394> (accessed May 12, 2010).

<sup>298</sup> Carroll J. Doherty, "EL SALVADOR: Bush Holds Off on Military Aid That Congress Had Resisted," March 16, 1991, *CQ Weekly Online*, <http://library.cqpress.com.lib-ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/cqweekly/WR102402692> (accessed May 12, 2010).

<sup>299</sup> "Charge Warns ESAF Chief of Staff That Jesuit Case Not Forgotten," January 14, 1991, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA; "Jesuit Case Demarches Coincident with Presidential Determination," January 30, 1991, folder El Salvador – January 1991-March 1991 [3], Charles A. Gillespie Files, GBPL.

<sup>300</sup> "Part 45 in Jesuit Series--Frustration Abounds Over Jesuit; Case," February 5, 1991, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

February 1991 a message “asking State to direct him to tell Cristiani that all funds would be cut off if the entire Tandoni did not resign within 30 days.”<sup>301</sup> Embassy staff convinced Walker to withdraw the message and send an alternate cable.

On February 19, 1991, Ambassador Walker made his strongest condemnation of the FAES’ lack of accountability for the Jesuit murders. Walker stated that since January 1990, “the ESAF [could not] take credit for the emergence of one new fact, one scrap of incriminating information.” He called for the removal of Ponce and other High Command officers, essentially the decapitation of the FAES leadership in wartime, for the mishandling of the Jesuit case. In contrast to his August 14, 1990 cable, Walker recommended the Bush administration freeze high priority requests for AH-1 Cobra helicopters, armored personnel carriers, and place heavy conditions dependent on the progress of the Jesuit case investigation on FY 1992 military assistance. The cable ended with Walker stating that supporting the FAES was incompatible with the policy objective of a negotiated political settlement.<sup>302</sup>

The High Command made a weak attempt at resolving the Jesuit case. In a February 22, 1991 letter to Justice Minister René Hernández Valiente, Ponce and four High Command officers offered to assist the SIU by providing several investigative initiatives.<sup>303</sup> They continue to stress that there was no institutional responsibility for the murders and cover-up. Walker welcomed the letter but remarked it was “the first time

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<sup>301</sup> “Update 10 Feb 1991,” February 10, 1991, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>302</sup> “The ESAF and the Jesuit Case: Reaching the End of the Rope,” February 19, 1991, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>303</sup> “[Salvadoran Defense Ministry to Minister of Justice on Jesuit Investigation],” February 22, 1991, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.



any GOES/ESAF official has admitted that ‘others [officers and soldiers other than the nine defendants] were involved.’”<sup>304</sup> However, interviews conducted with officers mentioned in the February 22 letter produced no new information.<sup>305</sup> The CIA stated in an April 10, 1991 commentary that the letter “served to delay the case from going to trial, muddied the already murky waters and generated both hope and despair that a just solution [would] be found.”<sup>306</sup> In April 1991, the Bush administration decided that it would use the available \$42.5 million in military aid to fund only nonlethal sustainment items such as medical supplies and field rations. These items would be reviewed and their delivery delayed or halted based on three conditions: progress in the Jesuit case, progress in the peace negotiations, and El Salvador’s security situation, and in that order.<sup>307</sup> The administration had imposed the same conditions on military aid that it had opposed for over a year. Human rights promotion had trumped security interests. El Salvador had ceased to be the “Israel of Central America.”

After nearly two years of pre-trial proceedings and military obstructionism, the Jesuit murder trial began on September 26, 1991 before the Salvadoran Supreme Court. The trial lasted only two days. The jury found Benavides guilty of eight counts of murder, instigation and conspiracy to commit acts of terrorism and Lieutenant Yushy René Mendoza guilty of one murder count. They were sentenced in January 1992 to 30 years in prison. For the first time in Salvadoran history, a senior military officer was

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<sup>304</sup> “MOD Ponce Describes to USCINCO Joulwan New ESAF Initiatives on Jesuit Case,” March 11, 1991, El Salvador Collection, U.S. Department of State Electronic Reading Room.

<sup>305</sup> “Jesuit Case: Follow up to Ponce Initiative,” March 22, 1991, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>306</sup> “[Excised] Country Commentary: Attitude of the Salvadoran; Armed Forces on the Jesuit Case,” April 10, 1991, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>307</sup> “Conditioning Delivery of Military Assistance,” April 12, 1991, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

found guilty of a human rights violation. However, the seven other officers and enlisted men, the actual triggermen, were acquitted of all murder charges despite their confessions and physical evidence. Three officers were found guilty of lesser charges and were sentenced to three years in prison.<sup>308</sup> On November 18, 1991, Moakley issued a statement alleging that former Defense Minister General Bustillo, Ponce, and the High Command met in the afternoon of November 15, 1989, decided to kill the Jesuits, and gave the order to Benavides. The Embassy regarded this accusation as “informed speculation.”<sup>309</sup> The Bush administration’s final report on the Jesuit murders concluded that “there is no evidence that Benavides consulted with other officers from his academy year group (tanda) about the murders or that he received orders from anyone to carry out the murders.” In addition, the alleged November 15 meeting of the High Command “hinged on unsubstantiated information.”<sup>310</sup> The United Nations Commission on the Truth of El Salvador declared in its March 1993 report on human rights violations that “[t]here is substantial evidence that on the night of 15 November 1989...Ponce, in the presence of and in collusion with...Bustillo [and four other colonels, three of whom were *Tandona* members] gave...Benavides the order to kill Father Ignacio Ellacuria and to leave no witnesses.”<sup>311</sup> The Bush administration spent nearly two years demanding a full investigation of the Jesuit case by pressuring the same individual who may have ordered the murders.

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<sup>308</sup> Doggett, *Death Foretold*, 195-199.

<sup>309</sup> “Moakley Statement--What's New?” November 22, 1991, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>310</sup> “Draft Report on 1989 Jesuit Murders,” August 13, 1992, El Salvador Collection, U.S. Department of State Electronic Reading Room.

<sup>311</sup> *The United Nations and El Salvador*, 312.

To remove El Salvador from the foreign policy agenda, the Bush administration gradually became a more forceful advocate of human rights in El Salvador than either the Carter or Reagan administrations. However, human rights promotion conflicted with the policy of democracy promotion. Supporting Salvadoran democracy meant providing the FAES with the weapons and training to fight the FMLN. Although the Salvadoran civil war was not a vital national security issue, the Bush administration opposed attempts by Congress to significantly cut military aid to El Salvador. Though it was willing to condition, albeit secretly, the release of withheld military assistance on progress on the Jesuit case.

The Jesuit case represented the near complete failure of the new case theory of human rights violations. Bush administration officials, the US Embassy, and SOUTHCOM repeatedly and forcefully argued to the FAES that failing to resolve the Jesuit case would galvanize Democrats and Republicans in Congress to cut military aid. Yet, Colonel Ponce and his *Tandona* classmates in the High Command delayed the case from going to trial as long as possible. Military obstructionism kept El Salvador on the foreign policy agenda for nearly two years. Although Benavides and Mendoza were found guilty of murder, the actual killers and possible planners were not.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION AND THE SALVADORAN PEACE PROCESS

The Bush administration supported the UN-mediated peace process to end the Salvadoran civil war as soon as possible and to remove the burden of El Salvador from the foreign policy agenda. Even before the UN intervened in December 1989 to bring an end to the war, the Bush administration expressed its support for peace negotiations. The FMLN sent President-elect George Bush a letter on December 8, 1988 requesting to hold private conversations with US representatives to discuss “a prompt political solution” to the war.<sup>312</sup> These talks would complement renewed dialogue between the FMLN and Salvadoran government. The State Department, according to former Foreign Service Officer Todd Greentree, sent a positive reply to the initiative.<sup>313</sup>

On January 23, 1989, the FMLN offered to participate in the coming presidential election if they were postponed from March to September. After the postponed elections, the FMLN would negotiate a cease-fire.<sup>314</sup> The State Department publicly stated that the proposal was “worthy of serious and substantive consideration, which it [was] receiving.”<sup>315</sup> However, acting Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Michael Kozak argued in a February 9 cable to Secretary Baker that the peace proposal was “a propaganda ploy [because the FMLN]...ha[d] not dropped their earlier demands

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<sup>312</sup> “Letter from FMLN to President-Elect George Bush,” December 8, 1988, folder El Salvador – January-June 1989 [3], Latin American Directorate Files, GBPL.

<sup>313</sup> Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, 155.

<sup>314</sup> Lindsey Gruson, “Salvador Rebels, Shifting Tactics, Offer to Join in Presidential Vote,” *The New York Times*, January 24, 1989.

<sup>315</sup> Elaine Sciolino, “REBEL PLAN SPLITS U.S. AND SALVADOR. (Foreign Desk),” *The New York Times*, January 27, 1989.

for power sharing outside of elections and the integration of guerrilla combatants into the army.”<sup>316</sup> When both parties rejected proposals and counter-proposals for a cease-fire in late February and early March, the FMLN boycotted and disrupted the election.<sup>317</sup>

Salvadoran President Alfredo Cristiani fulfilled a campaign promise by pledging to restart negotiations with the FMLN in his inaugural speech on June 1, 1989. He recognized that the Salvadoran public was tired of the war and wanted it to end.<sup>318</sup> Peace talks, arranged by the Catholic Church and observed by the UN and OAS, resumed between the Salvadoran government and the guerrillas in September and October 1989 in Mexico and Costa Rica, respectively. Negotiations resulted in no breakthrough as the guerrillas rejected the government’s proposal for an immediate cease-fire. The FMLN withdrew from negotiations after unknown persons bombed the offices of two leftist organizations with links to the guerrillas on October 31.<sup>319</sup> Less than two weeks later, the FMLN launched its offensive in San Salvador.

Military stalemate motivated the FMLN and the Salvadoran government to seek a political solution under UN auspices. The failure of the November 1989 offensive to inspire a popular insurrection demonstrated that the FMLN did not have the support of the Salvadoran people. The FMLN’s five factions argued over the utility of armed struggle compared to peace negotiations. They feared that they would be perceived as militarily weak if they negotiated. However, they soon realized that peace negotiations

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<sup>316</sup>“El Salvador: FMLN Peace Proposal,” February 8, 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA..

<sup>317</sup> Julia Preston, “Latest Salvadoran Peace Efforts Fall Short but Leave Lasting Effect,” *Washington Post*, March 5, 1989.

<sup>318</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 215.

<sup>319</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 216-217.

could accomplish the same political objectives as armed struggle, most importantly, the dissolution of the FAES.<sup>320</sup> UN Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar assigned Alvaro de Soto, a fellow Peruvian diplomat, as his Special Representative for El Salvador. De Soto would be responsible for mediating a nearly two-year long peace process. The FMLN reached out to the UN in late November as it was simultaneously fighting for control of San Salvador. A FMLN diplomatic commission, led by Salvador Samayoa, arranged a secret December 8 meeting with de Soto in Montreal, Canada. Unlike the *comandantes*, Samayoa supported a UN role in ending the civil war. The *comandantes* were suspicious of the UN's impartiality and remained committed to a military solution. De Soto assured the FMLN commission that the UN would be an impartial mediator.<sup>321</sup> As a result, the FMLN accepted UN mediation of peace negotiations on December 18.<sup>322</sup>

The Salvadoran government approached the UN publicly and privately. At a summit in San Isidro de Coronado, Costa Rica summit on December 12 1989, five Central American presidents including Cristiani and Daniel Ortega signed a declaration “request[ing] respectfully the Secretary-General of the United Nations to do everything within his power to take the necessary steps to ensure the resumption of dialogue [in El Salvador]...., thereby facilitating its successful continuation.” Cristiani recognized that dialogue with the FMLN was critical to domestic and international perceptions of the Salvadoran government and maintaining US aid. With pressure from the Bush

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<sup>320</sup> Diana Villiers Negroponete, “Conflict Resolution at the End of the Cold War: The Case of El Salvador, 1989-1994” (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2006), 124-131. Negroponete is the wife of John Negroponete, Reagan’s ambassador to Honduras from 1981 to 1985.

<sup>321</sup> Alvaro De Soto, “Ending Violent Conflict in El Salvador” in *Herding Cats: Multiparty Mediation in a Complex World*, eds. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1999), 356-357.

<sup>322</sup> Negroponete, “Conflict Resolution at the End of the Cold War,” 290.

administration, he formally requested Pérez de Cuéllar's help on January 31 to end the war. The US also pressured the Salvadoran military to accept UN involvement in the peace process.<sup>323</sup> However, Cristiani considered the UN an intermediary not a mediator because he insisted, according to historian Diana Villiers Negroponte, that “the Salvadoran protagonists would find a solution to their own national problems.”<sup>324</sup> He also called for dialogue not negotiations because negotiations legitimized the FMLN as equal to the Salvadoran government.<sup>325</sup>

For the next eight weeks, de Soto conducted shuttle diplomacy between the five FMLN *comandantes* and the Salvadoran government to establish the procedure for the peace process. Both parties disagreed over the format with the government favoring direct talks and FMLN pushing for UN mediation.<sup>326</sup> A compromise allowed the UN to use either method at each stage to ensure continuous negotiations. According to de Soto, most of the peace process was negotiated using the single negotiating text technique: “consulting with the parties on each issue and subsequently submitting a text to them, as far as possible simultaneously, and then discussing it with each of them separately and revising it in light of their reactions so as to narrow down differences, repeating the exercise as many times as necessary.”<sup>327</sup> On March 27, the two parties secretly met in Mexico City for the first time since October 1989 to resolve the remaining differences over the procedure.<sup>328</sup> They publicly signed the agreed framework for negotiations on

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<sup>323</sup> Negroponte, “Conflict Resolution at the End of the Cold War,” 274-275.

<sup>324</sup> Negroponte, “Conflict Resolution at the End of the Cold War,” 277.

<sup>325</sup> Negroponte, “Conflict Resolution at the End of the Cold War,” 272-273.

<sup>326</sup> De Soto, “Ending Violent Conflict in El Salvador,” 360.

<sup>327</sup> De Soto, “Ending Violent Conflict in El Salvador,” 359.

<sup>328</sup> De Soto, “Ending Violent Conflict in El Salvador,” 361.

April 4, 1990 in Geneva, Switzerland. The purpose of the peace process, according to the Geneva Agreement, was “to end the armed conflict by political means as speedily as possible, promote the democratization of the country, guarantee unrestricted respect for human rights and reunify Salvadorian society.”<sup>329</sup>

Before mediating the end of the Salvadoran civil war, the United Nations had helped end the war between the Sandinista government and the Contras in Nicaragua. The Contadora Group worked with the UN to develop a mechanism for the implementation of Esquipulas II. At a February 1989 summit in Costa de Sol, El Salvador, the Sandinista government agreed to free and general elections on February 25, 1990 in exchange for the demobilization of the Contras. On July 27, 1989, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 637 which offered the full support of the Secretary-General to the Esquipulas II process. The UN deployed a peacekeeping force to Central America in December 1989 to verify Esquipulas II compliance and to monitor the February 1990 elections and Contra demobilization.<sup>330</sup> In the presidential election, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, the candidate for an anti-Sandinista coalition, defeated incumbent Daniel Ortega.<sup>331</sup> For the first time since July 1979, the Sandinistas were out of power. After signing a cease-fire and demobilization agreement in April 1990, the last Contras demobilized in July.<sup>332</sup>

Unlike the Reagan administration, the Bush administration was willing to

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<sup>329</sup> *The United Nations and El Salvador, 1990-1995*, 164.

<sup>330</sup> Child, *The Central American Peace Process, 1983-1991*, ch. 6 and 7.

<sup>331</sup> To learn more about the February 1990 elections, see Robert A. Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua*. rev. ed. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2002), ch. 15-16.

<sup>332</sup> LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 563.



cooperate with the UN on regional and global issues. Pérez de Cuéllar summarized the Reagan administration's attitude toward the UN as "an ideological distrust of the United Nations as an organization where democracies faced a hostile majority of communist and dictatorial regimes. In this view, the greater authority the United Nations had, the greater the influence of these undemocratic forces in the world."<sup>333</sup> By the end of 1986, the UN faced bankruptcy because the Reagan administration was withholding US contributions to the UN budget.<sup>334</sup> For Pérez de Cuéllar, the US vote for Security Council Resolution 637 in July 1989 was a turning point of US policy toward Central America. The US had accepted for the first time a UN role in ending Central America's civil wars.<sup>335</sup>

The Bush administration's acceptance of UN mediation of the Salvadoran peace process reflected the US-UN relationship in the post-Cold War era. Bush recognized that international institutions like the UN could be used to carry out American foreign policy goals.<sup>336</sup> Bush's own experience as US Permanent Representative to the UN from 1971 to 1973 and as head of the United States Liaison Office in China from 1974 to 1975 shaped his diplomatic style and his administration's successful relationship with the institution.<sup>337</sup> His commitment to personal diplomacy was developed in New York and

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<sup>333</sup> Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 8.

<sup>334</sup> Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 10.

<sup>335</sup> Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 403-404.

<sup>336</sup> "Discussant: Brent Scowcroft," in *A Noble Calling: Character and the George H. W. Bush Presidency*, eds. William Levantrosser and Rosanna Perotti (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 225. On Bush's beliefs on international institutions, see Jeffrey A. Engel, "A Better World. . . but Don't Get Carried Away: The Foreign Policy of George H. W. Bush Twenty Years On," *Diplomatic History* 34 no.1 (January 2010): 25-46.

<sup>337</sup> On Bush's experiences at the UN, see Jerry Pubantz, "George Bush and the United Nations: A Prudent Journey from Realism to Moralism, 1971-1993" in *A Noble Calling: Character and the George H. W. Bush Presidency*, eds. William Levantrosser and Rosanna Perotti (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 196

in Beijing. Seymour Maxwell Finger, Bush's former advisor at the UN, attributed the Bush administration's successful relationship with the UN to the performance of Permanent Representative, Ambassador Thomas Pickering.<sup>338</sup> The former Ambassador to El Salvador from 1983 to 1985, Pickering was a career Foreign Service Officer who unlike previous Permanent Representatives was not a Cabinet member. Pickering would play a key role in facilitating the Salvadoran peace process and resolving differences between the Bush administration and the UN.

Starting in January 1990, the Bush administration fully supported Cristiani and a negotiated political settlement to end the Salvadoran civil war. Secretary Baker outlined the administration's approach to both sides of the peace process: "On the one hand, we had to signal to the Salvadoran military that they must support a negotiated peace-and a purge of human-rights violators-or risk losing U.S. support. On the other, we had to convince hard-line factions among the guerrillas that if they continued the war, the United States would not abandon El Salvador."<sup>339</sup> Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Joseph G. Sullivan stated that the goal of US involvement in the peace process was to end the war as soon as possible.<sup>340</sup> The faster a comprehensive peace agreement was reached, the faster the administration could shift its attention from El Salvador to other foreign policy agenda items. To achieve this objective, the administration pushed the Salvadoran government to take an open and flexible stance

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200. On Bush's experience in China, see Jeffrey A. Engel, ed., *The China Diary of George H.W. Bush: The Making of a Global President* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>338</sup> Seymour Maxwell Finger, "George Bush and the United Nations," in *A Noble Calling: Character and the George H. W. Bush Presidency*, eds. Levantrosser and Perotti, 189-190.

<sup>339</sup> Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 603.

<sup>340</sup> Joseph G. Sullivan, "How Peace Came to El Salvador," *Orbis* 38 no.1 (Winter 1994): 87.

and relied on the UN and other third parties to pressure the FMLN to negotiate in good faith. Cristiani and his team of negotiators faced intense pressure throughout the peace process from the right wing of ARENA and the FAES to compromise as little as possible on all issues. According to political economist Tricia Juhn, a pervasive fear during peace negotiations was that the High Command would overthrow Cristiani.<sup>341</sup> The administration's public and private statements in support of Cristiani made it clear to the Salvadoran officer corps and rightist extremists, according to Negroponte, that the administration "would not tolerate any move to get rid of, or murder [Cristiani]."<sup>342</sup>

The Bush administration fully supported the peace process to prevent Congress from cutting US aid to El Salvador. As discussed in the previous chapter, Congress sought to condition US aid on progress in peace negotiations. According to Assistant Secretary Aronson, the US was committed to both a political solution and the security of the Salvadoran government.<sup>343</sup> In a *Washington Post* editorial aimed at influencing the vote for HR 5114 on October 19, Aronson argued for a bipartisan El Salvador policy that cut aid to punish government and guerrilla human rights abusers but not to the extent that it undermined El Salvador's security. This policy would send the following message to all sides of the civil war: "It is time to end the war through negotiations; the search for military victory by either side is a formula for endless destruction and suffering. Peace requires not just the absence of war, but safe political space and personal security for all

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<sup>341</sup>Tricia Juhn, *Negotiating Peace in El Salvador: Civil-Military Relations and the Conspiracy to End the War* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 77.

<sup>342</sup> Negroponte, "Conflict Resolution at the End of the Cold War," 312.

<sup>343</sup> Bernard W. Aronson, "The Role of US Policy," in *Is There a Transition to Democracy in El Salvador?* eds. Joseph S. Tulchin with Gary Bland (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), 72.

Salvadorans and civilian control over the military must exist in fact as well as in name.”<sup>344</sup> Aronson’s statement represents the fundamental difference between the Reagan and Bush administrations. In contrast to the Reagan administration’s emphasis on military victory over the insurgents, the objective of the Bush administration’s El Salvador policy had become a negotiated political settlement with concessions from the Salvadoran government and the FMLN.<sup>345</sup>

The May 1990 talks in Caracas, Venezuela focused on establishing the agenda and schedule for negotiations. The Caracas Agreement, signed on May 21, outlined a two-phase process. During the first phase, both parties would reach political agreements on the armed forces, human rights, electoral system, judicial system, constitutional reform, economic and social issues, and UN verification before a cease-fire was negotiated. The target date for the completion of the first phase was September 15, 1990. The second phase would focus on the reintegration of FMLN members into post-war Salvadoran society and the implementation of the political agreements.<sup>346</sup>

Negotiations stalled in June and July 1990 over issues regarding the armed forces. The negotiating team assembled by Cristiani rejected demands such as a purge of the FAES officer corps and the end of military impunity. However, it was willing to segregate the public security forces from the FAES.<sup>347</sup> With no progress on armed forces

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<sup>344</sup> Bernard Aronson, “Peace in El Salvador,” *Washington Post*, October 12, 1990,

<sup>345</sup> On the differences between the two administration’s policies toward peace negotiations between the Salvadoran government and the FMLN, see Paul A. Labedz, “Changing Beliefs and Changing Policies: Explaining Transitions in U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Central America in the Reagan and Bush Years” (PhD diss., The George Washington University, 2001).

<sup>346</sup> *The United Nations and El Salvador*, 165-166.

<sup>347</sup> Juhn, *Negotiating Peace in El Salvador*, 61-62.

issues, government and guerrilla negotiators shifted their attention to human rights. The first major breakthrough of the peace process, the signing of the San José Agreement on Human Rights, occurred in San José, Costa Rica on July 26, 1990. The San José Agreement called for the full guarantee of human rights and the end of violations.<sup>348</sup> Both parties agreed to allow a UN verification mission to investigate human rights violations and promote and defend human rights in El Salvador. The UN human rights verification mission known as the *Misión de Observadores de las Naciones Unidas en El Salvador* (United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador) was established in Security Council Resolution 693 on May 20, 1991. ONUSAL was launched on July 26, 1991 in San Salvador and on October 1, 1991, began investigating alleged human rights violations with the cooperation of the Salvadoran government, military, and FMLN.<sup>349</sup>

Following the San José Agreement, the peace process stalemated again in August and September 1990 over armed forces issues. The Salvadoran government rejected the FMLN demand for the dissolution of the FAES but offered concessions in a 33-point proposal. These included the dissolution of the Atlacatl BIRI.<sup>350</sup> As a result of fundamental differences over armed forces issues, both sides deserve blame for missing the objective of a cease-fire by September 15 as set by the Caracas Agreement.

To move negotiations forward, Pérez de Cuéllar invited the nations of Colombia, Mexico, Spain, and Venezuela in late September to form the “Group of Friends of the

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<sup>348</sup> The San Jose Agreement defined human rights as “those rights recognized by the Salvadorian legal system, including treaties to which El Salvador is a party, and by the declarations and principles on human rights and humanitarian law adopted by the United Nations and the Organization of American States.” *The United Nations and El Salvador*, 108.

<sup>349</sup> *The United Nations and El Salvador*, 17-19.

<sup>350</sup> Juhn, *Negotiating Peace in El Salvador*, 70-71.

Secretary-General for El Salvador” also known as the “Four Friends.”<sup>351</sup> The purpose of the Group of Friends was to support the Secretary-General by pressuring both parties reach a negotiated political settlement. Except Spain, the Group of Friends was the original Contadora Group members. However, unlike the Contadora and Esquipulas processes, Pérez de Cuéllar excluded Central American nations to maintain impartiality.<sup>352</sup> Spain, the only European country, was included because it maintained good relations with the region and could place additional pressure on the Salvadoran government to control the FAES since five of the six Jesuit priests murdered on November 16, 1989 were Spaniards. Since the US had the greatest leverage on the Salvadoran government and military, the group was referred to, according to Venezuelan diplomat Diego Arria, as “The Four Plus One.”<sup>353</sup>

Until September 1990, the Bush administration had played a minimal role in the peace process. The failure to achieve a cease-fire by September 15, 1990, however, provoked strong criticism of de Soto’s mediation by the Bush administration. On September 29, 1990, Aronson, Pickering, and NSC Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director on Latin American Affairs William T. Pryce met with de Soto and his team at UN headquarters to express the administration’s frustration with the slow pace of peace talks. The US officials emphasized that de Soto and Pérez de Cuéllar were

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<sup>351</sup> According to scholar Jean Krasno, De Soto and UN Secretariat official Francesc Vendrell developed the concept of the Group of Friends in December 1989. Jean Krasno, “The Group of Friends of the Secretary-General: A Useful Leveraging Tool,” in *Leveraging for Success in United Nations Peace Operations*, eds. Jean E Krasno, Bradd C. Hayes, and Donald C.F. Daniel (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 172.

<sup>352</sup> Krasno, “The Group of Friends of the Secretary-General,” 174.

<sup>353</sup> Diego Arria, “Bringing Leverage to the Peace Process in El Salvador and Central America,” in *Leveraging for Success in United Nations Peace Operations*, eds. Jean E Krasno, Bradd C. Hayes, and Donald C.F. Daniel (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 65-66.

not fully using the power they had over negotiations. By not punishing the FMLN for its lack of cooperation, they argued, de Soto and Pérez de Cuéllar were perceived by the FAES and ARENA as sympathetic to the FMLN. To break the stalemate, they recommended a more active role for the UN, more concessions from the FMLN, and to “let the side that refuses to cooperate bear the public responsibility.”<sup>354</sup> De Soto attributed the Bush administration’s criticism to “a reluctance to accept the consequences of the mediation having been entrusted to a genuinely impartial good officer, and the corollary that he could not unilaterally move the goalposts.”<sup>355</sup> The date September 15, de Soto argued, was interpreted incorrectly as a deadline by the administration which was seeking a cease-fire to prevent Congress from cutting US aid to El Salvador.<sup>356</sup> He stated that imposing deadlines or punishing either party for intransigence would have undermined his credibility as an impartial mediator.<sup>357</sup>

De Soto’s working paper on military reform broke the logjam in the peace process. Presented to both parties in secret “working group” meetings on October 29-31, 1990 in Mexico, the working paper proposed measures such as a new civilian national police force that assumed the responsibilities of the National Guard and the Treasury Police, the dissolution of the BIRIs, and stronger civilian authority.<sup>358</sup> Most importantly, the working paper proposed a process known as *depuración* (purification), the purging

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<sup>354</sup> “GOES/FMLN Negotiations – Aronson Meeting with De Soto at UN,” October 9, 1990, folder El Salvador – (General) July-December 1990 [5], William T. Pryce Files, GBPL.

<sup>355</sup> De Soto, “Ending Violent Conflict in El Salvador,” 372.

<sup>356</sup> De Soto, “Ending Violent Conflict in El Salvador,” 372.

<sup>357</sup> De Soto, “Ending Violent Conflict in El Salvador,” 378.

<sup>358</sup> “Follow-up Meeting with Salvadoran U.N. Ambassador –Texts of Documents,” November 11, 1990, folder El Salvador – (General) July-December 1990 [2], William T. Pryce Files, GBPL.

of the officer corps by a three-person ad-hoc commission. Despite objections from both parties, de Soto's working paper was accepted as a basis for further discussions.

Negotiations between November 1990 and March 1991 focused on armed forces issues but failed to produce a breakthrough. When the FMLN's November 1990 offensive threatened to wreck the peace process, Pérez de Cuéllar appealed for restraint on both sides and instructed de Soto to intensify negotiations.<sup>359</sup> Instead of boycotting the March 1991 Legislative Assembly elections, the FMLN participated by supporting leftist parties to end ARENA's majority. According to Juhn, the FMLN delayed any major breakthrough in negotiations until after the elections in order to prevent ARENA from gaining any electoral advantage.<sup>360</sup>

In January 1991, Ambassador Walker proposed a series of diplomatic initiatives to accelerate and intensify negotiations. The purpose of this "diplomatic offensive" was to create a "pressure cooker" to achieve a cease-fire agreement before the March 1991 elections. Walker recommended initiatives that would convince Pérez de Cuéllar "that there [was] significant international pressure on him for the negotiations to produce results in the shortest possible time."<sup>361</sup> Cristiani responded favorably to the recommendations in a meeting with Walker on January 20 but for unknown reasons, he did not carry out the diplomatic offensive.<sup>362</sup> De Soto rejected the State Department's insistence on pressure-cooker negotiations because he believed they "would have been

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<sup>359</sup> Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 424-425.

<sup>360</sup> Juhn, *Negotiating Peace in El Salvador*, 85-87.

<sup>361</sup> "Suggestions for GOES Strategy to Generate International Pressure on US for Salvadoran Negotiations, January 19, 1991, folder El Salvador – January 1991-March 1991 [4], Charles A. Gillespie Files, GBPL.

<sup>362</sup> "Ambassador Presents US Suggestions on GOES Military Proposal, Diplomatic Offensive Leading to Pressure Cooker Negotiations," January 20, 1991, folder El Salvador – January 1991-March 1991 [3], Charles A. Gillespie Files, GBPL.



of little usefulness until the proper conditions existed...My critics did not understand that-as Pedro Nikken [a Venezuelan lawyer on de Soto's team] so aptly put it-fruit does not ripen by being thrown against the wall."<sup>363</sup>

The transition from the Cold War to the post-Cold War era had a moderating influence on the FMLN. The loss of political and military support from its key allies forced the insurgency to reevaluate its ideology. Violeta Chamorro's victory in the February 1990 Nicaraguan presidential election severed the links between the FMLN and the Sandinistas. The Chamorro government had to end arms shipments to El Salvador to maintain compliance with Esquipulas II. In an attempt to normalize relations with the US, Cuba ended material support for the FMLN in February 1991.<sup>364</sup> Although the Sandinista-controlled Nicaraguan military circumvented President Chamorro by continuing to send weapons months after the election, the FMLN had recognized the reality of the new post-Cold War era international system. A March 22, 1991 CIA report asserted that by March 1991, the FMLN had shifted from using armed struggle to achieve a Marxist-Leninist state to using negotiations to reach its new goal of a pluralistic democracy.<sup>365</sup> ERP *comandante* Joaquín Villalobos was considered the most radical FMLN *comandante* during the war but in March 1991 he described orthodox Communism as an extreme ideology. He sought to model El Salvador's future on capitalist countries such as Costa Rica.<sup>366</sup> This ideological reorientation partly explains

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<sup>363</sup> De Soto, "Ending Violent Conflict in El Salvador," 375

<sup>364</sup> "[Excised] Cuba's Role in Central America," February 22, 1991, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>365</sup> "El Salvador: What Does the FMLN Really Want" March 22, 1991 folder El Salvador – January 1991-March 1991 [1], Charles A. Gillespie Files, GBPL.

<sup>366</sup> Mark A. Uhlig, "Top Salvador Rebel Alters His Goals. (Foreign Desk)," *The New York Times*, March 7, 1991.

why the FMLN, for the first time, participated albeit indirectly in the democratic process in March 1991. Also, the situation in El Salvador in 1991 was no longer as dangerous for the guerrillas as it was in the 1980s.

Following the Malta summit, the US and Soviet Union cooperated to end the Salvadoran civil war. The two superpowers agreed at the summit at Camp David, Maryland on June 1, 1990 to support a negotiated political settlement in El Salvador and recognized that Cuban support for the FMLN hindered the peace process.<sup>367</sup> Bush and Baker continued to urge the Soviets to convince the Cuban government to end arms shipments to the FMLN. In exchange, the US offered to improve relations with Cuba.<sup>368</sup> Through its contacts with the PCES (Communist Party of El Salvador), the Soviet Union pressured the FMLN to agree to a comprehensive peace agreement.<sup>369</sup> However, de Soto contended that the Bush administration placed too much emphasis on Soviet support for the peace process. PCES *comandante* Schafik Handal told de Soto that the Soviet Union had no leverage to exercise on the FMLN.<sup>370</sup> Also, the PCES was the least influential of the five FMLN factions.

Starting in June 1989, the Bush administration had offered to allow Cuba to play a constructive role in the Central American peace process. When Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze visited Cuba in early October 1989, Castro told him that

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<sup>367</sup>“Briefing Cards: Reminder of Issues to Raise,” n.d., folder Washington Summit June 1990 [2], Condoleezza Rice Files, GBPL.

<sup>368</sup>“General Scowcroft on US-Soviet Summit for Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,” folder Chron Files May 1990-June 1990 [4], Nicholas R. Burns Files, GBPL.

<sup>369</sup>“Soviet and Cuban Support for the Farabundo Marti National; Liberation Front,” October 31, 1990, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>370</sup>De Soto, “Ending Violent Conflict in El Salvador,” 370-371.

the supported a political solution to the Salvadoran civil war and was willing to end arms shipments to Central America if the US did the same.<sup>371</sup> Castro also stated, according to Yuri Pavlov, that as long as the US provided military assistance to the Salvadoran government, “Cuba had a moral right to render assistance to the FMLN forces when necessary and would not accept any unilateral obligation that would limit this right.”<sup>372</sup> Baker, Pickering, and the US Interests Section in Havana, Cuba made offers but the Cuban government refused to participate in negotiations.<sup>373</sup> Pavlov argued that US-Soviet cooperation failed to pressure Cuba to participate in the Salvadoran peace process because both superpowers had opposing objectives. The Soviet Union sought to preserve its alliance with Cuba despite attempts by the US to end it. The US was unwilling to make serious concessions such as cutting all military aid to El Salvador to normalize relations with Cuba. Attempts at tripartite dialogue between the US, the Soviet Union, and Cuba ended in failure.<sup>374</sup>

Negotiations in Mexico City in April 1991 focused on amending the 1983 Salvadoran Constitution to incorporate political agreements affecting Salvadoran government and military institutions. However, a constitutional deadline threatened to set back the entire peace process. Article 248 of the Salvadoran Constitution required that constitutional amendments be approved by two consecutive Legislative Assemblies. The Legislative Assembly would be replaced after April 30 by incoming members. If the

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<sup>371</sup> “[Deleted] Shevardnadze’s Visit to Cuba,” October 10, 1989, El Salvador, 1980-1994, DNSA.

<sup>372</sup> Pavlov, *Soviet-Cuban Alliance*, 150.

<sup>373</sup> “US/USSR/CUBAN DISCUSSIONS ON PEACE IN CENTRAL AMERICA,” n.d., El Salvador Collection, U.S. Department of State Electronic Reading Room.

<sup>374</sup> Pavlov, *Soviet-Cuban Alliance*, 214-215.

Salvadoran government and FMLN did not agree on constitutional amendments before April 30, they would have to wait until the 1994 Legislative Assembly elections. The FMLN, supported by de Soto, pushed for reforming Article 248 by allowing any amendment to be approved by a single assembly. Cristiani, supported by the Bush administration and the Group of Friends, made it clear that the Salvadoran government opposed reforming Article 248. He regarded Article 248 reform as an attempt by the FMLN to delay negotiations.<sup>375</sup> Subsequently, the FMLN dropped the demand.

On April 27, 1991, both parties agreed to constitutional reforms regarding the armed forces, judicial system and human rights, and the electoral system. The Legislative Assembly approved the amendments on April 29-30. The most significant aspects of the Mexico Agreements included stronger civilian control of the armed forces, the creation of the *Policía Nacional Civil* (National Civilian Police or PNC), an independent judiciary, and a new administrative body for electoral matters.<sup>376</sup> The parties also agreed to the establishment of a Commission on the Truth composed of three Secretary-General-appointed individuals to investigate “serious acts of violence that have occurred since 1980 and whose impact on society urgently requires that the public should know the truth.”<sup>377</sup> The Truth Commission would be part of a process to promote national reconciliation.

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<sup>375</sup> Juhn, *Negotiating Peace in El Salvador*, 88. “GOES – FMLN Negotiations: GOES Position on Article 248,” April 19, 1991, folder El Salvador – April-June 1991 [4], Latin American Directorate Files, GBPL.

<sup>376</sup> With the creation of the PNC, the Mexico Agreements separated public security forces from the FAES. *The United Nations and El Salvador*, 167-174.

<sup>377</sup> *The United Nations and El Salvador*, 168.

Negotiations during the summer of 1991 stalemated over how to handle the “Gordian knot,” a term that referred to the dilemma imposed by the Caracas timetable.<sup>378</sup> According to former UN Undersecretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Marrack Goulding, the Caracas Agreement made arrangements for a cease-fire nearly impossible: “The government’s primary objective was an end to the war and demobilization of the FMLN...But agreement to end the conflict was the only card in the FMLN’s hand; they would not play it until the government had committed itself to a [series of fundamental reforms].”<sup>379</sup> The Gordian knot was untied when both sides agreed in August to compress the peace process into one phase rather than two as outlined in the Caracas Agreement. Now, both sides would reach agreements on all issues before a cease-fire was declared.<sup>380</sup> The details on the cease-fire were delayed until the final negotiation sessions in December 1991.

During the summer of 1991, the Bush administration and the Group of Friends pressed both parties and the UN to make greater progress in the negotiations. President Carlos Andrés Pérez of Venezuela nearly undermined the peace process when he summoned government and guerrilla negotiators to Caracas in early July without consulting de Soto.<sup>381</sup> At the first Ibero-American Summit in Guadalajara, Mexico on July 18-19, the Group of Friends urged both parties to increase the pace of negotiations.<sup>382</sup> Baker and new Soviet Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh issued

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<sup>378</sup> Juhn, *Negotiating Peace in El Salvador*, 94-95.

<sup>379</sup> Marrack Goulding, *Peacemonger* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 225.

<sup>380</sup> Juhn, *Negotiating Peace in El Salvador*, 97-104.

<sup>381</sup> De Soto, “Ending Violent Conflict in El Salvador,” 368.

<sup>382</sup> Sullivan, “How Peace Came to El Salvador,” 93.

a joint letter on August 1, 1991, urging Pérez de Cuéllar to take personal leadership of the peace process. For both superpowers, the unresolved Salvadoran civil war was a barrier to the post-Cold War era of peace and economic development in Latin America.<sup>383</sup> To reenergize the peace process, Pérez de Cuéllar invited Cristiani and the five FMLN *comandantes* to UN Headquarters in New York on September 16-17. For the first time, negotiations to end the Salvadoran civil war took place in the US. Ambassador Pickering ensured that the US issued visas for the *comandantes*.<sup>384</sup>

Along with an agreement on a compressed agenda, both sides signed the New York Agreement on September 25, 1991.<sup>385</sup> This agreement established the *Comisión Nacional para la Consolidación de la Paz* (National Commission for the Consolidation of Peace or COPAZ). Composed of government, military, FMLN, and political party representatives, COPAZ would oversee the implementation of the peace agreements. The New York Agreement reduced the size of the FAES and established an ad hoc commission to purify the armed forces by investigating all FAES officers and removing those who have committed illegal acts. Both parties agreed that former guerrillas could join the PNC but not the FAES and that the FMLN could no longer demand the dissolution of the FAES.<sup>386</sup> The function of the FAES was redefined from internal security to defending national sovereignty and territory. For the first time, both sides discussed social and economic issues. They agreed to give land in excess of 245 hectares to landless peasants and small farmers.

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<sup>383</sup> *The United Nations and El Salvador*, 142-144.

<sup>384</sup> Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 433.

<sup>385</sup> *The United Nations and El Salvador*, 159-163.

<sup>386</sup> Negroponte, "Conflict Resolution at the End of the Cold War," 321.

Throughout the peace process, the UN, the Group of Friends, and the Soviet Union urged the Bush administration to directly contact the FMLN. Since 1980, the US had refused to directly contact and negotiate with the guerrillas and insisted that negotiations take place between Salvadorans. Since the Bush administration refused to talk to the FMLN, it relied on de Soto to present the FMLN's views. De Soto argued that this arrangement contributed to the misperception that he favored the FMLN.<sup>387</sup>

Bush's officials reevaluated the policy on contacts with the FMLN after the September 15, 1990 target date for a cease-fire passed. An October 20, 1990 Embassy cable to Baker described how the US government would directly contact the FMLN after it made major concessions: publicly renouncing attacks against the Salvadoran infrastructure and assassinations of civilian and military officials, not launching a second offensive, and conditioning direct contact on a serious FMLN effort in the peace process. Discussions with the FMLN would not involve the Ambassador or other high-ranking Embassy officials. The Embassy would present the Bush administration's positions on the negotiating process and consult with the Salvadoran government before and after each meeting. Walker and the Country Team commented that "if played just right, the FMLN could end up with severe irreversible restrictions in their modus operandi... Let's go for it."<sup>388</sup>

After receiving approval from Baker on January 1, 1991, the State Department carried out both secret and public meetings with the FMLN. Peter Romero, the State

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<sup>387</sup> De Soto, "Ending Violent Conflict in El Salvador," 376.

<sup>388</sup> "USG Contacts with FMLN," October 20, 1990, folder El Salvador – (General) July-December 1990 [2], William T. Pryce Files, GBPL.

Department's Salvadoran Desk Officer, had the first direct meeting with *Resistencia Nacional* representatives in Mexico City in January despite the fact that the FMLN did not make any of the major concessions described in the October 20, 1990 cable.<sup>389</sup> During his second trip to El Salvador in late June 1991, Congressman Joe Moakley wanted to see living conditions outside San Salvador. Walker accompanied Moakley to Santa Marta, a pro-FMLN town near the border with Honduras consisting of refugees who had fled the death squads and the fighting, to listen to the town leaders' concerns about government services and military repression. The US delegation provided gifts such as children's coloring books and Gillette razors for the adults.<sup>390</sup> Walker returned to Santa Marta with USMILGP Commander Colonel Hamilton, on August 31, 1991. They met with the town's leaders and RN *comandante* Raúl Hercules, conversed with teenage guerrillas and later posed for pictures with them.<sup>391</sup> During negotiations in September 1991, RN deputy *comandante* Roberto Cañas requested a meeting with Joseph Sullivan to discuss a FMLN proposal for a one-year truce and a mechanism to establish civilian control of the FAES. According to a US Permanent Mission to the UN cable to the State Department, Sullivan and Pickering denied the request for a meeting and the Salvadoran government rejected the proposal. However, Pickering did not rule out further discussion with the FMLN during the negotiation sessions: "it was obvious that the FMLN wanted the meeting very badly and that it should therefore have to pay a price for it. The

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<sup>389</sup> Negroponte, "Conflict Resolution at the End of the Cold War," 210.

<sup>390</sup> Lee Hockstader, "Foreign Journal; The Congressman and the Rebels," *Washington Post*, July 1, 1991.

<sup>391</sup> Lee Hockstader, "U.S. Envoy, Colonel Meet Salvadoran Rebels; Encounter in War Zone Called 'Fruitful,'" *Washington Post*, September 13, 1991; Juhn, *Negotiating Peace in El Salvador*, 104-106.



meeting idea could be left on hold for now. It could be cashed in later for something important that the GOES wanted.”<sup>392</sup>

Negotiators faced the daunting objective of reaching a comprehensive peace agreement before the end of Pérez de Cuéllar’s second term as Secretary-General on December 31, 1991. His successor, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, stated that the Salvadoran peace process would have low priority during his tenure.<sup>393</sup> As a result, the UN, the Bush administration, and the Group of Friends, aggressively pressed both sides to reach a definitive agreement by December 31. Fighting between the FAES and FMLN stopped as the deadline approached. In response to a six-day truce announced by the FMLN, the Salvadoran government stopped aerial and artillery strikes in late November.<sup>394</sup> The State Department and US Embassy discussed the possibility of a bilateral meeting with the FMLN. An October 29 Embassy cable contended that such a meeting would assure the FMLN that the Salvadoran government would respect a comprehensive peace agreement.<sup>395</sup> Cristiani told Walker on December 19 that he believed a US-FMLN meeting could help break the stalemate over unresolved issues.<sup>396</sup> Although high-ranking Bush administration officials were present during the final negotiations in New York, it is unknown if they directly contacted the guerrillas.

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<sup>392</sup> “GOES/FMLN Talks: Meeting with USUN Sept. 16 – 17,” September 18, 1991, folder El Salvador – July-December 1991 [4], Latin American Directorate Files, GBPL.

<sup>393</sup> Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 435.

<sup>394</sup> “EL SALVADOR HALTS BOMBING OF REBELS. (Foreign Desk),” *The New York Times*, November 22, 1991.

<sup>395</sup> “Is It Time for the USG to Meet with the FMLN?” October 31, 1991, folder El Salvador – July-December 1991 [3], Latin American Directorate Files, GBPL.

<sup>396</sup> “Cristiani Believes USG Meeting with FMLN Now Could be Helpful,” December 20, 1991, folder El Salvador – July-December 1991 [1], Latin American Directorate Files, GBPL.

The final round of negotiations began on December 16 but stalemated over numerous issues most importantly, the integration of former insurgents into the PNC and cease-fire arrangements.<sup>397</sup> Starting on December 25, Goulding led cease-fire talks. After reaching an agreement on the structure and time of the formal cease-fire, Goulding imposed a decision on December 31 on the locations where FAES and FMLN forces would be stationed for demobilization.<sup>398</sup> Urged by Pérez de Cuéllar, Cristiani arrived in New York on December 28 to ensure that a peace agreement was reached. According to Negroponte, de Soto abandoned the single negotiating text technique and imposed agreements on unresolved issues.<sup>399</sup> Pérez de Cuéllar nearly left New York in the afternoon of December 31 but stayed to pressure both sides to make compromises.<sup>400</sup>

At four minutes before midnight on December 31, 1991, both parties signed the New York Act which contained definitive agreements “on all technical and military aspects relating to the separation of the warring parties and the cessation of the armed conflict.”<sup>401</sup> The cease-fire would take effect on February 1, 1992 and the war would end on October 31, 1992. New York Act II was signed on January 13 after meetings in early January had resolved all remaining issues including the timetable for implementing the agreements and the reintegration of the FMLN. In a ceremony attended by many Latin American leaders, Boutros-Ghali, and Secretary Baker, the Salvadoran government and FMLN signed the Peace Agreement in Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City on January

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<sup>397</sup> Juhn, *Negotiating Peace in El Salvador*, 119.

<sup>398</sup> Goulding, *Peacemonger*, 235-236.

<sup>399</sup> Negroponte, “Conflict Resolution at the End of the Cold War,” 326.

<sup>400</sup> Pérez de Cuéllar, *Pilgrimage for Peace*, 435.

<sup>401</sup> *The United Nations and El Salvador*, 230.

16, 1992. The Chapultepec Accords encapsulated every agreement made between both parties since April 1990. De Soto stated that the peace agreement constituted a “negotiated revolution” in El Salvador.<sup>402</sup>

On January 1, 1992, Aronson and Colonel Hamilton met with all five FMLN *comandantes* in Roberto Cañas’ New York hotel room. For the first time, an Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs had directly contacted the guerrillas. Aronson stated that “I felt it would be useful to tell them to their faces that we wanted to make peace and supported the accords...And that we didn’t just view them as a necessary evil to end the war, that we believed in the reforms that had been negotiated.”<sup>403</sup> In a scene that would have been unimaginable during the Reagan administration, the US had accepted the presence of the FMLN in post-war Salvadoran society. By making peace with the FMLN, the Bush administration had lifted the burden of US policy toward El Salvador.

The Chapultepec Accords ended the protection racket state by establishing civilian control and supervision of the military. El Salvador’s President now could appoint civilian Defense Ministers and had authority over a new independent intelligence agency. After reaching a high of more than 60,000 personnel during the war, the FAES was reduced to less than 30,000, a size appropriate for national defense. The peace accords also included the *depuración* of the officer corps by an ad-hoc commission, the disbanding of the BIRIs and paramilitary units, and the end of military

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<sup>402</sup> Tim Golden, "THE WORLD; The Salvadorans Make Peace in a 'Negotiated Revolution'. (Week in Review Desk)," *The New York Times*, January 5, 1992.

<sup>403</sup> Tim Golden, "Salvador War Ends for U.S. And Rebels. (Foreign Desk)," *The New York Times*, January 5, 1992.

impunity. The institutional autonomy of the Salvadoran military and public security forces that had been in place since 1931 was over.

El Salvador ceased to be a burden for the Bush administration after January 16, 1992. The Cold War was over and the Salvadoran government and FMLN had achieved a cease-fire. The administration pledged support for the reconstruction of post-war El Salvador but the era of constant US intervention in Salvadoran affairs had ended. The Bush administration requested nearly \$300 million in US aid to El Salvador for FY 1993 but in October 1992, Congress limited the request to \$228.4 million including \$45 million in development aid, \$110 million in Economic Support Funds, and \$11 million in non-lethal US military aid.<sup>404</sup> During this critical and potential volatile period in Salvadoran history, the US had no ambassador in El Salvador. William Walker served as ambassador until February 1992 but he was not replaced until September 1993. Senator Dodd and Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) blocked Bush's nominations for ambassadors to El Salvador and Nicaragua, Michael Kozak and Joseph Sullivan, respectively. The two Senators wanted to know what Kozak and Sullivan knew about the Bush administration's covert support for Violeta Chamorro's presidential campaign in Nicaragua.<sup>405</sup> Peter Romero stepped in as the Deputy Chief of Mission in July 1992 and remained in El Salvador until Alan Flanigan was appointed ambassador.<sup>406</sup>

Difficulties in demilitarizing Salvadoran society stalled the implementation of the

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<sup>404</sup> K. Larry Storrs, *El Salvador and U.S. Aid: Congressional Action in 1992*, Congressional Research Service, March 10, 1993, 1-8.

<sup>405</sup> Clifford Krauss, "Washington Talk; Anger Unites Dodd and Helms, the Oddest Couple. (National Desk)," *The New York Times*, July 28 1992.

<sup>406</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 228.

Chapultepec Accords. Both the Salvadoran government and FMLN were not upholding the cease-fire agreements. The FMLN was delaying demobilization and the government was slow in dismantling public security forces and the BIRIs.<sup>407</sup> Between June and October 1992, the UN intervened several times to revise the cease-fire timetable.<sup>408</sup> The slow pace of the FMLN's demobilization prompted Boutros-Ghali to reschedule the target date from October 31 to December 15.<sup>409</sup> Subsequently, former guerrillas began demobilizing and handing over weapons in greater numbers.<sup>410</sup> The FMLN finished demobilization and became a political party on December 14. The next day, the Salvadoran civil war officially ended. Approximately 75,000 Salvadorans had died.<sup>411</sup>

The ad hoc commission's secret report to Cristiani led to a crisis in Salvadoran civil-military relations. Presented in late September 1992, the report recommended the removal of 102 officers (the names were never revealed publicly) including Ponce and the entire *Tandona*.<sup>412</sup> Ponce denounced the ad hoc commission for not providing evidence of alleged illegal acts and the fact that officers could not appeal.<sup>413</sup> Cristiani delayed the implementation of the commission's recommendations to prevent a possible coup. The deadline for *depuración* was December 15, 1992 but by January 1993, Ponce

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<sup>407</sup> Goulding, *Peacemonger*, 239.

<sup>408</sup> Goulding, *Peacemonger*, 240-244.

<sup>409</sup> *The United Nations and El Salvador*, 28-30.

<sup>410</sup> Shirley Christian, "El Salvador Guerrillas Begin Destroying Weapons. (Foreign Desk)," *The New York Times*, December 3, 1992.

<sup>411</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, 261.

<sup>412</sup> Negroponte, "Conflict Resolution at the End of the Cold War," 350.

<sup>413</sup> Negroponte, "Conflict Resolution at the End of the Cold War," 352.

and fourteen other officers remained.<sup>414</sup> Despite pressure from the William J. Clinton administration and the UN, Cristiani did not finish the purge until the summer of 1993.

The Salvadoran government's response to the release of the Truth Commission's report undermined key aspects of the peace agreement. Released on March 15, 1993, *From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador: Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador* examined patterns of violence and 32 cases of serious acts of violence since 1980. The Truth Commission collected 22,000 complaints and attributed 85 percent of the complaints to the armed forces and security forces, 10 percent to the death squads, and 5 percent to the FMLN.<sup>415</sup> Furthermore, the Commission recommended the removal of dozens of military officers and civil servants including the entire Supreme Court. To placate an already hostile group of FAES officers led by Ponce, Cristiani pushed for a general and absolute amnesty law. On March 20, the Legislative Assembly passed a law granting amnesty to all Salvadorans accused of human rights violations committed during the civil war including the Jesuit murders.<sup>416</sup> Benavides and Mendoza were released from prison on April 1 after serving less two years of their thirty year sentences.<sup>417</sup> Ponce retired on July 1 and became executive director of a Salvadoran telephone company; several officers retired in the US.<sup>418</sup> Despite nearly two years of negotiations over armed forces and human rights issues, military impunity remained the last vestige of the protection racket state.

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<sup>414</sup> Negroponte, "Conflict Resolution at the End of the Cold War," 353-354.

<sup>415</sup> *The United Nations and El Salvador*, 290-414.

<sup>416</sup> Howard W. French, "Rebuffing the U.N., El Salvador Grants Amnesty," *The New York Times*, March 21, 1993.

<sup>417</sup> Doggett, *Death Foretold*, 276.

<sup>418</sup> Negroponte, "Conflict Resolution at the End of the Cold War," 357.

The Bush administration facilitated the end of the Salvadoran civil war by urging continuous negotiations and encouraging all sides to accept compromises. After nearly ten years and billions of dollars of economic and military aid, the US embraced a political solution in January 1990. During the transition from the Cold War to the post-Cold War era, the time had come for the Salvadoran civil war to end. However, the Bush administration could not abandon the Salvadoran government and military during the peace process. As a result, the administration had to battle Congress over its dual commitment to a negotiated political settlement and El Salvador's security.

After the September 15, 1990 target date for a cease-fire passed, the Bush administration became more involved in the peace process. Working with the UN, Soviet Union and the Group of Friends, the administration pressured the Salvadoran government and the FMLN to negotiate in good faith. The administration pushed for continuous negotiations because it feared that leftist or rightist extremists could wreck the peace process and prolong the war for years. In contrast to the Reagan administration, the Bush administration was willing to directly contact the FMLN. As the December 31, 1991 deadline approached, the administration increased the pressure on all sides to reach a comprehensive peace agreement. The Chapultepec Accords, the product of nearly two years of UN-mediated negotiations, transformed Salvadoran society. The institutional autonomy of the FAES, the source of the resistance to the investigation and prosecution of the Jesuit case, had ended. The Cold War was over and Central America was once again marginally important to US foreign policy.

El Salvador in 2010 is a working democracy. The military no longer wields the power it had for 60 years, the economy has grown and diversified, and poverty has been somewhat reduced. However, the country faces a widespread gang threat. The FMLN won the presidency in 2009, ending twenty years of ARENA control. Almost twenty years after the end of the civil war, El Salvador is still recovering.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

At the start of the George H. W. Bush administration, El Salvador had disappeared from the foreign policy agenda. The administration had more pressing priorities, most importantly, the state of relations with the Soviet Union. However, El Salvador reemerged as a divisive foreign policy issue in November 1989. Two days after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the FMLN, launched its largest military offensive of the war in San Salvador. On November 16, the FAES, used the guerilla offensive as an opportunity to murder six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter in cold blood. The murders were covered up and blamed on the guerrillas. These two events demonstrated the failure of US Cold War policy in El Salvador. Despite receiving more than \$1 billion in US military assistance over a period of nearly ten years, the FAES could not defeat the FMLN. By murdering the Jesuits, the FAES had betrayed years of diplomatic initiatives and training by US military advisors to respect democracy and human rights. The Salvadoran civil war had stalemated, promoting both the government and guerrillas to seek the auspices of the United Nations to end the war with a negotiated political settlement.

During the transition to the post-Cold War era, the Bush administration viewed El Salvador as a burden of the Cold War. Despite attempts to avoid a debate in Congress over El Salvador, the Bush administration had to defend an unpopular policy. To remove the burden from its foreign policy agenda, the Bush administration fundamentally

changed US policy toward El Salvador. The administration carried out a private campaign involving nearly every major administration official, the US Embassy, and SOUTHCOM to pressure the FAES to investigate the Jesuit case and bring the killers to justice. Although the administration sought to prevent Congress from cutting US aid, frustration with the obstructionism of the FAES provoked the administration to secretly condition the release of military aid on progress in the Jesuit case. The Bush administration changed the objective of the El Salvador policy from military victory to a political solution. In contrast to the Reagan administration's hostility toward peace negotiations between the Salvadoran government and the FMLN and third party involvement, the Bush administration fully supported the nearly two year-long peace process mediated by the UN. Although the administration preferred a comprehensive peace agreement to be signed much earlier than January 16, 1992, it did facilitate negotiations by working with the UN, the Group of Friends of the Secretary for El Salvador, and the Soviet Union to encourage all sides to accept compromises. Just as important, the administration accepted the presence of the FMLN, which transitioned from an insurgency to a political party, in post-war Salvadoran society. When the Chapultepec Accords were signed on January 16, 1992, the Bush administration promptly lost interest in El Salvador.

This thesis contributes to the histories of the Bush administration's foreign policy at the end of the Cold War and US-Latin American relations. Implementing a post-Cold War policy toward El Salvador demonstrated the pragmatism and prudence that defined the Bush administration's foreign policy. Despite the realist orientation of Bush's

foreign policy advisors, they recognized, albeit gradually, that lecturing the Salvadoran government and military about human rights and withholding military aid was crucial to resolving the Jesuit case. Rather than continue advocating a military solution after November 1989, the administration accepted that domestic and international factors pointed toward a negotiated political settlement. Although the administration supported the peace process, it did not fully understand the role of the UN as mediator. The administration's constant insistence on a peace agreement as soon as possible, regardless of the status of negotiations, placed unnecessary pressure on Alvaro de Soto.

The Bush administration's efforts to remove El Salvador from its foreign policy agenda demonstrate that in the absence of a pressing security threat, American foreign policymakers have marginal interest in Latin America. The overwhelming fear of Soviet and Cuban expansionism in Central America greatly influenced US policy toward El Salvador after 1979. When that perceived threat ended in 1990-1991, the Bush administration recognized that there was no need for the US to continue its anti-communist crusade but instead help bring peace to the region. During the early 1980s, the Reagan administration argued that the fate of El Salvador would determine the global balance of power. Today, El Salvador is a working democracy of little strategic importance to American national interests.

The Bush policy toward El Salvador is an anomaly in the history of US-Latin American relations. Rather than act unilaterally, the Bush administration encouraged a multilateral approach to ending the Salvadoran civil war by supporting the participation of international institutions and third party countries. Unlike the Latin American policies

of previous administrations, the objective of Bush's El Salvador policy was to disengage the US from the domestic affairs of another country. To achieve this objective, however, the Bush administration had to directly intervene in Salvadoran political and military affairs by applying pressure on the FAES to end its obstructionism of the Jesuit case and on government negotiators to accept compromises during the peace process.

The history of the Bush administration's El Salvador policy remains incomplete. Many documents related to El Salvador at the George Bush Presidential Library remain classified while those currently available for researchers contain redacted sections. When scholars have complete access to these records, they will fully understand how the Bush administration removed the burden of El Salvador.

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