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El Salvador

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Background: The Salvadoran political system was marked by more than 50 years of domination by a wealthy elite, whose interests were protected by the military. Although there was considerable economic progress from 1945 to 1975, the newly emerging middle class did not receive a corresponding share of political power. Marxist groups advocating violent change had long existed, but their numbers increased rapidly after the failure of a democratic alternative in the 1972 presidential elections when Jose Napoleon Duarte, the apparent winner and leader of the Christian Democratic Party, was denied the presidency and exiled. By the late 1970s, the traditional political structure began to disintegrate under a cycle of escalating violence and counterviolence from leftwing and rightwing terrorists.

On October 15, 1979, a group of junior and middle-grade army officers overthrew the government of General Carlos Humberto Romero and issued a manifesto which:

- Denounced abuses of power by government officials;
- Proclaimed a commitment to fundamental social and economic reforms, including land reform; and
- Called for elections and a transition to a democracy.

In January 1980, Duarte returned from exile to become President of the Revolutionary Junta.

Economic reform: The junta embarked upon the most comprehensive land reform program in Latin America. As of October 1982, the program has benefited more than 370,000 peasants whose heads of household have become the owners of the land they previously worked (an estimated total of 19% of all Salvadoran farmland--including 53% of the land devoted to sugarcane, 13% of the coffee land, and 38% of the cotton land). The wealthy were divested of control of the banks to enable the government to provide credit in support of the land reform, and government marketing boards have been established for major export commodities.

Political reform: The junta met its commitment to initiate a democratic electoral process. The first step was the March 28, 1982 Constituent Assembly elections. More than 80% of eligible Salvadorans turned out in a courageous demonstration of the Salvadoran people's desire to end the violence wracking their country. Over 300 foreign observers and 800 journalists attested to the election's fairness. Because no single party won a majority of the seats in the Constituent Assembly, a Government of National Unity, led by independent Alvaro Magana and including representatives of the three major parties in the Assembly, was formed to govern until presidential elections are held. Roberto D'Aubuisson, leader of the National Republican Alliance (ARENA) which won the second largest number of seats, was elected Speaker of the Constituent Assembly. The Assembly is drafting a new constitution and has set the ground rules and date for presidential elections for March 28, 1984. The soon-to-be-announced Peace

Commission will formulate recommendations to the president on such issues as amnesty for guerrillas and pacification.

Human rights: Long a violent country, El Salvador suffers from a breakdown of the judicial system. Extremist groups of left and right and elements of the security forces continue to commit human rights abuses. The government, however, is attempting to improve the human rights situation: The military has issued a code of conduct for its personnel; well over 1,000 security personnel have been dismissed or disciplined since October 1979, including 300 in the past year; five former National Guard members have been arrested and are being tried in the case of the four American churchwomen; and other current or former security officers have been arrested in other cases. In our training of Salvadoran troops and officers, we stress that the guerrilla war can best be won through respect for the rights of noncombatants. The result of these efforts has been a decline in civilian deaths attributable to political reasons by 60% from 18 months ago.

The guerrillas: Five Marxist guerrilla groups, trained and armed by Cuba, Nicaragua, and other Communist or radical states and dedicated to seizing power by force, were united under Castro's auspices to form the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front. The guerrillas failed in their January 1981 "final offensive" and in their attempt to disrupt the Constituent Assembly elections. Although their civilian allies, the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) which operates out of Mexico, refused invitations to participate in the Constituent Assembly elections, the Salvadoran Government hopes that more moderate elements of the FDR can be persuaded to join in the ongoing political process.

Current situation and prospects: Major progress has been made since 1979 in transforming El Salvador from an authoritarian to a democratic and more just society. The Salvadoran military is improving its ability to contain the guerrillas who, as the elections demonstrate, represent only a small minority. The constructive changes now well underway will require years to complete and institutionalize. Progress is being made on human rights, and problems associated with the land reform have been overcome. The reestablishment of a well-functioning judiciary and the development of confidence necessary for economic investment are critical challenges facing the government.

US policy: The US believes it is necessary to build on the major progress already made in achieving the goals cited in the October 1979 manifesto. The US strongly supports efforts to reach a peaceful, equitable, and durable solution to El Salvador's political and economic problems. US assistance to El Salvador (millions of dollars) is:

	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>	<u>1982</u>	<u>1983 request</u>
Economic aid	58.5	104.5	192.5	164.9
Military aid	6.0	35.5	82.0	61.3

US economic aid is being used to overcome balance-of-payments problems, finance labor-intensive employment in public projects, support the land reform program, and provide help for displaced persons. Our military aid helps the Salvadoran armed forces protect the country's vital infrastructure so that the political, social, and economic reforms can proceed and the Salvadoran people themselves can continue to decide their own future.