THE ELITE POLITICS OF STATE TERRORISM IN EL SALVADOR

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that to fully understand violence by states against their civilian populations, we need to unpack the state, examining the interests of different levels and agencies of the state in carrying out violence. It also demonstrates that, given certain economic, political, and institutional conditions, violence can be the currency of relations between the state and civilian economic elites -- a tool of legitimation, competition, and influence. This approach helps refine our understanding of how such factors as mass opposition, interests of economic elites, international pressures, and ideology are actually transmitted, through elite-level political practices and institutions, to affect the timing, targeting, and intensity of state violence.

This argument is based on a case study of how intra-elite politics affected the dynamics of state violence in El Salvador. The Salvadoran military replaced the economic elites as governors of the country in 1932 and retained control until 1982. Military rule was based on an explicit "protection contract" under which the military provided violent repression of the poor in exchange for the privilege of state power. This relationship was often conflictual: military leaders intermittently attempted to gain a mass constituency through reforms which tended to antagonize the economic elite. When challenged by civilian elites on the question of reforms, military regimes resorted to conspicuous and arbitrary repression to revalidate their legitimacy in the eyes of economic elites.

The choice between repressive and accommodative strategies of rule generated conflict within the military, partly along generational lines, partly between the regular Army and specialized security agencies that were more closely tied to civilian elites. This internal conflict led to a particularly severe episode of state violence after October 1979, when reformist officers overthrew a repressive government. State-led reformism triggered an intense effort by civilian economic elites, in alliance with hardline elements of the military, to reimpose a repressive formula of military
rule. The elite-level dispute over reforms and repression was resolved in favor of greater violence. Violence by hardline elements of the state, goaded onward by the civilian far-right, forced the left towards a military strategy, which in turn helped conservative senior officers to rebuild military unity around a policy of violent confrontation. The reformist project proved to be politically, institutionally, and ideologically vulnerable to this campaign of violence.

U.S. foreign policy contributed to the intensity of rightist mobilization and failed to effectively hold the Salvadoran state accountable for human rights violations. U.S. pressures for land reform and inclusion of reformist civilians reinforced the civilian right's ideologically-driven sense of persecution, intensifying their efforts to promote an all-out campaign of state violence. U.S. policy makers emphasized preservation of the institutional unity of the armed forces and proved willing to overlook state violence as long as other U.S. political objectives were achieved.

This thesis is based upon extensive interviews with Salvadoran and U.S. political participants and observers, supplemented by documentary research using U.S. and Salvadoran government materials, journalistic accounts, human rights documentation, and publications of Salvadoran political organizations and parties.

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CHAPTER ONE

EXPLAINING STATE TERRORISM IN EL SALVADOR:
OVERVIEW OF AN ELITE POLITICS APPROACH

Introduction

Since roughly June of 1980, the tiny Central American
country of El Salvador has been locked in a civil war
between a determined insurgency and a government backed by
the United States. A common estimate is that over 70,000
people have died in the struggle, most of them civilians,
and roughly a fifth of the population of five million is
either displaced within the country or living in exile. As
of this writing, negotiations are continuing between the
Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerrilla
organization and the government of El Salvador, giving some
hope that in the next few years the two sides will find a
political means of ending hostilities.

Unless there is a dramatic change in the expectations
or power of the FMLN and its supporters, such a solution
will most likely require a fundamental change in the
political role of the Armed Forces and their relationship
to civilian society -- both elite and popular. A key
characteristic of the Salvadoran armed forces has been
their extensive involvement in violence against non-
combatant civilians. This role has been thoroughly
documented by a variety of human rights organizations, is
readily acknowledged by Salvadoran military officers in off-record interviews, and is beyond reasonable dispute.\footnote{Tutela Legal del Arzobispado, Socorro Jurídico Cristiano, and the non-governmental Comisión de Derechos Humanos de El Salvador (El Salvador Human Rights Commission), Amnesty International, and the Human Rights Watch Committee (formerly Americas Watch) have published periodic assessments of human rights conditions in the country.} The very intense violence of the Carlos Romero government from July 1977 through October of 1979 played an important role in mobilizing and radicalizing the popular organizations of the late 1970s. A brief effort in late 1979 by reformist elements in the military to ameliorate social and political conflicts was undercut by a wave of state violence by more hardline elements. Eventually, participation in violence spread from the specialized security forces to the regular Army. The combination of the failure of reformism and the increase in state violence after October 15, 1979 led directly to the formation of a powerful revolutionary movement and to civil war.

In the present context, the potential for a renewal of massive state violence against civilians remains one of the primary threats to any process of negotiation, demilitarization, and democratization in El Salvador. The past involvement of virtually all major units of the armed forces in illegal violence against civilians greatly complicates negotiations regarding the disposition of the military. One positive point is that even representatives
of the FMLN acknowledge that there is a "progressive, pro-
civilian tendency in the army." (Villalobos 1991, 3) The
problem is that this reformist current in the military has
not been able to assert itself in any enduring fashion
because its initiatives, in the past, have been undercut by
the violence of more conservative elements of the armed
forces.

Conspicuous violence against popular opponents of the
status quo has historically been one of the foundations
upon which the Salvadoran military based its political
power and privileges. Sectors of the military, most
notably the security forces such as the National Guard and
Treasury Police, have had a close, mercenary relationship
with civilian economic elites, providing protection,
coercive muscle, and terrorism in exchange for financial,
social and political privileges. The relatively autonomous
capacity of these units to carry out violence against the
civilian population has enabled them to shape the political
landscape in such a way as to increase the need for their
services. The supply of state violence radicalizes
opposition, which in turn increases the demand from
civilian elites for further state violence and makes more
reform-minded sectors of the military more likely to
tolerate and even participate in violence. While it is
impossible to prove that hardline sectors of the military
have intentionally used violence in such an instrumental
way, the historical account presented below shows clearly that state violence had the effect of intensifying opposition, pushing regime opponents towards more violent approaches, and blocking efforts by reformist elements of the state to gain a degree of popular legitimacy.

Existing literature correctly identifies most of the major factors that made state violence likely in El Salvador. Severe inequalities in the distribution of land and income, national dependence on a coffee monoculture whose profitability is particularly sensitive to wage rates, the emergence of organized mass protest and guerrilla violence in the late 1970s, strong anti-communist ideology among civilian elites and the military officer corps, and a history of effective use of repression by the state all made severe state violence more likely in El Salvador than in many other countries. What is missing, however, is a specific account of how these general factors were translated, through actual state institutions and their relationships to various sectors of civilian society, into acts of violence against civilians.

This thesis unpacks the state in an effort to show how these underlying factors play themselves out through factional competition within the state and through the relationships between competing state sectors and their
supporters and enemies in civil society.\textsuperscript{2} The intensity of conflict between leading sectors of the military and civilian elites, the strength of reformist factional challenges to conservative military leaders, and the development -- or perceived development -- of ties between sectors of the military and popular opposition groups all contribute to the intensity, timing, and targeting of state violence. Intermittent efforts at reform, or even just the moderation of state violence, trigger pressures from some sectors for greater violence.

The focus on intra-elite politics reveals three important findings. First, contrary to the assumptions of most writings on state violence, the question of how much state violence should be used turns out to be one of the central policy disputes within the state and between state and non-state elites. As already pointed out, violence served historically to legitimize the power and privileges of the Salvadoran military in the eyes of economic elites. As a result, military regimes repeatedly resorted to increased repression whenever their credibility with civilian elites began to slip. Members of the officer corps did not consistently support violent policies. Reform-minded junior officers repeatedly rebelled against their superiors

\textsuperscript{2} Jonathan Fox suggested the phrase "unpacking the state" to describe an approach which specifies the different patterns of state-society interaction across the state, and which treats intra-state conflict as both cause and effect of state-society relations.
in opposition to military rule and the repression required to maintain it. Conversely, when top commanders proved reluctant to use violence, hardline elements of the military, responding to pressure from civilian economic elites, often acted autonomously to impose a more barbarous approach to dealing with popular mobilization.

A second finding is that there is a tendency for this dispute to be decided in favor of greater violence: the use of state violence tends to reinforce itself at the expense of more reformist types of state policy. During the period following the reformist coup in October 1979, increased state violence blocked the formation of ties between reformist military officers and a base of popular support. During this same period, persistent, accelerating state violence exposed the lack of authority of civilian partners of the military in government and forced the left towards a military strategy. The militarization of the conflict in turn helped conservative senior officers to suppress reformist tendencies within the military, rebuilding military corporate unity around a policy of violent confrontation with the left.

A third finding is that international efforts to influence the human rights situation in El Salvador were sometimes counterproductive because of the way they interacted with the elite politics of violence. For example, the Carter administration succeeded in pressuring the
Romero administration to moderate its human rights abuses, but this success generated a violent, rightist backlash which weaker U.S. human rights policy after the 1979 coup failed to contain. The success of the U.S. in pressuring the Salvadoran military to bring the Christian Democratic Party into government and carry out a major land reform in early 1980 also produced a rightist backlash that greatly increased state violence against civilians. At the same time, because U.S. policy confused regime change with human rights, no sanctions were imposed against the Salvadoran Revolutionary Governing Junta during most of the crucial year of 1980, despite the fact that state violence became so intense as to leave the leftist opposition no alternative but civil war.

**Theoretical Background**

During most of the 1950s and 1960s, political development literature tended to see state violence as an unproblematic phenomenon -- the inevitable result of excessive pressures placed upon legitimate governments by the modernization process. The Weberian definition of the state was turned so that states, and the force they chose to use, were assumed to be legitimate. (McCamant, 1984) Subsequently a small academic literature developed that acknowledged the existence of state violence as a problem. This literature tends to assume that states use violence
against civilians as a last resort in response to mass opposition. The state is treated as a unitary actor and the complex relations among competing groups within the state, or between state and civilian elites, are not generally considered relevant. Douglas Hibbs (1973) makes a classic statement of this view: "in nations where the burdens generated by social mobilization outrun the capabilities of sociopolitical institutions, political elites tend to resort to repression as an alternative means of social control."

This opposition/reaction model, sensible as it seems, doesn't account very well for some instances of state violence. State violence does not always coincide with opposition activities, nor do states facing comparable threats necessarily use comparable kinds or levels of violence in response. In Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, for instance, state violence at several points increased after the successful suppression of armed or mass opposition. Argentina's violence worsened during 1976 and 1977, and remained high during 1978, even though the guerrillas were virtually eliminated by the end of 1975. (Pion-Berlin 1989, 4-5) As it proceeded, violence came to be directed against a broad cross-section of society, far beyond the domain of active opponents of the regime. In Brazil, state violence, particularly torture, escalated following the military's declaration of the Fifth Institutional Act in
1968. The Act was promulgated in a context of expanding popular mobilization, but it preceded any significant guerrilla activity. The guerrilla movement, once it developed, was quickly suppressed, yet state violence rose again in 1973-74, in the absence of a fresh opposition threat. (Stepan 1988, 40-41) In Uruguay, the crescendo of repression in Uruguay after the rapid eradication of the Tupamaros by the government "led one to wonder whether [the government's repressive machine] had not become an end in itself." (Rouquié 1987, 255-6)

In Colombia, a dramatic increase in state violence against civilians after 1984 ironically coincided with the arrangement of a cease-fire between the government and guerrilla groups. This outcome doesn't make much sense within an opposition/reaction framework. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) had been active for over twenty years, augmented since the late 1960s and early 1970s by several other guerrilla groups. Disappearances and assassinations attributable to the military have not been unfamiliar in Colombia, but increased dramatically in 1984 after the government of Belisario Betancur arranged a cease-fire and allowed representatives of the guerrilla groups to participate openly in elections. Persons associated with the left-wing political coalition Patriotic Union (UP) have been particularly targeted, along with

While it is intuitively reasonable to assume that state violence is a response to extra-institutional opposition, and while many historical cases fit such a model, the examples just mentioned indicate that in at least some cases, other factors play an important role. Economic and class structures are among the factors that probably contribute to state violence. Buchanan (1989) argues that a power shift within the capitalist class in favor of agricultural capital lead to more repression in the case of Argentina. Buchanan claims that the economic project of agrarian capital required more violence than that of industrial and commercial sectors. At a point when the industrial sector was in disarray, agrarian elites asserted themselves, setting in motion a process of "re-pastoralization" that required intense violence to destroy the labor movement.

Other economics-based arguments are broader, arguing that the state carries out policies, including repression, as needed to ensure the continued reproduction of the capitalist system. Guidos Véjar (1986) argues that the military took power and carried out a campaign of state terror in El Salvador in the 1930s because the oligarchy was divided and unable to maintain the degree of order needed for continued functioning of capitalist agriculture.
O'Donnell (1979), combines conventional and structural approaches. He focuses on both the degree of mass opposition threat to the existing system prior to the installation of Bureaucratic-Authoritarian regimes and on a specific set of structural economic factors in late-industrializing countries which make repression essential to restore national economic growth, stability and security.

Economic causation of state violence could be construed more broadly still. The general phenomenon of economic dependence distorts political systems and makes states less capable of responding to social pressures with policies other than violence. Mason and Krane (1989, 176-7) argue that dependent states simply lack alternatives:

> the conditions of structural dependence characterizing these regimes leaves them without the institutional machinery, economic resources, or political will to address opposition challenges through more accommodative programs of reform. Thus, escalating repression is perpetrated not because it has a high probability of success but because the weakness of the state precludes its resort to less violent alternatives.

This explanation also has some appeal, but not all dependent nations experience indiscriminate state violence. Even such a clearly dependent country as Honduras, which has an active popular movement and a highly organized labor force, manages to avoid the kind of wholesale state violence seen in other countries such as Guatemala and El Salvador. In El Salvador, more accommodative policies were available; rather, they were actively and successfully sup-
pressed by conservative elites both inside the state and outside of it. Elements of the state did in fact attempt a reformist program following the October 1979 coup, but their program was undercut by a systematic campaign of terror by hardline elements of the armed forces.

These economic explanations appear to provide a means of accounting for episodes of state violence that are more prolonged, more intensive, and more widely targeted than would be required to merely suppress opposition activity. They help to explain cases for which conventional opposition/reaction theory is clearly insufficient. A drawback of most economic accounts of state violence, however, is that they tend to assume, rather than demonstrate, that states provide for the needs of economic elites. This is empirically a rather problematic assumption. The Argentine and Chilean experiences of violent authoritarian rule suggest that states can depart significantly from the interests of dominant economic elites and may even make decisions damaging to the capitalist economy as a whole. (Pion-Berlin 1989, 187-198) Economic approaches leave unexplained exactly what mechanism translates the interests of civilian elites into repression by the state. The interests of elites might call for state violence, but what compels the state to actually do violence when other paths may be available? Without a detailed examination of civil/state relations regarding the
use of violence, it is not obvious, on the basis of economic reasons alone, how the interests of the state are served by waging war on a broad cross-section of the citizenry.

States may also use disproportionate violence against weak or non-existent opposition because of ideological distortions in how state elites perceive their political environment. George Lopez (1986) and David Pion-Berlin (1989) show how particular economic and political belief systems or doctrines provide the intellectual basis for state violence, even in the absence of continued opposition mobilization or violence. By focusing on the logic and perceptions of state actors, one can explain why state violence need not coincide with or be in any way proportionate to opposition violence, mass mobilization, or the immediate economic needs of the top economic classes. Such an approach adds a degree of flexibility that conventional and economics-based arguments lack.

The mix of ideological orientations within a given state is likely to change over time, however. While it is possible to demonstrate that certain aspects of national security doctrine or orthodox economic ideology can provide a rationale for state terror, it proves difficult for ideology-based arguments to explain why these ideas were acted upon at some times and not at others. There is also the question of why ideas that are common currency among
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militaries and financial elites throughout Latin America lead to state terrorism in some countries and not in others. It is one thing to show how a given package of ideas may logically call for violence; it is another to account for how these, as opposed to alternative projects or ideas, come to dominate decision making. Pion-Berlin (1989) examines how certain ideas, namely, monetarist economic doctrine, came to dominate among state elites, leading to increased use of violence. According to Pion-Berlin, economic, political and institutional factors account for why monetarist ideas got acted upon when they did, and as widely as they did, within the Argentine and Peruvian military states. Once adopted, these ideas tended to linger, resulting in persistent application of failed and even counterproductive policies.

The Importance of Intra-state Politics

José García (1978) observes that almost all Latin American militaries are deeply divided along factional lines based on differences in generation or rank, institutional specializations of different services, education, experiences of combat, etc. It seems obvious that officers within different sub-institutions within a military state, as well as officers of different ranks and different professional experiences, are likely to be attracted to different sorts of ideas. They are also likely to have
differing concrete interests and linkages to elements of civil society. Under such circumstances, any approach to explaining state violence, whether centered on the behavior of opposition, the interests of dominant economic groups, the requirements of the economy as a whole, or the ideological formation of state leadership, will be more accurate if it accounts for how these factors interact with the internal diversity of state institutions. The utility of existing approaches will be enhanced, in other words, by unpacking the state and examining how the factors which these approaches identify as important play themselves out through factional competition within the state and through the relationships between competing state sectors and their supporters and enemies in civil society.

One important intra-state variable is the breadth of involvement of different agencies in repression and the distribution of competing ideas or political affiliations within the military affect patterns of violence. To give just one comparative example, in Argentina during the post-1976 period, personnel from virtually all agencies of the military and police, grouped in multi-agency task forces, were involved in capturing civilians, many of whom were tortured and killed; in Brazil from the mid-1960s onward, such repressive activities developed largely within specialized agencies. This difference in the institutional base of repression was associated with marked differences
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in actual patterns of violence: the Argentine state killed thousands of civilians from broad sectors of society while the Brazilian state killed much less frequently and more selectively, making greater use instead of political imprisonment and torture. El Salvador, between the late 1970s and 1980, experienced a transition from the Brazilian pattern to the Argentine, with an associated increase in the intensity and breadth of violence.

Another intra-state variable is the degree of autonomy enjoyed by repressive agencies. In some cases, state violence is controlled or at least sanctioned by central command authorities; in others, specialized agencies exercise considerable autonomy in deciding when and how to use violence against civilians. When the high command sanctions violence, those officers and agencies involved in violence have authority to expand the personnel base for their operations. In the process, they secure political protection for themselves by forcing participation in violence by officers and recruits who are "too clean," creating a sort of "'blood pact' of repression." (Comisión Nacional 1984, 243-4; Duhalde 1983, 95; Pion-Berlin 1989, 103) Coerced participation by other officers and soldiers in violence can help break up potential foci of opposition within the military to a policy of state terrorism. When senior command officials do not support the use of repressive violence, hardline agencies, if sufficiently autono-
mous, can use increased violence as a means of resisting high command policies with which they disagree. As an example, Stepan (1988, 40-1) notes that Brazilian intelligence agencies intensified the use of torture and "disappearances" in an effort to veto the political relaxation being promoted by the high command.

The Case of El Salvador

El Salvador has experienced two major episodes of state terrorism. The first came in 1932 following a series of events that included an election, a military coup, and a peasant rebellion. Elite units within the military carried out a massacre of between 8,000 and 30,000 people, mostly in two rural departments and in the major towns. The second episode began in roughly 1977 and peaked in 1981, with violence continuing at very high levels until tapering off at the beginning of 1984. The country remains locked in a civil war in which both sides are known to kill civilians, both accidentally and otherwise. The human rights office Socorro Juridico Cristiano (1984) reports that in 1978 government forces and death squads killed 687 civilians; in 1979, this rate more than doubled to 1,792. During 1980, which was a crucial turning point, government forces murdered at least 11,895 people. The peak year was 1981, with over 16,000 civilians killed. During 1982 and 1983, government forces killed over five thousand civilians
per year. From 1984 onward, government killing decreased fairly steadily, though disappearances began to increase again in 1988, and a number of indiscriminate killings by government forces took place during and after the November 1989 FMLN offensive. In total, almost 50,000 civilians have been killed by government forces and their allies since 1978.3

The intensity of the Salvadoran violence was augmented by the gruesomeness of many of the acts committed. Disfigurement was common, especially the use of acid to "erase" the face of victims. It was common practice during the early 1980s to decapitate, dismember, and/or sexually mutilate victim's bodies. Death squads operating in Santa Ana beheaded victims at a rate that peaked at over 30 per week in the one department alone.4 This went on for several years and appeared, because of the precision of the cuts, to involve the use of a meat packing plant.

3 Many sources cite a figure of 70,000 without stating exactly how this figure is arrived at. It may well be close to the truth, since the human rights organizations have faced considerable difficulty in documenting and counting deaths in rural areas. The cases for which documentation exists number closer to 50,000 for the period 1978-1990.

4 U.S. Department of State cable SS 6390, 26 August, 1981, U.S. Embassy San Salvador. "Violence Week in Review August 15-22." (In National Security Archive collection (1989b). While 34 in one week was the highest rate I found for Santa Ana, large numbers of decapitations were routine in that department.
There were a number of prominent incidents in which the state used deadly force against non-violent demonstrators. One of the first cases of this took place on July 30, 1975 when government forces killed at least 37 students by firing on a protest march. On the 28th of February, 1977, government forces opened fire on an all-night vigil being held by supporters of opposition presidential candidate Colonel Ernesto Claramount to protest electoral fraud. About 200 people were killed. The armed forces had to use trucks to remove the bodies open fire hydrants to wash away the blood before dawn. (McClintock 1985, 183-4) Such treatment of protest marches became routine, culminating in the machine-gunning of a massive march in San Salvador on January 22, 1980, in which 49 died and hundreds were injured. (Montgomery 1982, 129) During 1980, there were numerous incidents in which building occupations and other unarmed protest actions were broken up by force, often in violation of specific orders from civilian authorities. The use of violence against demonstrators continues, though it is usually more subtle and selective.^5

^5 The current approach was illustrated by a rally I attended in San Salvador on October 12, 1989, at which two demonstrators on the fringes of the crowd were shot by government agents in plain clothes. In both cases, the triggermen escaped, but agents working with them were captured by rally organizers, questioned, and released. Both were carrying Air Force identification cards. This level of violence seldom attracts international attention —only CBS Radio had a reporter at the rally — but is sufficient to intimidate the demonstrators.
The perceived intensity of violence has also been increased by some of the target chosen by state agencies. The intensification of violence during 1977 began with widely publicized killings of Roman Catholic priests and lay catechists, followed by an ultimatum from hardline elements of the military for all Jesuit priests in the country. Several more priests were killed during the late 1970s and in March 1980, the Archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero, was assassinated, most likely by a National Police agent. (See Chapter 6) In December 1980, four U.S. churchwomen were raped and killed. In November 1989, elite Army troops assassinated six Jesuit priests, their cook, and her daughter, at their residence at the Central American University. Because of the high regard in which Church figures, especially these particular individuals, were held by the Salvadoran population, their assassinations sent strong signals that no one in the society could consider themselves exempt from the violence of the state.

In per capita terms, Salvadoran state terror has been among the most severe in the hemisphere. The 42,171 killed by government forces during the six peak years of violence from 1978 through 1983 (Socorro Jurídico, 1984) were almost one percent of the population. The impact of the violence is greater than this 1% figure would suggest because deaths were concentrated among young people, especially men, a fact that makes it likely that a given family has ex-
experienced a political killing or knows another family that has. In addition to the confirmed deaths, thousands more were "disappeared." The only Latin American case that may match El Salvador in the number of state murders per capita over the past two decades is Guatemala, where death squads and rural counterinsurgency sweeps there have killed tens of thousands since the late 1970s. The numbers for Guatemala are difficult to estimate because no regular human rights monitoring has been possible within the country, but many observers believe the rural killing by the Guatemalan armed forces reached genocidal proportions in some regions. One frequently cited estimate is 100,000 killed and 38,000 disappeared from 1965 through 1985.

To put the Central American violence in comparative context, secret cells of the Argentine military "disappeared" at least 8,960 people during the "dirty war" from 1976 through 1979. Some estimates run as high as 20,000 killed, out of a population of 28.2 million. (Sloan 1984:87) Even using the high-end estimates of killings,

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6 Though the 1980s, the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission operated from Mexico City, obtaining its information through clandestine channels. The most active human rights group within the country, the Mutual Support Group (GAM), documents cases of disappearances but is not equipped for and does not attempt a comprehensive compilation of human rights cases.

7 Simon (1987, 14) cites this estimate from the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The estimate was calculated on the basis of indicators such as the number of orphans, the numbers of cadavers passing through morgues, etc.
the Argentine dirty war was thus less than one tenth as violent in per capita terms as the 1978-1983 period in El Salvador. According to an investigative commission, the military regime of Augusto Pinochet in Chile killed or disappeared 2,115 people. (Comisión de Verdad y Reconciliación 1991) Earlier estimates were much higher. The Pinochet government also arrested an estimated 60,000 people in the process of taking and consolidating power beginning in September 1973, this from a population of around 10 million. (Sloan 1984:86) Chilean state violence was thus roughly one one-hundredth as intense in per capita terms as that of El Salvador. The Brazilian military used deadly force far less than the Argentines or the Chileans, disappearing over a hundred people and imprisoning and torturing thousands for political reasons beginning in the late 1960s. In Uruguay, government forces arrested 70,000 people between 1973 and 1977 in a crackdown that began as an effort to combat the Tupamaro guerrillas. (Remmer and Merkx 1983:13) This amounts to one out of every forty people, and torture of those imprisoned was virtually routine. However, the number killed by the Uruguayan government was low, compared to the other cases, estimated by Amnesty International (1979, 5, 10) to be two hundred for the period 1973-1979. Peru and Colombia are both currently experiencing high levels of political violence of a variety of kinds, a portion of which is state terrorism
against suspected regime opponents. The violence in Peru
is now approaching the intensities seen in El Salvador in
the early 1980s.

In all of these cases, state violence created profound
changes in patterns of political participation, cultural
and intellectual expression, and in the ability of labor to
bargain collectively. It also created large-scale refugee
flows. The timing and intensity of state violence were
extremely important to political outcomes in El Salvador.
First of all, the tremendous escalation of repression that
took place during the 14 months following the October coup
transformed a largely non-military, mass-based opposition
movement into a guerrilla organization that came very close
to militarily defeating the government during 1983. Until
November of 1980, sectors of the popular opposition were
still attempting to promote major social and political
reforms by non-military means, mainly mass demonstrations,
strikes, building and land occupations, and proposals for a
negotiated "political" solution. Government violence
contributed to choices of increasing numbers of people to
take up armed struggle.

The mass movement in El Salvador underwent during 1979
and 1980 a process known in the country as "pistolización,"
in which increased government attacks led demonstrators to
arm themselves with a collection of knives, pistols, and
sundry rifles and shotguns. This armament raised the
stake for the security forces in attacking demonstrations, but also eroded the distinction between guerrillas and members of popular organizations, a distinction that the Salvadoran security forces were generally loathe to respect in the first place. People who carried pistols in demonstrations were usually not integrated into guerrilla organizations, although the guerrilla groups viewed such individuals as having taken an additional step in radicalization and frequently tried to recruit from among them.

Mason and Krane (1989) explain this shift towards armament on rational choice grounds. They point out that "indiscriminately targeted repressive violence" creates conditions that make it rational for poor people to take arms. As state violence becomes more intense and more random, poor peasants and urban-dwellers are increasingly likely to be killed regardless of what they do, making it increasingly compelling to take arms, even without taking into account emotional factors such as the desire for revenge.\(^8\)

Gradually, during the course of 1980, there was a shift of resources and personnel toward the guerrilla organizations, at the expense of the non-guerrilla popular

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\(^8\) Greater intensity and randomness tend to go hand in hand, largely because intensity is achieved at the expense of good intelligence. As more units and individuals become involved in repressive activity, targeting tends to be based increasingly on hunches, crude profiles of probable subversives, and geographic proximity to suspected guerrilla activity.
organizations that made up the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR). Individuals who had been openly involved in the popular organizations either fled the country or joined the guerrilla movement, since open organizing against the government became increasingly suicidal and, apparently, pointless. This process of militarization of the left became irreversible with the assassination of six key leaders of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), and culminated ultimately in the January 1981 guerrilla "final offensive."

The persecution of opposition activists, combined with wholesale massacres of people in rural areas in which the guerrillas operated, displaced over 500,000 people internally and drove at least 750,000 people, about 15% of the population, into diaspora in neighboring countries, Mexico, and the United States by 1984. (Montes 1985, 2; Weiss Fagen 1984, 38) One political consequence of this flight was the removal from the country of people who were opposed to the current state of affairs but reluctant to take arms, a group who constituted the potential core of support for a political, negotiated settlement of the crisis. The 15% of the population abroad is effectively disenfranchised because Salvadoran electoral law does not permit absentee voting. Ironically, this disenfranchised minority has become essential to the economic survival of the country through its economic remittances, which provide a sig-
significant proportion of the country's foreign exchange earnings. Many families have become dependent upon the money sent by emigrants. Thus an exodus that appears to have begun for political reasons has transformed the economy of the country. (Stanley 1987)

El Salvador and Theories of State Violence

On the surface, it appears that we know all we need to about the causes of state violence in El Salvador. During both episodes of severe state violence, a highly mobilized opposition had come into existence, accompanied by (initially) limited use of violence by regime opponents. The violence also clearly served the interests of the dominant coffee-growing elite, whose profits required a large landless and unorganized rural work force. Ideological currents existed within both the Salvadoran agrarian elite and the armed forces, based in part on past experiences, that were supportive of extremely violent policies against popular opponents of the status quo. These attitudes were reinforced, within some sectors of the military, by U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine and training. Such thinking, and the perceptions of opposition activity that it engendered, are arguably responsible for the disproportionality of state violence against civilians in 1932 and during the 1977-83 episode.
There are a number of good reasons to take a closer look at the politics of state violence in El Salvador, however. First is the simple fact that the history of El Salvador consistently violates conventional assumptions that the state is a unified actor and represents dominant social groups. The state has frequently been internally divided, particularly over the issue of how the state's monopoly on armed force should be used. Relations between the state and economic elites on this and other issues have frequently been tempestuous.

Another reason, built upon the observation that there has been intra-elite conflict, is that any reasonably close reading of Salvadoran historical sources suggests that the actual practice of state violence has depended a great deal on factors that are at least partially independent of opposition activity -- factors such as leadership, the balance of power between different state factions, the level of mobilization of economic elites, and the actions of foreign powers, particularly the U.S.

The role of elite political factors in shaping state violence is concealed in the case of El Salvador by the fact that intra-elite conflict generally coincided with periods of elite/mass conflict. If one merely looks at the fact that both opposition and state violence increased, the conventional spiral-of-violence interpretation seems a sufficient explanation. As it turns out, however, a
plausible argument can be made on the basis of a detailed examination of state political factions and their relations with civilian groups that elite politics factors figured prominently in determining the timing and intensity of state violence.

Sufficient evidence points to the importance of elite factors that to omit it from our analysis of the Salvadoran experience is to run the risk of biasing our interpretation of events in favor of the conventional emphasis on mass opposition as the main catalyst for state violence. Even during the periods in which escalating state and opposition violence clearly coincided, it appears that elite political factors were also at work. As a result, an analysis that focuses exclusively on conflict between the state and mass opposition probably attributes to much direct impact to the opposition mobilization when in fact the consequences of opposition behavior were mediated in important ways by elite politics.⁹

⁹ The situation is analogous to the omitted variables problem in multiple regression statistical analysis: if one omits a variable that is positively correlated with a regressor in the model and which also has a strong relationship with the dependent variable, the coefficient estimate of the regressor that remains in the model is exaggerated. Because a particularly intense period of elite conflict coincided with state/mass opposition conflicts during 1932 and 1977-1980, the contribution of elite politics is easy to neglect unless one looks for it, yet neglecting it leads to an analysis that is misleading.
Objectives and Themes

The paper will develop a more complete understanding of state violence in El Salvador by examining how different elite groups interacted with one another over the use of violence. The argument acknowledges that the factors put forward in existing theory -- simple reaction against opposition, the interests of economic elites, the requirements of the capitalist system as a whole, and ideological perspectives -- all contributed to the occurrence of state violence. The working proposition, however, is that the contributions of these various factors will be better understood if placed in an analytical framework that takes explicit account of competition within the state and between elements of the state and civilian elites.

My approach examines how elite politics affect 1) the policy orientation of top state authorities and 2) their ability to implement their policies or to prevent the implementation, at lower levels, of policies that they oppose. Several themes recur throughout the historical account. One is that the military's right to control the state and to enjoy privileges and opportunities related to state power has not been a foregone conclusion, but rather something that the military has had to earn. Its chief rivals have been the private sector elite and popular opponents, whose demands upon the military were generally contradictory. These conflicting demands have divided the
military between hardline and reformist camps. In this context, one of the main responsibilities of senior military authorities has been to contrive policies which balanced conflicting demands from outside the military as well as from within.

Complicating this task has been the fact that, in the Salvadoran context, actual authority boiled down to the ability to convince and elicit support from an institution in which departmental commanders operated with autonomy and had their own relationships with local economic elites, in which the security forces and the regular Army often favored vastly different policies, in which junior officers tended to have very different policy ideas than their superiors, and in which the likelihood of disciplinary action for insubordination was very much dependent upon the relative political power of the accused and the accuser. The timing and intensity of violence are thus affected not only by the policies of senior commanders, but also by the extent and determination of resistance to either reformist or violent policies from within the state.

Particular attention will be given to the 1977-80 conjuncture during which state violence forced the opposition to shift from a dominant strategy of mass protest to armed struggle. The timing and intensity of violence during this period were politically decisive because stepped-up violence coincided with a series of efforts by
some elements of the state to appease the opposition through major socio-economic and political reforms. Occurring when it did and in the intensity that it did, state violence following October 1979 had the effect of undercutting the reformist strategy, leaving little alternative to civil war.

**Synopsis of the Historical Account**

Since the 1940s, the Salvadoran armed forces had included three recognizable tendencies: a reformist current that favored civilian rule and restructuring of the economy, a hardline current that opposed all reforms and wanted the military to depend on repression, and a mainstream "institutionalist" project that placed first priority on enhancing the power and autonomy of the military by combining reforms and repression in an expedient manner to balance both internal and external pressures.

Military rule was initially established in 1932 by General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez and legitimated, in the eyes of the coffee elites who had controlled the country politically until that time, by the military's massacre of thousands of rebellious peasants shortly after taking over the government. A more institutional form of military rule was established in 1948, which sought to legitimate the military's control of the state to a broader
audience through a combination of carefully controlled electoral competition and mild socio-economic reforms. These measures never went far enough for the military to develop a popular constituency fully independent of the coffee-growing elites.\textsuperscript{10} Private-sector elites maintained an ability to block reforms by working through sympathetic officers in the specialized security forces. They were also able to pressure the high command to increase repression as a demonstration of the military's continued commitment to protecting private sector interests. The growth of the reformist current within the military, and its ability to build ties to a popular base, were constrained by number of institutional factors which will be discussed at length in Chapter 6. Despite these limitations, periodic uprisings occurred involving junior officers. These young officers' coups, though never fully successful, prompted reinvigorated efforts by agrarian elites to push the military toward more conservative, repressive policies. The initially successful reformist coup of October 1979 was the most dramatic example of this cycle.

During the mid-1970s, hardline elements gained increased autonomy within the military. In 1976 agrarian elites, reacting to an attempt by the military president to

\textsuperscript{10} The Democratic Nationalist Organization (ORDEN), which was the organized rural constituency of the military's official party, was also strongly influenced at both the local and national level by the agrarian elites and hardline officers loyal to them.
carry out a land reform, managed, by working through hardline allies in the military, to block the reforms and impose their choice of president in 1977. After the inauguration of hardline President Carlos Romero, however, agrarian elites soon grew disillusioned. For reasons related to generational succession which will be outlined in detail in Chapter 5, Romero was vulnerable to being overthrown by his colleagues. He was therefore especially concerned about maintaining international legitimacy and was reluctant to permit the formation of a clandestine state terrorism network suggested by the oligarchy. Under pressure from the U.S., Romero intermittently restrained the use of force. The level of violence he permitted was sufficient, combined with his renunciation of reforms, to provoke a radicalization and expansion of mass opposition; from the point of view of agrarian elites and hardliners in the military, a much higher level of violence was needed to suppress, rather than fuel, mass opposition.

The growing popular mobilization was made more frightening still, from the point of view of the Salvadoran military, by the popular insurrection in Nicaragua and its eventual triumph, in July of 1979, over Anastasio Somoza's National Guard. The fall of the Nicaraguan Guardia on July 19, 1979 polarized the Salvadoran officer corps. Those who doubted that repression would be sufficient to prevent revolution felt that major political and economic reforms
Chapter One

were required, including immediate abandonment of the repressive strategy of the Romero government. In contrast, growing sectors of the officer corps wanted greater latitude to act, believing that only through immediate and dramatic application of violence could the military prevent a Nicaragua-style insurrection.

On October 15, 1979 the reformist movement in the military seized the initiative, ousted Romero, and set up a pluralistic, reform-oriented junta. They took aggressive measures against the hardline faction and its institutional base, and announced plans to prosecute corruption cases, which constituted a direct threat to much of the senior officer corps. A few weeks after the coup, the Young Military convened a representative organization called the Permanent Council of the Armed Forces (COPEFA), which was to ensure the implementation of the radical "Proclamation of the Armed Forces," including the sections relating to prosecution of wrong-doers. The reformist movement did not achieve complete dominance, however, as they permitted a number of senior officers to take control important command positions, including the Ministry of Defense. These senior officers, who had been associated with the "institutionalist" mainstream and were therefore seen as somewhat independent of the oligarchy, nonetheless formed an alliance with the most hardline elements of the military to protect themselves from the reformist Young Military.
The immediate measures against hardline elements were confined to formal organizations and top commanders. The remainder of this faction, including mid-ranking officers on down, lashed out in self-defense, killing hundreds in the immediate aftermath of the coup. Whereas they had been operating under considerable constraints during the Romero period, the breakdown in hierarchical control after the coup, combined with encouragement or at least tolerance by the new High Command, actually gave them greater freedom to operate, despite the reformist tenor of the post-coup government.

The economic elites of the country were very alarmed by the reformist movement in the military and by the initial inclusion of socialist civilian political leaders in the post-coup junta.¹¹ Ideological factors appear to have led the private sector to see the reformist elites in government as a more severe threat than either the radical mass movements or the guerrillas. In reaction, the private sector organized itself politically, worked closely with military hardliners to prepare coup plots against the reformist junta, and funded and helped organize an expanded

¹¹ Prior to the October coup, the agrarian sector of the oligarchy had been most active in anti-reformist activities; following the coup, however, industrial and financial elites who had previously been more supportive of the reformist initiatives of the military joined forces with the more conservative agrarian elites.
network of death squads, manned primarily by military personnel.

Several informants believed, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, that the increased violence following the coup was specifically intended to undermine the reformist junta. This interpretation is consistent with the fact that Salvadoran economic elites tended not to distinguish between elite reformists and the radical left. As a result of this thinking, they believed that attacks on the popular left were equivalent to attacks on the reformist governments.

Whether this was the intent of the increased violence or not, it was the result. The civilian members of the first junta, along with all of their cabinet except the Defense Minister, resigned over the issue of government repression. They were replaced by a second government formed jointly by the Christian Democratic party and the armed forces. The second junta carried out a series of land and commercial reform measures in March and April of 1980. These reforms were ironically accompanied by greatly increased violence by government forces, and the second government also collapsed, to be replaced by a third made up of more conservative Christian Democrats.

The High Command/hardline alliance took a number of measures that led to the breakup of the Young Military movement. To keep junior officers from meeting with one
another to discuss ways to promote their agenda, the High Command kept them dispersed on patrol activities. Junior Army officers were ordered to participate in joint roadblocks and invasions of poor communities along with the hardline National Guard, National Police and Treasury Police. This spread the responsibility for violence and made Army officers more apt to become involved in repressive violence.

The ongoing campaign of violence by the security forces, the obstruction of concrete reforms by the High Command, and the preparation of coup plots by far-right elements (with High Command connivance) forced the Young Military into a series of confrontations with the High Command. These crises frightened many officers because of the threat they posed to military unity at a time of growing social opposition. As a result, many moderate and mildly reformist officers abandoned the Young Military movement and sided with the High Command.

The reformist movement was vulnerable to political attack. Its own ideology was rather vaguely defined, its reformist project would, under ideal conditions, require considerable time to bear fruit, and its most respected and senior leaders were split in their loyalties between the reformist project and the military institution itself. The complexity and unfamiliarity of reformist thinking made it relatively easy for hardline elements to propagandize young
officers, convincing them to turn to a simpler and more familiar anti-communist formula. The reformist project depended, for its political success, on convincing the popular opposition to cooperate with the government. Such cooperation was easily scuttled by delays in the implementation of reforms and by the persistent and escalating violence by hardline elements. The loyalty of Young Military leaders to preserving the unity of the military led them to shy away from open confrontation with the High Command and the security forces, giving their opponents time to work. The movement was seriously disrupted in September 1980 and moribund by the end of the year.

As a result of the collapse of the reformist faction as a coherent, organized movement, the regular Army became increasingly available for repressive operations during the course of 1980. By the end of the year, the Army was the lead agency in extremely bloody rural counterinsurgency sweeps that killed hundreds. The security forces, formerly the most brutal agencies, operated in support roles. In effect, the majority of military officers and units had been converted, through a process of political competition within the state, from support for reforms to active involvement in a hardline policy of extermination.

The playing out of factional struggles within the military affected not only the timing and intensity, but also the targeting of state violence during the course of
1979 and 1980. As increasing numbers of non-specialized Army units and personnel took part in violence, targeting became increasingly random. In effect, the military out-paced its capacity to identify opposition targets and resorted to targeting individuals fitting certain crude profiles, such as young women wearing blue jeans and tennis shoes. At the same time that mass killings became more random, hardline elements of the military also began assassinating reformist leaders of increasing prominence, including members of the government, reformist military officers, leading clergy and religious, members of the Christian Democratic Party, and leaders of the non-guerrilla popular opposition. The increased boldness by hardline elements was encouraged by agrarian elites, by the inaction of the U.S., by the hardliners' own perceptions that their reformist victims were in cahoots with the radical left, and by the hardliners' desire to achieve greater status and influence within the military.

The Impact of U.S. Policy:

The United States contributed to the intensity of violence against civilians in El Salvador through its interaction with competing military factions and private sector elites. U.S. security assistance and training

programs during the 1960s, particularly in the area of intelligence, created an institutional base within the military for a faction that was especially prone to violence against civilians and closely tied to ultra-conservative elements of the civilian elite. The agrarian elite was therefore better able to resist reformist initiatives of the military state during the mid-1970s. Thereafter, routine intelligence-gathering activities by the U.S. during the 1970s forged ties between U.S. officials and a group of colonels, creating an impression that they had U.S. backing. In part because they were seen by junior officers as having ties to the embassy, these colonels were able to subvert the October 1979 coup and gain control of most key command positions in the aftermath of the coup.\(^\text{13}\) Subsequent Carter administration backing for this leadership group, driven by a concern for maintaining the unity of the Salvadoran military, made it difficult for the reformist movement to replace this circle of colonels, even after their involvement in violence against civilians became obvious and damaging to the mili-

\(^{13}\) Some analysts such as Dermot Keough (1983) and Carolyn Forché (1980) have suggested that the U.S. actively intervened to assist the "institutionalists" in subverting the coup. There is only thin evidence for this, and ample evidence that the institutionalists were, by themselves, well positioned to take control of the 1979 coup. My interviews suggest that their perceived ties to the U.S. embassy helped the institutionalists to gain the support of otherwise skeptical junior officers. This will be treated in depth in Chapter 6.
tary's image as well as to the political effectiveness of its reforms.

While U.S. human rights policy was modestly successful in restraining the violence of the Romero government from July 1977 through mid-October 1979 (despite inconsistent and half-hearted application), it appears to have completely collapsed after the October coup. A key reason for this was that U.S. policy makers focused primarily on the change of regimes from overt military rule to pluralistic juntas. This regime transition seems to have led some policy makers to see human rights issues as no longer relevant. There was also a tendency, evident in cable traffic from 1980, to disbelieve and actively discredit the extent of violence being reported by human rights monitoring groups.\(^{14}\)

U.S. policies of supporting major social reforms and the Christian Democratic Party also had a powerful mobilizing effect on the Salvadoran far-right, leading them to increase their efforts to promote violence as a way of blocking reforms. U.S. diplomats personally and combatively confronted leaders of the Salvadoran private sector, apparently with the purpose of intimidating, but with the result of increasing their resolve to resist U.S. policy. This confrontational strategy, combined with the weakness of U.S. human rights policy and unwillingness to support

\(^{14}\) See, for example, embassy cables SS 3747 (29 May, 1980) and SS 3157 (5 May, 1980).
actively the reformist sectors of the military, was a dangerous mixture.

This sequence of events shows the importance of disaggregated analysis of the state and recognition of the distinctions and relative autonomy of different factions. In principle, the U.S. policy of promoting reforms and thereby diminishing the economic power of the landed elite was consistent, at least in the long run, with improvement in the human rights conditions of the country. However, the U.S. failed to take account of the extent to which the implementation of political reforms (i.e. the inclusion of the Christian Democrats in government) and land expropriations would trigger a successful effort by the right wing private sector to regain lost influence within the military, leading to an overall shift within the military toward support for violence.

A final factor which contributed to the advance of hardline policies was the fact that the U.S. delegation did not speak with one voice: what pressures were applied by U.S. diplomats on the Salvadoran armed forces to improve their human rights conduct were undercut by the activities of U.S. military officials, who maintained cordial ties with hardliners and displayed tolerant attitudes when discussing political violence with Salvadoran officers.15

15 Interview, former Ambassador Robert White, April, 1990, Washington, D.C. Also, confidential interview, former U.S. intelligence official.
During the first three years of the Reagan administration, the U.S. was virtually silent on human rights issues. U.S. aid levels increased dramatically compared to the Carter period and no effective conditionality was imposed. By the end of 1983, however, Salvadoran government forces were beginning to lose to the FMLN. The Reagan administration sought a major increase in the Military Assistance Program (war materiel), but ran into resistance from Congress, which was increasingly concerned about the ongoing, flagrant violations of human rights in El Salvador. In response to this pressure, the administration sent clear messages via Vice-President George Bush and Director of Central Intelligence William Casey that violence must be reduced. This high level pressure, coming at a time when the Salvadoran military was in danger and when a major increase in funding was in the offing, led to marked reductions in state violence.

Unfortunately, these reductions did not reflect major institutional changes in the military but rather a shift in conjunctural incentives in favor of less violence. (See Chapter 7) As U.S. military assistance levels drop, there is a risk that political incentives will shift towards greater violence. One factor that might tend to reduce violence, however, is the fact that the Salvadoran military has managed to set aside over $100 million in capital. As U.S. aid levels fall off, the military high command will
want to shrink the size of the officer corps, making it possible to share the reduced income of the military (proceeds from the $100 million) among fewer hands.\textsuperscript{16} It will only be safe to reduce the military force structure after obtaining peace settlement with the FMLN. The financial incentives to obtain a peace settlement may help constrain what might otherwise be a hardline backlash.

\textbf{Methods:}

This study is based on intensive field work in El Salvador during 1987 and 1989, plus additional work in Mexico, Washington, New York, California, and Florida, consulting with current and former participants in Salvadoran politics. I combed through an extensive collection of declassified U.S. Government documents at the National Security Archive in Washington, D.C., and secured additional documents through requests to the Department of State and the Defense Intelligence Agency under the Freedom of Information Act. The University Center for Documentation, Analysis and Information (CIDAI) of the University of Central American (UCA) in San Salvador provided documentary information on political events, the conduct of the war, and public statements of various political factions in El Salvador. The Salvadoran Armed Forces provided documenta-

\textsuperscript{16} The military cannot hope to sustain the current force structure without significant U.S. assistance.
tion on personnel changes, promotions and transfers, as well as on guerrilla violence and on criminal behavior by members of the Salvadoran Armed Forces themselves. Human rights information came from U.S. government documents, the Center for Human Rights at the UCA, Christian Legal Aid (Socorro Juridico Cristiano), the Archbishop's Legal Aid Office (Tutela Legal), the non-governmental Human Rights Commission of El Salvador (CDHES), Amnesty International, and the Americas Watch Committee.

Many of the people that I interviewed for this study required that I not attribute their statements to them by name. Many still work for the Salvadoran or U.S. governments, including the military and intelligence agencies. Several work for international agencies or private companies that do not permit them to make political statements for attribution. Others simply live in El Salvador or hope to return there some day and cannot afford to make enemies. Where it is possible to do so without exposing a person's identity, I indicate the general characteristics of the individuals and their basis for knowing what they told me. Anonymous interviews are denoted in the text by the "μ" symbol. Preserving the anonymity of interviewees unfortunately denies readers to opportunity to judge for themselves the credibility of my sources. In view of the high stakes for many Salvadoran political participants and critical observers, however, granting anonymity is an
unavoidable price of admission to studying a dangerous but vital topic.

Contents

Chapter Two reviews existing literature on state violence and shows that ideological and economic arguments facilitate our understanding of particularly severe episodes of state violence as well as the anomalous timing of violence in some cases. It then goes on to suggest how examining the relationships between different factions of the state and civil society can enhance existing theory. In Chapter Three, I review the historical role of violence in the relationship between the Salvadoran state and civilian elite, from the 1800s through 1944. Chapter Four deals with the period of institutionalized military rule from 1948 through 1977, focusing on cyclical attempts by elements of the armed forces to transform the relationship between the military state and elite civil society. Chapter Five discusses the elite politics of violence during the Romero administration, showing how the extremely counterproductive use of state violence can be traced to efforts by Romero to cope with conflicting demands being placed upon his politically vulnerable administration. Chapter Six discusses the coup d'état of October 15, 1979 and the period of institutional instability through the end of 1980, linking the dynamics of state violence to the
interaction of the military high command, reformist military officers, conservative civilian elites, military hardliners, the popular and guerrilla left, moderate civilian political elites, and the U.S. embassy. Chapter Seven briefly traces the political and violence dynamics from the guerrilla offensive of January 1981 through the present, showing how U.S. policy interacted with Salvadoran elite politics to affect the dynamics of violence. Chapter Eight offers conclusion and explores the implications of this case material for research on state terrorism, for reformist political strategy, and for U.S. foreign policy, particularly in the area of human rights.
CHAPTER TWO

THEORIES OF STATE VIOLENCE

Overlooking State Violence

During most of the 1950s and 1960s, political development literature tended to see state violence as an unproblematic phenomenon -- the inevitable result of excessive pressures placed upon legitimate governments by the modernization process. John McCamant (1984) argues that the prevailing view of political systems saw them, by definition, as legitimate expressions of the collective will of the people. This approach left little conceptual room for illegitimate, abusive state conduct. Interest group models with their emphasis on "decentralized but consensual democratic polity" did not discuss the government as an independent actor with coercive capacity. McCamant (1984, 24) notes that David Easton, for example, sees coercion as an occasional and temporary means of achieving compliance with the law until stronger support can be achieved. "It apparently did not occur to him that the same coercive power could be used to shape the pattern of demands within the system."

Structural-functionalist approaches such as that of Gabriel Almond considered "system maintenance and adaptation" as a key function of government, yet, as McCamant
points out, "he only mentioned communication and socialization as processes to achieve this function. Not even a little arm twisting now and then would be necessary."

(McCamant 1984: 24)

A statement of the 1953 APSA Seminar on Comparative Politics illustrates a kind of thinking that made inquiry into state abuses unlikely:

The function of politics...is to provide society with social decisions having the force and status of legitimacy. A social decision has the 'force of legitimacy' if the collective regularized power of society is brought to bear against deviations and if there is a predominant disposition among those subject to the decision to comply. As for the means of enforcing decisions, every society...has a determinate organization which enjoys a monopoly of legitimate authority (or political ultimacy.) (Shafer 1988, 55-56)

This view assumes that every society has a single legitimate authority and that the "predominant disposition" among citizens to comply stems from this legitimacy and not from coercion. With states defined as the single legitimate authority, and their use of force seen as inherently legitimate, there was no theoretical latitude for state violence to be viewed as a problem to be investigated.

These heroic assumptions have their intellectual basis in classical sociology, especially the work of Tönnies, Weber, and Durkhiem. According to Shafer, the classical sociologists believed that

all institutions derive from the shared values of society, all are, by definition, legitimate and authoritative. As Max Weber put it, the "basis of every system of authority, and correspondingly
of every kind of willingness to obey, is a belief, a belief by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent prestige." Thus, for Emile Durkheim, the state is "the collective type incarnate" and crimes are "acts universally disapproved of by members of each society [and which] shock sentiments found in all healthy consciences." Similarly, Tönnies defines the law as "nothing but common will" and declares that public opinion has "decided tendencies to urge the state to use its irresistible power to force everyone to do what is useful and leave undone what is damaging." The very existence of the status quo vouches for its legitimacy and reduces all differences with it to evidence of an unhealthy conscience. (Shafer 1988, 51)

A predictable distortion of the research agenda resulting from this kind of thinking was that the vast majority of literature on political violence that emerged during the 1960s focused on opposition violence -- rebellion -- not on the violence of governments. Gurr (1986, 45-46) engages in implicit self-criticism when he observes that "much theorizing about the causes of rioting, revolution and terrorism has been criticized as one sided because of its single-minded concern with the grievances, ideologies and organization of challengers and rebels."

Research on political violence neglected repression because repression was "what states do by right." The problem, according to Gurr, lies in the prevalence of "the Weberian notion that the state is characterized by legitimacy and a monopoly of the means of coercion." This assumption of legitimacy "confuses the contemporary global ideology of the state, in terms of which state managers justify their claims to authority, with the objective nature of the
state." Gurr's point is that states may claim to be legitimate, but all we can objectively say about them is that they "claim to exercise sovereign (ultimate) control over the inhabitants of a territory, and ... demonstrate enduring capacity to enforce that claim."

McCamant argues that researchers failed to challenge these questionable assumptions about legitimacy because of social and political pressures upon them not to bring up so unsavory a topic as state violence by allies, presumably because of the Cold War. Whether one believes this, or perhaps that these ideas in and of themselves were powerful enough to block state violence from the research agenda, the fact remains that, for whatever reasons, social science researchers failed for decades to seriously inquire about occurrences of state violence, its intensity, who was targeted, what effects it had on society, and what relation it bore to the nature and extent of opposition. The only exception to this blind spot was violence by totalitarian regimes. As a result of this prolonged neglect, little data is available and the literature on state violence is underdeveloped compared to that in other sub-fields of comparative and international politics.

Research began to take account of state violence during the 1970s, as more scholars began to reject the inherently conservative presumption of state legitimacy in the face of increasingly brutal forms of authoritarian rule.
in Latin America and elsewhere. Newer literature treats state terrorism as both normatively objectionable and theoretically interesting. Unfortunately, the traditional thinking that blocked scholarly inquiry into state violence is still in evidence in the ways that many U.S. policy makers think about Third World politics. There remains a tendency to view governments of capitalist societies, however constituted, as basically legitimate, so that their use of force is presumed, until clearly demonstrated otherwise, to have been necessary and contextually appropriate. This point will be dealt with in depth in the discussion of U.S. policy actions in El Salvador.

**Explaining State Violence**

One of the most challenging aspects of explaining state violence is that the most massive cases of it occur very seldom. Intense state violence is, in general, quite effective, so that rarely does a state need to conduct intense violence against its population for more than a few years at a time. The terror created by state violence is long lasting, enabling regimes that have once used wholesale violence to effectively suppress opposition with relatively small "reminders" of past violence. As a result, it is difficult for analysts to classify countries for cross national research since two countries with comparable levels of repression at a given point in time
may have very different levels of effective terrorism because of differences in past uses of violence.

Political violence is a form of internal warfare. As with international wars, internal wars are relatively infrequent events compared to conflicts of lesser kinds. J. David Singer (1981) comments that in research on international wars "many models fail to recognize that a phenomenon irregularly distributed in time and space, such as war, cannot be explained on the basis of relatively invariate phenomena." Yet much of the existing quantitative research on internal political violence in fact focuses primarily on "relatively invariate" phenomena such as social stratification or ethno-linguistic fractionation. This dependence on temporally stable variables to explain the occurrence of an infrequent and highly dynamic phenomenon leads inevitably to a heavy emphasis on reciprocal conflict and violence to explain state violence. If one seeks to explain state violence, which occurs infrequently even in those countries where it is most severe, one must seek out similarly dynamic explanatory variables. When working from aggregate data of any kind, virtually the only highly dynamic variables, aside from economic data, are ones related to the behavior of mass oppositions.

At a more basic level, it has proven extremely difficult to measure state violence in a quantitative way. Events count data tend to under-count the most severe
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episodes and fail to capture clandestine forms of state violence. Rankings are unlikely to account for further deterioration of conditions in countries in which state violence is already very prevalent. (Stohl et. al, 1986; Goldstein 1986, Bollen 1986) As countries such as Brazil, Argentina, and Chile have liberalized, human rights organizations have attempted to reconstruct information about past state violence. El Salvador is unique among cases of severe repression in that Catholic Church-affiliated monitoring groups managed to measure, with a reasonable degree of accuracy, the intensity of violence in the country beginning in 1978, yielding a useful time series. As a result of these measurement problems, existing quantitative studies on state violence such as Hibbs (1973), Duff and McCamant (1976), Wolpin (1986), Banks (1986) or Mitchell and McCormick (1988) do not fully account for the special severity of cases such as Argentina, Chile in 1973-4, El Salvador, or Guatemala.

To fully reflect the political impact of state violence, researchers would need to deal with several interlocking aspects of the phenomenon: 1) the probability of its ever occurring; 2) its intensity when it occurs; 3) its timing; and 4) who the victims are. Often these distinctions are not as carefully drawn as they might be. States that are very likely to use state violence may not necessarily use it very intensively or for a prolonged
period. Most analysts agree that the propensity of states to use violence is conditioned by long-term historical factors such as the economic, class, ethnic, and political structure of the country; the timing of violence is generally seen as being determined by the occurrence of opposition threats, and the intensity of state violence as the result of the form and intensity of opposition. The nature of opposition is shaped by the long term structural attributes of the country, amplified at times by outside assistance to regime opponents.

The remarks that follow attempt to clarify what different authors say about the factors shaping state violence. Many authors are unclear about whether they are explaining the probability of state violence occurring or its probable intensity. In some cases, I will allow the ambiguity to stand; where possible, I attempt to impose a greater specificity regarding which attributes of violence are being explained.

**Violence as Reaction to Opposition**

Working within the "modernization school" of political development analysis, it is possible to posit conditions under which terroristic state behavior is likely to take place, if one permits the notion that state violence can be excessive, counterproductive, or normatively objectionable. The foundations for such an analysis can be found in the
discussions by Lucian Pye, Leonard Binder and others of "crises of legitimacy" and "crises of development," which recognize that, at times, states are extraordinarily stressed and challenged by their populations. Such stresses arise out of the modernization process itself, which mobilizes populations through literacy, increasing exposure to modern communications media, migration from rural to urban areas, and rapid economic changes. All of these modern influences create rising expectations which lead to demands on the political "system" which exceed its resources.

Douglas Hibbs (1973) makes a classic statement of how such crises translate into state violence: "in nations where the burdens generated by social mobilization outrun the capabilities of sociopolitical institutions, political elites tend to resort to repression as an alternative means of social control." The "burdens" resulting from social mobilization take the form of collective protest and internal war, with varying combinations of the two being found in the data. Implicitly, therefore, the probability of a country experiencing repression is enhanced if a country's social modernization outstrips the resources of the state. The intensity of repression depends here upon the extent to which opposition takes the form of internal warfare; the timing of repression depends upon when mass opposition of either form appears.
Hibb's empirical findings suggest that, as a means of social control, repression leaves something to be desired, especially when used against mass protest.

The reciprocal nature of these causal relations also demonstrates that Collective Protest and Internal War not only engender repression from elites, but that the nearly instantaneous response to repression is most often more mass violence. This is not at all surprising, for it is a common observation that meeting mass protest or rebellion with repression frequently only exacerbates the situation, at least in the short run. (emphasis in original)(182)

Hibbs finds that not only does repression exacerbate both protest and armed rebellion, but the dominant causal sequence he finds "is one in which Protest is met with repression by elites, which produces in turn an escalated response of Internal War from its recipients."(182) In other words, state repression turns protesters into guerrillas.

Despite the short run exacerbation of conflict, Hibbs finds that repression does have the long-term effect of making internal war less likely. It does not have the same enduring impact on mass protest, however:

although the short-term consequence of repression is even more violence, the long-term impact is to deter outbreaks of Internal War. Hence, from the perspective of elites who seek to suppress popular expressions of discontent and to maintain domestic stability, repression appears to be an efficacious long-term strategy vis à vis the more threatening Internal War dimension of mass violence. However, this is not the case for Collective Protest -- the knowledge that political authorities have in the recent past responded to Protest with repression does not appear to
inhibit the current incidence of this type of political violence. (p.185)

In Hibb's model, the state coercion is basically a reaction to mass opposition (both protest and violence). The fundamental cause of violence is social mobilization, which translates into mass opposition. Opposition ultimately induces the state, which lacks sufficient material and institutional resources to pursue more accommodative policies, to turn to repression. This conceptualization reflects the apolitical treatment of the state in classical sociology and modernization research. The demands placed upon the government (or "system") are excessive in reference to the resources of the state: the possibility that what the society is demanding is a change in state policy away from the preservation of privileges isn't considered. This approach presumes that somehow the distribution of resources within the society is unrelated to the problem of mass opposition, so that the ability of the state to respond positively to popular demands is resource-constrained, not limited by the political power of economic elites and their ability to block state initiatives to remove their privileges. The source of instability isn't distribution-based grievances, but the failure of growth of state resources to keep up with the demands generated by population growth and urbanization, complicated by problems such as ethnic and linguistic divisions. Hibb's formulation of what factors affect state violence is fundamentally
non-political in the sense that he excludes questions of how the exercise of violent state power relates to the distribution of scarce resources. It also excludes the issue of policy choice: to the extent that mass opposition is motivated by grievances related to the distribution of land or income, a given state at least potentially has the option of carrying out redistributive reforms. If one considers the possibility that a state might be or become internally divided over the choice between repression or redistributive reforms, the internal politics of the state, and its relationship with competing groups within a materially and politically differentiated civil society, suddenly appear to be more relevant to the actual implementation of state violence than Hibb's scheme provides for.

Steven Jackson et. al. (1978) present a formal model of the interaction between mass protest and state coercion which, like Hibbs', sees state coercion as a reaction to popular opposition. Jackson et. al.'s notion of the underlying conditions which make violence likely differ from Hibbs', however, in that they focus not on modernization in general but on "dependent development" as the underlying factor making state repression more probable. They claim that "The relationship between conflict and coercion in dependent states may be viewed as an ongoing action-reaction process which is embedded in, and structured by, longer-run historical processes." (629) The
long-run processes to which they refer are the distortions of the economies of peripheral countries in the world economic system. Such countries tend to export a handful of primary products, are typically vulnerable to international price shocks, and have highly stratified social structures that become even more stratified over time. Dependent economies suffer from dualism, in which the most dynamic sectors are externally oriented, while the part of the national economy oriented toward the internal market lags, resulting in deepening income and wealth disparities. These long-term structural conditions generate a great deal of "latent conflict."

According to Jackson et. al., state coercion actually takes place when "latent conflict" is translated into "manifest conflict," or mass protest and violence. State coercion raises the costs of "manifest conflict" and therefore may have the effect of reducing it. On the other hand, it also adds additional frustration to existing "latent conflict" and may therefore have exactly the opposite effect. Jackson et. al. argue that low to moderate levels of "coercive authoritarianism" actually lead to increased protest and violence but that at some degree of intensity, state violence creates so much fear that it diminishes the opposition's "latent conflict."

As with Hibbs, the Jackson et. al. model sees state violence as essentially a reaction to what opposition does.
Jackson et. al. see the timing of violence as dependent upon the occurrence of opposition activity and its intensity as dependent upon how the opposition responds to state coercion. If state coercion leads to ever stronger opposition, a temporarily explosive situation is created in which violence by both sides spirals upwards. Once state coercion reaches very high levels, however, opposition activity will ebb. As with the Hibbs model, all conflict is seen as occurring between the state and mass opposition, with the state treated as a unitary actor.

Why Some States are Particularly Prone to Violence

The studies mentioned so far focus primarily on opposition as the proximate and most robust explanation of state violence. Hibbs (1973) sees elite electoral accountability as a constraint on state repression and finds the greater availability of coercive resources to correlate with higher levels of "negative sanctions" by the state, but opposition collective protest is the dominant variable. Other studies focus more closely on the question of, given a certain level of opposition activity, how reactive is the state likely to be.

Institutional Factors

Counterinsurgency theorists Blaufarb and Tanham (1984) argue that one of the most vital but also most difficult
tasks of the United States in assisting governments that are faced with insurgency is to help them improve their control over their armed forces, reducing or eliminating indiscriminate violence against civilians. Embedded in their recommendations is an institutional or bureaucratic theory of why some states are more reactive or excessive in their use of violence against civilians than others. Blaufarb and Tanham think that poor training, inappropriate equipment and tactics, and unprofessional military traditions are the main reasons for excessive violence. The implication they draw from this is that if the U.S. trains, equips, and advises militaries in more appropriate institutional procedures, it may be possible to reduce indiscriminate violence, although they are far from sanguine about the effectiveness of such measures in highly unprofessional armies.

This bureaucratic explanation for state violence is widely held among U.S. policy makers. Several of those interviewed for this study argued that military violence against civilians results from organizational and institutional deficiencies of the forces themselves. Former U.S. Chargé d'Affairs in San Salvador James Cheek remarked that the Salvadoran military was "too crude an instrument" to respond appropriately to mass opposition. It was a "broadsword" that could not be used in a measured fashion. It lacked the right arms, training, and control to effec-
tively contain popular mobilization without resorting to excessive violence.\textsuperscript{1} Several other U.S. officials mentioned that the lack of training and preparation of the Salvadoran forces resulted in their using more force than was necessary in many situations. Several of the more liberal Salvadoran officers interviewed for this study argued that the Salvadoran military was accustomed to acting with brutality, so that when under pressure, they merely responded in their usual way, but on a greatly exaggerated scale. (See Chapter Six.)

The problem with such an approach is that it fails to consider in any depth why violence against civilians was the military's customary response to unarmed opposition in the first place. Presumably the armed institutions of a given country are representative of some combination of the interests and security needs of the military and/or state itself and those of whatever elements of civil society are capable of asserting themselves politically. The "standard operating procedures" that are the stuff of bureaucratic politics analyses don't develop in a vacuum. Some develop over a long period of time, others develop and change rapidly, as in the case of the Argentine armed forces after 1976 or the Chilean forces in 1973. In either case, institutional norms, even if relatively recent, reflect the

\textsuperscript{1} Interview, James Cheek, April, 1989, Washington, D.C.
political environment in which the institution operates, the political and economic incentives for them to follow different policies, which actors are most powerful at a given point in time, and how they perceive their roles and the nature of civilian opponents.

O'Donnell's (1978) account of the development of repressive, "Bureaucratic-Authoritarian" states, points to a dynamic, institutional factor, namely, the emergence of new actors within the state. He argues that increasingly complex economic structures, the expansion of the state, and the professionalization of the military created a new group of technically sophisticated professionals based in both and civilian and military bureaucracies. These actors, relatively insulated from issues of political legitimation, established technical criteria for the satisfactory performance of the state, criteria which required the suppression of popular political pressures to enable the state to follow policies that were technically rational but politically unpopular.

Blaufarb and Tanham recognize that institutional tendencies towards excessive violence may be quite resistant to outside efforts to force changes. If such problems just stem from a lack of training, outside powers can intervene successfully with aid. If, however, they stem from politicization of the military, control of forces by a clique with substantial economic interests, then outside
aid or pressures are unlikely to affect the state's con-
duct. (Baufarb and Tanham 1984, IV:8) In other words, the
reasons that some states are more prone to using excessive
and indiscriminate force against civilians sometimes
involve long-term, historical and structural antecedents.

Some analysts believe that rather than having poten-
tial to reduce the violence-proneness of state institu-
tions, U.S. training and interference is in fact largely
responsible for violent institutional habits. Noam Chomsky
and Edward S. Herman (1979) argue that terrorist regimes in
the Third World are the handiwork of the U.S. This argu-
ment is based on evidence that the United States has en-
couraged military coups and aided post-coup governments, as
well as evidence that the U.S. government has provided
weapons, torture equipment and training. They also cite
evidence that U.S. intelligence and military operatives
have participated directly in torture and other repressive
activities. Their text is salted with references to "our
juntas," "client states," and "the U.S. role in introducing
and protecting the leadership of this client fascist
empire." While the observation that the U.S. has frequent-
ly supported some of the most repressive regimes worldwide
is well taken, Chomsky and Herman fail to convert this
observation into an argument about the relative impact of
U.S. policy as opposed to the internal political dynamics
of nations that experienced state terrorism. U.S. military
and intelligence aid to countries have been far more widespread than state terrorism itself. If the U.S. has sought to plant the seeds of a "client fascist empire" based on state terrorism, the seeds have not germinated everywhere, a fact that suggests more complex causation than Chomsky and Herman allow for.

A more nuanced and convincing discussion of the contribution of U.S. security assistance to state terrorism comes in McClintock's (1985a) volume on El Salvador, which shows in great detail how U.S. assistance revived and provided an institutional base for the hardline faction of the Salvadoran military. By the 1960s, the hardline security apparatus was in decline and more modernizing elements were dominant within the Army high command. U.S. intelligence assistance was instrumental in creating a series of new or strengthened institutions, including a national intelligence agency (ANSESAL), a grass-roots paramilitary and intelligence network called the National Democratic Organization (ORDEN), and greatly strengthened intelligence sections in most military units. These became the institutional base for a renewed hardline tendency within the military. McClintock's greatest contribution is to show how U.S. security assistance dovetailed with and reinforced existing traditions of surveillance and repression, patterns which originated in the enforcement of land expropriations and anti-vagrancy laws vital to the creation
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and maintenance of the coffee economy. While McClintock clearly considers the U.S. to have contributed to the likelihood and intensity of violence in El Salvador, he also makes clear that there were ample internal propensities for state violence that the U.S. merely reinforced.

Alan Nairn (1984) makes arguments similar to those of McClintock, focusing on the involvement of the U.S. in training and building up intelligence agencies and paramilitary organizations which became the death squads in El Salvador. This limitation of such an argument, as will become clear in the chapters below, is that the death squad phenomenon, though abetted by the U.S. in recent decades, has a long history in El Salvador and deep roots in the relationship between the armed forces and the country's agrarian elite.

Economic Explanations

Writings on Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism attempt to explain the implantation of more force-prone, coercive states in the relatively developed Latin American countries such as Argentina and Brazil on the basis of a specific sequence of events related to the stagnation of import-substitution industrialization in these countries. One version of the argument, that of O'Donnell (1978), proposes that exhaustion of import substitution industrialization in peripheral capitalist economies leads to stagnated growth
and economic crises which can only be answered through reinvigorated international and state investment in "deepened" industrialization, investments that are expected to take a long period of time to bear fruit. At the same time, the economic crises associated with stagnation of import substitution industrialization heighten class conflicts and lead to greater mobilization of working people and the poor. These popular movements appear threaten the basic capitalist system. The combination of economic crisis and popular threat lead to the establishment of a bureaucratic-authoritarian state which strives to demobilize the popular sectors and promote "orthodox" economic policies. (Remmer and Merkx, 1983)

In this argument, there are both reactive and active reasons for a state to be prone to repression. The reactive element is basically the same explanation of state coercion given by Hibbs and Jackson et. al. The active element, however, is different from anything discussed so far. Part of the repressiveness of the state, according to the O'Donnell view, stems from an economic calculation that for further growth to take place, a social and labor climate must be created that is attractive to international capital. The state becomes more violence-prone when economic conditions, and the preferences of the international capital market, require it.
O'Donnell's argument regarding "deepening" of industrialization has proven to be too specific to have much cross-case applicability. Many of the cases in which more authoritarian or force-prone regimes have been installed do not fit the "deepening" formula. Several of these involve the most severe episodes of repression (Chile 1973, Argentina 1976-1980, Uruguay 1978-9) O'Donnell himself acknowledges that "cases such as Chile and Uruguay may turn...in a socially even more oppressive sense than the 'deepening' that I deal with here, towards a 're-agrarianization' or a 're-primarization' of their productive structure." (1978, 3) A similar description can be made of the 1976 Argentine "proceso," which will be discussed in detail below. The force-proneness of states in Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, or Peru cannot be reasonably attributed to a need to deepen industrialization, nor would O'Donnell have intended his argument to be tested so broadly.

There are some problems with the "reactive" side of O'Donnell's formulation as well. While arguing that the implantation of force-prone, B-A regimes results from a specific kind of economic crisis, he argues that the subsequent repressiveness (and durability) of B-A regimes depends upon the "threat" that exists prior to implantation of the regime. The greater the threat, indicated by the degree of popular mobilization and the "declared intentions
of the political movements through which most of the popular sector expresses itself," the more repressive will be the behavior of the B-A state. The mechanism for this is two-fold.

First, a higher threat level lends more weight, within the armed forces, to the "hard-line" groups not preoccupied, as was President Juan Carlos Ongania in Argentina (1966-1970), with the immediate achievement of "social integration." Second, and closely connected, a higher threat level leads to a greater willingness to apply and to support a more systematic repression for the attainment of the political deactivation of the popular sector and for the subordination of its class organizations, especially the unions. (O'Donnell 1978, 7)

Though he is not entirely clear on the issue, it appears that O'Donnell believes that the translation of prior threat into repression is mediated primarily by the internal politics of the military -- the shift in favor of hardliners. Nowhere does he argue or even imply that conservative economic elites somehow force the military be repressive, but clearly elite civilian support for the B-A regime is enhanced by the view among civilian elites that repression is necessary. This is particularly important for O'Donnell's purpose of explaining the dynamics of political change in B-A states: while export-oriented sectors of domestic capital as well as the multinationals

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2 Note that O'Donnell addresses repression rather than violence per se. Repression is a broader concept that includes formal, legal restrictions on labor organizing, political participation, and speech, as well as violence. There is, however, no a priori reason for O'Donnell's hypothesis not to apply just as well to the more specific issue of state violence.
approve of the B-A state's orthodox economic policies, the middle sectors -- the petty bourgeoisie and nationally-oriented firms -- are hurt by them. O'Donnell argues that these middle sectors will continue to support the B-A regime even after it begins to damage their own economic interests because they are so grateful for being rescued from the popular threat.

While O'Donnell's observations about threat level make intuitive sense as a way of explaining state violence, it seems mistaken to focus exclusively on the threat level prior to the implantation of the regime. Remmer and Merkx (1983) point out that only the case of Chile fits O'Donnell's predictions in that a high prior threat translated into intense state violence and other forms of repression in the immediate aftermath of the coup. The dynamics in other Latin American cases are more complicated and less clearly linked to the level of threat at the time of implantation.

An obvious modification to O'Donnell's sub-hypothesis regarding threat and subsequent repression is to simply argue that state violence depends on the opposition "threat," regardless of when this occurs relative to regime implantation. This requires one to be less focused on the initial implantation of an authoritarian regime and to pay more attention instead to transformations that may take
place within a given regime over time in response to opposition actions.

Originally written in 1975 and published without major revision, O'Donnell's 1978 piece doesn't discuss the authoritarian regime installed in Argentina in 1976. The project of this regime contrasts considerably with O'Donnell's "deepening" industrialization thesis. Paul Buchanan (1989) argues that the regime installed in 1976 sought to turn back the clock in the structure of the economy, a process that Buchanan calls "re-pastoralization" (similar to the "re-agrarianization" or "re-primarization" that O'Donnell perceives in the Uruguayan and Chilean projects.) Buchanan argues that the nature of this economic project was the underlying logic for the much greater willingness of the post-1976 Argentine state to use violence and of its intentional development of greater repressive capacity through institutional changes.

According to Buchanan, the installation of the new regime took place during a period of "organic crisis," the "most overt manifestation" of which was

a full scale guerrilla war waged by leftist groups against the army in the northern province of Tucuman, rampant sectarian violence between leftist and rightist terrorist groups (some of which were connected to the government) in the cities that resulted in an average of over three politically motivated murders a day, the breakdown of normal party lines, a sustained wave of strikes, work stoppages, and industrial sabotage that paralyzed production, a huge fiscal deficit, an inflation rate exceeding 500 percent, and rapid disinvestment by foreign capital which
aggravated an already-severe balance-of-payments problem. (34)

With the entire productive system, society, and political system of the country malfunctioning to such an extent, the military intervened to restore order. Beyond a reactive urge to reimpose order, the military's takeover involved a project to erase from Argentina all vestiges of Peronism, labor unions, and the import substitution industrialization upon which these two "diseases" were based and to impose in its stead a completely different economic model, one based upon a return to Argentina's supposed strengths, namely agro-exports and associated industries such as leather and food processing. The choice of this model, according to Buchanan, reflected a shift in political power toward the agro-export and transnational elites and away from the national industrial bourgeoisie, which had historically colluded with the Peronist labor movement and received strong support from the state. The conduct of the state, in other words, reflected shifts in "the internal balance of power within the dominant bloc." (Buchanan, 1989, 30)

The specific project that was undertaken included complementary political and economic rationales. The economic side of the program was one of orthodox liberalism, in which tariff barriers were lowered, subsidies to industries phased out, taxes on exports removed and labor unions dramatically weakened, thus removing presumed distortions in the labor market. The purposeful destruction
of inefficient industries created unemployment, which was helpful for the development of the more transnationalized economy.

The political side of the program was simply that the Peronist union structure was seen as the underlying reason for the unrest and chaos that the country was experiencing in the mid-1970s. The conclusion was that the unions, and all of their allies, had to be broken. Given the strength of organized labor, and its extensive alliances with small entrepreneurs, professionals, and even national industrialists, breaking the movement required the massive use of secret and terroristic deadly force against a broad cross-section of society. Around 20,000 people were killed or "disappeared," many of them with only the most tenuous connections with the Peronist movement or the left.

Buchanan's thesis is that the conformity of state policy to the economic and political preferences of agro-export and transnational elites reflects their achievement of dominance over other sectors of the capitalist classes. Their resurgence was a reaction to the breakdown of the sort of complex, politico-cultural domination of the country by these classes known in Gramscian terms as "hegemony." While descriptively appealing, this argument is one for which it is extraordinarily difficult to find much supporting evidence, and Buchanan provides little explanation of how the newly resurgent agro-export and
transnational elites asserted such power over the military. He quotes Rojas (1981) to the effect that the state "adapts chameleon-like to the mutable strategies used by dominant classes against the dominated classes, and to the dynamics of the internal balance of power within the dominant bloc." (Buchanan 1989, 38) This claim is entirely theoretical, and such an assumption of dominant class control of the state overlooks the possibility that the preferences of a particular set of elites (in this case the agro-export group) and that of the military may coincide without this coincidence stemming from the dominant power of the civilian elites.

In the case of post 1976 Argentina, there was a strong complementarity between the liberal economic program favored by the agro-export and transnational elites and the anti-Peronist program of political repression seen by the military as necessary for restoring national security. Both Buchanan and Pion-Berlin (1984) make much of the fact that the violent suppression of the Peronism movement had very salient effects for an orthodox economic program, since it made it possible to drastically reduce wages to public employees and to curb wage-driven inflation. It must be recognized, however, that from the military's point of view, the agenda of the "liberal" faction of economic elites represented a program that promised to accomplish socio-economic and political changes that the military
itself saw as essential for long term restoration of order and the rebuilding of national strength. The military's repressive program served liberal economic interests, but the liberal economic program also served the military's national security interests. The fusion of military coercion and liberal economic policy may not represent so much a success by economic elites in controlling the military as a consensual meeting of military and civilian elite minds.

Stepan (1971, 94) argues that militaries must build a coalition of civilian support in order to take state power. The reason for this is that militaries are not generally presumed to be legitimate rulers unless they can demonstrate that taking power is necessary for the preservation of the integrity of the nation. Active civilian support strengthens such a claim. I would argue that a prior condition for military government is that the military pretenders must first build a coalition of support within the military. To accomplish this, a group of officers must either have tremendous personal credibility, or put forward a program that strikes the officer corps as being legitimate and in the national interest. If one group of economic elites, such as agrarian capital, actively solicits repressive military action, this will provide support for hardline officers within the military ranks. Solicitations from economic elites are most likely to be
effective if their proposed program promises to solve problems that are of urgency to the military; this is exactly the situation that obtained in Argentina in 1976. Such a coincidence of orthodox economic programs and security concerns of the military is most likely when there has been a high level of labor unrest, popular mobilization, combined with armed opposition activity or a strong perception on the part of the military that armed opposition is likely (as in Chile, 1973).

Setting aside for a moment the question of whether civilian elites are able to make the state do their bidding, it is clear that decisions were made at the highest levels of the Argentine military to institute a combination of orthodox liberal economic policies and a massive, direct assault upon the entire Peronist political structure and any group or organization that in any way supported it. To accomplish this required institutional changes within the military itself.

During an exercise in dominio, this becomes most apparent in the expansion and promotion of the internal security apparatus, most notably specialized agencies such as the intelligence services, secret police, border guards, and gendarmes, as well as in the growth of paramilitary groups and the reorientation of the armed forces' role toward internal rather than external security concerns. (Buchanan 1989, 38)

In Argentina, this reorientation involved the creation of specialized branches of existing military units. Whether formally or informally attached to the state, these decentralized commandos of a half-dozen heavily armed men operated with nearly
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complete autonomy and in highly amorphous, overlapping jurisdictions. In addition to those of the military high command, each service branch, military district, police district, and police station had its own "operative" unit. (Buchanan 1989, 53)

Once we take account of both the political project of the military and the institutional measures taken to make it possible, the dynamics of state violence in Argentina, particularly its severity and the acceleration of violence after the defeat of the guerrilla movement, become more understandable. The military sought to completely redraw the political map of the country through an integrated program of coercion and economic restructuring. The decision to adopt such a program may have been affected by opposition violence, but, once under way, the state's violent campaign was not subject to being brought to a halt by the end of opposition violence. The momentum of violence was further reinforced by the institutional changes described above, which weakened central control and established new institutional interests committed to continued violence.

Michael McClintock (1985a) provides another account of how economic interests led to the formation of a state that was prone to using repressive force. He demonstrates that the development of an internal security-oriented military apparatus in El Salvador was intimately related to a particular form of export-oriented agricultural economy — coffee production. In the case of El Salvador, much of
this process took place gradually as the coffee economy developed, rather than taking place rapidly in a context of crisis, as in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, or Brazil. The basic argument is that the economy was created in the first place through an active state policy of transferring communally held lands to private owners on the condition that they produce coffee. The oligarchy-controlled state established rural para-military police forces to enforce land expropriations. These forces were subsequently used to enforce a series of "vagrancy" laws that prevented campesinos from engaging in subsistence agriculture, thereby forcing them to be available as a low cost labor force for the commercial coffee planters (and later for commercial farms producing other products such as cotton, sugar, and beef.) McClintock's argument does not really speak to regime type: he is concerned with tracking the development of the state apparatus for violence itself, irrespective of whether civilians or military men held formal state power. The specific institutions of repression, particularly the National Guard and the Treasury Police, retain essentially the same institutional missions and patterns of conduct over extended periods of time and under both civilian and military rule.

This clear historical linkage of the Salvadoran military to the oligarchy leads many analysts from the Salvadoran left to view all state violence in El Salvador
as responding to the wishes of the oligarchy. McClintock himself carefully avoids such claims, with good reason. The main limitation of such an approach is that although it provides a compelling account of both the construction of a repressive apparatus and its routine use, it does not account well for the timing or severity of the worst episodes of state violence. While originally created by the landed elite, the armed sections of the state did their greatest violence in 1932 and in the late 1970s, during times at which the oligarchy, as a class, was at its weakest. In 1932, the oligarchy was weakened by the depression, and in the late 1970s much of the oligarchy was driven into exile by a spate of kidnappings and assassinations.\(^3\) It seems difficult to sustain an argument that the oligarchy was able to compel the military to carry out such violence. An alternative proposition would be that the military institution itself had an interest in carrying out mass repression.

As they stand, both Buchanan's and McClintock's arguments are ultimately \textit{economic} explanations of state violence. The fundamental demand for state violence against civilians stems from the perceived needs of economic elites. In McClintock's case, the argument is fairly straight-forward: landed elites need violence to

\(^3\) Many well informed Salvadorans believe that elements of the military were involved in some of the kidnappings of the 1970s, as they proved to be later in the 1980s.
preserve oligarchic control over productive lands, ensure the availability of wage laborers at low cost, and to suppress labor organizing. Buchanan's argument is more complex and contextual: agrarian elites in Argentina succeeded in reorienting state policy in their favor, leading to a multi-faceted politico-economic offensive against leftism, Peronism, labor unions, and the national industries that provided the setting for the development of these "diseases." In both cases, however, the arguments regarding how violence served particular economic interests could be made clearer and more complete by looking at the interaction of military and economic elites to see what the payoff was for the Argentine and Salvadoran militaries to carry out these violent programs. If, instead of assuming that economic elites could impose their will on the military, one credits the militaries with at least a degree of autonomy and an internal political debate of their own, it should be possible to construct a more compelling and empirically grounded account of how state violence came about when it did, and with the observed intensities.

Sociological and Political Explanations

In "The Political Origins of State Violence and Terror: A Theoretical Analysis," Ted Robert Gurr (1986) lays out a framework to predict how prone a given country is to occurrences of state terrorism. Gurr identifies
three types of variables, structural, situational, and dispositional. His structural variables include social stratification and the elite's position in it, as well as the nation's position in the international system. In brief, the more inequitable the stratification of society, the more isolated the society within the international community, and the more involved the country in great power proxy conflict, the greater the likelihood that the state will use terrorism as a means of rule. Dispositional variables include the past experiences of the elite with violent means of power, the presence of democratic institutions, and ideological accretions resulting from these historical and institutional factors. Elites with previous successful experiences with rule by violence are more likely to choose state violence. Situational variables include the status and strategies of challengers and the elites' own political resources (including regime strength and police apparatus). The more socially isolated the challenging group is from the elite, the more likely the elite is to use terror against them. This would be exemplified by the use of terror against the indigenous population in Guatemala. The stronger the challengers are, and the more they use violence, the more likely state terror against them. Weaker regimes are more likely to use terror, since they lack other kinds of resources to sustain
their rule. And, of course, the availability of repressive agencies increases the likelihood of their use.

Gurr seeks to explain the probability of violence rather than its intensity; however, the argument appears to be equally useful for explaining either. Despite its comprehensiveness, however, Gurr's approach depends entirely on the occurrence of opposition protest and violence to explain the timing of state violence. In other words, all of the other factors that he mentions speak to the propensity of the state to use violence. The only actual trigger for violence mentioned is opposition activity. Gurr's approach would therefore have trouble accounting for several of the prominent cases of state violence such as Argentina, Colombia, and Uruguay where heightened state violence occurred at times when opposition protest and violence had lessened.

Two modifications might enhance Gurr's approach. First, he states at the beginning of the study that

The essential assumption underpinning the analysis is that state terrorism arises out of conflict between elites and non-elites: It is a particular kind of policy or strategy chosen for dealing with actual or anticipated opposition. (1986,45)

This assumption precludes the importance of conflict among elites. Yet Buchanan's highly compelling argument regarding Argentina suggests that conflict between agrarian elites and the Peronists (who comprised both a mass movement and a competing political elite) over control of the state was
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the fundamental reason for the massive violence that took place following 1976. Alfred Stepan (1988) argues that heightened assassination and torture in Brazil in 1973-74 stemmed from conflicts between the intelligence apparatus and the high command over distensão.

Why, if the incoming "military as government" began to plan the distensão in September 1973, did more than two-thirds of all "disappearances" of political prisoners between 1964 and 1979 happen in 1973-1974? (40)

Stepan answers his own question this way:

The extremists in the security community, fearing they would lose their autonomy, waged a new round of warfare against leftist organizations, both to eliminate them and to convince the "military as institution" that the subversive threat was real and that distensão was a dangerous mistake. (41)

The hardliners in the security community had grown accustomed to privileges, power, and considerable autonomy. They correctly ascertained that the sort of liberalization that the high command was promoting would harm their institutional interests. In response to this challenge, they exercised their independent capacity to carry out repression in an effort to signal the high command that liberalization was not advisable. In general terms, then, the increase in state violence during 1973-74 stemmed from a dispute between factions of the state. Gurr's construct would overlook this possibility completely.

The other aspect of Gurr's argument that needs reappraisal is its equation of "elites" and the state. He says that "State terrorism should be seen as arising from
conflict situations created by interactions among elites and their opponents." Exactly how the state and elites fit together is never made clear, but the language of the study suggests that they are one and the same. The problem with this is that many countries contain competing and highly antagonistic economic elites; states in such countries may align themselves with one group, may remain independent, or may split internally over which group to support. State and non-state elites are analytically distinct in terms of the powers they hold and empirically distinct in many countries. Gurr's approach parallels many classical and structuralist Marxist views that presume that the state is either an instrument of dominant economic elites or inevitably acts to preserve the underlying capitalist system of their countries, thus making distinctions between state and civilian elites analytically unnecessary. As pointed out already with respect to Argentina and El Salvador, the relationship between state and non-state elites is by no means a constant one, and intense episodes of state violence appear to coincide at a number of points with major shifts in state/non-state elite relations.

One reason for distinguishing clearly between state and non-state elites with respect to state violence is that under some circumstances, state violence may be a means for

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state elites to extract concessions from non-state elites. In other words, while economic elites sometimes control, influence, or manipulate state elites, it is also possible that state elites use their powers to influence and manipulate civil elites. In "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," Charles Tilly (1985) argues that states may create "threats," or the appearance of threats, in order to legitimize greater demands on the resources of private capital. War making by states -- picking fights with neighbors -- amounts to a protection racket in which the state "protects" economic elites from external "threats" and in the process is able to justify the construction of ever larger state institutions. Tilly is referring to European states and specifically to conflict with "external" opponents. It seems plausible that Latin American states may have used analogous protection against internal enemies to increase their call on the resources of capital. It may also have served as the condition on which militaries, rather than civilians, are able to claim control the state. This is, in effect, Marx' (1963) Brumairean deal: allowing a military dictator to rule in exchange for protection and order. The protection contract

5 While several of the state institutions we have discussed so far, including Argentina, Uruguay and El Salvador, have literally harbored organized crime activity against wealthy citizens such as kidnapping for ransom, theft, and killing for hire, there is a broader analogy to be drawn about the political relationship between the state and civilian economic elites.
isn't confined exclusively to situations in which the military controls the state. Any control over resources or policy-making by the military is earned on the basis of protection.

With such an implicit contract in place, a number of dynamics are predictable. First, the arrangement may far outlive the original conditions that led civilian sectors to hand over the state. Civilians are afraid that the same threat could recur. They are also grateful for having been rescued. The state can manipulate these reactions by acting in a way that maintains the appearance of a threat, continuing, for example, to be conspicuously repressive even in the absence of opposition violence. Only if there is a genuine threat, or if the state is successful in creating the appearance of one, are leading civilian sectors likely to tolerate a military state that acts against their economic interests.

O'Donnell (1978), Buchanan (1989), and Rouquié (1987) argue persuasively that violent suppression of popular mobilization and guerrillas was one of the key bases upon which the Argentine, Chilean, and Uruguayan militaries built support for military rule among elite civilians. O'Donnell (1978) points out that the military's supply of repression is virtually the only thing that can prolong support among middle sectors and national capital for a B-A state that is carrying out orthodox economic policies.
However, if Stepan is right that the continued use of violence by the state creates an impression of a continued threat, this suggests that a military state might continue to "supply" repression in order to perpetuate the impression of a threat and thereby to retain the support of civilian sectors who are actually being hurt by the state's policies.

In the absence of a believable threat, however, there isn't much reason for powerful civilian sectors to put up with a military that promotes hostile economic policies. The intensity of elite reactions to a breach of the protection contract can vary from demonstrations of class solidarity and public condemnation in the media to the use of allies within the state -- sectors more enmeshed in the protection relationship or otherwise linked to the dominant classes -- to apply pressure from within the state. In the event of a major breach, such as a failure to respond to violent threats against economic elites or an attack by the state on elites' core interests, dominant classes can respond in a variety of ways, including mobilizing an electoral vehicle for taking state power directly, actively encouraging and paying their allies within the state to take action, and taking measures to provide their own protection through the use of mercenaries. During the late 1970s, the Salvadoran oligarchy used all of these means to combat what it perceived as the increasing betrayal of its
interests by the military-led state. (See Chapters Five and Six.)

State actors may undertake to fabricate a threat to justify their own position. Semi-autonomous elements within the state, operating at a local level, may engage in "entrepreneurial violence," in effect supplying violence to create a demand for violence (i.e. a willingness to pay for it or provide other kinds of rewards in exchange for it). Thus Tilly's "protection racket" can operate at different levels of the state, ranging from the central government to a local police barracks. Such activity, repeated in numerous locations, could have a significant effect on the overall levels of violence carried out by the state, and might have little to do with objective or even perceived levels of opposition.

I ideological Explanations

Another set of explanations of state terrorism focus on the ideological orientations of state leaders. This group of arguments is distinguished from the economic or political approaches in that the analysis starts with the ideas themselves, rather than seeing ideas as an intermediate variable between the basic causes and the violent outcome. Economic arguments such as that of Buchanan (1989), for instance, argue that the ideas of state actors change in accordance with the shifting power of economic
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elite groups. McClintock (1985a) indicates that elements of the Salvadoran armed forces adopted an ideology compatible with the thinking of their sponsors within the oligarchy. Several of the factors that Gurr (1986) sees as predisposing states to violence are ones that would have their effect by influencing the thinking of state actors. The social distance between elites and their opponents, for instance, would make elites more willing to use violence. Past successful experience with using violence -- i.e. learning -- increases the likelihood of violence. A natural part of any reciprocal violence model is that opposition violence affects how state decision makers perceive the threat posed by political opposition, making state violence more likely.

George Lopez (1986) and David Pion-Berlin (1989) focus their analyses directly on the power of ideas to catalyze or justify state terrorism. Lopez examines the thinking embodied in the doctrinal statements of South American militaries and argues that the versions of "National Security Ideology" (NSI) developed there provide a framework for thinking about the state, national interest, the nature of security, and the obligations of state actors which justifies extremely broad and persistent use of state terrorism. NSI "reifies" the nation state as the unit of human society that must be preserved, strengthened, and built upon. The nation is seen as an organism, the
individual parts of which are of subsidiary moral consequence. Aspects of individual security, such as freedom from arbitrary arrest, torture, or murder at the hands of the state are simply not important in contrast to the security of the state as a whole. The institutions of the state itself, and the military in particular, are of tantamount importance because they are the actors of last resort for the preservation of the nation. Lopez argues that a key component of NSI is its resurrection of geo-strategic thinking, which he links to the overwhelming concern of national security states with internal security. The link between geo-strategic and internal security concerns is not obvious at first glance; however, internal stability and the organic health of the nation are seen under NSI as vital to the nation's overall strength as a unit and hence its ability to compete and survive internationally. Under such an organic conception, security threats stem not so much from violent rebellion as from ideas and social forces. Any ideas or social movements that are not conducive to national economic development become threats to the state: "Under these circumstances, social science professors, union leaders, bank vice-presidents, and clergy who object to the economic policy of the state are viewed without much differentiation and are considered targets for suppression, if not outright elimination." (Lopez 1986, 86) With such a broad
definition of the threats to security, an extremely severe and prolonged campaign of repressive violence appears to be necessary. It also becomes very difficult to define at what point victory over the "enemies" of the state has been achieved, with the result that state terror campaigns have been open-ended. Lopez' argument thus proves helpful not only in explaining the intensity of violence but also the breadth of sectors targeted by the state and the prolongation of violence even after the disappearance of armed opposition and significant popular mobilization.

Lopez is cautious about the claims he makes for ideology as an explanatory variable. He does not tackle the issue of to what extent National Security Ideology is an exogenous variable or merely an elaborate justification for actions that militaries want or need to take to promote their institutional interests. The reification of the state and its leaders under NSI would seem to suggest that NSI was self-serving, yet there is a compellingly close fit between the actions that NSI logically requires and the actual conduct of several of the militaries that subscribe to NSI, suggesting that NSI either influenced or at least facilitated state violence.

David Pion-Berlin (1989) focuses on a particular form of economic orthodoxy, namely monetarism, as a central explanation for episodes of repression in Argentina and Peru. He shows that state repression and terrorism are
associated, over time, with the ascendance of monetarist ideas. His explanation for this is that the content of monetarist thought made violence seem necessary to state officials. Monetary stability required an end to fiscal deficits (which were generally financed through expansion of the money supply). Balanced public sector budgets could only be achieved if the state could resist popular demands for state services and higher wages in the public sector. Thus repression was required to eliminate one of the main causes of monetary expansion and (presumably) inflation.

**Advantages of Idea or Project-Centered Arguments**

The arguments of Lopez and Pion-Berlin make clear that certain ideas can provide powerful rationales for prolonged, intense use of state terrorism, beyond what would be needed for the short-term suppression of opposition protests of violence. Likewise, the sorts of politico-economic projects described by Buchanan (1989) and McClintock (1985a) call for a breadth and intensity of violence beyond that necessary for mere suppression of opposition. Thus, if an analyst takes ideology or regime projects into account as major factors in shaping state violence, he or she would be better able to deal with cases that cannot be explained very well using explanations that place primary emphasis on popular opposition as the predictor of state violence. It becomes easier to
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comprehend campaigns of violence that target large numbers of politically inactive civilians and which continue well past the point at which significant opposition protest or violence have been quelled.

With ideological approaches, as with politico-economic ones, the analyst quickly runs into the problem of how to explain why a given military institution adopts a particular project or set of ideas. While the sort of National Security Ideology described by Lopez does in fact appear to have provided part of the rationale for mass state violence in several South American countries, the fact remains that over the decades, militaries in these same and in other countries have chosen more reformist and populist paths. The nationalist military junta that came to power in Peru in 1968 acted in accordance with a set of almost radical socio-political ideas that had gained ascendancy within the Peruvian military academy. Even within those militaries that have most forcefully adopted and acted upon National Security Ideology as Lopez describes it, there have existed competing factions with very different preferences regarding types of political regimes or socio-economic orders. In view of this fact, Lopez' account of the value of ideology for explaining state violence is only partially satisfying since his analysis begs the prior question of why these ideas got adopted in the first place.
One way to approach this problem is to assume that the adoption of a given ideology or project is the outcome of a process of political competition within a given military institution in which ideas, and leaders upholding particular ideas, compete for support among the officer corps. Just as the electoral success of political parties depends upon their ability to choose a platform that has broad appeal and minimizes defection from the party, the intra-institutional success of a given leadership group depends in part on its ability to choose political and economic ideas for which broad support can be built within the institution. A faction's ideas may assist it in gaining power, or a group may be able to take power for other reasons that have little to do with its ideological predispositions. Even in the latter case, the ideas adopted by a leadership group, whether before or after taking power, may affect its ability to maintain power.

This argument presumes that even within a formalized, hierarchical organization such as a military, advancement to the highest levels of the institution depends upon building "political" support among peers and subordinates. In more strongly institutionalized militaries, only the upper levels of the officer corps are crucial. In less

6 Examples of other factors that can affect the ability of a leadership group to take power include how well known it is, whether it is seen as having international support, and whether it has particularly good access to military or organizational resources.
institutionalized militaries, such as those of Mexico or the Southern cone up through the early 20th century, or those of Central American countries more recently, the support of junior officers is necessary for a given leadership group to gain and retain control of the military.

Ideas can help a leadership group gain or maintain ascendency within the military in two basic ways: 1) by providing a program that appears likely to enhance the power and security of the military institution under prevailing conditions; and 2) by attracting powerful civilian supporters or neutralizing civilian opponents. Ideas that are perceived as clear and practicable are more likely to gain supporters; ideas that are complex, abstract, or likely to require long periods of time to bear fruit are less attractive. Leadership groups that adhere to less immediately practicable ideas or projects are less likely to gain ascendance on the basis of their program or to maintain it should they manage to gain a dominant position through force.

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7 Analogously, Michael Shafer (1988) writes that U.S. offici ldom has clung to elements of counterinsurgency doctrine, despite repeated failures in practice, because the underlying ideas are familiar, universal, and provide clear guidance for concrete policy actions. The familiarity and apparent applicability of the doctrine is more important than its actual effectiveness in determining its continued adoption by government decision makers.
As circumstances change, perceptions within a military institution regarding which ideas best support the interests of the institution may also shift quite dramatically. For example, an economically orthodox, politically repressive project may appear to maximize the interests of the military at a given point in time by simultaneously dealing with perceived threats to the institution, increasing the organizational purview of the military, and securing strong civilian support for the military. The formula of repression and orthodox economic thinking espoused by the anti-Peronist faction around General Videla in 1976 was a potent combination in these terms, since it simultaneously addressed real security threats to the nation (or at least to the status quo), offered a basis upon which to expect future improvements in the overall strength of the nation, expanded the political role of the military, and guaranteed active support for the military from powerful civilian groups. In a number of Latin American cases, such views have subsequently lost ground to alternative, liberalizing tendencies that promise to extricate the militaries from unsuccessful experiments in government. Reformist ideas can gain strong support within the military of a country in which rigidities of the existing economic structures appear to be causing mass social upheaval. This type of scenario led to the development of a reform movement within the Salvadoran
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military during the late 1970s, culminating in the reformist coup of 1979. Such reformist ideas, however, can (and did, in the case of El Salvador) quickly lose support if implementation proves more complicated or less immediately efficacious than originally thought.

Episodes of great social and political turmoil have both centrifugal and centripetal effects on militaries. On one hand, the existence of a crisis leads to the development within the officer corps of contrasting prescriptions regarding the appropriate political role of the military, the advisability of major socio-economic reforms, etc. On the other hand, if the threat to the survival of the state as a whole is perceived to be great, many officers will want to present a united front to protect the integrity of the institution. Internal polarization, and the perception of threat to the survival of the institution, can be heightened if 1) existing groups within the military seek support for their cause from elements of civil society, as happened in El Salvador during 1932 and 1979 (Anderson 1971, 95-97; McClintock 1985a, 107-111), or if 2) outside forces conspicuously court military factions in an effort to catalyze conflict, as happened in Chile in 1973 (Rouquié 1985, 238-248) and in Argentina in 1976. (ibid 274-76)

Under such circumstances, the simplicity and immediate practicality of policy prescriptions, and the extent to
which they secure powerful allies for the military, are likely to be decisive. A military that is divided between reformist and conservative programs may quickly unify around one or two conservative views if these meet these criteria of best protecting the institution. In El Salvador, the simple anti-communist formula pushed by hardliners within the Salvadoran military in 1979 was a useful implement for building internal political support. It brought the hardliners and any officers willing to support them the active support of powerful and unified civilian agrarian elites. Its action implications were obvious and practicable. The political program of the "institutionalist" senior officers was substantially compatible with that of the hardliners, except that the institutionalists carried out sufficient economic and political reform to secure the United States as a supporter, which gave added protection to the military institution. Compared to the political analysis and programs of reformist officers were complex, difficult to implement in a short time period, vulnerable to disruption by popular opponents and by hardliners within the military. Compared to the relatively unified conservative oligarchy, the only a fragmented and volatile coalition of civilian political elites could be counted on to be supportive of officers who promoted reformist ideas. (Pelupessy 1987)
In sum, it appears likely that ideas, in the form of ideology or of specific politico-economic programs such as those adopted in Argentina or El Salvador, must form an important part of any analysis of what makes a state prone to using severe violence against its civilian populace. Ideas need to be included as a type of filter which affects how opposition protest or violence, as well as the political needs of the state, are interpreted, and which therefore influence the ensuing reaction of the state. Particular attention should be devoted to how a particular set of ideas comes to be adopted by the state. This crucial step affects, and is affected by, factional political competition within the military. Ideas, in other words, need to be part of the picture, but do not appear out of thin air and proceed to guide state policy. A given project or set of ideas becomes dominant as a result of 1) the political power of the groups that endorse them and 2) the ideas' own utility to members of state institutions under a given set of circumstances. The utility of complex ideas declines rapidly as the apparent urgency of action increases. There is therefore a tendency during episodes of mass opposition for significant portions of military institutions to gravitate toward simple, repressive formulas that promise a quick fix. Often these formulas are those preferred by conservative economic elites.
Sabatier (1987) argues that public policy making in the U.S. involves a feedback process in which policy thinking affects policy actions taken, actions lead to policy learning, which affects subsequent policy thinking. An analogous process affects decisions about state violence: an evaluation of how particular "projects" such as the Salvadoran or Argentine agrarian restorations get adopted should take into account the impact of actual policy actions along the way on prevailing thought and opinion within the state. As noted by Stepan (1988) regarding Brazil, the use of violence by elements of the state can have a symbolic value, communicating to other factions or opinion groups the message that a political threat exists that can only be met with force. Increasingly heavy use of repressive violence by those elements of the military who already favor such a policy may gradually convince elements who prefer other policies that the threat is so severe that the hardliners' policy ideas are correct. The combination of the impression of growing danger and the ideological coherency of a hardline argument may suffice to cause reformists to change their views. In a country such as El Salvador in which increased state violence generated a more violent form of opposition, the autonomous capacity of hardliners to use violence not only created an impression of greater danger, it created the reality, with predictable results in the form of widespread persuasion on
the part of formerly reformist officers that violent action was required.

Conclusions

Several lessons emerge from this literature review that will be useful in analyzing in depth of occurrence of state violence in El Salvador during the late 1970s and the 1980s. First, the most simplified approaches to explaining state terrorism, such as the conventional wisdom action-reaction model, are undermined by numerous anomalies that they cannot easily explain away. Second, economic, political, and ideological approaches, particularly ones that focus on the specific politico-economic project that a given regime is trying to implement, provide greater flexibility in accounting for the timing and severity of violence in several empirical cases than the conventional opposition/reaction model. Existing literature applying these approaches can be enhanced by setting aside two common assumptions: 1) that the state is a unitary actor and 2) that state and civilian elites are either not meaningfully distinguishable or, if distinguishable, the state does the bidding of and adapts itself to dominant civilian economic elites. In the chapters that follow, I will review intra-elite political events and the dynamics of violence in El Salvador, showing that the interplay of
different state and civilian elite factions had a significant effect on the occurrence of state violence.
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CIVIL MILITARY RELATIONS IN EL SALVADOR:
FROM GUARD DOG TO PROTECTION RACKET

"¿Porque estan guardando las nalgas de los oligarcones?"
"Why are you guarding the asses of the oligarchs?"
COMADRES demonstrator at Costa Rican Embassy, speaking to
government soldiers, September 1989

Overview

Between the 1880s and the late 1970s, the armed forces of El Salvador evolved from being a creation of the oligarchy to being an increasingly independent institution with a political mind of its own. As the interests and policy preferences of the military diverged from those of economic elites, conflicts arose over what the political role of the armed forces should be.

In the aftermath of Central American independence, El Salvador lacked a formal military institution. Forces were raised as needed to respond to frequent invasions and uprisings as all of Central America struggled with the question of regional unity and which of two major parties, the Conservatives or Liberals, would dominate. The depth of political divisions on these issues made the formation of a unified national army impossible. Liberal president General Gerardo Barrios took initial steps towards professionalizing the military in the early 1860s, establishing
an academy, purchasing uniforms, and bringing in foreign military advisers to provide training and discipline. Once professionalized, the military became a contender for state power, and generals held the presidency from 1887 to 1903. Tensions remained high between the military and the civilian government until 1911. Grieb (1968, 8) quotes U.S. Minister William Lawrence Merry as reporting back to Washington the following episode, indicative of the nature of civil/military relations at the time:

July 10, 1906. On the 5th, General Regalado, Command. of the Salvadoran army, commenced one of his drunken orgies, ordered out a Hotchkiss gun, and fired two shells into the Presidential Palace, loudly proclaiming his Government a den of thieves whom he desired to wipe out... The morning of the 6th he left for the Guatemalan border where he previously had stationed 1400 troops, and attacked a Guatemalan outpost. [President] Escalón did all in his power to get him to return to the capital...

In the late 1800s, the state carried out a series of reforms that transferred communal lands farmed by indigenous communities to private planters. The goal was to promote commercial agriculture, particularly coffee production. The implementation of this land expropriation was enforced by the enlarged and professionalized Army and by new rural security forces. The new forces were explicitly designed to serve the needs of the dominant economic classes. During the 1920s, the military became further professionalized and institutionalized, and, from 1932 onward, took over the formal reins of government, with
technical, economic and political cooperation from the oligarchy. During the ensuing years, the military-as-governor usually acted in accordance with the wishes of the landed elites, although it departed significantly from the laissez-faire policies preferred by the oligarchy, expanding the role of the state in banking, commerce, and the promotion of industry.

There have been underlying tensions, and occasional crises, regarding the basic legitimacy of military rule. Oligarchic tolerance for military rule has always been conditional. Military rule was legitimated in the first place in 1932 by the willingness and ability of the armed forces to slaughter thousands of peasants in response to an abortive rebellion. The legitimacy of military rule was subsequently bolstered by the efficacy of state policies which, though initially unpopular with the oligarchy, served to improve the economic situation of coffee producers. The post-1932 relationship between the military and the oligarchy can best be described as a "protection contract" in which the oligarchy recognized the privilege of the military to govern the country in exchange for protection of the oligarchy's fundamental material interests. Under the protection contract, the high command was obligated to maintain economic policies consistent with the continuation of the coffee economy, and to use whatever
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level of coercion was necessary to ensure order, labor
discipline, and low wages.

This chapter will show that the relationship between
the military and the oligarchy, while generally best
categorized as an alliance, was an unstable relationship
fraught with latent and actual conflict between and within
the two parties. The periods of greatest friction and
change in the relationship between the military and the
oligarchy coincide with intervals in which the greatest
amount of state violence took place. Much of the autonomy
and political power of the military after 1932 appears to
have been made possible by the military's willingness to
murder large numbers of civilians. To the extent that this
is true, state violence in El Salvador may have as much to
do with frictions between elites as with mass protest or
opposition violence.

The Landed Oligarchy

The origins of the Salvadoran oligarchy can in part be
traced back to the landed elite that developed during the
colonial period, based, by the 18th and early 19th cen-
turies, on the production of indigo. However, an economic
metamorphosis took place between the 1860s and the second
decade of the 20th Century in which a new, more powerful
and concentrated oligarchy was formed, based on the
production of coffee. While data do not exist to account
in a clear, quantitative way the change that took place, in general terms, wealth in El Salvador become far more concentrated following the coffee revolution, and a much greater gap emerged between the top 50 coffee-growing families and their smaller or less successful competitors. This new wealth resulted from the fact that the system of coffee production developed in El Salvador was unusually efficient and profitable. The new coffee elite that emerged was not only fabulously wealthy within the Salvadoran context, but also far more independent internationally than coffee producers in other countries such as Costa Rica or Guatemala, where extensive international financing had been used and a degree of indebtedness had resulted. (Browning 1971, 223)

The first steps towards sparking the coffee revolution that created the new oligarchy were taken by Liberal President and General Gerardo Barrios. During the 1860s, he provided incentives and political support for introduction of coffee cultivation. (Anderson 1971, 6; Elam 1989, 83) Barrios was succeeded in office by a Conservative president, Francisco Dueñas, who did little to promote the new crop. Alistair White dates the creation of the coffee oligarchy from the departure of Dueñas, who was the last Conservative president of El Salvador. The Liberal regimes that followed had a remarkably consistent economic vision. They sought to promote the expansion of the national
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economy, and of the overall strength of El Salvador as a
country, through active promotion of entrepreneurial
agriculture, taking advantage of El Salvador's principle
comparative advantage, which lay in medium altitude
volcanic soils and good rainfall, perfect for producing
coffee. According to White (1971), successive governments
differed from one another primarily on issues of principle
involving political freedoms. White labels the two
distinguishable factions during the first thirty years of
liberal rule as "idealists" and "pragmatists."

The principle obstacle to capitalist agriculture in El
Salvador was a complex system of land holding that dated
from the colonial era. Large areas of the country were
held in communal land holdings known as ejidos. Population
densities were greatest in fertile upland areas (as opposed
to the disease-ridden coastal lowlands), and these prime
areas were where ejidal holdings were most common.
Relatively extensive areas of the country were used in
shifting, low intensity production of either food staples
or añil (indigo). The shift from indigo to coffee as
principle export had a number of serious implications:
whereas indigo cultivation required little capital or
labor, and tended to shift from field to field to avoid
soil exhaustion, coffee was a permanent, fixed crop,
requiring high initial capital inputs, a five year waiting
period before harvesting, and intensive maintenance and
fertilization. It therefore depended on formal, permanent land-holding patterns and the availability of a permanent (and low cost) labor force. (Browning 1971, 145-221)

Browning (1971) notes that the private interests of Liberal elites in El Salvador and their assessment of the collective economic interests of the nation coincided. They identified themselves as the entrepreneurial leaders of the country, and proceeded to use their power within the state to decree laws which facilitated expansion of coffee agriculture. The first step was to directly require that communities with common lands dedicate a portion of those lands to coffee production, or else risk confiscation. Since coffee requires significant investment and a long delay before harvest, and since most pueblos lacked either capital or access to credit, these laws provided the basis for expropriation of some ejidos. A sequence of increasingly direct laws led eventually to the abolition of common lands in 1882, which forced communities to divide up their holdings, cultivate them individually, and apply for private ownership. This privatization of land ownership, and of the risks and financial burdens of agriculture, made it possible for agrarian elites, and anyone else who had substantial financial resources, including urban merchants and professionals, to buy up and consolidate huge holdings of prime land at low prices.
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The intensive methods of coffee cultivation developed in El Salvador were particularly well suited to the climate and soil conditions there, and the fertilization, maintenance, and rotating replacement of plants allowed high production levels to be sustainable virtually indefinitely. Salvadoran coffee producers obtained among the highest yields in the world at costs which, once the initial start up period was past, were comparatively low. The result was extraordinary returns, averaging over 30% annually for decades. (Baloyra 1982, 28) One of the factors that contributed to this profitability was low labor costs. While other Latin American countries were importing labor, El Salvador developed a labor surplus as early as the 1890s which suppressed wages. (White 1973, 92)

Besides creating fabulous wealth among the key planting families, the extraordinary profitability of coffee production in El Salvador enabled the country to pay off its international debts between the 1870s and 1914, and to invest in infrastructure, much of it oriented toward further expansion of coffee production or lowering of costs. (Baloyra 1982, 7) Under the presidency of Dr. Manuel Enrique Araujo, it became explicit state policy to avoid foreign loans, although during the teens and twenties, considerable direct foreign investment in railroads,  

1 The labor surplus, of course, resulted from the fact that the expropriation of communal lands was more comprehensive in El Salvador than in neighboring countries.
communications and banking were permitted. The continuing coffee boom had two major structural effects on the Salvadoran economy: first of all, larger producers tended to absorb the lands of smaller or less efficient growers whenever that latter got in difficult financial straits. It also generated a distinct and powerful class of capitalists who financed production and marketed coffee abroad. Many of the members of this group were relatively recent immigrants from Europe or elsewhere in Latin America -- Colombia in particular -- who used their knowledge of overseas markets, finance, and foreign exchange to earn high returns. This group, which Guidos Véjar designates the bourgeoisie, as distinct from the coffee producers, used their capital reserves to move into coffee processing, previously the domain of the largest coffee growers. By 1924 seven of the top twelve coffee processors and exporters were not coffee producers. (Guidos Véjar 1980, 82) The success of the bourgeois group ultimately generated tensions and diverging interests between them and the coffee growers.

The advance of the coffee commerce bourgeoisie found political expression in a series of presidential administrations, beginning with that of Dr. Manuel Enrique Araujo and continuing with a dynasty of presidents from the Meléndez-Quiñonez clan. These Liberal, pro-bourgeois presidents managed to choose their successors and get them
elected, using a corporatist organization called the Liga Roja, or "Red League." The name of the Liga Roja is misleading: it was chosen to confer a sort of leftist caché on the organization and was reinforced by espousal of "vague egalitarian sentiments." (Dunkerly 1985, 20) In addition to the Liga Roja, the bourgeois governments of the teens and twenties permitted, and even at times actively promoted, the development of trade guilds among artisans. According to Guidos Véjar (1980, 68) the goal of these policies was to develop "auxiliary classes" in support of the state.

Guidos Véjar believes that relations between the producers and the bourgeoisie were strained by the 1920s. The evidence for this view is the expansion of the bourgeois element and their increasing dependence on foreign capital, which the growers had historically avoided. The main material issues dividing the two camps were prices and terms for financial and processing services. According to Guidos Véjar’s portrayal, the Liga Roja was needed to reinforce the political position of the bourgeoisie because of growing conflicts with the producers. He may be overstates the extent of these divisions: during the teens and twenties, the supposedly bourgeois governments of the Meléndez-Quiñonez dynasty made particular efforts to establish military and police organizations that supported the coffee growers' interests, and these forces cooperated
closely with the Liga Roja. (Dunkerly 1985, 20) These facts point to a high degree of cooperation between the bourgeois and producer sectors of the oligarchy. Only with the onset of the depression, which caused the bourgeoisie to restrict credit and proceed with numerous foreclosures of coffee producers' lands, did the divisions within the economic elite become clear.

It is notable that the Liga Roja, as an instrument for preserving the oligarchy's political power, prefigured later organizations such as the National Democratic Organization (ORDEN) and the ARENA party, which was formed in 1981 to help restore the oligarchy to state power. The similarity lies in the combination of electoral organization, selective mass mobilization, and coercion. During the Meléndez-Quiñonez period, the coercive capability of the Liga Roja was independent of the formal structures of the armed forces, though they regularly cooperated with one another. (Dunkerly 1985, 20) The same independence and cooperation characterized death squad organizations established by the oligarchy during the late 1970s and the 1980s.

The Military and Security Forces

The expropriation of communal lands was, as one might expect, the cause of intense conflict between aspiring coffee elites and rural communities. Force was required,
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and the military capabilities of the state determined the pace of expropriation and privatization. According to José García (1982, 6-8), it is no accident that President Gerardo Barrios introduced both commercial coffee production and a more professionalized military. Furthermore, the Liberal state was only able to proceed with direct expropriations when it had sufficient muscle to suppress those rural communities that resisted:

"Not until 1882, however, three years after the army had been beefed up to four divisions, each containing 5000 men, did the government feel strong enough to take the final step. On March 2, 1882 by government decree the ejido system was simply abolished." (ibid. 7)

In 1884, it was decided that additional forces were necessary to continue evictions and control the rural population. The first step was the formation of a national rural police force, dispersed throughout local communities rather than being concentrated, as the Army was, in large regional barracks. In 1888, the rural police were reinforced by a mounted police force assigned to key coffee producing areas. The law establishing the mounted police stated that the force would be "financed exclusively from a tax on coffee exports from the districts where the units were based," thereby making the link between the forces and coffee cultivation legally explicit. (McClintock 1985a, 95)

These police forces also came to play an important role in ensuring the supply of permanent labor required by
coffee agriculture. Vagrancy laws had been on the books since the 1820s, which required peasants to work on local plantations for a fixed number of days per years. These were updated to prevent people displaced by the abolition of common lands from finding subsistence on private land holdings. Police were to

prevent the firing of fields, the clearance of timber and undergrowth from the banks of the rivers, unauthorized hunting and fowling...the settlement, clearing, and burning of any land belonging to private estates. (Browning 1971, 218) 2

The goal of these policies was to prevent people from finding sufficient means of subsistence so that they would be available as laborers. The enforcement of such vagrancy laws became less important in the 20th century because population pressures ensured relatively large numbers of unemployed people seeking wage labor. (White 1973, 93)

Land consolidation continued and actually accelerated during the first two decades of the 20th century. With this acceleration came increasing resistance from rural peasant communities. To provide additional and more specialized coercive muscle, the government created a new, paramilitary force in 1912, modelled on the Spanish Civil Guard, trained by a Spanish officer. The new force, known as the National Guard, took over policing duties in rural areas and served particularly to enforce the 1907 Agrarian

2 quoting Decreto Legislativo, Diario Oficial, 12 May, 1895.
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Code (Ley Agraria) which prohibited trade union organization among rural workers. The Guard took on various administrative functions such as keeping lists of names and descriptions of agricultural employees, as well as law enforcement tasks such as arresting people found gathering firewood, picking berries, or otherwise harvesting any food without written permission from landowners.

The National Guard and the National Police (originally called the Policía de Linea) were elite forces compared to the regular Army. Guard and Police forces were generally better armed, trained, and paid than the Army. While much of the rank and file of the regular army was made up of conscripts, significant proportions of the "security forces" were career soldiers or at least soldiers who re-enlisted repeatedly. They were thus well experienced and seen as loyal to their commanders.

Marked distinctions developed between the security forces and the Army. Although Guard and Police officers were initially drawn from the same pool as the Army, this changed over the years, with increasing numbers being promoted from among the non-commissioned ranks. (García 1983, 4) With such differences in education and institutional experience, the security forces officer corps developed loyalties distinct from those of Army officers. While Army units remained dedicated to territorial defense and were concentrated in large regional barracks, Guard
units were more dispersed geographically, and officers typically remained in the same posts for years, forming close ties with local landowners. In many cases, National Guard officers and troops received their salaries, or significant supplements, from local landowners. The dispersion of Guard units throughout the countryside enabled local commanders "to enjoy local fiefdom privileges." (García 1983, 3-4)

James Dunkerly characterizes the National Guard during its early stages as "a relatively popular police force composed largely of artisans," but argues that it was transformed during the course of the 1920s into a more repressive organization. (1985, 22) His description of the early years presents too benign an image; however, his assessment of the Guard as highly repressive by the 1920s is consistent with other sources. One recorded event which indicates the increasingly repressive role of the National Guard was a massacre in 1922 of protesters in San Salvador. Most of the killed were market women. This action was carried out in conjunction with militants of the government's mass organization, the *Liga Roja*. (Dunkerly 1985, 20)

Anderson (1971, 58) points out that the role distinctions between the National Guard and Army developed only gradually. This is logical, given the important repressive role of the Army in the early phases of land privatization.
(García 1982, 6) Military architecture gives one indication of the rather blurred distinctions between the two forces during the first third of the century. For both the National Guard and the army,

the barracks resembled the common notion of a medieval castle. They had high walls with gun slits in them, crenelated along the top. Watch towers stood in the corners. Barracks in the provinces were built the same way. Of course, such forts would be useless in modern warfare against an enemy with mortars and artillery, but they were not designed for fighting a regular army. Rather, the purpose of these forts, like those of many medieval lords, was to keep the populace in check. They were proof against men armed only with hand guns and machetes. (1971, 58)

In addition to the creation of the National Guard, governments during the teens and twenties made overall efforts to both enhance the security forces and clarify the distinction between them and the regular army. According to Michael McClintock (1985a, 98)

President Manuel E. Araujo (1911-1912) is generally credited with having established the basis of a professional law enforcement system, and sought to relieve the army of its police function; he is also credited with reforms to the army itself which have permanently influenced the security system. Today, Salvadorean army writers date to Araujo's short presidency the introduction of elements conducive to greater professionalization of the army, including the creation of a General Staff -- again on the advice of Spanish officers; the creation of an army educational corps to give troops minimal education; the reorganization of the army hierarchy along present-day lines; and the organization of a workable army reserve system...
The military as a whole became more formalized, more professionalized, and developed more of an institutional sense of itself during the 1920s with the formation of an organization called the circulo militar. The circulo was a sort of officers' guild which pooled the economic resources of officers to give loans and augment pensions. According to Patricia Parkman, "This officer's club proposed, in addition to promoting the 'intellectual, moral, physical and economic improvement' of its members, to 'increase cohesion and harmony among the officers and to resolve differences between members through the mediation of the organization.'" (1988, 13)

Civil-Military Relations in the 1920s

Despite, or perhaps because of, the improvements that took place in the socio-economic status of officers during the 1920s, relations between the officer corps and the governments it served were strained. There were two unsuccessful military uprisings during the 1920s. (Parkman 1988, 13) The first was an insurrection of cadets in February of 1922; the second came in 1927, motivated in part by President Pío Romero Bosque's efforts to impose merit-based promotions and strengthen the position of younger, better-trained officers versus their less technically competent superiors. (Elam 1989, 136-7). In both cases, the National Guard played a vital role in putting
down the rebellion. The loyalty of the National Guard to existing governments, and its decisive superiority over rebellious regular army units became consistent patterns in Salvadoran military politics.

Although President Romero Bosque asserted civilian power over the military in organizational matters, he also became increasingly dependent upon the military during the latter years of his administration to maintain order. Romero Bosque was the last in a dynasty of presidents from the Meléndez-Quíñonez clan of the oligarchy. He was something of an enigma: shortly after his inauguration, he exiled his predecessor and carried out a major, anti-corruption purge of the government. He unmuzzled the press, cancelled a state of siege, restored constitutional rights, and restored university autonomy. He also declared an amnesty, allowing most political exiles of the past administrations to return. (Elam 1989, 136) He was, for a period, more permissive of labor organizing, although exclusively in urban areas. Despite aggregate national prosperity during the late 1920s, however, Romero Bosque was soon faced with highly mobilized and disruptive unions, several of them with significant Communist influence, and turned increasingly to repression, mainly in the form of imprisonment rather than the extra-judicial killings that came later. The elite National Guard played a vital role during the period in maintaining order.
Romero Bosque's dependence on the military increased further as the economic consequences of the world-wide depression began to be felt in 1929 and 1930. Coffee prices collapsed in 1930, leading many growers to allow the crop to rot in the fields. A key element of the collapse of the coffee economy was the unwillingness of banks, most of which were no longer controlled by coffee growers, to provide credits to the producers, causing many of them to cease operations. During this period, many of the weaker coffee growers went bankrupt and lost their lands. The processors, exporters and bankers increasingly took over expropriated lands, generating considerable hard feelings between the bourgeoisie and the producers, while at the same time diluting the distinction between them.

The greatest impact of the depression was on the country's poor rural majority. Highly dependent for decades on wage labor, having had their lands privatized during the expansion of coffee production from the 1870s through the 1920s, the rural population was now in dire straits because coffee growers were either not hiring or were paying wages insufficient for subsistence. Many people who had engaged in share-cropping tenancy arrangements lost access to land when they were unable to pay their debts. This massive economic dislocation in rural areas provided opportunities to labor organizers, including Communists, and Romero Bosque was faced with large-scale
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demonstrations and strikes, in response to which he increased repression, depending upon the National Guard and National Police to imprison labor leaders and break up demonstrations. Eight people were killed when police fired on a demonstration in Santa Ana in December 1930, (Parkman 1988, 18) and between November 1930 and February 1931 around 1,200 activists were jailed. (Dunkerly 1985, 22)

Continuing his earlier pattern of breaking with the past, Romero Bosque decided not to choose his own successor in the accustomed way and insisted instead on a truly competitive election in which there would be no "official" candidate. Relatively little is known about the origins of Romero Bosque's decisions on this matter. They may merely be the result of a singular, idealistic personality. Anderson describes Romero Bosque as "a kind of Salvadorean Good King Wenceslaus." (1971, 8) Baloyra (1982) speculates that Romero Bosque was trying to compensate for the repression that he had used by holding a free election. Despite the fact that Romero Bosque's relatively permissive policies may have unwittingly opened the door to social unrest, the sophistication of his other measures while in government, particularly his reorganization of the military, suggest that there was probably method in his madness. It seems plausible that Romero Bosque's decision to permit a free election reflected a recognition that repression, at least of the limited kind that he had
practiced, was no longer sufficient to maintain social order and preserve the political dominance of the oligarchy.

If Guidos Véjar is correct about the extent of divisions between bourgeois and cafetalero factions, it may have ceased to be possible to maintain a working elite coalition, thus making it necessary to throw the process open to a broader political base. Existing sources do not make clear at what point in time Romero Bosque decided to hold free elections. Most likely, the decision came after the onset of the economic depression, and therefore took into account the social forces that the economic crash set in motion. This would be consistent with the sort of renegotiating of the "social contract" that took place in several Latin American countries in the wake of the depression. (Carnoy 1984, 194-7)

Whatever Romero Bosque's reasons, his decision to hold a free election effectively ended direct oligarchic rule in El Salvador. The candidate of the oligarchy, Alberto Gomez Zárate, came in a distant second to Arturo Araujo, who was the candidate of a self-styled Labor party. Although he was himself a wealthy landowner, Araujo was a populist and was elected on the basis of extensive promises -- made by him and by overzealous campaigners on his behalf -- to reform the economy, redistribute land, and generally defend the
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interests of workers and the poor. Immediately after
taking office, Araujo was faced with large and continuous
demonstrations demanding that he carry out the expected
reforms. Araujo called upon the armed forces to repress
the demonstrations.

The armed forces had a more prominent position in the
Araujo administration from the start because General
Maximiliano Hernández Martínez was both the Vice-President
and Minister of War. His presence on the ticket had helped
to ensure the loyalty of the armed forces during the
tumultuous election and post-election haggling in the
legislature over seating Araujo as president with only a
plurality of the popular vote.3 His ability to deliver
military forbearance was the most likely reason for his
inclusion on the ticket: in preliminary campaigning, during
which Martínez was himself a presidential candidate, he had
the weakest support among a large field of candidates.
According to McClintock (1985a, 103), Martínez was Araujo's
"sole supporter in the Army high command," which doubtless
put Araujo in a position of increasingly deferring to
Martínez in order to maintain the loyalty of the armed
forces. The U.S. military attaché said of Araujo April
1931 that "In most of the difficulties which have arisen he

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3 According to Kenneth Grieb (1971, 153), the American
minister was sufficiently uncertain of the military's
attitude toward the elections that he requested that a
warship be held in readiness in Panama for hasty deployment
to San Salvador.
has relied on the Vice-President, General Maximilian [sic] Martínez..." (McClintock 1985a, 106) Araujo's dependence on Martínez was exacerbated when his government announced its intention to seek a new foreign loan. The Araujo government had already developed a reputation for corruption, so the foreign loan proposal triggered fear of foreign intervention and anger over expected misuse of the funds. Opponents of the proposed loans organized mass demonstrations, which turned into riots ensued in San Salvador and Santa Ana. These were put down with force. (Parkman 1988, 18)

The Araujo administration was in trouble from the beginning for a number of reasons. First of all, the conditions of depression and the very limited fiscal resources of the state made it impossible to fulfill the expectations for reform that had been raised during the campaign. Furthermore, the Araujo government lacked sufficient technical and administrative capacity because civilian elites who had previous government experience were unwilling to join his government. (Parkman 1988, 18) All government salaries were in arrears, and Araujo gave the military no priority over civilians in the government. He also took steps which gratuitously provoked the military. First, he refused a reasonable request that military salaries be equalized across provinces of the country. Then he ordered all officers who were in professional
schools or other non-military educational programs to either withdraw from them or leave the military (Grieb 1971, 21-22)

On December 2, 1931, an army revolt drove Araujo from office. The rebelling units were led by a heterogeneous group of younger officers. On the night of the golpe, Vice-President and Minister of War Martínez went to the rebellious artillery barracks overlooking San Salvador. His car was fired upon, but he managed to drive close to the walls, below the angle at which the machine guns could fire, went to the iron door and demanded to be let in. He was allowed to enter, but was then disarmed and held prisoner.

Martínez' "imprisonment" at the outset of the coup has been the subject of considerable debate. Shortly after the coup, the junta of young officers named Martínez provisional president, a move which was, in a sense, constitutionally mandated, since Martínez was the Vice-President and Araujo had departed the country. Martínez was also a logical choice for the young officers, since he was clearly the most respected senior officer in the military. The question of Martínez' participation became crucial because U.S. diplomatic policy of the time required that the U.S. not recognize a government coming to power by force. It has never been satisfactorily resolved whether Martínez was a co-conspirator in the coup, or merely a
skilled "serendipidist" and the lucky beneficiary of Araujo's failures. Clearly Martínez was shrewd in positioning himself to benefit from a coup once it happened.

Most sources claim that the military rebels acted with broad public support. At a popular level, the suffering brought on by the depression, and by the Araujo government's apparent inability to cope with it, made for a sentiment that any change would be a change for the better. The oligarchy, for its part, was frightened by the extent of social mobilization and by the reformist campaign rhetoric of Araujo's Labor Party. They were glad to see him go.

1932: La Matanza and Consolidation of Military Rule

The reaction of the U.S. foreign policy system towards Martínez was contradictory from the outset. Senior levels of the State Department in Washington were resolutely opposed to recognizing Martínez and intended to prevent him from taking power through diplomatic pressures. The basis for this policy was U.S. adherence to the 1923 Washington Treaties. According to Kenneth Grieb (1971, 151)

By the terms of these accords, the Central American nations had pledged to withhold recognition from governments seizing power through force in any of the isthmian republics. Although not a signatory of the treaty, the United States based its recognition policy on this principle. Through this means the State Department had attempted to impose some stability in Central America, by discouraging revolts. With the cooperation of the isthmian governments, United
States diplomats endeavored to bring pressure to bear on the leaders of any uprising, to deny them the fruits of their victory, and thus reduce the constant series of coups and counter-coups that normally characterized Central American politics.

Even though Martínez could not be proven to have planned or participated in the coup, he eventually came to hold the office of President as a result of it. U.S. policy explicitly rejected recognition of such a person. Shortly after the coup, however, it became evident that the U.S. Minister, Charles Curtis, was not effectively implementing this policy. He distrusted the Military Directorate, which was composed of two colonels, a captain, and several lieutenants. Curtis characterized the junior officers as "little more than half witted" and "utterly irresponsible youths," having "no capacity and no fixed plan beyond getting rid of the present government."  

While perhaps overly harsh, Curtis' assessment that the junior officers lacked a coherent plan for governance is probably correct and is consistent with the lack of political preparedness of junior officers evident in subsequent military rebellions in El Salvador. Curtis' hostility to the directorate continued after Martínez was named as provisional President, because "The young officers obviously intended to employ Martínez as a figurehead in an attempt to satisfy

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4 Quoted in Grieb (1971, 155) from Curtis to Stimson, 3 Dec. 1931, 816.00 Revolutions/1, and 5 Dec. 1931, 816.00/Revolutions/35.
domestic and foreign opinion, while continuing to exercise power." (Grieb 1971, 158)

While Curtis was under explicit and repeated instructions to make clear to both the directorate and to Martínez that none of them could receive U.S. recognition, he focused on getting the directorate to resign, and failed completely to send the signal that the U.S. would not recognize Martínez. Apparently, he was so frustrated with working with the directorate that he placed a priority on getting them to resign. Curtis recommended to the State Department that they recognize Martínez, ignoring violation of existing policy.

Washington sent a special envoy, Jefferson Caffery to evaluate the situation. Caffery found that the "better elements" (i.e. the oligarchy) were now supporting Martínez "as for the moment he offers a stable government and they very much fear that any change in the situation might bring renewed disturbances." He advised immediate pressure be brought to bear to oust Martínez before it was too late and replace him with a provisional junta. (Grieb 1971, 160)

This proved ineffectual, since Martínez had growing civilian support and would not leave unless the military so required. Ironically, special envoy Caffery turned to the younger officers of the now-disbanded directorate to pressure Martínez to resign in favor of an individual who was clearly not involved in the coup, whom the U.S. could
therefore recognize. Eventually, the directorate was convinced to consider Colonel José Asensio Menéndez, Under-Secretary of War in the provisional government, as a successor. He had been at sea at the time of the coup and could thus recognizable according to U.S. policy.

But events intervened: as Grieb puts it, "just as Martínez' replacement appeared imminent, a series of so-called 'communist-uprisings' swept the country." (1971, 162) The rebellion had an immediate political effect. On the second day of the uprising, the Military Directorate, which U.S. diplomats had been trying to coax into replacing Martínez, instead transferred full executive power to him. (Elam 1968, 31) After the rebellion began, the U.S. abandoned its efforts to oust Martínez, since removing him would jeopardize the unity of the military.

Rumblings of rebellion had been growing since 1930 in the coffee-growing regions of Western El Salvador because of the greatly increased unemployment and suppressed wages. The Communist Party under Farabundo Martí had been working to incorporate rural discontent into a nation-wide movement, with the eventual goal of an armed rebellion. The rebellion of January 22, 1932 was not actually decided upon until the night before. It was an act of desperation triggered by the capture on January 19 of Communist Party leaders Farabundo Martí, Alfonso Luna, and Mario Zapata. The main rebellion took place in rural areas, led by
indigenous caciques and the members of religious organizations known as cofradías. It was poorly organized, and had only the vaguest military goals or strategy. The rebels had very few firearms, most of them captured from rural police posts; generally they were armed only with machetes. The dominant military tactic of the rebellion was to overwhelm government forces with sheer numbers.

The rebels took control of several towns in the western part of the country where they killed a handful of prominent ladino citizens, burned houses of the wealthy, and looted businesses and homes. The sharpest military conflicts came around Sonsonate, where rebellious indians armed with machetes overpowered small units of police and guardia, only to be beaten back and gunned down in large numbers. In most other towns and occupied plantations, government forces, armed with repeating rifles and machine guns, were quickly able to dislodge the rebellious forces, causing them to scatter. The rebellion was quelled in three days. Anderson estimates that no more than thirty five civilians and local police were killed by the rebels, and believes the number is closer to twenty two. Five Customs Policemen were killed in the attack on Sonsonate, the National Police (Policía de Línea) lost a total of ten in Sonsonate and Santa Tecla. Nine National Guardsmen were killed and ten wounded. Anderson's top estimate of regular
army casualties is forty, but "half that many might be more accurate." (Anderson 1971, 136)

Despite the relatively low cost of suppressing the rebellion, the perceived threat was amplified by the fact that the Communists made public statements about plans for, as Rouquié puts it, "carrying the class struggle into the heart of the armed forces" (1985, 247) The Salvadoran Communist Party circulated pamphlets in military barracks arguing that:

Above all, the soldier is a worker or a peasant whom the rich exploit in factories, shops and fields. When he is still a youth he is taken to the barracks where he is forced to bear arms in defense of the wealth which he has produced for the rich as a worker or peasant.

The discontent which the soldier feels in the barracks from the oppression by which he lives is the result of the fact that a soldier, enduring the lies of chiefs and officers, feels that they are his enemies, because these same chiefs and officers belong to the same class which exploited him in the factories, shops and fields. (Elam 1968, 38)

The next circular was even more direct:

COMRADE SOLDIERS: Don't fire a single shot at the revolutionary workers and peasants. Kill the chiefs and officers. Place yourselves under the orders of the Comrade Soldiers who have been named Red Comrades by this Central Committee. (Elam 1968, 39)

Several plots were uncovered when enlisted men reported suspicious activities to their superiors. There were, nonetheless, a number of barracks revolts, confined exclusively to the less elite regular army. The first of these, at the First Cavalry barracks in San Salvador,
precipitated a state of siege in six of the fourteen departments. (Elam 1968, 39) An entire company of the First Cavalry was executed by firing squad. There were similar executions at the First Infantry Regiment and the Air Force. The U.S. legation reported at the time that nearly half of the soldiers in the regular army, (about 4,500 men) were "dismissed" in January, 1932. On January 16, officers disarmed, arrested, and shot many members of the Sixth Regiment of Machinegunners. Such a lack of loyalty is not terribly surprising, given the class origins of most soldiers and the deplorable conditions under which the regular army troops lived. (McClintock 1985a, 119) The response of government forces to the rebellion is well known: government troops, with the National Guard playing the most prominent role, went into the rebellious areas and proceeded to massacre anyone they suspected of having participated in the revolt. In practice, suspects included anyone of "Indian" appearance, dressed as a peasant, and/or carrying a machete (which almost all rural workers do). Suspects were executed en masse. In a number of cases, people in the rebellious zones were told to report to neighboring National Guard barracks to receive safe conduct passes. When they arrived they were seized and executed. According to Salvadoran Communist Miguel Mármol's highly credible account (Mármol himself survived four volleys of a firing squad),
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From the barracks at Ahuachapán a stream of blood flowed, as if it were water, or the urine of horses. [Later] a lieutenant who was in service there would recall, crying, that the peasants who were being shot in groups in the patio would sing "Corazón Santo, Tú Reinarás ("Sacred Heart, You will Reign, a Catholic hymn) and that in the pools of blood he and the soldiers in the firing squad had seen, clear as can be, the image of Christ and had refused to go on killing and protested to their superiors. The protest was made in such adamant terms that the Commander of the garrison ordered a temporary halt to the massacre. (McClimock 1985a, 114)

Though the exact extent of the carnage has been lost, largely because the government destroyed virtually all documents that could provide clues as to the extent of the massacre, it seems likely that at least 8,000 to 10,000 were killed. (Anderson 1971, 135) Many observers put the number higher, between 20,000 and 30,000. One former Salvadoran government official who lived in the zone in which the rebellion took place believes that the numbers may have been overstated, given the weapons and amount of ammunition available to the government forces. He argues that the numbers may have been as low as 2,000 to 4,000 but, because of the political and symbolic importance of La Matanza in El Salvador, he has so far been unwilling to make his own lower estimates public. One thing that would seem to point to higher estimates, however, is the fact that large numbers of executions are reported to have been carried out in San Salvador and other cities, as government forces rounded up virtually anyone they suspected of being
a leftist. The urban executions were sufficiently numerous that

the chief of the department of sanitation feared a major epidemic would result from the slowly decomposing bodies. By the end of January the number of deaths had risen to the point where burial became impractical, and the chief of operations ordered the incineration of bodies. Night after night San Salvador was disturbed by the rumble of military trucks carrying the captured into the city, and bursts of machine-gun fire as "justice" was hurriedly rendered.⁵

According to Salvadoran military historian Colonel Bustamante,

Every night trucks went full of victims from the Direción General de Policía to the banks of the Río Acelhuate where the victims were shot out of hand and buried anonymously in great ditches. (McClintock 1985a, 114)

McClintock reports that

Sometimes the killings in the cities were entirely arbitrary. Several accounts tell the story of a group of about 100 anti-Communist craftsmen who presented themselves at the garrison in San Salvador to offer their services as volunteers. They were invited in and then shot dead in the courtyard of the barracks. (1985a, 114)

Almost all of the killing was carried out by government forces. In late January, about a week after the revolt began, the government began encouraging the organization of civilian vigilance committees, called the Guardia Cívica. These armed civilians, however, served

⁵ Kenneth Grieb (1968, 42-3). This description based on interviews with Robert Gregg, then a resident of San Salvador.
mainly to watch over the cities while the National Guard was in the countryside carrying out the massacre. The exact class makeup of the cívicos is a matter of some debate. International news reports of the day indicated that they were upper class citizens. Canadian Naval Commander V.G. Brodeur, who was in El Salvador at the time of the rebellion and matanza, disagreed, reporting that the cívicos were "not exactly the flower of Salvadorian aristocracy." (McClintock 1985a, 117) Anderson says that the class makeup of cívicos varied from place to place and that in general, "every class that had something to lose by the success of the rebellion was represented in the Civic Guard." (1971, 123) It appears that the contribution of the civic guards to the massacre was relatively minimal, though some authors, such as Dunkerly (1985), attribute some of the worst atrocities to them. McClintock suggests that the internal rebellions in the army made the Civic Guards an important part of the security system. But while it is clear that the barracks revolts reduced the effective size of the regular army, as officers disarmed their men, all of the specific documentary accounts of killings indicate that the perpetrators were either National Guardsmen, National Police, or army soldiers. Anderson concludes that:

Outside of the fact that they freed more reliable units to go on patrol while they guarded the settled areas, the cívicos played very little part in the struggle. Legend attributes to them
many of the massacres that followed the crushing of the revolt, but cooler heads discount these claims, giving dubious credit to the guardia.

The National Police appear to have been the principal executioners in urban areas, an aspect of the matanza for which we have relatively little quantitative information.

Despite the creation of the civic guards, therefore, it is clear that the economic elites of the country depended entirely upon Martínez and the military to defeat the rebellion and prevent its recurrence. Representatives of five leading families, at Martínez' behest, collected over 400,000 colones for the campaign against "the Indians." (McClintock 1985a, 119) The three main banks in the country and the company of H. de Sola donated 160,000 colones, while private donors gave at least an additional 175,000 colones. Canadian Naval officer Brodeur estimates private funds raised for the military at around $125,000.

Faced with the threat of the rebellion, the economic elites of the country also rallied politically around Martínez, something they had been reluctant to do prior to the rebellion. Parkman reports that

Under pressure of the emergency the National Legislative Assembly on February 5, 1932, elected him constitutional president to finish Araujo's term, and leading liberals joined his government. Having established himself with the oligarchy and much of the urban population as their savior from the horrors of Communist revolution, he launched his career as El Salvador's last, and perhaps greatest, caudillo. (1988, 20)
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Such political support for Martínez would seem unremarkable except that Martínez differed from earlier military presidents in being of very humble and partly indigenous origins. He was also known to hold very unusual spiritual convictions, including beliefs in the transmigration of souls from one person to another and witchcraft. He had published several books on theosophy and the occult prior to assuming the Vice-Presidency in 1931. He was referred to by Salvadorans as "El Brujo" (the warlock) and as "el teósofo ametallador" (the machine-gun theosopher). He was, in short, a far cry from the elegant, European stock economic elites who had ruled El Salvador for virtually all of its history (previous military and civilian leaders had been from the upper, ladino classes). One needs only look at the contrast between official photos of members of governments from the Meléndez-Quiñonez period as compared that of Martínez to perceive the major racial shift that had taken place in the state elite.

Martínez was, as Parkman describes him, a caudillo, but he was also representative of the military as an institution, having been the first president and co-founder of the circulo militar, so that allowing him to secure his control over the state signified, from the beginning, an expanded and enduring role for the armed forces in the politics of the nation. To actively support the undisputed leader of the military as president was a dramatic tur-
naround for the civilian elites of the country, since anti-military sentiment had been growing among elites and the middle classes under Romero Bosque and Araujo. Newspaper articles had begun openly attacking the military for alleged incompetence during 1931. (Elam 1968, 25, 45-6) Salvadoran historian Salazar Valiente argues that the Salvadoran "oligarchy" as a whole was "disconcerted" by the 1931 golpe. (Guidos Véjar 1980, 26) Martínez' relations with the coffee oligarchy were rocky during the period prior to the rebellion. Anderson reports that

the president was forced to suffer through a rough meeting with representatives of the cafetalera, led by Francisco Dueñas, the greatest of the coffee barons. These men demanded repeal of Araujo's monetary decrees of October prohibiting the shipment of gold abroad, on the grounds that the bankers were using the tight money situation as an excuse for not making loans to the coffee growers. But Martínez refused. (1971, 90)

Despite these earlier frictions, Martínez, and the military as a whole, consolidated tremendous power in the months and years following the matanza and appear to have met little effective political resistance from the oligarchy. Between 1932 and 1934, the civilians on the cabinet were gradually replaced by military officers. By the spring of 1934, "all but one of the governors of the fourteen departments were military men. The subordinate officers of all government branches were filled with loyal officers." (Elam 1968, 47) Edelberto Torres Rivas expresses
the paradox of the consolidation of military rule this way:

How, having in the country the most concentrated and powerful coffee bourgeoisie, with the greatest entrepreneurial sense, could they be displaced from the exercise of government by a small military group which only had only just converted itself into a modern and professional army?⁶

Many analysts express the view that Martínez' acceptance and consolidation of power was the direct result of his ordering of the matanza. Elam observes that "By dealing successfully, if brutally, with the question of disorder, Hernández Martínez had acquired the right to advance the process of militarization." (1968, 45) Rubén Zamora argues that the new division of labor in which the military took control of the state signified not only

a hypertrophic development of the repressive apparatus of the state, but also a constant shift in our political life, lasting until the present. This act [the repression of 1932] has been the base upon which there has taken place the development of an increasingly autonomous state, which has not only grown quantitatively and qualitatively, but has also developed a greater capacity to act politically... (1976, 518)

The repressive role of the military, therefore, provided not only for the immediate consolidation of power by Martínez, but provided the long-term base for the increasing political autonomy of the military state.

Given the tremendous political benefits that accrued to Martínez and to the military as a whole as a result of the matanza, the question inevitably arises whether the slaughter was carried out for that purpose, rather than merely to repress mass opposition. This is, of course, a fundamentally unresarchable question. There is suggestive evidence, however, that Martínez encouraged the rebellion to take place. The fact that Martínez' first acts after the coup were to begin preparing and beefing up the security apparatus for a major conflict indicates that carrying out a sweeping limpieza was on his agenda well before the Communist rebellion was imminent. Miguel Már mol claimed that friendly army officers warned him that Martínez planned a military operation to "physically eliminate" supporters of the left. (McClintock 1985a, 108)

Several facts point to the possibility that Martínez sought to provoke the rebellion. First of all, he post- poned the municipal elections scheduled for December 15 until January 3, and permitted the Communist party to openly participate in the elections if they would register their membership with the government. All voters had to be registered according to party. This registration, with which the Communists complied, later provided Martínez with a death list, and McClintock concludes that the measure "in retrospect appears to have been designed to encourage Communist Party supporters to reveal themselves." (1985a,
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108) On January 2, 1932, Martínez indefinitely suspended the municipal elections in some of the most potentially insurrectionary towns, an act which precipitated revolts throughout the coffee growing areas "where the peasantry was most organized and restless. Within weeks, the departments of Sonsonate and Ahuachapán (except for their capital cities) and the Indian towns of Nahuizalco, Sonzacate, Izalco, Juayúa, Apaneca, Concepción de Ataco and Jujutla, were up in arms." (McClintock 1985a, 108) Marroquín argues that in the weeks prior to the rebellion, Martínez gave more freedom of movement to the Communist leadership, in hopes that they would successfully catalyze a revolt. (Guidos Véjar 1980, 24) There may have even been direct incitement to rebellion: Anderson quotes Salvadoran historian Mauricio de la Selva as claiming that Martínez went so far as to "send army recruits back to their home villages to spread the word that the acting president wanted reforms, but the rich would not allow them unless a campesino demonstration changed their minds. (1971, 85)7

Martínez accentuated the incendiary effect of the election manipulations by having his minister rudely rebuff an offer by delegates of the Communist party to pacify the workers. When the Communist delegates responded to the

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7 Anderson does not ultimately endorse this conspiratorial view of Martínez' conduct, though several pieces of evidence he provides point to a conclusion that Martínez may have helped the rebellion along.
rebuff by saying that "The peasants will win with their machetes the rights you are denying them," the War Minister responded "You have machetes; we have machine guns."

(Anderson 1971, 92) McClintock concludes that "the last thing Martínez desired then was a truce with the peasantery." (1985a, 109) Perhaps the most damning evidence that Martínez wanted the rebellion to take place is the fact that the coming of the rebellion was well known well in advance, yet he did nothing of record to prevent it from taking place. In fact, in the name of "regrouping" forces, Martínez ordered the withdrawal of National Guard troops from towns such as Izalco that were obvious potential targets of the rebellion. (Anderson 1971, 118) This of course made it easy for rebels to capture towns from which they could most likely have been repulsed by the superior weaponry of the National Guard units. Removal of the Guard forces looks, in retrospect, like an invitation.

The excessive intensity of the violence itself, the randomness of the selection of victims, and the prolonged duration of the slaughter, suggest that suppression of rebellion may not have been the primary purpose of the matanza. The U.S. Minister in Guatemala in 1932 declared that the uprising had been "greatly exaggerated and used for political ends." (Anderson 1971, 150) One of the best ways to exaggerate the extent and threat posed by the rebellion was to react to it very strongly, creating an
impression of great danger. There are, of course, other explanations for the severity of the massacre. Rumors were common during the few days of the rebellion that the Indians intended to commit mass rapes of ladino women. The origins of these rumors are unclear, and Anderson concludes that no such violations took place. In fact, the rebels conducted themselves with what must be considered a remarkable degree of selectivity and decorum for such a spontaneous movement. For example, they consistently spared religious art, churches, and the homes of more generous landlords, while looting and burning homes of particularly notorious landlords.

The orders which Farabundo Martí himself supposedly sent out on the sixteenth instructed the rebels to use against the bourgeoisie "the most opportune means, that is to say: shoot immediately or kill them in some other way without delay...Do away with all of them, saving only the lives of the children." Anderson comments that

If this document is authentic, and I believe that it is, it puts considerable blame for the frightfulness of the repression on the fears that the revolt engendered. In fact, there was no 'massacre' of the bourgeoisie, but such documents, made public after the revolt, helped to convince even moderates that the repression should be severe.

Anderson 1971, pp. 92-93, quoting Jorge Schlesinger, Revolución Comunista, Guatemala, 1946. Anderson states that he believes the documents are authentic.
Anderson also points out that the 1932 rebellion fulfilled the Salvadoran economic elite's worst nightmare — a mass revolt by the "Indians" that they had oppressed, and depended upon, for so long. A February 1, 1932 article in one of the leading Salvadoran dailies, *La Prensa*, was titled "The Indian has been, is, and will be the enemy of the Ladino." The author wrote that "there was not an Indian who was not afflicted with devastating communism....We committed a grave error in making them citizens." (Anderson 1971, 17)

The fact that elite opinion may have called for the massacre does not remove the fact that the massacre was militarily unnecessary and that therefore its implementation was, at its base, a political decision. There is little to suggest, in any of Martínez' conduct throughout the events that led to his taking power, that he was a man of passion prone to rash or vengeful acts. The prolonged implementation of the massacre, which continued, apparently, until there were effectively no more targets, seems consistent with a strategy of demonstrating to the oligarchy the military's, and Martínez', usefulness. A member of the U.S. legation at the time wrote

The de facto regime is undoubtedly keeping up the fear of communism for practical reasons in order to make it appear that General Martínez is indispensable and cannot step aside at the present time. (McClintock 1985a, 121)
The prolonged violence is also consistent, of course, with a decision to prevent future rebellions by exacting a horrible price for this one, no matter how unsuccessful. This last explanation, however, presumes that Martínez used an extremely long-term decision making framework, so that his actions were aimed at preventing revolts decades in the future. This was, in fact, the outcome of the matanza, but it seems implausible that consideration of security decades hence dominated Martínez' thinking. It seems more convincing to argue that he acted in accordance with his short term political interests, which were best served by convincing the oligarchy that they needed him.

Several authors have pointed to the possibility that international factors played an important role in encouraging the rebellion, with the key issue being U.S. recognition. As pointed out earlier, the U.S. had initially refused to recognize Martínez. Even though the Roosevelt administration had been generally moving away from military intervention in the region, and was on the verge of removing the Marines from Nicaragua, it would not have been unreasonable on Martínez' part to suspect that the U.S. (and/or other powers) might intervene, especially since the State Department in Washington seemed to take a dim view of him. In reaction to the January 22 rebellion,

Ships of the Special Services Squadron were rushed to Salvadoran waters under orders to be prepared to land troops, and air force units in the Canal Zone were also placed on alert.
British and Canadian warships hastened to the scene, and at one point a British landing party embarked in small boats and circled the harbor of the capital for three hours before returning to their vessels. (Grieb 1971, 163)

Salvadoran officers made a point of demonstrating to their U.S. colleagues that they had the situation well in hand. General José Tomás Calderón, commander of the National Guard, sent a message to the captains of four gunboats anchored off Acajutla that the Communists "had been totally beaten and dispersed" and would be "entirely exterminated." He reported on January 29th that "already 4,800 of them have been killed." According to McClintock's account,

[Canadian Naval] Commander Brodeur went ashore to pay his respects to the General, and to "verify ... in a general way" the report of 4,800 killings. On shore, he was enthusiastically embraced by General Calderón, invited to lunch in Sonsonate the next day, and to "witness a few executions." The commanding officers of the Canadian ships Skeena and Vancouver accompanied General Calderón and an aide to Sonsonate, and "given an exceedingly good lunch... They were shown five Indians who were about to be shot, but did not witness the actual execution as this was thought to be inadvisable." (1985a, 116)

I am not aware of any documents confirming similar "demonstrations" made to U.S. officers, but Commander Brodeur's account would seem to suggest an intent on the part of the Salvadoran officers to impress upon their foreign guests that the situation was in hand and that no intervention would be necessary. Anderson concludes that "Martínez may have been trying to pose before world opinion, especially
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that of the United States, as the champion of anticommunism." (1971, 134)

If this was his intent, it worked, as U.S. attitudes towards Martínez shifted quite markedly following the matanza. Although the State Department continued to hold to its former position that Martínez could not be recognized, its tone, and the intensity of actions to unseat Martínez, were quite different. The Department sent the following message to U.S. Chargé McCafferty: "You will of course make it clear that the Department as it has already stated is not (repeat not) motivated by any unfriendliness against General Martínez for whom it has great regard."

(Grieb 1971, 165) McCafferty's communications began to reflect a new tone of moderation, referring regularly to the "efficiency" of the new government. Whereas before the matanza, the U.S. had attempted to get other officers to remove Martínez from power, afterwards, such activities ceased and the U.S. eventually found, a few years later, a means of recognizing Martínez once he was officially "elected" to office.

Perhaps the best conclusion to render is that all of the political incentives operating on General Martínez favored a major massacre, while virtually none of them encouraged restraint. Clearly, the oligarchy, with its fears of rebellion and its general interest in a frightened and obedient work force, favored harsh measures. To the
extent that he hoped to win oligarchic tolerance of his government, Martínez had good reason to deliver the kind of coercion the oligarchy would prefer. Whether or not Martínez premeditated the exploitation of the Communist threat to install himself in power, he clearly learned its utility from experience. During the brief provisional presidency of Col. José Asencio Menéndez, which provided the fig leaf that allowed Martínez' "election" and recognition by the U.S., a new "Communist conspiracy" was miraculously uncovered, strengthening the enthusiasm with which Salvadoran elites and the U.S. welcomed back the "savior." (Parkman 1988, 151) As both elite and mass resistance to a fourth Martínez term began to grow in 1943, an opposition pamphlet was circulated that "accused Martínez of pinning the 'Communist' label on the campesino uprising of 1932 and perpetrating the massacre to secure his own position, asserting that he was plotting another "Communist revolt" for the same purpose." (Parkman 1988, 49) Even after Martínez' resignation in May of 1944, student organizers of the civic strike that had brought him down caught members of Martínez' personal police force attempting to provoke a group of peasants into looting stores in San Salvador, presumably with the end of creating a pretext for the dictator's return. (Parkman 1988, 88)
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The Martínez Regime

Often characterized as little more than a reinstatement of "oligarchic" rule, the Martínez regime marked in many ways a radical departure from previous regimes in El Salvador. Its two central characteristics were its use of state power to intervene in the economy, and its personalism. The expanded role of the state in the economy proved to be a lasting development; the personalism of Martínez' rule became his undoing. It directly undermined the original basis for his legitimacy, which was his ability and willingness to protect the privileged and suppress the rebellious poor. Many of his statist economic measures were initially opposed by the oligarchy because they departed from the "laissez-faire," Liberal traditions of these elites. After a few years of experience, however, the oligarchy found these to be extremely helpful for the overall functioning of the economy. In many cases, institutions set up at Martínez' initiative came to be financially and politically controlled by the coffee growers or processors, in partnership with the armed forces.

Some of Martínez' state policies were pure populism, designed to secure public support for his government. Several of the institutions that he set up accomplished little, serving mainly propagandistic functions. Such measures were never supported by the oligarchy, but neither
were they seen as a serious threat until the final two years of Martínez' reign, when he began to seriously cultivate popular backing to compensate for the active opposition of the oligarchy. The statism of Martínez regime, therefore, was to a large extent accepted by the country's elites.

Eventually, Martínez' regime deteriorated. His personal ambitions and continuismo led to opposition from elites and resignations by civilian government officials. His repressive reaction, which included imprisonment of civilian elites, constitutional and legal measures which threatened oligarchic interests, and eventually violence against elite families, made him a threat to the upper classes. Ironically, having consolidated his power by protecting social elites from popular uprisings, he ended his political career trying to pull together popular support against an oligarchy that had come to see him as a menace, not a savior. The danger posed by Martínez was, however, confined to his person; the protection contract upon which his government had been based was transferrable to the military as a whole. Even after his fall, the oligarchy made little effort to compete for state power and it was left to factions of the military to struggle for domination. After three changes of government in quick succession, a durable system of institutional military rule was established in 1948. Post-1948 governments differed
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from that of Martínez in that no longer was the political agenda of a given presidential incumbent of primary importance. The contrasts between post-1948 regimes and that of Martínez have often been overdrawn, however, in the sense that the fundamental legitimacy of military rule, and the military's capacity to act independently from the oligarchy, continued after 1948 to be predicated on the military's protective functions -- i.e. its willingness to deliver repression.

Martínez' Policies

The first and most important deviations by the Martínez regime from the "laissez-faire tenets of the liberal tradition" came in the area of finance and banking. (Parkman 1988, 21) Many of the measures worked against the interest of the banking sector described by Guidos Véjar as the "bourgeoisie," and in favor of the coffee producers who were being hard-hit by credit shortages and expropriations during the depth of the depression. Shortly after taking office, he decreed the Ley Moratoria which suspended the payment of all domestic private debts, reduced the interest payments on them by 40 percent, and prevented further foreclosures of mortgages on land. (Anderson 1971, 149) In 1934, he established the Banco Central de Reserva (Central Reserve Bank) and took away the previous right of the private banks to issue their own paper money. In the same year, he established a mortgage bank, Banco Hipotecario,
which was charged with providing production credits for commercial agriculture. Not surprisingly, these measures were greeted with caution and even opposition by the oligarchy because they so greatly expanded the economic role of the state, but by the mid-1930s, their utility for the coffee economy as a whole was recognized and Martínez won the "unqualified support" of the oligarchy. (Elam 1968, 57) Even after the worst effects of the depression were past, Martínez continued to expand the role of the state. According to Parkman (1988),

In 1939 a new constitution for the first time gave the state the exclusive right to regulate the coining of money, mail, telegraph and telephone services, and radio broadcasting, and increased the number of enterprises that might be operated as state monopolies. (21)

Several of Martínez' ventures were partnerships of the state and the oligarchy. These included a mortgage bank, Banco Hipotecario and the Compañía Salvadoreña de Café (Salvadoran Coffee Company), established in 1942, which attempted to stabilize prices and make production loans. In the late 1930s, the Banco Hipotecario branched out into marketing and warehousing activities for crops and handicrafts.

To the extent there really was a division within the elite such as the one that Guidos Véjar describes, the financial bourgeoisie appears to have been comparatively hurt by these policies. Martínez' interventions appear to have broken their dominance in production financing by
establishing a state-sponsored alternative. In this light it is significant that the main civilian partners in the Banco Hipotecario were major coffee and cattle producers themselves, rather than financiers. The Asociación Cafetalera (Coffee Growers' Association) and the Asociación Ganadera (Cattle Producers' Association) between them owned 95 percent of the stock in the Banco Hipotecario (75 percent was held by the Asociación Cafetalera). (Parkman 1988, 37) Guidos Véjar (1980) depicts the Martínez regime as an expression of restored coffee-grower dominance: the sequence of events, however, suggests that Martínez' policies made the relative advance by the producers possible. The state under Martínez, in other words, exerted considerable power and influence of its own. It appears that Martínez chose to take actions that were in the interest of, if not immediately supported by, the coffee growers. He thereby secured them, in the long run, as a key support group for his continued rule.

Other measures that Martínez took help to clarify his independence from the coffee producers. In 1932 he created the Fondo de Mejoramiento Social (Social Betterment Fund) and an agency to administer it, the Junta de Defensa Social (Board of Social Defense.) Mejoramiento Social was used to put into effect land-redistribution laws that had been on the books since the 1920s, but never acted upon.⁹ Accord-

⁹ The antecedents of these laws is unclear.
ing to Anderson, "Great estates were turned into Haciendas Nacionales and divided up. Roads were run between the small parcels, so that they could not be reunited, it was said." (1971, 150) In a preview of the results of land reforms in 1980, relatively few people (less than 2 percent of the peasantry) benefitted from the reforms and the new farms were not economically successful. Large scale growers criticized the reforms for causing rapid deterioration of formerly productive plantations. Despite such complaints, the reforms went largely unchallenged, especially in comparison to the strenuous way coffee growers reacted forty years later in 1976 when President Arturo Molina attempted a similar, small scale land reform. The most likely explanation for the relative toleration of Martínez' measures is that coffee producers felt sufficiently dependent upon Martínez for protection that they were unwilling to challenge him, even on those policies that cut directly against their interests in exclusively private ownership of land and private control of the economy.

This dependence, or willingness to give Martínez the benefit of the doubt, disappeared during the latter part of his period in office. When he sought a third term as president in 1939 there were numerous resignations from his
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One notes that the officials who resigned were all below the level of minister, but they were the highest ranking civilians in the government, since military officers controlled most ministries. These individuals had been an important source of technical and administrative competence for Martínez' regime and their participation in his government had signalled oligarchic support. Their departure left him surrounded by political hacks and "yes men," and represented a loss of political support within the agrarian elite. The main reason for the resignations was constitutional. As Parkman puts it,

alternation in office was one principle of the Constitution of 1886 that had been consistently honored in practice, and Martínez' assault on it threatened to do away with "the last vestiges" of El Salvador's liberal institutions and traditions. (1988, 30)

As Martínez' elite support dried up, he turned increasingly to a popular base to legitimate his wavering regime. Beginning in 1942, he tolerated the first steps of labor organizing and in 1943 tried to make the cause of labor and land reform his own. "His speeches to the weekly Pro-Patria assemblies in early 1943 attacked the concentra-

10 These included Alfonso Rochac, auditor of the treasury, Margarito González Guerrero, chief of the treasury legal staff, Manuel López Harrison, undersecretary of public works, Hermógenes Alvarado, undersecretary of government, David Rosales, undersecretary of public instruction, Max Patricio Brannon, undersecretary of finance, and Agustín Alfaro, auditor general of the republic, as well as several other officials. (Parkman 1988, 30-1)
tion of wealth in the hands of the few, while expounding on
the virtues of cooperatives and Mejoramiento Social's land
distribution program." (Parkman 1988, 35) His flirtations
with the left were not successful in securing strong
support for him from that sector. Workers remembered the
events of 1932. His efforts to find popular support,
however, galvanized the opposition to him from among
elites.

By the beginning of 1944 fears arose in some
upper-class circles that the government was
"inclining toward 'communism'" "likely to adopt
supposedly progressive measures -- social
security, a minimum wage, excess profits taxa-
tion, etc," and might undertake a "general
revision of the tax structure and particularly an
overhaul of the poor tax collection system.
Moreover, some saw unfair competition with
private business in the existing government
enterprises as well as the projected Mejoramiento
Social thread factory and feared a trend toward
more such competition. (Parkman 1988, 36)

These fears were well-founded in the sense that Martínez
did move aggressively to wrest more money and more politi-
cal power from the oligarchy. In 1943, he fixed prices and
raised taxes in cotton and coffee, and passed laws that
allowed the state to interfere in the management of the
Ganadería and Cafetalera associations. Since these
associations controlled the Banco Hipotecario, controlling
them would allow Martínez to take over the bank and its
resources, even though the bank's funds had originally come
from largely private sources. Opponents believed his
intent was to make the bank into a patronage machine for his Pro-Patria party.

The sequence of events in the unravelling of Martínez' regime is crucial to an understanding of the original nature of the regime. The initial objections of the oligarchy to Martínez did not stem from his policies, they stemmed from a perception that he had worn out his legitimacy by trying to stay in power personally. In reaction to this loss of support, he turned to measures that directly assaulted the oligarchy's interests and which seemed to revive the pre-1932 threat of organized popular mobilization.

The conflicts with the oligarchy came to a head when Martínez made clear his intention to run for office again in 1945. An organization called "Acción Democrática Salvadoreña" (Salvadoran Democratic Action, ADS) had been created in 1941 by many of the officials who had resigned from Martínez' government. The organization was initially public, but was forced underground after only two public rallies. It became "the general staff of a conspiracy to frustrate Martínez' fourth-term aspirations." (Parkman 1988, 42) The "moving spirit" of the conspiracy was a coffee grower named Agustín Alfaro Morán, whose previous offices included auditor general in Martínez' government, founder of the Compañía Salvadoreña de Café, head of the Coffee Control Office, and president of the Asociación
Cafetalera. There can be no question but that Alfaro Morán represented the sentiments of the coffee producers and that these elites were prepared to overthrow Martínez and, if possible, take power directly themselves, legitimating their rule, as they had before Martínez took power, by means of elections. These oligarchic conspirators had middle class allies, particularly among the professions. One of the key middle-class leaders in the conspiracy was physician Arturo Romero. He emerged as a champion of reform for the movement, and brought in middle and even lower class support. He was known, among other things, for his generosity in treating indigent patients. Despite Romero's liberal image, the movement as a whole depended heavily on oligarchic leaders and financial support. U.S. consular official Overton Ellis reported that the Alvarez family, which owned the world's largest coffee mill, was a key support to the movement, as was the most prominent citizen in Santa Ana, Francisco Alfaro. (Parkman 1988, 44)

The pace of civilian plotting accelerated in December 1943 and January 1944 and relations with Martínez deteriorated. Martínez began to try to rally the military to him with reformist talk, telling officers that the "capitalists were against him" and that "all his plans for social betterment and economic improvement -- including higher pay for the Army -- [were] being blocked by the selfish and uncooperative attitude of the wealthy class." (Parkman
1988, 52) At the same time, he attempted to shore up the protection contract by reporting to the oligarchy that he had discovered a major communist conspiracy to exploit any openly contested elections. Martínez took to arresting members of the elite, and by January 11, some forty were in custody. (Parkman 1988, 53)

On January 25, 1944, the constituent assembly revised the constitution to give itself power to elect the president, and proceeded to do so. This had been expected. What was not anticipated was a series of laws that allowed Martínez to establish a monopoly of any "services that may be beneficial to the community and which the laws may determine," (Parkman 1988, 54) which basically provided Martínez to nationalize or socialize any aspect of the economy, should he choose to do so. These actions galvanized opposition to Martínez among the middle and upper classes. U.S. Vice Consul H. Gardner Ainsworth noted that the middle classes had "almost no direct economic grievances against the government." (Parkman 1988, 55) Their opposition to him stemmed mainly from his repressiveness and his flaunting of even the most minimal standards of constitutionality. Another U.S. Vice Consul, Overton Ellis, polled the leading twenty four families in the country and found that twenty of them were anti-Martínez, two supported him, and two abstained. (Parkman 1988, 57)
At the same time that the civilian elites were plotting against Martínez, a parallel conspiracy developed within the military. The main issue that undermined military loyalty to Martínez had little if anything to do, at least at the outset, with his relationship with the oligarchy. The main grievance stemmed from his favoritism toward the security forces -- the National Guard and National Police -- over the regular army. The security forces received, as they always had, much better pay, but after 1937 Martínez allocated them a growing percentage of the budget and they received new weapons. Promotions tended to favor officers serving the in the security forces (McClintock 1985a, 127-28). Even within the Army itself, promotions were not merit based, but rather based on personal loyalty to the dictator. During the 1940s, Martínez replaced commanders of internally strategic posts with officers who had risen up through the ranks, removing those who had been trained in the academy or abroad. He also had a personal secret police which constantly surveilled officers. Finally, he created a civilian militia using members of his Pro-Patria party. This last move violated the military's monopoly on armed force. These grievances cut across the ranks, according to Elam (1968, 108-9) but most of the conspirators were younger, academy trained regular army officers. A high proportion were lieutenants. Parkman reports that "Of twenty whose ages
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appeared, only three were over forty; most were in their twenties." One informant told her that 70-80 percent of the army supported the revolt. (1988, 58)

The civilian and military committees joined forces in early 1944 and on April 2 they struck while Martínez was out of the capital. Two army brigades in San Salvador and the Second Brigade in Santa Ana rebelled. However the First Artillery barracks El Zapote, the National Police and the National Guard held out against the rebels, who prematurely announced over the national airwaves both their anticipated victory and which units were still holding out. Hearing on the radio that the security forces' barracks had held, Martínez managed to work his way, apparently without resistance, to the National Police headquarters to prepare his response. The rebels were soon defeated, with considerable casualties. A convoy of army troops (and probably armed civilians) from Santa Ana en route to the capital were ambushed by the security forces, killing 53 and wounding 134. (McClintock 1985a, 130; Parkman 1988, 60)

What happened after the failure of the golpe chilled many Salvadorans and led ultimately to Martínez' downfall. He immediately executed ten army officers charged in the coup, "a measure almost unheard of in Latin American military tradition." (McClintock 1985a, 130) Twenty other officers were sentenced to death in absensia, along with
nine civilians from the Acción Democrática committee.\textsuperscript{11} Dr. Arturo Romero was captured and, having been wounded in the process, taken to hospital in San Salvador, where he remained under a death sentence. These repressive acts triggered an unprecedented and almost totally effective civic strike, called the \textit{huelga de brazos caídos} (strike of fallen arms). The strike was led by students from the university, most of them from elite or middle class families, who received active organizational and financial assistance from businesses, banks and wealthy citizens. The strategy of the strike was to avoid providing Martínez -- who had once again proven his willingness to stop at nothing -- with any targets. The strike organizers encountered some difficulty in getting workers to participate in the \textit{huelga}. The strike was not the product of a mass movement, even though the lower classes certainly had reason to wish Martínez gone. Cooperation of workers, taxi-drivers and bus drivers was secured by providing them with their anticipated lost earnings and, in some cases, providing them with safe houses in which to stay during the course of the strike, to protect them from reprisals. Funding for this came from businesses and the upper classes generally. Individual contributions as large as 5,000 colones, or U.S. $2,500, were made to the student strike

\textsuperscript{11} Castro Moran 1989, 177-78. Mariano Castro Moran, then a lieutenant, was among those sentenced.
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committee. In several cases, wealthy bankers directly approached taxi drivers, offering them money to join in the strike. To some extent, the strike was more a management lockout than a labor paro. A week after the strike began, Martínez left the country.

Parkman concludes that to a large extent, elite support for the strike was driven by fear of what Martínez might do next, since he had shown himself willing to prey on the elite. She quotes a contemporary journalist as writing:

...People felt that the shootings were simply the beginning of a new nightmare. They feared Martínez' revenge.
"It was this collective fear," a coffee plantation owner told me, "which gave us courage. We were deathly afraid of Martínez because we knew him to be a brave and decided man. Fear drove the students to strike. Fear forced the merchants to close their shops. Fear made the banks suspend operations. (1988, 75)

It is important to note that even after massive demonstrations took place, something that the strike organizers had been trying to avoid, Martínez refrained from using massive violence upon them. This fact raises important questions for theories of state violence, since Martínez was clearly faced by mass opposition and his government had earlier been the target of a violent assault that included armed civilians. His regime, if not the state as a whole, was in grave danger, yet despite his imprisonments and executions, he did not use widespread violence as he had in 1932. The best explanation for the difference seems to be that mass
killing could no longer serve to legitimate his government before the economic elites. It could no longer help him in extracting financial support; it could no longer earn him autonomy, freedom of action, and authority. The protection contract was suspended, at least for Martínez. His only choices were to kill the other party to the contract, or leave office. No longer able to depend fully on his terrorized military, he chose to go.
CHAPTER FOUR

INSTITUTIONAL MILITARY RULE:
THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN REFORM AND REPRESSION

"The military is a political party which has held power on the basis of maintaining public order." -- Former Salvadoran Government Official.

"The oligarchy treats us like guard dogs." -- Former Minister of Defense Colonel Guillermo García M

Overview

After the fall of Maximiliano Hernández Martínez in 1944, El Salvador experienced a four-year period of uncertainty in which three models of rule competed with one another: military personalism, civilian liberalism, and institutional military rule. This competition was resolved, four years later, in favor of institutional military rule. This new model of rule suffered from a fundamental dilemma. On one hand, the military sought to popularize its rule and enhance the long term stability of the country by carrying out social reforms; on the other, it had to contend with a powerful civilian elite that resisted reforms and which viewed military rule as legitimated almost exclusively by the military's ability to maintain order.

During the thirty-one years of institutional rule that followed, the military used a sporadic and contradictory mix of reformist and repressive measures and became increasingly divided over how to deal with the still
unresolved socio-political problems of the country. There were, in effect, two coherent models for the future of the country: a reformist and democratic model in which the privileges of the former oligarchy and the military would be sacrificed to achieve a more sustainable and just system, and a repressive model based on the events of 1932 in which the state would use force to such an extent that reforms would be unnecessary and privileges could be preserved. In between was the model of rule actually practiced, which drew on elements of the two coherent models but which was, in and of itself, both unsustainable and prone to considerable violence.

There are several lines of competition and conflict to consider in examining this period. The military-as-government was challenged by middle-class civilians who advocated electoral democracy, by labor unions which demanded both democracy and greater freedom to organize, and, beginning in the 1960s, by highly effective electoral competition from the Christian Democratic Party. At the same time, the military was also challenged by the civilian oligarchy, which opposed virtually all reforms and was particularly concerned about maintenance of order.

The military institution itself was internally divided about what policies to follow and how to legitimate itself. Junior officers (*juventud militar*) tended to favor reforms and civilian rule. *Juventud* officers rebelled against
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their superiors in 1960 and 1972 (see below). Officers in the security forces and (later) in the intelligence services tended to favor the **Martinista** formula of military rule based on violent repression. Most senior and middle-ranking officers favored an "institutionalist" program which combined repression with mild reforms.

The institutionalist formula gradually deteriorated during the 1960s. One fundamental problem was that the institutionalists' electoral strategy for legitimating military rule only worked so long as their electoral opponents were not powerful enough to unseat the official party. When an opposition coalition defeated the official party at the polls in 1972, the military resorted to fraud and repression to retain power. The formula finally came to grief during the administration of Arturo Molina (1972-77). Concerned by the growing potential for mass opposition to the government, Molina attempted to carry out a minor but symbolically important land reform, only to be stymied by the combined efforts of the oligarchy and hardline elements of the military.

During the period of institutional rule, the military never escaped the legacy of Martínez. The military was unwilling to give up power, but so long as it remained in power it depended ultimately upon support, or at least the absence of active opposition, from the oligarchy. Private sector elites remained powerful enough to block efforts by
the military to carry out sufficient reforms to establish genuine popular legitimacy. Failing that, the military, even those elements of it with some apparent preference for reforms, fell back on Martínez' formula of legitimating themselves in the eyes of the oligarchy through repression.

The 1944 to 1948 Interlude

Before he left the country in 1944, President Maximiliano Hernández Martínez succeeded in pressuring the National Reconstruction Committee (CRN) to choose as his interim successor his former Minister of War, General Andrés I. Menéndez, who he chose because of Menéndez' unswerving personal loyalty. The CRN went along with this choice in order to facilitate Martínez' departure. Despite being the favorite of the dictatorial Martínez, Menéndez was supportive of holding a fair election and, toward that end, allowed civilian liberals to openly reorganize Acción Democrática Salvadoreña (ADS) as a political party named the Partido Unión Democrática (Democratic Union Party, PUD). He also allowed urban labor organizing, including the formation of the National Workers' Union (UNT) which was essentially Communist-led. Physician Arturo Romero was expected to be the presidential candidate of the PUD and probably had sufficient popular support to win in a fair election. (Elam 1968, 76) His candidacy was actively
supported by the UNT and various emerging popular and sectoral organizations

An electoral campaign got under way during June and July of 1944. Opposing the PUD was a reincarnation of the old Hernández Martínez party, Pro-Patria, now called the Unification Social Democratic Party (PUSD), whose candidate was General Salvador Castañeda Castro. PUSD had the support of most of the armed forces, which were hostile towards Arturo Romero. According to Elam (1968, 79)

Attacks on Romero and his followers, searches, insults, arrests and occasional shootings throughout the country, betrayed the close cooperation of the armed forces with Castañeda Castro.

It is important to note in the post-Martínez vacuum, the economic elite was not represented politically in any coherent fashion. Strangely, some planters and financial elites belonged to the liberal PUD, while others supported the military’s PUSD. Two other splinter parties had elite support: the Salvadoran Agrarian Party and the Social Republican Front. Both put forward opportunistic and divisive candidates and had little prospect of electoral support. The relatively low quality of the economic elite’s electoral effort reflects the fact that, despite their distaste for Martínez, they had grown accustomed to working through the military rather than competing directly for political power. The early twentieth century division between idealists and pragmatists reasserted itself in the
differences between those elites willing to join forces with the middle class liberals of the FUD and those who chose right wing parties or the party of the military.

The high level of popular mobilization achieved during the May 1944 general strike carried over into the campaign from June through October. Popular demonstrations forced the assembly to reverse a decision to make an old-guard Martinista the first designate of interim President Menéndez, and also forced it to renounce Martínez' 1939 constitution and reinstate that of 1886, which provided greater confidence that there would be future elections.

Most of the officer corps was very reluctant to see Arturo Romero elected to the presidency. His Partido Unión Democrática joined forces with members of Acción Democrática and the UNT labor federation to form the United Democratic Front (FUD). "Labeling itself the defender of the nation, this group manifested its desire for a civilian government and a complete economic and social overhaul of the country." (Elam 1968, 82) Amplifying the impact of this level of mobilization, the liberal press in San Salvador regularly attacked the military institution as anti-democratic, corrupt and abusive. The forthcoming elections, therefore, presented the military with the prospect of handing over government to a group of civilians who "had no record of respect or sympathy for the entire concept of armed institutions." (Elam 1968, 93) In the
face of this political challenge, the military, which had been seriously divided following Martínez' departure, began to unify in opposition to the elections and the civilian liberals.

This opposition eventually took the form of a bloodless coup d'état against Menéndez, led by the director of the police, Colonel Osmín Aguirre y Salinas. Aguirre had been the director of police in the early years of the Martínez administration and had been one of the principle architects of the matanza. He obtained strong political support from the private sector elite, who trusted his ability to restore order. His own justification for taking power represents an attempt to legitimate himself on the basis of the protection he could provide:

The seriousness of the moment in which I have acted has not escaped me; a man aware of his responsibilities. Anarchical ferment has kept the country in constant peril during the last few days, seriously threatening the institutional life of the Republic. The Salvadoran family has been divided by a flood of passion and we men of conscience could not help but be alarmed by the proximity of chaos. (Elam 1968, 97)

Aguirre acted immediately to provide the protection expected of him. The evening of the coup, leaders of the PUD, Acción Democrática, and the UNT were arrested and slated for deportation. In the next week, hundreds of liberal opponents were jailed. The administration of the University, appalled by the crackdown, closed the
university, and the two main liberal newspapers in the
country were pressured to close and did so.

Aguirre appears to have been opposed by the commercial
and financial sectors of the elite, lending support to the
claim of Guidos Véjar and others of a split within the
oligarchic block. Businesses and banks throughout the
country closed following the coup. The military responded
by temporarily taking over businesses and informing
employees that they would be dismissed if they didn't show
up for work. (Elam 1968, 99) Aguirre was thereby able to
head off the kind of general strike that brought down
Martínez.

Despite the heavy handed controls used by the
government, opposition demonstrations continued. More
importantly, exiled liberal leaders in Guatemala formed a
government which received international recognition. This
government-in-exile organized an invasion force of some
2,000 combatants. The force was "untrained and
undisciplined" and was quickly defeated by the Salvadoran
army. Four hundred and fifty of the rebels were killed,
compared to one hundred and fifty government soldiers.
(Elam 1968, 103) The defeat of the liberal invasion
removed the last serious opposition to the military; it
also bolstered the military's claims to have saved the
country, once again, from chaos.
On January 14, 1945, Martinista military rule was consolidated with the election of General Salvador Castañeda Castro as president. He ran essentially unopposed. Castañeda Castro proceeded to take measures reducing the power of Aguirre, sidelining him to the directorship of Social Security. Castañeda Castro's measures prompted plotting and resistance to him, including an abortive coup attempt by Aguirre and his supporters. These conflicts did not represent significant ideological or programmatic differences: they are best characterized as the last playing out of personal rivalries that had developed during Martínez' period as a result of his total domination and manipulation of command assignments and promotions.

The main significance of the Castañeda Castro government was the climate it created for the development of the movement that took power in 1948. The threat that the PUD and FUD had posed to the military institution during 1944 had caused the military to pull together, making strange bed-fellows out of officers of different generations, professional backgrounds, and ideologies. The brutality and conservativeness of the Castañeda Castro government, and the absence of an immediate threat to the military as an institution, weakened the glue that had temporarily held the various factions together. With the basic issue of the political role of the military laid to
rest, junior and middle-ranking Army officers with internal, institutional grievances and a more populist political philosophy decided to put the old guard officers out to pasture.

The development of this project was facilitated by the fact that, despite his repressiveness toward the civilian community, Castañeda Castro did not attempt to build a system of personal control within the military as had Martínez. He allowed, in effect, a political apertura within the military institution. He also enhanced the relative power of the regular Army by bringing the National Police under the control of the Defense Ministry, rather than the Ministry of Interior. (Elam 1968, 123-4) While providing an easier context within which junior officers' could organize, Castañeda Castro nonetheless gave the junior officers a reason to act against him. He decreed a new law that regulated the number of officers at each rank strongly in favor of existing senior officers, leading to the expectation that many junior officers would be dismissed. He then proceeded to send reformist junior officers out of the country for training.

On the 14th of December, 1948, President Castañeda Castro was forced to leave the country. The triggering event was a vote the day before in the National Assembly extending Castañeda Castro's term by two years. The golpistas held a meeting of the entire officer corps in
which three officers and two civilians were chosen for a Revolutionary Governing Council. The vote was held without regard to rank, with each officer having an equal vote. This innovation proved to be a lasting one: subsequent crises were often resolved by means of votes by the whole officer corps. In addition to the two civilians on the Council, the entire cabinet, with the exception of the Defense Minister, were middle-class civilian professionals. (McClintock 1985a, 132) The position of the younger officers was secured by forcing the retirement of all officers over the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Rather than attempting to claim constitutional support for their government, the 1948 Council abrogated all Constitutional provisions that were inconvenient to them, securing their democratic legitimacy by promising to hold elections in 1950.

The governing council of 1948 and the subsequently elected government of Oscar Osorio pursued policies best described as mildly reformist and developmentalist. They sought to use the power of the state to promote aggregate economic growth and the development of physical infrastructure, but aimed as well at efforts that would have positive distributional consequences. The national development programs to promote industry and trade, to diversify agriculture, and increase production also created jobs and raised the standard of living even for the working
classes. Economic policies were generally designed to favor smaller entrepreneurs and the emerging middle class, rather than the established oligarchy. (García 1983, 15)

There was also a social welfare component which benefitted the lower classes. Using increased revenue from good coffee crops and prices, the government carried out housing, sanitation and health projects on "an unprecedented scale." Elam (1968, 146-7)

Despite the fact that such measures were clearly advantageous to the economy and society as a whole, the upper classes regularly objected to these initiatives. The military government responded by pointing to the Communist threat in neighboring Guatemala, arguing that moderate reforms were necessary in order to avoid wide-spread popular discontent. This argument persuaded the social elite to tolerate the developmentalist measures, and even to go along with policies permitting urban labor organizing and a law establishing an graduated income tax. (Elam 1968, 147) These successes came at some cost, however.

The military's efforts to defend its reforms on the basis of anti-Communism only made it and its reformism more vulnerable to attack by the oligarchy, which continued to monopolize the proper vocabulary. Thus military reformism could always be castigated as hasteful, demagogic, and dangerous and injurious...to some basic pillars of Salvadoran society, such as the right of property and the free enterprise system. (Baloyra 1982, 21)

Outmaneuvered rhetorically, and overpowered by the oligarchy's control of the media, the military government
was forced to demonstrate the existence of a genuine threat by means of repressive actions. According to McClintock's account:

Reds were continually found under beds (particularly in the trade unions) in the early 1950s and arrest and exile were frequent. A state of siege was declared in March 1951 in order to "abort a subversive plot," and again in September 1952, when a campaign was unleashed to clean the Communists from the National University and the trade unions. (1985a, 134)

As early as the 1950s, therefore, a basic dilemma for the institutionalist project had become evident. The military remained sufficiently vulnerable to challenges from the economic elite that it could not push forward its reformist agenda without resorting to symbolic repression to justify and gain elite acquiescence to its actions.

As the Osorio administration neared its end, the military became divided over who should succeed Osorio. The economic elite put pressure on the military to choose a more conservative successor. Osorio himself hoped to choose a civilian candidate who would continue his policies of favoring the middle class and emerging sectors of capital. His senior colleagues within the military, still leery of civilian politicians, insisted on a military candidate. (García 1983, 16)

The next president, Colonel Jose María Lemus, attempted to continue the compromise policies of Osorio's government. He promptly installed prominent lawyers affiliated with the oligarchy as his ministers of Exterior
Relations, Justice, Economy, Interior, and Labor. (Castro Moran 1989, 208-210) Perhaps to counterbalance the private sector elite orientation of his cabinet, Lemus began his term with a political opening, allowing exiles to return and permitting freer labor organizing. This liberalization led to considerable popular mobilization, particularly by the General Federation of Salvadoran Workers (CGTS) which was backed by the Communist Party. The Cuban revolution in 1959 prompted even livelier opposition. Lemus had exhausted the range of reforms that could be carried out without a major confrontation with the oligarchy. He had already damaged his relations with the cafetaleros by intervening in the coffee market in 1958 and 1959, when falling coffee prices led him to force producers to reduce their output in an effort to support prices. Not willing to incur the wrath of the economic elite by going further in the reformist direction, Lemus cracked down, ordering troops to fire on demonstrations and arresting hundreds. The kind and intensity of repression used created even greater mobilization. (McClintock 1985a, 135)

Lemus' heavy handedness, while supported by the agrarian elite, triggered a reaction within the military. Junior officers overthrew Lemus in a bloodless coup on October 26, 1960. Former president Oscar Osorio played an important role in bringing together the coalition of junior officers and civilian supporters that made the coup
possible. The junior officers, having been the ones most directly responsible for the success of the coup, managed to claim a dominant role in choosing who would be in the new government, to the exclusion of Osorio. They chose three liberal civilians with University connections. This move made the new junta very popular: it was greeted by a demonstration of over 80,000 people. (McClintock 1985a, 136) However, it also frightened the civilian right and significant portions of the officer corps, even officers of relatively moderate views. After the success of the coup, the golpistas went from barracks to barracks, explaining to officers their reasons for the coup and their plans for reestablishing constitutional government. The questions raised during these meetings showed that many officers wanted reassurance "that military supremacy in national matters would continue." (Elam 1968, 157) The juventud agenda of the 1960 coup, in other words, quickly ran up against the institutionalist sentiments of the majority of the officer corps, even though the experience of the Lemus regime had suggested that the existing formula for institutional military rule could probably not be sustained in the long run.

The problems of the new government were complicated by the hostile reaction of the U.S., which refused to recognize the junta because of suspicions that members of the government, particularly the civilians, were pro-Castro.
U.S. embassy cables referred to the new junta as "a triumph of 'infiltration' by subversive forces into the highest levels of government. Under their direction, 'a Castro/Communist takeover...loomed large.'" Given the actual makeup of the government, this seems like a grossly exaggerated perception of threat. Perhaps the evidence of sympathy within the military for leftist civilian politics caused particular alarm because of the experience of Batista's army in Cuba. The Cuban force had suffered from serious internal divisions and an unwillingness to fight the guerrillas; portions had deserted en masse to the rebels, and there were several conspiracies and barracks revolts.

Lack of recognition from the U.S. was more decisive in the post-Cuban-revolution context than it would have been earlier. The Salvadoran officer corps anticipated that they might need some help in dealing with leftist elements. The popular organizations that had continued to grow during Lemus' administration, despite repression, now flourished under the more lenient policies of the 1960 Junta. Numerous radical labor and political leaders exiled by previous governments were permitted to return. The political future of the junta was probably harmed by the fact that the radical General Workers' Federation (FGT) and the General Association of Salvadoran University Students
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(AGEUS) actively supported the junta, while demanding that it move toward civilian rule and purge the military. This sort of military/popular sector alliance was extremely alarming to the institutional elements of the armed forces, as well as the oligarchy.

On January 25, 1961, the juventud junta fell in a coup. A group of middle and upper-ranking officers sought to restore the 1948 framework. The coup was greeted by angry crowds which gathered around military barracks and threatened a general strike. The new government called out National Police and National Guard units to disperse the crowds, and roughly 100 people were killed by gunfire. Former members of the junta were arrested and exiled. As in 1948, an assembly of the officer corps met to elect the post-coup leadership, and settled on Lt. Colonel Julio Adalberto Rivera and Colonel Aníbal Portillo as initial members of a new Civil-Military Directorate. Three conservative civilian elites were added to the Directorate. (Elam 1968, 161-2)

The initial cabinet of the government was characterized by ex-President Oscar Osorio as "ridiculously rightist." According to Lt. Colonel Mariano Castro Moran, who as a Major was a member of the Directorate from September 1961 through January of 1962, this rightist stance at the outset of the new government was a necessary reaction to the excessive leftism of the 1960 junta.
Considerable reformist sentiment still existed within the officer corps, even among officers who had opposed the 1960 experiment. (Castro Moran 1989, 217-223)¹ In February 1961, the Army issued a *proclama* which declared the military's solidarity with the population and set forth a reinvigorated institutionalist/reformist program reminiscent of 1948. This *proclama* triggered the resignation of the two most conservative civilian members of the Directorate.

The actual policies of the new government were more or less in line with what the *proclama* promised. The main

¹ Castro Moran classifies the 1960 and 1961 coups differently. He describes the 1960 junta as a personalistic creation of Oscar Osorio and the 1961 counter-coup as a populist, constitutionalist, *juventud* project. Castro Moran cannot be viewed as a dispassionate observer, however, since he participated in the 1961 operation and was a member of the Directorate during its second year. Virtually all other observers agree in seeing the 1960 coup as *juventud*-led (though no-one disputes the role of Osorio) and the 1961 coup as essentially institutionalist. Most observers agree that the 1961 Directorate was more reformist than the government of Lemus. Castro Moran embodies the ambiguities and fluidity of factions within the Salvadoran military: as a Lieutenant he was sentenced to death by Hernández Martínez for his part in the unsuccessful 1944 uprising. As a retired officer in the 1970s, he sided strongly with the opposition civilian coalition UNO and was seriously considered as its presidential candidate for 1977. He had close ties to the 1979 *juventud* coup plot, especially to one of its most radical members, Captain Francisco Mena Sandoval, who later joined the guerrillas and whose name Castro Moran actively defends in public, a stance that is extremely unpopular with the armed forces. His reformist credentials notwithstanding, Castro Moran is also a strong anti-communist, and it is most likely on that basis that he took part in 1961 in a movement that clearly sought to perpetuate military rule, albeit of a somewhat more reformist ilk.
reforms were essentially statist in nature, enhancing state control over the economy and improving the ability of the government to raise revenues. The government restructured the Salvadoran Coffee Company to better protect smaller coffee producers from larger growers who controlled processing and marketing facilities; it reorganized the Central Bank once again into a publicly controlled Central Reserve Bank; it imposed new taxes on the export of shrimp and other products, and decreed laws putting stricter controls on contraband and other "customs fraud." The populist dimensions of the Directorate's program challenged the oligarchy's interests only at the margins. Examples include laws raising the minimum wage, requiring paid Sundays off for workers, enhancing pension benefits for commercial employees, and protecting small businesses. None of the measures threatened the agrarian elite's core interest -- control of land -- and the landowners managed in many cases to undermine the intent of the laws. Coffee growers evaded the minimum wage law by paying more but ending their previous practice of giving two free daily meals to workers. (Anderson 1971, 155)

Overall, the policies of the Directorate reflect the same 1948 model of military government in action. The new government first established its "protection" credentials by cracking down, then proceeded with reforms intended to legitimate it to a broader audience and ameliorate some
social discontent. Yet the reforms carried out were basically peripheral to the causes of unrest, oriented in large part towards expanding the power of the state.

The transition from the "ridiculously rightist" cabinet and harsh repression of January 1961 to the reformist program that followed was not a conscious policy but rather the outcome of a political struggle. The civilian right agreed to join the government in the wake of the repression used at the time of the coup. They then abandoned the government when it advanced a reformist agenda. The reformist impulse came, according to Castro Moran, from junior officers, and was resisted, at least initially, by the more senior ranks. (Castro Moran 1989, 221-223) The fact that the oligarchy abandoned the government was not sufficient to cause its collapse; it was a sufficiently strong warning, however, to ensure that the "reformist" officer corps was unwilling to promote policies that would be radical enough to trigger active oligarchic opposition.

The U.S. immediately recognized the 1961 Directorate, being satisfied that it represented more "responsible" elements of both military and civilian leadership. The new government benefitted from increased aid levels under the Alliance for Progress, including soft loans totalling $25 million in 1961. (Webre 1979, 41) U.S. State Department cables characterized the new government as likely to carry
out the reforms promised by the more anti-U.S. 1960 junta, but viewed it with greater confidence because it was outspokenly anti-communist. (McClintock 1985a, 149)

In 1962, Colonel Julio Adalberto Rivera, one of the original members of the Directorate, was elected president. He ran as the candidate of the newly formed National Conciliation Party (PCN) which replaced the Democratic Revolutionary Unification Party (PRUD) as the Army's official party. Evaluations of Rivera's administration differ somewhat. Anderson (1981, 29) states that Rivera, "despite the means he had used in coming to power, turned out to be a very able president." Elam (1968 164-5) likewise argues that Rivera "compiled a notable record of political achievements." Among these was the establishment of proportional representation for future National Assembly elections, and considerable improvements in the fiscal stability of the state, which encouraged both foreign and domestic investment. Resources provided by the U.S. under the Alliance for Progress funded school construction, new health facilities, water and sewage projects, and housing. To this day, many of the schools in the country are ones constructed during the Alliance period. These achievements notwithstanding, Castro Moran (1989, 226-28) accuses Rivera of permitting extensive corruption and of allowing the oligarchy, once again, to obtain an excessive share of power, against the wishes of both the juventud and the
population at large. In 1965, Castro Morán, along with Dr. Feliciano Avelar and Colonel Aníbal Portillo published a full page political statement in the Prensa Gráfica attacking the Rivera government for betraying the proclama.

Other sources do not single out the Rivera government as particularly corrupt, but one must presume that Rivera, like most Salvadoran military presidents, received considerable benefits from his post. In the absence of an urgent and credible popular threat to the survival of his government, it is unclear why Rivera would want to invite a challenge to the military's pre-eminence by undertaking, for example, a major land reform. While we lack detailed evidence regarding exactly how private sector elites wielded influence within the military during this period, evidence regarding how the agrarian elite responded to the land reform attempt of 1976 shows that the private sector had sufficient support within the military to challenge the president if its core interests were threatened.

The Development of ORDEN

The vulnerability of president Rivera and his successors to pressure from the oligarchy was exacerbated by the development of a military intelligence network that became the institutional base for officers who were politically oriented toward the private sector elite. The United States played a crucial role in the development of
this network as part of the counterinsurgency policies of
the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. McClintock's
(1985a) account of the U.S. role is the most complete
available, and the comments that follow summarize his key
points.

In mid-1960, the U.S. embassy, alarmed by the street
demonstrations against Lemus, requested additional aid for
the Salvadoran security forces. The Public Safety Division
of the International Co-Operation Administration (ICA) sent
a two man team which concluded that there was a growing
threat due to infiltration of arms, "subversive materials,"
and commercial contraband. The team saw the National Guard
as the linchpin of the security system and as probably one
of the most efficient police forces in Latin America, but
concluded that security arrangements were nonetheless
deficient and that "the internal security situation in El
Salvador may soon develop into one of extreme urgency."
(McClintock 1985a, 198)

After the overthrow of Lemus and the subsequent
January 1961 counter-coup, the embassy became extremely
preoccupied about the prospect that former junta members
might organize subversion from outside the country. The
overthrow of Lemus was seen as largely the work of "pro-
Castro" forces, and the embassy cabled Washington that
"reports of clandestine movements of personnel and arms
across El Salvador's frontiers and coastline continue to be
received." (McClintock 1985a, 199) In retrospect, it is difficult to imagine what the source of these reports could have been, given the complete lack of insurgent activity in El Salvador until the 1970s. One cannot rule out the possibility that Salvadoran intelligence sources manipulated the embassy, or even that the embassy was manipulating Washington. At a minimum, the tone of the cable traffic suggests that both the embassy and the State Department in Washington were operating under intense fear that there would be a repeat of the Cuban revolution, so that any indication of instability was being read in an extremely alarmist way.

However one explains the perception of threat, the U.S. proceeded to increase military assistance and to provide special assistance in the development of a counter-subversion intelligence network, based on local informants and integrated at the national level. The regular military aid didn't amount to much, despite the hyperbolic language about the communist threat: some 70 vehicles, plus radios and a couple of thousand M-1 and M-2 carbines. The intelligence assistance, however, was both more extensive and politically far more important. The first step was to develop an improved intelligence section within the National Guard. Much of the balance of intelligence assistance was of a covert nature. Throughout the balance of the 1960s, the Office of Public Safety provided law
enforcement training and assistance in El Salvador. The Public Safety Teams regularly included members ("investigative advisors") who were CIA operatives and who "spent virtually all their time with the intelligence agencies, to the neglect of Public Safety's own, more conventional work," and much to the irritation of the regular OPS staff. (McClintock 1985a, 61) Several of the Salvadorans who were involved, such as General Jose Alberto "Chele" Medrano, were on the CIA payroll, worked closely with U.S. "Green Beret" advisors, and received prominent recognition for their anti-communist services. Medrano was personally awarded a silver "Presidential Medal" by President Lyndon Johnson "in recognition of exceptionally meritorious service." Medrano claims to recall that Johnson told him: "'I know all about you, Medrano. You're doing good work. I know your pedigree' -- like I was a bull!" The U.S. sent Medrano on a three month tour of Vietnam to observe U.S. counterinsurgency techniques. (Nairn 1984, 23)

Medrano began his work by forming a small, elite intelligence coordinating agency known as the "Security Service," which had a staff of at most 15 men. This was later reorganized as a presidential security agency called the Salvadoran National Security Agency (ANSESAL). The agency didn't engage in routine intelligence gathering; it relied on the expanded National Guard intelligence section for that. The Security Service's main accomplishment was
to form a nation-wide, grass roots paramilitary network of informants known as the Democratic Nationalist Organization or ORDEN (the Spanish acronym means "order"). Most of the members of this organization, at least at the outset, were recruited from soldiers recently discharged from military service, since they had been drilled, observed and politically indoctrinated, making it easier for officers to select "reliable" candidates. (McCintosh 1985a, 204-207) ORDEN members, most of whom were tenant farmers or small landholders, were able to get easier and cheaper access to agricultural inputs, as well as health care and education, and were permitted -- even encouraged -- to carry arms (usually just handguns during the 1960s). (Cabarrús 1983, 43, 260)

From its beginnings as a covert intelligence gathering network, ORDEN, by 1967, was transformed into a public organization which served as a sort of mass rural auxiliary for the military's official National Conciliation Party (PCN). This meant that ORDEN members were known as such, and participated prominently with the Army and National Guard in civic action projects such as building schools or repairing bridges. ORDEN also continued its spying role, being responsible for identifying and reporting on individuals who were possible subversives. This intelligence was routed through local National Guard commanders, to departmental intelligence centers, and then
on to the San Salvador National Guard intelligence center. From about 1967 on, ORDEN served increasingly as a paramilitary force, as well as an intelligence gathering agency, providing muscle and sometimes deadly force against organized labor and other "threats." In its intelligence and goon-squad role, ORDEN was effectively an extension of the National Guard and Treasury Police and, like these agencies, formed close political ties with local elites, from whom ORDEN members received favors and material rewards. This ORDEN/oligarchy tie was to become important in 1971 when Medrano stepped forward, with coffee-grower backing, as a presidential candidate in opposition to army's official PCN candidate. In this contest, ORDEN members, or at least some of them, provided manpower for Medrano's campaign, reinforcing the oligarchy's ability to politically challenge the military.

The development of ORDEN reflected a dove-tailing of U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine and repressive Salvadoran practices of long standing. Counterinsurgency doctrine, as promoted by U.S. "temporary duty" advisers and Army Mobile Training Teams (MTTs), called for departures from traditional military roles in favor of the development of irregular, counter-guerrilla forces, conceived of as local civil defense commandos who would fight the guerrillas with their own tactics and be organized in an analogous fashion. Salvadoran military and security forces had in the 19th
century assembled civilian militias to help put down rebellions and control labor in rural areas. In effect, U.S. counterinsurgency teachings provided a doctrinal basis for reestablishing such forces, even in the absence of an ongoing rebellion. This justification, plus the technical assistance and aid resources that the U.S. provided, were a shot in the arm to the security specialists, whose institutions and political stature had suffered considerable atrophy since 1948.

The impact of U.S. counterinsurgency training was not confined to the security forces and ORDEN: one Salvadoran military informant remarked that U.S. Special Forces trainers had led regular Army units on simulated counterinsurgency sweeps in Chalatenango and Morazán, precisely those areas that later became most revolutionary. ¶

Electoral Opposition and Growing Challenges to Military Rule

Following the mass mobilization of the late 1950s, the fall of Lemus, and the protests that met the establishment of the Directorate in 1961, the institutional military felt compelled to make greater efforts to legitimize its rule to a broader cross section of Salvadoran society. As Webre puts it, "If Rivera wished to avoid the fate of Lemus, he must discover a way to keep his opponents out of the streets." (1979, 48) The first indication of this concern
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was the presidential election of 1962, during which PCN nominee "Rivera campaigned as hard as, or perhaps harder than, he would have had he been opposed." (Webre 1979, 47)

Rivera went on to make electoral reforms that permitted the Christian Democratic party, among others, to successfully run candidates for the national Legislative Assembly, replacing the venerable and nearly moribund Renovating Action Party (PAR) as the main party of opposition. Up to this point, the results of liberalization were optimal for the official party, because it now had a credible electoral opponent but had nonetheless retained majority control in the Legislative Assembly. The more important event, however, was the election of Christian Democrat José Napoleón Duarte as Mayor of San Salvador. Faced with serious budgetary constraints, Duarte set up an organization known as "Communitarian Action" which succeeded in promoting community development services on the basis of organized self-help. These organizing activities gave the Christian Democrats the core of a mass following, an event which would in the long run pose a threat to the PCN's dominance.

The PDC acted cautiously in the 1967 elections, holding Duarte in reserve for nearly certain re-election as Mayor of San Salvador and running party Secretary General Abraham Rodríguez for the presidency. The PCN candidate was Fidel Sánchez Hernández, and the PAR split into a new,
somewhat left-wing PAR, and a conservative splinter called the Salvadoran Popular Party (PPS). The PAR candidate was Fabio Castillo, the former National University rector who had served on the short-lived 1960 junta and who had been one of the main targets of U.S. charges of "Castro/Communism." The PPS ran a retired Army major and coffee grower, Alvaro Martínez, a shrewd choice that threatened two of the main constituencies of the PCN. (Webre 1979, 93-94) As one might predict, the main strategy of PCN candidate Sánchez Hernández was to play up the PCN's role as protector of the country from communism. In the context of the campaign, this meant focusing on the threat posed by PAR candidate Fabio Castillo. (Weber 1979, 97) The press played into the PCN strategy by giving extensive coverage to the Castillo candidacy and running a special feature series on the uprising of 1932, which it blamed on Communist manipulation of the ignorant peasantry. By allowing the PAR to remain in the race, the military "heightened the value of the Red scare issue to the PCN" and at the same time managed to enhance its image as a force for democracy. (Webre 1979, 99)

The PCN strategy started to backfire for the party in 1968. The PDC had seventy-eight municipalities under its control after the 1968 elections, and the 1968-70 session of the Legislative Assembly saw the PDC team up with members of smaller parties and mavericks from the PCN to
change committee rules and pass reformist legislation. These activities brought increasing rightist pressure against Hernández, particularly after he "attended the opening session of a congress on agrarian reform organized by the assembly and declared that agrarian reform was a necessity in El Salvador." (Baloyra 1982, 45) This kind of talk was seen as all the more threatening since the Rivera government had seen fit to distribute plots of land to some 3,500 families near the end of his presidency. (McClintock 1985a, 152)

As a counterweight to his reformist rhetoric, Sánchez Hernández took actions that signalled his concern for oligarchic interests: he moved Colonel José Alberto Medrano from the Army First Brigade to command the National Guard, the most powerful command within the security system and certainly the position most concerned on a daily basis with the suppression of the economic elite's number one opponent, labor organizers. In late 1967, President Sánchez and Colonel Medrano pressured the agrarian elite to finance an expansion of ORDEN, claiming this was necessary to fight communism and was "consistent with El Salvador's own historical experience," a statement which was, in this context, a reference to the events of 1932.

The expanded ORDEN was quickly put into use: in 1968 the radical, national teachers union ANDES went on strike and ORDEN members, along with National Guard forces, were
instrumental in breaking the strike through beatings, imprisonment and the "disappearance" of two teachers by ORDEN members. The two bodies were found, "almost unrecognizably mutilated," much later. (McClintock 1985a, 207) These actions were part of an overall pattern of increased use of force against labor activists, and further enhanced the prestige of Medrano in the eyes of the conservative civilian elite, who saw him as a man capable of taking decisive action against their natural opponents.

President Sánchez received a bit of a reprieve from rightist pressure, and Medrano's prestige was further enhanced, by the brief war with Honduras in 1959. The war resulted mainly from a series of events in both El Salvador and Honduras regarding land. Continued population growth, and the increasingly marginal lands available for food production as cotton and sugar cultivation expanded in the lowlands (Brockett 1990, 55-6), had led Salvadorans to seek work and land in Honduras. As many as 300,000 Salvadoran were in Honduras, where the population density was much lower (57 per square mile versus 380 in El Salvador) and where northern lowland banana plantations offered opportunities for wage labor. (McClintock 1985a, 155) A land reform initiative in Honduras led to the expropriation of lands occupied by Salvadoran squatters and to expulsions. Numerous reports of mistreatment of Salvadorans in Honduras, and mob violence against Hondurans at a soccer
match in El Salvador fueled nationalist anger on both sides. Under tremendous pressure from the right, and with the opposition PDC, PAR, PPS, and even the outlawed Communist party stating their support for action against Honduras, the Sánchez Hernández government ordered a surprise invasion of Honduras. (Anderson 1981)

The military offensive is generally viewed in El Salvador as being a great success, and Salvadoran military officers to this day are fond of describing themselves as the "Israelis" of Central America. In reality, the initial Salvadoran air strikes were almost a complete fiasco, and Salvadoran ground forces, though successful in advancing onto Honduran territory along two roadways, quickly outran their supply lines and were forced to a halt by Honduran resistance. The nationalist fervor that accompanied the fighting and the Salvadoran "victories" seems to have provided the Sánchez Hernández government with a temporary respite from private sector elite pressure to use a firmer hand. (Anderson 1981, 107-28) In the long run, however, the economic and demographic results of the war greatly complicating institutional military rule. First of all, by breaking the Central American Common Market, the war undercut the light industrial production that had helped buoy the economy. Furthermore, some 300,000 Salvadorans were repatriated from Honduras, to face landlessness and unemployment. This greatly increased the pressures for
land reform in El Salvador. Not coincidentally, the areas of the country that received the largest numbers of repatriates -- Chalatenango and Morazan -- later became the most revolutionary departments in the country.

The Crisis of 1972

The contradictions inherent in trying to secure electoral legitimacy for institutional military rule came home to roost in 1972. In the 1970 elections, the PCN had swept the PDC, increasing its strength in the Legislative Assembly and taking back control of all but eight municipalities. The PCN victory was attributable to a combination of electoral fraud and, more importantly, fear of renewed hostilities with Honduras and a resulting sense that the official party should be given the strongest possible mandate. Sánchez Hernández "chose to regard the vote as an endorsement of his reformist initiatives," increasing conservative hostility towards him. (Webre 1981, 142) At the opening session of the assembly, Sánchez Hernández announced plans to push forward reform legislation affecting under-utilized lands. He then went on to declare in his Independence Day address of 1970 that further reforms must take place:

The Salvadoran people are noble; they have trusted and continue to trust their leaders. But they have now reached their limit. At this moment, the reforms under consideration are like a rock teetering on the edge of a precipice that
no one and nothing can prevent from falling.  
(Webre 1981, 143)

The first specific measure was the irrigation and drainage law, which provided the state with limited rights to claim private lands to make improvements in the public interest. The signing of this law was accompanied by accusations from agrarian elites that the government was reckless and was serving "the communist cause." There were rumors of a coup d'etat to block its implementation. (Webre 1981, 143-4)

Several actions by the left in late 1970 and in 1971 reinforced the impression on the part of the oligarchy that the military government was violating the traditional terms of the "protection contract." A funeral march for the Communist party leader Raúl Castellanos Figueroa showed the continued existence of an organized left in the country, despite the fact that the Communist party was not permitted to participate in politics. In January of 1971, a young industrialist by the name of Ernesto Regalado Dueñas, son of two of the country's most powerful families, was kidnapped and killed a week later. The kidnappers demanded a one million dollar ransom, but never collected it. The government investigation into the killing focused on a supposed leftist cell within the National University. The idea that a leftist cell could kidnap and kill such a prominent citizen without a prompt and effective law enforcement response further alienated the oligarchy.
In fact, there is strong suggestive evidence that General Medrano himself was involved in the Regalado Dueñas killing. Medrano shot to death a police officer who tried to arrest him in connection with the killings. During questioning Medrano went to some lengths to cover up the extent of his knowledge of the case and the investigation into it. Apparently both Medrano and his civilian supporters, the Salaverrias, were among the initial suspects in the case, but the government had switched to focusing on leftists at the University. Several other "political arrests" took place the same night that Medrano killed the police officer, though the others were released without charges. Medrano was eventually acquitted by a jury for the killing of the policeman. He claimed self-defense. (Webre 1979, 161-2)

The Salaverrias and Medrano could have had a motive for killing Ernesto Regalado Dueñas. The Regalados and the Dueñas had expanded from traditional agricultural activities into finance and industry, and Ernesto Regalado was particularly noted for his support of the modernizing policies of the Sánchez Hernández government and its interventions in the social and economic sphere. He was thus a target who, from the point of view of the agrarian elites, was expendable. The London-based Latin America Weekly Report recounted that:

Although no direct link has been established between the PCN and the unknown kidnappers, it is
widely believed in San Salvador that the murder was a desperate attempt by the right-wing of the party [PCN] to arouse the country to the dangers of left-wing terrorism and to stampede the party into choosing a hardline candidate -- preferably General Alberto Medrano, former head of the National Guard and until recently the government's strong man. The accusation that the Left was responsible lacked credibility even among those who would have liked to believe it. Observers argue that a left-wing group would have claimed responsibility for such an action as a victory, and would anyway have collected the ransom money. (cited in McClintock 1985a, 167)

The supposition that the killing was intended to incite support for Medrano and for the hardline agenda is not implausible, given the circumstances. In December of 1970, General Medrano had been dismissed as chief of the National Guard and replaced by a confidant of Sánchez Hernández. It was rumored at the time that Medrano was involved in a coup plot, supported by the ultra-conservative coffee growing Salaverría family of Ahuachapán. (Webre 1979, 161)

Frustrations and discontent on the part of the right-wing increased further when, in July, 1971, the ANDES teachers' union went out on strike once again, supported by massive street demonstrations by a variety of disgruntled sectors of society, including the middle classes, peasants, students, and especially the urban poor from "shanty towns" around San Salvador. Several of the demonstrations turned violent, with stone-throwing attacks on public buildings. These actions were met with violence by ORDEN and the
regular security forces but the impression had been made that the government was not fully in control. (McClintock 1985a, 163-4) There was also a steady stream of demonstrations at the National University. Webre argues that Salvadoran conservatives saw the regime not only as a government that was irrationally hostile to the interests of the more substantial sectors of society, but also one that irresponsibly tolerated and even pampered those whose activities demonstrated contempt for the sacred traditions of Salvadoran society and posed an immediate threat of social disintegration. It must have particularly disturbed oligarchs that there was -- in spite of periodic coup rumors that may have represented mere wishful thinking or attempts to offer self-fulfilling prophesies -- little evidence of unrest within the military. (1979, 152)

There was, in fact, considerable unrest within the military, but not of the type that the oligarchy would have preferred. At the beginning of 1971, a meeting of the entire officer corps of the country was held for the purpose of informing the officers of who, as former Army Captain Mena Sandoval puts it: "would be the next president, pardon me, the candidate of the PCN in the forthcoming elections." The meeting of officers did not go as President Sánchez Hernández intended. Two challenges were raised by officers at the meeting: one was the obvious question, "Why have elections if you already know who will be the president?" The other question was why Sánchez Hernández did not consult with the officer corps, rather than imposing his choice. A Captain by the name of Andre
Julio Azahar challenged the president, stating he disagreed with the entire proceeding. When the President told him to "measure his words," the assembled officers responded by pounding on the tables in unison. Junior officers spoke, demanding that the assembled officers elect the next candidate in that very meeting. Sánchez Hernández responded by simply announcing that the subject would be taken up at another meeting, which was never scheduled.²

(Mena Sandoval 1990, 59-61)

International events had served to increase the political fears of the oligarchy. First, in Peru, the military had seen fit in 1968 to implement a major land reform program at the expense of agrarian elites. With the existence of reformist juventud sentiments within the military well known, the oligarchy was less and less confident that the military institution could be relied upon. Conservatives were further alarmed by the fact that the Christian Democrats were being allowed to compete so

² It is interesting to note that during the course of this meeting, Major Guillermo García spoke out against the selection of Molina as PCN candidate. If true, this is ironic, since García came to be one of a group of officers who were closely associated with Molina and seen as his most likely successors. During Molina's government, García had a highly lucrative post as president of the national telephone company. Mena Sandoval claims that this prize was given to placate García, who had a strong following among junior officers because he had been a teacher at the military academy for several years. (1990, 61) García later emerged as Minister of Defense following the October 1979 coup and proved to be an extremely agile politician, maintaining a delicate balance between the economic elite and the U.S. embassy to keep himself in power.
freely in elections. The election in Chile in 1970 of the Marxist Popular Unity candidate Salvador Allende as successor to Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei gave the oligarchy, and conservative elements of the military, proof of what they had suspected all along, which was that Christian Democracy would merely serve as a bridge for the left to take power.

The discomfiture on the part of the oligarchy took electoral form in 1972 with the formation of the United Democratic Independent Front (FUDI), which ran General Medrano as its candidate. Medrano had considerable appeal to conservative elements of the oligarchy:

Medrano was the man who had pacified labor in 1966-68, a man who understood the operation of the political economy of export agriculture in El Salvador, a man who understood why it was necessary to keep labor organizers out of the Salvadoran countryside, and a man who could take initiative during times of crisis. Quite literally, he represented an opportunity to return to the golden past when Salvadoran presidents did not have to talk about reformism, when junior officers were easily put in their place, and when there was no need to appease so many professionals and intellectuals who, the conservatives insisted[,] had never met a payroll in their lives, did not know how to read a balance sheet, and did not understand how Salvadoran society "worked." (Baloyra 1982, 47)

Medrano was, in other words, the candidate of the system of 1932, an officer who understood the "protection contract" upon which military rule had been, and, from the point of view of the oligarchy, still should be based. Medrano's electoral support went beyond members of the oligarchy:
whereas in the past, ORDEN had been available to help turn out the vote for the PCN, at least part of ORDEN supported Medrano (who had resigned as head of ORDEN after his removal from the National Guard). Between them, FUDI and the older conservative PPS received 100,000 votes, many of which came at the expense of the official party.

The candidacy of Medrano put security force and intelligence officers in the military in a bit of a quandary. While important elements of the economic elite supported Medrano, it was still unlikely that he would succeed. As a result, officers who were politically and personally close to Medrano nonetheless supported Molina. Captain Roberto D'Aubuisson, a close affiliate of Medrano and an officer who had early established his reputation as a countersubversion specialist and interrogator, served as the coordinator for the Molina campaign in the eastern zone of the country. Other officers who later emerged as prominent, hardline guerrilla-fighters, such as Captain Domingo Monterrosa, were also instrumental in the campaign. (Mena Sandoval 1990, 65) The other electoral opposition to the military came from the Christian Democratic party, which had joined with the MNR and the UDN in an opposition coalition called the National Opposition Union (UNO). The coalition ran their most electable candidate, San Salvador mayor José Napoleón Duarte, with MNR leader Guillermo Ungo as his running mate. They campaigned effectively, despite
some harassment and the sniper killing of one campaign worker. Although serious, the pressures against the UNO campaigners were markedly lower than the widespread killings and beatings that had been directed against Acción Democrática activists after 1944, even though the electoral threat they posed was more serious.

UNO probably won a plurality and possibly even a majority. (Webre 1979, 170-4) Returns from rural areas showed PCN leading, but as urban precincts began to be counted, the trend turned strongly in the direction of UNO. The Central Elections Committee suspended public announcements of the vote count and announced the following day that PCN candidate Colonel Arturo Armando Molina had been the victor. Mena Sandoval, who was posted in San Miguel at the time of the elections, reports that a meeting took place in the cuartel of the Third Brigade as soon as it became clear that the UNO coalition was winning at the national level, in which a specific plan was put forward to "fix" the completed ballots to ensure that the official candidate would win in a recount. The plan called for a team of officers and soldiers equipped with erasers, official stamps, pens and blank ballots to go to the buildings in the zone where the ballots were kept to 1) nullify ballots that had been marked for UNO; 2) complete all blank ballots in favor of the PCN; and 3) as necessary substitute PCN ballots for UNO ballots to change the
percentages without altering the total number of votes. Mena indicates that similar actions took place across the country. (Mena Sandoval 1990, 68-69) This account helps to explain the discrepancy between the fact that early returns suggested an UNO victory, while the official recount, observed by UNO official Abraham Rodriguez, "was of little consequence." (Webre 1979, 171)

Molina's election was confirmed by the Legislative Assembly in a hastily and irregularly called session that the opposition boycotted. The immediate post-election period was plagued by a series of guerrilla-style attacks, fires, and "incidents of terrorism." One of the most notable was a guerrilla assault on March 2 which killed one National Guardsman and wounded a second, after which the assailants supposedly fled in the direction of the University. The security forces were unable to catch the assailants despite a disruptive search of the University. The authenticity of the attack is not entirely clear. The government announced the discovery of "communist literature" of unspecified nature and content at the site of the attack. There were so many other less serious incidents of this type that "Sánchez Hernández found it necessary to deny rumors that the government was behind the wave of disorders. It was not true, he insisted, that his regime was attempting to create the conditions for military intervention in the form of a 'self-coup' (autogolpe)."
Perhaps Sánchez Hernández protested too much: given the above-noted extent of discontent within the officer corps and the fact that he received early reports of coup plotting by Colonel Benjamín Mejía (Webre 1979, 179), Sánchez Hernández had good reasons to enhance the appearance of violent opposition. It is more likely, however, that the Popular Liberation Forces Farabundo Martí (FPL), whose first cells had formed in 1970, were responsible, but had not yet worked out a clear procedure for claiming their actions. Later in 1972, the FPL would make itself known with an attack on a National Guard post for which it claimed credit. Other emerging groups, such as the Popular Revolutionary Army (ERP) and later the National Resistance (RN), regularly claimed credit for their bombings and other attacks.

On March 25, 1972, a coup attempt took place which showed the extent of discontent within the military toward the institutionalist leadership. The Artillery battalion at the Zapote barracks and the First Brigade, both in San Salvador, rebelled, took control of strategic positions within the city, and captured the President, an accomplishment that usually guarantees the success of a coup.

The movement, led by Colonel Benjamín Mejía, apparently had co-conspirators in other important barracks in San Miguel, Santa Ana, and San Vicente, but the rebels
in those barracks failed to secure full control of the
units and were forced to surrender. As had happened in
previous coups, the security forces -- the National Guard,
the National Police, and the Treasury Police -- remained
loyal to the government. Although the Artillery Battalion
directed highly effective bombardment against the Air Force
base at Ilopango, forcing personnel there to take shelter
in tunnels under the runways, a handful of aircraft did get
airborne in response and successfully bombed the Artillery
and First Brigade barracks. (Mena Sandoval 1990, 70-2) The
combined efforts of the Air Force, the security forces, and
loyal Army units from outside the capital were sufficient
to militarily defeat the rebels, who surrendered between
4:15 and 5:00 p.m. Around 100 people were killed, most of
them soldiers, and another 200 wounded. (McClintock 1985a,
168-70)

A decisive factor was the failure of the rebels to
capture the Minister of Defense and other senior officers,
who were able to coordinate the very rapid counter-attack
against Mejía's forces. Two confidential informants with
detailed knowledge of these events stated that a young
Cavalry officer by the name of Sigifredo Ochoa had agreed
to participate in the coup but failed to carry out his
role. Mena Sandoval's account also includes this detail.
(1990, 72) One of the informants claimed that Ochoa
notified the Minister of Defense, General Fidel Torres,
enabling him to evade the rebel forces and assemble other senior officers. Ochoa's action earned him little respect: the culture of the Salvadoran military is such that participating in a coup is considered honorable, as is declining to participate. Agreeing to rebel, then betraying the movement, is taken as a sign of cowardice.  

Ironically, and perhaps in reaction to this blemish, Ochoa later created an image for himself as a notorious hardliner and became a leader of the ultra-right ARENA political party.

Even if Mejía's forces had managed to hold through the first few days, the long term prospects for the coup were dim. Under the auspices of the Central American Defense Council (CONDECA), Nicaraguan and Guatemalan planes began flying combat supplies into San Miguel, which would have made it possible for the Third Brigade and other "loyalist" units to fight a protracted campaign against the golpistas. (Dunkerly 1982, 86) (Cabarrús 1983, 44)

The first indication of the political agenda of the golpistas was a radio announcement by Mejía that the movement was one of juventud militar. The fact that Mejía was the leader signalled the reformist orientation of the coup: he had a reputation as something of a romantic and military eccentric. He was scrupulously honest, a characteristic that called attention to him in the context of the Salvadoran military, and, partly as a result of the
low income which his honesty brought him and partly out of solidarity with the poor, lived in very humble quarters. Several of the other officers involved had been participants in the April 2, 1944 revolt against Martínez. (Castro Moran 1989, 235) Others included junior officers such as Pedro Guardado and Adrián Ticas, who were later involved in the 1979 coup. (Mena Sandoval 1990, 72)

The movement's political alignment with the civilian UNO coalition emerged later in the day, when José Napoleon Duarte went on a San Salvador radio station and called upon people to obstruct the forces that were moving into the city to defeat the golpistas. Apparently, Duarte was not involved in the plot in advance, but was called upon by the conspirators once it became clear that the movement was in trouble and would need popular support. His decision to comply led to his arrest, torture, and exile, and that of many other UNO leaders, many of whom attempted to take shelter in embassies after the collapse of the coup attempt. Castro Moran (1989, 235) argues that Duarte's radio call for popular support for the juventud actually "sealed the military fortunes" of the rebellion. While much of the officer corps was sympathetic to greater reformism and objected to the election fraud, the thought of an alliance between the military and a popular mob turned officers and units against the rebellion.
There was a great deal of confusion at the time of the coup. Soldiers who had been awakened and ordered to take up defensive positions in the capital were unaware of which side they were on. Reporters who stopped a patrol and asked them whether they were loyalists or rebels were told "They awakened us at eleven o'clock last night. We don't know what's happening." (Webre 1979, 177) Mena Sandoval's account is quite similar:

Along the Panamerican Highway we encountered very confused soldiers. Some said they supported the coup, others said they were with the forces of the east [who were marching against the rebels], others may have been in accord with the coup but in the confusion had joined forces loyal to the government. (1990, 72)

This degree of confusion is an inevitable result of the clandestinity in which coups are prepared. Conditions do not generally permit plotters to discuss their goals with subordinates who must actually do the fighting. Which side soldiers fight on is often a product either of personal loyalty to their commander or simply being told what to do by whatever officer happens to be on the scene. One result of this is that the actual makeup of forces for a given coup movement can be extremely volatile from one hour to the next.

This volatility is amplified by the particular ideological formation of military officers, for whom certain issues of institutional principle often outweigh political issues such as reformism, democracy, or
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repression. A former senior government official told me that an important contributing factor to the collapse of the 1972 movement was the fact that Colonel Mejía permitted the civilian member of the "Revolutionary Junta," Manuel Rafael Reyes Alvarado, to dress in a military uniform at the rebels headquarters. A photo was taken of the three junta members, including Reyes, holding G-3 rifles. Word spread throughout the rebel units that "the civilian" had been photographed in uniform, causing a number of officers to defect with their troops.  

From March 25 until April 10, 1972, the country was placed under martial law, and constitutional guarantees were formally suspended until June 3, 1972. During this period, there was intense repression, although no figures are available. Many of the official killings were of curfew violators who were shot on sight. (McClintock 1985a, 170) Castro Moran maintains that UNO members and other civilian opponents were "arrested, massacred or tortured" under orders of Sánchez Hernández, though he provides no quantitative estimate of these crimes.

The Molina Administration: Growing Conflict and Rightist Autonomy

Because of the apparent fraudulence of his election, Arturo Armando Molina was on shaky political ground from the outset, with both the population at large and the
military itself. His initial response to weakness was to use conspicuous force. According to Webre (1979, 185),

Before he even assumed office, there was a military challenge to his legitimacy in the form of a coup attempt that enjoyed at least some support from representatives of the civilian opposition. The new president survived this test, but he needed an issue upon which he could base his right to govern and he found it in "law and order" and "anti-communism." Virtually Molina's first official act was to join the government to the conservative assault upon the National University. On July 19, explaining that the institution "had fallen into the hands of the Communists," Molina secured a decree from the Legislative Assembly abrogating the university's organic law and ordered troops to occupy the central campus in San Salvador as well as the outlying regional centers in Santa Ana and San Miguel.

The university remained closed for over a year, and reopened under tight government control.

During Molina's administration, the inherent dilemmas in the institutionalist framework became increasingly acute. By the end of his term in office, he had attempted to set in motion a comprehensive land reform process and been forced to reverse himself, mercenary elements in the military had developed increasing political and institutional autonomy and had begun to respond to leftist opposition in markedly more violent ways, a reformist junior officers' movement had begun to coalesce, and Molina was denied his choice of successors in favor of an officer with close ties to the agrarian elite. Shortly after the beginning of his term, the first guerrilla organizations made themselves known in attacks on military and police
posts. These organizations continued to embarrass the Molina government throughout his term. At no point, however, did they threaten the government in any direct way, and there is little evidence that they increased markedly in numbers or capability until 1977, although a split within the ERP created a third guerrilla group, the National Resistance, in 1975. The main development in the mass opposition during Molina's government was the growth and increasing radicalization of popular organizations. These organizations were able to field increasingly large numbers of people for demonstrations and other acts of civil disobedience, and their discourse became increasingly radical, such that the Molina regime came to be characterized regularly as "fascist" of "fascistoid."

State violence, particularly direct killing or disappearance, increased markedly during Molina's term, and was directed increasingly against middle class targets and members of the elite, electoral political opposition. It is, of course, extremely difficult if not impossible to tease apart the direction of causation between state violence and increased participation, radicalism and militancy on the part of popular organizations. In a rough sense, the simultaneous growth of opposition and increased state violence during the Molina government conforms to conventional hypotheses of reciprocity between state and opposition. The behavior of the Molina regime suggests,
however, not a unitary "state" mechanism responding to its environment, but rather an internal struggle between conflicting impulses. While it is not possible to confirm the extent to which President Molina ordered or authorized violence against civilians, it is clear that hardline elements gained increasing power and autonomy within the government, even as Molina himself was staking his political fortunes and those of the PCN on a more reformist policy. The political logic of Molina's land reform proposals runs completely against the kind of increasing violence used during his term. In this light, it is significant that Molina's Minister of Defence, Carlos Humberto Romero, emerged early in Molina's administration as a hardliner with close ties to the agrarian elite. It is also significant that major institutional changes took place within the Salvadoran security apparatus during the course of Molina's administration, changes that made the network more autonomous from Presidential control.

In September of 1972, 11 FPL guerrillas unsuccessfully attacked a National Guard post and several were killed. After this, a series of police posts and multinational firms were attacked and or bombed. After a spate of bombings in early 1973, Defense Minister Romero ordered the arrest of about one hundred Christian Democratic Party and trade union leaders, twenty-two of whom were flown to Guatemala. (McClintock 1985a, 171) This action reflected
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an emerging pattern on the part of the security agencies of responding to guerrilla activities by persecuting more visible individuals and organizations which in all likelihood had no ties whatsoever to the guerrillas. There are two related reasons for this behavior. First, despite efforts to build better intelligence capabilities, the military lacked the investigative ability to identify urban guerrillas, especially in the early years when they were few in number. The first guerrillas tended to be relatively well educated, sophisticated individuals who quickly developed techniques for living and operating in clandestinity. Following guerrilla attacks, the military felt obligated to respond in some way: being unable to find and attack the guerrillas, they resorted to blaming and persecuting people they could get their hands on, namely, public members of opposition parties and labor organizations.

These retaliations against the public opposition of course had no deterrent effect on the guerrillas, who immediately carried out an attack on a National Guard post in Cuscatancingo and killed a policeman in San Salvador. In August, a new group, the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), announced their existence by successfully robbing a bank, killing a bank guard in the process.

It is easy to develop the impression from these accounts that such violence posed a serious threat to
stability and order. During all of Molina's term, however, there were a total of thirty one attacks, in which twenty four security personnel were killed, eighteen ORDEN or other paramilitary members were killed, eleven people were wounded, and eight people kidnapped. (López Vallecillos 1979b, 871) Considering that these events occurred over a five year period, this level of violence was scarcely more than a nuisance, especially in a country with a nation-wide non-political annual homicide rate which, at 130 per 100,000, was approximately five times the level of that of the average large city in the U.S. (Cohen 1984, 8, 10)

Of greater significance to the government and the oligarchy was the development during this period of more highly politicized peasant organizations. One of the most important of these, the Salvadoran Federation of Christian Peasants (FECCAS), had been formed in 1964 by the Catholic Church as a self-help organization. In the process of trying to improve their material circumstances, communities often came into conflict with land owners and local officials. Elements of the membership of FECCAS gradually became radicalized, and rural priests in particular came to advocate a more combative stance. In 1972/3, FECCAS was briefly allied with a Communist Party (PCS)-led rural union, ATACES, but FECCAS soon broke off again because it found the PCS position too compromising and reformist. (Dunkerly 1982, 99) Urban unions also grew rapidly and
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became more radical during the 1970s. In June 1974, FECCAS, along with a smaller rural union, the Union of Rural Workers (UTC) based in San Vicente, plus the teachers union ANDES, two urban labor federations, FUSS and FENASTRAS, formed an independent popular organization, the United Popular Action Front (FAPU). FAPU's discourse and goals were explicitly political; the organization viewed the Molina government as fascist and called for revolution and democracy. In 1975, part of FAPU split off to form a new and more militant organization, the Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR). The BPR drew more support from FECCAS and UTC, while FAPU maintained its greatest strength among urban workers. (Dunkerly 1985, 96-102; Montgomery 1982, 123-8)

These organizations posed a growing threat primarily because their membership was so large. By 1976, FAPU had around 30,000 members and the BPR had over 60,000, which gave them impressive capacity to stage demonstrations and to press increasing demands on the local level. (Montgomery 1982, 126) The rural components of these organizations were strong only in certain parts of the country, mostly areas in which the Catholic Church had been particularly active in organizational work, such as around Aguilares and San Martín in northern San Salvador department, Armenia in Sonsonate, and in Usulután. (Cabarrús 1983, 23)
The state reacted violently to the development of these activist organizations. During the course of the Molina government, thirty seven people were assassinated by government forces, and an additional sixty-nine were disappeared (presumed dead). (López Vallecillos 1979b, 871) In addition, two priests were assassinated and seventy eight people were wounded in attacks by government forces or their paramilitary supporters. None of these operations were plausibly related to guerrilla activities: rather, they were directed against public, popular organizations or individuals who made the mistake of calling attention to themselves by voicing grievances. In November 1972, the Treasury Police captured a peasant from a small hamlet in Santa Ana. His headless body was found three weeks later. In May 1974, National Guard troops raided another village, killing several people and disappearing others. No exact figures are available for this particular attack. On November 29, 1974, the National Guard, along with ORDEN members, attacked the village of La Cayetana in San Vicente, killing six and disappearing 13. Most of the residents of the village were members of the FECCAS. The violence occurred "in the context of a land dispute between villagers and a neighboring estate owner," indicating the extent to which the security forces were responsive on the local level to pressures from the oligarchy. (McClintock 1985a, 170-2)
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The killings at La Cayetana stimulated a reaction by the popular organizations: In December 1974, a priest led a protest march in San Salvador of 10,000 peasants, mostly members of FECCAS or UTC. This was the first time the rural popular organizations had demonstrated in San Salvador and was an important signal that the organized peasantry was breaking with its quiescent past. (McCintock 1985a, 173)

The next act of violence by government forces in the countryside was the murder by the National Guard and ORDEN of six peasants in the village of Tres Calles in Usulután. The combination of these two attacks convinced the peasant organizations that the government had declared war on them and pushed them to greater militancy. (McCintock 1985a, 173) This was the beginning of a pattern that was to continue and intensify through the end of 1980, in which government violence, instead of suppressing mass opposition, served to make it more militant and, eventually, violent.

On July 30, 1975, about 2,000 university and secondary school students demonstrated against the amount of money the government was spending to host the Miss Universe contest and against the use of force to break up a similar demonstration a week earlier in Santa Ana. As the march passed along a depressed section of roadway that passed under another thoroughfare, National Guard forces opened
fire with automatic weapons, killing at least 37 and taking away an undetermined number of the wounded who were never seen again. According to Mena Sandoval, the National Guard planned the massacre in advance, planting guardsmen within the demonstration to fire shots that would justify the security forces' firing in retaliation. (1990, 92) This action had a greater impact on the country's elite and middle classes than had isolated violence in rural areas. It prompted a Church-led protest march of 50,000 in San Salvador. (McClintock 1985a, 173) The formation of the more radical Popular Revolutionary Block (BPR) was in large part a reaction to the massacre of students.

The Rightist Challenge to Molina

As previous presidents had done when popular mobilization began to exceed tolerable bounds, Molina announced the discovery of a Communist plot and attributed the student and other demonstrations to the work of professional agitators of the Communist Party. Two days later, on August 2, 1975, a new death squad disclosed its existence and announced that a wide range of regime opponents, including members of ANDES, journalists, priests, and trade unionists had been sentenced to death. (McClintock 1985a, 174-5) McClintock argues that the new death squad, the Anti-Communist Liberation Armed Forces (FALANGE), was probably a creation of the national security
agency ANSESAL. If this is true, which seems probable, part of the FALANGE statement is very revealing. Calling for a liquidation of regime opponents in the style of Martínez in 1932, FALANGE proclaimed its intention to kill the above-mentioned categories of people, and also to kill:

communists who are in government through the stupidity of those who govern, and even those military men who contemnorize with them.
(McClintock 1985a, 175)

This statement is significant because although it was made immediately after and was in step with Molina's announcement of a "communist plot," it can also be construed as a strong criticism of Molina.

This statement was issued in a context of growing conflict between Molina and the oligarchy over the question of land reform. In June of 1975, Molina had pushed through the legislature a law, Decree 302, which created the Salvadoran Institute for Agrarian Transformation (ISTA). Earlier, in 1973, Molina had held a national seminar for military officers on the subject of agrarian reform. (Baloyra 1982, 58) Although there was not yet a major outcry against the ISTA law by the oligarchy, it is very unlikely that Decree 302 was well received. In that light, the FALANGE statement about communism in government and military officers who collaborate with them should probably be interpreted as a protest and a warning by mercenary sectors of the military against Molina's reformist initiatives. It was also a statement of intent to
unilaterally take stronger actions to maintain adequate order, whether or not authorized by "those who govern." In this light, it may not be merely a coincidence that the massacre of students in San Salvador occurred just one month after the passing of the ISTA law.

Several developments had taken place during the course of the Molina administration that made it possible for ANSESAL, though originally a highly centralized presidential security system, to challenge the president in this manner. First of all, ANSESAL became more of an operational agency during the 1972-1975 period, going beyond its previous function of coordinating intelligence collection. Significantly, while the intelligence offices of ANSESAL remained in the presidential compound, the operational headquarters were set up elsewhere. (McCIntock 1985a, 219) An additional development was the increased capacity of the National Guard's Special Investigations Section (SIE), which had been expanded with help from the USAID Office of Public Safety. With the growth of SIE, the National Guard, which had long been the military agency most closely aligned with the oligarchy, played an increasingly prominent role in the national intelligence network and provided much of ANSESAL's operational capacity, removing these activities further from presidential supervision. These developments meant that hardline elements had an increasingly powerful and independent institutional base
within the military. ANSESAL had extensive independent contacts with the private sector; in particular, it served as an employment agency for landlords and industrialists looking for security personnel. (McClintock 1985a, 220)

The Agrarian Transformation Crisis

The conflict between Molina and the agrarian elite (and its military allies) came to a head after June 29, 1976, when the legislature passed Law-Decree 31 which created the First Project of the Agrarian Transformation. The government arranged a show of force in support of the reform plan, bringing between 70,000 and 100,000 peasants of ORDEN to the capital city for a demonstration, the largest demonstration in El Salvador in fifteen years. It seems contradictory to see ORDEN mobilized on behalf of land reforms, especially after its partial support for Medrano in the 1972 elections. Despite its role as intelligence gatherer and paramilitary enforcer for the mercenary sectors of the military, however, ORDEN had also been established as a constituency for the official party. Baloyra argues that the government decided that for political reasons it had to provide some tangible benefit to its constituents, or else risk having increasing numbers of peasants turn away from the official party. (1982, 57-9)

Molina may also have been under some degree of pressure from junior officers to carry out a major reform:
there is documentary evidence of the development of a young officers' movement as early as February 1976 which was protesting, within the regular Army, the excessive corruption and domination by the security forces which characterized the Molina regime. (Movimiento de la Juventud Militar 1976, 1-3) Dunkerly describes the MJM as a "semi-clandestine" organization of officers who argued for "retaining faith in the original PCN project." (1985, 105) Though it is unclear how important a role the MJM played at this juncture, the government's statements, taken at face value, suggest that the primary rationale for the reforms was essentially the "original PCN project" view that limited reforms were necessary to preserve long-run political stability.

Whatever the government's motives, the country's landed elites did not react well to the news:

In spite of the fact that the model adopted in the transformation was Taiwan's -- and not Cuba's -- that most of the land involved was government property, that the United States Agency for International Development (AID) would provide the money for compensation, and that the "agrarian reformers" were wearing a uniform that had always defended their privileges, the traditional oligarchy and much of the Salvadoran private sector went on the warpath. (Baloyra 1982, 57)

On July 8, the National Association of Private Enterprise (ANEP) issued a statement which endorsed the general idea of reforms to "achieve an integral development of the country," but stated "we object to a political economy inspired by the methodology and principles of central
planning" and condemned the transformation plan as having been prepared in secret and sprung by surprise. The statement went on to protest that the lands involved in the first zone of the Agrarian Transformation were among the best tended in the country. The government replied that the reform plans had been announced long in advance, disputed the claims that the land was efficiently utilized, and emphasized, in response to language of the ANEP statement, that "while it is no sin to have a high income, neither is it a sin to be born," implying that the government was prepared to side with the poor and disadvantaged in this case.

ANEPE's second attack made a series of points which were to be the argument used by the agrarian elite to oppose land reform through the remainder of the 1970s and well into the 1980s. Several private sector elites and ARENA party members I interviewed in 1989 used the same argument, as did several Reagan administration officials interviewed during 1987. In its second statement, ANEP disputed the accuracy of ISTA's figures, arguing that statistics compiled by "planning functionaries" could not convince those who "in the affected zone or outside of it, know the reality of production and the high degree of


utilization and efficiency of these lands." The statement pointed out that although it was true that the population density was quite high in the affected zone, it would be impossible to give land to every individual, and that a reform of this kind would reduce production, with disastrous effects nationwide. The statement ended with thinly veiled threats, pointing out that there was reason to doubt that

the citizenry would conform to a measure with such grave consequences, just because it has been announced. The Executive Power needs to consider, with great responsibility, the baneful consequences for the future of the country and for the next government that can derive from measures taken so precipitously and which so seriously compromise the future of the country. (emphasis added)\(^5\)

The July 14 response of the government to this statement was remarkable in a number of ways. First of all, responding to the ANEP charge that the reform would diminish production, the government statement quotes studies by the Jesuit Central American University (UCA) -- generally recognized within the country as a center of reformist and even socialist thought -- demonstrating that the lands in question were not producing to their capacity. Given that elements of the armed forces in subsequent years would repeatedly bomb the facilities of the UCA, threaten all Jesuits in the country with death, and eventually assassinate six Jesuits, including three of the

\(^5\) ibid. p. 614
university's most prominent scholars, it is remarkable that
the Molina government would quote the UCA as an author-
itative counterweight to ANEP. The government statement
went on to say that

for any person even modestly versed in the
problems of economic and social development in
underdeveloped countries, it is clear that the
problems deriving from the dramatic conditions of
life of the population are not resolvable by
means of a focus purely on aggregate
productivity.  

It further says that El Salvador could produce twenty times
as much and not solve its social problems, and that
industrialization would require the country to develop
internal market, to which end the agrarian reform would be
helpful. The government statement accuses ANEP of being a
"small sector," accuses ANEP members of having been on
luxury vacations abroad while the reform plan was being
prepared, and reaffirms that the government,

faced with the impossibility of reconciling the
interests of a minority that has everything and a
majority that has nothing, reiterates its
historic and irrefutable commitment to the
latter...  

On July 15, ANEP charged the government with "verbal
violence," "demagogic and classist language," and focused
on what it called Molina's "planning group" for using
language imprecisely, in the manner of demagogues of other


7 ibid. p. 618
latitudes, "especially those countries where liberties and citizens' rights are in danger," a reference to the East Bloc. The statement concluded with the observation that the government "has the obligation to listen."

The final shot in this public war of words came from the government in a published statement entitled "The Government Reaffirms its Position with Respect to ANEP." The statement made the following points: 1) the government alone is responsible for public policy in the country; 2) ANEP is a selfish and intransigent organization attempting to hide behind claims of social conscience; 3) ANEP has not been able to deny the necessity of an agrarian transformation; 4) reforms in the short run will prevent violence and dictatorship in the future (here one sees the treatment of reforms as a national security policy); 5) the government will listen to ANEP or any group, but is not obligated to obey; 6) ANEP is the party responsible for verbal violence; and 7) the government commits itself to carrying out the reforms and promises not to fail the country's majorities.

After this final government statement, ANEP and its affiliates "saturated the media with a barrage of propaganda. The tone of this campaign was one of hysterical anti-Communism." (Baloyra 1982, 59) The private

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sector created a number of new "organizations" and federations that ran advertisements condemning the government's actions. The most important of these was the Agrarian Front of the Eastern Region (FARO), which called upon landowners to resist the implementation of the reforms, a position consistent with the warnings by ANEP in its second statement to the effect that announcing the reform wouldn't make it really take place.

In retrospect, it seems clear that the main audience for this public exchange of views was the military. No other constituency in the country had the power to block Molina's reform plans, and the content of ANEP statements seems tailored to condemn Molina and reformist elements of the military, while scrupulously avoiding any criticism of the military as a whole. As Baloyra puts it:

as astute an observer as Zamora could not detect a single instance of criticism against the military institution among the proclamations of the ANEP against the transformation...In short, the behavior of the private sector vis-à-vis the government seemed an attempt to undermine support for Molina and his initiative, but not to question the legitimacy of the military's presence in power. (1982, 62)

By October 1976, Molina had been forced to back down, which meant not only a defeat for him and for the reformist program, but a loss of institutional political power for the military. It is generally held that Defense Minister Carlos Romero was instrumental in preventing the reforms from going through. According to Montgomery (1982, 90),
who cites a confidential informant, Romero threatened Molina with a coup d'etat if he did not back down on the reform. Evidence from other sources supports this view, as discussed below.

The success of this privately-sponsored threat against Molina was not strictly the result of the power of the private sector elites and the increased strength of hardline elements within the military: it appears that the agrarian elite's initiatives were greatly assisted by a generational conflict within the military over seniority, advancement, and the presidential succession. A former senior civilian government official with close personal and professional ties to the military told me that President Molina had arrived at a decision to choose as his successor either Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova or José Guillermo García. These two officers, from the tandas of 1957 and 1956, respectively, were well known and highly respected within the officer corps. Both had held choice positions under the Molina government and had been seen as among his heirs apparent. The ascendance of either García or Vides to the presidency would virtually insure the immediate retirement or marginalization of all officers senior to them.

Although the Defense Minister of a given government was usually seen as next in line for the presidency, Defense Minister Carlos Romero was actually one year senior
to President Molina, which meant that choosing him as president would block the advancement of the tandas of García and Vides Casanova, creating potentially intolerable pressures from below for a coup. Molina and his advisers doubted that Romero would be able to complete his term. They also viewed Romero's main proteges, the Escobar García group of 1955, as markedly less competent than the García and Vides Casanova cohort. Molina therefore decided in favor of Vides and García. He had an intermediary inform Vides and García that one of the two of them would be president and himself informed Carlos Romero that the decision had gone against him. Vides responded to the good news by saying that the honor should go to Guillermo García and asked the intermediary to congratulate García. García responded by saying that he deserved to be the one because he was senior to Vides. ¶

Molina, however, was forced to reverse his decision. In an effort to preserve their positions, and with active political and financial support from the oligarchy, Defense Minister Carlos Humberto Romero and a group of officers of the tanda of 1955 led by Colonel Roberto Escobar García, threatened Molina with a coup if he did not 1) back down on the land reform and 2) alter his choice of successor in favor of Romero. This group of officers was temporarily in a position to carry out a coup because Escobar García's tanda controlled most of the largest troop commands in the
country and had the support of elements within the security forces and the intelligence network. The generational issue therefore dovetailed with the policy issue regarding land reform: Romero, and his backers from the class of 1955, had strong personal incentives to join the oligarchy's challenge of Molina and his policies.

Molina's acquiescence to Romero's pressure sealed the fate of the Agrarian Transformation and put a more mercenary leadership group in power. This decision weakened the institutional autonomy of the military and contributed directly to an expansion of state terrorism during the next government. My informant speculated that having been elected under highly irregular circumstances, Molina was particularly concerned about completing his term, so that the long-term interests of the military became of less concern to him than his immediate political survival. It is probable that had he chosen to resist the threats, he would have succeeded, since Colonels García and Vides Casanova would most likely have been able to rally sufficient support from the middle ranks of the officer corps to resist the coup. García and Vides had the twin advantages of supporting an incumbent president and being able to promise faster advancement for subordinates than could the more senior group around Romero. *

The existence of a coup threat against Molina is confirmed by Mena Sandoval in his 1990 manuscript. He does
not mention all of the details regarding presidential succession which, as a lieutenant at the time, he would not have been privy to. Mena claims, in fact, that there had been rumors of several efforts to put together a coup against Molina, and that the private sector elite was the main sponsor of these efforts. Mena was contacted by a captain, whom he does not name, and by a private businessman, Engineer Funes Harman, to recruit him for the coup plan which both claimed had the overwhelming backing of "the principal members of private enterprise." Mena had worked as chief of bank security for Roberto Hill, who was among the most reactionary and pro-violence members of the private sector elite. Being known and trusted, Mena was therefore a likely candidate for participation in a rightist plot against Molina. He was given a large sum of money to participate in the coup. Intending to convert himself into a double agent to subvert the coup plot, Mena naively reported these propositions to his commander in the Air Force and to General Castillo Yanez in the Ministry of Defense, who discussed it with him for an hour and a half but who feigned disbelief at what Mena was telling him.9

9 Mena identifies General Castillo Yanez as the Minister of Defense. In fact, Carlos Romero was Minister during this period. Castillo Yanez became Minister of Defense when Romero became President. I have yet to determine what position Castillo Yanez held during the Molina government. It seems unlikely that Mena would confuse Castillo Yanez with Romero and more likely that he confused the position of Castillo within the Ministry of Defense. Mena's manuscript was written from memory without
Castillo Yanez was closely associated with Carlos Romero and became defence minister during Romero's presidency.

Mena had also been told that the U.S. military attaché was involved in the coup. After an abortive attempt to meet with the attaché (neither would agree to get into the other's vehicle) Mena was given the keys to a new Subaru and ordered by his commander to "stop risking himself" and to pursue the matter no further. (Mena Sandoval 1990, 98-103)

Aftermath of the 1976 Coup Threat

The success of the threat against Molina marked the end of the institutional formula of placating the population with minor reforms while using conspicuous acts of repression to forestall political challenges from private capital. Seeing that the formula as practiced since 1961 would no longer suffice to preempt popular upheaval and fearing the loss of the ruling party's existing rural constituency, Molina attempted to challenge the agrarian elite and begin a genuine process of military-led, military-controlled reforms, hoping, one presumes, that the controlled manner in which the military would carry out the reforms, and the obvious political necessity of doing so, would persuade the oligarchy to permit the measures. These significant access to reference materials, so it is not surprising to find factual errors of this kind.
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hopes proved wrong; the oligarchy mobilized and took advantage of generational stratification within the military to force Molina to back down. With this gambit, and with the imposition of Carlos Romero as president, the oligarchy appeared to have recaptured the state for the first time since 1948, possibly even regaining the degree of control they had enjoyed prior to 1932. Baloyra (1982, 3) calls Carlos Romero's administration a period of "oligarchic restoration" or "reactionary despotism."

Conclusions

One of the fundamental innovations of the system of institutional military rule established in 1948 was that the military sought to legitimate its power to a broader base, rather than depending exclusively on the oligarchy for support. A variety of policies were put in place that benefitted the urban working class, the middle class, and small and emerging sectors of the private sector. These included state intervention to promote industrialization and help smaller agricultural producers, relatively liberal labor laws for urban workers, and the holding of elections. This strategy ultimately failed, leading the military to revert to a violently repressive strategy reminiscent of Martínez.

The reasons for the collapse of the institutional formula are complex, but a few generalizations seem
supported by the historical account presented above. First of all, the electoral path to regime legitimation proved short-lived because it worked only so long as the opposition was not a genuine threat. Once an opposition electoral coalition gained the upper hand in 1972, the military had to resort to other means to legitimate itself. It is not a coincidence that the confrontation between the institutionalist military and the oligarchy over land reform occurred after the fraud of 1972: lacking any electoral legitimacy, the military's only path to broader political support was to deliver substantive reforms. When Molina attempted this, he was vetoed by the oligarchy.

The ability of the oligarchy to restrain Molina depended on the continued existence within the military of agencies and officers who favored the original Martinista protection contract basis for military rule. This faction was far more powerful than it might otherwise have been for two reasons: first, the U.S. had put significant efforts over a decade and a half into building up the very institutions that were most wedded to the oligarchy and most oriented towards a mercenary style of military rule. Second, the Salvadoran military had not systematized the processes of promotions and retirements, with the result that senior officers who were due for retirement saw that they could, through political actions and coup-plotting, extend their tenure. This created, during the Molina
administration, a powerful group of officers whose careers would be served by breaking from the military mainstream and siding with the oligarchy against Molina and his reforms.¹⁰

Another general point that comes out of the 1948-1976 period is that the protective role of the military, often symbolized by conspicuous violence against supposed subversives, continued to serve as one of the main currencies in the relationship between the military and the oligarchy, even though there was relatively little mass opposition to the government throughout this period. Presidents could reinforce themselves against oligarchic challenges by finding, and attacking, "leftists." The fact that those attacked were seldom guerrillas or subversives had little bearing on the political value of conspicuous state violence for a beleaguered head of state. When a given president proved too "soft" or reformist in the eyes of the oligarchy, other officers, especially those in the security forces, could gain active political support from the oligarchy by establishing reputations as men willing to deliver violence against organized labor. The career of

¹⁰ A contributing factor in these generational problems was the fact that entire classes advanced through the ranks together, rather than being promoted on merit. As a result, there were always multiple groups of senior officers, any one group of which could fill most of the available command and bureaucratic posts. In a more meritocratic system, fewer officers would be qualified for the choice positions and they would compete as individuals, not a groups.
General Medrano in particular illustrates the political fungibility of a reputation for repressive violence.

The experiences of reformist junior officers in 1960 and 1972 illustrate the obstacles to substantially reforming the military's political role from within. Both of these coups were essentially efforts to abrogate the "protection contract" and replace it with some form of elected government, probably with a dominant role for civilians. This program, which re-emerged in 1979, was fundamentally unacceptable to most officers of middle rank and above, since it meant a diminution of the power of the military as an institution. Both the 1972 and 1960 movements failed to gain enough support within the military to suppress those forces that opposed civilian rule, and the collapse of each movement was followed by an increase in repression and closer ties between the military high command and the oligarchy. This pattern was to be repeated, with variations, after October 1979, at great cost in human lives.
CHAPTER FIVE
ELITE CONFLICT AND THE USE OF VIOLENCE
DURING THE ROMERO ADMINISTRATION

Dynamics of Violence under Romero

The events of Molina's last year made increased levels of violence under his successor very likely. Molina's announcement of a land reform had awakened expectations among campesinos, expectations that had been dashed by the subsequent blockage of the reforms. As a result, the membership of peasant organizations was expanding and becoming more political and militant.¹ At the same time, with the successful intervention by agrarian elites against Molina, and the installation of Carlos Romero as president, it appeared that the economic elites had captured the state. It appeared that there would be no further disputes between military leadership and economic elites over the question of reforms or the severity of government repression. It was predictable that a pro-oligarchy state under Romero would not tolerate popular unrest.

There was, indeed, greater violence under Romero than there had been under Molina. The pattern of violence carried out by the security forces and their para-military associates under Romero was essentially the oligarchy's preferred model: assassination of public figures of the

left, particularly priests, lay catechists, unionists, academics and journalists. The new policy began even before Romero took office, during the "regency" period between his election and inauguration. (Guidos 1979, 514-16) Shortly after the election, a protest vigil led by the UNO coalition was fired upon and around two hundred people killed. (McClintock 1985a, 184) The overall contrast between the Molina and Romero governments in the level of official violence is telling: whereas under Molina the government assassinated 37 people and disappeared 69, under Romero these numbers increased to 461 and 131 respectively. The Romero government also made four times as many political arrests. (López Vallecillos 1979b, 871)

Despite the predictable increase in violence, the dynamics of violence from 1977 through Romero's overthrow in October 1979 were far more complex than one would expect. First of all, state violence under Romero was very inconsistent. At times it reached an intensity not seen since the massacre of 1932; at others times it dropped off markedly. Furthermore, despite Romero's hardline reputation, his administration actually used less violence than did the supposedly more reformist and anti-oligarchic government that followed his overthrow in 1979. This pattern of abuses contributed to a greatly expanded and radicalized popular opposition: the periods of intense violence forced peasants, workers, students, and other
groups to shift from simple demands for economic conces-
sions to a more explicitly political position of denouncing
the military government. Surprisingly, given the hardline,
pro-oligarchy political orientation of the Romero govern-
ment, the violence it used was never sufficiently intense
or sustained to suppress the opposition that it provoked.

This surprising set of outcomes resulted from a
complex interplay of factors, including human rights
pressures from the new Carter administration in Washington,
internal politics of the armed forces, conflict between the
Romero government and civilian elites, and the particular
activities and tactics of the left. Because of the
transparent role of the oligarchy in Romero's nomination to
the presidency (which undercut support for him within the
military) and because he stood in the way of the ambitions
of a powerful group of younger colonels, Romero was
constantly at risk of being overthrown. This precarious-
ness made Romero more sensitive than he might otherwise
have been to international pressures to clean up El
Salvador's human rights record. Because of his lack of
institutional support within the military, it was especial-
ly important to Romero to preserve a degree of internation-
al legitimacy. He therefore responded to U.S. and O.A.S.
human rights pressures by periodically curbing state
violence, particularly in urban areas. Each time he did
this, however, the left mobilized to take advantage of the
relative opening, bringing the wrath of the oligarchy down upon Romero for not performing up to expectations. When threatened by the far-right, Romero ordered or permitted crackdowns. When the U.S., the O.A.S. and the U.N. reacted negatively, he would attempt to reduce the frequency of abuses.

Patterns of Elite Conflict under Romero

The successful intervention by the oligarchy to block Arturo Molina’s land reform proposal and alter his choice of successor neither permanently cemented oligarchic control over the military nor laid to rest the generational succession problem within the military. On the contrary, the way that generational issues had been exploited by the oligarchy to install their favored candidate in the presidency made Romero extremely vulnerable to overthrow throughout his administration. This internal vulnerability heightened his responsiveness to international pressures and made him wary of his own intelligence and state terror apparatus. As a result, Romero repeatedly disappointed his civilian sponsors and was subject to threats and pressures from the right which intermittently forced him to crack down. Because he was reluctant to give hardline and semi-covert elements free rein, with the result that even the most intense crackdowns under Romero were restrained compared with what was to come later.
Conflict between Romero and civilian elites was made more intense than it otherwise might have been by the new emergence of the U.S. as an advocate of human rights. Until the Carter administration, there was relatively little conflict between the interests of the U.S. and those of the Salvadoran agrarian elite. The Ford administration's ambassador to El Salvador, Ignacio Lozano, had made an issue of one human rights case involving a U.S. citizen, but Lozano was seen as operating on his own. Under Carter, however, human rights were a higher priority, as indicated by the appointment of such highly motivated and bureaucratically skilled human rights advocates as Patricia Derian and Mark Schneider (respectively Assistant and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs). U.S. human rights pressures created intense frictions between Romero and his erstwhile supporters in the military and civilian right. The oligarchy had promoted Romero for the presidency because they perceived him as an officer who would not push for land reforms and

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2 Of these two, Mark Schneider was particularly effective in getting human rights in El Salvador on the agenda. As a former Peace Corps volunteer in El Salvador, he had in-depth knowledge of the country and its political system. His expertise, combined with his bureaucratic skills, enabled him to push the State Department toward taking more account of human rights issues in El Salvador than the professional diplomatic corps might otherwise have preferred. Following the collapse of the Somoza regime, however, security concerns became the focus of attention and Schneider lost much of his influence. (Interview, Ambassador Viron Vaky, April, 1990 Washington, D.C.)
who would apply the degree of repressive violence they saw as necessary. Romero's campaign received "massive financial support" from conservative business organizations, including the National Association of Private Enterprise (ANEP) and the Eastern Regional Agricultural Front (FARO), which had led the fight against land reform. (NSA 1989a, 12). The private sector had literally bought Romero's presidency and expected him to act in accordance with their wishes. The Carter administration had other ideas, and once Romero was inaugurated, U.S. pressures led him to intermittently curb state violence, triggering each time a hail of condemnation from the Salvadoran private sector.

Romero's vulnerability to these conflicting pressures was heightened by two additional factors, generational grievances and lack of esteem for him within the armed forces. The previous chapter has outlined the role of generational politics in Romero's ascent to the presidency. By becoming president, Romero was blocking the careers of younger officers, a situation that made a coup d'état against him more likely. The lack of respect resulted from the fact that despite his hardline image and affiliations, Romero was not a particularly outstanding soldier. His political affiliation with the oligarchy stemmed in large part from the fact that he had been one of the country's premier jockeys, a skill that gave him "special entrée in
the circles of the elite." (Dunkerly 1983, 105) Romero had spent six years in Mexico taking courses in horsemanship; this prolonged absence, combined with his abysmal performance as the Army's logistics commander during the Honduran war, diminished his prestige within the officer corps. His performance in the 1969 war contrasted markedly with that of Colonel Ernesto Claramount, who ran against him in the 1977 elections as the candidate of the National Opposition Union (UNO) coalition. Claramount had led one of the most successful advances into Honduras as part of the difficult "Northern Front" assault. In contrast, Romero's failure to mount an effective resupply operation for the fast-moving Eastern Front forces caused this offensive to grind to a halt. (Anderson 1981, 117-22; Dunkerly 1982, 105; McClintock 1985a, 235 fn)

3 It is worth noting that the use of horsemanship to build political contacts with the elite was not confined to Carlos Romero. Another officer, Sigifredo Ochoa, who had been disgraced by his betrayal of the 1972 coup, was exiled to Costa Rica where he taught equestrian arts to the daughters of wealthy Costa Rican families. This led to a similar role upon his return to El Salvador and Ochoa, who had initially sided with the juventud in 1972, became rehabilitated as a hardliner. He went on to make a reputation for himself as a "duro" while in the Treasury Police, led a hardline mutiny against institutionalist Defense Minister García in 1983, and later emerged as a leading member of the rightist ARENA political party. (confidential interview with a former senior government official with strong contacts in the military)

4 Although not especially competent, Romero did have training and experience consistent with his hardline political orientation. He had taken a three-month U.S. "Counter-Insurgency Course" in the Canal Zone during the early 1960s and, as an intelligence officer during the mid-
Dynamics of Violence Following the Election of Romero

Prior to his inauguration, Romero, as President-elect and Defense Minister, was in effective control of the government and security apparatus. During this period, shielded by lame-duck Arturo Molina from international accountability for state violence, Romero carried out an intense campaign of repression in accordance with the civilian elite's preferences. Eight days after the fraudulent election of February 20, 1977, government forces fired on a protest vigil being held in downtown San Salvador. The demonstration had begun on the 21st, with a march led by the UNO candidate Claramount. A vigil had been maintained in the Plaza Libertad thereafter. At around 12:30 AM of February 28, National Guard, Army, Treasury, Immigration and Customs Police units surrounded the plaza, leaving only one street unblocked. They ordered the crowd of about 6,000 to disperse, and many left. Claramount asked the 1,500 to 2,000 people remaining to gather closely around El Rosario church and sing the national anthem. At this point, the government forces opened fire. Accounts of what happened in the subsequent minutes are somewhat confused, as might be expected.

1960s, had worked closely with U.S. Military Group advisers and Office of Public Safety advisers on the restructuring of El Salvador's intelligence apparatus, as discussed in Chapter Five above. (McClintock 1985, 192-3)
Hundreds of those who attempted to escape through the one "open" street were captured and some of these apparently were killed. Witnesses observed about 160 bodies loaded on trucks and removed from the plaza, at least fifteen people were killed among those who attempted to escape, and a second hand accounts refer to over 100 corpses seen at a public hospital in the city. (McClintock 1985a, 183-4; Americas Watch 1982, 39-40.)

Whatever the exact death toll, this action was a clear and bloody signal to the opposition political parties that the era of electoral competition and political opening was over. In that sense, it was a major departure from earlier patterns of institutional military rule which combined measured repression with efforts to legitimate the government at the popular level. The immediate reaction of the popular movement to the massacre at the plaza was demonstrating and near-rioting in San Salvador and Santa Ana. In the months following February 28, large numbers of people abandoned the conventional political parties and joined the popular movement. (Dunkerly 1982, 107-9)

Between the February 28th massacre and Romero's inauguration, there continued to be more than the usual level of repression and violence. A Jesuit priest from Aguilares in Chalatenango, Father Rutilio Grande García, was ambushed and killed along with an elderly man and a young boy. (NSA 1989a, 6) A confidential informant who was
serving in the National Guard unit based in Aguiles at the time denied that National Guard units carried out the assassination, but confirmed that he and other Guardsmen had been tracking Father Grande's whereabouts for some time. The former guardsman observed that although Father Grande was not considered a communist, he was thought to have become closely associated with "subversives." Between the election and the beginning of April of 1977, roughly 300 people were arrested and 130 disappeared in what appeared to be a purge of key opposition figures, most of them associated with the UNO electoral coalition. (NSA 1989a, 7) On May 1, a National Guard unit attacked a May Day rally in a San Salvador park (held in violation of a ban on public demonstrations) killing eight and wounding 16. Official sources claimed the Guard was engaged by fifty armed men, but church sources strongly contested this version. (NSA 1989a, 13) [look for statements in ECA on this, or perhaps in FBIS notes.] On May 11, another priest, Alfonso Navarro Oviedo, along with a fifteen year old boy, were machine gunned at a parish hall near San Salvador. The official account claimed the location was a training center for guerrillas, a charge the Roman Catholic church vehemently denied. A death squad calling itself the White Warriors Guild (UGB) claimed responsibility. (NSA 1989a, 10) The "UGB" is generally acknowledged to have been
an operational creation of the National Guard and ANSESAL. (McClintock 1985a, 178-81)

The San Salvador killings were followed by the military occupation of the town of Aguilares in Chalatenango, in which at least 50 people were killed and three priests arrested and deported. (McClintock 1985a, 185; NSA 1989a, 10) Since the beginning of 1977, a total of 12 priests had been deported in addition to the two killed. On June 20, with Carlos Romero still not yet sworn into office, the UGB ordered the fifty Jesuit priests in the country to leave or face "immediate and systematic" execution. (NSA 1989a, 10-11)

Once Romero was inaugurated on July 1, 1977, an abrupt change took place in the intensity and kind of violence: the most blatant forms of state violence in urban areas diminished and remained at lower levels for about four months. These reductions in state violence took place despite a September increase in guerrilla assassinations, kidnappings, attacks on government posts, and propaganda activity.\(^5\) Shortly after taking office, Romero announced his opposition to terrorism of the right and the left, denounced the threats against the Jesuits, made "osten-

\(^5\) These included the kidnapping of the wife of a prominent U.S. businessman, the assassination of the Rector of the national university, FPL attacks on a National Guard post and seizure of 15 radio stations to broadcast proclamations, and invasion of a high school, all during September 1977. (NSA 1989a, 14)
tatious visits to them," and provided armed guards for their homes. (Dunkerly 1985, 109) His statements came just three days before the UGB's deadline for the departure of the Jesuits.

No one seriously claims that the reduction in violence once Romero took office reflected a commitment on Romero's part to less repressive state conduct. On the contrary, it appears to have been externally imposed, and the types of violence that were reduced were precisely the kind -- high profile urban assassinations, disappearances, and attacks on demonstrations -- that could be expected to attract international attention.

McClintock claims that in rural areas, government violence continued as before: military attacks similar to the one in Aguilares took place in several areas of Chalatenango, Morazán, San Vicente and Cabañas departments, with reports of detentions, "disappearances" and killings following these operations. (1985a, 187) According to Dunkerly,

in Chalatenango alone, the "low profile" of mid-1977 led to 28 political arrests, seven munici-
pality-wide joint searches with ORDEN, one three-
day military occupation, several cases of smallowners' crops being fired, seven killings and three rapes by National Guardsmen in a period of six weeks. (1982, 115)
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International Pressures

Relations between El Salvador and the U.S. over human rights abuses had begun to be strained before the inauguration of the Carter administration. The Ford administration's appointed ambassador in San Salvador, Ignacio Lozano, Jr., had pressed hard for an investigation of the disappearance of a U.S. citizen, Ronald James Richardson. Richardson had been arrested by Salvadoran Immigration Police on the basis of theft complaints against him in Nicaragua. He was tortured and killed while in custody.⁶ Ambassador Lozano was unable to obtain a satisfactory explanation from the Salvadoran government regarding Richardson's whereabouts and was recalled to Washington by the Carter administration in March of 1977 for "consultations" intended to signal U.S. displeasure with Salvadoran human rights conditions. This action, plus testimony given by administration officials in Congressional hearings, led the Salvadoran military to preemptively renounce all U.S. military assistance. The aid had amounted to only $2.5 million in low-interest credits and $600,000 in grants, but its renunciation reduced U.S. leverage.

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In an effort to maintain the initiative on the Richardson case, the U.S. reduced the size of the U.S. military assistance group in El Salvador from ten to six. Secretary of State Vance instructed Lozano to inform the Salvadorans verbally that the Richardson case was the reason for the cutback. (ST073709 1977) Lozano viewed the military group reduction as inconsequential and ineffective, in light of the Salvadorans' renunciation of military aid.\(^7\) He sent a sharply worded warning to Washington that efforts to pry information out of the Salvadorans on the Richardson case were being undercut by the "deafening silence that has emanated from Washington." Lozano argued that he was seen by the Salvadorans as essentially operating on his own, without Washington's backing, and that more dramatic measures would be needed if Washington expected the Salvadorans to cooperate on human rights issues. (SS 2056, 3 May, 1977) He later testified, after his removal from his post, that he received little to no support from

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\(^7\) In the context of the renunciation of aid and reduction in milgroup size, the U.S. military group lost much of their access to operational units, leading to a lack of intelligence on the readiness of Salvadoran forces. Not until December 1979 did the Salvadoran military permit the U.S. military group and a representative of Southern Command to inspect military units in the field. The results of this inspection were "alarming." U.S. inspectors found poor equipment and maintenance, a shortage of transportation and communications capability, and a generally poor state of readiness. (SS 7097 11 December 1979)
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Washington on human rights abuses until he made his complaints public. (NSA 1989a, 12)

The State Department responded to Lozano's pressure by threatening to postpone Inter-American Development Bank processing of a loan for a hydro-electric facility. (ST 105097, 9 May, 1977; and ST106224, 10 May 1977) Lozano cabled Washington that he believed pressure on the IDB loan would have the desired effect and might lead to a new Salvadoran government attitude toward human rights. (SS02297 1977) The basis for Lozano's optimism is not clear, though it may have been based on conciliatory statements by Salvadoran officials. Regardless, two days after Lozano's optimistic cable, Salvadoran government forces carried out the above-mentioned invasion of Aguilares, killing dozens. A month later, before the inauguration of President Romero, Lozano was removed from his post, with no immediate replacement named. (NSA 1989a, 11)

Romero's conciliatory gestures toward U.S. sensibilities after taking office, besides the renunciation of threats against the Jesuits, included receiving two State Department officials, Richard Arellano and Patricia Derian, and inviting the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to send a delegation to investigate conditions in El Salvador. These measures appear to have been sufficiently satisfying that the U.S. gradually slackened the pressure. As of September, the Inter-American Development Bank had
still not approved the suspended loan for the San Lorenzo hydro-electric dam, but the U.S. had announced the appointment of a conservative new ambassador, Frank Devine, drawn from the professional diplomatic corps, who had close ties to the U.S. Chambers of Commerce in Latin America and who was not known as a human rights advocate. In late August, the U.S. granted a $12.7 million urban development project loan. On November 3, the IDB lifted the suspension of the $90 million hydroelectric loan. State Department official Richard Arellano, who met with Romero shortly after his inauguration in July, testified in Congress that the extreme "abridgement" of human rights that had occurred during Romero's period as president-elect had been "anomalous." (Latin America Bureau 1979, 47-51)

Opposition and Elite Reactions to Romero's First Period of Restraint

Although repression continued unabated in rural areas, Romero allowed a sufficient opening in urban areas during his first months in office that the popular left was able

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* He was, in fact, quite hostile to the policy. In his book, Devine (1981) attacks human rights monitoring groups by questioning their political motives, offering as counter-evidence the denials made by the armed forces. He cites uncritically the claims of Salvadoran military officials that the "disappeared" had generally gone into hiding to be guerrillas or had gone to Cuba to receive training. He refers to the "traditions" of "frontier justice" meted out by the security forces, implying that much of the killing was justified.
to step up their protest activities. The Popular Revolutionary Block (BPR) staged a march on July 30, 1977, to commemorate the massacre of students in 1975. Between then and the middle of November, the BPR and its affiliates held at least eleven major demonstrations in San Salvador, Santa Ana, Aguilares, and San Martín. These demonstrations had a dual focus on the demands of workers, and on repression -- political prisoners, the disappeared, and the commemoration of those who had died in earlier acts of government repression. FAPU also held two major meetings/demonstrations during this period. These demonstrations were complemented by two major land occupations by the BPR, and by a series of strikes that shut down the Rio Lempa electrical generating system, as well as textile mills, clothing factories, bottlers and confectioners, mines, and the construction of the new airport.

The labor action that most alarmed the private sector was a demand submitted to the Ministry of Labor by rural workers just prior to the harvest season which called for a minimum wage increase. Workers organized under ATACES (which was affiliated with the Salvadoran Communist Party) and by the Federation of Rural Workers (FTC) which comprised members of FECCAS and UTC, presented relatively modest wage claims calibrated on the basis of a Ministry of Planning study on prices and profitability in coffee, cotton and sugar production. When these demands were
rejected, the two labor federations occupied the Ministry of Labor building and held 150-200 hostages. This choice of actions, in lieu of a major rural strike, probably reflects the fact that the reduction in repression was confined to urban areas, while organized campesinos in rural areas were subject to ongoing repression. Security forces came to the scene of the Ministry of Labor occupation, but held off action, allowing the negotiations to take place. Romero's government accepted the mediation of the Archdiocese, represented by Monsignor Urioste. The settlement reached provided for a fresh round of negotiations. (SS05234 1977; Latin America Bureau 1979, 36-42)

Despite the fact that Romero kept up the level of repression in rural areas, the constraints that he imposed on urban state violence during the first months of his administration caused an angry reaction on the part of the oligarchy. The Association of Private Enterprise (ANEP) launched a media campaign reminiscent of the attack against Molina. In its "Statement to the Government of the Republic," ANEP charged Romero with having been affected by the "psychological warfare" of the "red conspiracy," by which ANEP presumably meant the human rights pressures being brought to bear on the regime. The ANEP statement accused the Romero government of "indifference," "tolerance," "fear," and "incapacity," leading it ultimately to "an utter disrespect for those human rights they say
they are defending." It closed with the words "Enough of the fears and hesitation."  

The coffee growers' association, ABECAFE, which was particularly worried about rural demonstrations calling for higher wages during the coffee harvest, issued a public statement that was a clear warning to Romero that if he intended to continue to hold office, he needed to uphold his protective function in the tradition of Martínez.

it is time we realized that internal security against whatever may eventually prejudice the integrity of our homeland is the first priority—.... Many years ago one of our rulers understood this very well when he made the Republic's internal security, peace and order a primary and indispensable condition for the development and prosperity of our country.  

Another response by the civilian right and military hardliners to Romero's obedience to the U.S. was an assassination plot against the incoming U.S. ambassador, Frank Devine. A group that Devine identifies as "ultra-conservatives" and "free-wheeling elements of the security forces" intended to assassinate him in such a way as to make it appear the work of the Communists. The goal was to convince the Carter administration to abandon its human rights pressures on the Salvadoran government. (Devine 1981, 18) This assassination, if it had come to pass,

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would have been consistent with previous assassinations carried out by rightist elements at times when, from their point of view, the military government needed greater incentive to maintain order. Examples include the killing of Ernesto Regalado Dueñas in January 1971 (discussed in Chapter 5) and that of industrialist Raúl Molina Cañas on November 12, 1979, which, like the Regalado Dueñas killing, appears to have been the work of rightist, rather than leftist elements, and which was similarly used as a basis for mobilizing rightist pressures on the government for firmer action against the left. (Latin America Bureau 1979, 62-3, 79-82)

The Public Order Law

Romero responded to these pressures, and to the relaxation of pressures from the U.S., by announcing the Law of the Defense and Guarantee of Public Order on November 25, 1977. The new measure suspended constitutional protections and provided the security forces with arbitrary arrest and detention powers against demonstrators, labor activists, and others suspected of "subversive" speech. The Law remained in effect a little over a year. During 1978, killings by government forces and death squads averaged fifty-seven per month. (Socorro Jurídico Cristiano 1984) By outlawing virtually any kind of assembly, organizational activity or anti-government
speech, the Public Order Law provided legal cover behind which the security forces captured, according to the Archdiocese of San Salvador, 715 political prisoners before the law was suspended in March of 1979. Of these only 48 were accounted for; the balance presumably disappeared. (NSA 1989a, 26) Violence was increasingly targeted against urban activists, including students, teachers, trade unionists, and local organizers for the Christian Democratic and other opposition parties. (McClintock 1985a, 194) Virtually all of the violence during this period was carried out by the security forces. Documentation by Socorro Juridico Cristiano of forced disappearances and executions during this period shows the National Guard, special agents of the National Police, the Treasury Police, and "agentes vestido de civil" (plainclothesmen) as the perpetrators, with National Guard actions sometimes supported by ORDEN members. Numerous informants from human rights monitoring groups and from the military indicated that during this period, plainclothes agents were almost invariably from one of the security forces.

U.S. reaction to the Public Order law was mild. Ambassador Devine commented in a speech before the American Chamber of Commerce that "any government has the full right and obligation to use all legal means at its disposal to combat terrorism." (NSA 1989a, 15) This is a revealing remark in that it shows that although much of the opposi-
tion confronting Romero was in the form of demonstrations and strikes, the simultaneous occurrence of kidnappings, bombings, and assaults on security forces posts was seen by Devine as justifying draconian legal measures to fight "terrorism." It seems likely that this comment was read by Romero as a signal that repressive measures would be tolerated by Devine in view of the reaction of the left to the relative opening after July 1977.

Besides the steady "disappearance" of suspected subversives by the security forces, two other kinds of violence increased markedly during the period of the Public Order Law. First, there were serious clashes in the countryside between ORDEN and peasant organizations such as FECCAS and UTC.

In an action typical of this period, ORDEN seized a number of FECCAS-UTC leaders in La Esperanza, near San Pedro Perulapán, on 22 March. The next day one was found decapitated. This led to a gun battle between orden and peasant militants resulting in nine more deaths and a score of wounded. Four days later five ORDEN members were executed by the FPL, the vigilantes responding by driving villagers out of four nearby pueblos, 2,000 of them taking refuge in San Pedro. Further clashes resulted in another 15 dead and 50 wounded. Five members of FECCAS were shot in a subsequent demonstration in the capital in which four embassies and the cathedral were occupied by union militants in protest at the repression. (Dunkerly 1985, 116)

Similar violence took place in Tenancingo, where 15 were killed, and in Cuscatlan, where 29 died in a series of incidents, apparently initiated by ORDEN. (NSA 1989a, 17)

In late April, the government announced a campaign against
the Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR) and accused the Catholic Church of supporting the BPR. During a two month period, 15 BPR members were killed, 56 wounded, and around 100 imprisoned.

While it provided legal cover for violence against the popular organizations, the Public Order Law did not significantly redress the weakness of government forces dealing with the guerrillas. During the thirteen months of the Public Order Law, there was a marked increase in kidnapping of prominent businessmen, both Salvadoran and foreign, by the three main guerrilla groups. On May 14, two wealthy Salvadorans, Ernesto Sol Meza and Luis Méndez Novoa, were kidnapped by the FPL. Sol Meza was ransomed for $4 million, Méndez Novoa for $100,000. On May 17, the National Resistance (RN) kidnapped Japanese industrialist Fugio Matsumoto and demanded the release of political prisoners. He was found shot to death in October under circumstances that suggested that his killing had been accidental. Police reports did not indicate whether his $4 million ransom was paid or not. In June, two more prominent kidnappings took place, with the ERP claiming responsibility for one of the abductions. In August, the RN kidnapped a Swedish executive named Schel Bjork, demanding, among other things, the publication of a manifesto in newspapers in Sweden, Japan, Panama, and Costa Rica. (NSA 1989a, 17-20) In November and December, the RN kidnapped
an executive for Phillips corporation, two British bankers, and a Japanese businessman. Once again the demands included ransoms, publication of political manifestos, and the release of political prisoners. In January, 1979, the RN kidnapped Ernesto Liebes, president of country's largest coffee-export firm. His family and company failed to ransom him before the RN's deadline and he was found killed in March. In February, a coffee grower, Jorge Alvarez was kidnapped. He was the 22nd victim in less than 20 months. (NSA 1989a, 22-6)

The strategy of kidnappings was enormously remunerative for the guerrillas: the National Resistance alone had reportedly compiled some $36 million in ransoms by early 1979. (NSA 1989a, 26) The kidnappings had a devastating effect on the country's economic elite and international business communities. Many prominent capitalists and executives left the country, and several foreign embassies withdrew their personnel. Needless to say, the persistent vulnerability of elite Salvadorans to kidnappings and killings (several prominent citizens were killed as they attempted to defend themselves from kidnapping attempts) exacerbated frictions between the civilian elite and the military. If one recalls that the general willingness of the civilian elite to cooperate with military rule had been contingent for decades upon the military's ability to protect civilian elites, the kidnappings were the perfect
tactic to drive a wedge between the oligarchy and the institutional military.

The military itself was alarmed and humiliated by the continued success and impunity of the kidnappers. According to journalist Joel Millman, an officer who was in the Signal Corps in 1978-9 claimed that the guerrillas regularly tapped the military's phone lines and monitored their transmissions. The military found that the guerrillas made use of complex codes that they were unable to break. The relatively unsophisticated officers "were up against math majors from the National University."\(^{11}\)

Kidnappings were supplemented by other types of guerrilla actions such as bombings, machine-gunnings of buildings, and assassinations, all of which required less complex planning. The guerrilla groups regularly occupied commercial radio stations and broadcast political statements. By late 1978, guerrilla attacks of one kind or another were occurring at the rate of one per week. (Dunkerly 1985, 117)

It is important to note that some of the kidnapping was probably carried out by elements of the military, not the left. Several of my informants, both military and

civilian, argued that it was extremely unlikely that so many kidnappings could have taken place without a single arrest if elements of the military were not involved. Mena Sandoval, who was part of a special military investigations team funded by the Hill family of Banco Cuscatlán, claims that some of the kidnappings were carried out by Sections II (intelligence sections) of security force units, principally of the National Guard. (1990, 11:5)

In a sense, the emerging guerrilla groups provided the private sector elites and elements of the security forces with strong incentives to form an alliance. According to ERP leader Joaquin Villalobos, the guerrilla groups focused their attacks during the 1970s on the security forces and the economic elite, generally avoiding attacks on the regular Army, which they saw as a potentially progressive force. (Villalobos 1991) A review of accounts of guerrilla attacks in McClintock (1985a), Dunkerly (1985), the National Security Archive chronology (1989a), and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service appears to corroborate Villalobos' statement. This method of targeting by the guerrillas tended to reinforce the existing mutual affinity between the security forces and economic elites and heighten tensions between them and the nation's president, who tended toward constraint.

The selective attacks by the left helped polarize the armed forces, setting the stage for the open conflict
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within the military that emerged in 1979 (see next chapter). (Majano 1989, 75) By focusing their attacks on the security forces and sparing the Army, the guerrillas contributed to the differences of opinion that developed between the security forces and the Army regarding the use of repressive violence. While the security forces had both a pretext to use greater violence (ibid. 75) and personal scores to settle,\(^{12}\) members of the Army were less personally involved in the violence and could thus step back and look at the violence as the product of structural problems. If the left had attacked the Army as well, the reformist junior officers' movement of late 1979 would have been unlikely to develop. The general point to derive from this is that opposition violence can have a distinct effect on different parts of the state, thereby affecting patterns of political conflict within the state.

**Mobilization on the Right**

In response to this lack of security, civilian elites and hardline elements of the military concluded that much stronger, more violent measures would be required to suppress the left. At a personal level, many civilian elites and military officers were surprised that Romero had

\(^{12}\) Former security forces officers and enlisted men I interviewed consistently mentioned the casualties their forces had taken at the hands of the guerrillas during the 1970s.
yielded so readily to U.S. human rights conditionality for loans. Several civilian business elites interviewed for this study voiced the opinion that he was simply too weak as a leader. According to Col. Adolfo Majano, "Romero was judged by the [civilian] right to be weak, tolerant and incapable of controlling the agitation" of the left. A senior officer commented that Romero's inaction resulted from the fact that he was "very disciplined" as a soldier and thought that he could maintain order through formal means, without resorting to the irregular forces of a dirty war. Whatever the interpretation, a consensus developed within the civilian right and in the security forces that stronger measures were needed.

To this end, the civilian right began organizing themselves and their supporters within the military to carry out a full-scale dirty war against the left. They experimented at implementing their strategy through local and regional death squad operations, such as those around Santa Ana and in Usulutan. The oligarchy provided the funds and members of the security forces and intelligence units, supplemented by private mercenaries, provided the manpower. 13

13 Interview, former Colonel Adolfo Majano, Roslyn New York, March 1990.

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In addition to its increased terrorism against the left, oligarchic/hardline alliance also attempted to use its growing base of organization to pull together a viable coalition of forces for a coup d'etat.\(^{15}\) The main effort involved many of the senior officers in Romero's government, organized around Deputy Defense Minister Eduardo Iraheta and National Guard chief Ramón Alvarenga. (Dunkerly 1985, 127) \(^{16}\) This movement, which began seriously in April of 1979 and continued until October, never built enough support to act, largely because of competition from a younger group of colonels from the tandas of 1956 and 1957, and from the reformist junior officers' movement, both of which are discussed in detail below. Short of successful sponsorship of a coup d'etat, economic elites used their control of the national media to attack the president anytime he failed to live up their expectations. The combination of a coup threat and public criticism proved sufficient to force Romero to take a harder line and permit a gradual expansion of "dirty war" operations, though these never achieved the intensity that the private sector saw as necessary.

\(^{15}\) The hardline/oligarchic alliance continued to use this dual-purpose strategy of organizing to directly implement their preferred policy and also to take state power through the early 1980s.

\(^{16}\) Montgomery refers to Alvarenga and Iraheta as having had separate movements. This may have been the case, but my informants seemed to group these two together as having much the same agenda and personnel.
At some point during 1978, representatives of the oligarchy proposed to an aide to President Romero that the private sector be permitted to organize and fund a secret network that would adopt the cellular structure of the left and carry out a dirty war against them, à la Argentina. They specifically requested that ANSESAL intelligence Major Roberto D'Aubuisson be named to command the operation. This initial proposal was declined by Romero, probably out of fear that the independent, parallel command structure required for such an operation would require could make it a security threat to himself.\textsuperscript{17} Romero's reluctance notwithstanding, significant elements of what the private sector proposed were put in place during 1978: death squads funded by the civilian right went into operation in several parts of the country, supported to varying degrees by government forces. Among these were squads in Berlin, operated by a civilian named Freddy Portillo; in Usulutan, operated by the head of the Sixth Brigade, Colonel Elmer Gonzalez Araujo; in San Miguel and Santa Ana, operated by employees of the coffee growing Regalado family; and in Santiago de Maria (also in Usulutan) operated by a dentist named Hector Regalado (no relation to the coffee growing Regalados). (Gibb and Farah 1989)\textsuperscript{p}

\textsuperscript{17} Interviews, journalists Tom Gibb and Douglas Farah, San Salvador. Their account of this meeting comes from a senior military officer who declined to be identified. He claims he was present at the meeting in 1978. His information on other events has proven accurate in the past.
The Santiago death squad, known as Regalado's Armed Forces (FAR), was disguised as a boy scout troop. It was literally a protection racket, in which Hector Regalado, in at least one case, had his "guards" blow up a pharmacy to convince the owner of the need for his protective services. At the outset, in 1976 and 1977, Regalado's boy scout squad was private, though closely linked to activities of ORDEN, which was a semi-official entity with close ties to the National Guard. He charged local land owners by the man-hour for services, mainly killing activists. Later the military began actively cooperating with Regalado, providing clothes, shoes, guns, and helicopter transport for his operatives. In many zones of the country, military officers themselves were renting out the services of their troops. By 1978 and 1979, Regalado's operation ran in close consultation with both ANSESAL (the national intelligence agency) and the National Guard intelligence section in San Salvador, with messengers shuttling back and forth to prevent interception of radio or telephone communications. The FAR conducted joint operations with the National Guard and other units, "and were even ferried around in Army helicopters." "Some military commanders and wealthy civilians acted as 'padrinos' or godfathers to the death squads."18

It is not clear what Romero's attitude was toward this increased involvement of state forces in irregular death squad operations. Regardless of whether he changed his position to explicitly approve of such actions, tacitly approved, or simply lacked the power to resist them, it seems clear that the initiative for the expanded death squad operations came not from Romero but from civilians and hardline officers who saw Romero as too soft.

Mena Sandoval (1990, 107) provides an explanation of how the organizational efforts of the right wing could have continued to advance during 1978-9 despite Romero's reluctance to authorize them: during 1977 and 1978, there was a growing realization among several of the wealthiest families that they could no longer depend upon their ties with the highest levels of the military leadership, whose levels of corruption gave them a degree of independence and might undermine their commitment to effectively combating the growing left. Leading private sector families therefore sought increasing ties with junior officers, holding meetings with them and offering them "moonlighting" opportunities outside of the military. Their primary goal was to prepare an institutional basis for attacking the political crisis that they saw as imminent. Mena comments "For me this was a change in their manner of penetrating the Armed Forces, above and beyond their real and objective concern about the corruption of the high command."
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Following the collapse of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, elements of the private sector wanted to reinforce the Salvadoran forces -- and hopefully inspire them to greater action -- by incorporating members of the disbanded Nicaraguan National Guard into Salvadoran forces. This proposal was put forward at a meeting at the home of rightist millionaire Roberto Hill. The officers present resisted the idea because it would spread the disrepute of the Somoza regime to the Salvadoran forces. (Mena Sandoval 1990, 131)

In his 1983 series of investigative articles in the Albuquerque Journal, Craig Pyes provides detailed documentation of how members of the civilian right sought, as Napoleón Duarte put it, to "create a structure outside the army, to do things the army could not do." According to Pyes, this effort was a response to the reformist coup of 1979, a view that is strongly supported by my own interviews and which will be discussed in depth below. The research of Gibb and Farah, however, suggests that the construction of such a network began earlier, in 1978, in reaction to the perceived failure of the Romero regime to maintain order. The scale of the death squad network following October 1979 was, however, much larger, and the goal of restoring oligarchic influence within the military more clearly formulated and explicit.
The Second Cycle of Restraining and Crack-down

Conflict between Romero and the far Right came to a head again in early 1979. In January, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States visited El Salvador to investigate charges of torture, disappearance, and extra-judicial executions. The rate of killing, which had averaged 57 per month during 1978, fell to 10 during January, and remained low at 18 in February and 32 in March. Romero's relative moderation during the Commission's visit could not undo the mayhem of the previous 12 months, and the commission duly reported that the Romero government tortured and murdered its political opponents and systematically persecuted the Catholic Church. (NSA 1989a, 22) Romero travelled to Mexico on January 19 in an effort to "polish up his tarnished international image, break the increasing isolation of his government, and seek guaranteed delivery of twenty thousand barrels per day of Mexican crude." He got a tentative agreement on the delivery of oil, but was roasted in the Mexican press, to whom the contents of the IACHR report had been leaked. During his visit, San Salvador Archbishop Oscar Romero, who had just been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize, was also in Mexico attending a conference. The Salvadoran popular organization FAPU occupied the Mexican embassy in San Salvador.
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during Romero's trip, adding to international attention. (Baloyra 1982, 83)

FAPU's action was one of several during January and February that took advantage of the relative relaxation of repression. On January 14, FAPU occupied a farm belonging to an ORDEN member. On January 15, it occupied the local United Nations and International Committee of the Red Cross offices in San Salvador. On January 16, as mentioned, FAPU seized the Mexican embassy as well as the headquarters of the Organization of American States. On January 17, the RN (which was closely affiliated with FAPU) kidnapped Ernesto Liebes. These actions brought a reaction from the state: on January 20, government security forces invaded a parish hall meeting in San Antonio Abad near San Salvador and machine-gunned Father Octavio Ortiz Luna and four young parishioners. The government claimed they and persons taken prisoner at the parish hall were members of FAPU. FAPU denied this. (NSA 1989a, 22-27)

Numerous other guerrilla actions took place in February. The ERP carried out a series of bombings of police stations and National Guard posts in the capital and in San Miguel, announcing that the actions are in retaliation for the killing of Father Ortiz. The Romero government announced that it would not impose a state of siege despite the increased violence. Following the established pattern of responding to guerrilla actions by taking
actions against open civilian activists, the Romero government deported a Spanish priest and a Mexican nun, and arrested five labor leaders. The FPL proceeded to murder two prominent businessmen and an unidentified group attempted to assassinate Vice-Minister of Defense Eduardo Iraheta. (NSA 1989a, 25-6)

In view of all of this leftist activity, it is remarkable that Romero repealed the Public Order Law. His decision appears to have been in response to international image problems, with added incentive coming from the fact that a loan from the Inter-American Development Bank was pending. On February 26, 1979, Romero announced the imminent release of all political prisoners and repeal of the Public Order Law. Around the time of the repeal, there appears to have been a temporary division within the leadership of the private sector over the use of repression. According to Dunkerly, the private sector association ANEP became concerned in early 1979 about the international business consequences of the deteriorating image and reputation of the Romero government. This softened line was reflected in an ANEP declaration in March which called for "peace...to correct errors that have been committed." (1985, 127) Just prior to the repeal of the Law, the Japanese government trade mission announced that it would relocate to Panama, citing the Salvadoran government's refusal to negotiate with leftist kidnappers. (NSA 1989a,
25-6) Baloyra sees the ANEP statement as more of a "convenient turnabout" made on the basis of advance knowledge of Romero's plan to repeal the security law. (1982, 84)

Along with the repeal of the Public Order Law, Romero dismissed the head of the National Guard, General Ramón Alvarenga, who was reputed to be instrumental in the killings and disappearances of 1977-78. Alvarenga was a convenient officer to sacrifice: the internal investigations unit that Mena Sandoval took part in had uncovered extensive evidence of Alvarenga's corruption and involvement in kidnappings of business elites. This evidence was presented to Romero who then dismissed Alvarenga, thereby quieting the complaints of some elements of the private sector who were concerned about corruption and kidnapping while at the same time appeasing international opinion. (Mena Sandoval 1990, 111-2)

The Carter administration saw the repeal as a "healthy sign of flexibility," and the Inter-American Development Bank promptly released a $16.3 million loan for livestock and animal health projects. (Dunkerly 1985, 118; NSA 1989a, 26) The change in policy, however, quickly put Romero in a hazardous situation. As had happened back in 1977, the March "opening" led to greatly increased activity by the left at the same time that the dismissal of Alvarenga generated hostility toward Romero within the security forces.
The most important development was a series of strikes at La Constancia and La Tropical bottling plants beginning on March 10. At La Constancia, the owner called in the security forces, which stormed the plant killing between three and ten workers and wounding some twenty others. A bottling plant strike may not sound, on the face of it, like a major political event. Three aspects of these strikes made them significant. First of all, the plants were located astride the main East/West road leading out of San Salvador, which was the Pan American highway as well as the route to the light industrial zone around San Bartolo and international airport at Ilopango. The strikes, with their pickets, crowds of onlookers, and heavy police presence effectively blocked commercial traffic to the eastern part of the country and led to the issuance of a travel advisory by the U.S. embassy.

The second factor was that this was the first major industrial strike which clearly conformed to the political agenda of the popular organizations. The popular movement had in the past shown most of its strength in rural peasant organizations and non-commercial unions such as the teacher's syndicate ANDES. Most industrial unions had either been pro-management or controlled by the Communist Party, which at this point in time was not a highly
militant organization. During the course of 1977 through early 1979, the more radical popular organizations such as BPR and FAPU had taken over many unions from the Communists, producing a much higher level of militancy.

(Guidos Véjar 1979, 509-10; Samayoa and Galvan 1979, 591-600)

By organizing among urban labor unions, the left had found a "chink in the armor" of the military regime in that urban unions were legal. The major advances by the radical left among urban workers therefore confronted the government with a challenge for which no legal means of suppression existed. This generated increased pressures among hardliners in the military for extra-legal action, namely, assassination of leaders and members of the newly radicalized unions.  

Another factor that made the strikes of March seem particularly threatening was the degree of cooperation that emerged between the different popular organizations. The bottling plant workers were affiliated with the BPR, but they were supported by FAPU, which called out the electricians.

19 Communist-affiliated unions were not particularly militant, following the Moscow line that agricultural exporting countries like El Salvador were not at a revolutionary stage of development.

20 Interview, José Z. García, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, May 1991. Professor García was in El Salvador in 1979. Military officers he interviewed at the time expressed particular concern about the threat posed by the radicalized labor movement.
cal workers of STECEL, shutting down electrical power in most of the country. When the STECEL workers barricaded themselves in the Rio Lempa hydroelectric station with explosives wired to destroy the station should the security forces attack, President Romero was forced to back down. (Dunkerly 1985, 126)

All told, 150,000 workers took part in the various sympathy strikes throughout the nation. (Dunkerly 1985, 126) The popular organizations enhanced the impact of the strikes by setting up barricades in various parts of San Salvador. The guerrilla groups attacked police posts and cars. President Romero responded to these actions with considerable restraint, the police attack at La Constancia notwithstanding. Security forces were placed on alert but confined to their barracks to avoid confrontations and possible international repercussions. On March 13, Romero addressed the nation by radio, characterizing the events as the actions of "seditious groups" against "public order and the right to work." According to an embassy cable, "Romero warned that the tolerance shown by the security forces in this situation should not be mistaken for indifference." (SS01333, 13 March 1979)

The Shift in Emphasis in U.S. Policy after the Strikes

The strikes of March were received with consternation by the U.S. embassy. Ambassador Frank Devine began issuing
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"situation reports" (sitreps) on the "Labor/Security Situation in El Salvador," as often as twice a day. These reports were rather alarmist in tone, relating events ranging in importance from a twenty-three hour nationwide electrical blackout to the spray-painting of slogans on walls. In his first sitrep cable, Devine's commentary on Romero's address shows growing concern that Romero was not being tough enough in responding to the left. Presumably on the basis of conversations with Salvadoran business elites, Devine remarked that

President's nationwide radio broadcast fell short of most listener's [sic] expectations. Although probably designed to reassure the public, many informal observers expected him to announce a state of siege and/or a curfew. Security forces are unlikely to be pleased by his emphasis on moderation and patience. President himself probably finds this a less than easy or satisfying posture but may well have adopted it in one last effort to identify himself, in the face of [illegible] provocation, with the cause of moderation and respect for human rights. (SS01333, 13 March 1979)

This priority concern about security was not confined to Ambassador Devine, whose views might have been distorted by his close ties to Salvadoran business elites. A declassified "memorandum of conversation" from the Overseas Private Investment Corporation discusses a briefing on "political instability in El Salvador" given by Arlen

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Wilson and Gordon Dugan from the State Department. In the briefing, Wilson and Dugan comment that

The GOES [government of El Salvador] is largely ineffective in pursuing the terrorists. They have apparently been able to make only very few significant arrests, notwithstanding the large number of bombings, attacks on police stations and military installations, and kidnappings/assassination of foreign businessmen that have occurred in recent months.

The document continues:

5. Wilson pointed out a current Bank of America dilemma in which the bank has announced that it will lead a $40 million consortium loan to the GOES, although for security purposes they have had to move their local manager to Guatemala. It can hardly be seen as a thorough endorsement of the GOES's stability if the lead bank does not feel secure enough to keep its top executive in El Salvador. The Bank is accordingly planning to drop its sponsorship of the loan.

6. Two incidents involving insurgent attacks against the physical assets of foreign companies have occurred within the past 24 months. A Bayer plant facility was reportedly blown up, and Teller Industry's subsidiary was taken over in January 1979 by a communist controlled labor union. The workers refused to release the U.S. plant manager and his secretary unless union demands were met on a long list of issues. The GOES did not intervene, contrary to assurances given to our Ambassador that it would, and Teller was ultimately forced to cave in completely. 22

An airgram from the embassy summarizing El Salvador's labor movement since August 1977 notes the "unprecedented display of labor union power," particularly the unexpected-

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ly high degree of cooperation among different federations. It singles out Minister of Labor Colonel Roberto Escobar García as "overly passive and cautious."\(^2\) (SS A-32, May 11, 1979) The combined problems of labor unrest and kidnapping had dramatically reduced foreign investment in the country: in 1979 private investment reached barely $5 million, compared to $32 million in 1978, "which was itself considered a bad year." The Japanese business community had shrunk from 2,400 in 1977 to 200 in 1979. (Dunkerly 1985, 127)

U.S. security concerns may have been somewhat tempered by awareness of the damaging consequences of extra-legal state violence. In one cable, sitrep number 3 (SS01373, 15 March, 1979), Devine noted that the assassination of FENASTRAS labor leader Oscar Armando Interiano, whose body was found in early March, "might well cause CUTS and its constituent unions to take an even harder line against the government." The emphasis in the embassy's cables, however, was clearly on Romero's seeming inability to maintain order.

Cable traffic (what is now public) from this period does not indicate what, if any, message the embassy

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\(^2\) Escobar García was a leading figure in the tanda of 1955, the members of which were closely aligned with Carlos Romero since most of them would be forced into retirement should the tandas of 1956 and 1957 -- the Vides/García/Carranza/Gutierrez group -- gain ascendance. (confidential interview with former senior government official with direct involvement in these events.)
delivered to Romero regarding the security situation. It seems probable that pressures were placed upon him by the embassy to act with greater firmness. First of all, it would be unlikely that the evident high priority concern of U.S. officials for the restoration of order would not have been conveyed, at least indirectly, in communications between the embassy and Salvadoran government agencies. A former U.S. official who prefers to remain anonymous singled out the March strikes as a watershed event which alerted the embassy to the power of the "communists" within the labor movement.¹

Whatever message the U.S. did or didn't deliver, it is clear that Romero began feeling considerable heat from the Salvadoran private sector, leading to the issuance on March 21 of a rather defensive statement to the effect that the government had acted with "deliberation and prudence" in recent labor unrest. Associations of the Salvadoran private sector held "emergency meetings" on March 22, which prompted President Romero to call an "emergency meeting of his cabinet." (SS 01514, 22 March, 1979)

Fortunately for Romero, there was markedly less opposition activity in April, providing him with something of a breather. Nonetheless, the March crisis had set in motion two coup plots which began to develop into serious threats in April. There was also an attempt by a group of reformist officers and civilians to negotiate the
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president's resignation through the new National Guard
chief, Colonel José Antonio Corleto and the president of
the National Assembly, D. José Leandro Echeverría. (Mont-
gomery 1982, 8)

The first of the two coups efforts was an ultra-
rightist putsch involving dismissed National Guard com-
mander Ramón Alvarenga, Vice-minister of Defense Eduardo
Iraheta, and a group of civilian rightists. The Hill and
Regalado families were involved (Dunkerly 1985, 127), as
were a group of younger businessmen who organized a far-
right group called the Salvadoran National Movement (MNS).
A key organizer of the MNS told me that they "began by
pressuring Romero, then planned a coup against him. We met
with some officers in May 1979, trying to get something
going before it was too late."

The second involved Colonels from the tandas of 1956,
1957, and 1958, including Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova,
Guillermo Garcia, and Rafael Flores Lima. This plot was
motivated by generational differences and concerns about
Romero's ability to maintain order. The conspirators had
previously been associated with the Molina regime, though
they had all distanced themselves from his land reform
proposals. They were reportedly seriously considering the
prospect of naming a civilian banker and confidant of the
military, Alvaro Magaña, as president or as a junta
member. Their intentions regarding violence are unclear:
once this same group of officers gained power in the wake of the October 1979 coup, levels of violence proved to be much higher than those experienced under Romero.

The hardline group was unable to assemble enough support, and the Vides/García/Flores Lima plot met with resistance to their plan among junior officers. This was one of the first indications to senior officers of the developing strength of reformist sentiment among junior officers. According to an informant who was involved in the Vides/García/Flores Lima plot, President Romero was aware of the general shape of preparations being made against him.

At the beginning of May, Romero was faced by a new series of “extraparliamentary” actions by the popular organizations, to which he responded with great violence, possibly because of the increasing political pressures on him from the right. On May 4, the BPR occupied the French and Costa Rican embassies, demanding the release of five BPR leaders arrested in late April. On May 5 BPR members occupied the Metropolitan Cathedral of San Salvador. In addition, they took over eight churches and five schools. On the tenth of May, National Police fired upon demonstrators at the Cathedral, killing 23 and wounding 70. The shooting was filmed by new crews and televised around the world, making this incident one of the first in which the violence in El Salvador was effectively “witnessed” abroad.
Undeterred, the BPR occupied the Venezuelan embassy on May 11, holding the Ambassador and 7 others hostage. On May 22, despite the fact that the Venezuelan ambassador had already managed to escape, police fired on a group of protesters who were delivering food to the BPR members occupying the embassy. Fourteen were killed and the Venezuelans announced their intention to break diplomatic relations with El Salvador over the incident. (NSA 1989a, 29)

Following the assassination of Education Minister Carlos A. Herrera Rebollo by the FPL guerrillas, the government declared a state of siege.24 Far-right elements in the security forces appear to have viewed the state of siege as an opportunity to put their policy preferences into action. An embassy cable quotes an unconfirmed report that "there had been a recent meeting at which member of security forces had told group of Salvadoran businessmen that state of siege would be used as means of getting rid of 'troublesome' labor and other leaders." (SS03093 6 June, 1979) Confirmation of the intent by the security forces to settle some scores is provided by the civilian death toll: according to Socorro Juridico Cristiano, 142 civilians were killed by government forces in May, compared to 46 in April, 32 in March, and only 18 in February. The Arch-

diocesan Secretariat for Social Communication puts the May figure even higher at 160. (UCA 1981, 12) (See Table 5.1) According to Socorro Juridico, the rate of killing remained at around 130 per month for the remainder of Romero's time in office, while the Archdiocesan Secretariat shows lower figures for July through September. (Socorro Juridico Cristiano 1984; UCA 1981, 12)

Table 5.1
Alternative Estimates of State Violence, 1979

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socorro Juridico</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cristiano</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
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The increased violence after May 1979 would appear to confirm the process of death squad expansion and increasing state support, particularly from ANSESAL, the National Guard and ORDEN, described by Gibb and Farah (1989). According to my interview with Farah, the use of military helicopters and vehicles in support of death squad ac-

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25 Since Socorro Juridico was, at that time, the official human rights agency for the Archdiocese, the discrepancy in the figures is puzzling. I was unable to obtain any information on the origins of the data presented by the Secretariat, which I found in an UCA recompilation of human rights statistics. (UCA 1981, 12). The Secretariat's figures seem more descriptively consistent with written accounts of the levels of violence during the last 9 months of Romero's regime.
tivities increased most markedly in 1979. The greatly reduced levels of violence in January and February of 1979 during the IAHRC visit indicate that Romero could cause the security forces to cease and desist when he needed to. The bloodbath of May and June coincided with a major challenge to Romero from the right, so it is not surprising that repressive activities increased during this period.

The different estimates by Socorro Juridico and the Social Communication Secretariat present some problems for analysis of Romero's final months. The Secretariat's figures would seem to suggest a moderation of violence after June; the Socorro figures point to its continuation at high levels. Unfortunately, it is impossible at this distance to diagnose the discrepancy. Socorro Juridico, which had contacts with the popular organizations, was probably in a better position to gather data from rural areas around the country, while the Secretariat's figures may reflect primarily the dynamics of violence in San Salvador and environs. It would be consistent with previous dynamics under Romero (for example, his post-inauguration opening) for violence in the and around city to be moderated during a period of international scrutiny, but for killings in isolated rural areas to proceed unabated. In any case, either set of figures is consistent with the general points made in this chapter: 1) international pressures could compel Romero to restrict violence
somewhat; 2) he was unable to sustain reductions because of threats against him from the far-right; and 3) peak levels of violence under him were lower than those that followed his overthrow, despite very high levels of popular mobilization from April 1979 onward.

Last Ditch Efforts at Regime Legitimation

Despite permitting greater violence by the security forces, Romero persisted in efforts to legitimate himself to a broader audience than the economic elite. On May 18, he called upon political, student, church, labor, professional, and other "legally recognized" groups to join the government in a "National Forum" to discuss social and political issues. Most opposition organizations refused to participate, forming instead a "Popular Forum" (Poro Popular) which included the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), the National Democratic Union (UDN), and the United Confederation of Salvadoran Workers (CUTS). The Poro Popular was one of the organizations to which the junior officers' movement turned for political support following the October 1979 coup.

Following the obvious political failure of the National Forum idea, and after the collapse of the Somoza government in Nicaragua, Romero began, at the eleventh hour, to reconsider his prior opposition to socio-economic
reforms. In August of 1979, Romero and Minister of Defense Castillo Tunes met with a group of officers who had just returned from a two month political warfare course in Taiwan. There were four majors and five lieutenant colonels in the group. Citing the forthcoming October OAS meeting at which Romero expected his government to be condemned on human rights grounds, he ordered the officers to form a task force to prepare a series of reform proposals for "social changes," based on their training in Taiwan, that would undercut popular opposition. Romero expected the OAS condemnation to trigger a serious security problem in El Salvador, and he hoped to preempt it by instituting some significant measures. According to a confidential informant who was part of the group, "He asked us to speak out frankly, which officers were not at that time accustomed to doing. This was unusual. There used to be repression of officers who spoke critically." In the end, Romero found the recommendations of the working group to be too radical and chose not to put them into effect.

In early September, Romero let it be known that he was committed to the idea of a civilian successor once his term ran out. This idea, though welcomed by the U.S. embassy, which saw a civilian president as likely to help restore the legitimacy of the government, apparently met with some resistance in military circles. Officers were particularly uncomfortable with the idea of a civilian minister of
defense. In response to this opposition, Romero prepared a
new law which provided for a position "akin to our chairman
of the joint chiefs of staff -- to which the military com-
manders would elect one of their number to serve as top-
ranking military figure in the government at such times as
a civilian might be minister of defense." (SS05202, 11
September, 1979)

As it turned out, of course, Romero did not stay out
his term in office. He was, in effect, trapped by the way
he had come to power. Beholden to the oligarchy and having
placed conservative officers in most command positions,
Romero was not in a position in which he could carry out
major reforms without being overthrown in what many of my
informants referred to as an "autogolpe" led by his senior
commanders. Neither was he able to unleash an all-out
assault on the popular left as the oligarchy and many
hardline officers wanted. The main impediments to a
hardline solution were pressure from the U.S. and the
expectation that the OAS would condemn Romero's government
even more vehemently if violence were increased. Assistant
Secretary of State Viron Vaky visited Romero at the end of
July and pressured him to liberalize rather than cracking
down to maintain order.\textsuperscript{26} An additional constraint
stemmed from Romero's vulnerability to coups, which led him

\textsuperscript{26} Interview, Viron Vaky, April, 1990, Washington,
D.C.
to try to resist the sort of secret, de-centralized, autonomous organizational structures necessary for an all out campaign of state terror. The secrecy and lack of centralized command control that would be required to protect those involved in extensive death squad activities would also create ideal conditions for coup plotting.\footnote{27} His internal weakness also led him to divert military intelligence resources to the task of identifying coup plots rather than pursuing the guerrillas, much to the irritation of hardliners in ANSESAL.\footnote{28}

**The U.S. Policy Vacuum**

Despite the alarming cables sent by Ambassador Frank Devine during the strike actions of March 1979, U.S. policy toward El Salvador appears to have received little high level attention until after the fall of the Somoza government in July. A regional meeting of ambassadors and embassy officials was held in Costa Rica at which those present discussed the various alternatives. Those present agreed that neither a coup from the right nor a young officers' coup would reliably serve U.S. interests, and "the more politically sensitive ambassadors at the meeting

\footnote{27 Interview, Douglas Farah, October 1989, San Salvador.}

\footnote{28 Interview, former U.S. intelligence official based in San Salvador. ANSESAL officers had complained to him about the diversion of resources.}
in Costa Rica stressed the need to broaden the range of American political contacts in the country." (Keogh 1983, 155) Frank Devine complains in his book that he expected guidance and that none was forthcoming. (1981, 122-9) When comprehensive instructions finally did come in late September, they reflected a serious lack of reality contact in Washington. In orders likened to those given for the "charge of the Light Brigade," Devine was instructed to get in contact with "all appropriate parties" and insist upon elections. (Keogh 1983, 165)

In July, following the collapse of the Sandinista regime, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Relations Viron Vaky traveled to San Salvador to meet with President Romero and his senior cabinet. According to Vaky, the Salvadorean seemed to expect the U.S. to tell them to "circle the wagons against communism." What they got instead, according to Vaky, was general advice that some sort of significant gesture was required to calm popular sentiment. Vaky left it open what such a gesture should be; this advice seems to have been widely interpreted in San Salvador as a signal that Romero should resign and is recalled by Salvadorean rightists with great bitterness.29

Vaky's visit was followed in September by the new Assistant Secretary, William Bowdler, who was on a tour of

the region to explain U.S. Nicaragua policy to members of the "private sector" in the other countries. In a cable sent September 7, five days before Bowdler's scheduled arrival, Ambassador Devine warned Bowdler that coup rumors were flying, that his visit would become the subject of considerable speculation within El Salvador, and that the Salvadorans would probably not be in a mood to focus on the problems of a neighboring country. It seems remarkable that Washington would need to be told this, but El Salvador was, at this point, still receiving very little attention. Finally, in a note that probably reveals a desire on Devine's part to avoid any action that might destabilize Romero, he advised Bowdler against meeting with Archbishop Oscar Romero, suggesting instead a private meeting with the Archbishop's "closer advisers." (SS 5113, 7 September, 1979)30 Devine's caution about a meeting between Bowdler and the Archbishop reflected pressures being placed upon him by the Salvadoran private sector and the resident American community for "reflecting undue alarm over situation which confronts us." There was growing suspicion on the part of conservative business elites that the U.S. was preparing to abandon Romero as it had Somoza. (SS 5802

30 Another interesting note from this same cable is that Bowdler's itinerary included luncheon with the "Ambassador's Steering Committee of the American Chamber of Commerce (American business liaison group)." The cable does not make clear who was "steering" whom.
October 11, 1979) What actually happened was less dramatic: U.S. policy simply drifted until Romero was overthrown, apparently without significant U.S. involvement. (See next chapter.)

Consequences of the Dynamics of Violence under Romero:

The conflicting pressures upon Romero led him to use violence inconsistently. He conducted a reign of terror between his election and inauguration, he curbed violence during the first few months of his administration, then ordered or permitted a crack-down for the thirteen months under the Law for the Guarantee of Public Order. At the beginning of 1979, he backed off again under international pressure. Each time Romero ordered or allowed severe repression, he created powerful grievances on the part of the popular organizations; each time he backed off, he provided an opening in which the left could voice its outrage through demonstrations and strikes.

Most state violence was not directed against the violent opposition, but rather against the openly organized popular movement. The result of this was that state violence provoked more violent opposition than it sup-

31 Bowdler did meet with Mons. Romero, in the company of Ambassador Devine and Román Mayorga. Bowdler acknowledged, when questioned, that they had urged President Romero to consider early elections. Mayorga and Archbishop Romero shared their thoughts on repression, illegitimacy of government, structural problems, etc., but gave no specific advice. ¹
pressed. (Mason and Krane 1989, 176-7) While clandestine guerrilla organizations such as the FPL, the ERP and the FARN kidnapped the wealthy, attacked the security forces, took over radio stations and planted bombs, it was the popular fronts such as the FAPU and the BPR bore the brunt of state violence. The security forces seldom succeeded in attacking the clandestine guerrilla movement, although ANSESAL did manage to infiltrate a few agents into the guerrilla organizations by 1979. As a consequence of the violence directed against them, their constituent organizations and unions shifted towards a more explicitly political and revolutionary discourse and they turned to increasingly confrontational tactics such as land and building occupations (Cabarrús 1983, 284-324), nation-wide strikes, and, increasingly, bus-burning and arson.

Particularly severe violence was used against labor unions that had been formed or taken over by the FAPU and the BPR. The leadership and even rank and file of FAPU or BPR-oriented unions were a favored target of semi-official death squads, with the same results such repression had in other sectors: radicalization. (Cuidos Véjar 1979, 510)

Security force attacks on the popular organizations had another effect: it led these groups to seek crude armament, initially sticks and machetes, later pistols and miscellaneous long arms, which complicated the work of government forces. This process of pistolización was
primarily for self-defense, and those who took arms were usually not committed to armed struggle, *per se*. The willingness to take arms in self-defense was a significant step, however, and these changes later provided the guerrilla groups with a pool of radicalized militants from which to recruit when, in 1980, they began a serious effort to increase their military capacity.

Since there is little evidence that state violence during Romero's regime significantly damaged the guerrilla organizations themselves, it would appear that the overall effect of state violence was to both provoke more mass opposition and to push it towards more violent forms of expression. As open membership in protest organizations became increasingly dangerous, the pool of recruits for the guerrillas expanded. The radicalization of the popular organizations may actually have pushed the guerrilla organizations to develop their activities faster than they otherwise would have. Informants who were in both the guerrilla and popular organizations at the time claim that the politico-military groups often found themselves reacting to unexpected mobilization and militancy by the popular organizations.

This counterproductive effect of violence was not lost on members of the armed forces, who became increasingly divided over how to respond. As already discussed, hard-liners proposed to expand the violence to the point that it
would suppress, rather than provoke, opposition. Junior officers in the Army, on the other hand, thought that the violence should be stopped altogether and reforms implemented to demobilize the radical left. This reformist current, which eventually overthrew Romero, will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Teetering atop such a polarized institution, Romero made gestures in both directions but was completely unable to order a coherent policy response to the growing discontent of mass society. The institutional bases for a hardline policy, namely the security forces and ANSESAL, were of questionable loyalty to Romero by the end of his term. Much of the regular Army could not be counted on to carry out a hardline policy because the junior officers disapproved and would resist. Greater violence would have brought the sort of international isolation that contributed to Somoza's fall. The alternative, a shift towards major reforms, including civilian rule, would almost certainly have brought Romero's overthrow, either by hardline elements or by the group of officers -- the so-called Equipo Molina -- that Romero had displaced from power.

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Conclusions

There are unexpected parallels between the institutionalist military governments discussed in the last chapter and that of Romero, despite major differences in overall policy orientation. Both the institutionalist governments and Romero found their actual authority to determine state policy to be limited. For example, Molina's political interests lay with carrying out a land reform to retain rural support for the official party; Romero's political security depended upon limiting state violence to avoid international condemnation and isolation. Both leaders found that they could not long sustain a policy that went against the wishes of the oligarchy without being threatened with overthrow.

Another parallel between the Molina and Romero governments is that state policy regarding the use of violence under both administrations appears not to have been the product of centralized decision-making and unified implementation. Rather, it resulted from a process of tugging and pulling between different policy currents within the military, and between top state leaders and both domestic and international influences.

The next chapter will show that similar factors affected the patterns of state violence after Romero's overthrow. The key difference is that international pressures on human rights evaporated after Romero was
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replaced by a joint civilian/military junta, leaving only the civilians in government and portions of the military itself as impediments to the sort of second matanza that the civilian far-right was calling for. The dynamics of state violence during late 1979 and 1980 trace the power struggle between pro- and anti-violence sectors of the state.
CHAPTER SIX

STATE REFORMISM, STATE VIOLENCE:
THE CRISIS OF 1979-80

Some of the greatest tragedies begin with good faith. You don't have to look for bad faith to find the seeds of disasters. -- Former Member, Revolutionary Governing Junta.

Introduction

On October 15, 1979, President Carlos Romero was overthrown in an almost bloodless coup carried out by junior officers. Unlike previous coups that had focused on capturing capital city barracks, this uprising took over virtually all of the barracks in the country. Even the National Guard, usually the coup-breaker, decided to remain neutral. Romero was replaced by a five-man, joint military/civilian junta that included three individuals who were known to be personally committed to carrying out major socio-economic reforms. Some 50 senior officers were summarily dismissed from the service. On the surface, this new government seemed likely to produce a reduction in state violence, since its announced goal was to carry out accomodative policies, close the gap between the military and the people, and stamp out the kind of corruption and brutality that had characterized the regime of Carlos Romero. Although the government included senior officers
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whose commitment to reforms was uncertain, at a minimum
the personnel in government seemed much less closely tied
to the oligarchy than Romero had been.

In fact, however, state violence escalated dramatically
after the coup, subsided briefly in November, then
escalated again in December to levels far higher than those
seen under Romero. Through 1980, state violence stair-
stepped upward, increasing in large increments, then
leveling off, then increasing again. Violence became so
intense by mid-year (averaging over 1,000 killed per month)
that the popular organizations of the left effectively
disbanded as much of their leadership either fled the
country or went into clandestinity, supporting the guerril-
las. "Under this assault, many people decided that if they
were going to die, they were going to die fighting. Many
more people realized the need for armed struggle."¹

During the second half of 1980, with a supposedly reformist
civilian/military junta in power, at a time when opposition
guerrilla forces still numbered only a few hundred and
civilian elements of the opposition were still attempting
to arrange a dialogue with the government, state forces
were killing over nine times as many people per month as
they had during the final five months under Romero.

¹ Interview, Aronette Diaz v. de Zamora, Secretary
General of the Democratic National Union (UDN), San
Salvador, August 1989.
Part of the reason for this increase in violence is obviously that the mass opposition increased its mobilization, particularly after the collapse of the first Revolutionary Governing Junta in January of 1980. The popular organizations achieved greater unity from January onward, and showed a capacity to put literally hundreds of thousands of people into the streets. During the course of 1980, the guerrilla groups increased their activities and appeared to increase in numbers, though they numbered only a few hundred during most of 1980, and had no more than 1,200 full time combatants just prior to the January 1981 offensive.2

Another factor in the increase in state violence, much neglected by the literature, is that the factional politics of the military after the coup shifted in such a way that the most powerful officers in the military had strong incentives to either order or tolerate greater state violence. The Military Youth movement, although it had carried out the coup, had not completely controlled its outcome. A group of senior officers who had previously been shunted aside by Romero managed to infiltrate the coup plot and piggy-back their way into senior command positions following the coup. This group of officers, who were known as the "Equipo Molina" (Molina team), had been former

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2 Personal communication, Tommie Sue Montgomery, who obtained this information from anonymous sources associated with the FMLN.
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President Arturo Molina's heirs-apparent until the civilian far-right intervened to impose Romero. (Castro Morán 1989, 265-6) They were to restore the autonomous political power of the military institution and secure their personal positions within the institution. These plans were directly and imminently threatened by the Military Youth reformists, who intended to weaken the political role of the military, hand political power over to civilians, break up the socio-economic and political power of the oligarchy, and punish human rights violations and corruption within the military.

The reformist threat led the high command to form an alliance with the mercenary, hardline elements that had challenged Romero from the right. This alignment is ironic, given that the Equipo Molina officers were, by reputation, more independent of the oligarchy than Romero had been. By permitting the hardliners to operate as they wished, the high command indirectly attacked the reformist project, since state violence made it less likely that the first junta would be able to calm the popular opposition. The high command also used its formal authority in a variety of ways to break down the solidarity of the young Army officers. One of their most important tools in this was to put junior Army officers in situations in which they

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were forced to participate, alongside hardline security forces officers, in acts of violence against civilians. The net result of this was a gradual erosion of the distinction between the security forces and the Army, such that by late 1980, the regular Army was the principal violator of human rights in rural areas. 4

At the same time that the high command was turning to the right for political support, the civilian far-right mobilized itself to a greater degree than it had in many decades. The reason for this was that the Juventud Militar, and the reformist civilian government they installed, were an immediate threat to the interests of the civilian right. For ideological reasons that are elaborated below, capital saw the civilian reformists in the first and second juntas as a greater and more imminent threat than the mass opposition organizations. The far-right's sense of threat was not at all reduced when the first junta was replaced by a somewhat more moderate one with stronger U.S. backing. In fact, wealthy civilian elites saw the second junta as an even greater threat. The response of the right to this perceived threat was to organize to regain its influence within the military and press the military to use so much violence as to make the

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4 Interview, Jon Cortina, S.J. San Salvador, September, 1989. Cortina has worked extensively in Chalatenango and heard the personal testimony of people there as to which state agencies attacked them at various points in time.
reformist approach irrelevant and unnecessary. They did this by forming a civic organization, the Broad National Front (FAN), to publicly pressure the government, by preparing coups against the reformist civilians and military officers in government, and by working directly with mid-level officers in the military to increase the rate of violence. They also formed their own underground death squad organization which, though it probably never numbered more than about fifty operatives, helped pressure the military towards greater violence. (Pyes 1983a)

U.S. policy helped shift the incentives for the high command in favor of greater violence by effectively removing human rights pressures on the military after the coup. With the overthrow of Romero and his replacement by a joint civil/military junta, U.S. policy makers declared that human rights differences were "behind us." (SS 7097, 11 December, 1979) Most U.S. pressures on the military after the coup had to do with preserving the appearance of pluralistic, if not really democratic, governance.

Craig Pyes conducted an investigation into the death squads as a correspondent for the Albuquerque Journal. He managed to penetrate the inner circles of several parallel underground operations sponsored by the FAN. His estimate of fifty civilian operatives is important because it shows the extent to which the state was responsible for the violence that took place. Extreme right death squads did exist, but they could not have been responsible for more than a small percentage of the hundreds of killings that took place each month during late 1979 and 1980, especially since a single assassination usually involved intelligence gathering, planning, and an assault involving several operatives.
Furthermore, the U.S. continued to express concerns, as it had under Romero, about the ability of the Salvadoran military to maintain order. Thus the fear of international isolation that led Romero to curb the hardline elements was removed, replaced by a sense that the military was insulated from political consequences for human rights abuses and encouraged to do whatever was necessary to maintain order. This was combined with powerful internal incentives for greater violence.\(^6\) Conditions were ripe for a hardline, 1932-style solution.

With the U.S. not acting effectively on human rights issues, the only remaining barrier to an all-out matanza was the Juventud movement based in the regular Army plus the reformist civilians in the government. Yet the reformist project, which ultimately depended upon building a base of popular support (or at least popular acquiescence) proved extremely vulnerable to violence by hardline elements. The reformist faction within the military was gradually broken up by the combined efforts of hardliners and the high command. With their departure, virtually all restraints on the intensity of state violence were removed, setting the stage for the extremely intense state violence in 1981 and thereafter.

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\(^6\) No human rights sanctions were imposed against the Salvadoran government from October 1979 until the assassination of four U.S. churchwomen in December of 1980.
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Polarization and the First Junta

The general lines of elite-level conflict that affected state violence following the coup had emerged first during the Romero administration. Romero's inconsistent, provocative, and unsuccessful policies on violence yielded two divergent impulses within the Salvadoran officer corps. One current of opinion, already discussed in Chapter Five, was a growing extremist movement of the right in which hardline officers, in conjunction with freelance mercenaries and backed by conservative civilian elites, pushed for an all-out dirty war against the popular left. Though somewhat constrained by President Romero, this rightist current worked to develop an organizational infrastructure for carrying out an intensified campaign of terror. By the time Romero was overthrown, hardline influence was still confined to the National Guard, National Police, Treasury Police, the intelligence sections within some regular Army units, ORDEN, and a handful of private death squads such as Héctor Regalado's boy scout troop in Usulutan. Most regular Army units were not

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8 In early 1980, the National Guard had 2,500 men under arms, the National Police 1,900, the Treasury Police 660, and the Customs Police 530, for a total of 5,590. The regular Army, most of which was not under hardline control, numbered 6,500 plus 500 officers. The Air Force and Navy totaled another 1,500 and were mixed in their political orientation. (Institute of Policy Studies 1980) ORDEN could mobilize as many as 100,000 people, though relatively
involved in these activities (though senior commanders and intelligence units often had ties to death squad activities) and a minority of the total officer corps was reliably incorporated into the rightist project. (Pyes 1983a, 1983b)

Officers in the security forces were aware by early 1979 that their experimental efforts at selective repression against the popular organizations had failed. Rather than suppressing the left, it had fueled greater expansion and radicalization.9 With the departure of Romero, the most conservative elements of the private sector and the hardline network in the military hoped to expand their war against the popular left. Two strategies were used. One was to "create a structure outside the army, to do the things the army could not do," that is, carry out the aggressive measures that the hardliners had been "hindered from employing" through the army.10 (Pyes 1983a, 1983b)
The second strategy was to attack the civilian and military reform movements with both propaganda and violence, reduce their influence, and thereby make it possible for "anti-

few of these were armed. (McClintock 1985a, 205-8) The private death squads expanded following the overthrow of Romero, but probably did not exceed fifty members even at their peak. (Pyes 1983a)

9 Interviews, Gibb and Farah.

10 Elements of this parallel military command structure had been set up before Romero's ouster, but it appears to have expanded rapidly once Romero was gone. (Interviews, Gibb and Farah.)
subversive operations" to be taken over by the regular army. (Pyes 1983b)

Romero's policies also triggered the development of an unprecedentedly powerful reformist movement centered on the junior officer corps in the regular Army. This movement viewed the extent of violence under the Romero government as detrimental to national security and to the image, integrity, and future prospects of the military institution. They saw violence as stemming from corrupt ties between senior officers, the security forces, and wealthy private sector elites. The reformist movement favored a policy of replacing repression with a strategy of militarily led political opening in which dissident social groups would feel they had a voice; they also favored major socio-economic reforms which would simultaneously redress the grievances of the landless poor and reduce the overwhelming power of the oligarchy. The junior officers allied themselves with Church leaders, academics from the Jesuit-run University of Central America (UCA), and with politicians from the opposition Foro Popular.\footnote{The Popular Forum had been formed in late September 1979 as a response to President Romero's not-entirely-credible call for a National Forum to discuss the political future of the country. The Foro Popular included the PDC, the MNR, and the UDN (the legal front for the Communist Party) and therefore bore a strong resemblance to the UNO coalition that had contested elections in 1972 and 1977. The Popular Forum also included the popular front organization LP-28 (affiliated with the ERP guerrilla) as well as several of the labor union affiliates of FAPU. The BPR did not belong to the Foro Popular, although one of its secret}
civilian associates of the movement were movitated primarily by a desire to promote changes without violent upheaval. They saw mass violence as inevitable if the policies of Romero were to continue and feared that such an uprising might fail.

Development of the Reformist Conspiracy

"To understand the Salvadoran military, you must view it as a political institution in which political experience is extremely valuable. For this reason, the Juventud Militar was extremely vulnerable." -- Former senior government official.

The reformist movement that overthrew President Romero in October of 1979 was more formidable than the earlier reformist movements led by Osorio (1960) and Mejía (1972) in that it had an organized base among the lower ranks and evolved, by mid-1979, into a genuinely national conspiracy. Unlike the earlier movements, which had been confined mainly to capital city barracks, the movement of 1979 built coordinated, majority support within the officer corps throughout the country, eventually dominated most of the country's military units, and built a higher level of political consciousness than had previously been seen.

A significant proportion of captains formed very radical views directed against the status quo of their own

members, Salvador Samayoa became the Minister of Education under the new government. (Dunkerly 1985a, 129, 137-9; Baloyra 1982, 97)
institution. The Juventud movement of 1979 thus presented
the post-coup high command, military hardliners, and
conservative civilian elites with a serious new challenge
which forced a political realignment of the high command
and triggered a political and operational mobilization by
the far right.

The seed crystal of a reformist movement had formed
within the junior ranks of the regular Army as early as
February 1976. This semi-clandestine group, which called
itself the Military Youth Movement (Movimiento de Juventud
Militar -- MJM), was dedicated to reorienting the military
towards a more popular agenda, reducing levels of corrup-
tion, and regaining the preeminence of the Army vis-à-vis
the security forces. (Movimiento de Juventud Militar 1976,
1-5)

In an open letter written in February 1976 and ad-
dressed "To the Army," the Movimiento de Juventud Militar
(MJM) denounced the growing corruption within the Army and
in "key points" of state institutions. It condemned the
Molina government as "unpopular, anti-democratic, and
inefficient." By the time this document was written, the
hardline organization built around ANSESAL, ORDEN, and the
security forces, with support from Defense Minister Romero,
had already gained, and exercised, considerable independent
power within the Molina administration. The MJM letter
refers derogatorily to "la camarilla policial-co-terrorista
de Molina," which translates roughly as "the police-terrorist clique of Molina." The reference to "police" is important here, because it suggests that discontent about corruption and violence was overlaid with institutional objections to the increasing political dominance of the security forces over the Army. Elsewhere the document refers to "police-oligarchic cliques," a reference to the close relations between the security forces and the agrarian elite. The document refers to a growing number of officers who,

by means of a process of sensitization and political education, realize that their place is with the people, and not in the service of a closed elitist minority which controls and appropriates the benefits of almost the entire wealth of the nation, or of powerful interests foreign to El Salvador. (MJM 1976, 2)

The document concludes with an enumeration of the agenda of the movement:

The Fatherland is First: We fight to irradiate all vices and privileges in El Salvador.

The Fatherland is First: we fight as soldiers to establish a real democracy.

The Fatherland is First: we fight so that major political decisions are not made within closed circles of police-oligarchic cliques, nor at the luxurious desks of large transnational corporations.

The Fatherland is First: we fight to establish, on the side of the popular sectors, a process of democratic transformations in which the people themselves would have an effective participation.

The Fatherland is First: We do not collaborate with the methods of repression over the people, nor the curtailment or restriction of popular liberties.
The Fatherland is First: We will not permit the sullyng of the honor of the Army, tolerating corruption nor permitting the police cliques, who are in the service of the oligarchy, to continue using soldiers and the Army for their bastard goals.

The Fatherland is First: Let us pull together, comrades, and struggle to change governmental structures, shake the conscience of the nation, to eliminate forever worn out, immoral and anti-popular methods of government.

The Fatherland is First: Let us struggle, as soldiers, on the side of popular, democratic forces, to achieve a DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL SALVATION. Tomorrow may be too late, comrades in arms. (MJM 1976, 4-5)

What stands out in this document is the dichotomy it establishes between the agenda of the Army, which is pro-popular, democratic, in favor of social equity, honest and honorable, and the agenda of the security forces, high command and oligarchy, which is violent, corrupt, and anti-democratic. Among my interviewees, officers with a wide range of current opinions, including some who are now quite hardline in their views, described themselves as having subscribed to this general view of the issues at stake in 1979.

One very powerful unifying grievance appears to have been electoral fraud and the professional indignity that this imposed upon the military as an institution. Three of the officers I interviewed who had been part of the reformist movement as captains or lieutenants said that personal experiences of stuffing ballot boxes or otherwise participating in fraud had been decisive in moving them
towards taking action against Romero. Mena Sandoval also gives an account of personal involvement in fixing elections. (1990, 63-71) Several other officers I interviewed knew of the extent of the fraud and objected to it strenuously.

Colonel Adolfo Majano participated in the PCN legislative and municipal election campaign in 1976 and the presidential campaign of 1977 as a member of the Presidential staff of Arturo Molina. He describes the PCN as a party in decay, depending increasingly on the military for support, and being largely supplanted at the local level by the paramilitary elements of ORDEN and the "territorial" militias. Electoral anomalies were "too many to enumerate." These irregularities were largely responsible, according to Majano, for the groundswell of opposition to Romero and willingness among junior officers to take action. (Majano 1989, 13-5)

In addition to electoral fraud, many were also personally offended by the extent of corruption. In part, this stemmed from the fact that most of the corruption was taking place at higher levels in the military. Most of those I interviewed, however, put their complaints in terms of the damage that corruption at higher levels did to the prestige and integrity of the armed forces as an institution. One of the key results of this concern about corruption and electoral fraud was a belief among many
officers that there should be a civilian president, that this would be more convenient and safe for the military. (Mena 1990, 129)

By late 1978, the simultaneous and rapid escalation of mass opposition and government violence gave added impetus to the reformist movement and pushed it in a more radical direction. According to Raymond Bonner (1984, 148-50), Lieutenant Colonel René Guerra y Guerra and a civilian doctor by the name of Guillermo Quiñonez had begun thinking about organizing a reformist coup as early as 1973, although Guerra y Guerra was out of the country until 1976. Guerra began meeting with other officers in November of 1978, when he attempted to recruit an artillery captain by the name of Román Barrera.

There is something of a debate about the role of Lt. Col. René Guerra in the coup. Historical accounts based on interviews with René, Hugo, and Rodrigo Guerra y Guerra (Montgomery 1982, Keogh 1985, Bonner 1984) tend to emphasize the role of the Guerra brothers in mobilizing and leading the reformist movement. This interpretation tends to minimize the seriousness and solidity of the reformist movement among the lower ranks. Alternative accounts of the coup, however, including those of Mena Sandoval (1990), Majano (1989) and several confidential informants acknowledge that Guerra played a vital role as an organizer, military planner, communications specialist, and liaison
with advisers in the Catholic University and the Archdiocese of San Salvador, but argue that the fundamental impulse for the development of the reformist movement came from the lower-ranking officers themselves, based on their own experiences, concerns, and analysis of their institution's predicament. According to these sources, the movement was not the creation of the Guerras. From late 1978 onward, captains and other lower-ranking officers were talking among themselves, feeling each other out regarding why the country seemed to be headed towards greater and greater violence and what should be done about the situation. Guerra's leadership tapped into this sentiment and built upon it, but he did not found the movement and it did not immediately dissipate when he was forced out of the country by an assassination attempt in early 1980.

One of the main reasons for all the confusion about the formation of the movement was its clandestinity. Officers who had already been recruited by someone else would not necessarily reveal that fact to an officer attempting to convince them to join up, since to do so would risk exposing the participation of the original recruiter. By August 1979, the movement gained so much momentum that captains who had recently incorporated into the conspiracy were attempting to recruit officers like Mena Sandoval, Marenco, Godínez, and Barrera, not knowing that they had helped found the movement. (Mena 1990, 144)
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Organization of the conspiracy began with junior officers, particularly Army and Air Force captains, talking among themselves and establishing a rough consensus that something had to be done, that Romero needed to be removed and the drift toward greater violence stopped. By March or April 1979, the discussions had led to a few conclusions, among which were that: 1) they needed to find a core group of officers who could actually organize a movement; 2) after the coup, the security forces -- the National Guard, the Treasure Police, and the National Police -- would have to be "disarticulated," or, at a minimum, separated from the military; 3) officers involved in corruption and assassinations would have to be tried and punished, or else the movement would have no credibility; 4) the movement would have to remain "out of the hands of the United States," but any government created by the coup would need U.S. support. (Mena 1990, 134)

They also reached some tactical decisions, for example that they would seek their first contacts in units whose participation might be crucial to military success, including the artillery battalion and the Air Force. These were also units in which the junior officers were most concerned about the existing situation and most

conscious of what was in store for our country, in view of the failure of the agrarian transformation, military disgrace, the threat of civil war following the electoral fraud of 1977, the fights over control of the state, and the intense
social struggle of the popular and radical sectors. (Mena Sandoval 1990, 134-5)

There were good reasons for the movement to have developed among junior officers. Most officers in the Salvadoran military are recruited from the lower and lower middle classes. Despite efforts during academy training to distance them from the civilian population, most officers retain, for a time, a sense of their own humble origins. Most officers are posted in provincial barracks during their first years out of the academy, and therefore most marry women from modest provincial families. Until such time as officers reach advanced rank and gain access to greater wealth through corruption, they are more likely to identify with the concerns and welfare of the lower classes. Another point is that unlike officers enjoying their moment at the top and hoping to just keep the racket going a little while longer, the junior officers tended to have a longer-term perspective. Their prospects for being able to complete their careers depended on the ability of the military to find a sustainable institutional role for itself. The increasing violence of the late 1970s, the blatant corruption and fraud, and the growing intensity of mass opposition all tended to suggest that the long term prognosis for the Salvadoran military was not good.

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In August 1979, the conspirators formed a "Military Coordinating Committee" made up of Lt. Col. René Guerra y Guerra, Air Force Major Alvaro Salazar Brenes, Colonel Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez, Captain Román Barrera, and Captain Francisco Mena Sandoval. Gutiérrez' reformist credentials were suspect from the start. He had learned about the movement from Mena Sandoval, who worked under him in the "Maestranza," which was a logistics center that repaired vehicles, weapons, and other equipment. Because Gutiérrez had been involved in the coup of 1961, as had other moderate and respected officers such as Mariano Castro Morán, Mena felt free to discuss his concerns about the current situation with Gutiérrez. This was to prove a crucial mistake, as Gutiérrez ultimately functioned as an anchor within the conspiracy for his allies Vides Casanova, García, and Carranza, to whom Gutiérrez unilaterally assigned senior positions once the coup took place. It is indicative of Mena's lack of political sophistication, and that of many of the junior officers involved, that he was not aware of how different the politics of the Gutiérrez/García/Vides/Carranza cabal were from his own. Mena notes that once Gutiérrez was incorporated in the movement, he and Guerra y Guerra fought constantly. (1990, 139) Gutiérrez saw Guerra y Guerra as an unreliable leftist; Guerra y Guerra saw Gutiérrez as corrupt, conservative, and personally ambitious. Their personal struggles prefigured
the fundamental conflicts over policy and power which developed after the coup between the junior officers and the senior officers affiliated with Gutiérrez.

Despite these internal divisions, the coordinating group had sufficient common interests that they were able to advance their work. The first step was to identify supportive officers in all of the barracks in the country, a strategy which eventually made possible a militarily robust, nationwide movement which avoided the isolation which led to the military defeat of the golpistas in 1972. Mena Sandoval, who had been assigned to a staff job in the High Command in early May 1979, travelled about the country, visiting various barracks under the pretext of inspecting equipment and weapons storehouses. These trips provided him with an opportunity to talk with many junior officers and assisted in the building of the movement. His next assignment, to the logistics and repair center known as "Maestranza," likewise gave him an excuse to travel, and opportunities to talk with officers from various cuartels who came in with equipment needing repair. (Mena 1990, 128-39)

Another factor that helped the movement organize was the fact that between 9:00 pm and 12:00 am, captains were customarily the officers in charge of barracks around the country. Thus conspirators could pick up the telephone and be assured of reaching a fellow captain. A core group of
captains from the tandas of 1967 and 1968 were in the midst of their second year at the High Command and General Staff School, which they attended while still holding command positions. Meeting regularly in the course of their studies helped them formulate their ideas for what needed to be done and proceed with planning. (Majano 1989, 32-3)

Even with these opportunities for contact with other officers, it is remarkable that the early conspirators were able to assemble such a strong movement, given the history of repression of dissident officers within the institution, the strong incentives of Romero to find out and crush any such movement, and Romero's use of ANSESAL for the purpose of identifying conspirators. The primary enabling condition for the growth of the movement was the nearly unanimous sense, even among officers with relatively conservative instincts, that some sort of change was necessary, lest the Salvadoran military go the way of the Nicaraguan National Guard. Another factor, however, was that the organization of coups d'état was an institutionally respected activity within the Salvadoran military. Coups were widely seen as a normal and acceptable way for the institution to deal with generational imbalances as well as improper conduct of whatever kind by higher-ups. One

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13 As noted in an earlier chapter, officers in ANSESAL were disgruntled about having to do internal policing, according to a former U.S. intelligence official who must remain anonymous.
confidential informant described a series of unspoken rules of the game that facilitated coup plotting and made it "sporting, like the play-offs." One of these rules was that an officer who was invited to join a coup could honorably decline to participate; that officer was expected, however, to maintain confidence and not report the solicitation. Under these circumstances, the conspirators could approach fellow officers who might be sympathetic with relatively little fear of being turned in.\textsuperscript{14}

These rules of the game were possible because of a tradition of treating the losers in coups with a degree of gentility and providing guarantees for their families.\textsuperscript{15} Although General Martinez had executed junior officers who rebelled against him in 1944, thereafter losers were usually exiled rather than being killed or imprisoned. As will be seen below, this gentility broke down in the coup of 1979 because of the high stakes involved. Some elements within the reformist movement wanted to execute corrupt and repressive senior officers. In the aftermath of the coup, reformist officers were repeatedly subject to assassination by the right wing of the military.

\textsuperscript{14} My informant, a former senior civilian government official, has close ties and extraordinary access to the military, but his interpretations of military rules-of-the-game are nonetheless those of someone outside the institution.

\textsuperscript{15} Several officers I interviewed who had been involved in coups as lieutenants and captains made this point regarding the provision of guarantees. So did my senior civilian informant mentioned above.
Reformist and Institutionalist Currents Vie for Control

The reformist current described above did not completely dominate the movement to overthrow Romero. Col. Gutiérrez was brought into the movement at an early stage, and he immediately tried to include his colleagues García and Vides. He scheduled special meetings at which the conspirators were addressed by García and Vides. Gutiérrez made a point of not inviting Lt. Col. René Guerra. (Mena 1990, 145; Keogh 1983, 166) García et. al. had tried to organize their own movement as early as April of 1979, but had encountered resistance among junior officers who were already developing their own plans.16 Frustrated, García had sought a role in a rightist "autogolpe" being planned by Deputy Defense Minister Eduardo Iraheta.17

The inclusion of Gutiérrez in the reformist movement was a windfall for García. Though he was never formally included in the conspiracy, he was able to build some support for himself, even among junior officers, by tailoring his views to his young and idealistic audience. According to Mena Sandoval, García and Vides declared themselves in full support of the young officers' "just struggle."

16 This according to a retired senior official who was involved in the Vides/García/Flores Lima plot.

17 Confidential interview, Salvadoran Army officer who played an important role in planning the October 1979 coup.
I personally, when I listened to García talk about institutionality, love of profession, commitment to the fatherland...I truly believed what he was saying. (Mena 1983)

One informant claimed that only a handful of the most rightist junior officers within the movement were supportive of García, naming José Ricardo Pozo (tanda of 1969) and René Arnoldo Majano (tanda of 1968). It seems clear, however, that support for García et. al. was not confined to these two individuals. On October 6, 1979, a meeting of delegates to the Military Coordinating Committee was held to elect members of the post-coup junta. With 30 of the 37 delegates present, Col. Adolfo Majano was elected unanimously to represent the military on the junta. In voting for the second military member of the junta, a majority of 17 voted for Guerra, but 7 voted for García, 2 for Vides Casanova, and 1 for Gutiérrez.

18 Interview, former Army captain who participated in the October 1979 coup. This individual probably has some bias towards minimizing the extent of support among junior officers for a more conservative agenda.

19 These vote tallies are from Keogh (1983, 168), who got them from René Guerra. Other sources, including Mena Sandoval (1989 147) and Mariano Castro Moran (interview), indicate that Gutiérrez, García, and Vides Casanova, got zero votes. I suspect that Castro Moran got his information from Mena Sandoval, with whom he consulted regularly during the conspiracy. Because of the specificity of Guerra's numbers, and the fact that the vote tallies he reports are more consistent with what most of my sources told me about the extent of support for García within the movement, I am inclined to believe Guerra's account. Majano (1989, 38) indicates that García got a significant share of the votes, though he was not present at the meetings and does not provide specific counts.
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The following day, all 37 delegates were present in the capital, and a second meeting was convened. Gutiérrez managed to convince those present to hold a second vote, since only 30 delegates had been present the previous day. Guerra was not at the assembly; he was meeting with Archbishop Oscar Romero to brief him on the status of the conspiracy. Gutiérrez took advantage of Guerra's absence to attack him on ideological grounds, claiming that he was too left wing to be trusted, insinuating that he had connections to the radical left. Gutiérrez urged the young officers to vote for his colleague García. In the repeated votes that followed, a persistent deadlock developed in which neither Guerra nor García earned a majority of the votes present: 14 voted for García versus 17 for Guerra. This stalemate was resolved, in the early hours of the morning, when Captain Mena Sandoval proposed Gutiérrez, the least powerful of the "Equipo Molina" officers, as a compromise candidate. Mena's intention seems to have been to prevent the movement from breaking down or losing its momentum just a week prior to the planned date for the coup. Too exhausted to discuss it any further, a majority of officers backed Gutiérrez.²⁰

²⁰ Interview, Adolfo Majano. Also, Keogh (1983, 167-9) and Mena Sandoval (1990, 147)
The Role of the U.S.

The U.S. took a passive role towards the October coup and the first JRG. This passivity does not mean that the U.S. didn't influence the course of events: in several regards, the U.S. seems to have automatically affected things merely by the weight of its presence. The existence of prior U.S. intelligence contacts with the "Equipo Molina" helped these officers convince the reformist conspirators to include them in the coup, with the results already discussed. The slow and lackluster U.S. support for the first junta contributed to the junta's isolation. Most importantly, the remarkable attitude of the embassy that human rights were no longer a concern after the coup protected the high command from the kind of pressures that had at least partially restrained state violence under Romero.

As happens whenever a coup occurs in a country in which the U.S. Embassy has played a prominent role in the past, there has been considerable speculation about the possible contribution of the U.S. to the October coup. The available evidence suggests that although the U.S. embassy was aware of the coup, it did not play a major role in making the uprising happen. Ambassador Devine cabled Washington on October 10 to warn them that "the consensus of informed opinion is that President Romero is no longer capable of leading the nation through the present crisis to
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a more democratic and broadly-based government." (SS 5772, 10 October, 1979) Devine had obviously heard the same message from many sectors: "there seems to be a growing sector in opposition parties and private sector which regards golpe as only solution to current political impasse." By this point both the conservative private sector and the opposition parties viewed a coup as necessary -- the conservatives because Romero was failing to maintain security and the opposition parties because he was implacably opposed to social and political reform. The embassy seems to have been reluctant to announce to Washington which of the multiple coup movements were more likely to succeed. It may have lacked the intelligence. Devine describes two scenarios in his October 10 cable: "(A) a semi-constitutional change of government involving resignation of president and other high officials in line of succession under article 75 of the constitution and (B) an outright military takeover -- perhaps by more rightist officers."

The embassy appears to have missed important opportunities to anticipate the shape of the post-coup government and be prepared to help it. At a meeting on October 11, only four days before the coup, Devine and Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) Richard Howard met with Archbishop Romero and Román Mayorga, who were by this point deeply involved in the planning for the coup, a fact that at least some
U.S. intelligence officials were well aware of. When the Salvadorans warned them that the time for elections was past, that the country was too polarized, and that the only solution at that point was a reformist coup -- a clear opportunity to discuss what a post-coup government would look like -- Devine and Howard instead "asked [their] listeners, nonetheless, to bear in mind, to discuss and to consider our plea for the holding of elections and that the Church use its influence to this end." (Devine 1981, 136-7)

It is still unclear how much the embassy knew about the Juventud plan in advance. One thing that is clear is that the State Department in Washington had less information about the coup plot than did intelligence gatherers in the field. In a secret cable sent from Washington on the day of the coup, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance asked Devine to "Please tap all your assets as soon as possible, [excision], to ascertain who is behind coup, what coup plotters represent, what civilian sectors are involved, what power dynamics look like. Please reply soonest by flash cable." (ST 269480 15 October, 1979) Viron Vaky confirms that the intelligence reports available to State

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21 Interview, former U.S. intelligence officer who claims to have been aware of most of the details of the coup plot and the nature of its civilian support prior to the coup itself. The official provided sufficient specific detail regarding how meetings were held and with whom to lend his account credibility. He professed surprise at the apparent lack of information in the hands of senior policy makers following the coup.
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Department officials did not spell out who the coup leaders were nor what their agenda was. The problem, according to Vaky, was that the "signal to noise ratio was too low." It was so much a foregone conclusion in San Salvador that Romero would fall to a coup and there were so many different rumors about who would do it that the raw intelligence coming out of El Salvador was overloaded with competing accounts. 22

One implication of this lack of intelligence on the coup movements was that it is unlikely that there was any deliberate manipulation of any of the conspiracies, at

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22 This overload was compounded by the fact that, as Vaky puts it, "the filter is in the wrong place." Intelligence gatherers have incentives to report every piece of possible information they come across. Analysts in the Washington area are expected to boil down all of this detail into succinct reports. The net result is that the people who are doing the filtering are the ones who have the least feel for what is actually going on. (Interview, Ambassador Viron Vaky, Washington D.C., April 1990.)

One former U.S. intelligence official interviewed for this study provided a feel for how raw intelligence came into his hands. From roughly August onward, Salvadoran coup plotters paid social visits to him at his home. Sometimes representatives of opposing movements happened to drop by at the same time and would contrive various excuses to have a moment alone with the U.S. official, usually in the kitchen or garden of his home. Once in private, they would tell him the status of their preparations, fishing, as my informant put it, for some sign of support. My source claimed that he always wrote up these contacts and any information that he obtained about the agenda of the conspirators and cabled it to Washington. What ever happened to that intelligence, he doesn't know. He was surprised when I told him that senior State Department officials were unaware of the leadership and agenda of the reformist movement until days after the coup had taken place.
least not with high level State Department authorization. Particular attention has focused on the possibility that the U.S. influenced the outcome of two votes taken on the 6th and 7th of October, in which Lt. Col. René Guerra was initially elected to the junta, and subsequently replaced by Col. Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez. Caro'yn Forché (1980) claims that the U.S. intervened to block the selection of Guerra. Her evidence comes from a young officer who told her:

The United States opposed the naming of Guerra y Guerra and instead proposed two names: Colonel José García and Colonel Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez. We needed American support, and we agreed to this.

When Forché asked why the U.S. favored Gutiérrez and García, the officer answered "There are other ways for you to find that out."

Dermot Keogh (1983, 155-7) constructs a similar scenario of U.S. influence over the outcome of the votes. He argues that a high level clique centered around the National Security Council, which he refers to as the "security lobby," developed covert, "back-channel" ties, through the intelligence community, to reliable anti-communist officers in El Salvador. Keogh cites interviews with two former U.S. ambassadors from the region who "state that in the absence of a strong ambassador -- and Devine was seen to be much more a 'bureaucrat' than a strong diplomat -- greater latitude was given to covert elements
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seeking a predicable 'safe' military solution." Within this framework, "Gutiérrez was a leader of the group chosen to defend American security interests in post-Romero El Salvador."

Keogh is probably correct in positing a connection between Gutiérrez and U.S. intelligence agents. This view is almost universally shared among present and former Salvadoran officers I interviewed. A former U.S. intelligence official interviewed for this study confirmed that the CIA routinely establishes contacts with national telephone systems, so that the members of the ANTEL Mafia are likely to have had such connections. Keogh's broader conclusion that the U.S. somehow acted decisively to ensure the success of the ANTEL Mafia group states the case to strongly, however. Keogh does not present concrete evidence showing how U.S. operatives in any way altered the outcome of the votes within the conspiracy. Montgomery (1982, 196) argues that about the most the U.S. might have done would have been to encourage Gutiérrez and García to call the second meeting that deposed René Guerra from the junta and installed Gutiérrez in his place.

No one I interviewed had any evidence regarding U.S. involvement in encouraging the second meeting to take place, although it is clear from several of my informants that Gutiérrez and García, in their efforts to convince the young officers to support them in lieu of Guerra, played up
"on more than one occasion" their connections to the embassy and claimed that Guerra on the junta would jeopardize U.S. support for the post-coup government. (Majano 1989, 54)

In general, whatever efforts the U.S. may have made to influence the direction of the coup, there are good reasons to think that Gutiérrez et. al. possessed, by themselves, the political skills and influence to shift the course of events in their favor. There is no particular reason, for example, to think that Gutiérrez would have required U.S. coaching to think of trying a second meeting to obtain a more favorable outcome for himself and his allies. Furthermore, many of the circumstances that allowed Gutiérrez to take these steps seem to have involved a great deal of luck that the U.S. is unlikely to have influenced. Gutiérrez' initial discovery of the Juventud plot resulted from his happening to be the commanding officer of Captain Mena Sandoval, who happened to be politically naive enough to inform Gutiérrez of the plot. It also seems to have been an extraordinarily bad stroke of luck for René Guerra that he was absent from the second meeting, on October 7, during which Gutiérrez successfully argued that "Guerra's 'left-wing tendencies' meant that he could not be trusted." (Keogh 1983, 169) Guerra had in the past proven sufficiently articulate to defend himself against such red-baiting by Gutiérrez. Guerra also knew how to exploit the
corrupt reputation of Gutiérrez et. al. to undercut support for them among idealistic junior officers. In Guerra's absence, however, Gutiérrez was able to sway the officers, producing the deadlock between Guerra and García that was eventually broken by Mena Sandoval's compromise proposal that Gutiérrez, the weakest of the ANTEL Mafia officers, be elected to the junta. Finally, it was remarkable luck for Gutiérrez that Mena Sandoval, who had strong reformist credentials, chose to back Gutiérrez as a substitute for the unelectable García. This decision, made in exhaustion and without sufficient understanding on Mena's part of its consequences, could not have been controlled or in any way predicted by the U.S. Gutiérrez himself was extremely surprised and pleased by the outcome. When Mena informed him of the night's events, Gutiérrez' "smile reached from ear to ear." (Mena 1990, 147)

In sum, it is likely that the main impact of the U.S. upon this sequence of events was that the junior officers perceived, with good reason, that Gutiérrez and García had the backing of the U.S. embassy. In the wake of the collapse of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, the young officers were reluctant to be without U.S. support. It is at this point impossible to determine how the votes might have come out had Gutiérrez and García not been able to make credible claims of U.S. backing throughout their lobbying efforts from September onward. This may be one of
many cases in Central America history in which the capacity of the U.S. to influence events was amorphous but nonetheless powerful.

The Coup

The plan developed by the Coordinating Committee was a robust one which, unlike those of 1960 and 1972, did not depend upon capturing the president or the minister of defense. Instead, the junior officers were prepared to take control, or at least neutralize, all of the Army garrisons in the country, thereby presenting the Romero government with a situation of having virtually no forces to command. The planning had been highly decentralized: the liaisons between the Coordinating Committee and each military unit were responsible for finding sympathetic officers and developing a plan for taking control of the troops on the day of the coup. The Coordinating Committee was responsible for deciding on a date for the action.

On October 12, word of the juventud coup was leaked by an informant to the head of the Air Force. President Romero, who was in the U.S. for a medical check up, was promptly recalled. Air Force Captain Mejia Peña was arrested and a warrant put out for Mena Sandoval. Mena was confronted at the Maestranza repair shop by Gutiérrez, who tried to place him under arrest, telling him that "The government knows everything, they've already screwed us,
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and now I have to comply with the order to detain you and send you to the Treasury Police." Mena drew a sidearm, advised Gutiérrez and the two military policemen present not to attempt to arrest him, and fled the scene. (Mena 1990, 148) Unless he was willing to expose his own involvement, Gutiérrez had little choice but to follow the arrest orders, and the detention of Mena would not have harmed his own interests in the coup.

After his escape, Mena met with Barrera and other conspirators and they agreed amongst themselves that although they had lost the element of surprise and would need to postpone the coup for a day or so, that they would not let this setback scrub the coup. Mena and two security officers hid out in brothels for the two remaining days before the coup, receiving periodic updates from other conspirators who were not being sought. Apparently the government lacked full information on the membership of the conspiracy and were able to seek only a handful of officers known to the one informant. (Mena 1990, 147-50; Montgomery 1982, 10-13)

On the 13th of October, the Coordinating Committee sent out a series of orders and counter-orders to create confusion as to when the coup would take place. The definitive orders were written, in code, on banknotes and sent to the participating barracks. (Keogh 1983, 171) The coup took place on the morning of the 15th. It was timed
so that the captains would be on duty and armed, while their superiors were unarmed, eating breakfast. With the exception of one barracks in which the captains started too early, thus jeopardizing the movement elsewhere, things went smoothly most places and all of the major barracks in the country were under control by shortly before 8:00 A.M. (Keogh 1983, 171-3; Montgomery 192, 7)

In contrast to the 1972 coup attempt, neither the Air Force nor the National Guard proved willing to support the beleaguered president. Ironically, the commander of the Air Force had removed batteries from most of the aircraft on October 11 after he was notified of the impending coup by a mechanic. (Mena Sandoval 1990, 148) The remaining aircraft were disabled by golpistas, thus neutralizing the Air Force as a threat to the movement. (Majano 1989, 46-7) In the National Guard headquarters in San Salvador, the movement did not have enough support to arrest senior officers and take control. The seven or eight officers, mostly lieutenants, who supported the movement could do little more than step forward and attempt to convince their colleagues to support the coup. They were overruled and arrested. (Majano 1989, 48) Nonetheless, Guard commanders accurately sized up their military situation, realizing that without support from the Air Force, and with all of the barracks in the country siding with the golpistas, their situation was hopeless. Only the National Police
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attempted to resist the coup, and not for long, since they lacked heavy armament.\(^{23}\)

Things went much less smoothly at the level of leadership. According to René Guerra, cited in Keogh (1983) and Montgomery (1982), both Gutiérrez and Majano showed up late for their own coup. Gutiérrez arrived forty-five minutes late for his rendezvous with Guerra and Salazar Brenes. When he did get there, he was in civilian clothes and carrying a machine gun in his briefcase. He told Guerra that they should not proceed with the coup in the absence of Majano. (Keogh 1983, 171) Majano, who, according to Guerra, was to have met with Guerra, Gutiérrez and Salazar, went instead to the military academy. Majano claims he went there to prepare it as an alternate headquarters for the uprising should something go wrong at San Carlos, (Majano 1989, 50) but his delayed arrival at San Carlos was widely perceived among golpistas as excessive caution.\(^{24}\)

Guerra, suspicious of Gutiérrez, telephoned the First Brigade headquarters (San Carlos barracks) and learned that the coup was going according to plan. When Guerra, Gutiérrez and Salazar arrived at San Carlos, Gutiérrez

\(^{23}\) Interviews, military officers who participated in the coup.

\(^{24}\) Several officers who participated in the rebellion said that Majano's tardiness undercut his credibility among some officers who might otherwise have supported him more vigorously.
promptly changed into his military uniform and started giving orders. Guerra sent an armored limousine (one abandoned by Defense Minister Iraheta) and two trusted officers to fetch Majano, who arrived at 10:30. (Keogh 1983, 172)

The balance of the day was spent convincing Romero and his staff to leave the country. Romero, Defense Minister Federico Castillo Yanes, Sub-Secretary of Defense Eduardo Iraheta and four other colonels had gone to the National Guard, only to discover that "the National Guard, in a reversal of past behavior, was sitting it out." (Montgomery 1982, 13) While Romero went into hiding again, Iraheta proceeded to the Air Force base at Ilopango, where the Airborne Company, under the command of Major Domingo Monterrosa, was thought to be still willing to support of the president. The coup leaders issued an ultimatum to Romero to leave the country by 3:00 pm. (SS 5859, 15 October 1979) In an effort to avoid armed conflict, Hugo Guerra (René's brother and a member of the Civilian Coordinating Committee) contacted Ambassador Devine to ask him to use his good offices to encourage Romero to leave. Devine declined, saying he lacked the authority to do such a thing but would consult Washington. (Keogh 1983, 172) René Guerra and Alvaro Salazar Brenes then contacted the U.S. military attaché, Colonel Gerry Walker, to request the same from him. Devine instructed Walker to politely
refuse. (SS 5853, 5 October 1979) It appears that at no point did the U.S. communicate with Romero, but that Romero's military situation spoke for itself: he finally left the country at 5:00 pm on a Guatemalan Air Force plane.

The Balance of Power after the Coup

In the immediate aftermath of the coup it was unclear which of the two main factions in the conspiracy would dominate. Each had different advantages. Gutiérrez made good use of his position on the junta to unilaterally name his colleague Guillermo García as Minister of Defense before the junta was fully formed. García proceeded during the next several days to name allies from the tandas of 1956, 1957, and 1958 to all major troop commands in the country. He also named the highly competent but extremely hardline Colonel Nicolás Carranza to be Deputy Minister of Defense, a position from which he controlled the day to day operations of the military.25 There was a brief dispute with junior officers regarding the appointment of Carranza, but García and Gutiérrez merely pulled rank and the younger

25 Both former Ambassador Robert White and an anonymous former U.S. embassy official described Carranza as the operational head of the armed forces; García played more of a political role.
officers, who were not in a position to contact their colleagues, were forced to back down.\textsuperscript{26}

The more reformist military member of the junta, Col. Majano, did not challenge Gutiérrez' naming of García, nor did any of the junior officers in the movement. This single failure is illustrative of the central weaknesses of the reformist movement. Within the reformist camp, the junior officers were the most determined and the most radical, but had the least authority unless they could organize themselves to act collectively. More senior officers such as Majano or Salazar Brenes tended to have stronger commitments to "institutionality." As a result they were reluctant to foment division and conflict.

Colonel Majano was especially illustrative of this. As the only full colonel associated with the reform movement and as an officer who was widely respected even among relatively conservative middle-ranking officers (recall that he was elected unanimously by representatives of the conspiracy), Majano was in a uniquely powerful position. Yet the breadth of support for him stemmed in large part from his known commitment to the military institution, a personal commitment which seems to have inhibited him, at least in the immediate aftermath of the coup, from acting decisively against the "Equipo Molina" in

\textsuperscript{26} This according to a former juventud officer who was present in San Carlos barracks during the day of the coup and a few days afterwards.
ways that might disrupt military unity. Another factor that affected Majano's actions was a lack of awareness on his part of just how strong the support for him was within the officer corps. He had only been informed of the plot on the 7th of October, and had met only with the coordinating committee and the *enlaces* (liaisons) for the various barracks. On the day of the coup, he proposed that his selection to the junta be put up to a vote of the entire officer corps so that he could gauge support for himself and the reformist agenda. This proposal was resisted by those present, for reasons that Majano doesn't explain. (Majano 1989, 21, 69)

The more radical captains were less concerned about military unity and were in a combative mood in the immediate aftermath of the coup. They were in control of barracks -- and most of the combat troops -- all over the country. Having risked their lives to take control and arrest their superiors, they expected to hear a public proclamation consistent with their thinking. Most had expected more resistance by conservative elements than actually took place and had prepared themselves emotionally and militarily to fight.\(^7\) They were, as Majano puts it,

\(^7\) As it turned out, only the National Police resisted the coup, and only temporarily. Efforts by loyalists to Romero to rally the Airborne company of the Air Force failed and the National Police lacked the heavy weaponry to resist alone. The National Guard, usually the coup-breaker in the past, remained neutral.
"ready for anything." The coup had brought to the surface a deep hostility towards superiors on the part of some junior officers, particularly at the Third Brigade in San Miguel, where the captains briefly rebelled against the coup leadership when they learned that certain full colonels would remain on active duty. (Mena 1990, 150; Majano 1989, 49, 65-71)

Still the junior officers were at a disadvantage. They might have been willing, in principle, to rebel over an issue such as Gutiérrez' unilateral selection of García as Defense Minister, but to do so they would have had to act collectively. In specific situations in which junior officers attempted to challenge their superiors, they were overruled. Their strength lay in their control of troops in barracks around the country, but this power was highly dispersed. To actively resist policy decisions by Gutiérrez or his appointees, they had to communicate with one another and forge a commitment to action, which proved difficult, both in the immediate aftermath of the coup and later.

The diffuse power of the junior officers was nonetheless sufficient to ensure that the makeup of the rest of the new government, and its first public pronouncements, were in line with their reformist agenda. Aside from Majano and Gutiérrez, the membership of the junta was not determined until after the coup. The rector of the Jesuit-
run University of Central America (UCA), Román Mayorga Quiros, was elected by a majority of movement representa-
tives, but he refused to consent to serving until he was sure that at least one of the junta members would represent the Foro Popular, that the military would be purged of "murderers and torturers," and that a serious program of reforms was set in motion to "de-oligarchize" Salvadoran society. On the day of the coup, Gutiérrez attempted to propose a rightist civilian attorney, Francisco Roberto Lima, as a junta member, and also argued in favor of issuing a more conservative proclamation. He was overruled on both of these points: the proclamation issued was one drafted primarily by René Guerra in consultation with scholars at the UCA (see translation in Appendix, p. 566), and the Popular Forum gained a seat on the junta, for which they selected Social Democrat Guillermo Ungo. The fifth member of the junta, Engineer Mario Andino, was selected at the last minute to represent the private sector.

A cabinet was formed that drew primarily upon the political parties included in the Foro Popular and upon a network of reform-minded technocrats known to UCA rector

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28 This according to a former government official who was present during these discussions.

29 Ungo led the National Revolutionary Movement, affiliated with the Socialist International. He had been the successful Vice-Presidential candidate of the UNO coalition in 1972.
Mayorga. The result was a government that included many highly educated, talented, and socially concerned individuals. It was also a cabinet that was, from the point of view of many conservative and centrist officers in the military, frighteningly left-wing.\textsuperscript{30} Five cabinet-level posts went to the Christian Democrats, five to the National Democratic Union (UDN -- legal front for the Communist Party), and four to the social-democratic National Revolutionary Movement (MNR). The Minister of Planning, Alberto Hart Déneke and his Sub-Secretary, Mauricio Silva Argüello, were technocrats affiliated with the UCA. The Minister of Agriculture, Enrique Alvarez Cordova, was loosely affiliated with the PCN, but had been the director of the National Institute of Agrarian Transformation under the Molina government. Progressive technocrats affiliated with the UCA occupied many sub-cabinet positions and played a key role in drafting reform legislation. (Castro Moran 1989, 278) The power of the leftist party members and reformist technocrats was offset by the fact that figures associated with the private sector controlled three important ministries: Justice, Economy and Treasury.

Gutiérrez' inability to engineer a conservative post-coup government reflects the limits of his power versus the

\textsuperscript{30} This assessment was shared by several of the officers I interviewed, including individuals who were captains and majors at the time of the coup and supported the idea of reforms, if not the specific civilians chosen to implement them.
reformist movement. If he had obstructed the selection of a reformist junta, cabinet, and/or proclamation, it is very likely that the junior officers would have organized a second rebellion. The junior officers were not very sophisticated in analyzing the politics of their superiors and had been taken in, to some extent, by reformist talk by García and Gutiérrez. The selection of García therefore slipped by them; however, they were very alert to the tone makeup of the junta and the content of the proclamation, and were not in the mood for "tepid proposals." (Majano 1989, 65)

The lines of division soon became clear, even to the young officers. Two days after the coup, officers of the

31 Mena Sandoval provides an illustration of the intra-military political naivete of some of the junior officers. He inexplicably paid a visit along with two other highly committed reformist captains to retired General José Alberto "Chele" Medrano. Medrano had been head of the National Guard up until 1971, had been instrumental in developing ORDEN, and was seen as an extremely hardline officer. In recounting this episode, Mena comments that

Now I wouldn't know how to explain exactly why we went to see him, given that he was known as a great assassin, a great anti-communist, and had evident relations with the CIA. He had personally ordered my capture several times when I was on hunger strike trying to regain entrance into the military academy.

Medrano, on the other hand, had no difficulty in sizing up his visitors: after glasses of whiskey, he launched into a discussion of how the root of the present problems of the country were social injustice and endorsed the idea of selecting UCA rector Román Mayorga to the junta. (Mena Sandoval 1990, 138)
Juventud current met at the San Carlos barracks in San Salvador to discuss the reforms proposed in the Proclama. They argued that it should be implemented quickly, while García and Carranza said that the reforms should be delayed until after a restructuring of the armed forces.

By the end of the first week then, the Young Military recognized that a new division existed within the armed forces. ...it was a division between the High Command (with Gutiérrez) on one side and the bulk of the officer corps (with Majano) on the other. (Montgomery 1982, 17)

Aside from the ability to name senior command personnel, the Equipo officers appear to have been forced to accept an agenda shaped by the junior officers and oriented toward a decisive "break with the past." On October 17, Col. Majano ordered the release of 73 striking workers who had been arrested on the day following the coup. On the 18th, the Revolutionary Governing Junta (JRG) jointly ordered the release of all political prisoners detained before the coup. It also announced that it would be a temporary government with elections scheduled for no later than February 1982, a position that cannot have warmed the heart of Gutiérrez and García, who would clearly have preferred to hold power for an extended period.

One of the first actions taken by the junta, prior to the withdrawal of the junior officers from the scene, was to dismantle ANSESAL and the intelligence units within the security forces. According to Salvadoran Political
Scientist Rafael Guidos Véjar, Majano was instrumental in this decision, and was "smart to do it. He recognized that these institutions were the power base of the right within the armed forces. He chopped out the right's apparatus within the armed forces." On the 26th of October, Majano announced that the National Police, the Treasury Police, and the National Guard (which comprised the main institutional base of the hardline faction) would be reorganized, pending a process in which officials would be "judged and their real involvement in torture and corruption investigated." This phrasing implied that investigation would not be confined to officials of the Romero administration. On the same date, the JRG jointly issued Decree No. 9 which established a Special Investigative Commission to look into the thorny question of political prisoners and the "disappeared." The decree was presented at the press conferences by the more conservative Col. Gutiérrez, a fact that probably lent it greater weight with the security forces, signaling them that they could no longer act with impunity. This was followed on the 6th of November by Decree 12 which disbanded ORDEN and made any action done in its name illegal. (Baloyra 1982, 90-1)

Pressures from the junta on human rights grounds continued into November, and Gutiérrez et. al. appear to

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32 Interview, Mexico City, August 1989. Guidos is a member of the Latin American Social Science Faculty (FLACSO) in Mexico.
have felt compelled to play along, although in practice the military high command threw as many road blocks in the way of investigations as they could. On the 10th of November, an ORDEN leader was convicted by a civilian court for the killing of a teacher. On November 14, 60 National Guardsmen (not officers) were dismissed from the service for "various violations." (FBIS November 14, 1979) On the 19th, the junta appointed an additional commission to investigate secret burial sites. (FBIS November 21, 1979) On the 28th, the special investigative commission on called for the trial of ex-presidents Molina, Romero, and the former directors of the National Police, the National Guard, and the Treasury Police under the past two administrations. The commission claimed to have concrete evidence linking these commanders to 50 deaths. (FBIS November 28, 1979) This was followed by an order from the junta for a pretrial hearing and to the Attorney General to gather additional evidence on the former security forces chiefs. (FBIS December 5, 1979)

The hardline faction felt extremely threatened by all of these measures. Shortly after the coup, Héctor Regalado, who had been running the "Boy Scouts" death squad in Usulutan, went into hiding, expecting that the reformist

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33 This according to a former senior member of the post-coup government who must remain anonymous, who described some of the means of obstruction in detail, suggesting that this is not an empty charge.
military would be coming for him. Col. Roberto Santibañez, who headed ANSESAL under Romero, spent the two days prior to the coup destroying files that could implicate him or his associates in human rights violations. After the coup, Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, who had worked for a time in ANSESAL, was sent by either García or Carranza to salvage the ANSESAL files. He spent three to four days there after the coup, then turned the files over to the Ministry of Defense before going into hiding. Wearing dirty coveralls, a Caterpillar hat, and five days worth of beard, he slipped into Guatemala "so that if anything came up about human rights violations, he would be out of the country and they wouldn't try to pursue anything legal with him." He resigned from the military and returned to El Salvador clandestinely, where he worked on intelligence files, "on assignment" from someone in the Ministry of Defense, most likely Nicolás Carranza. The fact that D'Aubuisson's return was sponsored by someone in the high command, but that he had to come back secretly, is illustrative of the tension between the high command and reformist currents. It is also an early sign of the alliance of convenience formed between high command

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35 Interview with a retired colonel affiliated with military intelligence who knew D'Aubuisson personally and worked closely with him.
officials and hardliners against the reformist junior
officers and their civilian allies in government.

The New High Command

"It's hard to think of García as a soldier,
really. He was more of a 'military politician.'
He was practiced in how to deal with civilians,
civilian politicians. -- Former Ambassador
Robert White.

"García was for García." -- Salvadoran businessman.

"Garcia used violence provocatively, yet was also
a reformist. Hitler was a great reformist, as
was Mussolini. That doesn't mean that they
weren't repressive. There is a tendency to see
these as contradictory. That is incorrect." --
Former Salvadoran Government Official.

The "Equipo Molina" which formed the high command
after the coup was made up of colonels from the tandas of
1956, 1957, and 1958. Their primary grievances with
respect to Romero were generational and related to his
excessively close ties to the oligarchy. These officers,
who included Jaime Abdul Gutiérrez, José Guillermo García,
and Nicolás Carranza, had held prime positions under the
Molina administration. They had jointly controlled the
national telephone company, ANTEL, and had been able to use
these posts to engage in false invoicing and misallocation
of funds on the order of between $16 and $18 million.
Bonner (1984, 152) quotes a U.S. diplomat as commenting
that "You're entitled to your piece of the plunder, but not
to that magnitude." The gravy train came to a halt with
the election of Romero, which not only cost Guillermo
García the presidency, but resulted in García and his associates being removed from their ANTEL positions and sent to low status troop commands or, in Abdul Gutiérrez' case, to the inglorious position of running a repair shop.  

Romero attempted to placate and neutralize this group by putting one of their least "presidentiable" (and therefore least threatening) members, Rafael Flores Lima, into the position of Secretary to the Presidency. Flores Lima became "practically his right hand man." This move was designed to make the "Equipo Molina" members think that Flores Lima was Romero's heir apparent and thereby provide them with disincentive to carry out a coup. The effectiveness of this gambit was undercut by the numerous rumors to the effect that Romero planned to choose a civilian successor. Under these circumstances, if the Equipo members hoped to install one of their own in the presidency, their only prospect was to overthrow Romero.

Aside from their desire to oust Romero, the actual political agenda of the Molina team was ambiguous from the start. These officers' status as a group appears to have been defined primarily by generational, as opposed to

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36 The other prominent member of this group, Col. Vides Casanova, had been head of INSAFI, the state-run industrial promotion board. To my knowledge no specific information has come to light implicating Vides in substantial corruption.

37 Interview, Adolfo Majano. Also U.S. Embassy Cable SS 5202, 11 September, 1979.
ideological, cohesion. Although they had been closely associated with Molina, they had all managed to keep clear of making any public commitment to his reformist program. Among the top six officers was a wide range of policy orientations. Col. Gutiérrez came to be associated with military-led reformism, while Col. Carranza was instrumental in organizing death squads and facilitating the far-right's campaign of terror and propaganda against reformism. Col. Eugenio Vides Casanova headed the notorious National Guard during the extremely violent period from October 1979 through mid-1983 and took extremely hardline positions on a number of occasions, yet later came to be seen as a moderating influence as Defense Minister during the mid- to late-1980s. During 1980 and later, the "Equipo" proved as a group to be open to both major economic reforms and massive use of state violence.

A strong consensus emerged in my interviews that the officers within this group were committed to two things: their own power and the power of the military as an institution. Informants ranging from former U.S. intelligence officials to members of the Salvadoran left labeled them "institutionalists," by which they meant that these officers sought to maximize the institutional integrity and power of the military. Rubén Zamora summarized this view during an interview:

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38 Interview, retired Salvadoran military colonel.
The civilians [in the government] in general didn't understand the problem of the military: rather than reformism versus conservativism, reaction versus progressiveness, the military worried mainly about its institutional survival. García represented institutionality. If institutional survival required reforms, he would do them. To maintain institutionality, if necessary to lead reforms to shake off all these leftists that were seen to be a serious threat to the institution, they would do it. I don't tend to judge these people on a continuum progressive/-reactionary. Take a person like Vides Casanova: what is Vides? A reactionary, a progressive? He is a soldier who has to preserve his institution. He'll do what he has to. So you can't classify him politically very well. For this reason, civilian/military relations aren't well understood, because we don't speak the same language. The fundamental point of their agenda is preserve the institution. 39

In addition to tolerating reforms, they were willing to include civilians in government if necessary to ensure U.S. backing and international legitimacy, but they only wanted civilians who effectively subordinated themselves to military authority. At the same time, they tolerated coup plotting and paramilitary activities by the extreme right as long as these did not directly threaten the high command's position.

The U.S. embassy in San Salvador during this period viewed the post-coup high command officers as more moderate

39 Interview, Rubén Zamora, San Salvador, October 1989. Zamora is President of the Popular Social Christian Movement (MPSC) and a leading figure in the Democratic Convergence electoral coalition. In the 1970s he was an important leader in the left wing of the PDC.
than Romero. This claim of moderation is based upon the high command's openness to reforms, yet these officers appear to have been prepared to use far greater violence than was Romero. During a confrontation with civilian junta members in late December, 1979, for example, Col. Vides Casanova is quoted as saying that the military was prepared to kill 200,000 if necessary to defeat the opposition. (Keogh 1983, 183) Other observers, particularly critics of U.S. policy in El Salvador, have tended to view the Equipo Molina officers as purely a continuation of Romero's government, a view that isn't really correct either, given their willingness to reform and their greater independence from the country's civilian right.

The confusion regarding how to classify the Equipo Molina officers stems from the tendency of many observers to confound two different policy dimensions: socio-economic reform and repressive violence. The Equipo Molina officers differed from Romero in that they were more willing to break with civilian elites and promote reforms, when circumstances required. Their situation differed from Romero's in that the strength of their political position within the state was augmented rather than being undermined by intensified violence. Because of his exposure to international criticism, Romero's political security was

40 Interview, former U.S. embassy official who followed political and military affairs.
threatened when state violence increased noticeably. The 
Equipo Molina officers, after the coup, were shielded from 
effective international human rights pressures by the joint 
civil-military juntas. They were also free of the chal- 
lenge from frustrated, high-ranking subordinates that had 
forced Romero to restrain hardline paramilitary organiza-
tion. The greatest threat to the Equipo Molina came 
instead from the junior officer ranks within the regular 
Army. In general terms, the greater the intensity of state 
vio lence, the stronger the far-right presence within the 
barracks, and the broader the participation of military 
institutions in state violence, the weaker the reformist 
Juventud movement would become. Thus, whereas the internal 
politics of the military had tended to make Romero more 
cautious than his reputation and affiliations with the 
oligarchy might have suggested, the internal political 
pressures on the Equipo Molina officers following the coup 
tended to push them towards ordering or at least permitting 
greater state violence, despite their history of affilia-
tion with the more moderate Molina regime and their 
relative distance from the civilian oligarchy.

While there has been some confusion about the policy 
agenda of the Equipo Molina, most observers acknowledge 
that they were a particularly powerful leadership group. 
During several years as administrators at the military 
academy, they had cultivated recognition and support among
several promotions from the academy, partially offsetting
the distaste with which they were viewed by the most
reformist of the junior officers.\footnote{Interview, former senior government official with
close ties to these officers. My informant may have a bias
towards overstating the esteem in which the Equipo Molina
were held within the military, but Majano (interview,
Roslyn New York, March 1990), who should have no such bias,
corroborates the general view that they were widely
recognized within the military as a key leadership group.}
According to Adolfo Majano, García and Vides Casanova had taken special care of
members of the tanda of 1966, the so-called "tandona" (the
large class), most of whom were either captains or majors
at the time of the coup. García and Vides had intervened
repeatedly on behalf of individual cadets and officers from
this group who had failed to perform or had been involved
in malfeasance. The unusually large number of successful
graduates in the class of 1966 was partly attributable to
this protection.\footnote{Interview, Adolfo Majano. Mena Sandoval confirms
that the Tandona members were frequently sheltered from
disciplinary action. See his chapter 4.} The large size of the class, in turn,
gave the tandona disproportionate clout, since its members
would simultaneously control an unusually large number of
commands. In return, they provided political backing for
the Equipo Molina officers, though they also appear to have
had close ties with the civilian far-right.
Chapter Six

COPEFA

One of the key struggles between the high command and the Juventud movement was over a representative institution set up by the junior officers to keep up pressure on behalf of their reformist agenda. The organization, known as the Permanent Council of the Armed Forces (COPEFA), was set up on November 4, 1979. (NSA 1989a, 46) The idea for COPEFA had been developed prior to the coup, in part on the advice of Román Mayorga. (Mena 1990, 139) By convening COPEFA, the junior officers hoped to regain an ability to push through reforms, despite the already apparent opposition of the high command. The junior officers intended that COPEFA, which included representatives from all of the military units in the country, would function as a review board which could veto actions by the high command that were inconsistent with the Proclama of October 15, and apply pressure for the implementation of major reforms called for in the Proclama. (See translation in Appendix, p. 566) (Castro Moran 1989, 273) There were 26 representatives, one from each of the 13 barracks and one from each of the 13 other sub-agencies within the military, and each representative had an alternate.43 This structure gave the Army disproportionate representation within COPEFA. At this point the security forces, between them, numbered 5,500 as compared with 8,000 regular Army, Navy, and Air

43 Interview, U.S. military advisor based in El Salvador.
Force troops, yet within COPEFA they had only four representatives versus 22 for the conventional services. (McClintock 1985a, 214-5)

The idea of a representative counterweight to the high command and the security forces was never fully successful: COPEFA's power ultimately rested on the implicit threat of rebellion in the event that the high command acted against the junior officers' wishes. COPEFA was a more radical version of the Honduran Superior Defense Council, which is made up of the 25 Lt. Colonels who command the country's garrisons and is the highest authority within the Honduran military. COPEFA was never fully integrated into the Salvadoran military decision-making process, however. At best it served as a means for the junior officers to pressure their superiors. COPEFA appears to have intervened successfully only once, on behalf of Decree 43, which froze land holdings in preparation for agrarian reform. (See below.)

Weak as it was, COPEFA was seen by many senior officers as extremely threatening, and they conducted an energetic campaign to neutralize it. Their principal concern was that COPEFA might become a prosecutorial agency in which junior officers tried and punished their super-

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44 Interview, journalist Horacio Castellanos, Mexico, August 1989. Castellanos is an expert on the Salvadoran military.
Chapter Six

ies. Given the announced intentions of many of the captains to shoot or imprison officers guilty of corruption or abuses, this was not an unrealistic concern. To prevent COPEFA from meeting, the high command used their perogatives to keep the more radical junior officers who were COPEFA members out in the field on operations at times when COPEFA was to meet. This meant that the more troublesome representatives to COPEFA were replaced by their more moderate alternates. On December 18, the high command met with COPEFA members at the military academy with many of the more reformist officers absent. The senior officers ordered the restructuring of COPEFA and replacement of elected representatives with members loyal to the high command. The COPEFA members present complied, swayed by arguments from senior officers that COPEFA, as originally formulated, posed a threat to the hierarchical integrity of the armed forces. (ECA 1979, 34:1088-89) After this meeting, Col. García told a foreign diplomat:

45 Confidential interview, active duty military officer who participated in the October coup and supported the juventud agenda. This officer appears considers this concern about COPEFA to be a valid one.

46 Confidential interview, former government official who obtained his information from reformist junior officers who claimed that García was obstructing the ability of COPEFA to meet.

47 Interview, former U.S. embassy official.

48 Interview with a retired military officer who was present at these discussions.
We have managed to control COPEFA and convert it into an consultative, administrative organ, so that it will no longer be attacking my orders as Minister of Defense. In doing this, I have guaranteed protection for officers of the National Police, the Treasury Police, and the National Guard -- no one is going to judge them. We did this by having an assembly to which Colonel Majano was intentionally not invited. It is we who need to determine this situation, not the government. (Castro Moran 1989, 290)

Violence After the Coup

There was a strong current of opinion among informants from a variety of backgrounds that much of the violence carried out by the security forces was not centrally controlled in the sense of orders being given by the high command for the violent operations carried out, even such conspicuous actions as firing on demonstrators. Looseness of command hierarchy pervades the Salvadoran military. In the words of journalist Shirley Christian, the Defense Minister "presides" rather than "directing." His authority depends upon the willingness of the fourteen departmental and three security force commanders to obey. Even the commanders of the security forces have weak controls over their troops, since local National Guard or Treasury Police garrisons are most directly responsible to their departmental commander, who is usually the ranking regular Army officer in the area. (Christian 1986) Personal accounts of junior officers, such as that of Mena Sandoval (1990), show that junior officers frequently get away with acts of
insubordination. Whether one is punished or not seems to depend more upon the individual officer's political connections and ability to think quickly than on the formal norms of the institution. As a result of this diffuse command structure, many actions, whether of violence or clemency, are decided upon at a local level by officers or enlisted men who are weighing the pros and cons of a given decision.49

In the post-coup environment, as before, security forces units at the local level were subject to a variety of influences in making their decisions about violence. On one hand, they were under pressure from local landowners and businessmen to put a stop to growing labor activism. Many had long-established mercenary relationships with local capital.50 Local commanders talked among themselves about how to deal with the popular opposition, competing with one another to some extent to prove themselves.51 These same officers also had to consider the risks associated with capturing, torturing, and killing civilians.

49 According to a former National Guard corporal I interviewed, "Higher officers never knew what was going on at lower levels. An officer would order an investigation, but the soldiers might well just go get drunk, and who would know"?

50 The same former National Guard corporal told me, "Before the agrarian reform, we were invited to fincas. They would give us food and a place to sleep, and at the end of the week, money."

Under Romero, orders were given at times to cease and desist, evident in the occasional periods of relative restraint in mid-1977 and early 1979. Following the coup in October 1979, local-level security force officials could not have been unaware of the fact that junior Army officers had at least temporarily taken control of the country and were talking about executions and prison sentences for abusers of human rights. The government that had been installed was pursuing this line. Although many people in the security forces knew and trusted most of the new high command, there were serious doubts about Majano, Gutiérrez was virtually unknown, and the chance that the junior officers, through COPEFA, might push forward with prosecutions, had to be taken seriously. The dynamics of violence by the security forces following the coup can therefore be thought of as the product of competing influences, including the messages being sent through the command hierarchy, political events within the military (such as the selection of the new high command or the formation of COPEFA), and pressures, money, and persuasion brought to bear by the private sector.

The struggle for power within the military following the coup is reflected by the dynamics of state violence. The morning after the coup, a conflict developed between Guerra and Majano, on one side, and Gutiérrez and García on
Figure 6.1: State Violence during 1979
the other, regarding how the military should respond to attempted uprisings by the ERP in Mejicanos and Cuscatancingo. García wanted to send troops; Guerra and Majano opposed this as too provocative. Majano and Guerra managed to prevent García from using Army troops from the First Brigade (Keogh 1983, 173) but García sent security forces troops to suppress the rebellions. Hardline majors led the assaults, including Natividad Jesús Cáceres, Sigifredo Ochoa, and Roberto D'Aubuisson. At least 100 people were killed, many of them civilians. (NSA 1989a, 42)

The suppression of the uprisings was part of a pattern of increased violence by state agencies -- principally the security forces -- following the coup. Table 6.1 shows the marked increase in violence in October, most of which, according to verbal and written accounts of the period, occurred following the coup on the fifteenth. There were a number of very bloody attacks by security forces on demonstrators, as well as a general increase in the amount of death squad-type activity throughout the country -- targeted assassinations, at night, during a state of siege.54

52 Interview, former reformist military officer.

53 Interview, former senior government official.

54 Because of delays in reporting, some of the violence recorded for November probably occurred in the second half of October, so that the actual intensity of repression following the coup may have been greater than the October figures would suggest.
Table 6.1

Killing by the State Before and after the Coup

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It seems paradoxical that violence would increase so abruptly when the senior leaders of the hardline faction had been relieved of their commands, when ORDEN was slated for disolution, and when ANSESAL had been effectively disbanded. Most observers agree that the pro-oligarchic elements of the military were effectively decapitated following the coup, which might lead one to expect a reduction in violence. Two factors were mentioned by informants as contributing to greater violence: intense fear on the part of middle and lower-ranking officers in the security forces, and a breakdown in the chain of command that meant that units were operating independently at the local level. A reporter for the Spanish news service ACAN-EFE commented that "it is believed that some sectors of the security forces have contributed to the climate of instability by acting against popular
demonstrations without orders from their superiors." (FBIS November 5, 1979)

According to several of my confidential informants, there was a general sense within the security forces and intelligence units that some of the best senior officers in the military had been dismissed at the most dangerous possible time. This fear coincided with the fact that in the chaos of the post-coup period there was actually less control over hardline elements at the middle ranks and downward than there had been under Romero. Roughly 50 colonels were dismissed from the service, meaning that all of the commands in the country were simultaneously replaced, creating chaos and communications breakdowns throughout the institution. Lower ranking officers in the security forces, who generally retained their positions, were effectively without supervision. It appears that they continued with the same activities they had been performing under Romero, but without the constraints that had sometimes been imposed upon them through the chain of command during Romero's administration.

Salvadoran scholar Rafael Guidos Véjar provides a somewhat stylized and potentially complementary explanation: following the decapitation of the right within the military, middle-ranking officers of hardline orientation sought to distinguish themselves with violence. By carrying out conspicuous acts of violence, they could
create respect and notoriety, effectively building political space for themselves within the institution. Violence was, in effect, a means for creating a new, coherent group on the right, built around violent activity. The bloodbath that followed the coup was, in other words, the result of "a group constituting itself." Guidos argues that the use of violence to build individual and group political power within the military, what he calls a "guerra de caciques" or "guerra de caudillos," explains much of the state violence that took place during the first two years of the war, but was particularly significant in the immediate aftermath of the coup.\(^5\)

The increased violence following the coup clearly created problems for the new junta, whether it was deliberately intended to or not. In repeated press conferences, the junta members were questioned about the seeming inconsistency of their claims to be making a fresh start and the extremely high levels of violence, particularly against unarmed demonstrators. Majano, who was hoping to remain in power long enough to institute a major restructuring and professionalization of the military, could only offer such lame but true answers as "some of the forces still need to adjust to the new spirit." (FBIS 10-26-79)

The control over the security forces lost in the immediate post-coup period was partially recovered during

\(^5\) Interview, August 11, 1989, Mexico City.
November by the formation of COPEFA, the possibility that it would play a prosecutorial role, the investigations into disappearances and clandestine cemeteries, the outlawing of ORDEN, and the conviction of an ORDEN leader for murder. While security forces officers may have had personal incentives to use violence to carve out political space for themselves, as GUIDOS VÉJAR suggests, they also had to worry about what legal consequences they might later face. In the chaos of the first two weeks after the coup, the greater incentives lay with carrying out repression. Once the junta began its investigations and the young military formed COPEFA, however, the apparent risks associated with carrying out violence increased.

The pressures and investigations appear to have had some concrete effect during the month of November, at least in urban areas where killings could be promptly documented and acted upon. In interviews, Rubén Zamora and other informants claimed that there was a reduction in state violence during the month. The "Chronicle of the Month" in ECA likewise indicates that in the first week of November "began a period of greater tranquility, during which violent repression practically disappeared, allowing us a reasonably tranquil month." (ECA 1979, 34: 1088) What this meant was that there were no cases in which government forces fired upon demonstrators as they had in previous months. Human rights statistics from the Social Communica-
tion Secretariate of the Archdiocese of San Salvador indicate that violence fell from a rate of 159 in October to only ten in November. (See Table 6.1) Professor Tommie Sue Montgomery, who was in San Salvador at the time, believes that a figure of ten is too low for the country as a whole, though she confirms that there was clearly much less violence in November than in the preceding and following months, at least in the vicinity of the capital.56

Some ambiguity about the improvements in November stems from the fact that two other human rights monitors, Socorro Juridico (1984) and the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador (CDHES) (UCA 1981), both report a figure of 363 for November. The higher figures from Socorro and CDHES may in part reflect superior ability to gather information from rural areas, through their connections with the popular organizations. However, because these figures indicate the number of killings reported, not necessarily occurring, during the indicated month, the high figures for November may in part reflect killings that actually took place during the extremely violent second half of October. (UCA 1981) (See Table 6.1)

Unless one is willing to completely discount the Socorro Juridico and CDHES data for November, however, it would appear that at least some rural death squad killings

56 Personal communication, June 1991.
continued during November. There is little reason to doubt this. Army units in which the reformist movement had greater influence mostly kept to their barracks during this period and would have had little ability, at the local level, to intervene against death squad killings. Even if junior Army officers were to get wind of killings, they were not in a position, acting individually, to apply effective pressures against the high command to call a halt to it. Their main remedy was to contact COPEFA or perhaps communicate with allies at the First Brigade in San Salvador, which had close ties to Majano. Majano is reported to have sidestepped the chain of command and personally travelled about the country, ordering the release of prisoners and pressuring security forces units to cease and desist.\footnote{Interview, Salvadoran military officer formerly associated with the reformist current. He was critical of Majano's approach, though not of his intentions.} This one-man-show way of operating cannot have been highly effective on a national scale. The hardline alliance showed some signs of bucking the reformist program: on the 13th of November, an ORDEN spokesman thumbed his nose at the new restrictions and announced that ORDEN would go into clandestinity to continue the fight against communism. (FBIS Nov. 14, 1979)
Civil-Military Relations

Relations between the high command and civilians in the post-coup government were tense to put it mildly. The two most divisive issues were socio-economic reforms and human rights. For the junta, successful implementation of major reforms and the cessation of repression were the keys to their political survival. Without these, there was no reason to expect that the intense political crisis that had triggered the coup in the first place would be resolved. The high command, for its part, was seriously threatened by the junior officers and their pro-civilian, anti-corruption agenda. As a result, the "Equipo Molina" officers had closed ranks with the pro-oligarchy, hardline sectors of the military. The high command could therefore not afford to permit reforms and restrict the repressive violence that both the private sector right and the hardline military saw as necessary.

It took most of the month of November for the new government to formulate its plans, then in December open confrontation between government and senior military officers began. The high command attempted to use guile and verbal bluster to impede the reforms: when this was not entirely successful, they then either ordered or permitted a significant increase in state violence which challenged the authority of the civilians in government and created a growing rift between them and their potential supporters.
Several of the active-duty officers that I interviewed charged that the first junta intentionally dragged its feet in the implementation of reforms in order to create a revolutionary situation. Implicit in this view is an accusation that the politicians from the UDN, MNR, and PDC were in league with the radical left or were in fact controlled by them. Other officers were more charitable, saying instead that the first junta had simply been too diverse in its membership to function effectively as a group. Several officers, and a former U.S. embassy official, also accused the first junta of seeking to "decapitate" the military by combining popular pressure and manipulation of the junior officers.

Former civilian members of the government interviewed for this study vehemently denied any deliberate foot-dragging and also claimed that they had no intention of "decapitating" the military. They agree, however, that they had been disunified and that this had slowed the preparation of reform legislation. Regarding the military, their main mistake was to have been to willing to accept

58 In the case of the former U.S. embassy official, this was part of an overall assessment that members of the first post-coup government, including the junta (other than Minister of Education Salvador Samayoa, who was a member of the FPL) were clandestine members of the radical left. I know of no evidence to support this charge, and the intense conflict between the first JRG and the popular movements would seem to suggest the contrary. The obvious and admitted naiveté of most members of the first post-coup cabinet regarding the military makes charges of a scheme on their part to "decapitate" the officer corps implausible.
and even believe the high command. Members of the UDN, for example, thought that Defense Minister García was a "cultured soldier" because he quoted from Socrates and Plato in his public discourse. They therefore assumed that he would be progressive and supportive of a reform agenda. This kind of naivete enabled the high command to hoodwink the civilian members of government. For example, when the cabinet had completed a draft of what was to become Decree 43 (freezing land holdings in preparation for agrarian reform), they presented it to the junta. Andino and Gutiérrez were opposed to it, and Majano was unsure whether there was enough political support to move ahead quickly. He and Gutiérrez said they would need to clear the proposal with the military. They gave it to García, who said he would distribute the draft to the barracks, then promptly "stuffed it in his desk." The wait for a response from García delayed the law by weeks, which put the JRG in increasing trouble with the popular organizations, to whom they had promised a major reform initiative.

It is important to note that although the junior officers had been decisive in ensuring that reformist civilians such as Mayorga, Ungo, and much of the cabinet were able to take office, this government, once in place,

60 Interview, Rubén Zamora, San Salvador, October 1989.
found itself interacting almost exclusively with senior officers. The junior officers went back to their regular posts, leaving behind a high command, which, as already discussed, was made up of Equipo Molina officers with a markedly different agenda from the junior officers. On around the twentieth of October, Defense Minister García called a meeting to introduce junta members to the new key military commanders. According to Bonner (1984, 159)

when the civilians arrived, they were stunned and disappointed to discover that the twenty-five to thirty officers present were not the young officers who had planned and executed the coup but senior officers who had been placed in command positions by García.

The combination of reformist civilians and a conservative high command was a sure formula for animosity. Zamora, as Minister of the Presidency, was a key point of contact between the civilian government and the high command; he describes civil/military relations during this period as "very stormy." The key issues were expeditious implementation of reforms and human rights. Another cabinet official described several meetings held in December of 1979 at which Agriculture and Planning ministry officials presented plans for the land, banking, and commercial reforms to the Junta and cabinet for discussion and feedback. Defense Minister García sat silently through the meetings, then asked for time to speak near the end, delivering the following message: "all of the shit that you
have been discussing is not going to happen. We are not going to permit it."

In fact, part of the reform was carried out. Decree 43, issued on December 7, froze all major land transactions retroactively to October 15, thereby preventing large land owners from breaking up their holdings and distributing them among trusted relatives and friends. This was, of course, a preliminary step in the implementation of a major land reform, a fact not lost on the country's private sector. Minister of Agriculture Enrique Alvarez went on national television December 11 to outline the sort of land reform planned. (ECA 1979, 34: 1116-8) Seven days later, the junta approved Decree 75, nationalized coffee and sugar exports and established government agencies to handle these functions in the future. (Baloyra 1982, 91; ECA 1979, 34: 1090)

According to an anonymous informant who held a senior position in the post-coup government, COPEFA played a crucial role in gaining high command approval of Decree 43. When it became clear that Garcia was stalling, civilian junta members and cabinet contacted representatives of COPEFA and insisted that they act to see that the reform was implemented. My informant did not know exactly what action COPEFA took, but he believed, on the basis of the timing of their request to COPEFA and a favorable response from the high command, that the junior officers had been
decisive. It was to prove to be the first and last time that COPEFA successfully played its intended role.

The November Truce: The Junta gets its Chance

The success of the COPEFA intervention was gratefully received by the reformist members of the junta and cabinet, who by early December were desperate to carry out some kind of significant reform legislation. At the beginning of November, the junta had negotiated a 30 day truce with the BPR in which the popular organization agreed to halt all street actions and provide the government with a chance to prove itself. The government realized that if they failed to carry out some significant initiatives they would be confronted by massive protests by the popular left.

The initial reaction of the left to the coup and to the first JRG had been one of skepticism and distrust. While the BPR and the FAPU held off action for a few days to assess the situation, the ERP and its popular wing, the LP-28, attempted to trigger an insurrection in Mejicanos, Cuscatancingo, and in San Marcos. (ECA 34: 1006) Security forces, ordered into action by Defense Minister García over the objections of Colonels Majano and Guerra, crushed these rebellions, killing at least 100 persons. After the defeat of their adventures, ERP leader Joaquin Villalobos granted the new government a partial truce, warning, however, that Salvadoran history "is full of military coups led by people
who at first adopt the platform of the people before allowing things to go back to the way they have always been." (NSA 1989a, 42)

On October 25, the BPR took over the Labor and Economy Ministries, taking some 300 people hostage, including the ministers of Labor, Economy, and Planning. Among their 100 demands included the release of political prisoners and a series of socio-economic conditions that would have been impossible for any government to meet, such as the provision, within 15 days, of potable water supply to all the colonias of San Salvador. According to Rubén Zamora, who carried out the negotiations at the time, the BPR leadership was aware that their specific demands were beyond the pale: the goal was to make clear to the new government that the BPR expected prompt, dramatic action. Zamora provided the following account of the negotiations in an interview:

Juan Chacon [who represented the BPR] said "I don't care what you do, we'll give you thirty days to do this." I insisted, that we couldn't do this in thirty days. I said I couldn't negotiate these terms. Chacon said "That doesn't matter to me. We are going to leave the ministries, but be aware that we are giving you thirty days." I understood the message: he was saying, "Gentlemen, it's a truce of thirty days." We signed the agreement for the departure of protesters from the ministries, and I went directly to the casa presidencial and talked with the junta. I recall that I told them "Gentlemen, we have 30 days. If in 30 days we haven't taken the measures necessary to demonstrate to these people that we seriously want socio-economic
changes and democracy, we're not going to be able to go ahead.  

The BPR kept its word and suspended demonstrations for one month. The junta also communicated, through various indirect means, with members of the other popular organizations and guerrilla groups, and all reduced their activities during November to give the government time to act. There were a few minor incidents during the month, but diverse sources agree that the level of confrontation was dramatically lower than it had been in August through October. The FPL (the guerrilla group closely tied to the BPR) broke the truce somewhat early, with the kidnapping, on November 28, of South Africa's ambassador to El Salvador, Archibald Gardner Dunn. (NSA 1989a, 48)

The truce was a tenuous thing. Although the civilian right and hardline elements of the military assumed that the civilians in the government were politically indistinguishable from the popular organizations, in fact the ties between the two were very weak. According to a former senior civilian member of the first post-coup government, the ERP (and LP-28) completely refused to communicate with the junta. LP-28 withdrew from the Foro Popular on October 24th, citing the Foro's participation in the junta.

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62 Interview, former member of the post-coup government.
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The government maintained only indirect ties with the FPL/BPR. The minister of Education, Salvador Samaya, was a clandestine FPL member. Other members of government had to communicate indirectly through friends and relatives who happened to have FPL contacts. The junta, at least Ungo and Mayorga, did have discussions with the RN/FAPU. The RN was willing to remain neutral as long as the junta acted upon all of the things called for in the proclama, "but they were unwilling to expose themselves and participate openly at that point." 

The junta was very isolated: they had only tenuous ties to the popular sectors, the high command was being recalcitrant, and the junior officers had disappeared from view after about the 17th of October. The political parties that made up the government -- the UDN, the PDC, and the MNR -- had minimal popular support of their own. Although the Foro Popular included many of the unions that made up the FAPU, FAPU itself was unwilling to openly support the government. The survival of the government, therefore, depended upon their ability to deliver reforms and put a stop to the repression. The high command, on the other hand, threatened as it was by the reformist Juventud, had become increasingly dependent upon the civilian right for political support. Their interests therefore lay with impeding the JRG in any way they could.
The Private Sector Fights Back

The November truce proved short-lived. While the cabinet worked intensely to draft and build support for major reforms, pressures built that would ultimately lead to an intense elite confrontation over state policy. One key source of pressure against the reformist government was the private sector. According to one informant who had been a leading figure in ANEP, the initial reaction of the private sector to the overthrow of Romero was relief, because Romero had been so weak and incapable of maintaining "basic law and order." Private sector relief turned to "horror and shock" when they saw the makeup of the first government. "A small splinter" (associates of junta member Andino) tried to ally themselves with "the new masters," but the reaction of the majority of the business community was "terror." They believed that the strategy of the "leftists" in the government was to encourage the popular organizations to put pressure on the government, so that they could go to the military and say "look, our constituency demands these things." "Ungo and Mayorga wanted them to keep the pressure up so that they could confront the military."

A key aspect of rightist civilian thinking at this time was that Mayorga and his technocrats from the UCA network, as well as social democrats like Ungo of the MNR, were merely a polite front for the radical, guerrilla left.
Thus the activism of the popular organizations following the coup was all part of a leftist plan. It is, of course, impossible to know how sincere this view was. Clearly the private sector had significant material interests at stake. For them to portray the educated, upper-middle class reformists of the UCA, the MNR, and the PDC as tantamount to guerrillas probably reinforced their ability to organize a political response. Business elites interviewed for this study seemed to sincerely hold this view. One stated, very simply, that "The first junta was basically the guerrillas." Rubén Zamora, who has no particular reason to give the civilian ultra-right the benefit of the doubt, claimed that the private sector elite "didn't distinguish that clearly between the government and the popular movement. They saw all of it as a great conspiracy." Another cabinet member under the first JRG said that "The rich weren't seriously afraid of the [revolutionary] left, or at least, were equally if not more afraid of us. They thought we were as great a threat as the left, which is ridiculous."

The implications of this view, which was shared by hardline sectors of the military, cannot be understated. First of all, the conflation of elite reformism and popular mobilization meant that the installation of Mayorga, Ungo, and their reformist colleagues in government greatly

"3 Interview, San Salvador, October, 1989."
intensified the civilian right's perception of threat. Secondly, it meant that from the point of view of the far-right, violence against the popular organizations was violence against the junta and its policies. The logical response of the private sector elite to the makeup and agenda of the junta was to press for a reinvigorated hardline agenda, the sort of all-out program of repression that they had expected from Romero.

Part of the reason that private sector elites saw the first junta as such a threat was that it was comprised of elites at least as educated and sophisticated as themselves, triggering a sense of betrayal. One informant commented that it was difficult for the private sector to see the mass organizations as a threat, partly because they assumed that the military would take care of the problem as they had in the past, and partly because they held the common Salvadoran in such contempt. They simply couldn't believe that they were significantly threatened by a bunch of peasants. The post-coup government, however, was made up of highly educated individuals, professionals and educators, who, as a group, had historically supported the private sector.

Pyes (1983h) recounts the details of an assassination attempt against the Salvadoran ambassador to the U.S.,

64 Interview, former government official with close ties to the Salvadoran private sector.
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Ernesto Rivas Gallont, Pyes' informant, a death squad operative named "Gordo," acted "not because he thought the Salvadoran ambassador was a guerrilla, but because he believed he was an intellectual and posed more of a threat than the person carrying the gun." The same general thinking applies as well to Jesuits, reformist technocrats, and left-leaning priests: they are considered more threatening than the masses in the street.

Beyond their objectively greater education and professional skills, the idea that such people would turn against the "productive sectors" seems to have triggered a powerful emotional response on the part of private sector elites. Statements by coffee grower Orlando DeSola, interviewed by Tommie Sue Montgomery in 1980, are worth quoting at length:

People trying to be in the government are people who have never worked before; they don't know how to produce anything positive, only negative. They have never worked, for example, it a business office. There are/were many academics in the government who have ...only taught or done research in the university. Ethics is at the root of the whole thing... The Jesuits like parties, French clothes, driving Peugeots. Now they are saying there have to be social reforms. They don't live what they preach. We have had them in our homes. Who do you think built that

"Gordo" planned to attack Rivas while he was jogging, but Rivas had taken the precaution of jogging against the flow of traffic, making the snatch more difficult. Rivas was unaware of the attempt until informed by Pyes.
university? These people are traitors to their family, class, country, and world. 66

U.S. Embassy cables from the period report similar attitudes expressed by private sector elites and my own informants clearly felt the same way.

The alarm with which the private sector right viewed the first junta was accentuated by the disruption of the hardline faction within the military. Virtually all of the officers with whom the far-right had been conspiring since May of 1979 had been dismissed, leaving the civilian right with few high-level contacts within the military. As Craig Pyes (1983a) puts it, the oligarchy "felt dangerously exposed after the 1979 coup broke its hold on the military and upset the old power structure." Even though officers such as Gutiérrez and García were known to be more conservative than the reformist young officers, the private sector right didn't trust them. 67 There was deep suspicion that they were under control of the U.S., and that the U.S. was seriously considering letting the left win in El Salvador as it had in Nicaragua. Land owners were worried that ideas from Ecuador and Peru, where the militaries ex-

66 Photocopied transcript of interview on January 17, 1980.

67 Four private sector elites interviewed for this study claimed that there was strong distrust of these leaders, and of the military in general. This is consistent with the findings of Paige (1991) that Salvadoran business elites continue to harbor serious distrust of the military.
propriated private lands, might have infected the Sal-
vadoran military. The civilian far right was aware of
the divisions within the military, but feared that Garcia
and Gutiérrez would be willing, out of self-interest, to
sell out the interests of the private sector if necessary
to keep themselves in power.

The coup, and the seeming willingness of Garcia and
Gutiérrez to cooperate with radical civilians, brought out
intense hostility on the part of private sector elites
towards the military and regret for having ceded political
power to the military for so long. It was the final straw
in a process of alienation that had begun with Molina's
land reform attempt. The analysis was that "for last 30-40
years, the intelligentsia [by which my informant meant the
private sector elite] left political positions in hands of
opportunists -- that is, the armed forces, and dedicated
themselves to production." One informant held out
especially bitter hostility towards the official PCN, whose
civilian members had collaborated with the military for
years, often at the expense of the best interests of the
private sector. He referred to them, in English, as "the

68 Interviews, two private sector elites who argued
that the victory of the left was prevented primarily by
their own political efforts and by the election of Reagan
to replace Carter in the U.S. presidency. While praising
some military officers, they are reluctant to credit the
military as an institution with having prevented a "com-
munist" takeover.
scum of the earth, a bunch of no-good people completely
covered with shit."³

Given this fear of betrayal by the high command, a
priority goal for the private sector after the coup was to
reconstruct their ties with the middle-ranking officers of
the military. According to one informant, this contact-
building was the first step in coup-plotting:

When Romero fell, I immediately started going
against the junta. I started organizing to
overthrow it. Given the illegitimate way the
government had taken power, I didn't see another
coup as illegitimate.⁴

While it was not until February of 1980 that my informant
and his associates were ready to attempt a coup, their
organizational efforts, and the pressures that they imposed
on the high command, began to have effect in December,
shortly after the junta managed to push through the first
significant reform legislation. The U.S. embassy acknowledged the growing pressure from the right in a cable that reported

danger of rightist coup continues to be raised in
some quarters, but evidence available to embassy
indicates little immediate threat. However
political and economic right is becoming increas-
ingly vocal...[calling for] a halt to "anarchy
and corruption." (SS06976 4 December, 1979)

During the second half of November, the civilian right
began a publicity campaign, talking about the threat of
communism posed by the JRG. (ECA 1979, 34:1093) On
December 10, several thousand rightist women marched to
protest the failure of the junta to maintain "law and
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order." At the Casa Presidencial they were addressed by junta members. Majano's remarks were drowned out by chants of "Down with the junta." (ECA 1979, 34: 1093; FBIS December, 1979)

The women's march was followed on the 27th of December by an even larger demonstration of roughly 15,000 rightists. It was a show of force by the oligarchy, a parade of personal armored vehicles, body guards and wealthy businessmen themselves carrying military-style weapons, while private airplanes and helicopters flew overhead. The march proceeded directly to the headquarters of the military high command, where the demonstrators demanded to see Minister of Defense Garcia. Instead, they were addressed by Sub-Secretary of Defense Carranza who expressed sympathy for their concerns about law and order. (NSA 1989a, 51; ECA 1979, 34:1093)

This second march was organized by a new rightist umbrella group known as the Broad National Front (FAN), which was an expansion of the Salvadorean Nationalist Movement (MNS). The MNS had been formed by young civilian rightists in May of 1979 as the basis for a coup against the weakening Carlos Romero. The FAN combined different roles in a way that was to characterize the Salvadorean civilian right for the next decade: it was designed to serve as a "civic organization" to pressure the government, as an intelligence organization to support loyal sectors of
the military, and as a paramilitary network to supplement the besieged hardline elements of the military. It funneled money -- as much as $10 million -- to loyal sectors of security forces to support repressive operations. Roberto D'Aubuisson, who was working actively to organize death squads during this period, played an instrumental role in the formation of FAN. (Pyes 1983a)

An additional reason that rightist pressures against the high command intensified in December was that the popular organizations began to carry out increasing numbers of wage-related labor actions at agricultural facilities right at the beginning of the harvest season, just as they had in December of 1977. According to an embassy cable (SS 6976 4 December, 1979) something on the order of 50 coffee plantations, 25 cotton farms, and 15 cattle ranches were occupied by organized workers at the beginning of December. These figures, which came from Salvadoran private sector sources, are probably exaggerated, but reflect growing alarm by the agrarian elite about the level of activism in the countryside. As they did in late 1977, these harvest season labor actions set in motion a major newspaper advertisement campaign by the right, calling upon the government to restore "law and order." (SS 2150 6 December, 1979)

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69 FAN was converted into a political party with the founding of the National Republican Alliance (ARENA) in 1981.
The mobilization of the civilian right combined with the high command's successful recapture of COPEFA on the 18th to create an overall shift in the political climate by the second half of December. Early in the month, it began to be clear that the "Honor Commission" appointed by the high command to facilitate the investigation of human rights was in fact doing everything it could to obstruct that process. Subsecretary of Defense Nicolás Carranza was working closely with the hardline network, which was gradually reconstructing its organization and intelligence capacity. (Pyes 1983c) With high command sponsorship, powerful civilian support, and a decreasing threat from the reformist military, the hardline faction was freer to operate.

Not surprisingly, there was a marked increase in violence during December. With the end of the November truce, there were frequent popular demonstrations which were met with violence by the security forces. These episodes brought confrontations between the civilian government and the high command. JRG members Mayorga, Ungo, or Zamora repeatedly called the high command to insist that the security forces and tanks be withdrawn from the vicinity of demonstrations. Minister García's standard response was to claim that they had been misinformed, but

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70 Interview, former member of the first post-coup government.
that if there were forces in the area they would be promptly removed. Then he would do nothing and in several cases the security forces opened fire. (Montgomery 1982, 162-3)  

The violence of the security forces became the principal topic of communications between the civilian government and the military. The inability of the JRG to enforce its prohibitions on violence undermined its authority in the eyes of civilians and soldiers. The more frequently the security forces were able to act with impunity, the more confident they were of their safety, and the more freely they could act in the future. Thus violence became a tool of political competition against the civilian government and against the reformist movement in the military.

It appears that to some extent, the increase in violence may have been an intentional strategy to challenge the JRG. A former member of the high command accuses the security forces of cranking up the violence to block the reforms and destabilize the junta.

There was a conspiracy of the security forces with capital to impede the process of the reforms. They committed outrageous actions. It was never clear exactly who was committing them. These actions put us in trouble with friendly governments every time. I'm not talking about all the security forces, but people within them

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71 Interviews, Rubén Zamora, Luis de Sebastian, Guillermo Ungo, and a confidential informant.
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that wanted to maintain the hard line, terrorism of the state.º

The same source charges that "there was a stratum of majors and some lt. colonels who were opposed to changes. Very resistant. They were increasing the repression."º The Archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero, voiced this same perception in a homily in late December, asking rhetorically whether "internal forces within the institution [were] intentionally resorting to violence for their own purposes." (SS 7411 27 December, 1979)

Another source claimed that the security forces decided that it was necessary to drive the civilian elements of the government out of office. The primary independent means at their disposal for doing this was to carry out acts of repression that would frustrate the junta. He claimed that they were not under orders to do this, but were acting on their own.º There is little to suggest, however, that the high command did anything to block such actions. The involvement of Sub-Secretary of Defense Carranza in supporting intelligence activities of D'Aubuisson mentioned above would seem to suggest a degree of high command connivance.

Former Captain Alejandro Fiallos, who now works for a research organization affiliated with the MNR, charges that

º Interview, military officer who was a major in 1979-80. This informant claimed to disapprove of what was done, but to agree with the perception within the security forces that the first JRG was dangerous.
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the high command, rather than lower level hardliners, made a decision to unseat the first junta and that "the technique was to give repression." 73

There is some evidence to suggest that some officers who had initially sided with the coup turned against the junta because of a perception that the junta was dividing the military. One informant who was a major at the time told me that:

By December, the armed forces, realizing that the majority of the participants of government were pretty leftist, realized that the integrity of the FA was in danger. We saw it as a false government. It was calling for changes, and was in power, taking advantage of the proclama of the armed forces that authorized their actions. 74

Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Viron Vaky supports this view:

The increase in violence in late 1979 should have tipped us to how split things were. The divisions within the armed forces and the presence in the government of reformists made the right even more fearful... and brought to the fore the Matanza approach of just liquidating the problem.

Vaky sees a connection between this behavior in late 1979 and the murder of the Jesuits in October of 1989. "This is the pathology: the automatic resort to violence to deal with threats of quite another kind." 74

For the civilian members of the junta, the increased violence was a political disaster. It directly undercut

73 Interview, Mexico City, October 1989.
74 Interview, Washington D.C., April 1990.
popular tolerance for the government. Civilian officials realized that increased popular militancy would only strengthen the hand of the high command and the security forces. In an effort to curb the violence before it was too late, they pressed Majano to act more forcefully against the hardliners and the high command. Majano was spending much of his time at this point travelling from barracks to barracks, trying to keep the reformists together despite the neutralization of COPEFA. There was already serious talk among the junior officers of carrying out another coup, but Majano was unwilling at this stage to take such steps.\textsuperscript{75} He responded to the civilians that he was doing all he could, that building up the reformist movement would take time. "While he took time, they won."\textsuperscript{76}

\textbf{U.S. Policy Towards the First Junta}

Having failed to take advantage of opportunities to get advance knowledge of the shape of the post-coup government, the U.S. government delayed its response to the new government until it could get more information. In a confidential cable sent October 16, Assistant Secretary of State Vaky wrote:

\begin{quote}
We urgently need full information on coup, what final junta make-up is, where real power lies,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{75} Interview, military officer who was a captain at the time of the coup.

\textsuperscript{76} Interview, former member of the first post-coup government.
and how wide is A) support and B) participation by non-military sectors, i.e. Church, Christian Democrats, Private Sectors, etc. First indications look encouraging, and if this assessment is confirmed we will want to be responsive and supportive very quickly. (ST 269884, 16 October, 1979)

Once information was available about the new government, however, the U.S. responded with caution. Cabinet members met with AID officials in early November to request that the small amount funds still in the AID pipeline -- a few million dollars -- be disbursed without requiring a new formal agreement. U.S. officials claimed they had to consult with Washington, and the matter was never resolved before the cabinet's resignation in January. Washington did promise increase its aid program to a Development Assistance level of between 20 and 30 million dollars, but did not reach this conclusion until early December, and major funds were never disbursed. (ST 310366 1 December, 1979)

The State Department claimed it was unable to obtain fast disbursing Economic Support Funds because these were mostly earmarked by Congress. Failing that, the primary source was Development Assistance money that required a formal plan. (ST 310366 1 December, 1979) Curiously, after the fall of the first junta, $9.1 million in ESF funds were found, and under the Reagan administration, ESF funding climbed to $44.9 million in f.y. 1981, $115 million by
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fiscal 1982, an $140 million by fiscal 1983. (Fagen 1987, 148)

It appears that this slow response really indicates not a lack of means but rather a lack of enthusiasm for the first junta. Ambassador Devine met with the junta exactly twice, once to present his credentials, a second time to express concern about the government's ability to maintain order.77

A confidential informant who held a high level position in the embassy stated that he and others in the embassy had grave concerns about the presence of the communist UDN in the government.84 Cable traffic from the period expresses alarm over the prospect that the new government might establish diplomatic relations with Cuba and the USSR. (SS 5889 16 October, 1979)

Perhaps the most important contribution of the U.S. to the failure of the first junta, and to the violence that accompanied its final month in office, was the complete disintegration of any semblance of a human rights policy following the coup. The U.S. embassy under Devine willfully ignored the massive increases in state violence following the coup, providing misleading (not to say patently absurd) reports to Washington such as the following: "there is confusion as to who is shooting at whom and why. Early rumors were that terrorist groups and members of Christian

77 Interview, former member, first post-coup government.
Democratic Party were having another confrontation. Daily newspaper La Prensa Grafica calimed to embassy it was under attack by estimated 100 armed, masked men." (SS 6283 31 October, 1979) Reporting on violence emphasized actions by the guerrillas, concerns about the security of the embassy itself, the threat, never documented until a year later, of arms flows from abroad. (SS cables 6336 1 November; 6593 15 November, and 6664 20 November, 1979)

In a lengthy background cable on human rights in El Salvador classified "confidential," Ambassador Devine wrote that under the Romero administration, "the government, having to contend with a radicalized opposition using violent rather than legal methods, felt itself less restrained in resorting to violent tactics such as having persons 'disappear' as a means of silencing opposition." Thus from Devine's point of view, the government, which had allowed virtually no "legal" means of opposition (recall the February 28, 1977 massacre of UNO supporters), was somehow entitled to use violent repression. Referring to the post-coup situation, Devine placed the blame for state violence squarely on the opposition itself:

To maintain political momentum they must continue to provoke the government into human rights violations or failing this they will seek to use the JRG's response to the violations of past governments as political issue to discredit the new government and maintain popular support. Whatever steps the new government takes to try and rectify or correct human rights abuses, therefore, the radical left using its participation in human rights organizations such as
committees of mothers and relatives of political prisoners and disappeared persons or the now radicalized Salvadoran human rights commission (CDHES) can be expected to heavily publicize continued anomalies in the human rights area [sic] in turn will lead to continued charges of human rights violations under the new junta. (SS 6785 27 November, 1979)

Thus not only were the state's violent actions the fault of the opposition (for having provoked them), but the opposition's objections to state violence and expectations that past violence would be punished were part of a political ploy. The violations themselves, rather than being systematic policy of at least a significant portion of the state apparatus, are called "anomalies." In such a framework of analysis, anything that the JRG did to prosecute human rights violations -- clearly a necessary step to curb security forces abuses -- would be an unwarranted concession to the "extreme left."

The main concern about state violence expressed in embassy cables is that it not be so excessive as to provoke an insurrection, as in Nicaragua. The conclusion reached was that it was not of that magnitude, so that "if one is looking for parallels, situation in El Salvador may be more akin -- although at hopefully lower level of violence -- to situation prevailing in Guatemala rather than to one in Nicaragua." (SS 6785 27 November, 1979) Having reached that judgement, Devine cabled Washington about the improved contacts the embassy enjoyed with the Salvadoran military,
"today, with human rights differences behind us."
(SS 7097 11 December, 1979)

Consistent with this emphasis on security was the fact that the one type of aid which the U.S. managed to deliver promptly was a small shipment of riot control equipment (protective vests, helmets, tear gas), accompanied by a six-member Mobile Training Team (MTT) to train Salvadoran officers in the use of the new gear. The same MTT conducted a survey of the Salvadoran military's preparedness for counterinsurgency warfare. (SS 6664, 20 November, 1979; NSA 1989a, 47)

The net effect of U.S. policy after the coup was to remove the modest constraining effect that U.S. human rights concerns had had under Romero. Under Romero, the U.S. had at least sent a mixed message of alternating concerns about human rights and security. Following the coup the primary concern of the U.S. was security. This suggests that in practice, U.S. human rights policy responded to questions of appearance and practicality, not principle. Human rights violations under Romero were an embarrassment because his government had such a weak claim on legitimacy in the first place. After the coup, the only concern was whether the violence was so provocative as to trigger a Nicaragua-style insurrection. Violence didn't present a problem of appearances for the post-coup government because it was a new regime with broadly based
civilian participation. This suggests an elaboration on Terry Karl's (1986) observation that U.S. policy is more concerned with elections than democracy: even a non-democratic change of regime, if it includes a measure of civilian representation, can satisfy U.S. requirements to such an extent that human rights conditions become irrelevant.

Collapse of the First Junta and the January Military Crisis

On the 22nd of December, civilian members of the government met with high command officials. Following a heated debate about continued repression and the blockage of reforms, Defense Minister García introduced National Guard director Vides Casanova, saying that he would speak for the armed forces. Vides' comments were a powerful assertion of institutional military supremacy:

Colonel García is the man from who we take orders, not the junta. We have put you into the position where you are, and for the things that are needed here, we don't need you. We have been running the country for 50 years, and we are quite prepared to keep on running it." (Bonner 1984, 162)

This statement seems calculated to provoke, though it may have been merely a statement of fact. The high command may already, at this point, have been in touch with the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) regarding the formation of
a second junta. 78 Regardless, it signalled a major shift in the balance of power within the government. The increasingly violent confrontation with the radical left, the high command's successful suppression of COPEFA, and the mobilization of the private sector right had combined to weaken the position of the junior officers. Without that power base, the civilian government was in trouble.

According to Zamora,

From this point, the civilian ministers of the government started a kind of rebellion. We put ourselves in the Ministry of Culture. What we tried to do was reestablish our relationship with the Juventud Militar. This was hard, because the juventud militar were already very divided by Garcia and his people. This situation continued through Christmas and the new year, followed by our resignation early in January.

They issued an ultimatum calling upon COPEFA to act to stop the repression and ensure the implementation of reforms.

After three days of deliberations, COPEFA responded on January 2 that it was an apolitical institution dedicated only to the preservation of the unity of the armed forces. 79 This decision triggered the resignation of most of

78 Interview, former Christian Democrat Juan José Martel, San Salvador, October 1989.

79 It is noteworthy that even after the reported restructuring of COPEFA by Garcia back in mid-December, the officers still took three days to reach the conclusion that they should reject the cabinet's ultimatum. It is probably safe to assume that COPEFA members were aware that the PDC was waiting in the wings. The long deliberation suggests that considerable division remained. A U.S. military officer who was permitted to listen in on some of the debate said that even officers who were supportive of the Proclama of the armed forces were unwilling to break the
the government the next day. Only Colonels Gutiérrez and Majano remained on the junta, and the entire cabinet, with the exception of Minister of Defense García, resigned.\textsuperscript{60}

This sequence of events illustrates one of the key vulnerabilities of the reformist movement. Lacking any strong base of popular political support, the ultimate power of the junta depended entirely on the young military, yet their contacts with the young officers were sporadic and mostly carried out through COPEFA, which was subject to manipulation by the high command.

By resigning, the cabinet sought to isolate the military and expose them to international condemnation. This, it was hoped, might trigger some sort of second rebellion by the junior officers in alliance with the popular movement. The resignations did, in fact, lead to a stormy confrontation between the Juventud Militar and the high command. On the 11th of January, a petition circulated among all of the Army barracks in the country demanding the immediate resignation of García and Carranza. The language of the petition was ambiguous, implying that the Juventud would take appropriate measures to remove García and Carranza if they did not step down. Around fifty

\textsuperscript{60} Some returned to posts in the second junta formed by the Christian Democrats.
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officers signed this document.¹ A few days later, at an assembly of officers at San Carlos, 75% of those present voted to call for the resignation of García and Carranza. On that same date, a second petition was circulated, this time addressed to the new military/Christian Democratic junta, calling for the dismissal of García and Carranza. According to Montgomery (1982, 160) 186 officers signed, including all 74 officers in the First Brigade, the Signal Corps, the Military Hospital, and the Military Academy.² This is a remarkable number given that each signator was potentially exposing himself to retaliation by the high command should the demand fail.

The circulation of petitions were followed by a series of votes taken throughout the different agencies of the military over the course of several days. García and Carranza generally had the support of officers in the National Guard, the National Police, the Treasury Police, and the Cavalry Regiment. They had partial support from the Artillery Brigade and the Third Brigade in San Miguel. Other barracks either supported the Juventud position or

¹ Interview, military officer who belonged to the reformist current.

² Montgomery saw these petitions after they were collected and was able to hand copy the text and count the signatures. Personal communication.
were mixed, and it appeared by the 14th that the vote was coming out against García and Carranza.83

On the 15th of January, while votes were still being gathered, Juventud officers met at San Carlos to organize themselves. They decided to contact García and Carranza directly, selecting Captain Mena Sandoval to telephone the high command with their demands. Mena warned his superiors that he and his colleagues were once again "en el camino de la lucha" (on the warpath.) (Mena 1990, 157) The high command sent Chief of Staff Francisco Castillo, Col. Gutiérrez, and later Col. Bustillo to speak to the young officers.84 They also sent National Guard and National Police units to surround the First Brigade and Signal Corps barracks to ensure that these units "didn't get hot-headed." The security forces maintained a vigil through the night "with sabers half-drawn."85

The response of the high command to the young officers' challenge combined persuasion and coercion. By acknowledging the merit of the young officers' grievances, Castillo and Gutiérrez endeavored to calm the officers

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83 Given the relative size of the security forces and the partial support enjoyed by García and Carranza in a few Army units, it appears that at least some officers in the security forces voted against the high command.

84 Interview, former Captain Alejandro Fiallos, Mexico City, October 1989.

85 Interview, retired U.S. military officer assigned to El Salvador in 1979-80 who observed these events.
down. He also emphasized their duty to obey their super-
iors and the importance of this for preserving the in-
tegrity of the armed forces. Col. Rafael Bustillo,
commander of the Air Force, arrived later in the evening,
posing as an intermediary. He conveyed messages to the
high command and returned later that night with a verbal
agreement to comply with the young officers' demands that
the reforms called for in the October 15 proclama would be
carried out. Temporarily satisfied, the officers dis-
banded. (Mena 1990, 157)

The final vote by the full officer corps came out
evenly divided, and García and Carranza remained in their
posts. According to two anonymous military sources, the
young officers, having sent their petition to the junta,
merely waited for the junta to act against García and
Carranza.

Like many confrontations in the Armed Forces, the
peaceful resolution of this incident should not be taken as
a sign that it was a politically insignificant event. The
seriousness with which the high command took the challenge
is illustrated by the fact that the high command felt it
necessary to send forces to surround the potentially
rebellious units. A confidential informant interviewed

86 Interview, military officer who was present at this
meeting.

87 Interview, Alejandro Fiallos.
immediately after these events by Montgomery speculated that "Garcia and Carranza will be gently eased out, and it is probable that those two individuals will abide by that decision. Whatever happens, the army can paper over the division, but it will take a long time to heal because the rift is deep." In fact, García and Carranza managed to stay, though they had to weather two more challenges to them by the Juventud in May and September. The means by which the military papered over the division was to break up the reformist movement; the steady increase in state violence, combined with effective use of command authority by García and Carranza, were the key ingredients in this process. The eventual success of the high command in suppressing the reformist current, set the stage for the extremely high levels of violence -- over 1,000 civilians killed per month -- seen after September 1980.

While the high command was struggling to prevent the military from coming apart at the seams, the popular organizations of the left, on January 11, announced their unification under an umbrella called the Revolutionary Coordination of Masses (CRM). Eleven days later, shortly

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89 It is possible that pressure from the U.S. helped keep García and Carranza in place. James Cheek said in an interview that he "fought to keep García in" to help preserve the unity of the military. (Washington, D.C. March 1989)
after the military had managed to weather its crisis, the left carried out a massive march which catalyzed yet another crisis within the military. Organizers of the march, which commemorated the 1932 matanza, had managed to find ways to transport at least 200,000 people, most of them peasants from the countryside, to San Salvador, despite roadblocks and efforts by the authorities to keep buses from operating. The march was fired upon by National Guard and National Police troops. Organizers managed to redirect the route of the march, which was miles long, to avoid the area where the shooting occurred. Some 25,000 campesinos took refuge on the campus of the National University. The reform-oriented commander of the First Brigade in San Salvador, acting with the approval of Majano, sent troops to surround the University to protect the demonstrators from the security forces. According to Montgomery (1982 162)

At 8:30 the next morning the junta met with the army high command, including the directors and other officers of the security forces. The latter wanted to invade the university. When the junta refused to give its permission, Major Roberto Staben from the National Police and Captain Arnoldo Pozo of the Treasury Police announced they would invade the university with or without orders. Héctor Dada demanded that Minister of Defense García discipline these officers for insulting the junta and for insubordination. García responded that he did not have the power or authority to control the security forces.

The troops of the First Brigade, however, did have the power, and the invasion did not take place.
While it seems safe to assume that the unification of the left may have alarmed members of the armed forces, it also seems clear that, as in the reaction to the increased opposition mobilization under Romero, the threat posed by the left generated conflicting impulses within the armed forces. The coincidence of confrontation within the military and unification of the popular left suggests that part of the officer corps viewed the growth of the left as at least partly the result of the violent behavior of the military itself and the failure, three months after the coup, to have implemented major reforms.

The Second Junta

To understand the decision of the Christian Democratic Party to go into government with the Armed Forces in January 1980, and to understand the elite-level political implications of this act, it is important to note that the PDC had included a fairly broad political spectrum since its formation in the early 1960s, ranging from right-wing to radical. The party's best known figure, José Napoleón Duarte, had conservative instincts in the sense that he was concerned about social order and the preservation of institutions, at the expense of mass participation aside from voting. A number of key party figures were generally in line with him politically, but most of the mass base of the party was well to his left. With his exile in 1972,
the party moved toward the left, so much so that when
Duarte began considering returning to El Salvador in mid-
1979, the party's leadership discouraged him. Duarte
realized he was being put off and returned to San Salvador
in November of 1979, instantly shifting the balance of
power within the PDC in favor of the more conservative
branch.⁹⁰

When the first JRG collapsed at the beginning of
January, Duarte, Adolfo Rey Prendes, Fidel Chavez Mena, and
Abraham Rodriguez had already been in secret consultation
with the U.S. officials and the military high command at
the U.S. embassy. The U.S. seems to have been instrumental
in convincing even the more conservative members of the PDC
to consider going into government with the military. The
PDC had, after all, viewed the military as their political
enemy for twenty years, a view that was mutual. A con-
fidential U.S. government informant said that William
Bowdler was decisive in putting together this "unholy
alliance." Bowdler had been in El Salvador in 1972 and
knew the PDC well. "He thought the PDC was the only
salvation."⁹¹

To put the deal together, U.S. Deputy Assistant
Secretary of State James Cheek conducted a kind of shuttle

⁹⁰ Interview, Juan José Martel, San Salvador, October
1989.

⁹¹ Interview, former U.S. embassy official.
diplomacy between the military and the PDC, who were not accustomed to speaking with one another and harbored deep mutual suspicions. According to Cheek, both sides had to be convinced that the other was not the enemy.\(^92\) The main tactic in dealing with the PDC was to play up the "historic responsibility" that the party was taking on and the "courageous" nature of the decision. (SS 0051, 4 January, 1980) The approach to the military high command was more direct: U.S. officials made clear that any possibility of future aid hinged on the military accepting the PDC.\(^93\) In fact, U.S. officials actually had little in the way of an aid program to work with.\(^94\)

The leadership group associated with Duarte drew up an agreement for a second junta and presented it to the PDC at a convention. The more progressive elements of the party, several of whom had held important positions in the first junta's cabinet, were naturally reluctant to agree. The weight of Duarte's faction, however, and the reluctance of the left wing to split from the party after twenty years of unity were sufficient that the more left-leaning sector of


\(^93\) Interview, former U.S. embassy official.

\(^94\) Cheek commented that in negotiating with the military, he was working with "a shoeshine and a smile -- nothing but my good looks" and conditional promises of future assistance. (interview, Washington, D.C., March 1989)
the party agreed to the proposal. Duarte's group argued that the party had been struggling for twenty years to gain power and that this was an opportunity. Others thought that it might still be possible, through the implementation of concrete reforms, to avert an all-out civil war. Members of the left wing of the party convinced themselves that the popular sectors were not ready for an all-out confrontation with the military and that by going into government they might be able to provide some protection from repression while popular mobilization continued.

The new junta included Antonio Morales Ehrlich and Héctor Dada Hirezi, representing the conservative and left-wing sectors of the party, respectively. The military members remained the same -- Gutiérrez and Majano -- and a political independent, José Ramon Avalos, was named as the fifth member, replacing Andino. The PDC had been adamant about not including any representative of the private sector in the new government, a fact that enraged those portions of the business community that had collaborated in the first junta. (SS 0051 4 January, 1980) By excluding capital completely, the PDC catalyzed a degree of private sector unity that the business classes had not been able to achieve by themselves during the first junta.

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96 Interview, Juan José Martel, op. cit.
On the surface, the second junta looked promising. The PDC and the military high command signed a pact on January 9th in which the PDC extracted from the military a public commitment to extend the nationalization of external trade to cotton, seafood, coffee and sugar; carry out an integrated agrarian reform directly benefitting the rural poor; nationalize the banking system; initiate a constructive dialogue with the popular organizations aimed at including them in the process of structural changes; and guarantee the human rights of popular organization members. The pact required that the military recognize the authority of the JRG as their joint commander in chief. (Castro Moran 1989, 416-19)

Notwithstanding the success of the PDC in negotiating a pact with the military, the formation of the second junta created a configuration of elite politics that made greater violence likely. The military had entered into the pact with the PDC under considerable international pressure, particularly from the U.S. The first junta's cabinet had been correct in thinking that the military would be in great danger, both domestically and internationally, if they didn't have some sort of legitimate civilian facade. The problem for the high command and the security forces was that a significant portion of the PDC leadership and most of its mass base were too left-wing and anti-oligarchic to be suitable partners in government (ie. they
expected the military to make good on its promises, promises that would put the high command in Dutch with the private sector). The high command and the security forces both had strong incentives, therefore, to use their capacity for violence to "domesticate" the PDC, suppressing its mass base and leaving only the elite level which could serve as a useful facade. Sixty four PDC members were assassinated during 1980, including Attorney General Mario Zamora Rivas. At the time of his death, Zamora had been attempting to resuscitate the stalled investigation of disappearances and was also organizing a movement to split the PDC, withdrawing the progressive sectors from the government.

The Reaction of the Right

The right took for granted that the military could and would suppress the popular movement. Thus, the right really mobilized when the PDC and the military signed an accord. This action made the PDC an immediate threat to the right's

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97 Interviews, Rubén Zamora, Juan José Martel, Eduardo Molina, and a fourth anonymous source formerly with the PDC.

98 Mario Zamora was killed at his home during a meeting of PDC leaders, under circumstances that point to high-level connivance. His telephone service was cut off about an hour before the assassination and restored shortly afterwards. (Interview, Rubén Zamora) Montgomery (1982, 167) cites an anonymous source from within the government that the junta had concrete proof within 2 days implicating Sub-Secretary of Defense Nicolás Carranza in the killing.

99 Interview, former PDC youth leader Juan José Martel.
interests. -- Former Senior Government Official and Member of PDC

To say that the response of the Salvadoran right to the new junta was hostile would be an understatement. The reaction seems irrational in the sense that the PDC was, despite its commitment to reformism, less radical than the MNR and UDN who had participated in the first junta. Yet by most accounts the private sector saw the PDC government as "a real menace." (SS 1336 22 February, 1980) Several private sector informants confirmed that they had viewed the PDC junta as even more threatening than the first one. The first reason was that the PDC had managed to obtain an explicit pact and commitment from the armed forces high command, reinforcing the private sector's previous suspicion that García et. al. would be willing to sell out private sector interests in exchange for continued power. Secondly the PDC seemed to have the support of the U.S. The U.S. embassy had helped broker the pact and had spoken with private sector representatives "to impress upon them how much it is in their interests to dispel existing fears and doubts" about the PDC in government. (SS 0046, 4 January, 1980) The U.S. had had its eye on the PDC and Napoleón Duarte as potential saviors for several months.  

100 Viron Vaky (interview, op. cit.) had spoken with Napoleón Duarte in Caracas in August, and U.S. cable traffic from November onward mentions Duarte frequently, even though he had no official leadership position within the PDC and the PDC was a minor player in the first junta.
This evident U.S. backing, combined with the willingness of
the military high command to commit to reforms, convinced
the civilian right that the PDC might just feel empowered
even enough to actually carry out the substantive reforms
described in the PDC/military pact.

The PDC itself acted in ways that intensified the
hostility of the right. On January 17, the PDC issued a
statement charging that ANEP exemplified exactly those
oligarchic capital sectors which the reforms are designed
to eliminate. Outgoing Ambassador Devine commented in a
cable that the PDC statement was "unlikely to improve the
party's very strained relationship with conservative
elements traditionally opposed to any kind of reform in
this country."101

Pyes quotes Roberto D'Aubuisson as saying "The
Christian Democrats are communists," explaining that
"Communists are those or that which directly or indirectly
aid Soviet expansionism." According to D'Aubuisson, the
"collectivist" policies of the PDC fell into this category.
(Pyes 1983g) One historical basis for this thinking was
the Salvadoran far-right's perception that Christian
Democracy in Chile had paved the way for the Marxist
Popular Unity government.102

101 ST 39992 14 February, 1980. Cited in NSA (1989a,
55).

102 Interview, Eduardo Molina who helped found the PDC.
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Private sector informants for this study seemed to hold out special and personal hostility towards the PDC.

One private sector informant commented:

The PDC are the worst creatures in politics. They are dishonest at base, because they do not have a clear ideology, and they are really trying to get rich while claiming to be working for the people. Their views are bullshit. I would rather talk with a communist. With a communist, I could have coffee and have an exchange of views, because we would disagree, but both would be being honest. With a PDC member, they are basically lying.

Asked whether the PDC was more of a threat than the leftists in the first junta, the same informant responded, "Yes, in the sense that they lent more international 'legitimacy' to the government and its project, both U.S. and other international support. This made the reforms possible."

While the leadership of the FAN were not unaware that the PDC could prove useful as an international face for the military, they were determined to destroy its popular base and halt the momentum towards reforms. Pyes (1983a) claims that the primary goal of underground rightist organization was to attack the "rank-and-file Christian Democrats."

D'Aubuisson's "new ANSESAL" was moved under the army general staff and, until late 1981, operated as a political police against the Christian Democrats then in power and did little else, according to military officials from the United States and El Salvador.

Beginning in February, D'Aubuisson appeared regularly on national television in a series of videotaped denuncia-
tions of members of the popular organizations, accusing the PDC and reformist officers of having communist affiliations. Some of the material used was pure fabrication; much of it, however, came from the ANSESAL files that D'Aubuisson had recovered, reorganized, and turned over to the Ministry of Defense. Most of the episodes were taped at an Air Force facility in Guatemala. 103

In addition to direct violence against the PDC and public denunciations, the rightist political program from January onward focused on 1) repeated coup plots by the FAN aimed at unseating the PDC and the Majanistas; and 2) organizing within the military to increase the intensity of violence against the popular movement and to undercut the reformist military leadership. These were complementary

103 Some secondary sources indicate that D'Aubuisson "filched" a set of the ANSESAL files that he used for his television denunciations. (Pyes 1983a) This view suggests that he was working independently of the high command. One of my informants, a former high level government official, had noticed with alarm the similarity between the file folders that D'Aubuisson had in his hands during the taped denunciations and the folders used at ANSESAL. He contacted a high ranking officer in the Ministry of Defense, who told him that D'Aubuisson had turned over the ANSESAL files to the Ministry after the coup, "as was his duty," and that the Ministry was providing D'Aubuisson with the ANSESAL files as needed for his denunciations of "leftists" in the government and the military. My informant was unwilling to name his source. Given the key role of Nicolás Carranza in both the day to day operations of the Ministry and his well known involvement in aiding the underground right (Pyes 1983c) it seems probable that Carranza was D'Aubuisson's contact in the Ministry of Defense. The high command shared D'Aubuisson's interest in weakening the reformist sector of the military and intimidating the left wing of the PDC, so it seems entirely plausible that Carranza was aiding him with intelligence.
activities. Preparing coup plots, building up capacity for violence, and breaking up the reformist military involved some of the same tools: alarmist propaganda about the threat posed by the radical left, enhanced by accusations that reformist military leaders were in league with the left. (Castro Moran 1989, 423-33)

This multipronged strategy aimed at different pieces of the overall problem facing the business elite. The violence, denunciations, and coup plotting against the PDC aimed at forcing them out of the government. The increased violence against the general population was aimed at neutralizing the popular pressure for reform. One informant with close ties to both the military and civilian elite told me:

The acceleration of violence after January 1980 was predominantly a response to the prospect of land reform. With the military moving toward carrying out the reform, the right had to find a way to defend itself. So they put the D'Aubuisson group into action. The purpose of the violence was to stop the reform by erasing the call for them. (emphasis added) H

The FAN recognized that the young officers were, besides the U.S., the key base of political support for the PDC. By eroding support for Majano within the military, the FAN would be in a better position to block the reforms.

The first serious coup plot was slated for around the 22nd of February. It involved basically the same cast of characters from the FAN who had begun organizing in Decem-
March 1979. By mid-February, it was clear that the PDC was moving ahead with major reforms. The goal of the coup was to replace the two PDC members of the junta and substitute representatives of the FAN. Majano would also have been removed, replaced with another officer. The PDC heads of key ministries would have been replaced with FAN people as well. It is unlikely that García would have been removed, even though the FAN didn't trust him. Without the PDC in government, there would be little momentum towards reforms.

While it is impossible to determine whether this plot would have been successful, it was taken very seriously by the U.S. embassy, which met repeatedly during January and February with the high command and military junta members. The usual lineup for the U.S. was Chargé James Cheek, Deputy Chief of Mission Mark Dion, Defense Attaché Jerry Walker, the U.S. milgroup leader, and the political officer. The Salvadoran military was represented by García, Carranza, Vides Casanova, Majano, and Gutiérrez. The U.S. delegation stated in unequivocal terms that a rightist coup would be completely unacceptable to the U.S. and would result in

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104 Interview, prominent businessman who helped organize the FAN during 1979 and 1980.

105 Interview, retired senior military officer who was involved in these events.

106 Interview with an official who was present at these meetings.
cessation of all current aid to the government and military. The U.S. also applied pressure against presumed sponsors of the coup in residence in Miami, threatening them with deportation should it take place. (Montgomery 1982, 166)

The U.S. warnings were taken to heart by the high command, which seems to have helped forestall the FAN coup even though it might well have been convenient, from the high command's point of view, to see Majano removed. Another barrier to the coup, of course, was the Juventud itself, which was solidly in control of two Army barracks in the capital, meaning that any coup would automatically mean open combat between military units in the city, not a very palatable prospect for the high command. (Montgomery 1982, 165)

Adrenalizing the Right: the Role of the U.S.

As already pointed out, by engineering the PDC/military partnership, the U.S. created a situation in which the civilian right felt very threatened and accelerated its organizational activities, the consequences of which will be seen below. U.S. officials compounded the alienation of the right by meeting with representatives of ANEP, as well as FAN operatives, and confronting them with the intention of the U.S. to break their power in the country. Two

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Interview, James Cheek.
private sector elites I interviewed, one of whom played a prominent role in ANEP, the other a leading conspirator in FAN, both told me, without prompting, that they had had meetings with James Cheek that had stunned them and increased their determination to regain political control of their own country.

The purpose of Cheek's meetings with the private sector, of course, was to attempt to head off any FAN-organized coup. At one meeting, Cheek told an audience of ANEP members "The American Government is not willing to support regimes directed by bastards such as Somoza or other dictators. Within that context, the U.S. can live with benign Marxist regimes in Central America." Cheek delivered a similar message at another meeting, where he said "People like you are responsible for what's happening here." The second informant referred to Cheek as "practically a Sandinista." What was striking about their recollections of Cheek was the intensity of anger that his memory still evoked almost ten years later. The analytical significance of this is that in its efforts to cow the private sector, the U.S. also increased their perception of threat, confirmed their preexisting suspicion that the U.S. was part of the communistic forces arrayed against them. A third informant with an involvement in rightist political and paramilitary activities claimed that there were certain officials in the U.S. government, including William Bowdler
and James Cheek, whose job it was to disrupt governments and encourage revolutions. He remarked "Thank God that Pinochet never let Bowdler into Chile."\footnote{Cheek was sent to "run the embassy over Devine's shoulder" after Washington began to lose confidence in its envoy. (interview, former State Department official) Ambassador Robert White took over on March 11, his Senate confirmation having been delayed by North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms.}

There was method behind Cheek's provocative behavior toward the Salvadoran economic elite. It was part of an overall plan that had been devised by an inter-agency task force on El Salvador that Cheek had headed in Washington before he was sent to El Salvador at the end of December, 1979.\footnote{Interviews, James Cheek, Washington, D.C., March 1989; and former Ambassador Robert White, Washington, D.C., April 1990.} The task force represented an effort by the State Department to provide the sort of focused guidance that Ambassador Devine had been requesting since early 1979. The basic assumptions of the plan were that the cause of upheaval in El Salvador was the recalcitrance of the oligarchy and its power over the military, particularly the security forces. The long run plan of the Carter State Department was to undermine the oligarchy through successive land reforms, while building up the regular Army as a counterweight to the security forces, which the administration hoped to eventually see disbanded.\footnote{Interviews, James Cheek, Washington, D.C., March 1989; and former Ambassador Robert White, Washington, D.C., April 1990.} Thus while U.S. policy remained weak on human rights even after the
departure of Devine, there was a long-term strategy built into U.S. policy that aimed at shifting the socio-economic and institutional foundations of power in such a way as to make state violence less likely.

As will be seen, this policy came to naught. The oligarchy proved resistant to land reforms beyond the first phase, keeping its most profitable coffee lands. The U.S. eventually did manage to build up the regular Army relative to the security forces, but by the time this was accomplished the Army had effectively adopted the oligarchy's preferred policies with respect to violence against the popular opposition. The internal political basis for a more reformist, less repressive kind of military, that is, the Juventud current, was effectively erased before the U.S. policy of building up the Army relative to the security forces took effect.

Reforms with Repression

The failure of the late February coup shifted the power equation slightly in favor of the PDC and reformist current of the military, so that planning for the reforms proceeded rapidly in the final week of February. The high command appears to have accepted the idea of reforms and Col. Gutiérrez worked closely with U.S. agrarian reform advisers on revisions to the proposed decrees. (AID/LAC memo March 4, 1980) According to several confidential
sources and Castro Moran (1989, 311), Col. Majano played a crucial role in pressing for the reforms, backed by the continued strength and growing impatience of the Juventud. Sensing that the reforms were moving forward, the FAN increased its media blitz against the PDC, calling upon the armed forces to oust the PDC and not be intimidated by the U.S. State Department. (SS 1685 6 March, 1980)

On March 6, the reforms were implemented, expropriating properties of greater than 1,250 acres and turning them over to the permanent work force as cooperatives. On the same day, major banks around the country were nationalized, as were remaining elements of foreign trade. The way the reform was implemented, however, illustrates the amount of influence the FAN had achieved within the military and the limited ability of the Juventud to constrain violence in rural areas. The reform decrees were accompanied by a state of siege and the militarization of the countryside.

The implementation of the Junta's agrarian reform program in March 1980 produced a new surge of refugees. National Guard and Army units ostensibly deployed to implement the program were allegedly involved in the disappearance, torture, and execution of hundreds of rural inhabitants of villages where the population included members of opposition labor organizations. (Americas Watch 1982, xliii)

The greatest violence took place in Morazan, Cuscatlan, Chalatenango and San Salvador departments, where the workforces of the new cooperatives included members of popular organizations. Amnesty International reported that Army,
National Guard, and ORDEN forces virtually wiped out
several hamlets in Cuscatlan on March 13. (Americas Watch
1982, 158) In at least one case, the new cooperativists
were told to elect their leadership, which was promptly
executed by National Guard troops. (Bonner 1984, 199-200)

Table 6.2

Killings by the State during 1980

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
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<td>293</td>
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<td>634</td>
<td>1424</td>
<td>963</td>
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<td>869</td>
<td>1818</td>
<td>1389</td>
<td>1360</td>
<td>1164</td>
</tr>
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Source: Socorro Juridico Cristiano (1984, Table 6)

The violence with which the military went about es-
tablishing the cooperatives appears to have been designed,
in part, to prevent organizations of the left from gaining
a new institutional base. During a stormy meeting with
Sub-Secretary of Agriculture Jorge Villacorta about the
role of the military in implementation of the reforms, Col.
Gutiérrez told him "Doing it your way would be to establish
guerrilla cuartels on every finca." This appears to have
been a genuine concern: a March 13, 1980 Defense Intel-
ligence Agency document obtained under the Freedom of
Information Act reports an alleged plan by the FPL to place
ten cadre in each of the 376 expropriated farms to help
build up a popular militia. The report that generated this
document probably came from Salvadoran military sources,\textsuperscript{110} and while it gives what is probably an exaggerated portrayal of FPL ambitions, there is little doubt that the high command was concerned about the potential for the reform sector providing an organizational base for the radical left.

Montgomery (1982, 168) describes the violent implementation of the agrarian reform as the result of "a quid pro quo within the Salvadorean army" in which "the Young Military got their reforms and Garcia got carte blanche to implement a systematic policy of repression against the people, particularly those who lived in the countryside." I believe this is correct, though few of the Juventud officers would have agreed with the mass violence against rural civilians that followed the State of Siege decree. The point is that the reforms, and the way they were implemented, included something for everyone. The Majanistas got their long-awaited structural reforms, as did the U.S. Embassy. The State of Siege, and the excuse of occupying the cooperatives and surrounding countryside, satisfied the demands of hardline elements within the military for decisive action against the mass opposition. Thus while the private sector was deeply disturbed by the reforms, they were in a weak position to oppose it because their basis for organizing within the military -- their

\textsuperscript{110} Interview with a former U.S. intelligence analyst.
Figure 6.2 Political Killings in 1980
putative commitment to anti-communism -- seemed to be well served by the reforms, as implemented.

A representative of a federation of agrarian reform cooperatives pointed out that the reform provided the National Guard and participating Army units with a much clearer political context in which to engage in repression.

With the reforms, it made it easier and more legitimate to kill more people. If there is a reform, and people are still politically active, it must mean that they are leftists. Thus the Army could kill more freely.\footnote{111}

Former Sub-Secretary of Agriculture Jorge Villacorta points out that the formation of reform cooperatives provided the military with an opportunity to draw politically minded people and organizers out in the open.\footnote{112}

The manner in which the reform was carried out also had the effect of purging the left-wing of the PDC from the government and the party. Before the State of Siege decree, junta member Héctor Dada resigned, citing an unwillingness to "continue providing an umbrella of progressivism for a régime that is immersed in a profound repression." (Castro Moran 1989, 299) The PDC convention March 9 to choose Dada's successor "split the party wide open." (Montgomery 1982, 167) Napoleón Duarte had managed to handpick most of the delegates, but all of the PDC

\footnote{111}{Interview, Miguel Alemán, director of CONFRAS (Salvadoran Agrarian Reform Confederation).}

\footnote{112}{Interview, Jorge Villacorta, San Salvador, September, 1989.}
ministers in the government opposed him. The Juventud Militar expressed their opposition to him as well. Nonetheless, Duarte won by a slim margin. With that, the PDC Ministers of Economy and Education, as well as the Sub-Secretary of Agriculture resigned in protest, along with such prominent party figures as Rubén Zamora.113 Just as the violence of December 1979 had driven the first junta from office, the violence of January and February, combined with the repressive implementation of the agrarian reform, triggered the resignations of the more popularly-oriented elements of the PDC, leaving those who were willing to cooperate with the high command.

Despite the purging of the PDC and the heightened repression in the countryside, the FAN continued to feel threatened by the combination of the PDC in government, with its U.S. support, and the influence of Majano and the Juventud. Therefore, the FAN continued to develop its coup plot against the PDC and the Juventud. Through March and April, D'Aubuisson and his allies in the military continued their public denunciations of the PDC and the Majanistas, and continued their dual-purpose organizational work within the military. On March 24, an unknown assailant widely believed to have been working under Roberto D'Aubuisson

113 This dissident group later formed the Popular Social Christian Movement (MPSC) outside the country. By November 1981, over 60% of party members had resigned, most of them becoming members of the MPSC. (Montgomery 1982, 168)
Chapter Six

shot Archbishop Oscar Romero as he was saying mass.\textsuperscript{114}

Retired Colonel Roberto Santibañez claims that the civilian right ordered the assassination "with the single idea of destabilizing the junta."\textsuperscript{115}

D'Aubuisson, despite being formally retired from the military, continued to have full access to military bases where he met with officials and gave talks on the political situation. Beta-Max video cassettes and audio tapes were circulated among the barracks accusing Majano and PDC leaders of being communists. In March, unknown agents fired on Captain Mena Sandoval at a cross-roads near Santa Tecla. He had been warned that he was on a FAN death list.

(Mena 1990, 159) In early April, hardline elements appear to have made an attempt on the life of Col. Majano. An aircraft sent to Guatemala to pick up Majano was delayed over half an hour by inclement weather en route. It exploded mid-air at about the time it would have been

\textsuperscript{114}Journalists Tom Gibb and Douglas Farah (1989, 10) say that most evidence points to National Police detective Edgard Perez Linares, who was closely associated with D'Aubuisson. The killing was carried out with a .257 Roberts rifle -- a rare caliber -- and references to such a weapon were included in a notebook in D'Aubuisson's possession when he was arrested in May of 1980. (See notebook transcript in National Security Archive document collection (NSA 1989b.).

\textsuperscript{115}Col. Santibañez was interviewed at length in Alan Francovich's 1985 documentary film Short Circuit. Santibañez was the director of ANSESAL under the Romero government and maintained close contacts with hardline sectors of the military after being forced into retirement by the October 1979 coup.
airborne once again, with Majano on board, had it not been delayed. Three Juventud Militar officers on board were killed. (Castro Moran 1989, 316)

The motivations for the continued work against the Majanistas by both the FAN and the high command are fairly clear. They saw the reformist officers as having been responsible for the confiscation of lands in March, a perception that was largely correct. The Juventud continued to be a potential threat to the political security of the high command. Majano also believes that he and his supporters were seen as obstacles to the level of repression that both the high command and the FAN thought necessary. Acting as junta member and technical commander-in-chief of the armed forces (see below), Majano consistently headed off plans by the high command to increase violence against civilians, and lower level reformist officers were unwilling to participate in state terrorism.116

Things came to a head in early May, when Col. Majano got wind of a meeting of right wing civilians and officers at the Finca San Luis near Santa Tecla, a few miles west of the capital. He had been aware of coup-plotting by the FAN and had confronted García and Carranza with his information. They denied any involvement in the activities, but also refused to take any action against the conspirators.

116 Interview, Adolfo Majano, New York, March 1990.
Chapter Six

This was logical, given that the proposed coup was directed against Majano, rather than against them. Acting unilaterally, Majano sent troops from the Signal Corps and the First Brigade to surround the farm and arrest the conspirators. D'Aubuisson was arrested along with a dozen other officers and a dozen civilians.\textsuperscript{117} The prisoners were held in the First Brigade headquarters, from which one of the captives was permitted to call a U.S. military officer associated with the embassy. The prisoner, who was weeping, told his U.S. counterpart that he and his fellows were going to be executed before dawn.\textsuperscript{4}

The arrests triggered a crisis within the military: Majano took shelter in the First Brigade, while Garcia, Carranza and Gutiérrez went to the National Guard headquarters. There were preparations for military action at both barracks.\textsuperscript{118} Majano's demands were simply that D'Aubuisson and his associates be tried for "endangering state security." Majano ordered a pre-trial hearing. The judge who heard the case was associated with Majano's

\textsuperscript{117} Interview, Adolfo Majano, New York, March 1990.

\textsuperscript{118} Interviews, former members of the reformist current of the Salvadoran military. More conservative officers avoided answering specific questions about these events, responding instead with general comments to the effect that the military may come close to "divorce" but always manages to stay together. The former reformists' account of preparations for armed conflict is probably correct, however, as former reformists who remain within the military generally view these events as dangerous, regrettable moments which they have no particular desire to play up.
faction but a member of D'Aubuisson's tanda. After a delay of a few days, and much wrangling and confusion throughout the military, the judge ordered D'Aubuisson and his associates released for lack of evidence. (Christian 1986, 91-2)

Up to this point, there had been some ambiguity about who was the highest authority within the military. Majano had correctly exercised his legal authority in ordering the arrest of D'Aubuisson et. al. as well as their trial: as the senior military member of the junta, Majano was legally the commander in chief of the armed forces, superior to the Minister of Defense. This action, however, was deeply divisive. By attempting to try D'Aubuisson and associates for their actions, Majano was confronting head-on exactly the issue that had divided the military since October, that is, the willingness of the institution to punish officers who carried out politically motivated, illegal activities. He had also taken on one of the key players within the hardline sector of the military, thus inviting open conflict between his own allies in the Army and the security forces.

As had happened during the January crisis, a poll was taken of the entire officer corps on the question of

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119 Majano was had one year less seniority than Gutiérrez, but Gutiérrez was from the "services" branch of the military rather than the "arms" branch, thus Majano was superior according to Salvadoran military law.
whether Gutiérrez or Majano should be the commander in chief of the armed forces in the future. Going against the formality of military law, a slim majority voted in favor of Gutiérrez. This was, of course, a heavy blow to Majano’s status within the institution. A U.S. embassy cable on May 13 commented patronizingly that “Majano's pride is hurt and he is probably considering some action that will put a strain on the government.” (SS 3337, 13 May, 1979) This misses the point: the representative of the reformist, pro-civilian, human rights-oriented sector of the military had just been removed from his position as commander in chief and left as a figurehead on the junta. The crucial substantive consequence of the May 12 vote was that Gutiérrez was able to issue a general order on September 1 removing virtually all of Majano's supporters from the command of troops, effectively eliminating the chance of a reformist military challenge to increasing state violence.120

Majano was criticized by a number of confidential informants for triggering a confrontation and then being unwilling to carry through with the potentially violent action necessary to win. Alejandro Piallos claims that if

120 Of Majano’s supporters, only Mena Sandoval remained in his post, largely because he personally threatened to take over the barracks if they tried and had sufficient loyalty among the lieutenants to make his threat credible. He later mutinied and sided with the FMLN guerrillas. (Mena 1990, 163)
the reformist officers at the San Carlos and El Zapote barracks had taken action at this point, they could have won, because junior officers throughout the country were still sympathetic.\(^{121}\) Other former military officers claimed the same thing.\(^{122}\) Majano claims that he backed down because he simply didn't have enough forces to win and doubted the willingness of his troops to kill their fellows.\(^{122}\) The consequence of his inaction, however, was that even officers who supported him turned against him: it was simply too dangerous to follow a leader who would bring them to the brink of confrontation, then back down, leaving all of them vulnerable.

The confrontation in May began a rapid deterioration in the position of the Majanistas. Majano was portrayed by the high command, with considerable success, as a threat to the unity and integrity of the armed forces.\(^{123}\) Being stripped of his command authority greatly weakened the position of reformist captains and lieutenants in most of the brigades, where they had to contend with brigade commanders -- full colonels -- who were loyal to García.

Perhaps the most important thing to say about the May confrontation is that it represented a tremendous success

\(^{121}\) Interview, Mexico City, October 1989.

\(^{122}\) Interview, Roslyn, New York, March 1990.

\(^{123}\) Interview, Robert White, Washington, D.C. April 1990.
for the politico-military strategy of the FAN. By preparing a threatening coup plot, the FAN provoked Majano into a very high-risk act of self-defense that discredited him within the military institution and undermined the solidarity of the Juventud Militar. Thus, even though Majano prevented the coup from going forward, in a few months the FAN had achieved their goal in any case.

The deterioration of the Majanistas' position culminated in the September 1 general order, signed by Gutiérrez and García, transferring Majano's loyalists away from troop commands. Majano countermanded the order, telling his officers to stay put. Once again, the barracks in the capital prepared for combat. Majano took shelter this time at the Zapote Signal Corps barracks, while Gutiérrez, García and Carranza went to the National Guard barracks. Once again, Majano called upon his loyalists to confront the high command, then backed down after the high command agreed to a minor concession, leaving a few of Majano's loyalists in place. (NSA 1989a, 81) Majano was able to remain on the junta until early December, when the officer corps, at an assembly held in Majano's absence, voted 300 to 4 to remove him from the junta. (Baloyra 1982, 111)\(^1\)

\(^1\) After the assembly in which Majano received four votes, Minister of Defense García spoke of Majano derisively as a "quatrero," or cattle rustler. (interview, former military officer.)
Finishing off the Reformist Military

From May onward, the high command developed other methods of diminishing support for Majano's group. Lower-ranking officers who were known to be loyal to Majano were transferred to hazardous locations, such as Chalatenango, where guerrilla organizations were beginning to operate. The idea, according to Professor José García, was to put the young officers in a place where they would "take some fire" from the guerrillas. The Defense Ministry would then offer them an opportunity to transfer back to a safer locale if they were willing to "stop being Majanistas."125

Other measures were used as well: reformist junior officers in their barracks were subject to increasing pressures to commit massacres against civilians, particularly in rural areas. Mena Sandoval (1990, 162-170) describes several situations in which he was pressured to kill civilians and narrowly managed to avoid doing so. He was viewed with considerable suspicion by his superiors, which eased slightly when he proved himself highly effective in combat against guerrillas. Mena was warned that he was being watched and was regularly accused of being a communist.

125 Personal communication, José Z. García, April 1991. García was in El Salvador in late 1979 through 1980 and had an opportunity to travel to Chalatenango, where he met with officers who were receiving the described treatment from the high command.
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Other officers were threatened with death or directly attacked. In early November, an enormous bomb exploded near the central military command headquarters just as Majano's vehicle was driving by. The dynamite was ignited from a remote location and the timing was slightly off: Majano was unscathed. He immediately proceeded to the military academy where he confronted Col. Carranza who seemed extremely surprised to see him, blurting out "Majanito, Majanito"! Captain Amilcar Molina Panameño was assassinated ("they left him like a collar"") in mid-November by elements of the National Police, and other officers such as Captain Fiallos were threatened and forced to leave the country. (Mena 1990, 170)

While threats and assassination attempts were directed against the most committed and radical of the junior officers, others were subject to a persistent campaign to label the Juventud movement and its leadership as communist. This was a continuation of the strategy of the FAN from January through May, but came increasingly from the high command and officers loyal to it. There was, of course, some truth to the argument that Majano, Mena Sandoval and other had contacts with the left. "Following the mass demonstration of the 22nd of January, there had been a discrete dialogue between Majano, the PDC, and the

left, especially the BPR.\textsuperscript{127} There were additional contacts between numerous captains and the FARN, which hoped to include "honest sectors" of the military in the revolutionary struggle. The RN was particularly active in trying to arrange some sort of internal military rebellion around the time of the September crisis.\textsuperscript{128} Mena Sandoval and a few other officers developed contacts with the ERP organization. (Mena 1990, 161) None of this amounted to much, however. The higher level contacts, i.e. those involving Majano and the PDC, were not directed towards any sort of military cooperation between the Juventud and the guerrilla left, but rather were aimed at exploring the parameters for a negotiated, political solution. Even those officers who had ties with the RN or the ERP had a great deal of trouble trusting these organizations, partly because the officers had long been steeped in anti-communist thinking, and partly because the guerrilla organizations themselves were so disunified that it was difficult for the young officers to have confidence in them.\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{127} Former senior member of government with direct knowledge of these events.

\textsuperscript{128} The FPL objected to this tactic on the part of the RN, triggering the temporary departure of the RN from the Unified Revolutionary Directorate in September of 1980.

\textsuperscript{129} Interviews, Adolfo Majano, New York, March 1990; Antonio Hernandez, Politico-Diplomatic Commission of the FMLN, Mexico City, August 1989.
Although the threat of an alliance between part of the military and the guerrillas was in fact minimal, the high command and its hardline allies manipulated the fear of internal division. This became one of their primary tools in convincing young officers to turn against Majano and his supporters. In interviews, former *Juventud* members who had remained in the armed forces unanimously cited the threat to institutional unity as the reason for the removal of Majano and his supporters. All seemed to approve of this. This was one of the achilles heels of the reformist movement within the military: even officers who strongly believed in the reform program were only willing to actively promote it so long as it appeared possible that the reformist leadership could dominate and unify the military. Once the tide turned against the *Majanistas*, so that upholding a reformist agenda meant prolonged, indecisive conflict within the military that the left could take advantage of, many officers subordinated reformist principles to the preservation of the institution.

Table 6.3

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jan</th>
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<td>1077</td>
<td>869</td>
<td>1818</td>
<td>1389</td>
<td>1360</td>
<td>1164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Socorro Jurídico Cristiano (1984, Table 6)
Consequences of the Collapse of the Reformist Military

The dynamics of state violence closely trace the intensified campaign of the far-right to block reforms and drive the Juventud Militar and PDC out of power. As Table 6.3 shows, state killings stayed around 300 per month in January and February, then nearly doubled in March with the declaration of a state of siege. Violence continued to increase in April and more than doubled in May, following the defeat of the Majanistas in their confrontation with the FAN and the high command. Though the violence in May was exceptionally severe and the following three months showed somewhat less violence, it nonetheless marked a long-term increase in state violence: the rate of official killing did not drop to pre-May 1980 levels until the middle of the next year, and then only temporarily. The next major increase came in September, following the third Juventud/high command confrontation and the removal of most Majanistas from command positions. Over 1,800 people were killed by state forces in September, and the rate remained at well over one thousand per month until May of 1981.

It is important to note that there were no major expansions of the government armed forces during this period. The increases that took place in state violence reflect 1) increased activity by forces already committed to repression and 2) increased involvement by previously inactive forces. Both of these means of expanding state
violence depended upon the politics of the military. The intensity of activity by hardliners depended on the extent to which they were authorized (or perceived themselves as being informally authorized) by their superiors to kill civilians. It also depended on their perceptions of the political risks to them of doing so. As the reformist movement in the military was broken up, the constraints on violently-disposed officers and soldiers diminished. The prevailing atmosphere within the military was "kill a communist, get a medal; make a mistake, be excused for your good intentions." As the political power of Majano declined, and as reform-minded officers became increasingly isolated, their ability to resist pressures to participate in violence against civilians was reduced, thus enabling the high command to involve regular Army forces in repressive actions. By late 1980, the regular Army was the lead agency in repressive sweeps of the countryside in which hundreds of civilians were killed. In these operations, the security forces acted in support of the Army, a reversal of the previous relationship between the forces.

130 Interview, Antonio Morales Erlich, San Salvador, August 1989. Morales was a key FDC leader and member of the JRG from January 1980 until the junta's replacement in 1982.

131 Interview, retired military officer.
I do not intend to imply that the September crisis and the departure of Majano in December brought a final end to internal divisions within the Salvadoran military over the use of violence against civilians. What it did end was the effective representation of an anti-repression, pro-civilian, pro-reform agenda within the military. Junior officers continued in many cases to harbor private opinions opposed to the intensive and indiscriminate way that violence was used from 1980 onward. According to retired U.S. Army General Fred Woerner who led an team of U.S. officers to evaluate the Salvadoran military in 1981, Defense Minister Garcia's job in 1981 continued to be to hold the institution together, repair the schism. He put this even above fighting the war. Everything was shaded by how far he could go with the fractured institution. The problem was risk-taking. Garcia believed that the military could not, given its weaknesses resulting from internal fractionalization, stand a tactical defeat. This resulted in a defensive attitude and posture.¹³²

Salvadoran political scientist Rafael Guidos Véjar also believes that the military was on the verge of collapse for the first two years of the war, largely because of continued internal dissent over the violent path chosen by the high command.¹³³

Such continued instability may have affected the combat capabilities of the armed forces, but residual

¹³² Interview, Retired General Fred Woerner, Boston, July 1990.

¹³³ Interview, Mexico City, August, 1989.
Figure 6.3 Political Killings 1978-1985
opposition to state violence was, by late 1980, so disarticulated that it was not no longer an effective constraint on the policy of killing opposition civilians. The military high command maintained a degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the oligarchy on political issues such as the continued presence of the Christian Democrats in government, maintenance of the March 1980 land reform, and the choice of Alvaro Magaña as provisional president in 1982, but this seeming independence resulted primarily from U.S. pressure, combined with the long standing "institutionalist" military tradition of preserving some autonomy from civilian elites. With regard to the use of violence, however, the policy preferences of the civilian far-right became the practice of the military institution as a whole for roughly four years. There was, in effect, a consensus within the military on a policy of exterminating those portions of the population who supported, or might support, the guerrillas. This was not the "clean counter-insurgency" program advocated by Carter administration officials such as James Cheek, nor was it the more sophisticated, hearts-and-minds approach preferred by at least some U.S. military advisers. Only after the Reagan administration (responding to Congressional pres-

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135 Interviews, present and former U.S. military advisors in El Salvador.
sent clear signals to the Salvadoran military that continued aid depended upon reduced violence did killing by the state drop and consistently remain below 1980 levels. See Figure 6.3

One practical political consequence of the increased violence and the disarticulation of reformist dissent within the military was to foreclose any possibility of dialogue with the left. Once the military as a whole was operating on the principle of eliminating all opposition, there was very little possibility of reaching an accord. Carter administration officials had hoped throughout 1980 that they would eventually manage to work out a negotiated deal incorporating the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR)\textsuperscript{136} leadership into government, and constructing a cleaned-up military "around Majano."\textsuperscript{137} In late November, with Majano out of the country,\textsuperscript{138} six key leaders of the FDR were assassinated in an overt, high profile operation of the security forces most likely could not have taken

\textsuperscript{136} The FDR resulted from the unification of the popular organizations with political parties of the opposition, including the MNR, UDN, the dissident Christian Democrats who formed the MPSC, and various unaffiliated professionals, such as former Agriculture Minister Enrique Alvarez, who were working with the left.

\textsuperscript{137} Interview Robert White, Washington D.C., April 1990.

\textsuperscript{138} Majano, having survived the second attempt on his life, had just left the country, taking his family into exile. He later returned to resume his position on the junta. He was voted out in December.
place if the Juventud Militar had still had control of garrisons in the capital. (SS 8331 30 November, 1980) A source with close ties to the military told Ambassador White that "the security forces may have deliberately engineered the kidnapping and assassination in this obvious way in order to ensure an armed confrontation with the left." (SS 8325, 25 November, 1980) The day of the assassination, FDR Enrique Alvarez was to present a proposal for dialogue at a press conference. According to Francisco Altchul of the FDR, the right probably saw it as essential to kill the FDR leadership because they had been gaining increasing international recognition.  

139 Interview with former government official who spoke with Alvarez in Mexico shortly before his assassination regarding FDR proposals for dialogue.  

140 Interview, Francisco Altchul, Washington, D.C., April 1990.

According to three confidential sources -- two former Carter administration government officials and an informant from the Salvadoran private sector -- the killing of the FDR leadership was facilitated not only by the suppression of the Young Military but also by signals sent by U.S. rightists. Following the election of Ronald Reagan, a group of individuals who identified themselves, falsely, as members of the "Reagan transition team" travelled to El Salvador and Guatemala to meet with Salvadoran rightists and hardline military leaders. They encouraged the Salvadorans to do whatever was necessary to suppress the left, promising no interference from Washington. According to one of my sources, they encouraged hardline Salvadorans to kill high-profile targets before Ronald Reagan took office, thus the assassination of the six FDR leaders, two U.S. land reform advisers, and four U.S. Catholic church- women between the election and Reagan's inauguration.
If the intention behind the assassination of the FDR leadership was to force an armed confrontation, it was successful, although the momentum in that direction was already very strong by late 1980. As mentioned briefly in the introduction to this chapter, the violence created a situation in which, "as repression escalated, eventually a point was reached where for some people it was easier to organize and be active clandestinely than openly." The process of "pistolización" described in the last chapter accelerated rapidly following the coup, and the relative weight of the guerrilla organizations within the left increased as the prospects for changing the government through mass protest became increasingly dim.

One consequence of the spread of institutional participation in violence throughout the military, as well as the increased intensity of violent activities by those forces that had long been involved in violence, was that the targeting of violence became increasingly random. The military basically outran its intelligence-gathering capability, resorting to crude target profiles based on age, sex, clothing, occupation, and geographic location. Once this began to happen, there came to be less connection between an individual's level of political activism and

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141 Interview, Aronette Diaz v. de Zamora, Secretary General of the UDN, San Salvador, August, 1989.

142 Interview, Dagoberto Campos, CDHES, San Salvador, September, 1989.
their chances of being killed. Under such circumstances, even persons who had sought to remain above the fray found that they had little choice but to flee or fight. (Mason and Krane 1983)

The accelerated violence after the coup confronted the radical left with a series of extremely difficult decisions. Because of the reformist juntas and state violence associated with them, events accelerated much faster than most people in the left had expected.\footnote{Interview, Francisco Altchul, Washington, D.C., April 1990. Altchul is associated with the FDR.} The guerrillas had forces that numbered only a few hundred by 1980 and were still short of armament.\footnote{One confidential source -- a former government official with good channels of communication to the FMLN and no particular reason to play down the strength of the guerrillas -- said that the guerrillas had only around 250 military-style automatic rifles by mid-1980. This increased markedly after the Sandinistas began to facilitate large-scale arms deliveries in November of 1980.} While the FPL had

Several of the more conservative among active duty Salvadoran officers I interviewed claimed that the FMLN was better equipped and more numerous than government forces by late 1980. These claims are probably exaggerated: photographs in issues of the ERP (FMLN) publication El Combatiente from the period (for example, 15 November 1980), which would presumably be selected to amplify the apparent military capability of the guerrillas, show a motley collection of weapons including a few modern FAI and G-3 assault rifles and UZI sub-machineguns, combined with obsolete or comparatively ineffective arms such as M-1 Garand rifles, M-1 or M-2 carbines, Mauser bolt-action rifles, various .22 rimfire rifles and single-shot shotguns, and handguns. (Issues of El Combatiente and other FMLN publications are available in the archives of Inter-University Center for Documentation and Information at the UCA.)
developed a revolutionary mass base in the countryside with a strong ideological commitment, the strength of ideological preparation in the urban areas was weaker.\textsuperscript{145} While tens of thousands of people were outraged and radicalized by state violence, they were also intimidated by it.

In June of 1980, when the mass mobilization in the cities was greatest, there might have been opportunity for an insurrection, but the left opted for a general strike instead. The guerrilla organizations judged that they lacked the military capability to support an insurrection. Thereafter, the impact of state violence eroded the base of support, so that the second general strike, in August, was less successful than the first. In effect, "the massacre proceeded faster than the mobilization."\textsuperscript{146} By September, the left was clearly shifting its resources into building a military capacity. (SS 6612 24 September, 1980) This meant that much of the leadership of the urban popular organizations went into clandestinity to be trained and to help organize an army.

As the FMLN shifted towards a military strategy, leaders who had been organizing and expanding the popular movement in the cities withdrew from this work to prepare to be guerrillas. This, of course, weakened the organiza-

\textsuperscript{145} Interview, U.S. journalist Chris Norton, San Salvador, September 1989.

\textsuperscript{146} Interview, journalist Horacio Castellanos, Mexico City, August 1989.
tional infrastructure of the left in the cities, which contributed to the failure of the FMLN's attempt at insurrection in January of 1981. Without sufficient organization, people in the cities were too terrorized to spontaneously take the risk of supporting the guerrillas. In the long run, however, the military strategy came very close to being successful. By late 1983, U.S. officials were strongly of the opinion that the Salvadoran military was on the verge of collapse.¹⁴⁷ The guerrillas were in an open-war phase, operating units of multi-battalion strength, which were "particularly successful in wiping out government units."¹⁴⁸ Though it is impossible to judge, it seems likely that the Salvadoran government forces would have been defeated had U.S. military assistance not increased by two and a half times in fiscal 1984 to just under $220 million. (Fagen 1987, 148)¹⁴⁹

It seems reasonable to conclude that although the increased violence of the Salvadoran military during the 14

¹⁴⁷ Interview, U.S. military officer who was extensively involved in overseeing the aid program to the Salvadoran military.


¹⁴⁹ A key element of U.S. assistance was the provision of helicopters and ground-attack jets which could attack the FMLN's large units, forcing the guerrilla movement to shift to hit-and-run tactics suitable for much smaller units.
months following the coup were successful in forcing the popular left to retreat from the streets, the repression was ultimately counterproductive for the security of the state because it forced the creation of a military opposition that the state was not capable of resisting without massive outside assistance.

Conclusions

Alternative Outcomes

This chapter has played down the extent to which opposition demonstrations and violence provoked the violent behavior of the state. Many of my interviewees felt that the actions of the mass opposition were central to an understanding of state violence. All of my military informants argued that fear of the mass opposition had a major effect on political and professional decisions they made from 1979 onward. It is important to note, however, that their reaction to that fear was not uniformly a violent one, at least not at the outset. The collapse of the Somoza government triggered intense fear on the part of Salvadoran officers that they might soon face the same fate as their Nicaraguan brethren. Yet this fear did not have a uniform effect on the willingness of Salvadoran officers to use violence; in fact, it triggered two divergent reactions, one to crack down, another to meet the popular movement "half-way."
It is one thing to describe, as several informants did, scenarios in which young, badly trained troops were faced by angry mobs of demonstrators and fired in what they perceived to be self-defense. It is another to claim that such a reflexive, fear reaction is an adequate basis for explaining the large-scale, systematic application of violence witnessed from December 1979 onward. Most of the violence that the state committed in 1979 and 1980 was not in the form of troops firing on demonstrators, though this did happen. Most of it was the work of security forces troops, uniformed or otherwise, taking unarmed people out of their homes and killing them, often torturing them first. Such actions, though potentially informed by fear of a presumed enemy, are also very deliberate and the threat posed by the "enemy" is often very remote and ideologically stylized.

Ideology

A reformist civilian informant commented that military personnel have a deeply inculcated hostility towards any form of disorder or indiscipline, a view that was confirmed by comments of my more conservative military informants. All of the officer corps are deeply steeped in anti-communist ideology during their training, making distrust of the popular left vitally instinctual for virtually all officers. That said, many officers were nonetheless aware
that, as much as they might distrust the left, the opposition to the state during this period was ultimately based on valid grievances related to the inequitable economic structure of the country, the lack of political channels for expressing discontent, and the extent of violent repression against frequently innocent people.

Fear of opposition did not, therefore, automatically translate into beliefs that mass violence was the only solution. There were alternative ways of responding ideologically to the challenge the military confronted, especially when the opposition was mostly unarmed. Many officers, possibly even a majority at the outset, responded by being willing to break with the conservative, repressive status quo. One must then ask, If that is so, why did the institution as a whole ultimately commit itself to a policy of extermination of civilian opponents? Part of the answer to this lies in the complex nature of reformist ideas in comparison to the hardline formula of killing the enemy. Adolfo Majano argues that this was the single greatest vulnerability of the reformist movement: "The reformist project was ambiguous, lacked a clear theory, had no clear ideas. In contrast, the hardline was very simple: anti-communism. It was easier for the hardliners to obtain followers."\(^{150}\)

This ideological vulnerability of the reformist project was compounded by the fact that the project itself was likely to require some time to succeed and was vulnerable to interference. It depended upon 1) successfully implementing reforms and 2) the reforms having the effect of placating the mass opposition. Delays in implementation in late 1979 and early 1980 led to continued expansion of mass opposition. The political benefits of those reforms that were carried out were nullified by the campaign of state violence from December onward. These programatic vulnerabilities interacted with the fact that many of the officers who initially supported reforms held to reformist beliefs rather lightly. Most officers had very little formal education beyond what they had received in the military academy. Much of the understanding that junior officers had about the need for structural reforms came from a document written by scholars from the UCA and circulated among the conspirators prior to the coup. The young officers tried to study and discuss it in depth, "little by little getting a grip on its contents, at least in its most general aspects." (Mena 1990, 140-1) Majano argues that most of the young officers never understood very deeply how the reformist program should work, and that this weak understanding made them susceptible to being
persuaded to follow a hardline approach when the reformist project failed to promptly demobilize the opposition. Another important factor that relates to perceptions and ideology is the understandable preoccupation of most officers with preserving the unity of the armed forces. It is not accidental that the few officers who crossed over to join the left were individuals who were misfits in some way or another. Mena Sandoval had been thrown out of the academy twice for insubordination and was widely perceived as a maverick. Others such as Alejandro Piallos, Bruno Navarrete, and Marcelo Cruz were medical practitioners with a second set of professional commitments. Most officers, however, were reluctant to break ranks with the rest of the institution. In the early aftermath of the coup, when it appeared that the institution might unify behind the reformist agenda, it was easy to support. Once the depth of conflict involved became clear, many officers, including Col. Majano on a number of crucial occasions, opted for preserving unity over promoting the reformist program.

Ideology obviously played an important role in the reaction of the civilian right to the reformist governments. It seems clear from their statements that members of the oligarchy and its political organizations saw reformist elites in state power as at least as threatening, and probably more threatening, than the mass opposition.

151 Interview, Adolfo Majano, New York, March 1990.
Part of this was purely rational: the reformist state had the capacity to harm their economic interests and actually did so in late 1979 and early 1980. As Lt. Col. Mariano Castro Moran points out, the four pillars of political power for the Salvadoran agrarian elite for decades had been 1) the military; 2) the Church; 3) the U.S. Embassy; and 4) their own economic power. The reform movement in the military directly disrupted the oligarchy's channels of control within the armed forces; elements of the Church, including the Archdiocese of San Salvador and the Catholic University of Central America, turned against capital and supported the reforms; and the U.S. embassy seemed intent on the presence of the PDC in government and the implementation of reforms. In a sense, it is no surprise that the private sector elite was hostile.

The strength of reaction to elite reformists may in part be an indirect result of the extreme social distances that separate upper and lower strata of Salvadoran society. The Salvadoran elite tends to view the lower classes as incapable of independent political action. Unrest in rural areas, for example, was seen as the result of subversive elites such as Jesuit priests (or even the military during the Molina land reform episode). In their view, the peasants would not rebel were it not for such seditious influences. Thus while the oligarchy clearly advocated the use of violence to suppress rural unrest, they became far
more vigorous in their promotion of a hardline response when the challenge to them involved elites.

Leadership Issues

A former senior member of government commented that "To understand the Salvadoran military, you must view it as a political institution in which political experience is extremely valuable. For this reason, the Juventud Militar was extremely vulnerable."152 Because of this lack of experience, the reformist current was very dependent upon senior leadership. Unfortunately, it appears that those senior officers who were most willing to support the reformist movement were least likely to be able to effectively promote its agenda.153 Lt. Col. René Guerra y Guerra, for instance, was unusually open to major reforms for a senior officer. He had spent years studying electrical engineering in the U.S., and had come into contact there with a Marxist Salvadoran doctor by the name of Guillermo Quiñonez, who convinced Guerra y Guerra of the

152 Interview, former government official.

153 In an interview, retired Lt. Col. Mariano Castro Morán quoted Argentine writer José Ingenieros as saying that "Jóvenes son todos ellos que no tienan complicidad con el pasado" (Youths are all those who have no complicity with the past.) In the Salvadoran military, senior officers who could qualify as not having been complicit in the abuses of the past were few and far between, and most were individuals who were, for one reason or another, outsiders within the military institution and therefore handicapped as leaders.
need for radical changes at home. (Bonner 1984, 148)
Guerra had liabilities as a leader, however: the very
characteristics that gave him an unusually reformist
perspective -- his advanced education, his lack of depen-
dence upon a military career to make a living, his exposure
to radical ideas -- also made him less able to build
support for himself within the officer corps. Despite his
credentials as a reformist and an honest officer, Guerra
was not as trusted by many of the junior officers because
he had been absent from the country for so long. He was
simply not well known, and was seen as something of an
outsider. Some even suspected him, because he had been an
aide to President Romero, of being "Romero's man." Others thought he was a communist.

Colonel Majano was better known than Guerra because he
had taught for several years at the military academy. He
had a reputation among the students for honesty, loyalty to
the military institution, and progressive social thinking.
This positive image is reflected in his unanimous election
to the post-coup junta. As noted earlier, however, the
same personal commitment to the institution that gave
Majano such broad appeal led him to sacrifice the reformist
agenda to the preservation of institutional unity.

154 Interview, former Army Captain Alejandro Fiallos.
Chapter Six

Institutional Politics

One informant from the private sector commented that the reason the first junta collapsed was that "they overestimated the weakness of society" (by which he meant elite society) and underestimated its capacity and willingness to fight back. While I would hesitate to make a deterministic argument that the Salvadoran private sector was bound to defeat reformism simply because it controlled so many resources, its capacity to mobilize financial resources to influence the conduct of military officers clearly provided it with tools to resist reforms. Wealth alone is not the whole story, of course. The private sector's wealth was politically useful because a partially autonomous sector of the military -- the security forces -- had an established mercenary relationship with the private sector. The loyalty of these mercenary sectors was based not only on lucre but on shared risk: their institutional base, their careers, and potentially even their lives and liberty were threatened by the reformist movement.

The fact that the security forces sided with the oligarchy was not, in and of itself, sufficient to ensure that the reformist agenda would lose out to a hardline one. A key factor was the fact that the reformist project was vulnerable to increased violence by state agencies over which it had little control. State violence was a decentralized activity, but it affected the political
climate on a national scale. The hardline agenda had a self-reinforcing aspect in that as the state used more violence, opposition became more radical and more violent. In effect, the supply of violence created a greater need for further violence. As the nature of state/mass society conflict shifter in an increasingly military direction, it became more difficult for officers to remain committed to the reformist path and easier for hardliners or the high command to recruit officers for repressive missions.

The history of the Romero government suggests that we should not take for granted the fact that the pro-oligar-
chic elements in the security forces seem to have enjoyed virtually free-rein following the October coup. Despite powerful pressures from the oligarchy for stronger action, Romero hindered the security forces' freedom, partly in response to international pressures, partly out of fear for the internal security of his government. The freedom that the security forces enjoyed after the coup was a product of the fact that the high command after the coup, particularly Colonels García and Carranza, were threatened from below by the Juventud and actively needed the help of the hard-
liners. Because they were a well-recognized leadership group, they were not subject to the kinds of risks of a palace conspiracy that haunted Romero. Thus clandestine intelligence and death squad networks did not pose the threat to them that they had to Romero; on the contrary,
such activities increased the likelihood that the reformist project would collapse.

Whereas international pressures, particularly from the U.S., had contributed to caution on Romero's part in using or permitting violence, few such pressures were brought to bear on the post-coup government. The U.S. seems to have been concerned about state violence only when committed by a regime that already lacked international legitimacy. Once Romero was replaced by a joint civilian/military junta, the U.S. effectively dropped human rights policy. (This suggests that the original disapproval of Romero's violence was more a matter of public relations than substantive objections.) Having virtually removed all disincentives for state violence, the only other pressures the U.S. brought against the military after the coup concerned the keeping the PDC in the junta and implementing reforms.

Both of these pressures had the effect of intensifying the efforts of the civilian right to influence the military and gain control of the government, which in turn increased violence and helped undermine the reformist current in the military.

Although U.S. officials who served in El Salvador spoke with pride in interviews about their successful interventions to prevent rightist coups, it is possible that these actions contributed to greater violence in the
long run. By blocking the February coup, for instance, the U.S. prevented intra-military conflict from coming to a head while the Juventud movement was still largely intact, controlled important military units, and capable of resisting. When the next confrontation came in May, the young military was already somewhat weakened and the FAN and its military allies had had more time to prepare. The defeat of Majano in the May crisis was decisive in paving the way for the application of hardline policy on violence.

The Risks of Reformism

The reformist soldiers, civilian politicians, professionals, and scholars who participated in the first and second juntas were trying to prevent bloodshed and improve the social conditions of their country. The original military conspirators and their advisers from the UCA hoped that state-led reformism might defuse the social and political tensions that were otherwise pushing El Salvador towards civil war. The progressive Christian Democrats who went into the second JRG and cabinet were somewhat less optimistic. Most assumed that the new government would not last long and that some kind of revolutionary change was inevitable, but thought that by entering government they might be able to provide some protection for the popular
movement while it prepared itself.\textsuperscript{155} When it became clear that they were unable to provide any protection whatever, they promptly left the government. Other more conservative Christian Democrats, such as Antonio Morales Ehrlich, shared the optimism of the first junta that they might be able to avert a civil war.\textsuperscript{156}

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that far from averting civil war, the reformist governments actually accelerated its onset by creating a situation in which the civilian right and hardline military mobilized themselves, the high command cooperated with the far-right, and the U.S. felt it could ignore human rights violations because the international legitimacy of the regimes seemed assured. This is not intended to be a personal attack or criticism of the individuals who led the reformist effort; rather, it is a retrospective assessment of the structure of elite political competition after Romero and a reflection on its consequences for the dynamics of state violence.

The achilles heel of the elite reformist strategy was that the elites themselves had very tenuous ties to any base of popular support. The reformist officers had very little contact with the popular left; their civilian

\textsuperscript{155} Interview, Juan José Martel, former PDC youth leader and current MPSC leader, San Salvador, October, 1989.

\textsuperscript{156} Interview, San Salvador, September, 1989.
counterparts likewise had virtually no constituency, even though many Salvadorans supported the idea of reform. Even the PDC, which had at one time had a large popular following, was little more than an elite leadership group by the time it entered the state, and what little popular following it did have soon departed as the continued repressiveness of the military became clear. The result of this lack of popular backing was that the reformists lacked an actual power base to counteract the many advantages enjoyed by the private sector elite, military hardliners, and the high command. If state leaders had had a genuine mass following at the outset, it would have been far more difficult for the violence by hardline elements to drive a wedge between state elites and potential supporters. The absence of such ties was not the fault of the reformist elites themselves: by the time the coup happened, much of the population was too radicalized to put much faith in representatives of political parties, much less technocrats, scholars, and soldiers.
Overview

Elite level political considerations continued to influence the timing and intensity of violence after 1980, though the specific patterns of elite-level political conflict changed somewhat beginning in 1981. After the dismantling of the reformist current of the military as a coherent political force, the long-standing conflict between reformist and repressive formulas of military policy remained effectively resolved, at least for the first half of the 1980s, in favor of violence. During 1981, the military retained a powerful role in the state, but political momentum gathered during 1981 for elections which would reduce the over political role of the military. Even after the 1982 election, which replaced the joint military/civilian junta with a provisional president and a cabinet drawn from the three leading political parties, the military remained a powerful political force. It intervened, for example, to prevent far-right ARENA party candidate Roberto D'Aubuisson from assuming the provisional presidency of the country. The civilian the military preferred was banker Alvaro Magaña, whose personal and financial ties to the officer corps were so close that he was effectively a military proxy. ☞
The United States became an increasingly determinative force in Salvadoran politics as aid levels doubled from $149.1 million in FY 1981 to $326.7 million in FY 1983. (Fagen 1988, 148) As it had during the Carter administration, U.S. policy sought to limit the political power of the civilian far right, while remaining relatively silent about human rights abuses by the military. The Reagan administration was similar to that of Carter in that it spoke with contradictory voices: when Ambassador Deane Hinton condemned the fact that "since 1979 perhaps as many as 30,000 Salvadorans have been MURDERED, not killed in battle, MURDERED" [emphasis in original], his statements were repudiated by National Security Council chief William Clark, thus sending a high-level signal to the Salvadoran military that the administration in Washington would not interfere with their policy of violence. (Arason 1989, 99) While the Reagan administration abandoned the Carter policy of pressing for further reforms, it did not advocate a roll-back of the reforms carried out in 1980, no matter how contrary to the administration's pro-private sector ideology. Furthermore, while the election of Reagan was widely hailed among civilian rightists in El Salvador, in practice the administration was not actively supportive of the political ambitions of the oligarchy's ARENA party, formed in 1981.
Chapter Seven

In late 1983, the U.S. administration, under pressure from Congress, began to apply pressure on the Salvadoran military to reduce the rate at which it was killing civilians. This pressure, accompanied by a greatly increased military aid program for FY 1984 (Fagen 1988, 148), appeared to be effective. This chapter will argue that the improvements reflect expediency on the part of Salvadoran military elites, rather than fundamental institutional change. State violence diminished, in other words, because the United States managed to shift the incentives facing the high command in favor of less, rather than more, violence. Thus, although the specific patterns of elite competition and conflict were altered after the collapse of military reformism in 1980, the overall dynamics of violence still seem to depend upon elite-level considerations relatively unrelated to the dynamics of the primary conflict between the state and its mass opponents.

State Violence after 1980

With virtually no international constraints on killing by 1981, the Salvadoran military pursued a policy of mass extermination of civilians suspected of being regime opponents. In part, this reflected the weakness of the military institution as a whole. The High Command restricted offensive operations in order to avoid tactical defeats. The reason for caution was the continued in-
stability of the military: a major defeat might cause the institution to unravel.¹ Given the reluctance to fight, the main means of struggle available to the military was to retaliate against unarmed civilians for actions by the guerrillas. This was essentially the same hardline practice of preying on the popular organizations in the late 1970s and 1980 writ large, but was extended to a policy of attempting to completely eliminate the population of some zones of the country where the population was assumed to be sympathetic to the guerrillas.²

Data on guerrilla actions and state violence during January 1981 illustrate the relatively loose connection between opposition activity and state violence: Figure 7.1 shows that some of the departments in which there were the most FMLN actions during the offensive, including Morazán, La Paz, Cuscatlan, and Chalatenango, suffered relatively few civilian casualties from state violence, whereas in Santa Ana, where the guerrillas carried out modest actions, almost 700 civilians were killed.³ A similar pattern holds

¹ Interview, U.S. military officer who helped evaluate Salvadoran government military readiness in 1981.

² Interview, journalist Chris Norton, October 1989. See Americas Watch and American Civil Liberties Union 1982a, 1982b, 1983a, 1983b for discussion and illustrations of the Salvadoran military's policy of "draining the sea."

³ Departmental breakdown of state killing is from CDHES (1981); of guerrilla operations, from Balance Estadístico, Centro Universitario de Documentación e Información (CUDI), Universidad Centroamericana, Año 2, número 1, Enero 1981, Table 5, pp. 24-8.
for the month of April, 1981, which was, according to
Socorro Jurídico Cristiano, the most violent month of the
entire war, with 3,038 civilians falling to government
forces. (SJC 1984) The University Center for Documentation
and Information (CUDI) at the University of Central America
(UCA) reports that the departments with the greatest degree
of military conflict, including Cuscatlán, Chalatenango,
Usulután, La Paz, Cabañas and San Vicente, represented,
altogether, only 7.5% of the total number of civilians
killed during the month. (CUDI 1981a, 5)

The violence of April is something of a mystery. FMLN
activity dropped dramatically after the January offensive,
as Figure 7.2 shows. It may be that the military, which
was shaken by the offensive, had recovered sufficient
strength by April to retaliate against the civilian base of
the FMLN. Some evidence, however, points to the role of
elite-level political factors. In February, junta member
and president Napoleón Duarte had begun floating the idea
of negotiations and international mediation. Representa-
tives of the FDR, the civilian branch of the opposition
movement, had been working actively in Mexico and elsewhere
to promote this idea as well, which was rapidly gaining
international support, particularly within Latin America.
Panamanian strongman Omar Torrijos had begun pressuring the
Salvadoran high command and the FMLN to begin talks. An
electoral commission was formed in March in preparations
Figure 7.1: FBI NIBRS and State Violence

Comparison of NIBRS and State Violence by Department, January 1988.

The combined talk of negotiations and elections brought a response from the right. The Broad National Front (FAN), which had organized coups in early 1980 but which had not been heard from for months, suddenly reappeared on the scene in March, condemning the idea of negotiations and calling for the restructuring of the junta, eliminating the Christian Democrats, which FAN representatives accused of being the "right wing of the Communist Party." (Proceso 1981, 22:13) The Armed Forces Press Council (COPREFA) published a list of 138 "terrorists," which included the names of moderate civilian politicians, many of them former junta or cabinet members under the first two Revolutionary Governing Juntas. This list was virtually identical to lists distributed clandestinely in the name of the General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez Anticommunist Brigade and the Death Squad, both of which represented the hardline security forces. (Proceso 1981, 23:6) The publication of this list by an official organ of the military suggests that, once again, mobilization by the civilian far right and their allies within the security forces was forcing the High Command to fall in line with the civilian far-right. In this context, the massive escalation of violence against civilians in April,
in the absence of any new military initiatives by the FMLN, looks suspiciously like a politically-inspired action.

Aside from this suggestive evidence, exactly what determined the intensity and geographic distribution of military violence against civilians after 1980 isn't clear and is to some extent unresearchable. Prior to 1983, human rights data broken out by department are not consistently available in published sources and probably can no longer be reconstructed because repeated government raids and the 1986 earthquake have resulted in the loss of many of the original files of Socorro Jurídico Cristiano and the Non-Governmental Human Rights Commission (CDHES). After mid-1983, the new Archdiocesan human rights office, Tutela Legal, published departmental distributions of violence for most months, making it possible to examine the relationship between state violence and areas of combat in some detail. It would be particularly interesting in subsequent research to attempt to link departmental levels of violence to particular departmental commanders and their immediate subordinates. It seems possible, on the basis of the

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4 Two sources of information on military activity are available: the University Center for Documentation and Information (CUDI) of the UCA published a document entitled Balance Estadística from June of 1980 through May of 1981. Thereafter, the same data were recorded in unpublished tables prepared by the same organization. Professor José Z. García of New Mexico State University has photocopies of these in his personal archives. Another source is the Foreign Broadcast Information Service. I am currently collaborating with Professor García on a project to code and analyze FBIS reports.
dynamics of violence in the 1979-80 period, that higher levels of violence may result when officers with strong ties to the civilian right or personal histories of involvement with particularly notorious security force agencies take over departmental commands.

The overall level of violence after 1981 appears to have been shaped by several factors. One was the level of activity of the FMLN: during periods such as mid-1981 when the FMLN was particularly active, government killing of civilians dropped, then rebounded again when the FMLN retreated later in the year in the face of major government sweep operations that began in October. (See Figure 7.3) The lower levels of state violence in 1982 and 1983 compared with 1980 and 1981 (See Table 7.1) probably reflect, in part, the increased military capacity of the FMLN, which put government forces on the defensive by 1983. Another probable factor was the diminishing number of targets for government forces. Much of the politically active urban population of the country fled during the first few years of the struggle. By 1982, repeated military sweep operations had significantly depopulated rural areas of the most conflictive departments such as Morazan and Chalatenango, leaving relatively small numbers
Figure 7.3 Comparing Sources
SJC, UCA, & U.S. Embassy

Reports of Civilians Killed
U.S. Embassy
of civilians who became practiced at evading military
offensives using mass evacuations called "quindas."

The Impact of U.S. policy in 1983

A particularly important factor, after 1983, was a
shift in policy by the U.S. from silence to high level
pressure for reductions in human rights abuses. The change
in U.S. policy initially provoked an increase in far-right
death squad violence against prominent reformists, but it
eventually succeeded in forcing a reduction in all types of
violence by the state. The underlying reason for U.S.
leverage was the fact that the Salvadoran military was
beginning to lose ground to the guerrillas by the end of
1982. By late 1983, PMLN was massing battalion sized units
and defeating Army forces of similar size in direct combat,
as well as preying very successfully on smaller units which
they sometimes virtually wiped out. In September, company-
sized guerrilla units were moving about in trucks rather

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5 The continued ability of civilians to live in highly
conflicctive zones does not mean that they are not exposed
to great danger. On the contrary, government forces have
repeatedly attacked women and children on quindas. Disease,
lack of food and water, and exhaustion also take a serious
toll. The frequent quindas make it difficult for civilians
to grow food. (Oral presentation, Philippe Bourgois, Palo
Alto, California, March 1982. See also his testimony
before House Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs,
than on foot.⁶ (Aronso 1989, 135) The Reagan administration, aware that greater assistance was necessary, sought a doubling of aid levels. Congress balked, frustrated by continuing human rights abuses. Congress set a cap of $64.8 million on military aid to El Salvador (versus the $110 million requested by the administration) and tied 30% of that figure to a trial and verdict in the U.S. churchwomen murder case. (Aronso 1989, 129-33)

As a result of Congressional pressures, the administration began to put pressure on the Salvadoran far-right in a number of ways. The State Department began to


The guerrillas' primary tactic has been to concentrate a large force against lightly defended government outposts and then to ambush reinforcements. They use surprise well to multiply their force, and they have excellent intelligence. Ammunition and weapons capability on the ground often seem equal to the ESAF [El Salvador Armed Forces] and certainly sufficient for their operations.

The briefing paper notes that:

the guerrillas have retaken the initiative. They have built up momentum which, if allowed to go unchecked, could undermine the government's ability to maintain the morale and cohesion necessary to sustain a military effort in the field and to retain popular support. The 27,000 ESAF is faced with simultaneously defending the harvest now underway, protecting lightly defended areas, and reacting to guerrilla pressure, primarily in the east and north of the country.
put individuals thought to be associated with death squad activities on the visa "watch list" and denied Roberto D'Aubuisson a visa on grounds of his probable involvement in terrorism. Salvadoran financiers of death squads residing in the U.S. were put under renewed investigation by U.S. authorities, and U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering made a "hard hitting" speech in San Salvador in early November condemning death squad activities and calling for prosecutions.7

Part of the impetus for these admittedly mild U.S. measures against the far-right was the perception on the part of the embassy that there had been a "resurgence of death squad activity" beginning in about May, 1983.8 Interestingly, this increase is not reflected in figures compiled by the Archdiocesan human rights office Tutela Legal which distinguish between death squad killings and those committed by the military in non-combat situations.


The Carter administration had looked carefully at the possibility of deporting wealthy Salvadorans residing in Miami who were suspected to funding the death squads. This idea lay fallow once Reagan took office because, in the opinion of one State Department official, the administration was unwilling to incur the wrath of the very conservative Cuban community in Miami.9 See secret San Salvador embassy cable "Millionaire's Murder Inc.?" (SS 0096, 6 January 1981) in NSA collection (1989b) regarding role of Salvadoran expatriates in Miami in funding death squad operations involving the military.

9 ibid.
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(See Figure 7.4) The Tutela Legal figures essentially distinguish between those killings that appear to have been targeted against the individual victims and those in which people were indiscriminately killed in groups, usually in rural areas. The overall level of targeted killings fell during the course of 1983, while indiscriminate killings remained at high levels and actually increased during the end of the year. The discrepancy between the Tutela Legal figures and embassy perceptions of increased death squad activity probably relate to the particular type of activity that the embassy was concerned about: Tutela Legal figures reflect the ongoing assassination of common citizens by the security forces, while the embassy was primarily moved by attacks against Christian Democrats, government officials, pro-Christian Democratic labor unions, the Church, and academics. The U.S. was particularly alarmed by threats against the U.S. ambassador and Archbishop Rivera y Damas. If either threat had been carried out, it would have had disastrous consequences for the ability of the administration to maintain military aid flows. *

In a confidential cable (SS 11183, 2 December 1983), the U.S. Embassy assessed the political function of this increased violence:

Amid harsh reactions to the D'Aubuisson visa denial, the death squad issue is taking a disturbing new turn. In our view, the death

* ibid. and Arnson (1989, 134)
Figure 7.4  Military and Death Squads

INDISCRIMINATE AND TARGETED KILLINGS

Source: Tutela Legal (Amnesty Watch) + Death Squads
squad [the Secret Anti-Communist Army] is playing on the concerns of the right wing and the military in an effort to counter U.S. pressure for action against them.

The increase in violence and threats against prominent reformists, in other words, was a means by which the Salvadoran far-right was resisting U.S. policy. Violence against civilians had a secondary purpose of undermining the U.S. project.

Washington responded to the challenge by sending Vice-President George Bush in December 1983 to deliver an unequivocal message to the Salvadoran military and civilian right that death squad activity needed to stop. Lt. Colonel Oliver North, who accompanied Bush, handed Salvadoran officials a list of names of particularly egregious offenders associated with D'Aubuisson. The names included members of the security force of the National Assembly building, which was controlled at this time by the ARENA party headed by D'Aubuisson.10 Bush's visit was supplemented by a visit from Director of Central Intelligence William Casey, who similarly warned the Salvadorans to curb death squad killings. "Casey had strong credibility with the Salvadorans on this issue." (Woodward 1987, 291)

This high-level expression of U.S. concern produced results. As Figure 7.4 shows, both targeted and indiscriminate killings dropped, with totals hovering in the low

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10 Interview, former senior government official who was present at meeting with Bush and North and saw the list.
100s by the second half of 1984. Thereafter, indiscriminate killings fluctuated between a low of around 70 and a high of 232 per month, while targeted killings remained in the 20s and low 30s per month. (Americas Watch 1986, 1987a, 1987b) To keep this improvement in perspective, however, it is worth noting that these levels were still slightly higher than the levels of violence seen in the last five months of the Romero administration, violence which had been, at that time, sufficient to trigger increased mobilization by the civilian opposition.

Internal Voices for Moderation

The other key event which may have contributed to reductions in violence was the election of Christian Democrat José Napoleón Duarte to the presidency in a runoff against ARENA candidate Roberto D'Aubuisson. Prominent Christian Democrats interviewed for this study attributed the post-election improvements to "the personal work" of Duarte in convincing senior military commanders of the advantages to the military of not killing civilians. The reportedly strong personal relationship between Duarte and his Minister of Defense, Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, as well as with his Vice-Minister of Defense for Public Security, Colonel Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila, both of whom

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11 Interviews, Eduardo Molina, Antonio Morales Ehrlich, and a third anonymous informant.
emerged as advocates of improved respect for human rights, lends some credibility to this view.

One must recognize, however, that although all three individuals appear to have functioned as state human rights reformers during the mid-1980s, none of them were particularly distinguished in this regard earlier, suggesting that perhaps other factors, such as U.S. policy, created an environment in which it was politically convenient for them to advocate reductions in violence. Duarte was a member of the Revolutionary Governing junta from March 1980 until the junta was replaced by an interim president in June 1982. Duarte served as the junta's president from December 1980 onward. He therefore presided, silently, over the peak period of human rights abuse. Col. Vides Casanova headed the National Guard from October 1979 until he replaced Guillermo Garcia as Defense Minister in 1983. Vides was thus in charge of the lead agency in the violence against civilians during 1980. He therefore contributed significantly to the defeat of the reformist Young Officers movement and to the overall militarization of the conflict. Col. López Nuila was commander of the National Police during the same period. The National Police figured prominently in the killing of urban members of the popular organizations. During his tenure at the National Police, a

12 He was also commander of the National Guard when troops from that organization murdered four U.S. churchwomen in December 1980.
new intelligence organization was formed known as the National Center for Analysis and Investigations (CAIN), which replaced ANSESAL as the nerve center for national death squad operations. One of CAIN's most important agents, Edgar Perez Linares, was probably the man who assassinated Archbishop Romero.\(^{13}\) (Gibb and Farah 1989, 10-2) Though López Nuila may not have been personally aware of these activities, neither was he an effective human rights crusader until conditions made such a position politically expedient.\(^ {14}\)

There can be little doubt that Duarte, Vides Casanova and López Nuila contributed leadership that helped improve the conduct of the military. López Nuila in particular is deeply hated by Salvadoran rightists for his (unsuccessful) efforts to prosecute kidnapping operations carried out by hardliners within the military.\(^ {15}\) Nonetheless, circumstan-

\(^ {13}\) According to Gibb and Farah (1989, 10), death squad operatives associated with CAIN prided themselves "for being modern day counterparts of the Biblical Cain, capable of killing their own brothers."

\(^ {14}\) Several informants recounted second hand reports that López Nuila had personally participated in assassinations. The validity of these stories is unknown.

\(^ {15}\) Interview, ARENA activist and current government official formerly associated with right-wing paramilitary operations. According to my informant, a related reason the López Nuila is hated is that he invited intelligence officers from Venezuela to assist in investigating the involvement of military officers in kidnapping operations that had spun off of previous death squad operations. The principal objection was the involvement of outsiders in an internal military matter.
ces suggest that this leadership is less an independent factor than an artifact of the overall political environment in which they were operating. The U.S. sided decisively with Duarte and the PDC against the civilian right and is widely thought to have covertly channeled funds to his election campaign. U.S. aid levels were so much higher from 1984 onward that they effectively shifted the power balance away from the Salvadoran oligarchy. Because of Congressional frustration with human rights conditions in El Salvador, however, continued high levels of U.S. assistance were clearly dependent on improvements in human rights performance. In such a context, the costs associated with state violence, namely, potential loss of U.S. support, greatly outweighed the benefits to be gained by courting oligarchic favor by permitting conspicuous violence. The High Command under Duarte could therefore insist upon improvements in human rights conditions on the grounds that these would be good for the welfare of the military institution.

16 The improvements that took place after mid-1984, though remarkable, were still easier for the military institution to accomplish than prosecutions of previous cases would have been. The U.S. Congress had attempted, with measures such as the Specter amendment, to force the Salvadoran military to prosecute the churchwomen case. (Arnson 1989, 133) Institutionally incapable or unwilling to permit prosecutions for past abuses, the Salvadoran military did what it was capable of doing, which was to reduce the current rate of violence in an effort to maintain Congressional support. This approach by the Salvadoran government was successful.
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The result of this shift in institutional incentives is remarkable if one compares the situation during 1984-1989 with the 1979-80 conjuncture. In effect, the military institution as a whole, which adopted the hardline matanza mentality during 1930, appears to have shifted towards a consensus that intensive, conspicuous violence is not in its interests. This moderation of violence was combined with a new orientation towards winning hearts and minds of the population through civic actions programs. Two major efforts were made to integrate military operations with improved social services provided by civilian agencies. This was first attempted at the departmental level in San Vicente, then nationwide in a program called "United to Reconstruct" (neither of which proved very successful). Though not reformist in the sense that the original Young Military program had been, this was, at least, an attempt at an accommodative approach of reduced repression and amelioration of social hardships. In fact, current high-ranking officers who were previously involved in the Young Military movement claimed in interviews that their original ideas had eventually been implemented, just more slowly than they had intended.

The institutional shift in favor of moderation and accommodation has meant that, although hardline officers closely affiliated with the oligarchy are still very much present within the institution, they are not free to
actively implement a hardline formula. This relative abstinence seems to be maintained more by peer pressure than any formal mechanism for punishing human rights violators or insubordination, since none exists. The crucial questions, of course, are how deep the attitudinal shift is behind this new working consensus, what factors contribute to it, and how stable it is likely to be.

Attitudinal Change?

Salvadoran and U.S. military officers interviewed for this study claimed that U.S. training, combined with efforts of more moderate Salvadoran military leaders, had produced a change in human rights attitudes in the Salvadoran military from the ground up. Younger officers have received different training, emphasizing the importance of building confidence on the part of the civilian population in the lawfulness and restraint of government forces. Military informants claimed that these changes were fundamental and permanent. (None of my informants claimed that anything had changed in terms of institutionalized accountability for human rights abuses.) In interviews, however, the passion and clarity with which officers asserted the benefits of subordination of the military to civilian authority was much stronger than that with which they spoke of human rights. One officer, who had described
the difficulties the military had had to overcome in
learning to defer to civilian leaders, went on to say:

There were also some problems with U.S. aid.
Cultural problems. You have to remember that
we're fighting the war that the U.S. fought in
its Civil War. Our campesinos are very violent.
That's how we solve problems. The U.S. concept
of human rights is very far from ours.

Other officers argued with considerable emotion that
human rights groups and the press were manipulated by the
left. Four military informants made almost identical
arguments that the left was more sophisticated than the
military in psychological operations and political warfare.
They claimed that human rights criticisms of the military
were part of the left's campaign to subvert the reputation
of the armed forces and limit their capabilities.

It is difficult to assess the claim that U.S. guidance
has produced a fundamental and permanent attitudinal
change. The attitudes expressed by my informants tended to
call into question the depth of the new thinking. The
observable reductions in human rights violations from 1984
onward could also be attributable to the overall context in
which U.S. aid was seen by the High Command and throughout
the institution to be dependent upon human rights conduct
satisfactory to the U.S. Congress.

Several factors suggest reasonable doubts about the
contribution of U.S. training and advising on human rights
conduct. One is the fact that agencies with the greatest
involvement of U.S. personnel as trainers, advisers and
technicians, namely, the Air Force, the Army Rapid Reaction Infantry Battalions (BIRIs), and the intelligence "shops" of military units, have continued to be identified as the greatest violators of human rights. The Air Force engaged in indiscriminate bombardment of rural communities (Americas Watch 1985, 27-36; Americas Watch and Lawyers Committee 1984, 7-28, Americas Watch 1990, 39-42) and Air Force ground troops appear to commit a disproportionate number of violations. (Americas Watch 1990, 29-32, 54-5)\textsuperscript{17} The first and most extensively U.S. trained of the BIRIs, the Atlacatl battalion, continues to have one of the most atrocious records for violence within the military, including several massacres and ongoing involvement in assassination of individual, unarmed civilians. (Americas Watch 1990, 158-9) The Atlacatl was also responsible for murdering six Jesuit priests and their housekeepers at the UCA in November of 1989. (ibid 9-24)

One of the primary efforts of the U.S. has been to build up the intelligence capacity of the Salvadoran military. There is some evidence that intelligence units, as in the past, continue to be centers for state violence. In October of 1989, a deserter from the Army First Brigade in San Salvador, César Vielman Joya Martínez, briefed human

\textsuperscript{17} There have been frequent complaints against Air Force ground troops by residents of poor communities around the Ilopango base. Air Force agents were involved in two shootings at a demonstrations attended by the author in October 1989.
rights groups and the press about death squad operations being run out of the intelligence section of the First Brigade headquarters in San Salvador. (Farah and Podesta 1989)\(^1\) A former civilian informant for the First Brigade operation corroborated several of Joya's claims. (Blake 1990)

Given the seeming absence to date of fundamental institutional changes in the Salvadoran military that would guarantee reductions in state violence, and given the dubious contribution of U.S. training and oversight, it seems likely that the determinative factor has simply been U.S. money. Just as elite-level political considerations led to some restraints on violence under the Romero administration and acceleration of violence after the October 1979 coup, the size and conditionality of U.S. aid from 1984 onward, and the success of the U.S. in securing the election of its favored candidate in 1984, appear to have created a situation in which the military as a whole has

\(^{1}\) Joya Martínez' testimony has been called "patently absurd" by U.S. officials, but one of his civilian informants (orejas) has corroborated his statements, and much of what he says seems plausible in view of what we know already about the functioning of Salvadoran military death squads. Colonel Elena Fuentes, who heads the First Brigade in San Salvador, is a reputed hardliner, so it is not particularly surprising to hear charges of a death squad operating out of his unit. Joya's description of how U.S. advisers assigned to the intelligence section of the First Brigade write checks and don't ask questions is consistent with how confidential informants have described to me the tone of interactions between U.S. military staff and Salvadoran death squad operators.
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had an interest in curbing the most blatant forms of abuse.¹⁹

Unfortunately, this kind of restraint on state violence is very fragile. It depends upon the perceived risks associated with alienating the U.S. continuing to outweigh the risks associated with disappointing the domestic right wing. Or, to put it another way, as U.S. military aid flows drop, it will become easier for the civilian far-right to buy the cooperation of at least some sectors of the armed forces.

There is also an issue of political influence. During the first years following the U.S. engineered election of Duarte, there was no question but that the U.S.'s strategy for creating an elected, centrist government in El Salvador dominated the political scene. As a result, the oligarchy and ARENA had less of a basis for influencing the military. In early 1988, this political formula began to crumble with the defeat of the PDC in National Assembly elections in which the oligarchy's ARENA party won a working majority. This election took place in a context in which there was growing frustration on the part of civilian rightists and hardline elements of the military with the political opening that Christian Democratic civilian authorities had

¹⁹ It is important to note that the reductions in outright killing by the military have, to some extent, been compensated by increases in political imprisonment and the use of psychological torture. See Americas Watch (1988a, 1988b, 1990).
permitted.20 As opposition activism, particularly labor organization, increased during 1987, it became increasingly difficult for the high command to sell the idea that observing human rights was in the best interests of the military institution. During the first six months of 1988, the levels of state violence increased by 44% compared to 1987 levels (Americas Watch 1988b, 6) and continued to rise through the year.

The election of ARENA candidate Alfredo Cristiani to the presidency in 1989 was accompanied by a further increase in state violence, particularly the use of torture "by all units of the Salvadoran army and security forces, including: asphyxiation, simulated drowning, drugging, application of electric shocks, and sexual assault." (Americas Watch, March 1990, 7) There may have been a direct impact of the ARENA electoral victories on the perceptions of military personnel regarding what kinds of conduct are now permissible: on June 11, soldiers in the department of San Miguel gang raped a woman after searching her house for weapons. "Upon letting her go, the soldiers told her not to report what had happened to human rights groups, because they no longer existed. Now, the soldiers said, there was ARENA." (Americas Watch 1990, 100)

20 According to Americas Watch (1988b, 7), one of the main reasons for the opening was the PDC's desire to uphold their obligations under the Central American Peace Plan.
State violence escalated further in October 1989, with the bombing of the FENASTRAS labor union offices which killed ten and wounded thirty. (Americas Watch 1990, 122-5) Conditions worsened still further during and after the FMLN offensive of November 1989. The FMLN infiltrated some 1,500 fighters into poor neighborhoods surrounding San Salvador, dug in, and put the military in the situation of having to force them out. They were able to hold their positions for about a week, then were driven out by aerial attacks. Press reports at the time of the offensive claimed there had been hundreds of civilian casualties from indiscriminate bombing. Journalist Frank Smyth watched a helicopter rocket a house, killing three civilians. (Smyth 1989) Subsequent investigations by Americas Watch suggest that although government forces did bombard heavily populated areas, causing heavy physical damage, most attacks were focused on buildings occupied by FMLN forces. (Americas Watch 1989b)

The FMLN offensive did trigger a marked increase in incidents of both targeted and indiscriminate killing by government forces. There were a number of summary executions of people in communities throughout the country, as well as a marked increase in arrests and torture. Members of popular organizations went into hiding immediately after the beginning of the offensive. Many of those who did not hide were arrested. Offices of most labor unions and
community organizations were raided and damaged by government forces. Also subject to particular persecution were church workers, particularly those involved in community development or relief activities, who government forces saw as having supported the FMLN. (Americas Watch 1989b)

On November 16, soldiers and junior officers from the Atlacatl battalion entered the grounds of the University of Central America and killed six Jesuit fathers, their cook, and her daughter.\(^{21}\) The motive for the slayings seems to have been a perception on the part of military hardliners that the Jesuits were in league with the FMLN, or that they were intellectually responsible for FMLN strategies. (Americas Watch 1989, 14-27)

Retired Colonel Sigifredo Ochoa, who is generally thought to represent hardline military thought, made the following statement in an oral history interview taped in 1987:

> Well, I think it's important, for example, to maintain an intelligence apparatus, an apparatus that permits us to identify the real subversives. For example, we are shooting a lot and wasting a lot of ammunition out in the field, causing problems for the people as well. But the true leaders, the true thinkers are in the universities. For example, Father Ellacuria, a Jesuit priest of the Central American University (UCA), is a Spaniard, who along with all his entourage of Spanish Communists from liberation theology

\(^{21}\) The victims included Ignacio Ellacuría, rector of the UCA; Ignacio Martín Baro, Vice-Rector; Segundo Montes, head of the UCA Human Rights Institute; Juan Ramón Moreno; Amando López; Joaquín López y López; Julia Elba Ramos; and Celina Marisela Ramos.
are those who are here. They move around freely in El Salvador. In my opinion a law should be implemented in order to strengthen democracy, in the sense of expelling from the country all those foreigners who come to subvert order and implant the seeds of communism in the minds of the youth. If not, it will never end. 22

While the slain Jesuits were clearly sympathetic with the underlying goals of the FMLN to achieve major social changes, they had clearly and repeatedly positioned themselves as favoring a negotiated solution to the conflict and an end to fighting. UCA Rector Ignacio Ellacuría was generally thought to have played an important role as a kind of liaison between President Cristiáni and the FMLN leadership. The idea that the Jesuits were responsible for operational planning on behalf of the guerrillas, however, is patently absurd. The perception that the Jesuits were a key part of the guerrilla threat, and the resulting willingness to incur serious political risks to kill the Jesuits, reflects a visceral hostility on the part of the far right towards reformist elites. In 1980, the perception by members of the oligarchy and its sympathizers in the military that reformist elites in the government were tied to the radical left contributed to a campaign of state violence against the open organizations

of the left. The assassination of the Jesuits was a different consequence of the same kind of thinking: killing them appears to have been a kind of misguided reprisal for the FMLN offensive.

The assassination of the Jesuits led some observers to fear that the military was returning to policies of 1980. The parallels with the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero were striking. (Smyth 1989) Contrary to the initial fears of many observers, however, the FMLN offensive did not trigger an all-out blood bath by government forces. Though human rights abuses did escalate compared to the levels of 1986 and 1987, the government did not regress to the policy of wholesale terror followed in the early 1980s. Ironically, the assassination of the Jesuits may have saved hundreds of other lives: this act was so outrageous, and three of its victims so well-known internationally, that it dominated press reports on events in El Salvador and instantly galvanized opposition within the U.S. public and Congress to continued military aid to El Salvador. (Americas Watch 1989b) The risk of an aid cut-off probably helped curb what might otherwise have been a generalized assault on the civilian population in retaliation for the offensive.
Future Prospects

One of the key lessons of the assassinations at the UCA was that fundamental changes in the institutional characteristics of the Salvadoran forces have eluded the U.S. military aid program, despite over $1 billion spent. (Millman 1989) One U.S. official commented in 1990 that "There's been some progress in reforming the military, but fundamentally it's not working. Our pressure on them to reform has turned to dung." (Bronstein 1990) The tanda system remains in place, as does the effective immunity of officers from prosecution for virtually any wrongdoing. The ability of the U.S. to demand reductions in state violence appear to be contingent on continued large-scale funding of the military, suggesting that once U.S. aid levels fall, which they are almost certain to, the Salvadoran private sector may once again be in a position to press for a hardline solution.

This seemingly crucial role of U.S. aid in shifting the incentives of the Salvadoran armed forces away from the extremely violent policies of the early 1980s, combined with the seeming lack of any fundamental institutional change, raise serious questions about the future policy of the Armed Forces regarding violence against civilians. U.S. military assistance since 1980 has created a dangerous situation: the Salvadoran armed forces now number some 57,000 troops and the Air Force possesses hundreds of
aircraft. This force structure is far too large for the Salvadoran government to support without extensive U.S. assistance, a fact which enhances Salvadoran dependence on the U.S. and, therefore, probably increases their willingness to accommodate the U.S. preference for low levels of state violence against civilians. On the other hand, the large force gives the Salvadoran military a perverse leverage over the U.S.: should the U.S. abruptly cut off aid, there would be little to stop the Salvadorans from reverting to hardline policies of the past. The more likely scenario of phased reductions in U.S. assistance is less likely to catalyze a bloodbath; however, as aid levels drop, they will at some point reach a level at which they will no longer be sufficient to offset the political and financial incentives that the domestic Salvadoran elite can offer.

Prominent members of ARENA and their supporters in the military make no secret of the fact that they are frustrated with the U.S. model of counterinsurgency and believe that prompt, brutal violence against regime opponents would enable them to restore the country to peace. The large force structure in the hands of the government would make a massacre possible: the FMLN could not hope to protect its supporters if a significant portion of government forces were willing to wipe out entire communities as they did in
the early 1980s. Whether such a wholesale assault is likely is another question.

Just as mass opposition in the late 1970s undermined institutional consensus and triggered divergent responses within the Salvadoran military, the tapering off of U.S. assistance is likely to do the same. While hardline groups within the military will clearly see the reduction of the U.S. role as an opportunity to advance their cause, other groups with a less pro-oligarchic orientation may favor a negotiated solution. The failure of the hardline approach to suppress the FMLN during the early 1980s should suggest to at least part of the officer corps that a violent approach is no more likely to be successful now, though the greatly expanded size of the military may lead some to think that a repeat of the 1932 matanza would now be feasible were it not for U.S.-imposed constraints. A significant number of officers who sided with Col. Majano back in 1980 have gradually been rehabilitated during the period of less hardline military conduct and are now in control of major troop commands. These officers are unlikely to willingly go along with a return to wholesale violence against civilians. Junior officers are just as divided as the senior ranks: they have suffered far more casualties than their superiors, and most are thought to favor a prompt solution to the war. Their preferred solution varies, with some favoring a more hardline strategy and
others hoping for a negotiated solution. (Gibb and Smyth 1990, 17)

Another source of moderation may stem, ironically, from the military's history of corruption. After a decade of creative theft and rechanneling of U.S. assistance, the Salvadoran military has developed an unprecedented degree of independent wealth. The military's Social Provision Institute (IPSPA) has capital in excess of $100 million. (Millman 1989, 95) As U.S. aid diminishes, the Salvadoran officer corps will have to share a shrinking pie. Senior officers will therefore have increasingly strong incentives to find a way to reduce the size of the officer corps, enabling them to divide the diminished resources of the military among fewer colleagues. One senior officer interviewed for this study, an individual with a reputation for corruption, insisted that major reductions in the size of the armed forces were natural and desirable. Given the apparent ability of the FMLN to persist and to continue to harass government forces, reductions in the size of the military will require some kind of negotiated solution. This positive incentive to shrink the military could help forestall a more hardline strategy because excessive violence against the popular left would probably scuttle negotiations, making major reductions in the size of the armed forces impossible.
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The U.S. could facilitate such a transition by redirecting military aid funds into some kind of program for retraining lower level officers for other types of employment. Doing this would involve some injustices, in that funds would be going for the personal welfare of officers who are, compared to the lower classes, relatively well-off. It would also require the U.S. to look the other way regarding the underlying incentives of the senior officer corps for negotiating a settlement. These ethical questions notwithstanding, such a policy might help facilitate passage through what could otherwise be an extremely bloody period of transition from the relatively less violent period of U.S. political domination of the Salvadoran armed forces. One of the key flaws of U.S. policy during 1979 and 1980 was that it did not take account of how factional and generational politics within the Salvadoran military could lead either to greater moderation or greater violence. Now would be a good time to devise policy sensitive to the internal workings and political incentives of the Salvadoran forces.

Risks of Transition

At this writing, the government of El Salvador and the FMLN guerrillas are continuing U.N. mediated negotiations aimed at achieving a cease-fire and the political incorporation of the FMLN into a democratic political system.
The central issue in these talks is what will become of the armed forces -- how big they will be, what units will be disbanded, how command structures will be altered, who will be removed, and who will be prosecuted. The problems that the two sides are grappling with are closely analogous to those involved in cases of re-democratization following episodes of state terror in South America. O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) observe that the question of justice and retribution for past state violence are the greatest stumbling blocks for democratization. Many of the points they make about democratization apply equally to the Salvadoran peace process, which is basically an attempt to negotiate a pact regarding the shape of a democratic regime that both the left and right can live with.

Two issues related to state violence have to be dealt with in any re-democratization process: one is the demand of large sectors of an aggrieved population for justice against officers who ordered the killing, disappearance, and torture of thousands; the other is the ongoing threat presented by the continued existence of armed institutions that committed these crimes in the first place. A democratic opening, if it is genuine, will give rise to powerful political demands for prosecutions of war criminals. Yet, as O'Donnell and Schmitter point out, the opening is not likely to happen in the first place unless sufficient guarantees are provided to the military.
Chapter Seven

One important variable in shaping the dynamics of a democratic transition is the breadth of involvement of different state agencies in violence against innocent civilians. When responsibility remains concentrated in a particular sub-agency of the military, as happened in Brazil and Chile, it exempts the "bulk of military officers from charges of direct responsibility," which somewhat simplifies the transition to a less violent state of affairs. (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 29) Of course, even an isolated agency can remain a threat: the Brazilian intelligence "monster" remains largely intact after the transition to formal democracy there. Stepan (1988) argues that the military high command began the controlled liberalization in part to curtail the autonomy of the intelligence apparatus. The high command was willing to turn over part of its own political power to civilians to create a counterweight to the growing power of the intelligence service.

The case of Argentina suggests hope for El Salvador, in that, as in El Salvador, the Argentine military as a whole was implicated in terrorism, yet a fairly successful transition has taken place nonetheless. Unlike Chile and Brazil, where repressive activities were carried out by a centralized (if sometimes rather autonomous) apparatus, the Argentine repressive machine was almost completely decentralized, with separate units throughout the military
operating on their own, selecting victims according to their own criteria. (Smith 1980, 63) Because of this breadth of military participation in the dirty war, civilian president Alfonsin confined his prosecutions to the former juntas and to specific cases rather than to the overall pattern of abuse. Some observers saw this as prudent, others as a missed opportunity to dramatically reform the armed forces. (Osiel 1980) Despite Alfonsin's caution, he faced repeated barracks mutinies around the issue of whether junior officers would be provided with guarantees of immunity from prosecution. Alfonsin's successor, Menem, has seen fit to provide such guarantees. Although these compromises may not be entirely satisfying from a normative point of view, they have made possible a transition to elected government and a brought an effective end to state terrorism.

In El Salvador, violence was historically quite concentrated in the security forces and intelligence agencies, but spread during 1980 to include the regular Army. By late-1980, regular Army units were leading sweeps through rural areas, killing hundreds, while security forces units adopted supportive roles. This extensive involvement of the regular Army in violence presents problems for a negotiated solution to the war. First, it would be extremely difficult to distinguish reliably between officers who have and have not been responsible for
violence. Perhaps more importantly, any prosecutions would threaten virtually the entire officer corps, making rebellions such as those in Argentina very likely. Probably for this reason, the FMLN has backed away from demands for prosecutions, focusing instead on institutional changes that would make future violence less likely.

Another problem posed by the extensive involvement of the regular Army in violence is that for a negotiated solution to be durable, the armed forces must be reformed in such a way as to make this sort of snow-balling of violence less likely. The FMLN's current strategy is to combine the removal of the institutional centers of state violence -- the National Intelligence Agency, the civil defense patrol network, the elite Atlacatl battalion, the Treasury Police, the National Guard, and the infantry units currently set up under the National Police and Treasury Police -- with a self-purge by the armed forces of officers known to be involved in human rights abuses. This strategy effectively calls upon moderate elements of the armed forces to assert themselves against hardliners in order to secure the peace. If it worked, it would set a good precedent within the armed forces and would preserve the institutional integrity of the force. However, to be credible as part of a political settlement, moderate officers will have to be generous in offering up their brothers-in-arms for expulsion (prosecution seems to be out
of the question). Whether the moderates have sufficient power within the armed forces to deliver on the FMLN proposal at this point is unclear.

During any such period of restructuring, hardline elements of the military are likely to show some resistance to disappearing. The success of the restructuring and purge will depend upon the decisiveness within which it is undertaken. When the first junta attempted to break up key elements of the hardline system without dismantling the whole thing, hardline elements and the oligarchy managed to reassert their agenda by escalating violence against the popular left. It seems likely that hardline elements would attempt the same strategy again: their most obvious tactic for resisting such reforms would be to attack targets of opportunity among the organizations or parties of the left. During the transition period, therefore, the left must be prepared to protect itself against renegade elements of the military. Fortunately, the aftermath of the November 1989 FMLN offensive showed that Salvadoran left has learned a great deal in this regard over the past decade. Members of the popular organizations and leftist political parties disappeared from view during and after the offensive. While this disrupted their activities, it may also have contributed to the lower than expected civilian toll following the end of the offensive.
From the point of view of the FMLN, one goal of a negotiated solution would be to secure the opportunity for the left's electoral coalition, the Democratic Convergence, to compete more effectively for public office. Should leftist civilian politicians be elected to positions of state power, this would in some ways reproduce the elite reformist challenge of October 1979 and might trigger the same kind of hardline violence. There would be one key difference, however: the politicians who now represent the left via the Democratic Convergence actually represent and are integrated with a highly organized popular base. Any hardline attempt to use violence would be less likely to succeed in driving a wedge between leftist elites in the government and their constituency.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS

Overview

Most states, even authoritarian ones, have competing centers of power. Different agencies have different missions, interests, ideological orientations, and relationships with groups outside of the state. Although economic elites may have considerable power, most states, or at least elements of them, show some degree of autonomy vis-à-vis economic elites. Furthermore, economic elites themselves are frequently divided regarding how they would prefer to see the state perform. In most areas of public and foreign policy analysis, studies take explicit account of the internal diversity and partial autonomy of states by focusing on a variety of aspects of what can be broadly characterized as "elite politics." Such aspects include the social networks of state decision makers; the internal divisions within dominant social classes; the role of bureaucratic and institutional factors; ideology; group decision-making processes; and individual psychology.

There are a variety of factors that contribute to state violence. The most obvious is the emergence of a mass opposition, especially one that uses violence or creates widespread disorder. The way a state responds to opposition depends upon the types of resources available to
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it. One with relatively ample resources may adopt an accommodative strategy; one with a weak fiscal base is unlikely to be able to do this and is more likely to resort to force. A state with a proportionately overdeveloped defense or police establishment is more likely to use the means most readily available to it, namely, force. Economic crises can contribute to opposition mobilization, which in turn may trigger state violence. Longer-term economic patterns can contribute to state violence if, for example, leading sectors of a country's economy are particularly sensitive to wages, or if dominant classes demand a major economic restructuring involving reduced wages, triggering a confrontation with labor. Certain ideological perspectives may also make it more likely for a state to use violence: views emphasizing an organic view of the state make individuals' lives and rights seem secondary to the good of the state. Ideas that cast any kind of opposition as part of an international subversion may also make it easier for state actors to justify using violence against civilians.

In applying any of these approaches, or any combination of them, it is important to recognize that states are generally not unified actors, or at least it is not safe to assume that they are. This is particularly true if one is trying to account for the timing and intensity of violence on a fairly specific level, rather than just commenting on
the overall likelihood of violence taking place in a given country. Subagencies of the state may have their own reasons for carrying out violence in ways that are harmful to the interests of the state as a whole. Shifts in leadership groups or in the relative political weight of different institutions within the state may affect the timing and/or intensity of state violence. Different ideologies often compete for adherents within a given state or agency: to gain a dynamic understanding of how ideological factors affect the actual behavior of state agencies, it is important to examine how those ideologies that are conducive to violence come to be adopted in the first place. To understand how structural or conjunctural economic factors affect levels of state violence, analysts need to look in detail at the linkages between civilian and state elites to see when and to what extent leading social groups are able to impose their agenda on the state. Economic elites tend not to have uniform access to different agencies within the state and may have greater ability to influence state behavior at some times than others.

The historical analysis in the previous four chapters shows that the Salvadoran state has often been internally divided over policy issues and that the state and civilian elites have clashed as well, usually over issues of economic reform and the state's role in suppressing opposi-
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In the process of exploring these divisions, as well as the interactions between a divided state and civilian economic elites, the story told here helps account for how opposition, the demands of economic elites, and ideological factors interacted to affect the timing and intensity of state violence.

Review of the Argument

In Chapter Two, I examined alternative approaches to explaining state violence. I found that available approaches could be combined to provide a reasonably good account of most of the underlying pressures for state violence. The conventional opposition/reaction model of state violence by itself can't account for cases in which state violence was grossly disproportionate to opposition activity, preceded opposition violence, or continued long after the elimination of active opposition. To deal with such cases, one needs to claim that 1) the ideology of state actors is such that they perceive greater threats than are objectively present, or that 2) powerful sectors of capital see repressive violence as necessary for some sort of economic restructuring and are able to convince the state to adopt their project.

The greatest failing of existing literature, even that part of it which takes account of ideological or economic factors, is that it tends to assume a unitary state.
I ideological approaches, for example, don't discuss how a
given ideology or set of perceptions gain ascendance within
the state. One consequence of this is that although
ideological arguments are very useful in explaining the
persistence of failed or unnecessary policies, ideology by
itself sheds little light on changes in state policy.
Similarly, explanations of state violence based on the
power of economic elites tend to gloss over the question of
exactly how these elites manage to regulate the behavior of
the state, especially in view of the likelihood that social
elites will have greater access to some agencies of the
state than others.

Chapter Three traced the development of a "protection
contract" between hardline elements of the Salvadoran
military and the country's economic elite. Having begun as
a creation and instrument of the economic elite, the
military gradually became more professionalized in the
early part of the 20th Century and developed into an
increasingly important contender for political power. In
1932, the military took state power from the economic
elite, legitimating its new position by massacring thou-
sands of peasants. The matanza of 1932, which was grossly
disproportionate to the actual threat posed by the com-
munist rebellion, set the terms of a new relationship
between the military and the oligarchy according to which
the military enjoyed the privilege of controlling the state
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in exchange for protecting the oligarchy from the rebellious poor. It did so by creating the impression that General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez and his loyal National Guardsmen and Police had saved the oligarchy from calamity. This impression solidified what had been, until the massacre, Martínez' very tenuous hold on power. During the following 13 yea. , Martínez periodically reminded the oligarchy of their need for him by cracking down on supposed "communist conspiracies," especially at times when his credibility in the eyes of economic elites was slipping.

Martínez' violence-based mode of elite-level regime legitimation eventually wore thin. His continuismo alienated the oligarchy. He also antagonized significant portions of the military institution itself by favoring the security forces over the Army. The result, discussed in Chapter Four, was an alternative system of "institutional military rule" that lasted from 1948 through 1976. From 1948 onward, the regular Army dominated and attempted to legitimate its control of the state through a mixed program of national modernization, minor social reforms, and a continued but milder form of the original protection contract with the oligarchy. Periodic crackdowns against supposed communist opposition helped smooth over disputes between the military and economic elites over reforms.
During this period, the inherent contradictions of this "institutional" compromise generated dissident currents within the military. One of these was a tendency among some officers, mostly younger ones, to favor major socio-economic reforms and civilian rule. Officers with this agenda attempted coups in 1960 and 1972; the first was briefly successful, the second was crushed. In both cases the institutionalist formula was reasserted with cosmetic concessions to reformist sentiments. President Molina, who served from 1972 through mid-1977, appears to have realized that deeper reforms, including agrarian reform, would be necessary for institutional military rule to survive. His attempt at a minor land reform in 1976 triggered a powerful political reaction from the landed elite, who worked through the increasingly powerful hardline faction of the military to force Molina to suspend the reforms and choose a conservative successor.

The hardline faction of the military had been relatively weak during the 1950s and early 1960s: the formula of 1948 appeared to be working successfully and there was little active popular opposition. Because the military avoided challenging the core interests of the oligarchy, the private elite made no particular efforts to build up the hardline faction, although it continued to reward the security forces on a local level for maintaining order and labor discipline. During the 1960s, however, the U.S.
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began, for its own reasons, to build up in El Salvador an internal intelligence system based in the security forces. This provided both a stronger institutional base and a new set of ideological justifications for the hardline, Martinista formula of military political power based on the provision of security. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Salvadoran architect of the new system, General José Alberto Medrano, had become a competitor for power on the national level, backed by oligarchic interests who thought the state was being too soft on radical teachers and labor organizers. By the mid-1970s, the hardline core in the security forces and intelligence agencies was increasingly powerful and autonomous.

As a result of this renewal of the hardline current, the oligarchy had access to powerful military allies to help them block Molina's attempted land reform. The oligarchy also found that generational issues could be exploited: officers who were likely to be bypassed when Molina chose his successor were willing to side with the oligarchy and the hardline faction against the reforms. The reversal of the reforms meant that growing popular unrest had to be dealt with in another manner: the shift in the balance of power between the institutionalist and hardline currents resulted in markedly increased state violence from 1975 onward.
Chapter Five focused on the administration of Carlos Romero, which lasted from 1977 through late 1979. Although Romero's government looked like a reinstatement of the Mar-tinista protection contract, it became clear by late 1977 that the private sector did not fully control Romero's government. In fact, intense conflict ensued between Romero and oligarchy over the question of how much violence the state should use. The oligarchy wanted the state to crack down but Romero was unwilling to oblige. One reason for this unexpected conflict was the fact that Romero was extremely vulnerable to being overthrown by younger "institutionalist" officers whose careers he was blocking. This made him more sensitive than he otherwise might otherwise have been to his international image, and thus more responsive to human rights pressures. It also made him reluctant to permit the organization of clandestine state counter-terrorist networks which might be used to conspire against him. The tug of war between Romero and the oligarchy resulted in a very brutal but inconsistent pattern of state violence which served to provoke, rather than repress, mass opposition.

Chapter Six linked elite politics with rapid escalation of state violence during the crucial period from the overthrow of Romero through the end of 1980. In the October coup an unprecedently powerful reformist movement within the military established a joint military/civilian
government which included Communists, Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, as well reformist scholars and technicians. At the same time, the high command of the military fell into the hands of a generation of officers who had been President Molina's heirs apparent in 1976. This event created an entirely new elite-level political situation which made increased state violence likely for a number of reasons. First of all, the high command of the military was threatened by the power and agenda of the reformist military and their civilian allies. As a result, senior "institutionalist" commanders forged an alliance of convenience with hardline sectors in the security forces. A second key factor in shaping high command incentives was that, unlike Romero, who had been pressured by the U.S. to observe human rights, the new high command was insulated from most such pressures by the existence of the Revolutionary Governing Junta. Overall, the internal politics of the military gave the high command incentive to permit greater hardline activity while previous international disincentives for violence were removed.

The hardline sector of the military, for its part, was highly motivated: they were directly threatened by the reformist military, which seemed committed to prosecuting past human rights abuses. Their institutional bases, including the national intelligence agency ANSESAL, had been dismantled. They also received active support and
pressure from the private sector elite, who wanted to reverse the reformist trend of the new government and crush what they perceived to be its popular base.

The interests of the oligarchy were clearly threatened by the new government and the far-right elite mobilized themselves to an unprecedented degree to resist it. Ideological factors appear to have played a role in their response in that they viewed the new government as essentially the radical left in power. They made no distinction between the relatively moderate elites in the state and the radical left in the street. As a result, the oligarchy responded to the elite reformist challenge by pressing for a war of extermination against the popular left. They contributed their own private forces to the effort, though the vast majority of the killing was done by hardline state forces.

Virtually the only constraint on state violence after the coup was the reformist Military Youth Movement and its civilian supporters in government. The escalation of state violence after November 1979 partly reflects the declining ability of the young officer's movement to curb hardline activities. The reformists briefly succeeded in reducing violence during November 1979, when uncertainty about possible prosecutions kept the security forces in check. Thereafter, violence escalated as the position of the young officers gradually eroded. Lasting increases in the level
of violence took place after the Juventud Militar lost ground in internal confrontations in May and September.

Chapter Six also shows that policies of the U.S. government contributed in a number of ways to the likelihood of intense state violence after the coup. First, already mentioned, was the simple fact that the U.S. did not effectively threaten sanctions against the government for human rights abuses. At a time when the strength of the reformist movement within the military provided an opportunity for the U.S. to support a major restructuring and purge of the military, the U.S. maintained close ties with high command officers who were actively colluding with the hardline security forces to impose a violent solution and break up the reformist project. The U.S. used its aid leverage to pressure the military to include the Christian Democrats in government and to carry out a major land reform, both of which provoked a violent response from military allies of the oligarchy. U.S. diplomats personally affronted members of the Salvadoran oligarchy, contributing to their perceptions of threat and the intensity of their campaign to promote an anti-reformist, violent solution. If this assault upon the Salvadoran oligarchy had been combined with a sustained effort to back a reformist-led purge and restructuring of the armed forces, it might have contributed to reduced state violence in the long run. In the absence of any effort to take advantage
of internal reformist currents in the military, the U.S. policy of confronting the oligarchy contributed to greater violence instead.

Chapter Seven briefly examines the politics of state violence during the period following 1980. During 1981 through 1983, the hardline formula of mass killing prevailed. By the end of 1983, the increased dependence of the Salvadoran military on U.S. aid enabled the Reagan administration, under pressure from Congress, to demand reductions in state killing. The reductions achieved were based on leverage the U.S. obtained through the continued flow of aid; there is little evidence of lasting institutional changes in the Salvadoran forces. As a result, diminishing U.S. aid flows raise the specter of renewed violence as the relative buying power of the oligarchy increases once again. One factor which may ameliorate violence is the independent wealth of the military, built up during ten years of large U.S. aid flows. As U.S. aid falls off, senior officers will have incentives to shrink the military in order to have fewer colleagues with whom to share a smaller pie. Achieving a negotiated settlement would facilitate this force reduction. As a result, at least some portions of the officer corps will have incentives to prevent a resurgence of the intense state violence of the early 1980s.
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Opposition/Reaction Models

The case of El Salvador shows that rather than triggering a uniformly violent reaction by the state, opposition protests or violence can generate divergent responses from within the state. Mass opposition in the late 1950s triggered a repressive response from the Léon government, but then a reformist response in the form of the 1960 coup. The reformist solution was in turn reversed by the 1961 counter-coup, after which greater violence ensued once again. Similarly, the increasing mass protest and guerrilla violence of the late 1970s triggered competing responses within the state. The eventual degree of violence used by the state depended upon the outcome of an internal power struggle within the state. The general point here is that the way a state responds to opposition activity or violence is mediated by the internal politics of the state.

A second point regarding the reaction of states to opposition is that most opposition/reaction models, such as Gurr's (1986), assume that the primary dimension of conflict is between the (unified) state and a mass opposition. The Salvadoran experience after 1979 suggests that conflict within the state, and between reformist elements of the state and economic elites, may heighten the intensity of violence carried out by conservative elements of the state as part of a campaign to disrupt a competing
reformist project. In such a situation, state violence is partly a reaction to intra-elite politics. At least part of the effect of mass opposition on state violence is indirect, being mediated by elite politics. Mass opposition induces conflict among elites; the timing and intensity of subsequent violence by the state against civilians depends in large part upon the outcome of elite-level struggles.

The development of a mass opposition obviously constitutes a threat to the state as a whole: the Salvadoran case suggests that it can also be an opportunity for competing groups within the state to advance their cause. Mass opposition is a sign that an existing formula of governance is failing. It therefore provides groups of contending elites with opportunities to promote their preferred solution. The reformist civilians who made up the first post-coup government would not have had such an opportunity if the Romero government were not so obviously sowing the seeds of its own destruction. The reformist Juventud Militar would never have been able to build a nation-wide conspiracy if not for the extent of mass opposition to Romero. Of course, mass mobilization also gave hardline elements a basis for arguing that firmer measures were required. Unfortunately, the more violent factions of the state were able to impose their project on
the rest of the state, for reasons that are discussed in greater depth below.

**Economic Models**

There is clearly a strong relationship between the violence used by the state in El Salvador and the economic interests of the Salvadoran private sector. The connection between the oligarchy's interests and the policies of the state, however, is conditional and indirect. The Salvadoran oligarchy lost direct control of the state in 1932 and did not regain it until the election of Alfredo Cristiani to the presidency in 1989. In the interim, the state carried out a number of policies that were directly contrary to the economic and political preferences of the oligarchy. The oligarchy was not consistently in a position to force the state to use violence on its behalf, as illustrated by events during the Romero administration. Furthermore, when the state did do violence (as in 1932 or 1980) it sometimes went on to use the power it obtained through violence to carry out other policies, such as reforms, which ran counter to the oligarchy's interests.

During the 1979-1980 conjuncture, the oligarchy was unable to block the implementation of reforms in land, banking, and international commerce. They did, however, successfully promote a violent, hardline posture towards the mass opposition. The key factor in this outcome, and
in most state violence from 1932 through 1980, was the existence of a semi-autonomous military force with a mercenary relationship to private capital. The oligarchy did not control the entire state, but they could buy the security forces, whose institutional mission, organization, training, and tradition made them willing to be bought. The security forces were supplemented in the 1970s by intelligence structures set up by the U.S. and by senior officers who were about to be by-passed in the military succession process. This hardline current never really dominated the state: it did, however, provide a channel through which the oligarchy was able to challenge governments that stepped out of line. The security forces took direct military action to prevent junior officers from handing power over to reformist civilians, as in 1944, 1961 and 1972. After the October 1979 coup, they took indirect action, killing large numbers of civilians in what some of my informants interpreted as an effort to undercut the reformist program. (See Chapter Six)

The power of the security forces to block reforms came from two sources. One was their considerable military strength vis-à-vis the regular Army. Though their forces were dispersed around the country and they were numerically inferior to the Army overall, in the capital city they were a match for the Army First Brigade. At a minimum, suppressing the security forces would have required decisive
action by the regular Army. More importantly, however, the hardline forces' seemingly autonomous ability to carry out violence against civilians with impunity gave them the ability to shape the political climate in the country in ways disadvantageous to a reformist approach. Some of my informants believed that this was an intentional strategy of militarizing the conflict so that only a military solution would suffice. Intentional or not, it is clear that the violence had the effect of making it impossible for reformist officers or their civilian comrades to build a base of popular support. The result, from 1977 through 1980, was to gradually force the military, by default, into a policy of exterminating civilian opponents.

Other institutional factors contributed to the ability of the oligarchy to promote anti-reform violence by the military. One was the *tanda* system, according to which members of a given "promotion" from the military academy advanced through the ranks together, regardless of merit. This system cultivated a pattern of political loyalty and mutual support among *tandas*. One result of this was that if a relatively young officer were made president, as happened in 1972 with Arturo Molina, all officers belonging to more senior *tandas* immediately became lame-ducks with very limited future career prospects unless something were to happen to disrupt the normal succession process. These
by-passed officers became fertile ground for efforts by the oligarchy to promote hardline policies.

Another institutional characteristic, related to the tanda system, was the tendency of officers to shelter one another, especially tanda-mates, from prosecution for corruption, brutality, or other crimes. As a result, it has proven almost impossible to effectively discipline officers who are responsible for illegal violence against unarmed civilians or even those involved in conspiracy against government. The two most vulnerable groups to prosecution are officers in the security forces (mainly for violence) and most senior officers (mainly for corruption). Any serious move towards trials or a purge of the armed forces therefore makes instant allies of the senior officer corps and hardline elements, regardless of their differences on such issues as land reform.

Ideological Models

Ideological factors played an important role in the eventual spread of the hardline program throughout the military. Part of the reason that the oligarchy became as highly mobilized as it did after the coup was that they failed to perceive a distinction between the moderate, elite reformists in the government and the radical movement of the streets. This was a seriously distorted image: the politicians, scholars and technocrats who made up the first
junta had very few links to the radical left and sought much more limited changes than did the popular/guerrilla left. Because the oligarchy assumed that reformist elites were representatives or de facto members of the radical left, the logical response to the reformist challenge was a campaign of intense violence against the popular left. The private sector elite saw the second junta organized by the Christian Democrats through the same ideologically distorted lens, even though the Christian Democrats had even fewer connections to the radical left than the first junta.

This kind of thinking not only spurred the mobilization of the oligarchy, but was actively used by them to influence the perceptions and actions of officers within the military. Former Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, for example, visited military barracks and circulated video and audio tapes accusing civilian members of government, as well as reformist leaders in the military, of being "communists." This appears to have been designed to heighten young officers' sense of danger and encourage them to fall in line with the joint high command/hardline project of violence against the popular left.

Ideological factors interacted with political ones in leading to the collapse of the reformist officers' movement. Young officers initially supported the program on the basis of vague feelings of favoring "the people," opposing military servitude towards the oligarchy, and
objecting to the corruption, fraud and brutality that had characterized military conduct for the past decade. The economic, social and political thinking that underlay the reformist project was complex, however, and relatively few officers understood it in any depth. In contrast, the hardline, anti-communist formula was easy for officers to understand and provided clear prescriptions for action. When the reformist program failed to produce a rapid demobilization of opposition (because of high command and private sector resistance and hardline violence), officers who were initially sympathetic to reformism found it difficult to sustain such a commitment and many drifted toward the simpler and more familiar anti-communist formula.

Lessons for Reformers

When one appointee to the first Revolutionary Governing Junta discovered the makeup of the post-coup high command, he was disinclined to accept a position on the junta. He visited the Archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero, who encouraged him to stay on the junta, telling him "As a Christian, you must accept. Even if there is a 1, 2, 5 percent chance, you must take the risk, because the alternative is war." Archbishop Romero's advice was based on an assumption that attempting to carry out a reformist program, though not very likely to succeed, was unlikely to
make the situation worse. The analysis I have presented here calls that assumption into question.

Clearly the junior officers and their civilian partners began their reformist project in the hopes that it would reduce the intensity of political conflict and avert war. The Christian Democrats thought the same way as they took over from the first junta. Good intentions notwithstanding, their attempt to challenge the high command, the security forces, and the oligarchy appears to have sharpened rather than dampening conflict. The reformist project that they set in motion was an inherently conflictual program, yet the young officers in particular seem to have expected that they could carry it out without seriously disrupting the military institution.¹

The attempts by the first JRG and subsequently the Christian Democrats to gain state power and carry out a reformist policy without first building a strong base of popular support made their project extremely vulnerable. They created, in effect, a situation in which they provoked and threatened the oligarchy, hardline elements of the military, and the high command, creating powerful incentives for an alliance between the high command and the far-

¹ It must be acknowledged, as discussed in Chapter 6, that many of the captains involved in the conspiracy realized the violence that would probably be required within the military to clean things up, but their senior leaders were too committed to protecting military unity to take the necessary confrontational steps.
right. At the same time, the reformist leadership, with its weak ties to opposition, depended on the successful implementation of a dramatic reform measures to win popular support. Realization of major reforms required time; meanwhile, violence by semi-autonomous state agencies over which the reformists were unable to maintain control foreclosed any possibility of gaining popular support. In the face of evident failure to placate the opposition, many officers who were initially supportive of the reformist agenda defected and made themselves available for a policy of eliminating civilian opponents.

In retrospect, there were two complementary strategies which, in combination, might have enabled the reformist project to succeed. The first would have been for the reformist military to use violent force to suppress the security forces and purge the military of violent and corrupt senior officers. This is what at least some of the captains in the Army originally intended. The second component would have been for the reformist government to have established close ties, prior to the coup, with a solid mass base of support, one capable of resisting the violence of the security forces for a time. Under such circumstances, popular demonstrations could have served to assist the government in suppressing the security forces, rather than repeatedly confronting the government on socio-economic issues and providing the security forces with
opportunities to alienate the masses from the government. Without carrying out a true internal rebellion, and without establishing cooperative ties with a mass base of support, the reformist strategy for avoiding war was a dangerous mirage.

Lessons for the U.S.

The experience of the Carter administration in confronting and trying to undermine the power of the Salvadoran oligarchy carries some important lessons. As noted in Chapter 6, the long-range goal of the Carter administration was to weaken the Salvadoran oligarchy, making possible a more democratic and less violent political system. Their main tool for doing this was to take advantage of the fact that the Salvadoran military was very frightened by the radical left, especially in the wake of events in Nicaragua. Afraid that the loss of U.S. support would have the same consequences for them that it had in Nicaragua, the Salvadoran high command was willing to cooperate with U.S. insistence on Christian Democratic government and the implementation of reforms. U.S. success in forcing these measures on the high command did not, however, translate into success in isolating the military from oligarchic pressure for more violence. The reason for this was that the high command was still threatened by the Military Youth Movement and therefore could not afford a
confrontation with the security forces over human rights issues.

The broader lesson here is that in a situation in which there is a large, decentralized structure within the state that is involved in violence against civilians, suppression of state violence will require more than pressure on heads of state or officials in the high command. There was to be a base of actual political and military power to back up demands that the offending agencies curb abuses. U.S. pressures on Romero yielded only temporary results: whenever he cooperated with the U.S., he came under intense fire from the civilian far-right and from hardline elements of the military, who repeatedly succeeded in pushing him to take more violent measures. Though Romero seems not to have provided the full latitude desired by hardliners, neither did he effectively suppress their activities. Following the coup, the same situation existed, exacerbated by the fact that the post-coup high command was particularly dependent upon hardline elements for their political survival.

What the U.S. seems to have missed was the fact that the most promising basis for improving human rights conduct by the Salvadoran military was the reformist Juventud movement, which, with some help, would have had both the will and the power to bring a halt to abuses. Backing the Juventud, however, would have meant splitting the military
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at what the U.S. perceived to be a dangerous time. The embassy was too concerned about preserving the unity of the armed forces to actively support the junior officers. In retrospect, this choice may have contributed, in the long run, to a situation in which only massive amounts of U.S. aid could prevent the government from being overthrown.

It seems unlikely that the Salvadoran left would have begun seriously building an army during 1980 if government forces had undergone a major purge. There would clearly have been continued popular mobilization until major socio-economic demands were met and the guerrilla organizations might have continued to be active, but it is unlikely that the left as a whole would have tilted towards a military strategy in the absence of massive governmental repression. The November truce of 1979 shows that the popular left, though very radical in its discourse, was not completely unwilling to cooperate with reformist elites.

The role of institutional factors such as the tanda system, the lack of accountability for human rights abuses, and the independence of the security forces in creating the conditions for state violence might suggest to some readers that it would be helpful for a foreign power such as the U.S. to assist in modifying the institutional structure of the Salvadoran military. Such a conclusion should be approached with extreme caution, however. One must recall that U.S. efforts to build up the intelligence and counter-
insurgency capabilities of the Salvadoran military contributed significantly to the strength of the hardline elements and provided opportunities for oligarchic penetration of the military. U.S. efforts since 1980 to improve the institutional performance of the Salvadoran military have met with mixed success. According to James Cheek, the Carter administration intended to eventually eliminate the security forces entirely, thus breaking the oligarchy's grip within the military.\(^2\) This was never actually done - the Reagan administration apparently lacked either the interest or the leverage to accomplish it. U.S. aid did have the effect of building the Army up relative to the security forces.\(^3\)

By late in 1980, however, the regular Army was fully engaged in the policy of extermination of civilian regime opponents, so that its growth relative to the security forces did not lead to reduced violence. Newly U.S.-trained rapid reaction battalions quickly distinguished

\(^2\) Interview, Washington, D.C., April 1989.

\(^3\) In part this was because of a 1974 law which prohibited U.S. aid to foreign police forces. In 1985, however, the Reagan administration obtained a waiver of these restrictions. Police aid, including weapons, vehicles, and radio equipment has continued since that date. Additional funds have been channeled to Salvadoran security forces under the Antiterrorism Assistance Act. (Americas Watch 1987b, 205-9) As a result of this aid, the National Police and the Treasury Police now have well-armed crack infantry units which augment their power base within the military and make them potentially more resistant in any future showdown over state violence.
themselves as among the most flagrant violators of human rights within the Salvadoran military. U.S. training and aid programs did not have a positive impact on human rights conditions until late 1983, by which time the Salvadoran military had become dependent upon the U.S. to an unprecedented extent, giving the U.S. sufficient leverage to demand improvements.

As noted in Chapter Seven, the reductions that have taken place appear to have been based on expediency, rather than fundamental change in the institution. In effect, the U.S. has paid the Salvadoran military handsomely to kill more selectively. Despite the amounts of money spent, the U.S. has had little success in making more lasting contributions to improved human rights, such as an effective military justice system, reduction of the oligarchy's influence over the security forces, effective oversight of intelligence agencies to prevent involvement in death squad activities, and/or elimination of the tanda system with all of its associated contributions to the conditions for state violence. The basic reason for this failure is the same factor that caused the U.S. to miss the opportunity to help the Juventud Militar purge and restructure the armed forces in 1979-1980, that is, an excessive concern with preserving the unity and military capability of the armed forces.

4 The Atlacatl battalion was particularly conspicuous in carrying out rural massacres. See McClintock (1985a, 307-10)
without regard to the political and human costs of preserving that unity.

This excessive fear of weakening the military in the process of trying to alter its behavior stems from Cold War thinking that views the collapse of an allied government as a potentially catastrophic event in the delicate game of superpower competition. Shafer (1988) points out that U.S. security concerns have often put it in a position of being manipulated by its counterinsurgent client states. The new warming of U.S./Soviet relations, with its consequent reductions in the apparent risks to the U.S. of "losing" a client, opens up the possibility that the U.S. may become willing to take greater risks in pushing a government such as that in El Salvador to fundamentally restructure its armed forces in ways that might weaken them in the short run but reduce their proclivity for violence in the long run. Whether this happens or not will depend upon the rapidity with which U.S. policy makers adjust their perceptions to adapt to new international political realities.

**Normative Implications**

One of the disturbing aspects of conventional thinking on state violence is that it implicitly blames victims for the violence used against them and, in the process, imparts a legitimacy to state violence that it probably does not
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merit. If one assumes that state violence is a reaction to opposition, the immediate responsibility for state violence lies, in a sense, with the opposition that triggered it. Because this common sense framework defines state violence a priori as the act of defending the state from mass challengers, cases of grossly excessive state violence must be explained by saying that decision makers were frightened, perceived the threat as greater than it was, or lacked proper equipment and training for a more measured response.¹ The conventional framework excludes the possibility that state agents may use disproportionately severe violence because they have personal or intra-mural interests in doing so.

The analysis I have presented of events in El Salvador suggests that state violence may be motivated by far less noble considerations, namely, money, career advancement, and political power. Mass opposition may not be so much a threat to the state as an opportunity for particular sectors of the state to advance themselves at the expense of others. After the October 1979 coup, hardline leaders saw a clear opportunity to advance themselves and their

¹ These are precisely the explanations given by apologists for the Salvadoran military, including many present and former U.S. officials. Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State James Cheek, for example, remarked that "The Salvadoran military was too crude and instrument, a broadsword. They didn't have the right arms, training, and equipment to have much control." (interview, March 1989, Washington, D.C.)
agencies by rescuing the oligarchy from the reformist threat. They, of course, were also threatened by the reformist movement and were willing to use violence against innocent civilians to destabilize the reformist project. Increased violence against the popular sector and elite reformists helped militarize the conflict, increasing the stature of hardliners within the institution, minimizing the likelihood of a second, more radical junior officers' revolt, and making it more difficult for reformists to sustain their accommodative program. For the high command, whose careers were also on the line, the expansion of violence facilitated their campaign against reformist challengers. One notes that none of this has anything to do with defending the state, per se.

When I mentioned to Salvadoran Jesuit Jon Cortina my general proposition that elements of the military had used violence against civilians as a competitive strategy, he disagreed with the premise, saying that "it is important not to concede to them [hardline elements] too much intellectually. Eighty-five percent of them are 'burros.'" He argued that the repressors were not trying to block reformism, they were merely "following their life-long attitude of control, authority, complete disrespect for people's lives." I don't disagree with Cortina's view. In meetings with officers of various ranks, as well as

"Interview, San Salvador, September, 1989."
former enlisted personnel, I did find the lack of sophis-
tication and the penchant for order and control that
Cortina describes. Clearly, most of the time, local level
commanders and their troops were acting according to
established patterns, instinct, orders, and petty
gratuities from local elites. If one looks at the overall
armed institution, however, it appears that the freedom
that hardline soldiers and officers felt to carry out
repression, as well as the willingness of more moderate
officers to participate in violence against civilians,
depended in large part on the balance of political power
within the military institution. This balance was very
much affected by the actions of highly sophisticated elite
actors -- anti-reformists and shrewd senior commanders
interested in preserving their power through whatever means
were necessary -- who appear to have promoted state
violence in support of their personal and political
ambitions.

The actions of Salvadoran government forces, in and of
themselves, are cause for moral outrage. The cause for
outrage is even greater when the reasons for which state
forces killed tens of thousands of unarmed civilians have
less to do with the internationally recognized right of a
government to defend itself from violent efforts to
overthrow it, and more to do with internecine competition
between factions of the state. While many of the in-
dividual acts of violence carried out by Salvadoran troops and officers were no doubt spontaneous acts motivated by fear or by a desire for revenge in reaction to opposition violence, the overall political and institutional momentum towards wholesale violence that developed after October 1979 appears to have had much to do with factional political interests and money. As such, it is even more deserving of condemnation than if it had merely been the product of fear, weakness, and ideological distortion.

Directions for Future Research

This study has sought to demonstrate that our understanding of the causes of state violence can be enriched by examining political relations within the state, as well as politics between different elements of the state and civilians elites. For that limited objective, a case study is a useful first step. Patterns of elite-level political relations are, by their nature, likely to be highly idiosyncratic, with major differences across countries. Some of the factors that shaped state violence in El Salvador, such as the mercenary relationship between the security forces and private sector elites, the "protection contract" basis for military rule, the tanda system, and the particular forms that U.S. involvement took, may well be peculiar to the case. The broad lessons of El Salvador's violence, however, may well have bearing in other
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cases. In Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico, for example, it appears that elements of the state may have used violence against unarmed civilians as a way of resisting political openings initiated by other state authorities. Guatemala's military appears to have a mercenary relationship with private sector elites similar to that in El Salvador. If anything, the "protection contract" in Guatemala has been more overt and more directly linked to financial enrichment of military officers. Finally, one of the key determinants of the timing and intensity of state violence in El Salvador was the spread of violent practices from specialized agencies to the armed forces as a whole. A similar process appears to have taken place in Argentina in the 1970s, though of course there are numerous differences between the two countries' militaries. How this happened is one of the most important unanswered questions about the Argentine proceso.

David Pion-Berlin begins his book on state terrorism in Argentina and Peru with the remark that "The purpose of this book is to elevate state terror to a topic deserving serious inquiry in its own right, and more specifically to reveal the motivations behind use." (1989, 3) A similar motivation has driven my own research. Episodes of full-scale state terrorism in Latin America and elsewhere have radically transformed societies and their politics. Considerable effort has gone into studying the effects of
violence and on the processes by which polities emerge from periods of terror, but our understanding of the phenomenon of state violence itself is still rudimentary, especially in comparison to the fine-toothed analyses that the academic community devotes to other aspects of state policy such as finance, trade, economic development, education, and social welfare.

The neglect of elite politics as a factor in state violence is symptomatic of a broader failure to take state violence seriously as a political problem worthy of study. Liberals have preferred to pretend that capitalist states are basically legitimate, using violence only when necessary to defend themselves from (presumably illegitimate) internal enemies. Orthodox Marxists have preferred to think that state violence stems from economic structures, so that radical restructuring of economic relations can be counted on to solve the problem. My analysis of El Salvador shows that state actors sometimes kill their citizens for political reasons of their own, to enhance their wealth, power and privileges, and those of their institutions. It would seem that such elite politics-motivated violence can exist in any type of system in which inadequate controls and accountability give state agencies the power to kill, imprison, or torture civilians with impunity.
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We need to know more about the specific conditions that give state leaders the incentives to use violence and the freedom to do so. Unfortunately, the idiosyncratic nature of elite politics across different state systems will make the accumulation of general knowledge about the elite politics of violence a slow process, yet clearly further studies are needed. We can hope that as we accrue additional case studies, some patterns will emerge. Until this happens, intervening foreign powers, international organizations, and concerned individuals will be working without benefit of a potentially more complete understanding of why states abuse their people.
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APPENDIX

PROCLAMATION OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF EL SALVADOR,
15 OCTOBER, 1979

A. The Armed Forces of El Salvador are fully conscious of their sacred duties towards the Salvadoran People and sympathize with the clamor of all of the people against a government which has:

1) violated the Human Rights of the population;

2) fomented and tolerated corruption in public administration and the justice system;

3) created a veritable economic and social disaster;

4) profoundly discredited the country and the noble armed institution.

B. The Armed Forces are convinced that the problems mentioned are the product of antiquated economic, social and political structures that have prevailed traditionally in the country, which do not provide the majority of inhabitants with the minimal conditions necessary for them to realize themselves fully as human beings. Moreover, the corruption and incapacity of the regime has caused mistrust on the part of the private sector, resulting in millions of colonos in capital flight, intensifying the economic crisis at the expense of the popular sectors.

C. The Armed Forces are well aware that recent governments, products as they were of scandalous electoral frauds, have adopted inadequate programs of development. Those timid programs of structural change that have been attempted have been obstructed by the economic and political power of conservative sectors, which have consistently defended their ancestral privileges as dominant classes, endangering in the process the more socially progressive and conscious sectors of capital, which have shown an interest in achieving a form of economic development that would be more just toward the population.

1 Translation by author. For Spanish original, see Appendix 14 in Castro Moran (1989, 412-15).
D. The Armed Forces are firmly convinced that the conditions mentioned are the fundamental cause of the economic and social chaos, and of the violence that we are suffering at the moment. These conditions can only be overcome through the arrival in power of a government that will guarantee the installation of a genuinely democratic regime.

Toward that end, the Armed Forces, whose members have always been identified with the people, hereby, on the basis of the Right of Insurrection that all peoples have when governments fail to uphold the Law, depose the Government of General Carlos Humberto Romero and will immediately form a Revolutionary Governing Junta, composed in its majority of civilians whose honesty and competency is beyond all doubt. Said Junta will assume State Power with the goal of creating the necessary conditions under which all Salvadorans can have peace and live with the dignity that befits human beings.

While establishing the conditions necessary for the holding of genuinely free elections in which the people can decide its future, it is an unavoidable necessity, in view of the chaotic political situation in which the country is living, to adopt an Emergency Program containing urgent measures aimed at creating a climate of tranquility and at establishing the basis which will sustain the profound transformation of the economic, social and political structures of the country.

The elements of this Emergency Program are the following:

I. STOP THE VIOLENCE AND CORRUPTION

A) Dissolving ORDEN and combating extremist organizations which violate Human Rights;

B) Eradicating corrupt practices in public administration and the justice system.

II. GUARANTEE THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

A) Creating a propitious climate for the holding of genuinely free elections within a reasonable time frame;

B) Permitting the formation of political parties representing all ideologies, in a manner which will fortify the democratic system;

C) Granting a general amnesty to all political prisoners and exiles;
D) Recognizing and respecting the right of laborers to organize and form unions;

E) Stimulating free expression of thought in accordance with prevailing ethical standards.

III. ADOPT MEASURES CONducive TO AN EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF NATIONAL WEALTH, INCREASING AT THE SAME TIME THE GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT.

A) Creating a solid basis for initiating a process of Agrarian Reform;

B) Furnishing greater economic opportunities for the population by means of reforms in finance, the tax system, and foreign trade;

C) Adopting measures for the protection of consumers, counteracting the effects of inflation;

D) Implementing special development programs designed to increase national production and create additional sources of employment;

E) Recognizing and guaranteeing basic rights to housing, food, education, and health of all inhabitants of the country.

IV. PURSUE A CONSTRUCTIVE FOREIGN POLICY

A) Reestablishing relations with Honduras as quickly as possible;

B) Strengthening ties with the people of Nicaragua and their government;

C) Tightening our ties with the peoples and governments of our fellow republics Guatemala, Costa Rica and Panama;

D) Establishing cordial relations with all countries that are disposed to aid the struggles of our people and respect our sovereignty;

E) Guaranteeing the fulfillment of existing international commitments.

To achieve the accelerated implementation of these measures which the Salvadoran people has, with all justice, demanded, the Revolutionary Governing Junta will assemble a cabinet, formed by honest and capable individuals, repre-