

WHAT U.S. FOREIGN POLICY FACES IN RURAL EL SALVADOR: AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

BY PHILIPPE BOURGOIS

Peoples are like volcanoes; no one can ignite them. They explode on their own, and Central America . . . [is] . . . volcanic territory.

— Fidel Castro, July 19, 1980.

(Speech given on the first anniversary of the Nicaraguan Revolution.)

Very simply, guerrillas, armed and supported by and through Cuba, are attempting to impose a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship on the people of El Salvador as part of a larger imperialistic plan. If we do not act promptly and decisively in defense of freedom, new Cubas will arise from the ruins of today's conflicts.

— Ronald Reagan, February 25, 1982.

(Speech given to the Organization of American States, Washington, D.C.)

The ideological hegemony of Cold War analysis blinds U.S. foreign-policy makers to the reality they are determined to eradicate. Ever since the Truman administration, foreign-policy rhetoric (and practice) has been redundantly consistent. U.S. leaders are victims of their own propaganda. They categorically assert that all Third World national liberation movements are devoid of genuine, indigenous, popular support.

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Revolutions are automatically treated as plots masterminded—or at least manipulated—by a clique in the Kremlin.

This ideological dogmatism prevents the United States from accurately assessing the strength of popular movements. This was as true for U.S. policy toward China, Vietnam, Iran, and Nicaragua as it is for El Salvador (and Guatemala) today. It is what is forcing Americans to relive Indochinese history in Central America as the Reagan administration pursues to its illogical conclusion the military solution to the civil war in El Salvador that the Carter administration initiated.

For 14 days, November 11–24, 1981, I was forced to witness in excruciatingly gory detail exactly how mistaken State Department analysis of El Salvador is. Trapped with one thousand Salvadoran peasants in the northernmost portion of the Department of Cabañas, I fled with the noncombatant population under heavy aerial bombardment and ground attack from Salvadoran government forces. I saw that the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) is a formidable political-military reality in northern Cabañas precisely for the reasons that might make it appear militarily weak. It is a largely illiterate, barefoot, malnourished mass of mostly unarmed, unhealthy, self-educated peasants who feel they are the chosen people of God in the process of shaping history. Their strength lies in the fact that any outside aid they may or may not be receiving is completely irrelevant to their existence.* Their movement is fully indigenous, ill-supplied, and non-professional. It responds, however, to their needs and ideals because it arises out of them; therein lies its strength.

Guerrilla versus Civilian—A False Dichotomy

When I entered the 30-square-mile FMLN-controlled territory (planning to stay 48 hours) I naively wanted to examine the relationship between the civilian peasant population and the

*In Cabañas I saw no evidence of outside aid to the FMLN. I should qualify my analysis by emphasizing that northern Cabañas is not necessarily a typical FMLN-controlled zone. In fact, it is a relatively marginal region politically, militarily, and economically. My remarks therefore, are not unilaterally applicable to the entire Salvadoran struggle. Furthermore, at the risk of falling into ahistorical idealism or voluntarism, I have limited myself to addressing the realm of ideology and—to a lesser extent—military logistics among the revolutionary peasants. A serious attempt to examine the social, material basis for the struggle or the crucial dynamic of the emerging political structures requires a separate essay.

fighters. It was soon obvious that there is no such thing as a "relationship" between "guerrilla" and noncombatant because everyone is revolutionary. Those whom the North American press calls guerrillas are called *muchachos* or *compañeros* (kids or companions) by the Salvadoran peasants. The fighters are the 18- to 25-year-old men and women who happen to be carrying the guns simply because they are the most agile runners and the sharpest sharpshooters. The 65-year-old barefoot grandmother, however, considers herself as vital to the struggle as her 18-year old grandson or his two-month-old baby girl.

The Military versus the Political—Another False Dichotomy

From a strictly military point of view, this lack of differentiation between civilians and fighters is disastrous because the mobility of the fighters is reduced by their obligation to protect the slower runners, the elderly, the infirm, and mothers carrying children. During the entire 14-day odyssey, therefore, the FMLN had to maintain at all times a ring several miles wide around the civilians to prevent government soldiers from catching up with and killing them. The fighters are unable to go out on sorties and ambushes. Had the noncombatants not been present the fighters, who had the tremendous logistical advantage of growing up in the area, could have run circles around the government troops and inflicted heavy casualties.

The young FMLN fighters know every nook and cranny of the terrain because they began "preparing" for guerrilla warfare as barefoot children, when they chased lizards and rabbits for fun and food. There is no need, therefore, for them to be trained in Nicaragua; many of them do not even know where Cuba is, and may never have heard of the Soviet Union. In fact, probably the only time they ever left their home county was to pick cotton during the harvest season on the plantations in the lowlands.*

*I talked with several young peasants who had picked vegetables or fruit as undocumented workers in the southwestern United States. All of them had been deported. One of them actually managed to save several thousand dollars. He bought a small herd of cattle upon returning to his natal village in Cabañas in 1978. His livestock were massacred by paramilitaries during one of their raids in 1979, prompting him to join the FMLN forces, which at that time were just beginning to organize formally in the region.

Because of their commitment to protecting the civilians, however, the fighters are not able to make full use of their superior command of the terrain. I made the mistake of asking one of the FMLN fighters why the civilian population had not been evacuated to refugee camps or some other neutral region during the calm months prior to the invasion. He looked at me as if I were crazy: "Ah, *compañero!* You do not understand. Without the warmth of the masses we would be a band of militaristic adventurers. We need constantly to be reminded who and what we are fighting for."

Politically it is indispensable for a people's army to maintain organic ties to the noncombatant population. The political, of course, cannot be separated from the military if a popular prolonged war is to be successful. In addition to the political importance of constantly being in the process of constructing the new social order one is fighting for, the combatants also—quite humanly—need the love and support of their family and friends in order to maintain their morale. As one of the senior leaders of the FMLN, Cayetano Carpio, explained in a recent interview: "Weapons are not the only factor in this conflict, . . . a popular war that has been going on for over ten years, pitting the army against the people, and engulfing the whole country." (Boyer 1982: 1)

There is a powerful mystique involved in guerrilla warfare, something the State Department will never be able to admit since it is committed to the notion of conspiracy, so well articulated in all its simplicity by Secretary of State Haig: "First and foremost, let me emphasize . . . that our problem with El Salvador is external intervention in the internal affairs of a sovereign State in the hemisphere—nothing more, nothing less. That is the essential problem we are dealing with." (Cited in White 1982: 19)

Another, more concrete effect of the presence of large numbers of noncombatants* is to motivate the fighters to persevere to the bitter end, because the intent of the government on these military operations is to annihilate all form of life—human, animal, and vegetable—contained within the targeted region. The fighters, therefore, are protecting their grand-

*I estimate ten civilians for every fighter.

parents, siblings, and children from being murdered and possibly tortured and raped by the invading troops. Consequently, a handful of these ragged hungry peasants with tattered sandals and a couple of dozen guns, no matter how rusty, is worth a platoon of heavily armed, fully uniformed draftees fighting under U.S. trained officers. They know exactly what they are fighting for: their own survival and that of their loved ones.

Logistics: Guns, Bread, Butter and Discipline—or Lack Thereof

At first I was shocked by how poorly supplied the FMLN was in Cabañas. Although I suspected the State Department of exaggerating their claim that there was "... a systematic, well-financed, sophisticated effort to impose a communist regime in Central America" (State Department 1981: 217), I had no idea just how wild their fabrication actually was. I was unable to evaluate systematically the arsenal of the FMLN, since I spent my time with the noncombatants and only saw the fighters when they passed through on patrol or to check on the health of one of their family members. I did not, however, see any of the "nearly 800 tons of the most modern weapons and equipment" that the State Department said "key officials of several Communist States" had committed themselves "to supply to the insurgents." There was not even a residue remaining of "the covert delivery to El Salvador of nearly 200 tons of those arms, mostly through Cuba and Nicaragua." (*White Paper* 1981: 1) In short, they were poorly armed.

The paucity of arms in Cabañas is especially significant because the region borders on Honduras. According to the map provided in the State Department's *White Paper* the "primary overland route" is through Honduras. Cabañas therefore, due to its geographic location, should be overflowing with guns. Above all the FMLN fighters in Cabañas had Second World War carbines and G-3 rifles. These are the weapons carried by the government paramilitary organizations with whom they are in most frequent contact, and who are the easiest to ambush. The FMLN also had some M-16 and FAL semiautomatic rifles; the same kind that are carried by the regular government troops. They had nothing large enough, however, to shoot down the Huey helicopters that were strafing us or the Fouga-Magister planes that were bombing us.

Guns and—even more important—ammunition are their limiting factors in combat. I estimate that with unlimited military material in Cabañas, they could have fielded at least twice as many fighters. Guillermo Ungo, president of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), asserted: “We lack weapons, not people.... If the hundreds of tons of arms claimed by Washington had reached us, we’d have an army of 50,000 people....” Such an assertion appeared plausible based on what I saw in Cabañas. (*New York Times* 1982: 8) In fact, occasionally one would see patrols of several young men pass by with only one or two carrying weapons. Presumably the unarmed came along to pick up the gun when one of their companions fell in combat.

The lack of professionalism of the fighters was at times almost worrisome. Once again, however, when understood in the context of a prolonged popular war, this “amateurism” becomes a source and symptom of strength. In a nutshell, the FMLN in Cabañas is an irregular peasant army. Only months ago, many of the fighters were landless laborers on the infertile plots of small landowners who treated them worse than cattle, because indeed they were less “valuable” than the livestock. This area had been characterized by a quasi-feudal system whereby the peasants gave obligatory days of labor (“días de compromiso”) in return for access to eroded plots. All of a sudden these same “peons” found themselves in positions of leadership and discipline.

The hardest aspect of this new-found lifestyle to become accustomed to was giving orders. A Cabañas peasant in the past never told anyone what to do. Any favors or requests were alluded to diplomatically through a complex semiological structure of traditional peasant face-saving devices. I actually saw a peasant, who was pointed out to me as one of the head military figures, stop the patrol he was leading, stare at the ground and mumble: “Ahhh... excuse me compañero Ricardo, would you... ahh... errr... mind doing extra guard duty tonight?” This is the kind of person (according to President Reagan) who is “attempting to impose a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship on the people of El Salvador as part of a larger imperialistic plan.” (Reagan 1982: A14: 6) Of course this particular leader might actually consider himself to be a

Marxist-Leninist (he also might not) but his practice is certainly not "dictatorial" or foreign-inspired.

The fact that an FMLN leader (at least in the Department of Cabañas) was incapable of barking out military orders is an asset to the struggle in the long run. It means that the leadership arises directly out of the local peasant population. The leaders think and act as true peasants. The structures and forms of organization and survival that are forged during the fighting, therefore, respond organically to the necessities and psychology of the local populace. In other words, Reagan could not be more mistaken when he accuses the revolutionary movement of being "not of our hemisphere" and appeals to those who have "turned from their American neighbors and their heritage. Let them return to the traditions and common values of this hemisphere." (Reagan 1982: 14: 4 and 6) Reagan missed the point entirely. The FMLN fighters in Cabañas could not possibly be any more indigenous or any closer to the "traditions and common values" of their communities.

Another major military weakness of peasant armies that nevertheless ensures an integral tie to the traditional community is that they are noisy. They are accompanied by screaming babies and playful children who do not obey orders. Discipline, to put it mildly, is lax. The biggest problem when we were hiding from the government air force and foot patrols during the day was the crying of suckling babies — not something that can be hushed by an order. The breast milk of the mothers was drying up due to lack of food and combat trauma. All we could do was watch the squalling infants slowly dehydrate before our eyes.

The absence of pain killers and the inadequacy of medical supplies was also a serious problem. The moans of pain of the wounded could not be stopped; rags were stuffed in the mouths of those in the worst agony. Any such noises, of course, could have revealed our location to the government foot patrols who were searching for us. In fact, on the first night of the flight when we ran through the lines of encirclement that the government forces had tended around the 30-square-mile region, our position was detected due to the sound of the crying babies which the troops actually fired directly into in the darkness of the night.

The Role of Pain and Death in Political Consciousness

This physical suffering and the unimaginable cruelty of the government troops (imagine firing into the sound of shrieking babies!) only served to make the fighters more determined to protect us. They did not hesitate to take risks or to push themselves beyond normal limits of endurance. One fighter was particularly incensed. His wife had been killed on the first night of the flight and now there was no one left to breast feed — even to a minimal extent — his two-month-old baby girl or to take care of his two-year-old baby boy. He kept coming in from the battle zone to visit his children, tears of anguish in his eyes. If someone like him had not been politically determined to overthrow the Duarte regime prior to the offensive, now he certainly was. Virtually everyone in Cabañas has lost a family member or close friend. The FMLN slogan “Victory or Death!” takes on a new meaning when one has lost loved ones and witnessed so much tragic suffering. The term “genocide” almost becomes understatement rather than hyperbole. One can distinctly feel oneself losing any formerly held fears of death in a crescendo of outrage. Sorrow becomes transformed into concerted action, and personal concerns of well-being pale in comparison with the suffering of an eleven-year-old girl whose infected left foot has to be amputated with anesthesia, or an eight-year-old boy who has to be held down with a rag stuffed in his mouth while mortar shrapnel is removed from his legs. (He died two days later).

This determined outrage was only confirmed to the peasants on the night we re-entered the 30-square-mile region from which we had fled and came upon the naked body of a middle-aged woman. Her clothes had been ripped off and apparently acid had been poured on her skin because it was bubbling off. The body had been left in a prominent position along the path, presumably to terrorize any survivors. The effect of terrorism, however, is the reverse. Given the concrete alternative of fighting back together with an organization they can trust, the peasants become an even more effective and determined fighting force.

When I saw that mutilated body, I could not help thinking of the statements of Haig *et al* on “international terrorism.” The State Department is correct; a great deal of terrorism is

taking place in El Salvador today—but the U.S. taxpayers are financing it.

A State Department official in Washington, D.C. told me that I had to put the horrors I had witnessed in the context of the “cultural history” of El Salvador, which has always been rife with violence and suffering. His implication was that North Americans should not apply the same standards of human rights to El Salvador that they do to their own country. Somehow, the Salvadoran peasants are “used to it.” His “historico-cultural analysis” is reminiscent of General Westmoreland’s statement at the height of the Vietnam war, alleging that one had to “understand the oriental mind”; they do not “perceive death and suffering the way we do.” This logic, aside from being despicably racist, blinds the State Department to the single most radicalizing phenomenon: government repression and terrorism as breeders of armed resistance.

God and Armed Struggle

Given the inhumanity of the paramilitary and government soldiers, the struggle of the peasants against the military becomes a question of common sense. Their sympathy for armed insurrection arose directly as a response to repression initially directed against the church. They explained that approximately four or five years ago priests began entering the region, preaching the new gospel of the “preferential option for the poor.” The message was simple: it is harder for a rich man to go to heaven than it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle; Jesus Christ was poor; he loves the poor; do something to alleviate the suffering inflicted upon you by the rich . . . etc. The government then sent hit squads to kill the priests and those who were organizing in the catechist programs (“delegados de la palabra”). The peasants responded with their hunting rifles and pistols. After a number of years of this incipient armed resistance/defense, they organized formal structures of the FMLN.

Fueled by this deep root in the revitalized Catholic church, there is a strong messianic bent to the philosophy of life and political conceptions held by the revolutionary peasants. They articulate their world view in terms of the Bible (using imagery, above all, from the Old Testament) and the homilies of the late

Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, assassinated in March 1980 while saying mass. In fact one of the refugee camps in Honduras is named after the slain Archbishop, but the Honduran authorities took down the sign-post on the grounds that Romero is a subversive figure.

This profound religiosity is most eloquently expressed in the poems and songs written by the peasants.

I am a poor wanderer
 Fleeing from El Salvador
 Don't know where I come from
 All I know is here I am
 And only God who is always with me
 Knows what I'm headed toward.

Their compositions are systematically punctuated by biblical references. The Salvadoran government troops are referred to as the "Pharaoh's sons," and the Honduran troops who occasionally collaborate in the clean-up operations along the border, are the "Pharaoh's relatives." Many of the *noms de guerre* that the guerrillas assume are taken from the Bible; Moses is the most popular. Perhaps the most poignant of all the poems I collected was written by a 46-year-old peasant called "Hercules" in commemoration of his son, who had recently died in combat. In addition to its religiosity the poem illustrates well the determination and political commitment that can grow out of the tragedy of loss:

Oh you who showed us so clearly
 what the struggle is about
 From heaven you listen
 to our prayers
 Oh my dearest son
 How many nights of prayer
 have you led us through?
 But we are happy
 because you are in heaven
 and your destiny
 was to be a good guerrilla fighter
 Your memory will always remain
 in the heart of your companions
 Revolution or death
 The people armed will triumph

Intellectual/Emotional Metamorphosis of the Peasant

Despite the physical suffering they endure and the grief over lost loved ones the peasants of northern Cabañas have been actualized emotionally and intellectually. They have acquired a new sense of self-worth and dignity, all without losing their traditional humbleness. In a matter of one or two years they graduated from being the most despised creatures on earth (i.e., landless or land-poor laborers, giving obligatory days' worth of labor to overbearing landowners) to becoming the leaders of history: the people the Bible prophesied about. They feel honored to die for their cause because before its advent they had been half dead — and it hurt. The words of the Salvadoran poet Roque Dalton ring true in Cabañas:

Let us unite all of us, the half-dead
 In the name of the murdered
 Let us unite against the murderers
 of all
 Against the murderers of the dead
 and the half-dead
 All of us together have more death
 than they have
 But together all of us have more
 life than they
 The all-powerful union of our half-lives
 of the half-lives of all those born
 born half-dead
 in 1932
 Every day the dead are less docile

 These dead are different than in the old days.
 They ask questions
 It seems to me that they have begun to realize
 that they are the majority. (Dalton 1974: 125)

Ridden with amoebas, unemployment, and alcoholism, the peasants had a great deal more than just their chains to lose. One of the organizers of the local movement, a peasant born and raised in the region, explained to me: "Initially my consciousness was raised through parish work. We used to be macho [*machista*]. We used to put away a lotta drink and cut each other up. But then the Organization showed us the way, and we've channeled that violence for the benefit of the

people." This is a phenomenon that U.S. government foreign policy analysts will never be able to take seriously. If they did, they would lose their jobs or be referred to psychiatrists.

"At the risk of appearing ridiculous. . ." The revolutionary mystique I was exposed to in Cabañas is well summed up by Che Guevara in his statement: "The true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love." (Guevara 1968: 398) By assigning strictly cynical and devious motives to its enemy, the U.S. renders itself incapable of analyzing and combating it effectively. The revolutionary peasants, on the other hand, in character with their idealistic conception of human nature, are guilty of overestimating the humanity of their enemy. For example, on the eleventh day of the flight, our position had once again been detected by the air force and a Huey helicopter was spewing forth a barrage of machine-gun fire. I found myself next to an older man cowering for protection by the side of a tree trunk. He whispered in my ear in the midst of the firing: "Isn't it too bad Reagan's not here? Wouldn't he be sad too if he saw this? Will you tell him about it?" Luckily the bullets from this particular strafing did not hit home.

The Ineffectiveness of U.S. Strategy

Given that the United States is committed to a military solution, is their current strategy the most effective? In principle (scorched earth) yes, in practice no. The Cabañas military operation was called "one of the most successful of the war" by General José Guillermo García, the minister of defense of El Salvador. (United Press International 1981a: 8: 1) He said it was spearheaded by elements of the Atlacatl Battalion, trained by U.S. military personnel. (United Press International 1981b: 7: 1) The American Embassy has been equally unequivocal in its praise for the Cabañas invasion. Carol Torffline, press aide at the embassy in San Salvador has been proudly telling reporters: "All the Salvadoran military's operations in 1981 were failures except for the Cabañas operation which was a big success." *(Personal communication from a North American journalist.) Indeed, in Cabañas the

*I estimate that at least 50 civilians were killed and 50 wounded. The FMLN claims they lost three fighters. Colonel Sigfrido Ochoa who directed the invasion

government troops succeeded in blowing up many women, children and elderly, that is to say, the slow runners and those who did not hit the ground fast enough when a mortar or grenade exploded nearby. The Duarte regime's troops, however, were not able to hold the zone long enough to finish burning the huts and destroying the granaries and bean fields. The FMLN returned to the area as soon as the military withdrew, and set to work reconstructing the ruins. They succeeded in retaking all but one or two of the hamlets they had formerly controlled. There was enough grain hidden to feed the fighters and the sympathizing populace until the next corn harvest.

Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, the leader of the Nationalist Republican Party which obtained 30 percent of the votes in the March 28 elections for the Constituent Assembly, is logically consistent, therefore, in calling for the use of napalm to pacify the peasants. He calmly asserts that it may "justifiably" be necessary to kill 100,000 to 200,000 people to bring "peace" to El Salvador. (Cooper and Lovler, 1982: 119: 1) The current military campaign is not reducing the strength of the FMLN. On the contrary, if anything it strengthens them. Because of the cruel law of survival of the fittest, the population of Cabañas is becoming a more mobile, effective, fighting force with each subsequent invasion of the government forces. Furthermore, through ambush and because of the disorganized retreats of the Salvadoran military, the rebel forces are steadily building up their arsenal of U.S.-supplied weapons. Of course the D'Aubuisson strategy of systematic scorched earth does not represent a feasible alternative because it would lead to the polarization and regionalization of the conflict, radicalizing presently nonrevolutionary sectors in Honduras and possibly even Belize, not to mention Guatemala or Nicaragua. D'Aubuisson may indeed destabilize the dominoes.

Occasionally the State Department will condemn the simplistic military approach and pay lip service to the need for social and economic reform. More often than not, however,

boasted that between 350 to 400 guerrillas were killed out of a force of 1,500. (Christian 1982: 22A) In my estimation there were not more than 100 fighters and 1,000 civilians living in the entire region. The Colonel also assured reporters "... with a steady look from green eyes, that... excesses do not occur under his command. 'We are not permitting any outrage against the civilian population.'" (*Ibid.*)

they fall back, when challenged, on the conspiracy-theory slogans, or wallow in self-contradiction. For example, in his February 26, 1982, address to the Organization of American States, Reagan contradicted an entire section of his speech emphasizing the "economic disaster" of Central America and the Caribbean, by boasting that "the markets of the Americas have already produced the highest standard of living among the advanced as well as the developing countries of the world." (Reagan 1982: 14: 1) In fact, of course, it would be calorically impossible for the standard of living of the peasants of northern Cabañas to fall any lower. Reagan's "magic of the market place" has brought the peasants only malnutrition and humiliation.

Reagan's ideological rigidity and the consequent logical inconsistency of his analysis pale in comparison with the extremist statements of some of his political appointees. For example, Jeane Kirkpatrick, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, has actually condoned (if not praised) in print the violence of the death squads. (Kirkpatrick 1980, cited in Cockburn 1982) In a paper prepared for the American Enterprise Institute, after eulogizing the "political culture of El Salvador, [its] strength, machismo, competition, . . . shrewdness, assertiveness . . . and a certain 'manly' disregard for safety," she cites John Stuart Mill on order, invents her own corollary definition of heroism (i.e., heroes are people who make a special contribution to highly valued goods), and concludes: "Hernández Martínez is such a hero. . . . [He] ruthlessly suppressed the disorders [the 1932 uprising], wiping out all those who participated, hunting down their leaders. It is sometimes said that 30,000 persons lost their lives in this process. The traditional death squads that pursue revolutionary activities and leaders in contemporary El Salvador call themselves Hernández Martínez Brigades, seeking thereby to place themselves in El Salvador's political tradition and communicate their purposes."

U.S. Intelligence

One would think that U.S. foreign-policy brokers would be too intelligent and well-informed to believe their own public statements, but it appears that they do. In any case, whether or not they believe their rhetoric, they act upon it. How is it pos-

sible that the nation with the most sophisticated information-processing technology and with virtually unlimited resources to pour into intelligence gathering has so completely misunderstood the reality of the Salvadoran civil war?

One of the reasons is that the messenger bearing bad news is shot. Policy determines intelligence reporting, not vice versa. This has been a long tradition in the U.S. intelligence community. Perhaps the most notable example is the resignation of Jesse Leaf, chief CIA analyst for Iran. He was berated by his superiors for suggesting that the Shah was a "megalomaniac pipsqueak," sowing the seeds of popular dissidence. His realistic reports were suppressed or toned down before delivery to Washington. (Hersh 1979: 3: 1) The State Department even managed to dismiss the reports submitted to them in 1978 by the Israeli Embassy which argued that the conservative Islamic clergy were the greatest danger to the Shah. (Szulc 1979) As late as August 1978, the CIA was still reporting that "Iran is not a revolutionary or even prerevolutionary situation. Those who are in opposition, both violent and nonviolent, do not have the capability to be more than troublesome." (Cited in Szulc)

It appears that the U.S. government does not want to hear and—more important—is incapable of believing that thousands of unarmed civilians can believe so fervently in an ideal and be so economically desperate that they are capable of walking into the fire of tanks and machine guns. The same was true of Nicaragua. Up until the spring of 1978, the CIA was dutifully reporting that the Sandinistas did not have mass popular support. (Szulc 1979)

The same blinders affect the view of the Salvadoran situation. On December 11, 1981, three senators wrote a letter to the CIA complaining that a briefing given by Constantine Menges, one of the CIA's leading Latin American experts, "evidenced a rhetorical tone and selective use of information that bordered on policy prescription." Senator Tsongas actually walked out of the briefing and told Menges he considered the presentation "an insult." (Associated Press 1981) Apparently even Foreign Service officers oppose the Reagan Administration's military (*cum* elections) strategy. A Foreign Service officer working at the embassy in San Salvador admitted to me

that he and his associates advocated a negotiated rather than a military solution. This internal dissension has not fazed the ideologues in Washington. An anonymous U.S. Embassy official in San Salvador told the *New York Times* recently: "The State Department treats the reporting from here as if the embassy were filled with people feverish from a local virus." (Hoge 1981: E2: 2)

Most likely, if the State Department were to read this paper they would attempt to discredit it as a product of the "worldwide propaganda networks of Cuba, the Soviet Union, and other communist countries." (White Paper 1981: 2) At best they might dismiss the author as a misguided academic who has romanticized terrorism. They would merely be doing their job of reinforcing ideological hegemony: we are good, they are bad. In this manner they dutifully deny the existence of the grave they are conscientiously digging themselves.

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