

Marxist FMLN rebels breed chaos, despair



The most potent weapon in the arsenal of El Salvador's communist insurgency, the FMLN, is despair. The FMLN cultivates despair among Salvadorans by killing democratically elected officials: they have killed one governor and nine mayors during the past year, and have driven 80 other mayors from office.

The FMLN also stands to benefit from the despair being sown by critics of American policy toward El Salvador. The American left wing contends that military aid to Salvador should be withdrawn.

Two flatly contradictory arguments are conscripted by the left in defense of this proposition.

The first argument, summarized by Ruben Zamorra in *The Nation* magazine, is that the Salvadoran military has failed to contain the FMLN insurgency. "The [FMLN] forces have not been contained," writes Zamorra. "Today there is stepped-up military activity ... the FMLN has been expanding in military and social terms."

The thrust of this position is that military aid should be cut off, as it is an investment in failed strategy.

The antiphonal argument, proffered by (among others) Colin Austin, is that further military aid would amount to overkill: the Salvadoran army is needlessly large (although substantially smaller than the Sandinista army), and that "The [FMLN] efforts have been effectively neutralized." (Austin's phrase.) Ergo, military aid should be withdrawn so we can address the "root causes" of the conflict.

Clearly it is impossible for both of these arguments to be correct. There are compelling reasons to believe that they are both mistaken.

A more persuasive analysis comes from Professor Jose Garcia of New Mexico State University in *Current History* magazine. Garcia observes that the FMLN, while a smaller force than the Nicaraguan *Contras*, is more formidable because the FMLN's support has been stronger and more consistent. (The Sandin-

istas are unrestrained by trifles like the Boland Amendments.) Furthermore, the *Washington Post* reports that the FMLN, after several "lean years", consider its fortunes to be on the upswing — aided by fresh shipments of Soviet-made arms. Surveying the situation, Garcia observes that the FMLN enjoys little political support; however, their influence would increase (largely through terror) if the United States were to cut off military aid to the government.

Critics of U.S. policy focus upon the violence and poverty that still characterize Salvadoran life. Here's a fair question: are the problems confronted by Salvadorans something that Marxists can cure?

Furthermore, American policy has not favored a military solution exclusive of efforts to improve Salvadoran life.

American policy has attempted to fuse philanthropy and counter-insurgency. Of the \$2.7 billion spent since 1979, approximately one quarter has been spent for "security assistance."

The rest has been deployed to fight what critics denote as the "root causes": poverty, squalor, ignorance. (Even at the height of the "dirty war" — 1980-1982 — the Salvadoran government spent twice as much on education as it did on the military.)

Critics of American policy, using a quixotic standard, have judged both the policy and Salvadoran democracy and found both to be wanting.

Fifty years ago tomorrow, Hitler completed the conquest of Czechoslovakia made possible through the indulgent foolishness of Neville Chamberlain. Chamberlain, who found the Czech democracy to be morally unsatisfactory, placed the country in a militarily untenable situation.

Many self-appointed moralists — including some on this campus — consider Chamberlain to be the distillation of Christian virtue. Doubtless they see nothing wrong in cutting off military aid to Salvador. Clear thinkers should know better.

In Salvador, a nascent democracy struggles to take root in largely inhospitable soil. Severing military aid to a besieged democracy is neither sound politics nor applied Christianity.

Similar "Christian" proposals were very useful to the Communists who "labored in the vineyard" in Southeast Asia.

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