

# Counter - Insurgency and the People's War in El Salvador

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Patrolling the hinterlands.

Over the past few months, Filipinos have been hearing or reading a lot about the so-called "Low Intensity Conflict" or LIC. Newspapers have played up reports on *Alsa Masa*, *Nakasaka*, *General Singlaub*, etc., and linked these to LIC. Some progressive international magazines and periodical with articles dealing with the subject have filtered in. A number of visiting scholars and human rights advocates coming from the US have shed light on the LIC as an international doctrine and operational guideline of the Reagan administration for combatting communism, and on its application in Latin American countries like Nicaragua and El Salvador.

According to US scholar Sara Miles, the LIC doctrine calls for a radical departure from conventional military thinking. Instead of relying on conventional armies to deal with unconventional and revolutionary conflicts, proponents of LIC advocate "total war" on a variety of fronts — economic, social, political and psychological.<sup>1</sup>

In local discussions on LIC, particular interest has been focused on El Salvador. This country has served as the main model for the application of LIC in a client state of the US. More importantly, striking parallelisms in political circumstances have been drawn between El Salvador and the Philippines — the ascendance of a government that is purported to be "centrist" or "liberal", after a long period of fascist dictatorial rule; the continuing dominance of US imperialism; and the presence of revolutionary forces who remain relatively strong and persevere in armed and political struggles against the ruling social order.

While US imperialism and the Aquino government appear to be still in the process of formulating a more comprehensive post-February Revolution counter-insurgency program, the influence of the LIC doctrine on current counter-insurgency efforts of the government has already been noted by various international and local observers. The initiative of



Duarte with US Secretary of State Shultz: "that the wholesale slaughter would leave the fish without water."

some human rights organizations in studying LIC in depth and striving to demystify it is most timely and appropriate.

Given the similarities in certain conditions between El Salvador and the Philippines, it is particularly relevant to examine how US imperialism, in coordination with the Duarte regime, applied LIC in El Salvador. We should, however, bear in mind that the course of counter-insurgency there could be very different from that in the Philippines because there are a lot of other factors to consider.

Even as we study how the LIC doctrine was applied in other countries (particularly El Salvador), we should not be satisfied in confining ourselves to this. We should also study how the anti-imperialist or revolutionary forces in other countries responded to LIC, how they were able (or why they were not able) to frustrate this counter-insurgency scheme.

In the case of El Salvador, we should study how the revolutionary forces there managed to outwit the US and the Duarte regime and frustrate the latter's counter-revolutionary schemes. What many Filipino progressives may not be aware of is that despite LIC, the revolutionary forces of El Salvador have advanced their revolutionary struggle, and have in fact now reached the stage of "military equilibrium" and are girding for a "strategic counteroffensive". They are proving that LIC, together with other US counter-insurgency schemes, is a paper tiger after all.

As other groups are already conducting in-depth studies and discussions on LIC (including El Salvador's particular LIC experience), this writer will only briefly discuss LIC and will instead concentrate more on how the revolutionary forces in El Salvador frustrated the counter-insurgency schemes of US imperialism and the Duarte regime — before and after the LIC doctrine was applied — and further developed their revolutionary struggle.

In a previous article, "Parallelisms: The Philippines Now and El Salvador in 1979-80", this writer reviewed mainly the significant events in El Salvador from October 1979 to January 1981 and compared the conditions in El Salvador then with the conditions in the Philippines immediately after the February 1986 uprising.<sup>2</sup>

Our current paper will deal mainly with the Salvadoran situation from 1981 up to the present. In "Parallelisms", this writer already discussed the "final offensive" that the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) had launched starting January 10, 1981. The nationwide insurrection that the FMLN had called fizzled out and the FMLN failed in their bid to seize political power. For a while after this failed offensive, it seemed as if US imperialism and the local ruling classes had regained the initiative. Revolutionary victory seemed a long way off.

Six years after, with the FMLN preparing for a strategic counteroffensive, it now appears that they are not in bad shape after all.

#### Review of October 1979 to January 1981

Before we proceed to discuss the last six years of the Salvadoran revolutionary struggle, let us first review the immediate preceding period which "Parallelisms" focused on — the period from October 1979 to January 1981. The significant developments in the period were:

- the October 15, 1979 coup that ousted the military regime of General Carlos Romero (only three months after the victory of the Sandinistas in neighboring Nicaragua);
- the establishment of the first military-civilian junta which included several progressive liberals and lasted for less than three months;
- its replacement by a joint Christian Democrat-military government, eventually headed by Christian Democratic leader Napoleon Duarte;
- the tremendous groundswell of the revolutionary mass movement, especially in the first half of 1980, with general strikes and demonstrations mobilizing hundreds of thousands;
- the intensification of government repression resulting in the killing of at least 9,000 in 1980 alone (including the murders of Archbishop Oscar Romero; prominent

political leaders like Enrique Alvarez and Mario Zamora Rivas; four US churchwomen; and a land reform official and two US labor organizers);

-the unification of all revolutionary and democratic forces in El Salvador, as concretely expressed in the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR);

-the launching of a "final offensive" by the FMLN-FDR starting January 10, 1981, which fell far short of the objective of seizure of political power.

As we already mentioned in "Parallelisms", the FMLN's "final offensive" had come too late. By the time the FMLN had called for national insurrection, the government's brutal repression had already taken its toll and the peak of the insurrectional mass movement had passed. As Joaquin Villalobos, commander-in-chief of the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), the biggest guerilla group in FMLN, noted, the period of March-May 1980 would have been the best time for the "final offensive". J. Villalobos stated:

"In the period of March, April and May 1980, with 1000 armed combatants, we could have led the masses into insurrection and broken the backbone of the army . . . What occurred is that the politically advantageous moment of the insurrection had already passed."<sup>3</sup>

In a fairly recent document (March 1986), "The War in El Salvador", Joaquin Villalobos himself, the ERP commander who is reputed to be the FMLN's top military strategist, explained that there were several different factors in 1979-81 which "made it impossible for historical conditions to mature which would have permitted the taking of power". He specifically cited two factors: first, the lack of unity of strategic line within the revolutionary movement; and second, US intervention which altered the correlation of forces in El Salvador.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the first factor, J. Villalobos must have been referring to the debate within the ranks of the revolutionary forces in 1979-80 on the question of insurrectional strategy vs. protracted people's war. ERP, together with FARN, had long favored the insurrectional line. The FPL, led by Salvador Cayetano Carpio, adhered to Vietnamese-style protracted people's war and acceded only towards the end of 1980 to try the insurrectional route.<sup>5</sup>

US intervention was characterized by the artificial creation of a "centrist" government "headed" by a figurehead civilian president - Duarte; the launching of a sham Vietnam-type land reform program; massive infusion of military and economic aid; and the deployment of US military advisers. US military aid that amounted to \$6 million in 1980 leaped to \$35.5 million in 1981 and \$82 million in 1982. Economic aid tripled from \$58.5 million in 1980 to \$189 million in 1982. The US sent more aid to El Salvador in 1982 than to any other Latin American nation.<sup>6</sup>

According to J. Villalobos, the US-designed counter-insurgency plan in 1979-81 was not focused on a military defeat of the FMLN since the FMLN was not considered a military threat then. Rather, it represented a military effort "to contain a process of general insurrection in the city and the countryside by attempting to wipe out and disperse the social base of the revolutionary movement". The central tactic of that stage of the US strategy, he said, was what could be called "necessary genocide".<sup>7</sup>

When the Carter administration succeeded in pushing for the deal between the Christian Democrats and the armed forces in January 1980, "necessary genocide" was a central element in this deal despite Carter's avowed concern for human rights. "The political decision to carry out genocide and to take repression to such brutal levels," said J. Villalobos, "was a result of an assessment that the FMLN was not strong enough to turn the repression into a detonating force, and that the wholesale slaughter would leave the fish without water."<sup>8</sup>

The killing spree of right-wing death squads and trigger-happy armed forces units in 1980 when Carter was still US president, continued unabated in 1981 and 1982 under the new Reagan administration. No less than *Time* magazine, in its March 28, 1983 issue estimated that 35,000 Salvadorans had died in three years of conflict.<sup>9</sup>



"Necessary genocide" did prevent the Salvadoran government from falling and the revolutionary forces from coming to power. The US and the Salvadoran government, however, were not able to wipe out the revolutionary forces; in fact, they underestimated the ability of the revolutionary movement to sustain its buildup of forces, in spite of the genocide.

Analyzing the government's genocide approach, J. Villalobos stated:

"The urban rebellion was indeed contained, but at the same time the FMLN was able to develop the rebellion among the campesinos and agricultural workers throughout vast areas of the country — converting a popular insurrectionary process into a revolutionary army which gained territory, maintained a high level of revolutionary activity, and caused the economic, social, political and military aspects of the counterinsurgency plan to fail.

"January 10, 1981 was in and of itself a great popular insurrection which was strongest in the countryside, with massive participation by poor campesinos and agricultural workers, and fortified by the many workers, students, teachers and other urban sectors who joined the armed struggle. Militarily, it was of strategic importance in creating the popular army. From the point of view of the objectives put forth by the FMLN, the offensive appeared to be a failure. But from the point of view of the change in the military correlation of forces, it was unquestionably a qualitative leap in the development of the popular war."<sup>10</sup>

### From Insurrection to War

Prior to the January 10, 1981 insurrection, there had been scant military development in the Salvadoran revolutionary movement. The revolutionary forces had waged armed struggle since the early 70s but only as dispersed armed actions. "War as a *military* phenomenon of strategic importance," said J. Villalobos, "started in January 1981."<sup>11</sup>

The failure of the insurrectional attempt of 1981 made it necessary for the FMLN to shift to war (or military struggle) and to build a strong people's army. J. Villalobos explained:

"the conditions (after the failure of the January 1981 insurrection ) imposed upon us the task of having to build an army. When the insurrectional alternative was eliminated, it became necessary to weaken and further fracture the army, on a purely military level; this made us develop and fine-tune our own military structures."<sup>12</sup>

FMLN forces regrouped in the countryside where they were quickly transformed into a people's army. FMLN "zones of popular control" were defined. The six months after January were a period of resisting intense government counter-attack, consolidating the FMLN zones of control, developing the guerilla forces, and achieving greater military ability.

During this period, the fundamental tactic applied by the FMLN was the defense of positions. Through this tactic, the revolutionary forces were able not only to preserve and consolidate the zones of control on the whole, but even to inflict 3,000 casualties, including 400 dead, on the government side.<sup>13</sup>

Beginning in the second half of 1981, the FMLN forces were no longer limited to defending positions. In July, the FMLN guerillas took over the town of Perquin in Morazan province. For the first time, they were able to overwhelm one of the enemy's military positions, make its forces surrender, take prisoners and seize the weapons there. In December, the FMLN surrounded and annihilated the enemy position in La Guacamaya, Morazan.

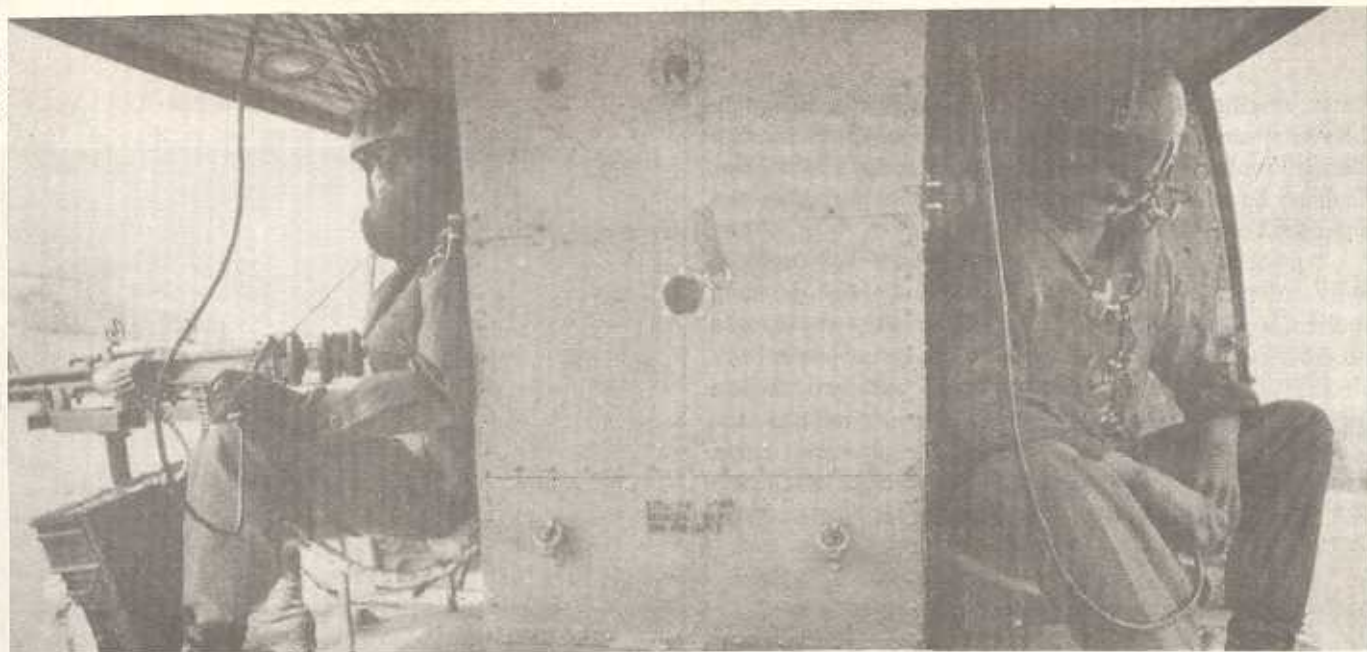
Soon after Reagan had assumed the US Presidency, the US State Department had released a white paper, charging that the insurgency in El Salvador was a "textbook case of indirect armed aggression by Communist powers through Cuba".<sup>14</sup> The Reagan administration had then dispatched additional military advisers, aside from announcing additional military aid. From 20 US military advisers in Carter's time, the number eventually rose to 55 officially-acknowledged military advisers (not including additional "temporary" advisers and undercover agents).

Reagan had calculated that with his support, the Salvadoran government would be able to defeat the FMLN militarily by August or September 1981. As hopes for a quick military victory by the Salvadoran government faded, Reagan was forced to accompany his military plan with a political plan which would provide a justification of US involvement to the American people and Congress and insure increased aid to the Salvadoran government. He trained his sights on Salvadoran elections scheduled for March 1982.<sup>15</sup>

But first Reagan had to satisfy a certification law passed by US Congress in 1981 as condition for continued military aid to El Salvador. Thus, in January 1982, even as "necessary genocide" reigned in El Salvador, the US president certified that the Salvadoran government was making progress in human rights, was investigating the murders of the four US churchwomen and two land reform workers, and was continuing land reform. Reagan issued a similar certification every six months until July 1983.

Meanwhile, the first group of young Salvadoran soldiers arrived in the US for military training. The three-month program eventually trained some 1,000 troops at Fort Bragg and 500 officer cadets at Fort Benning.

The March 1982 elections' purpose was ostensibly to choose a constituent assembly that would write a new constitution and choose an interim president to govern until fresh elections were held in 1984. Reagan hoped that the elections would bring about the trappings of "democracy" in El Salvador and legitimize the "centrist" Duarte government that



*In spite of the genocide, the FMLN revolutionaries sustained their build-up of forces.*

would draw off support from both the extreme right and the revolutionary forces.

The FMLN boycotted the elections and launched military campaigns to "pressure" major cities during the electoral campaign period. The most spectacular actions were the attack against the air force base at Ilopango on January 27, 1982, a commando action which destroyed 70 percent of the airplanes and helicopters of the Salvadoran armed forces; and the occupation of most of the city of Usulután for over a week in late March 1982 while elections were being held.

The "huge" election turnout was billed in the Western press as "a mandate for peace and democracy" and "a vote against (leftist) violence"<sup>16</sup>. In reality, the elections were characterized by massive coercion (e.g., voters' *cedulas* were marked; dire consequences awaited those without marked *cedulas*) and fraud (e.g., with the abolition of voting lists, the number of voters was artificially enlarged).

ARENA, a coalition of right-wing groups, won 36 of 60 seats in the constituent assembly. Its leader was the suave but ruthless Roberto D'Aubuisson (nicknamed "Major Blowtorch"), former intelligence officer linked to the murder of Archbishop Romero. D'Aubuisson's slick electoral campaign was handled by the US advertising agency McCann-Erickson no less. Duarte's Christian Democrats won only 24 seats despite blatant US government support. Reagan's political plan was almost a complete wreck.

If D'Aubuisson or an associate were chosen president of El Salvador, the US Congress would almost certainly have cut off aid. To salvage the situation, the US had a figurehead — Alvaro Magana, a "moderate" who was not even a leader of any political party and whose name had not been submitted for the consideration of the people during the electoral process — installed as provisional president of El Salvador. D'Aubuisson nonetheless became the head of the constituent assembly.

In one of its first acts, the D'Aubuisson-led assembly stopped the land reform program, the program with which the US planned to win the hearts and minds of the Salvadoran masses away from the revolutionaries. Pushed by US Congress, the US State Department tried to put the program back on track. The result was a stand-off. Meanwhile, leaders of the land reform charged that as much as \$30 million had been lost because of theft and corruption.<sup>17</sup>

Reagan targetted October 1983 as the new deadline within which to destroy the FMLN. He sought to achieve this with the help of Salvadoran "rapid deployment battalions" armed and trained by US military instructors.<sup>18</sup> The revolutionary forces, however, continued to develop greater military efficacy.

In mid-1982, FMLN forces occupied Perquin again; more importantly, they outmaneuvered, trapped then annihilated the reinforcements (three companies strong) that tried to get to Perquin by foot. The FMLN had advanced in military tactics "from the defense of positions to the war of maneuvers, from dispersion to concentration of forces".<sup>19</sup>

In this same campaign, they were able to shoot down the helicopter of Undersecretary of Defense Col. Francisco Adolfo Castillo and capture the undersecretary himself. When the government forces attempted an enormous counteroffensive in Morazan, using 6,000 troops, they obtained no results except a weakening of their forces and the defeat of the Ramon Belloso Battalion which had been trained in the US. To blunt this counteroffensive, the FMLN used a new form of action: generalized sabotage of all kinds of transportation, along the roads and highways, and shutting down all transportation.

Through the last quarter of 1982 and the first quarter of 1983, the FMLN pressed with its nearly non-stop tactical military offensives. The FMLN sought to deepen three lines of

action, specifically: (1) actions of strategic annihilation wherever possible, (2) destabilizing the country through sabotage, fundamentally against transportation, power lines, telephone lines and fuel, and (3) harassment ambushes and annihilation of minor positions.<sup>20</sup>

Ambushes along highways, temporary takeovers of towns and sabotage of the war economy became common occurrences. Several times much of the country was plunged into darkness after guerilla forces blew up electric power lines. In many parts of the country, the FMLN managed to close down the transportation system by destroying railroad cars, buses and trucks loaded with coffee and other export crops.

Reporting on the progress of their struggle as of early 1983, Arnaldo Ramos, FMLN-FDR representative, said:

"We are fighting in 12 of the 14 Salvadoran provinces. We have consolidated and expanded our zones of control. Our capacity to inflict losses on the enemy is an example of our capacity to deepen the war. For example, in 1982 we inflicted 4,000 losses against the enemy and captured some 1,250 arms. Since the beginning of 1983, we have recuperated some 2,000 arms, we have inflicted some 2,000 losses against the army and we've captured some 650 prisoners."<sup>21</sup>

To stamp out the FMLN guerillas, major units of the Salvadoran military conducted sweeps of countryside areas. Analyzing the government's moves, J. Villalobos said:

"The huge encirclement operations using conventional maneuvers and the defense of many fixed government positions were attempts to prevent the expansion of the FMLN and the loss of government territory, since otherwise the war would have entered a much more complex phase and become impossible to contain."<sup>22</sup>

The large-scale sweeps by government forces proved futile and wasteful. Soon, the Salvadoran military had to abandon hundreds of positions as a result of military pressure from the FMLN.

### Start of Application of LIC Doctrine

As Reagan's calculations had failed again, the US was forced to formulate a more complex counterinsurgency plan that required not just the reorganization of the Salvadoran armed forces but also a more sophisticated political plan to dispute for the support of the Salvadoran masses. El Salvador became the principal test case and laboratory for the application of the LIC doctrine in a client state of the US.

LIC was the specialty of Col. John Waghelstein, the chief US military adviser in El Salvador in 1983, who had served as a counterinsurgency expert all over the world — Vietnam, Bolivia, Dominican Republic, the Philippines and Venezuela.<sup>23</sup> US scholar Miles quotes Waghelstein as saying that LIC involved "political, economic and psychological

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*A peasant militia: soldiers aren't enough in winning a war.*

warfare, with the military being a distant fourth in many cases". In perhaps the most candid definition given by a US official, Waghelstein declared that LIC is "total war at the grassroots level".<sup>24</sup>

Miles wrote in an article, "The Real War: Low-Intensity Conflict in Central America", that the infrastructure for LIC in El Salvador began to be developed in 1983. According to her, Washington's policy in El Salvador was to construct a legitimate political alternative to the FMLN. Integrating this process, known as "nation-building", fully into the war involved first, restructuring the high command of the local armed forces, and then, reaching a consensus between US and Salvadoran officers on the basic outlines of an effective LIC strategy on the ground.<sup>25</sup>

In April 1983, the Salvadoran defense chief Gen. Jose Guillermo Garcia, who had been associated with the massive but useless army operations in the countryside, was replaced by Gen. Carlos Vides Casanova. The new armed forces hierarchy (Vides Casanova, Cols. Adolfo Blandon, Reynaldo Golcher, Domingo Monterrosa, etc.) was very much identified with US military thinking.

With the revamp of the high command of the Salvadoran armed forces, a move away from conventional warfare toward more small-unit operations, civic action and psychological warfare began to be effected, even as the Salvadoran armed forces maintained the ability to mount large-scale operations. After Garcia's downfall, shifting to small-unit operations did not pose much of a problem. The adoption of civic action and psywar, however, took some time to get off the ground since the Salvadoran armed forces had been so used to less subtle means.

As for the political aspect of LIC, much of it had to wait for 1984 since the Salvadoran national elections were scheduled in March-May 1984. The Reagan administration tried to have the elections moved up to December 1983 but failed.

Soon after the high command revamp, the Salvadoran armed forces abandoned any concept of permanent territorial defense and shifted to a tactic of mobile troops. Small-unit patrolling activities against guerilla forces were favored over large-unit countryside sweeps.

To "professionalize" the Salvadoran armed forces further, military training by US instructors was stepped up. Training included not just military subjects like jungle warfare, but also courses in civic action, psychological operations and national economic development. A new US training center in Honduras was opened to Salvadoran troops, aside from those in the US and Panama.

Through 1983 and early 1984, the FMLN pressed on with its military offensive. In the latter half of the year up to New Year's Day 1984, the FMLN launched a series of tactically brilliant battalion-sized attacks which the US acknowledged were far superior to the efforts of the Salvadoran armed forces. The FMLN forces raided and besieged San Miguel, El Salvador's third largest city, for seven hours; overran the

strategic hydroelectric plant Cerron Grande, which supplies electricity not only to El Salvador but to Honduras and Guatemala; captured and held El Salvador's fourth largest military base in El Paraiso, Chalatenango, for some eight hours; and blew up the Cuscatlan suspension bridge, a span many considered to be indestructible.

In the San Miguel raid, at least 20 members of the local garrison were killed and 100 wounded. In the El Paraiso raid, the FMLN guerillas set off a mortar barrage, scoring direct hits on barracks where government soldiers were sleeping. Over 100 government troops were killed and another 158 captured.

According to J. Villalobos, the FMLN's military offensive from 1981 and continuing into 1984 succeeded in eliminating hundreds of government positions, and resulted in more than 15,000 government casualties, 2,000 prisoners of war and 5,000 captured weapons.

It were not errors or inherent weaknesses in the enemy's first strategic military model, said J. Villalobos, that caused the plan to fail; rather, its failure was caused by the effectiveness of the FMLN's military strategies. It was the growing military force of the FMLN that forced the US counter-insurgency plan to be modified or brought to another stage.<sup>26</sup>

After its successive military victories, many observers expected the FMLN to move towards a "final offensive". But the FMLN decided otherwise. US journalist Paul Martin, writing for *Ampo*, related FMLN's decision not to engage in a decisive confrontation with the grave threat of direct US troop intervention:

"These victories left the rebels facing what FMLN Commander Joaquin Villalobos refers to as a "war of immediate definition". To press ahead in such a manner would have led to the definitive battles' which would likely bring down the regime - and bring US troops storming into the country. Late 1983, it will be remembered, was also the high tide of Reagan's 'new patriotism' following the US invasion of Grenada and the beginning of the US presidential campaign which would eventually produce a decisive victory for the Reagan forces.

"On the verge of the long-awaited military victory over the regime, the FMLN made a sober assessment of its chances against a direct invasion of US troops. Though the concentration of the mass movement in the zones of control had permitted the development of the military power which was winning the war, three years of isolation from the cities and rural areas outside of the zones had seriously weakened, or at least immobilized the rest of the movement's political base. Militarily, their forces were largely concentrated in the controlled zones, leaving them at a disadvantage against a direct intervention. In any case, the conventional battles they were now fighting were costly. If they continued with their current military line and did not achieve victory, their forces could be seriously crippled. Thus the FMLN could not merely tread water; if it was not going to press ahead to the 'decisive battles', a new strategic orientation was necessary."<sup>27</sup>

J. Villalobos himself observed a particularly weak spot of the FMLN: "One characteristic of that stage of the war was the calm and stability in the capital, while the army was losing strategic ground in the countryside and entire units were being wiped out by the FMLN. San Salvador was the showcase for apparent national stability."<sup>28</sup>

"We could have won the war in 1983," an FMLN commander reflected two years later, "but we would have lost the revolution."<sup>29</sup>

### LIC in Full Swing

1984 saw the full unfolding of the grand LIC counter-insurgency scheme of the US, a "total war" coordinating political, economic and psychological warfare with military warfare. Its first essential element — a core of pro-US military officers "professionalizing" the armed forces — had already been laid in 1983.

A second essential element in the LIC scheme was the installation of a civilian government "democratically" chosen by the Salvadoran people. It had to be more credible than the insipid Magana government. A "democratic" and "centrist" government would ensure the third essential ingredient of LIC: a strong political commitment from the US government, including bipartisan congressional support.

Thus, the Reagan administration did nearly everything possible to have Duarte elected to the presidency in the March-May elections, including overt CIA and USAID involvement. Duarte's principal promises in his electoral campaign were two: the so-called "social pact" (a commitment to reforms in favor of the workers which Duarte promptly forgot after the elections) and the promise to search for a negotiated peace.<sup>30</sup>

As usual, the elections were marked by coercion and fraud. The Central Elections Council fired the chief technician of its computer center for fixing vote results. The revolutionary forces did not participate in the elections, but they did not campaign for a boycott, since unmarked *cedulas* were tickets to arrest or even death at the hands of death squads.

This time Duarte made it. In the May run-off election, Duarte edged out D'Aubuisson. To make sure that the ultra-right would not attempt to seriously challenge President-elect Duarte, Reagan sent special US presidential envoy Vernon Walters, a former CIA deputy director, to talk D'Aubuisson out of any coup plans. Since the CIA possessed damaging information on D'Aubuisson's death squad activities, D'Aubuisson kept within bounds.

A Christian Democrat-military partnership that had existed from 1980 up to early 1982 was back in place but with a difference. Duarte now had the "popular mandate" he did not have in 1981-82. And the military was now headed by pro-US "professional" officers who understood and accepted the US's multifaceted "total war" concept. The elaborate civil-military machinery for LIC was now in place.

*The FMLN could have won the war in 1983, said a commander, but it would have lost the revolution.*



To brush up the image of the new regime, some improvement in human rights, no matter how cosmetic, had to be orchestrated. On the eve of a crucial US Congress vote on aid to El Salvador, five low-level guardsmen were rapidly tried and convicted for the murder of the four US churchwomen in December 1980.<sup>31</sup> Three officers most identified with death squad violence were exiled; the notorious intelligence office of the Treasury Police, the object of repeated charges of death squad activity, was abolished. Duarte himself attended a rally of mothers of "disappeared" and promised a thorough investigation.<sup>32</sup>

Duarte, however, resisted all efforts to prosecute death squad figures. Worse, many death squad assassins were simply integrated into the expanding Salvadoran army. In fact, immediately after his inauguration, Duarte named as Vice-Minister of Security Reinaldo Lopez Nuila, ex-Chief of the National Police and head of the Secret Anti-Communist Army, a most feared death squad. The Duarte government even stonewalled US efforts to hold at least a token trial of the killers of two US labor organizers gunned down in January, 1981. Death squad killings were by no means a thing of the past. In 1984, the Archdiocese of San Salvador reported that 1,973 murders were committed by death squads.<sup>33</sup>

As already mentioned earlier, the Salvadoran forces had shifted in 1983 to a tactic of mobile troops. Starting 1984, other aspects of the LIC scheme — mostly non-military in nature — came to the fore or became more pronounced. On the ground, the other features of the "total war" were:

\**Civil defense* — As the Salvadoran army shifted from the defense of fixed positions to a tactic of mobile forces,



civilians were recruited to take up the defense of fixed positions. Paramilitary or civil defense, common in the 70s, was back.<sup>34</sup> US-trained civil defense instructors organized "village defense networks" against "subversion". Civil defense structures, in theory voluntary, involved the local population in para-police functions, political meetings, civic action projects. The civil defense network was intended to affect every aspect of village life, instilling an anti-communist consciousness among the peasantry and providing the local security forces with an informal intelligence network.<sup>35</sup>

*\*Other methods of base denial* – Aside from civil defense, other methods used to deny rebels access to the population were control of the population's movement, food blockades and declaration of "free-fire zones". Eventually there was massive depopulation of the countryside. Campesinos living in particularly rebel – "infested" areas were lured to areas controlled by the Salvadoran military with promises of food, shelter and clothing, or they were "rescued" and packed off in military helicopters to official refugee camps while their houses and crops were burned behind them. Anyone refusing relocation or suspected of helping the rebels was denied all assistance.

*\*Civic action* – Like civil defense, civic action, a counterinsurgency weapon used in the 60s, made a strong comeback with LIC. The military, who had grown used to

instilling fear and hatred among the people, once again engaged in civic action in coordination with civilian government agencies to improve its public image and to extend its influence. Food, medicine and clothing were handed out to villagers as military officers gave speeches on the evils of communism and the virtues of the current regime. Army barbers cut hair, doctors gave vaccinations, dentists pulled teeth. Even the infamous Treasury Police now distributed toys. Some battalions had their own soldier-clowns who provided entertainment.

*\*Psychological operations (psy-ops)* – Sophisticated anti-"subversive" radio and television commercials, produced by the new Ministry of Communications and Culture, saturated San Salvador's air waves. To reach those in the countryside beyond the range of electronic media, government planes flew over rural areas dropping leaflets. Perhaps the most sophisticated operations involved a series of trial army forays into the countryside to round up rebel collaborators. When the terrified victims were taken back to the garrison expecting to face torture and death, they were instead given showers, fed better than they usually ate, and shown slick video tapes claiming that the guerillas living in their midst were commanded by Soviet and Cuban agents.<sup>36</sup>

*\*Intelligence* – The "total war" concept involved *mobilizing* the supportive sector of the population, *controlling* the largest possible sector of the opposition with the least amount of coercion, and *annihilating* that sector which could not be controlled. The entire strategy thus rested on the ability to *identify* which sector was being dealt with and that meant intelligence.<sup>37</sup> The Salvadoran armed forces first relied on civilians in collecting grassroots intelligence from civilians; later they made increasing use of infiltrators. Intelligence work on the ground was complemented by aerial intelligence, provided on a regular basis by US spy planes flown out of Panama and Honduras.

Small-unit military operations and the use of political, psychological and other means in the "total war" did not mean a reduction of the military component of the war. In fact, there was an escalation. The Salvadoran armed forces, who continued to be schooled by US military instructors in aggressive patrolling tactics, were re-equipped with more than \$130 million in military aid approved by the US Congress after Duarte's election.

In the countryside, the most concrete sign of military escalation was the air war, which became a marked feature of the Salvadoran conflict starting 1984. Since 1981, there had been an increase in the number and types of aircraft supplied to El Salvador by the US, most especially after the FMLN's raid of the Ilopango air base. El Salvador soon had the largest air force in Central America.

The Salvadoran air force conducted massive and indiscriminate bombing attacks in the countryside, killing thousands of innocent civilians and causing wanton destruction. The



bombing missions were often directed by US military advisers; there were reports of US pilots flying some of these missions themselves.

The death toll from the aerial bombings mounted, reaching the levels of the "necessary genocide" in 1980-82. A Salvadoran refugee described the horror of the bombings:

"At first the Air Force dropped bombs that knocked down trees and houses, killed people and made a three-meter crater. Then they began to drop bombs that exploded before hitting the ground (fragmentation bombs) and others that made craters eight meters deep to kill us as we hid in our shelters. Now they use the worst bombs of all - the flaming liquid (napalm)."<sup>38</sup>

### FMLN Shift to a Politico-Military Strategy

In 1984, it did appear to the Western press that the Salvadoran government was making significant headway in its efforts to win the hearts and minds of the Salvadoran masses as well as international public opinion. Politically, the Duarte government seemed credible - it was more coherent and internally consistent than any government that had ruled in El Salvador since 1979.

The "huge" turnout in the presidential elections was perceived as a political and diplomatic setback for the FMLN. The governments of Mexico, France, Spain, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries - all harshly critical of previous government and sympathetic with the insurgency - sent delegations to Duarte's inauguration.<sup>39</sup>

The White House was particularly pleased with Duarte's ability to project the image of a "new El Salvador", and boasted about the decline in death squad killings and other human rights abuses as proof that democracy was on the rise. Of course, it made no mention of thousands of *masas* in remote areas massacred in aerial bombings by "flying death squads", areas to which the press rarely had access.

After several years of US aid and training, the Salvadoran military now appeared to have taken the initiative from the FMLN. Salvadoran newspapers carried reports of defections by the insurgents or of arms caches turned up during army sweeps in the countryside. The Salvadoran military even claimed that the air war and its shift to tactics of mobile troops had forced the FMLN guerillas to break up their large units and halt their military offensives.

The FMLN, however, viewed the situation differently. According to them, by the time the US started applying its new counterinsurgency scheme (LIC) in El Salvador, the FMLN-controlled and disputed areas were already too large and the FMLN had already reestablished its presence in the outskirts of key urban centers. J. Villalobos explained:

"The strategy used by the FMLN to defeat Col. Garcia's strategy in the early 1980s allowed the FMLN to break through the army's defense of key centers, create

conditions for expanding the war throughout the entire country, and build ties between the guerillas and the people."<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, just as the US and the Salvadoran government were shifting to LIC, giving more attention to political and other non-military aspects of the "total war" against insurgency, the FMLN moved to redefine the relationship between the military and political facets of their strategy, giving more attention to the political than before. J. Villalobos continued:

"The next step for the FMLN was to move toward a more political strategy which would allow it to integrate political and military struggle. Here it is worth mentioning something very important: it was neither the air war nor the army's new mobile tactics which forced the FMLN to disperse its forces throughout the country. On the contrary, once it had broken through the army's defense of key centers, once it had built up military experience and leaders, and once a critical moment in the popular struggle had been reached, it would have been a very serious mistake for the FMLN to have continued waging the war on its traditional war fronts, far from the people who live in the key urban centers. The FMLN would have risked exhausting its human resources and would not have made the most of the conditions created by its own military advances in order to develop a strategy of linking up all the people with the war effort, throughout the entire nation in all possible ways."<sup>41</sup>

Another FMLN commander put it this way: "The unique aspect of the current situation is that, for the first time, both parties to the conflict have put the dispute for the masses in the center of their political military strategy." For the revolutionary movement, this meant a reversal of direction. The large conventional battallions of FMLN were broken down into smaller units as concerned with political organizing as with strictly military operations. The concentrations of fighters in the zones of control were dispersed throughout the national territory. Concomitantly, "popular power" in the zones of control was deemphasized as the primary political alternative to the state, in favor of revitalizing mass political activity throughout the country.<sup>42</sup>

"In 1984," said one FMLN fighter, "we were suffering from a militarist kind of thinking. We started to retrain all the combatants - every one, even the commanders - to make each one of us into a political organizer. Soldiers aren't enough to win a war."<sup>43</sup>

The FMLN's thrust in the political sphere occurred at a most propitious time - just when the country was experiencing both a severe economic crisis and a limited "political opening". The war had wrought ravages on the country's economy. The average Salvadoran's living standard had declined 30 percent in five years. The coffee harvest in 1984 was only half what it was in 1979. Unemployment reached about 30 percent. The country's oligarchs and corrupt military officials pocketed large amounts of US aid. The land reform program lay paralyzed.

The limited "political opening" was a result of the efforts of the Duarte government, with all its populist rhetoric, to project a "new" and "democratic" El Salvador. The government felt strong enough to allow some "space" both to let off popular steam and to begin the "nation-building" component of the LIC scheme.

The response to this political opening came as something of a surprise for the regime, and perhaps for the FMLN as well. Strike activity immediately shot up to pre-1979 levels and beyond. Organizing also began on the campus of the National University (which had been closed by the government in 1980 and reopened only in 1984) and in communities of the displaced, though with less spectacular results than the outburst on the shopfloor.<sup>44</sup>

United Nations, Duarte invited the FMLN-FDR to engaged in a "dialogue for peace". The FMLN-FDR, which had been proposing such a dialogue since 1981, took up the offer and talks were held in La Palma in October and in Ayagualo in November.

The FMLN-FDR presented a proposal for a negotiated political solution and peace in El Salvador. They saw the necessity to resolve "the causes of the current war in our country: social injustice, the excessive concentration of wealth in the hands of the oligarchy, the open violation of human rights by the Armed Forces of El Salvador and the Death Squads, the loss of national sovereignty, etc." The FMLN-FDR suggested three phases for the implementation of their proposal: "the recovery of national sovereignty in



*"Dire consequences awaited those without marked voters' cedula. . ."*

Meanwhile, the Salvadoran government and the FMLN conducted a number of prisoner exchanges. In September 1984, the two sides engaged in the most complex exchange up to that time. Sixty captured FMLN guerillas were allowed to go to Mexico in return for 16 Salvadoran army officers held by the guerillas.

The following month, another political space was opened when a "dialogue for peace" – negotiations between the government and the FMLN for a political settlement of the conflict – was opened.

#### "Dialogue for Peace"

In the March elections, Duarte had promised to bring peace to El Salvador. Using an October appearance at the

order to advance toward "a negotiated political solution between Salvadorans; the cessation of hostilities and guaranteed agreements; the institutionalization of democracy."<sup>45</sup>

In turn, the government delegation presented a peace plan proposed by Duarte which basically called for the laying down of arms by the FMLN, amnesty for members of the FMLN-FDR and an offer of participation in the legislative and municipal elections of 1985.

Just one hour after the end of the meeting in Ayagualo, Duarte announced his complete rejection of the proposal of the FMLN-FDR, explaining only that it was anti-constitutional. In effect, Duarte defended the constitution finalized and approved in December 1983 by the constituent assembly which had resulted from the farcical 1982 elections and which had been dominated by the extreme right.

The FMLN-FDR had categorically rejected the 1983 constitution:

"We do not recognize the Constitution of the country. Its elaboration and historical basis is flawed. It attempts to make the actual unjust economic, social and political order last forever and disguise the US counterinsurgency plan that we are defeating."<sup>46</sup>

Duarte's precipitous rejection of the peace proposal of the FMLN-FDR was a response to the pressures exerted by the extreme right and sectors of the armed forces. Not surprisingly, ultra-rightist leader D'Aubuisson praised Duarte for rejecting the FMLN-FDR proposal: "If you turned the television off and heard Duarte, you would think you are listening to an ARENA really."<sup>48</sup>

During the conversations at Ayagualo, different popular sectors expressed their position with respect to the dialog. Hundreds of Mothers of Political Prisoners and the Disappeared met at the site of the meeting and called for "the realization of sincere dialog", adding that "there can be no peace with persecution" and "alive they took them, alive we want them", alluding to the fate of their children. In a radio debate transmitted in San Salvador, different union representatives said they hoped that "the dialog would resolve the problems of the workers", and called for "peace with wage increases" and the "cessation of the repression".

The support of the international community for the process of dialog was evident during the Ayagualo talks. The Mexican government provided a plane to transport the FMLN-FDR leaders; the Embassy of Spain offered its chancery to house the FMLN-FDR delegation; and the Embassies of Sweden, Switzerland, Costa Rica and France offered their assistance during the meeting.<sup>49</sup>

In March 1985, Duarte's Christian Democratic party emerged as victors in the legislative and municipal elections, winning 33 of the 60 seats in the National Assembly and 153 of 202 mayoral posts. The elections, however, proved to be a worse charade than previous elections. The total number of votes supposedly cast in the 1985 elections was only 41% of the voting population, about 14% less than the total who supposedly voted in March 1984. The absenteeism was so evident that it did not allow for too much exaggeration of the general data. If, of the votes cast, one took out those blank, voided, incorrectly filled out and missing, the number of votes for all of the parties was reduced to about 30% of all the citizens. About 16% of this total went to the Christian Democrats.

Electoral figures were low even when fraud and terrorism were rampant. The Salvadoran armed forces for instance occupied certain areas under FMLN control on election day; they filled out a large number of ballots in favor of the Christian Democrats in these areas. Moreover, CEC workers publicly denounced that the results had been altered.



By 1985, the US and the Salvadoran government, becoming aware that the FMLN was moving toward a more political strategy, made adjustments in their LIC counterinsurgency scheme. J. Villalobos analyzed the government's new counterinsurgency plan:

"Three key elements make up the new army counterinsurgency plan. First, limit the war to parts of the country farthest removed from the main cities, thus isolating the FMLN's units and subjecting them to constant harassment. Second, separate political struggles from struggles for improved living conditions, in order to keep those involved in the latter from joining in the people's war. And finally, reduce FMLN sympathizers to small radical bands and campesino villages within the contested zones. According to the plan, these sympathizers must first be won over to the government; if that fails, they must be separated from the FMLN; and if they still persist, they must be wiped out.

"As we can see, the enemy clearly understands that the war is defined in favor of the side that can win the most popular support. That is why it would be simplistic and pointless to analyze the war only in terms of military tactics, technology or forces."<sup>49</sup>

To such LIC components as civil defense, civic action and psychological operations was added urban repression. As labor and student groups were resuming activity, a sophisticated combination of "limited fire power" and "population control" was applied in stark contrast to the crude death



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squad campaign of former years. The "new" repression was just as brutal once a target was selected, but the terror was now used to achieve sophisticated political objectives rather than simply as a means of physically eliminating opposition leaders.<sup>50</sup>

In the countryside, the air war continued but this time it was less indiscriminate. The use of air assets in military operations became increasingly defensive and psychological. Helicopters served largely as transport, to increase troop mobility and evacuate wounded soldiers. Their role as gunships became also primarily defensive, to cover retreats.

Air operations also offered what Defense Minister Vides Casanova called a "psychological deterrent". The threat of aerial surveillance and attack was designed to deter the FMLN from massing its forces. Targets for air attack were restricted to areas where the population was politically identified with the FMLN, to make clear to the population as a whole the difference between "civilians" and subversive *masas*.<sup>51</sup>

As the war escalated, the levels of US intervention also increased. Prospects for a political solution to the Salvadoran conflict could not but be tied to the US role. Guillermo Ungo, chairman of the FDR, castigated US intervention:

"The policy of the Reagan administration, which is doing its utmost to preserve the Duarte regime, is the main obstacle to a peaceful settlement of the Salvadoran conflict. Washington grants this regime over 1.5 million dollars a day. Thus it is the US government that decrees and implements the counterinsurgency policy in our

country. It directs military operations strategically as well as tactically and operationally. This fact has been ascertained by journalists who have seen and proved (by citing documentary evidence) that US military advisers are directly involved in combat operations. Americans train over half of the regime's army, fly on night raids with its pilots, carry out reconnaissance flights on their own, and supply intelligence to the Salvadoran army command.

"Washington also decides on many socio-political matters relating to our country. It specifies when this or that move should be made, where and how, funds elections in line with the counterinsurgency strategy, and directs the political and diplomatic activity of the Salvadoran regime. It prevents a peaceful settlement of the conflict through dialogue...<sup>52</sup>

### FMLN Advances in 1985-86

Even as the US counterinsurgency scheme became more complex, the FMLN-FDR continued to advance in both the political and military spheres. By 1985-86, the FMLN had sustained fighting in 12 out of 14 provinces. Approximately 20 percent of the country, covering scores of municipalities, was now under popular control and administration. Bordering these regions were disputed territories of changing size.

FDR chairman Ungo asserted the existence of dual power in El Salvador:

"The political, military and diplomatic battles in El Salvador over the past period have resulted in the emergence of dual power, which means that the regime and its political structures are faced with people's power in the areas controlled by the insurgents. Hundreds of thousands of my compatriots living in these areas participate directly in local self-government."<sup>53</sup>

The local "people's power" government was headed by a directorate elected by the entire local population and composed of a president and heads of production, legal affairs, social affairs, communication and mobilization, and security and self-defense.

No less than *Time* magazine acknowledged the existence of an FMLN zone of control in northern Morazan. In its January 20, 1986 issue, *Time* reported that the Salvadoran government had abandoned northern Morazan to the FMLN and that the rebels had restored some basic services. The magazine further reported that "the rebels through civilian 'directorates' that now run the towns, have reopened schools, many of which had not conducted classes for four years" and that "most of the new teachers are recruited and paid by the directorates."<sup>54</sup>

Despite urban repression, the FMLN made significant progress in its efforts to rebuild and develop the revolutionary mass movement. In the early 1980s, the open mass organizations of campesinos, workers and other democratic sectors — the pillars of the popular movement of the 1970s — had been the targets of vicious repression by the military and the death squads and had been forced to disband or go underground.



*Terror, in LIC application, was used to achieve sophisticated political objectives.*

As the old forms were decimated, new ones slowly emerged and came under the influence or leadership of the revolutionary forces.

Among the sectors and groups most active in the emerging mass movement were workers' unions; agricultural cooperatives; basic Christian communities; students and teachers of the newly-reopened National University; human rights organizations; and committees of refugees of the civil conflict.<sup>55</sup>

Initially, the activities of these groups seemed scattered and limited to narrow economic or sectoral interests. As the war escalated, however, it became impossible<sup>57</sup> to separate the people's struggle for immediate economic and social needs from the political struggle. On May Day 1985, some 20,000 workers and campesinos militantly marched through the streets of San Salvador, raising economic demands as well as political slogans.

After May Day, demonstrations continued, though on a smaller scale and organized by students and campesino cooperatives. A wave of strikes was launched by water workers, hospital workers, government employees, etc., even as the country's economic crunch worsened.<sup>56</sup>

The US-prescribed austerity measures adopted in early 1986 further fueled the people's anger and militancy even more. An immediate political effect was the unification of the labor movement: the National Unity of Salvadoran Workers (UNTS) was formed, uniting for the first time the formerly Christian Democratic unions with those to their left, who by this time were known as the May Day Committee. Then, on February 21, 1986, the biggest mass action since 1980 took place in San Salvador, with 60,000 people taking to the streets, protesting Duarte's austerity measures.

In the military field, the FMLN not only learned to deal with the enemy's air war and artillery, but also staged important military strikes in new theaters of operations near cities and other vital centers. On October 10, 1985, for instance, some 300 FMLN guerrillas attacked CEMFA, a major government military training center in La Union province, killing 42 soldiers and narrowly missing five US military advisers. Other vital centers which became scenes of FMLN attacks were San Salvador Volcano, Cerro Piedra Colorada on Guazapa, Santa Lucia, Guarnecia in Santa Ana, Juayya in Sonsonate and the El Martillo cooperative in Usulután. According to J. Villalobos, FMLN strategic operations in vital areas increased the political impact of the war because they were impossible to conceal and they motivated the most politicized people to become incorporated into the war.

J. Villalobos further recounted:

"Things that seemed impossible ten years ago are today common events. For example, guerilla patrols with rifles can now penetrate the neighborhoods surrounding San Salvador, large FMLN units can strike targets on the San Salvador volcano and on the outskirts of Santa Ana,

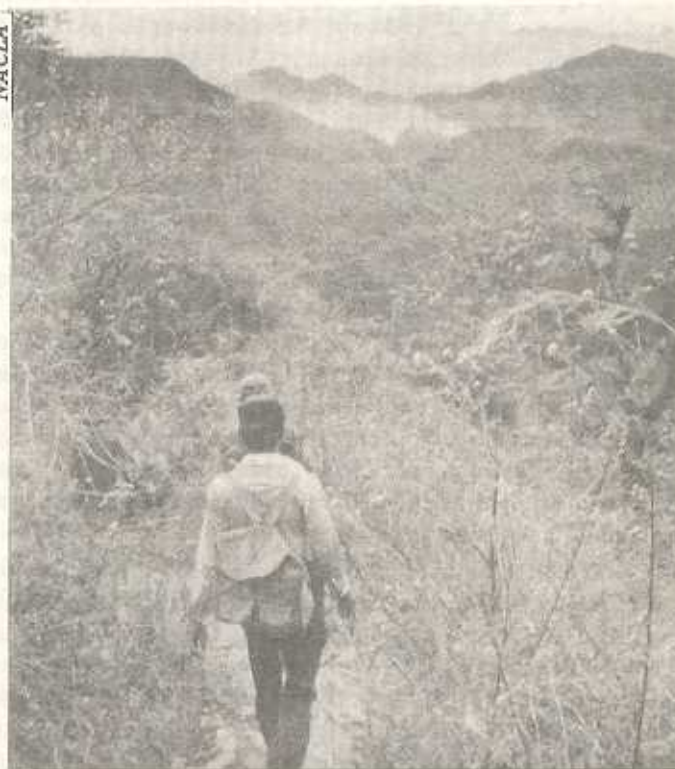
and guerillas can attack Mariona prison in San Salvador and liberate prisoners without much problem."<sup>57</sup>

The FMLN carried out three important intelligence coups between October 1984 and October 1985. First, Col. Monterrosa, an important army counterinsurgency strategist and commander, was killed when the FMLN shot down his helicopter over Morazan. Second, FMLN urban guerillas raided Zona Rosa, a fashionable recreation center, killing two US embassy marine guards and two other Americans. Third, the FMLN kidnapped Duarte's daughter, Ines Guadalupe Duarte, and 38 provincial mayors and officials and successfully exchanged them for the release of 22 key political prisoners and safe passage to Cuba for 96 wounded guerillas.

J. Villalobos explained the significance of the three guerilla operations;

"The execution of Col. Monterrosa left a leadership vacuum within the army such that today's command remains dispersed, divided and inept. The execution of US advisers in the Zona Rosa revealed the army's dependence on the US, pointed out who our principal enemy is, and exposed the weakest point in the Reagan Administration's policy when Reagan threatened to order bombing reprisals against the FMLN zones. The kidnapping and exchange of Ines Guadalupe Duarte and the mayors - carried out in the context of intense military activity, with transportation stoppages, sabotage, harassment operations, and the strategic attack against the CEMFA - deepened the government's internal contradictions and raised the people's morale."<sup>58</sup>

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Since 1982, the FMLN had developed economic sabotage as a powerful strategic weapon. The revolutionary forces used it as a means to weaken El Salvador's war economy and to completely shatter the economic component of the government's counterinsurgency strategy. Becoming more and more frequent and extensive, FMLN sabotage struck at strategic parts of the economy: electricity (mostly used by industry, trade and the productive apparatus of the nation's vital areas); export products (coffee, cotton and sugarcane); the telecommunications system; and the railroad and transportation system. Certainly, the sabotage activities of the rebels raised the cost of the war tremendously for the government.

By early 1986, the FMLN had achieved what was commonly referred to as a "military equilibrium" with the Salvadoran armed forces. It had reached "a more advanced stage in its strategy of people's war, one which seeks to lay the groundwork for a 'strategic counteroffensive' in terms of the development of military, political and international factors".<sup>59</sup>

The FMLN guerillas had developed the ability to concentrate and disperse large units for attack at lightning speed. The guerillas had adapted their tactics to the armed forces' use of helicopter transports and gunships, which for a time had hampered their ability to mass in large groups. In June 1986, for instance, some 100 guerillas attacked San Miguel, demonstrating the guerillas' ability to group about three specialized small units and then disperse.

### The Salvadoran Situation Today

After nearly four years of employing the LIC counterinsurgency scheme, the Salvadoran government has miserably failed to stamp out the insurgency and is in fact now in a terrible fix and feeling increasingly beleaguered.

The economy is in a shambles — with depressed industry, shrinking markets for export crops, and high unemployment and inflation rates. Fully 50 percent of El Salvador's work force are now either unemployed or underemployed. New austerity measures ordered by Duarte in December 1986 have failed to perk up the economy. The measures, which included a hefty currency devaluation and a cut in government spending, have instead resulted in higher prices for gasoline and other basic commodities, increased unemployment and heavier tax burdens.

Land reform has gotten nowhere due to the landlords' intransigence. Many campesinos have fled from their farms, victims of the military's base-denial operations. An estimated one million people — 20 percent of El Salvador's population — have been evicted from their homes and lands and driven into refugee camps or into exile — a higher percentage than Vietnamese homeless at the height of the Vietnam War.<sup>60</sup>

Already in a critical state a year ago, the economy was further ravaged by an earthquake last October which killed



LIC: "A total war at the grassroots level."

1,500 people and added tens of thousands to the already swelling ranks of the homeless. The quake caused damage estimated at between \$1 billion and \$2 billion.

The Duarte regime has grown more and more dependent on US aid. In the past seven years, the US has provided El Salvador with \$500 million in military and \$1.5 billion more in economic assistance. Since 1980, the size of the Salvadoran army has grown fourfold, to 52,000 (pitted against an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 FMLN guerillas).<sup>61</sup>

Despite the massive US aid, 40 percent of the Salvadoran annual budget have to be spent on the war. With the heavy war drain, it has become impossible for the regime to do anything substantial on such basic demands of the masses as land, shelter, jobs and food. A contradiction has thus emerged between the government's political attempts to win the hearts and minds of the people, and the military necessities resulting from the FMLN's intensification and broadening of the war.

After over seven years, the war in El Salvador has already taken 62,000 lives. Extreme repression, however, has



apparently not deterred the Salvadoran masses from taking to the streets in large numbers again. In fact, there is a clear revival of the mass movement. The constant strikes and demonstrations have been given new impetus by the government's economic measures that have hurt the people but have been necessary to support the armed forces' ability to wage the war.

Just last May 1, according to a UPI report, about 8,000 workers and students marched through the streets of San Salvador calling for Duarte's resignation, an end to US intervention and a negotiated political settlement to the civil war. Rallies were also held in three other cities.<sup>62</sup>

FMLN successes in the battlefield have been even more dramatic and stunning, with the guerillas returning to battalion-size offensives, but this time able to concentrate and disperse at lightning speed. Last January 4, for instance, some 250 rebels attacked an isolated military outpost in Morazan and then scattered.

Last March 31, the FMLN once again raided the army base in El Paraiso which had been fortified after the 1983 attack. The rebels, some 200 strong, hit the base with automatic weapons fire, rockets and mortar bombs, then fought with soldiers inside the compound. The four-hour battle ended after military jets and helicopter gunships strafed the surrounding area. Sixty-nine Salvadoran soldiers and a US military adviser were killed, 60 other soldiers were injured and only eight rebels perished. The guerillas showed not only that they were capable of putting together units to mount surprise raids, but also that they had inside support. Salvadoran military officials admitted that the guerillas had infiltrated the army before the attack.<sup>63</sup>

The day after the Labor Day mass actions, some 200 FMLN guerillas, backed by artillery and mortar barrages, attacked the main army base and the police headquarters in San Francisco Gotera in Morazan. An FMLN communique claimed 36 soldiers were killed and 42 wounded, with no guerilla casualties. The attack partially destroyed the army base and badly damaged the police headquarters. Also destroyed were several military posts in the town and outlying areas, three military trucks, a tank, three 120 mm artillery pieces and a helicopter landing field. According to the rebels' Radio Venceremos, the attack was carried out by three FMLN battalions and "a unit of support weapons that used conventional arms and artillery made by the people".<sup>64</sup>

As if FMLN military and political offensives were not enough, the Duarte government had to contend with an increasingly vociferous ultra-right. Last January 22, leaders of big business, complaining against sharp increases in income taxes and other levies, staged a day-long general strike, demanding a repeal of Duarte's austerity measures. Afterwards, ultra-rightist political parties staged a legislative boycott to protest the tax increases.<sup>65</sup> Once again, rumors of right-wing agitation for a coup are rife.

The Duarte government's political support has been declining ever since the breakdown of peace talks with the FMLN in 1984. Duarte himself feels besieged, blaming "pre-revolutionary spiral" on the "equally destructive" FMLN rebels and the extreme right. He compared the spiral to a typhoon, saying the guerillas wanted to move it to the left, his government wanted to veer in toward "democracy", and the ultra-rightists wanted to stop it altogether. "The social forces of this country are funneling this typhoon," he said.

Then Duarte made a most revealing admission: "We have the government, but we don't have the power."<sup>66</sup>

Is the FMLN about to launch its "strategic counter-offensive"? We do not know. What is clear though is that despite LIC and previous counter-insurgency schemes, the revolutionary struggle of the FMLN-FDR is fast advancing. Ever since January 10, 1981, the FMLN has sustained and even stepped up its tactical military offensives and broadened the sphere of its military operations from its initial zones of control to other areas including vital urban centers. Moreover, in recent years, the FMLN has succeeded in reinvigorating the mass movement in the cities, such that it now declares that "a new national revolutionary crisis is imminent".

Commenting on the US counterinsurgency schemes implemented through the years, J. Villalobos said:

"In 1981, the US considered the war more of a political than a military problem, tried to win it with genocide, and failed. In 1983, the US considered the war a fundamentally military problem, and set about to win it by building up the army, but failed again. In 1986, for the US the war has become a political and military problem of even greater dimensions. The US no longer has a solution for it: neither genocide nor military aid will work."<sup>67</sup> **K**

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>Sara Miles, "The Real War: Low Intensity Conflict in Central America", *Report on the Americas*, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>See *Philippine Collegian*, September 16, 1986, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Marta Harnecker, "From Insurrection to War: An Interview with Joaquin Villalobos", *Punto Final*, November-December 1982.

<sup>4</sup>Joaquin Villalobos, "The War in El Salvador", Solidarity Publications, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup>Raymond Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, p. 96.

<sup>6</sup>Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, p. 286.

<sup>7</sup>J. Villalobos, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>George Russel, "Much Talk about Talks", *Time*, March 28, 1983, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup>J. Villalobos, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>11</sup>Harnecker, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>US State Department, "Communist Interference in El Salvador", February 23, 1981, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup>Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, (FMLN), "The FMLN's Position on the Process of Dialogue - Negotiation", p. 9.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas A. Sancton, "Voting for Peace and Democracy", *Time*, April 12, 1982, pp. 18-19.

<sup>17</sup>LaFeber, op. cit., p. 288.

<sup>18</sup>FMLN, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>19</sup>Harnecker, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>"El Salvador - 1983: Interview with Arnoldo Ramos of the FMLN-FDR", *Denuncia*, April-June 1983.

<sup>22</sup>J. Villalobos, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>23</sup>Hochschild, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

<sup>24</sup>Miles, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>25</sup>Op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>26</sup>J. Villalobos, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>27</sup>Paul Martin, "The 'Disputes for the Masses': The Popular Movement in El Salvador", *Ampo*, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup>J. Villalobos, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>29</sup>Miles, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>30</sup>FMLN, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>31</sup>Deborah Mutnick, "Justice-for-Dollars in El Salvador", *The Guardian*, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup>Robert Armstrong, "What Now for the Salvadoran Left?", *The Guardian*, p. 11.

<sup>33</sup>"El Salvador: The New Face of War", *For Peace and Solidarity*, June 1985.

<sup>34</sup>Paul Martin, "Total War at the Grassroots Level in El Salvador", *Ampo*, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup>Miles, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>36</sup>Martin, "Total War", p. 5.

<sup>37</sup>Op. Cit., p. 6.

<sup>38</sup>"El Salvador: The New Face of War".

<sup>39</sup>Armstrong, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>40</sup>J. Villalobos, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Martin, "The 'Disputes for the Masses'", p. 9.

<sup>43</sup>Miles, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>44</sup>Martin, "The 'Disputes for the Masses'", p. 9.

<sup>45</sup>Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), "Our Proposal: The Road to Peace".

<sup>46</sup>FMLN, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>47</sup>Los Angeles Times, December 2, 1984.

<sup>48</sup>FDR, op. cit.

<sup>49</sup>J. Villalobos, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>50</sup>Martin, "Total War", p. 6.

<sup>51</sup>Miles, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>52</sup>Guillermo Ungo, "What Prevents a Settlement of the Salvadoran Conflict", *World Marxist Review*, April 1986, p. 103.

<sup>53</sup>Ungo, op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>54</sup>Ricardo Chavirán, "Inside Guerilla Territory", *Time*, January 20, 1986, p. 14.

<sup>55</sup>Martin, "The 'Disputes for the masses'", pp. 9-10.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>J. Villalobos, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>58</sup>Op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>59</sup>Op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>60</sup>"El Salvador, The New Face of War".

<sup>61</sup>John Borrell, "Bloody Setback at El Paraiso", *Time* April 13, 1987, p. 27.

<sup>62</sup>United Press International, "Duarte's Resignation Sought", *The Manila Bulletin*, May 3, 1987.

<sup>63</sup>Bryna Brenna, "Salvadoran Rebels Far from Finished", *The Manila Chronicle*, April 8, 1987.

<sup>64</sup>Associated Press, "Salvadoran Rebels Attack Army Base", *The Manila Chronicle*, May 4, 1987.

<sup>65</sup>AP, "Duarte Faces Left, Right Threats", *The Manila Bulletin*, February 14, 1987.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>J. Villalobos, op. cit., p. 14.