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# More U.S. Trouble in El Salvador

The United States is on the verge of repeating its disastrous Iranian and Nicaraguan policies in El Salvador, with results that could be equally catastrophic for U.S. interests in Central America.

The State Department, the Pentagon and the CIA have all urged Congress to rush economic and military aid to the coalition junta that rules the Massachusetts-sized nation—the second junta to take control since a coup toppled President Carlos Humberto Romero Oct. 15.

Yet these same agencies' intelligence experts privately acknowledge that the five-member junta has virtually no popular support and will undoubtedly fall by the end of the year, at the latest.

Propping up the losers, who are nominally in charge of El Salvador, will put the United States in a no-win position if the intelligence experts' predictions come true and the junta collapses. Armed revolt almost surely will break out, with leftist rebels encouraged by Cuba and the Soviets, who could conceivably gain another toehold near Mexican oil fields. The United States will be seen once more as the bulwark of an unpopular regime.

The basic trouble, sources told my associates Bob Sherman and Peter Grant, is the lack of popular support for the military-moderate junta. Its failure to control events has been demonstrated by continuing bloodshed—kidnapings, street violence and random acts of terrorism.

The one way the junta could survive, according to the experts, would be to effect land reform, disband the hated secret police, guarantee political liberty

and curb the inordinate power of the army and the 14-family oligarchy that has exploited El Salvador for generations. But this the junta cannot do, analysts say.

Despite repeated pledges, as recently as last week, to enact reform measures, the junta is by its very makeup incapable of carrying through on its pledges, U.S. experts say. The coalition, with two members from the military, is "really unnatural," one source said, like a coalition between the Yippies and John Birch Society in this country.

The basic economic and political power in El Salvador in this century has rested with 14 extremely wealthy families, who have kept their wealth and position by an unholy alliance with the military. And this power base has remained as solid as ever since the October ouster of the latest in a long line of military dictators.

It might seem, with the lessons of Iran and Nicaragua at hand, that U.S. policymakers would use the proposed millions in economic and military aid as a lever with which to pry some real reforms out of the rulers of El Salvador.

It would, for example, be in line with President Carter's vocal support of human rights to demand that, in return for U.S. aid, the junta live up to its promise of a general amnesty for political prisoners.

The United States might insist that the junta broaden its base to include civilian elements from the left. This would give it a slight chance for survival, according to spokesmen for the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), a Washington-based human

rights organization.

Instead, our policy advisers are urging Congress to rush \$49.5 million in aid to the junta without exacting any conditions that would make the aid worthwhile.

The predictable result is that violence will continue in the unhappy nation. Intelligence officials estimate that kidnaping is already a \$20-million-a-year industry in El Salvador. Leftist elements, cut out of participation in the junta's regime, are believed to be preparing for insurrection—with Cuban help.

By using our aid package as leverage for reform, there is an admittedly slim chance that a peaceful solution may be achieved in El Salvador. By pouring money down the junta rathole with no concessions, there's no chance at all.