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El Salvador

The military situation in El Salvador remains relatively stalemated: prospects are for a continued war of attrition, which over time may favor the guerrillas because of continuing economic decline.

- The damage sustained by the Salvadoran Air Force will prevent the military from staging the massive sweep operations that characterized their efforts last year. Instead, they are conducting smaller-scale search and destroy missions to try to keep guerrillas off balance.

- While some guerrilla leaders may entertain hopes for a near-term general offensive to secure a "liberated zone," we believe that shortages of arms and logistical problems would prevent the insurgents from holding on to such a zone.

- Nevertheless, they will continue to attempt to expand present areas of control and disrupt the 28 March election. Current and projected activities of insurgent forces in this regard are designed for psychological as well as military impact, and thus include stepped up attacks on power lines, gas storage facilities, and other infrastructure; raids on military installations, small towns, and outlying neighborhoods of key municipalities; and assassination of public figures.

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We believe that the elections will be carried out fairly and on schedule. Despite continuing differences between the Christian Democrats and the co-governing military, the government has improved its effectiveness and its confidence during the past six months.

- The electoral process continues to gain momentum; seven parties are inscribed and campaigning. The 3-man Central Elections Commission has been revamped along more non-partisan lines; highly respected independent council president Jorge Bustamante remains in place.
- The strongest parties remain the co-governing Christian Democrats and the old official National Conciliation Party (PCN)--these two groups are expected to split the lion's share of the votes. The Christian Democrats have held a slight advantage in popularity and organization, but the conservative PCN appears to be gaining ground.
- 60 legislators from the 14 departments will be elected to form a constituent assembly; their duties will include rewriting the 1962 constitution, setting a date for national presidential elections, and appointing a new provisional government.
- El Salvador's political future will depend to a large extent on the success of the assembly in carrying out these duties and on the international credibility of the results. Failure of the Christian Democrats to maintain their central role probably will ruin chances for the government to win support away from the radical left and thus perpetuate the war.