

Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Insurgency in El Salvador: Rebels With A Cause

Summary

The insurgency movement of El Salvador has throughout its history struggled against the ever present problem of internal strife. Personal rivalries among the individual leaders of the five guerrilla groups and intense resentment of authority of any kind--a quality central to the rebel personality--have generated serious divisiveness in the movement; but common goals, common political beliefs, common friends, common enemies, and common personal backgrounds have helped hold them together.

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Since cohesiveness in El Salvador's insurgency movement tends to wax or wane with the ability of its leaders to focus their oppositional tendencies upon external targets rather than upon one another, the behavior of the primary external target--currently the government of El Salvador-- plays a significant role in the process. The results of the upcoming elections thus will have important effects on the internal workings of the insurgency groups: a clear victory for a right-wing government headed by Roberto D'Aubuisson unwilling to acknowledge differences within the insurgent movement would go a long way toward eliminating those differences. Conversely, the insurgents would have more difficulty closing ranks against a moderate government flexible enough to recognize and exploit their differences.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Political Psychology Division, Office of Global Issues. It has been coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Comments and questions may be addressed to the Chief of the Division [redacted]

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Military victory for the insurgents--resulting in the collapse of the government of El Salvador--would provide the most serious test of all of the ability of the rebel leaders to hang together. Having devoted their lives to rebelling against the establishment, they would find it very difficult to become the establishment--to become a positive rather than a negative force. In such circumstances, their personal differences would probably intensify, and it would not be surprising to see some of the charismatic revolutionaries drop by the wayside, with the more disciplined party professionals such as can be found in the Communist Party of El Salvador (PCES) and the new leadership of the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) ready to replace them. However, still oppositional by nature, and having eliminated their current enemy, the new leaders of El Salvador would probably direct their energies against a new external focus--the United States--seeking to blame the US for El Salvador's problems and attempting to unify the population.

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Common Origins and Common Beliefs

Almost without exception the leaders of the various groups have a common socioeconomic background. They are of middle and upper middle-class origin. Nearly all of them attended the University of El Salvador; most of them at the same time, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Characteristically they were active during their student days in political movements and their current political beliefs tend to coincide on most major points.

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Finally all of them seem to share a belief in the philosophical proposition that the end justifies the means. This principle has been applied to the execution of members of the opposition, of bystanders and even comrades--perhaps especially comrades.

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Common Friends and Common Enemies

The external factors tending to unite the small groups into a unified whole are likewise compelling. The insurgency groups have the same supporters, the same enemies, and a common operational goal. Their supporters would like nothing better than a closer union among the various groups. For example, the insurgents finally agreed in 1980 to the formation of the FMLN

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(The Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front)-- an umbrella organization that provides the structure for unified action--only at the insistence of the Cubans. Their enemies promote union by their opposition. The operational goal of bringing down the government of El Salvador is shared by all the insurgency groups. [REDACTED]

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#### Who's In Charge?

For the most part, cohesion within the insurgent movement is obstructed by the personal ambition of the small group leaders. In discussing their differences, these leaders talk of procedural disputes; the overt agenda of disagreements tends to focus on strategic issues concerning the conduct of the revolution. But the covert agenda of "who is going to be in charge" is always operative and always a major issue. We believe that each of the group leaders--and many of their subordinates--considers himself uniquely qualified to control the movement and ultimately to control the destiny of El Salvador. We doubt that this sort of tension will be resolved by existing group processes. [REDACTED]

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#### You Can't Take the Rebel Out of Rebellion or Rebellion Out of the Rebel

El Salvador's insurgent leaders are not only rebellious in their politics, but also in their personalities. They did not emerge full-blown from behind corporate desk or even a highly disciplined political organization--with the exception of Shafik Jorge Handal, leader of the PCES--to lead an insurrection against the government. Most of them probably rebelled against their middle-class parents' discipline and values and most participated in organized rebellion in the University. They rebelled and continue to rebel against the established government of El Salvador and most of them, despite their Marxist/Leninist convictions, have rebelled against the restraints imposed by the Communist party of El Salvador as well as the party leadership in Cuba and Moscow. Because rebellion is an integral part of the insurgent leaders' personal identities, they are unwilling to step aside and let others take charge.

#### Schism and Growth

In the decade of the '70s, the trend of the movement was toward disunity, but it was also a period of rapid growth. From various combinations of dissident members of the PCES, student activists, religious dissidents, campesino and labor groups, five separate armed groups came into being. Today these five groups, the FPL (Popular Liberation Forces), the ERP (Peoples Revolutionary Army), the FARN (The Armed Forces of National Resistance), the PRTC (Central American Workers Revolutionary Party) and the FAL (Armed Forces of Liberation), collectively under the direction of the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National

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Liberation Front) form the body of armed opposition to the government of El Salvador.

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Carpio and the FPL

In 1970, one of the party's early heroes, the late Salvador Cayetano Carpio started the divisive trend by leaving the party

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Carpio was of sufficient stature in the party to establish both a precedent and a model for future defectors. Leaving groups with which he disagreed was a pattern throughout his life. What is surprising is that it took so long for the rebel dynamic to begin to be acted out within the ranks of the party itself. Carpio's motivation for leaving the party was clear. He had been Secretary General of the party from 1964 to 1969 when he was unseated by Shafik Jorge Handal. Carpio left the party because he had lost control and because he believed that his tactics and his leadership were critical to the success of the revolution. As a youth he had removed himself from a Catholic seminary, presumably out of disagreement with church policy, and he had been a labor activist when he joined the party in the '40s. (S NF NC OC)

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The guerrilla group that he formed, the FPL, the Popular Liberation Forces, was, until 1983, the most radical and the largest of the guerrilla groups. True to its heritage, however, the FPL itself eventually became plagued with divisiveness and defections.

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Villalobos and the ERP

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In 1972 some youthful members of the party left to join young Christian Democratic Party dissidents, religious activists, and student revolutionaries to form the ERP, the People's Revolutionary Army. Precisely how the leadership evolved in the early years is unknown, but by 1974, the present leader, Joaquin Villalobos Hueso, had become a member of the Executive Directorate and in 1977 he was elected commander in chief of the military forces and Secretary General of the party organization. Like most of the other guerrilla leadership, Villalobos attended the University of El Salvador in the early 1970s and was involved in radical student activities. He was a student of economics. Publicly, Villalobos has advocated terrorism to achieve political goals. He established himself very early as a skilled battlefield tactician with a sophisticated knowledge of weaponry. More recently he has focused his attention upon the acquisition of power in the overall movement, and he is generally considered today to be the most powerful figure in the movement. ERP troops constitute about 35 percent of the total insurgent armed forces.

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The FARN

FARN, the Armed Forces of National Resistance, was spawned by a split within the ERP in 1975, a split that was probably not simply coincidental with Villalobos' rise to power.

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The present leader of FARN, Ferman Cienfuegos, has been described as one of the insurgency moderates, successfully maintaining a dual Marxist/Christian identity.

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He broke with the ERP in 1975 after Dalton's execution.

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Castillo and the PRTC

The PRTC, the Central American Revolutionary Workers Party, was formed by Fabio Castillo Figueroa in Costa Rica in 1976. Structurally the Salvadoran branch forms part of a regional organization with Trotskyite leanings, wedded to the concept of a regional revolution involving, as the name implies, the whole of Central America.

[Redacted] During the ferment of the mid-60s he served as rector of the University of El Salvador, contributing actively to the unrest by bringing radicals into the administration. He also made several attempts to bring Soviet professors into the university but those efforts were blocked by the Salvadoran government. Though numerically weak--they provide only 9 percent of the guerrilla troops--the PRTC is considered an implacable foe of the United States and unpredictably radical.

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The FAL

Finally in 1979, the PCES, encouraged by the success of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and concerned by the prospect of missing out on a similar revolutionary opportunity in El Salvador, spawned its own guerrilla organization, the FAL, the Armed Forces of Liberation. The man who had replaced Carpio as party secretary, Shafik Handal, in a reversal of his opposition to a violent revolution, established his authority over the FAL while

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maintaining leadership of the PCES. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] He has been active in the PCES since 1960 and has established and maintained close ties with the Soviet Union, Cuba and the PLO as well as other communist countries. [REDACTED]

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#### A Delicate Balance - Resistance to Change

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As with any organization with a history, the guerrilla groups, operating collectively since 1980 under the umbrella of the FMLN, have developed mechanisms for the maintenance of the status quo. For example, when a guerrilla leader appears to be surrendering too much of the small group autonomy to the larger system, he is disciplined by his small group comrades. When on the other hand he tries to chart a course completely independent of the larger group, particularly if he does this in a way to raise the spectre of serious discord, he is disciplined by the larger group. It can be inferred from the mortalities within the leadership of the insurgency that a mechanism of choice in preserving the status quo is execution. [REDACTED]

#### Jovel Tries His Wings

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We believe this mechanism was operative in the death of Ernesto Jovel, the leader of FARN. The movement of the FARN away from the larger group (they withdrew from the FMLN in 1980) was reversed by Jovel's "accidental" death. According to a press account, it was first announced by the FARN that Jovel's death was the result of a traffic accident in San Salvador; it was later attributed to his aircraft having fallen into the sea. (It was said that one engine stopped and the other fell off and the plane plunged into the sea.) The later announcement was accompanied, gratuitously, by a denial of disunity in the organization. To the surprise of no one, the new commander of the FARN led it back into the folds of the FMLN. [REDACTED]

#### Dalton Rebels

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In another instance, Joaquin Villalobos, commander of the ERP and probably the most powerful figure in the insurgency movement today, found it necessary to execute Roque Dalton in the interest of group cohesion. Dalton was an uncompromising idealist and a critic of the leadership. [REDACTED]

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#### Carpio Resists Closer Unity

A similar but more complicated dynamic has been unfolding in the FPL. About a year ago Cayetano Carpio found himself faced with serious dissension in his own organization. [REDACTED]

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Smouldering Resentments

Now, a year later, half of the original FPL membership, still adhering to Carpio's hardline philosophy of no negotiations and military victory, however prolonged the war, are operating separately as the MOR (Revolutionary Workers Group). The FMLN has not recognized the legitimacy of this faction, despite its considerable popular support. Still another faction loyal to Carpio's beliefs has remained in the FPL working to change the leadership from within. [REDACTED]

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Negotiations, Soviet Style

A recent meeting between Ambassador Stone and representatives of the insurgency movement provided some direct insight into their dynamics. Those attending the conference as representatives of the movement were Guillermo Ungo and Reuben Zamora of the FDR, Orlando Aguinada, the PCES representative to the FDR, and Jose Mario Lopez Alvarenga, the PRTC representative. [REDACTED]

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The key man was Aguinada. Conspicuously in charge, obviously enjoying the proceedings, Aguinada in his personal and negotiating style appeared to the American observers to come straight out of the Soviet book of instructions. This is in keeping with his personal allegiance to the PCES, the most orthodox Communist group. Ungo, the designated leader of the group, was allowed to present his opening statement, a set piece, and then pushed aside. In his turn, Zamora attempted to convey a sense of his own importance and Lopez, clearly a sick man, said little. But none of them left any doubt as to the fact of Aguinada's leadership. [REDACTED]

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From Ungo's behavior during the conference, American observers inferred a recognition on his part that he had no place in the ultimate scheme of things in El Salvador. On the other hand, Zamora's behavior in trying to upstage Ungo in the eyes of the Americans and to curry favor with Aguinada indicated that he is still hopeful for his political future. Lopez, the PRTC representative, was seriously ill [REDACTED]

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In summary, the composition of the insurgency representation at the meeting was stereotypical: the politically impotent but internationally known and respected patriot up front; a still respected but more flexible colleague close behind him, pushing; the physically broken revolutionary hero presumably representing the colorful and gifted amateurs who were carefully kept at their posts in the field; and the disciplined party hack at the helm.

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Outlook

If ARENA (National Republican Alliance) wins the elections and takes the expected hardline stand against negotiations, what had been Carpio's philosophy of no negotiations with the government under any circumstances could be immediately transformed into established insurgency philosophy without so much as a hint of acknowledgment that anything had changed. By definition, then MOR would no longer be a deviant group and group cohesiveness would be improved. On the other hand, the election of a less authoritarian government would tend to diminish their capacity for collective opposition, freeing up more of their energy for internal strife.

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We believe the internal struggle for power will reach unprecedented heights if and when the insurgents attain their ostensible goal of overthrowing the Salvadoran Government. Some of the charismatic leaders will have to choose between losing their share of control or their lives, with a resultant thinning of their ranks. But even when overt competition for leadership is resolved, the survivor or survivors will still face the serious problem of shifting from an oppositional to a positive mode of behavior, a transition the rebel is characterologically ill-equipped to make. We believe they will consequently rely more and more upon disciplined Party professionals from the PCES and the new leadership of the FPL to run the government. Consistent with their life-long pattern of opposition, the revolutionary leadership, in our judgment, will continue to direct their attention against an external focus, and, having vanquished the current government in El Salvador, in all likelihood the United States will become the major target.

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