

Piero Gleijeses

THE CASE FOR POWER SHARING IN EL SALVADOR

The Reagan Administration came to power confident of its ability to impose Washington's will on Central America. El Salvador was the immediate focus of its attention—and optimism ran high. The ill-timed January 1981 “final offensive” of the *Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) had already failed when Ronald Reagan entered the White House. To the eager eyes of the new Administration the FMLN's defeat appeared a rout. Victory would be swift and at little cost, Washington believed, with no need for U.S. assistance markedly above the levels reached by the outgoing Carter Administration. The easy success would spark little controversy at home and abroad, and sweep away any lingering remnants of the Vietnam syndrome in the United States.

The Reagan Administration also emphasized, and has done so consistently ever since, that the course of U.S. policy in El Salvador would influence American prestige and credibility throughout the world. Indeed, if the United States were able to attain the defeat of the rebels without indiscriminate violence, U.S. prestige would be greatly enhanced. Even victory through extreme repression would demonstrate the credibility of the Administration's guarantees, however costly the success might appear in moral terms.

But the Salvadoran “test case” has turned into a nightmare. Recent Administration requests for vastly increased military aid confirm the evidence from the battlefield: the war is not going well. The record of the Salvadoran regime on human rights and social reforms appears dismal to all but the Administration's most devout supporters. At home, Reagan's Salvadoran policy is increasingly divisive; abroad it evokes little sympathy, even among those who do not wish an FMLN victory. Rather than projecting an image of strength and resolve, U.S. involvement in El Salvador increasingly

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betrays weakness and lack of purpose. The Administration haggles with Congress over a few million dollars of military assistance and a few dozen military advisers, but is unable to suggest a coherent strategy for victory. Meanwhile, inordinate concern is focused on that small country, deflecting U.S. attention from other pressing issues—to the point that South America, beset by dangerous economic and political tensions, appears as an appendage of Central America and, in particular, of El Salvador.

President Reagan has asked Congress to “stay the course” in El Salvador, but only offers old prescriptions which have already failed. American-trained battalions have performed poorly; in view of the pervasive lack of morale that characterizes officers and troops alike, there is no reason to believe that additional training will produce more satisfactory results. An election is scheduled for late 1983—as one took place in the spring of 1982—but there is no present indication that the second will prove any more effective than the first in solidifying the domestic strength or international prestige of the regime. The Administration’s search for a “center” will continue in a game of musical chairs: generals will replace generals and civilians will replace one another. Meanwhile U.S. officials will claim, as they have done throughout, that the “process” of democratization (that ritual expression that masks a paucity of evidence) is underway, and that time must be granted to the president or defense minister of the moment.

The quagmire will deepen. This is the lesson of the U.S. involvement in El Salvador and of the “process” underway since 1980. As U.S. officials have periodically acknowledged, the easy victory over the guerrillas predicted in January 1981 has become a stalemate, and this stalemate is slowly turning in favor of the FMLN. Yet President Reagan disclaims any intention of sending combat troops—and his sincerity need not be challenged. But he also stresses, with an emphasis that seems to grow with the deterioration of the situation in El Salvador, that an FMLN victory will threaten vital U.S. interests, and that the United States will never abandon the Salvadoran people. Thus two principles are set forth which appear increasingly contradictory—a gap in logic which words, or robust optimism, cannot bridge and which may eventually confront the United States with the agonizing choice between a humiliating last-minute withdrawal and a desperate recourse to military intervention.

Both direct U.S. military intervention and military victory by the FMLN appear unacceptable to a large majority of Americans. Many agree with the view recently stated by Representative Clarence

Long, an outspoken critic of the Administration's policy: "We made a mistake by becoming involved. But we are involved and it would be a mistake to pull out."¹ With rare exceptions even those who do not believe that a military victory of the FMLN would threaten vital U.S. interests fear the intangible toll that such an outcome would exact on U.S. prestige and, above all, on American self-confidence: however ill-conceived the U.S. involvement may have been, a great power cannot afford simply to withdraw and acknowledge its impotence, particularly in its own backyard.

While criticism is growing within the United States—and in Congress a majority is clearly dissatisfied with the present policy—the Administration retains one major advantage: its opponents lack a coherent alternative. The fear that a victory of the FMLN would lead to another Cuba paralyzes real debate. The growing radicalization of the Sandinista regime fuels such fears, adding welcome support to the Administration's admonitions. Nor are Congressmen necessarily impervious to the Administration's thinly veiled warnings: were El Salvador to "fall," Reagan's critics would be saddled before the American people with the responsibility of defeat—an ominous threat for elected officials.

Trying to break out of this vicious circle, the most vocal critics of the Administration, particularly those of the liberal persuasion, seek to strengthen the political center in El Salvador. Extreme repression, corruption and lack of social reforms, they note, only deepen the regime's isolation, weaken its war effort, and make it difficult for the United States to provide much needed military and economic assistance. They demand, therefore, that the United States exert much greater pressure to force the Salvadoran regime to respect human rights and implement social reforms. Finally, both the Administration and its critics profess to want meaningful elections.

The thesis of this article is that the Salvadoran military is indeed the real source of power on the government side, and that moving toward its reform is a first essential step. But sweeping or lasting reform cannot be achieved in a state of continued hostilities. Likewise, elections cannot be truly meaningful, or produce stability, so long as they are held under essentially wartime conditions.

Accordingly, what is proposed here is a sequence of steps: (1) achieving significant reform of the Salvadoran military by determined U.S. pressure; (2) the initiation of a dialogue between a

¹ Martin Tolchin, "Working Profile: Rep. Clarence D. Long, Shaping a Response to the 'Mistake' in El Salvador," *The New York Times*, April 22, 1983, p. A16.

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partially reformed military, on the government side, and the leaders
of the guerrilla opposition—looking toward a truce and leading,
after such a truce, to (3) the formation of a Government of Tran-
sition in which power would be shared by the contending forces,
and the introduction of outside peacekeeping forces. Such a tran-
sition government would then operate for a period of two or three
years, leading finally to (4) the holding of nationwide elections.

In carrying out such a course of action, the United States would
consult closely at every step with the governments of other inter-
ested countries in the area. In short, to the maximum possible
extent this process should have the genuine force and appeal of a
regional solution.

II

As the Administration has argued so convincingly, real power in
the rebel camp belongs not to the "moderates"—the civilian politi-
cians of the *Frente Democrático Revolucionario* (FDR)—but to those
who have the guns, the leaders of the FMLN. The same consideration
applies, however, to the government camp. Duarte was an ineffec-
tual president not because Reagan provided him with less support
than Carter did (a highly dubious proposition), but because power
rested, then as now, in the hands of an unreformed military.
President Alvaro Magaña and the moderate civilian groups that
support him have as little influence with the armed forces as Duarte
and the Christian Democrats had in 1980 and 1981. Clearly, the
United States will achieve little in El Salvador without a fundamen-
tal restructuring of the military—a task particularly difficult in the
midst of civil war. Mere reshuffling among senior leaders of the
present military establishment (as was the case with the recent
replacement of General José Guillermo García as Defense Minister)
represents cosmetic changes of marginal significance.

Apparently, however, the advocates of a more moderate course
have won an important victory. The House Foreign Affairs Com-
mittee has overwhelmingly voted to suspend military aid to the
Salvadoran government if unconditional negotiations do not begin
within 90 days of the legislation's enactment—unless it is the
insurgents who have refused to negotiate. What is more, the Ad-
ministration, in a sharp reversal of its previous policy, has an-
nounced that it will accept this condition.

But the Committee's resolution still shies away from the twin
imperatives that alone can make possible a negotiated solution: a
thorough restructuring of the armed forces and power sharing
between the military and the FMLN *before* elections. The resolution

offers no way out of the dilemma represented by an oppressive military, and only demands, as a condition for further aid, that the Salvadoran government begin negotiations. Under these circumstances, there is no incentive for the regime to seek a negotiated settlement. Negotiations will remain a sideshow that will drag on without results while the war continues. It is little wonder, therefore, that the Reagan Administration has at last moved away from its previous rejection of unconditional negotiations. By a long overdue formal concession the Administration will mollify—for a time—its domestic critics. Behind the rhetoric, the Administration will persist in the policy that it has consistently followed from the start—the pursuit of military victory. There is no other option, so long as the United States refuses to accept either a military victory of the FMLN or the only feasible peaceful solution: one based not on the concept of unconditional negotiations, but on power sharing.

Power sharing may appear, however, an equally unrealistic formula. An exceptional dose of optimism is required to imagine peaceful coexistence between the FMLN and the Salvadoran armed forces as presently constituted. Moreover, even if negotiations toward power sharing under the present circumstances were to prove possible and lead to some form of transitional government, the truce would doubtless prove fleeting, with the two camps maneuvering to position themselves for the final onslaught. Civil wars seldom end through negotiations, and this dictum seems particularly appropriate to El Salvador, in view of the chasm separating the antagonists. Is the battlefield therefore the only solution?

I do not believe so. The situation in El Salvador has not yet deteriorated to such a degree. There is a reformist group within the armed forces that could bring about a restructuring of the military sufficient to justify an earnest attempt at power sharing without, however, destroying the institution in the process (for otherwise power sharing would merely mean a negotiated surrender to the FMLN). And this proposition can be better appreciated if one looks back at the events of October 1979, when the military deposed the then President, General Carlos Humberto Romero.

III

By the end of the Romero regime, the officer corps shared one common belief: that the Carter Administration was ready to abandon the regime, while the growing guerrilla threat made U.S. support imperative. Thus the army felt compelled to act against Romero. Beyond this, there was no unity within the 800-man strong officer corps, except on one crucial point: the military institution

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must be preserved. A large number were apathetic toward social reform, and would follow any group within the military which could best ensure the survival of the institution, particularly if this group enjoyed the blessing of the United States.

There were, however, two factions of roughly equal strength that held more precise views. The first was led by Colonel Adolfo Majano and Lt. Colonel René Guerra y Guerra, two men untainted by corruption. It included a core of about 200 officers, mostly lieutenants and second lieutenants, but also a number of captains and majors. These were moderates, who had come to accept the principle of social reform as both morally just and indispensable for the survival of the army, and favored the principle of negotiations with the radical left.

The other faction was led by Colonels García, Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez and Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova (the current Defense Minister); it was smaller in numbers, but stronger hierarchically, for it included a majority of senior officers. This faction opposed both social reform and any negotiation with the radical left, and offered to the fledgling insurgency only a choice between unconditional submission and war; it accepted corruption as a normal feature of military life, as Colonels García, Gutiérrez and Vides Casanova had amply demonstrated in the course of a long and profitable career.

This division between moderates and hard-liners, with an apathetic group in between, was not new in Salvadoran military politics; it had already appeared on several occasions (in 1944, 1948, 1960 and 1972); on each occasion the conservative group eventually won out, usually with the benevolent neutrality or the active support of the United States. Each time, however, the moderate group only represented a minority of senior officers, while those of lower rank remained passive. But following the events of 1972—when presidential candidate Duarte was denied victory at the polls through brazen electoral fraud—a new process began to unfold. Confronted by mounting popular unrest and growing evidence of the bankruptcy of the system, junior officers began to question, in increasing numbers, the entire structure of Salvadoran society. The divisions within the armed forces that emerged between 1972 and 1979 differed from those of the past in at least two crucial respects. Instead of a small group of senior officers, it was now a question of a large number of junior officers; and instead of the constitutionalist demands and vague populist aspirations of the past, the disaffected officers now sought deeper social change.

By October 1979 the forces were balanced: the moderates were

stronger numerically and held the initiative, while the conservatives had the advantage of rank. In the tenuous equilibrium which marked the first post-Romero junta (mid-October 1979 to early January 1980), U.S. support could have tipped the balance in favor of the moderate group. But the Carter Administration, while clearly sympathetic to the principle of social reforms in El Salvador, feared losing control of events. Washington's suspicion of the obvious inclination of the reformist officers to establish a dialogue with the radical left and of the presence of communist ministers in the Cabinet, was matched by the failure to appreciate the true repressive nature of the group led by Colonel García. Thus, the U.S. attitude toward the first junta was one of suspicion, and American support went to "safe" officers like García.

By the time the first junta collapsed in early January 1980, the balance of power was already shifting against the reformist group—a process of emasculation that continued in the following months. U.S. distrust helped to isolate the moderates, while the escalation of the civil war that followed the demise of the first junta created a context of violence that made moderation difficult for military officers. Lieutenant Colonel Guerra y Guerra was forced into exile already in late January 1980; Majano held out longer, but his power steadily decreased. He was forced out in December 1980, after losing the last major confrontation in September.

Majano, Guerra y Guerra and other leading moderates, like Lieutenant Colonel Leonel Alfaro, Major Román Barrera and Lieutenant Colonel José Francisco Samayoa, are now in exile,² but the great majority of their former associates remain in the armed forces—in positions, however, of little influence. The captains and the majors have been shunted off to desk jobs. The lieutenants are at the front—but their low rank means that they lead only small units. They are under the command of more senior and "trusted" officers, making it impossible for them to acquire an independent power base. Furthermore, the dynamics of the war, and their own code of loyalty, lead them to fight for the survival of the military institution, however much they may disagree with the policies of their commanders.

It is obvious that on their own the reformist officers can no longer

² Majano is in Mexico, travels frequently throughout the region, and maintains excellent contacts with the governments of Mexico and Panama; Guerra y Guerra, who had acquired a graduate degree in engineering in the United States, lives in California. Barrera is Military Attaché in Venezuela; Samayoa is Consul General in San Francisco; Alfaro has been sent to study in the United States. Technically, Barrera, Samayoa and Alfaro are not in exile.

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play a critical role within the armed forces—except perhaps in the chaos of a military defeat, when all that they would be likely to achieve would be a negotiated surrender to a triumphant FMLN. But Washington, if it has the political will, possesses the leverage to repair the error of the Carter Administration and enable the reformists to attain key positions within the armed forces as a precondition for power sharing.

This proposition may appear incongruous when critics and supporters of the Administration alike bewail the lack of U.S. influence over the Salvadoran military. But at present the leverage of the United States suffers from a devastating weakness: a lack of credibility. The Reagan Administration scolds its Salvadoran protégés—at times even publicly—and warns them that, should they fail to improve their behavior, Congress will stop aid, against the Administration's own wishes. But the perceptions of many Salvadorans, and particularly the military, are more straightforward. The Administration has pawned its prestige on the Salvadoran test case, stressing repeatedly that a guerrilla victory would threaten vital U.S. interests, even raising the specter of falling dominoes from Panama to Mexico. Time after time U.S. officials have stressed that a guerrilla victory cannot and will not be tolerated—while arguing, for domestic consumption, that the conduct of the Salvadoran allies is far better than the critics claim, and continues to improve. The United States will never turn its back on the Salvadoran people, Reagan has solemnly promised, and the Salvadoran military conclude—perhaps with the naïveté of unsophisticated foreigners—that, with only minimal concessions on their part, the Administration will effectively shield them from Congress' wrath.

Congress' own behavior reinforces these perceptions. Congressmen complain, threaten, and reduce the size of the increases in aid demanded by the Administration; yet the vital flow of military and economic assistance is not cut off. Congress, too, is not ready to countenance an FMLN victory and is hostage to its own fears.

The United States can reestablish an eroded credibility, and acquire the leverage that the importance of its aid warrants, only when reproaches and highly circumscribed sanctions give way to concrete and decisive actions. The unambiguous suspension of military assistance, accompanied by the firm threat to cancel economic aid within a given time period, would be the only effective weapon to force a restructuring of the military. Such action, aimed at creating the indispensable preconditions for a negotiated settlement of the war, would have to be placed within an effective

framework of mutually reinforcing policies.

Before delivering any ultimatum to the Salvadoran military, the United States should ascertain whether the conditions exist for power sharing. Concretely this would mean that Washington would seek the collaboration of Latin American and European governments particularly concerned with Salvadoran developments and able to provide useful assistance.³ Regional powers such as Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Panama (already associated in the Grupo de Contadora) and, in Europe, France and Spain, would be logical candidates. Washington would also confirm the willingness of Majano and others in the same group to participate. Similarly, the United States would establish contacts with the FMLN to gauge the rebels' reaction. The FMLN would be asked to agree in principle to a truce and other key elements of power sharing.

If the results of these preliminary talks prove satisfactory, the United States will present its desiderata to the Salvadoran armed forces. It will announce that within the framework of a peace plan formulated with other governments, it is suspending military aid to El Salvador, and will halt economic aid in a specific and limited period of time unless its demands for restructuring of the armed forces are met.

The initial U.S. desiderata should be significant enough to have a real impact, but not so sweeping as to immediately threaten the stability of the Salvadoran armed forces. The United States could demand that Colonel Majano be made Defense Minister (such an appointment under the constitution is the prerogative of President Magaña), and that some other key military positions go to officers from the moderate group that emerged in October 1979. Concurrently, a few senior officers, particularly notorious for their repressive practices or particularly hostile to a democratization of the military, would be retired or sent abroad as military attachés.

At this stage a full-fledged restructuring of the armed forces would not yet be in order, only an effective beginning of the process. For its part, once the initial U.S. demands were met, the FMLN would be expected to honor the commitment made in the exploratory talks by accepting a truce for a set period. Thus would begin the formal negotiations on power sharing.

One must ask, however, whether the United States would indeed

³ Many studies, like the recent Sol Linowitz/Galo Plaza, *The Americas at a Crossroads* (April 1983), argue that the United States should give a major role in El Salvador and Central America as a whole to the regional powers. The intention is laudable, but only the United States has the leverage to bring about a negotiated solution. Therefore the key role in effecting a peaceful settlement in El Salvador must belong to the United States.

possess the leverage to impose these initial changes on the Salvadoran armed forces.

From a purely military perspective, the Salvadoran army could continue to fight for many months without U.S. military assistance. Once economic aid was suspended as well, however, the ability of the regime to resist would be drastically curtailed. But the significance of U.S. aid goes well beyond narrow military and economic considerations. Aid is necessary as proof of Washington's commitment to prevent a collapse of the already shattered morale of the Salvadoran army. Some argue that if the "Yanquis" were to push them too far, the Salvadoran military would react in a spasm of nationalism, fighting with fierce pride to the bitter end. But the behavior of the Salvadoran officer corps—a consistent pattern to which U.S. military advisers have been at times blunt witnesses—leads to opposite and unflattering conclusions.

Confronted by a credible U.S. threat, and fully cognizant of their own military weakness, the Salvadoran officers would not react with suicidal pride and defy the "Yanquis." Rather, two deeply rooted and mutually supporting impulses would prevail: personal opportunism and the desire to save the military institution. Both require not defiance, but acquiescence to U.S. will.

IV

Once the initial U.S. demands on the Salvadoran High Command have been met and the FMLN has responded by accepting a truce, negotiations between the armed forces and the FMLN could begin.

The moderating participation of civilian associates on both sides and the inclusion of mutually acceptable foreign governments would ease the process of negotiations. The United States would play a vital role behind the scenes, using its leverage to force deeper changes in the Salvadoran military—an indispensable condition for a negotiated settlement. The security corps murder machine would have to be disbanded. Moderate members of the 1979 Majano group would occupy more senior positions, while a significant number of officers implicated deeply in the repression would be cashiered or sent abroad as military attachés; some, instead, might receive scholarships for foreign study (in this regard the precedent of the settlement imposed by the United States in the 1965 Dominican civil war provides valuable guidelines).

While any suggested plan should not attempt to be overly precise (for many points will evolve during the negotiations), the negotiating process should end with the establishment of a Government of Transition (GOT) that would lead to internationally supervised elec-

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tions. The GOT should last two or possibly three years—so as to afford the country the benefits of a long enough respite before elections after the convulsions of the civil war. Within the GOT, as many cabinet positions and key bureaucratic posts as possible should go to representatives of the civilian groups: the FDR and the parties that supported the Magaña government. Above all, personalities who have broken with the current regime, without however joining the FMLN/FDR, should be included. Many, with impeccable democratic credentials, are now in exile in Mexico, Costa Rica, Honduras and the United States.

On the other hand, it is unlikely that ARENA, which is controlled by elements of the most extreme right-wing fringe, could be allowed to continue in its present form. Some of its most dangerous leaders, such as Roberto d'Aubuisson, should be exiled. One should not exaggerate the difficulty of this task: with the support of the military, ARENA can orchestrate widespread terror; its own military strength, however, is marginal (as in the case of ARENA's Guatemalan counterpart, the *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional*, which the current Guatemalan military government has neutralized with little effort). In the final analysis, ARENA's influence on the Salvadoran armed forces would prove insignificant if counterbalanced by an effective U.S. pressure.

The GOT would institute social reforms according to a minimum program previously agreed upon in the negotiations. As the FMLN has hinted, such reforms could be those enacted (but not implemented) since October 1979—on paper, an impressive bit of legislation. The realization of the program would create a critical momentum for peace, giving to the population, regardless of political sympathy, a vested interest in the survival of the transitional government. By the same token, it would strengthen civilian organizations such as the large peasant confederation, *Unión Comunal Salvadoreña*, which cannot prosper in the midst of civil war.

Economic aid of roughly \$400–500 million annually would flow into the country to sustain social reform and economic recovery. Of this sum, the United States could contribute the amount it now disburses in economic and military assistance (within the framework of a GOT, any further inflow of arms into El Salvador would be both unnecessary and destabilizing). The balance of necessary aid would come from international organizations, and from U.S. allies that now refuse to further a unilateral U.S. policy they oppose. This assistance would be an additional guarantee of peace, since El Salvador's economy, to a much greater degree than that of Nicaragua in 1979, is in desperate straits. Representatives of interna-

tional organizations, and of donor governments neutral in the conflict, should monitor the use of the aid.

To hope for a swift integration of the military units of the FMLN with the army would be overly optimistic. If necessary, the two forces should be allowed to coexist under some appropriate formula throughout the tenure of the GOT, leaving the issue of integration to an eventual elected government; an effort should be made, however, to decrease the size of the two forces proportionally. Above all, it would be imperative to establish an international peacekeeping force of a few thousand—that is, strong enough to police the agreement. Probably no foreign governments would be eager to volunteer contingents (except perhaps those governments which are not neutral in the conflict and would therefore be unacceptable). But several countries that have forcefully expressed their dissatisfaction with current U.S. policy and their eagerness to contribute to a peaceful solution would find it hard to refuse their participation in so important an undertaking.

In the Western Hemisphere, likely candidates include Mexico, Panama, Ecuador and Canada; European governments such as those of France and the Scandinavian countries could also participate. The force should remain in El Salvador throughout the two- or three-year tenure of the GOT and in the first year of the elected government to help ensure compliance with the results of the elections.

v

Power sharing runs against the grain of present U.S. policy, and goes beyond the proposals of most critics of the Administration. It raises significant questions about the fairness of the plan, the risks it would entail of a violation by the FMLN, and the effect it would have on the prestige and credibility of the United States. Many, and, in particular, Administration supporters, will condemn power sharing as undemocratic, and unfair to the Salvadoran government, arguing that “we would be treating our allies as puppets,” while allowing the FMLN “to shoot its way into power.”

But these objections are hardly pertinent in the Salvadoran context. The present regime is neither democratic nor representative of the population, and the Salvadoran armed forces, the real holders of power, are repressive and corrupt, as the Congress of the United States is discovering. The Reagan Administration, furthermore, interferes daily in the internal affairs of the Salvadoran government, at times successfully (as in the selection of a provisional president after the March 1982 elections), but more often ineffectually. The issue, therefore, is not the principle of U.S. interference,

but rather the efficacy of such interference in protecting U.S. interests.

Principled opposition to violent seizure of power seems equally irrelevant. In the case of El Salvador both the Carter and Reagan Administrations lent their support to those who shot their way into power in October 1979 (the "legitimizing" elections took place only two and a half years later in the midst of bitter civil war). At present, in neighboring Guatemala, President Reagan is eager to embrace another group that overthrew an elected government ("Rios Montt has received a bad rap from the press," the President proclaimed after a brief meeting with the highly controversial Guatemalan general in December 1982). In short, U.S. policy does not oppose on principle the violent seizure of power, and with good cause—such rigidity would justify the permanence of dictatorships. Instead, the principle is conditioned by an Administration's approval of those who do the shooting—a task at which, unfortunately for U.S. policymakers, the FMLN is proving increasingly proficient.

But even if one accepts that power sharing must be imposed on the Salvadoran government, wouldn't fairness and prudence require that extremists be purged not only in the armed forces, but also within the FMLN?

In the case of the Salvadoran military it is possible to purge a group of extremists without destroying the effectiveness of the institution, for they would be replaced by moderates. Reciprocity would demand that the same principle be applied to the FMLN. It is evident that the United States cannot exert over an undefeated enemy the same leverage that it has over an ineffectual client—thus it would be naïve to expect that the State Department could select members of the leadership of the guerrillas, as it can do for the Salvadoran military High Command. The issue is further complicated by the lack of unambiguous criteria by which to identify the extremists within the FMLN.⁴ Many U.S. observers considered the late Cayetano Carpio an extremist among the major FMLN leaders because he was the last to accept the principle of a negotiated settlement. If extremism were based on "pro-Sovietism," then the villain would not be Carpio, but Shafik Handal, the Secretary

⁴ The FMLN consists of five groups: the Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL) which were led by Carpio; the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP); the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN); the Communist Party of El Salvador (PCS); and the Central American Workers' Revolutionary Party (PRTC). The FPL, the ERP and the FARN provide almost all of the FMLN's mass support and military strength. The deaths of Carpio, the FMLN's most prestigious guerrilla leader, and, a few days earlier, of his second-in-command, is likely to have two effects: a decrease in the relative importance of the FPL vis-à-vis ERP and FARN, which have shown more inclination toward negotiations; and an increase in the influence within the FPL of those who are more inclined to compromise than Carpio was. The FMLN should thus be more receptive to the possibility of a negotiated settlement.

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General of the Communist Party of El Salvador, a minuscule group which has distinguished itself, within the FMLN, both for its close ties to Moscow *and* for its willingness to negotiate.

In short, the principle as applied to the FMLN is far more complicated than in the case of the Salvadoran armed forces. Furthermore, reciprocity may be to a large extent a moot point. By replacing extremists within the armed forces with more moderate officers, the United States would be doing much more than granting a concession to the guerrillas: above all, it would be pursuing its own objectives. As presently constituted, the Salvadoran armed forces are a prime cause of U.S. failure in El Salvador. Moderate officers would help restructure the military in a direction that most Americans, including Administration officials, wish to see, but that cannot be attained through present policy. The concession to the FMLN, in other words, would also be a major gain for the United States.

It might prove tempting, however, to implement the same program of military democratization and socioeconomic reform without power sharing—presenting the FMLN, instead, with a fait accompli. Yet, this course would ultimately prove self-defeating. The war would continue, for unilateral U.S. moves could hardly assuage the FMLN's deep distrust. A program of democratization in the midst of civil war would be extremely difficult to implement, however sensible the proposition might appear in theory. Moreover, the vital international component of the plan would be sacrificed, since third countries would be highly reluctant to join in what they would consider as one more cosmetic effort on the part of the United States. For this same reason, independent Salvadoran figures whose participation is vital would remain aloof, if not outright hostile.

Power sharing, however, can only succeed if the FMLN is willing to join in the negotiations and the subsequent transitional government in good faith. There are no ironclad guarantees that the rebels will be serious negotiating partners; there exist, however, strong indications to that effect, and, above all, countervailing measures built into the power sharing plan. The FMLN has repeatedly stated its willingness to negotiate, arguing that the price of military victory would be a protracted struggle that would not only entail a high cost in human lives, but leave the economy in a shambles.

While skepticism may be the better part of wisdom, this is no reason to refuse even to explore the possibility. If the guerrillas were to break the negotiations or violate their premises, the United States would retain the option of resuming military aid, and the Reagan Administration would be in a far better position, both at home and abroad, to justify support for the Salvadoran regime. If

the FMLN were to resort to force once the GOT had been established, or to disregard the results of the elections, the presence of the international force would place the rebels at an extreme disadvantage. Nor is it inconsequential that the neutral countries that would participate in the power sharing scheme cannot be accused of bias toward the FMLN. Even France and Mexico, which have expressed with particular force their sharp disagreement with Reagan's policy in El Salvador, do not support the rebels. Their mounting disappointment with Sandinista rule would harden their opposition to FMLN attempts to subvert the negotiations or the GOT.

U.S. prestige and credibility abroad are suffering—and the damage will increase as long as the present policy continues. In contrast, through power sharing the United States would demonstrate both the pragmatism necessary to abandon a counterproductive policy and the intellectual flexibility to devise coherent alternatives. Power sharing may also influence developments elsewhere in Central America, but would not require, as a precondition, a general political settlement for the region. A peaceful solution in El Salvador should not be held hostage to a more encompassing settlement which may occur too late, if at all. On the other hand, just as the Salvadoran conflict exacerbates regional tensions, its solution could have positive repercussions throughout the area. In particular, it could help defuse tensions between the United States and Nicaragua. An improved relationship would strengthen the hand of the pragmatic group within the Sandinista leadership, depriving hardliners such as Tomas Borge and Bayardo Arce of the argument that U.S. aggression requires stricter social control at home and closer ties with the Soviet bloc.

By the same token, the end of U.S. "covert" actions against Nicaragua would free Washington from the need to support the military faction of General Alvarez in Honduras. This faction, through widespread corruption and repressive practices, poses an immediate threat to the feeble Honduran democracy and, by furthering a process of radicalization, endangers the long-term political stability there. Finally, there is a distant possibility that the American refusal to sustain the Salvadoran regime any longer might spur Guatemalan officers to support a reformist policy in their own country before it is too late, rather than relying on cosmetic changes and prospects of U.S. assistance, as the current military dictatorship does.

The plan outlined here provides a framework rather than a rigid structure. It allows room for flexibility and modifications—as long as the essence of power sharing is not weakened. It emphasizes the

figure of Majano, but in the end that role might be played by another moderate officer. It stresses the suspension of military aid as an instrument to restructure the armed forces, though there might be flexibility as to the timing. It makes no mention of Cuba, yet a degree of Cuban participation might help allay FMLN suspicions. Other formulas as well could be devised for particular aspects of the plan, but definite contours would only emerge through the process of negotiations.

Power sharing offers a realistic chance of success. Yet it requires a willingness on the part of the United States to take one chance: if the Salvadoran officer corps rejects the U.S. demands, it must be left to its fate. For reasons already noted, this act of defiance would be most unlikely; but should it occur, it must be said that the United States would only be abandoning sooner rather than later a doomed enterprise.

VI

In the final analysis, the virtues of power sharing must be assessed against the alternatives. It holds no attraction for those who believe that current U.S. policy in El Salvador has a fair chance of success. It is addressed to those who have concluded that "staying the course" in El Salvador can slow but not reverse the deterioration of the situation. If this assessment is accurate, then the present policy will eventually confront Congress with a cruel dilemma: a direct military intervention, or military victory by the FMLN in circumstances humiliating for U.S. prestige and credibility, and hardly conducive to an eventual *modus vivendi* with the triumphant guerrillas.

Those who believe that Nicaragua is becoming a second Cuba, and fear that, without U.S. aid, the same fate might befall El Salvador, should remember that the Sandinistas came to power through a total military victory. Power sharing would deprive the FMLN of just such a victory—far more effectively, indeed, than Reagan's present policy can hope to do—and restrain the rebels within effective limits. The period of transition would permit the growth of other political groups and a softening of the polarization between contending military groups. In elections, held under far more dignified circumstances than those of March 1982, the Salvadoran people could at last express their preferences. The Christian Democrats, the political parties of the FDR, and other forces of the moderate left and right could profit from this opportunity, as could the Salvadoran people, at last afforded a realistic hope of democracy and reform.