

**Revolutionary Change in Nicaragua and El Salvador:**

**A Comparative Analysis**

by

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(ABSTRACT)

With the success of a leftist revolution in Nicaragua and a civil war against a strong revolutionary movement in El Salvador, Central America has become one of the flash points of world politics. The two revolutionary movements, which adhere to similar ideologies, emerged in countries with similar historical roots and similar socio-economic background. This thesis analyzes the question why the Nicaraguan revolution was successful after one and a half years of general insurrection, whereas the Salvadorean revolutionary movement has failed so far in gaining power. The author looks at four major factors which seem crucial for revolutionary success: *Breadth of the Revolutionary Coalition*, *Military Strength and Strategies*, *Role of the Church*, and *External Influences*. The comparative analysis shows that three of these four factors favor the Nicaraguan revolutionaries. In contrast to El Salvador, the Nicaraguan revolutionary coalition included all major classes, not only the lower classes and parts of the middle class. When compared to the government forces, the Nicaraguan guerrillas were stronger than the Salvadorean. Furthermore, the counterstrategy of the Nicaraguan government was not as systematic and sophisticated as in El Salvador. In contrast to Somoza, the Salvadorean government has gotten strong U.S. support and the Salvadorean revolutionary movement does not get the same support from other states that the Nicaraguan revolutionary movement received. Only the role of the Church is in favor of the Salvadorean revolutionaries. The Salvadorean Church was more active in promoting Liberation Theology and thereby helped to make the people conscious about the social injustices prevailing in the country and to organize the lower classes.

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They made my staying here very pleasant and gave me the necessary environment for successful academic work.

My thesis is dedicated to my parents, and to the memory of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, who was assassinated because of his outstanding and fearless commitment to the cause of the poor.

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# Introduction

Since the mid-seventies, Central America has become one of the flash points of world politics. In Nicaragua and El Salvador, initially small leftist avant garde groups have grown into massive revolutionary movements. The Nicaraguan Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) guided a popular uprising, which finally overthrew the dictatorship of the Somoza family in July 1979 after one and a half years of general insurrection. In El Salvador, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) constitutes since the early eighties a strong guerrilla movement, which over the years has held up to 30% of the national territory. The FMLN has a civilian branch, the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), which includes major political parties and mass organizations. In the early eighties, international observers considered a guerrilla victory in El Salvador as a possibility. But in contrast to the Sandinistas, the FMLN has failed so far in seizing power in a civil war which has already lasted eight years.

The question about the causes of the revolutionary insurrections in Central America - beside Nicaragua and El Salvador there has been a guerrilla movement active in Guatemala since the sixties - is controversial. One point of view sees the internal strife mainly in the light of the east-west conflict. The Soviet Union tries to get a foothold in Central America. According to the "domino theory", already successful in Nicaragua, the Soviet Union now tries to spread its influence to other Central American countries. It massively supplies weapons to leftist guerrillas which do not have

popular support, and trains them in Cuba and elsewhere in guerrilla warfare. Thereby, it is able to destabilize existing regimes and threatens to overthrow them and replace them with Marxist dictatorships.

Another major point of view perceives the causes of the conflict as basically internal. Throughout recent history, the Central American states were marked by great inequalities between an upper class living in affluent wealth, and a poor majority of peasants and workers, which suffer from malnutrition and lack basic social services such as health care and education. During the last three decades, the Central American states have developed their economies with aid and loans from the industrialized nations. Contrary to expectations, this process has not narrowed the gap between rich and poor, but rather increased the inequalities. Influenced by the teachings of leftist revolutionaries and Liberation Theology, the disadvantaged people have finally started to recognize the causes of their misery and have begun to rebel against the status quo. The upper class tried to repel the attack on their privileges through massive repression. This led to the vicious circle of violence and counter-violence which Central America experiences today. This view does not deny that the Soviet Union tries to use the conflict in its worldwide competition with the United States. But it perceives the internal inequality and repression as the primary root of the conflict, not the Soviet-Cuban interference.

It is not the goal of this thesis to settle the question about the real causes of the insurgencies. The broader context of this research is the question about what helps a revolutionary movement to seize power and which factors can prevent it from doing so. Why were the Sandinistas successful after one and a half years of mass insurrection, whereas the Salvadorean FMLN has fought an eight year old civil war so far unsuccessfully? This question can be examined independently from the question about the causes of the insurgencies. Both points of view will agree that there are additional factors influencing the revolutionary success beside the Soviet interference or the social inequalities.

At this point, a short remark about the time periods that are used for the comparison is necessary. For both countries, the time period is chosen at the time when the revolutionary movement transforms from a small avant garde movement into a numerous revolutionary movement that

poses a real threat to the power of the government. In Nicaragua, this point is reached at the beginning of 1978, in El Salvador in 1980. This can for example be seen when looking at the development of the number of guerrilla fighters. In Nicaragua, this is also the period when mass insurrections in the neighborhoods start. The Salvadorean revolution has not yet reached this stage. The chapter on military strength and strategies and the conclusion tries to answer why this is the case.

Nicaragua and El Salvador are two excellent cases for a comparative analysis of the reasons for success or failure of revolutionary movements. First, both countries can look back on a similar historical development. Both countries were colonized by the Spaniards and have therefore inherited the Spanish cultural roots. A different cultural and historical background can therefore be excluded as reason for the difference in the revolutionary success. Second, the socio-economic conditions in the two countries are similar. Both countries are agricultural nations with extreme inequalities between a small upper class and a poor majority. Third, the ideologies of the revolutionary movements can be considered very similar. The ideology of the FMLN seems to be somewhat more radical and Marxist than the ideology of the Sandinistas, but the FMLN has built a revolutionary coalition with the FDR, which includes moderate elements from a Christian democratic and social democratic origin. In summary, Nicaragua and El Salvador constitute two cases with a similar historical and cultural development and similar socio-economic conditions, in which two revolutionary movements with a similar ideology have emerged. These similarities then pose the question why one of the movements was successful and the other not, or not yet.

This question will be examined through a comparative analysis of four major factors, which are generally considered to be crucial for the success of social revolutions in today's Latin America. They have been selected from the literature on revolutions and contemporary Latin America. It is clear at this point that there are additional factors which influence the revolutionary success or failure, but this study concentrates on the four factors. They are examined in a qualitative rather than in a quantitative way. Each factor is discussed in one separate chapter. In the final concluding section, it will be asked for each of these factors whether it is more favorable to revolutionary suc-

cess in Nicaragua or in El Salvador. No assumption is made about which of the four factors are more and which are less influential.

A short description of the four factors may be appropriate at this point. The first factor which will be examined is the *Breadth of the Revolutionary Coalition*. As chapter 1 shows, several authors on the theory of revolution stress the importance of broad coalitions for revolutionary success. Revolutionary movements that include only the lower classes or only the middle class are less likely to succeed than broad multi-class alliances. It will therefore be asked which interests were and are represented in the revolutionary coalitions in Nicaragua and El Salvador. "Interests" thereby means class interests as well as interests of other relevant groups in the society, such as students, which do not form a class by themselves.

The second factor is *Military Strength and Strategies*. It is obvious that the strength of the troops on both sides and their strategies contribute to success or failure. This part examines the military power constellation by looking at the manpower ratio of government troops and guerrillas, and by considering the equipment and training of the two armies. It also examines the strategies of the revolutionary movement and of the government.

The third factor is the *Role of the Church*. This is a factor which comes into play in the special situation of Latin America since the sixties. Revolutionary movements need a theoretical background which explains to the people their situation and gives them the hope that a change is possible. If a revolution is more than a spontaneous short-term mass revolt, it also needs to organize the masses and to form leaders for this work. In the case of Latin America after the second Vatican Council, the progressive part of the Church has taken on these two tasks with Liberation Theology and the Christian Base Communities. For mobilizing the masses, the author considers the progressive Church more influential than Marxist ideology. This part therefore looks at the strength of the progressive wing of the Church within the two countries and at the connections between the Church and the revolution.

The fourth factor is *External Influences*. A single example may show why it is justified to include this factor as a major one. While the insurgents have inflicted about two billion dollars in economic damages on the Salvadorean state, massive U.S. economic aid of more than two billion

dollars has flowed into the country to prevent a breakdown of the economy. This outside support plays certainly a significant part in the revolutionary struggle. The factor includes influences from the United States, Latin American and other states, and from international organizations.

The discussion of these factors in the context of the theory of revolution in the first chapter will make it clear why the author considers them as major ones. At this point, some possible additional factors may be mentioned. Governments that are threatened by revolutionary overthrow can sometimes strengthen their position by introducing reforms. A look at the situation in Nicaragua and El Salvador shows that Somoza did not make any concessions towards the opposition, whereas the Duarte government in El Salvador implemented some reforms. This may have had some influence in preventing mass insurrection, as is argued in the fourth chapter and in the conclusion. Nevertheless, the author does not think that this was a major factor since the military and the oligarchy prevented Duarte from implementing any far-reaching reform.

A second additional factor could be the existence of paramilitary forces and the type of repression that was prevailing. Whereas in Nicaragua the repression was carried out by the armed forces of the government, in El Salvador a large part of the repression was the work of private paramilitary organizations, the death squads. It was therefore more difficult to fight against the repressive forces in El Salvador. In addition, the Salvadorean death squads were more systematic than the Nicaraguan National Guard. Whereas in Nicaragua during the time of the general insurrection the whole population was threatened by the National Guard, the death squads basically killed only people with leftist leanings. The influences of these differences are discussed in the fourth chapter and in the conclusion.

A third additional factor is the degree of popular support. This factor is often mentioned in the news media or by the current U.S. administration as a reason for the failure of the Salvadorean revolutionary movement. The Salvadorean revolutionaries are not successful because, in contrast to Nicaragua, they do not have the backing of the population. The factor "popular support" is similar to the factor "breadth of the revolutionary coalition". The former looks at the percentage of the population that backs the revolutionary movement, while the latter looks at the variety of interests that are represented in the revolutionary coalition. This analysis has chosen the latter

factor for two reasons. First of all, the author believes that the type of represented interests is at least as influential on revolutionary success as the pure percentage number of supporters. A group of ten top industrialists probably strengthens the revolutionary movement more than a group of ten peasants. Second, it is hardly possible to exactly measure popular support, whereas the interest groups that are represented in the revolutionary coalition are usually well known. The question of popular support for the revolution in El Salvador is briefly discussed in the conclusion.

Concerning the relevance of the research question, it is necessary to emphasize that Central America currently constitutes one of the focal points of world politics. The current instability in Central America is perceived as a danger to U.S. national security interests. The research question is therefore not only of academic interest but it concerns also day-to-day policy making. A better understanding of the factors that are conducive to revolutionary uprisings and the success of revolutionary movements could give new guidelines for future U.S. policies towards this region. The question of revolutionary success is especially interesting for El Salvador, where the revolution is still continuing and where the outcome is less clear than ever. The recent events in El Salvador indicate that we have to expect more polarization and an intensified struggle for the next years.

The question is also relevant in regard to the ongoing research on the phenomenon of revolution in general. Not many substantive research results have been produced so far that would allow us to predict and evaluate revolutionary movements. It is difficult to examine revolutions through quantitative statistical analysis, since they are very complex phenomena, which include a lot of variables that are hardly measurable. It seems therefore reasonable to shed light on this phenomenon through qualitative case studies. This analysis will not be able to establish general criteria for the success of revolutionary movements. A case study of two countries, which involves four major factors, can not provide a scientific proof that the assumed theoretical model is correct. But it will at least show if the application of the above introduced four factors would explain the success of the revolution in Nicaragua and the continuing failure of the revolutionary movement in El Salvador. In addition, it can give new insight into the phenomenon of revolution by drawing an impressionistic picture of the two revolutions.

The thesis is organized in six major chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 1 gives a short theoretical introduction into the phenomenon “revolution” and connects the theory to the comparative analysis of the Nicaraguan and Salvadorean revolution. Chapter 2 briefly summarizes the recent history of the two countries, focusing especially on the development of the revolutionary movements. It builds the necessary background to understand the following chapters. Important events are herein explained and key organizations and personalities are introduced. Chapter 3 through 6 analyze the four factors that were chosen for the thesis. These chapters contain the actual comparative analysis. Each chapter deals with one factor and summarizes the findings in a conclusion section. At the end, the findings are drawn together and presented in a final conclusion. The conclusion also tries to shed some light on the controversial question if the Salvadorean revolutionary movement has popular support or not.

# 1. Introducing Thoughts on Revolution

There is no commonly accepted definition of the phenomenon of revolution in the literature. Chalmers Johnson, one of the leading authors on revolution, adopts the definition of the French theorist Arthur Bauer:

Revolutions are social changes, successful or unsuccessful, involving violence and concerning the basic constitution of a society.<sup>1</sup>

Theda Skocpol, in her book *States and Social Revolutions*, understands revolution as “rapid, basic transformation of a society’s state and class structures, accompanied and in part carried through by class based revolts from below.”<sup>2</sup> Thomas H. Greene claims to sum up in his definition “the almost unanimous opinion of writers on the subject”:

“Revolution”... means an alteration in the personnel, structure, supporting myth, and functions of government by methods which are not sanctioned by prevailing constitutional norms. These methods almost invariably involve violence against political elites, citizens, or both ... and a relatively abrupt and significant change in the distribution of wealth and social status.<sup>3</sup>

To sum up, these definitions show three main characteristics of the phenomenon that is commonly understood as “revolution”. Revolutions change the governmental structure and the

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<sup>1</sup> Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, second edition, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982, p.1. Johnson’s citation is taken from: Arthur Bauer, *Essai sur les Revolutions*, Paris: Giard and Briere, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.33.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas H. Greene, *Comparative Revolutionary Movements*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974, p.8.



ruling elite fundamentally through means which are not designated by the constitution. This seizure of power usually involves more or less widespread violence. But a simple seizure of power through violent means is not commonly understood as a "revolution". In addition, such an attack on the governmental power has to aim at a basic transformation of the society. This generally means that a massive mobilization of popular discontent has to accompany the change of power. Mass mobilization distinguishes a revolution from a coup d'état.

Three major stages can be distinguished in the process of a successful revolution. In a first stage, existing popular discontent has to be mobilized and expressed. A revolutionary movement has to be formed which attacks the legitimacy of the incumbent regime through a revolutionary ideology. It has to find some mass support in order to threaten the incumbent power holders. Popular discontent and a loss of the legitimacy of the existing regime does not necessarily lead to the formation of a revolutionary movement. Repression, for example, may prevent the opposition from taking revolutionary actions. When the opposition has been able to form a revolutionary movement with some mass support and to carry out revolutionary actions against the incumbent regime, the first stage of the revolution was successful. We might call this stage *cultural or intellectual revolution*.

The second stage of the revolutionary process concerns the actual seizure of power. During this phase, the government forces and the forces of the revolutionary movement are in a power struggle. This phase is usually marked by widespread violence. It can include fights between the armed forces of both parties, popular insurrections, and general strikes. If this stage of the revolution is successful, it leads to the ouster of the existing government. This phase might be called *political revolution*.

The last stage of the revolutionary process is the transformation of the society according to the program of the revolutionary movement. We might call this stage *social revolution*. Although the old government is ousted, there will still be influential members of the society that oppose the social revolution. Some of them may have taken part in the political revolution because they were discontent with the leadership, not with the system in general. The social revolution may also be confronted with strong opposition from other countries.

A revolution in the comprehensive sense outlined above can only be considered successful when it is successful in all three stages, including the social revolution. Nevertheless, the following analysis of Nicaragua and El Salvador only deals with the second stage, the power struggle of the political revolution. It compares this stage for the two revolutions. While the Nicaraguan revolution has meanwhile reached the third stage, the Salvadorean revolution is still in the second stage. It is not clear at this point, if the Salvadorean political revolution will be successful in the future, but it can already be said that it will at least take much more time if it is successful at all.

Different factors influence the different stages of the revolutionary process. First of all, it might be interesting to ask which factors cause the emergence of a revolutionary movement. The existing literature on revolution distinguishes between preconditions or root causes, and catalysts or accelerators. The preconditions bring about the necessary situation in which a revolution can develop. But they are not sufficient to create a revolution. As Booth says: "A warehouse full of cardboard does not become a four-alarm fire until flame touches paper."<sup>4</sup> The necessary flames to start the fire are the catalysts.

For the analysis of the preconditions for a revolution, two different approaches are prevalent. One approach uses the society as a whole as the unit of analysis. It tries to identify the structural characteristics of a society which lead to revolution. The other approach tries to explain revolution by starting out at the individual level. It tries to explain what conditions cause an individual to participate in a revolutionary movement. One of the leading theorists using the structural approach is Chalmers Johnson. Johnson considers a "disequilibrated social system" as precondition for a revolution.<sup>5</sup> A social system becomes "disequilibrated" in Johnson's view, when there appears a dissynchronization between the predominant values in the society and the division of labor. In other words, the society becomes disequilibrated when the actual division of labor does not any longer reflect the value system of the society. In this situation, two possible ways of development are open. Either the ruling elite promotes reforms to release the strains in the system, or elite intransigence

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<sup>4</sup> John A. Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, second edition, Boulder: Westview Press, 1985, p.5.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, pp.91-121.

prevents structural reforms. In the latter case, the result will be a loss of authority. The ruling elite has to resort to police and military forces to stay in power. At this moment, an additional accelerator can unleash the revolution.<sup>6</sup>

Ted Robert Gurr is a protagonist of the second, psychologically oriented approach. His theory is based on the frustration-aggression hypothesis from psychology, which says that a person that experiences frustration is more likely to act aggressively. The counterpart of frustration on the level of the society is relative deprivation. Gurr defines relative deprivation as “actors’ perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their value capabilities.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, that means that there is a gap between what people think they are entitled to receive and what they believe they can achieve in the actual situation. To conclude what they are entitled to, people will generally look at their past experience and at the situation of reference groups within the society. The counterpart of aggression in Gurr’s theory is political violence. Gurr’s main hypothesis then says that the higher the relative deprivation in a society is, the more likely is this society to develop political violence. The form of the violence is depending on additional variables. Revolution, for example, is likely when the relative deprivation affects the elite as well as the masses.

The author’s own understanding of revolution includes elements of both approaches. In his view, the most fruitful attempts to understand “revolution” must include both approaches. The two approaches are simple two different ways to look at this phenomenon, each approach showing things which the other does not. For the understanding of the role of revolutions in the historical development of nations, the structural approach seems more promising. A society is more than the sum of its individual members. There are other actors beside the individuals. Large political or economic organizations play an important role. The same is true for the socialization process and for the control of the mass media. The political culture is different in every society. It is therefore necessary to look at the society from a global perspective, not only to look at the individuals. In this context, the author sees revolution as one possible way for political systems to adapt to changing environmental conditions, i.e. changing conditions in the society. Either they adapt con-

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<sup>6</sup> Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*.

<sup>7</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970, p.24.

tinuously by small structural reforms, or they will experience a breakdown followed by revolutionary change, which has to make up the missed structural changes. In this sense, continuous reforms would be the best insurance against revolutionary upheaval.

The structural approach has two major disadvantages. First, by neglecting the individual revolutionary actor, it tends to ignore specific conditions which can incite the individual to revolutionary action or prevent him from doing so. Johnson, for example, says that in a disequibrated social system, where elite intransigence has produced a loss of authority, revolution is likely to occur when an additional accelerator exists. In this situation, revolution can happen but does not necessarily happen. At this point it can be fruitful to apply the second approach, to explain why people do or do not join the revolutionary movement in a potentially revolutionary situation. A second disadvantage is that the structural approach is very difficult to apply in concrete cases, since the society is a very complex unit of analysis. The approach which starts out from the individual level is easier to apply. In summary, to understand the role of revolutions in the historical development of nations, the structural approach is necessary. This approach shows, how a revolutionary potential emerges in a society. But to explain why people do or do not participate in a revolutionary movement, the individual approach is more appropriate. In other words, the structural approach explains how revolutionary situations emerge, and the individual approach explains the complex phenomenon of mass participation in revolutionary actions.

Possible catalysts that are mentioned in the theory of revolution may be cited briefly at this point. Catalysts usually either weaken the ruling elite or the deterrence of its armed forces, or increase the discontent with the regime by raising people's expectations or their detestation. Commonly listed catalysts are military defeat, economic crises, excessive government violence, elite fragmentation, or efforts at reform and political change.<sup>8</sup> Efforts at reform and political change can work as catalysts when they come too late to defuse the crisis. Then, they can produce new expectations and result in increased discontent.

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<sup>8</sup> Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, p.5.

Several factors influence the success of the second stage, the political revolution. This introduction will concentrate on explaining the relevance of the four factors that were chosen for the following analysis of the Nicaraguan and Salvadorean revolution. Broad revolutionary coalitions including all major classes and diverse interests are generally noted as important for revolutionary success.<sup>9</sup> Single-class or single-interest movements have generally failed. Samuel Huntington points out that discontent of urban groups and rural groups has to coincide in order for a revolution to succeed. More than one group is necessary to incite a revolution. A single group might be able to overthrow the government but not to produce revolution. Revolution can only be achieved by a coalition of urban opposition groups with rural opposition groups.<sup>10</sup>

Gerard Chaliand also comes to the conclusion that a broad coalition is a necessary condition for the success of a revolution. He shows that revolutions are usually not successful when they attempt only social change. The successful social revolutions were in most cases connected to the fight for a nationalist cause. Whereas a nationalist cause can unite a whole country in a revolutionary movement, a pure social revolution will cause a rift in the society, since some groups will loose in the transformation of the society.<sup>11</sup>

A broad revolutionary coalition does not mean that all groups in the coalition follow the same interests. A revolutionary coalition can include a variety of even conflicting interests, as long as all these groups have the common goal of overthrowing the incumbent regime. This point is stressed by Manus Midlarski and Kenneth Roberts in a comparative article on state and revolution in Nicaragua and El Salvador:

At times, middle-class and even upper-class groups will offer sympathy or active support to revolutionary movements for the purpose of destroying a state that is no longer perceived as serving their interests. This does not mean, however, that such groups seek the transformation of class structures as well. As such, revolutionary coalitions may aggregate classes, class fractions, or groups with

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<sup>9</sup> See for example: Greene, *Comparative Revolutionary Movements*; Carl Leiden and Karl M. Schmidt, *The Politics of Violence: Revolution in the Modern World*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968; and Claude E. Welch, Jr., and Mavis Bunker Taintor (eds.), *Revolution and Political Change*, North Scituate, Mass.: Duxburg, 1972.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.

<sup>11</sup> Gerard Chaliand, *Revolution in the Third World: Myths and Prospects*, translation into English, New York: The Viking Press, 1977.

sharply divergent interests and objectives, with their only point of convergence being their common opposition to state structures (or even regime leaders).<sup>12</sup>

A second factor influencing revolutionary success is the military strength of both sides and their strategies. The incumbent regime can usually rely on military and police forces which protect it against the challenge of the revolutionary movement. The revolutionaries have only a chance to succeed when they can build up their own armed forces or when the military and police forces dissolve or go over to the revolutionaries. The guerrilla army does not have to have the same size as the regular army, since by using guerrilla tactics the guerrillas are able to withstand a stronger and better armed conventional army. The literature generally mentions that a manpower ratio between five to one and ten to one in favor of the government forces is necessary in order to defeat the guerrilla movement.<sup>13</sup> Beside the manpower ratio, the armament and the training of the guerrillas and the government troops are important to evaluate their strength.

In addition to the strength of both armies, the strategies influence the outcome of the power struggle. The government will try to prevent the masses from supporting the guerrillas. If violence and repression is the means to reach that goal, the government strategy will often have the contrary effect, strengthening the revolutionary movement. Similarly, the revolutionaries can alienate the masses with unpopular actions or when forcing people to support them rather than gaining their support through conviction. For the final outcome, it is crucial who can secure the support of the masses.

Another important factor are influences from foreign countries and international organizations. The international environment can be more or less conducive to revolutionary success. Usually, both sides of the revolutionary struggle get some support from foreign countries. Governments can get military and economic aid to strengthen the regime against the guerrillas. Rebels can strengthen their troops if they get arms from foreign supporters. Occasionally, foreign governments have even tried to prevent revolutionary success by overt armed intervention. Chaliand and Stavrianos both note the role of Western industrialized nations in preventing leftist revolutions in the Third

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<sup>12</sup> Manus I. Midlarski and Kenneth Roberts, "Class, State, and Revolution in Central America: Nicaragua and El Salvador Compared", in: *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol 29, Iss 2, June 85, pp.164/165.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Greene, *Comparative Revolutionary Movements*, p.84.

World.<sup>14</sup> Important for the revolutionary success is also the role of the neighboring countries. A neighboring country which supports the revolutionaries can provide them with a sanctuary and can also be used by them to smuggle arms into the country. Greene mentions the importance of a sanctuary for revolutionary success.<sup>15</sup> International Organizations can influence the revolutionary process by influencing their member nations and urging them to take measures such as economic sanctions or breaking diplomatic relations. Economic organizations can also use their financial power. They can support or undermine the incumbent regime by granting or denying loans.

To explain the relevance of the fourth factor, the role of the Church, a few reflections are necessary on the relations between prevailing injustices, the emergence of discontent, and the expression of this discontent in revolutionary actions. Situations of injustice do not necessarily cause widespread popular discontent, and widespread popular discontent does not necessarily mean revolution. In a case study on Appalachian mountaineers, John Gaventa shows that the consciousness of the individuals itself can be strongly influenced by the prevailing power structure.<sup>16</sup> By giving the dominated a sense of powerlessness and by shaping their cognition through the education system, the media, and other institutions, power holders can succeed not only in preventing them from raising their grievances, but even in preventing them from being aware of injustices. Gaventa shows for example that in secret elections the mountaineers support the interests of the dominating coal company with high majorities, even when they are obviously in conflict with their own interests as stated by themselves. In Latin America, the Church had a regime supporting functions throughout the history by teaching people to accept the extreme inequalities as the will of God and not to perceive them as injustices.

Even when widespread discontent has emerged, revolutionary action does not necessarily follow. The intensity of the revolutionary actions does not directly reflect the intensity of the discontent. There are various barriers that prevent people from expressing their grievances through

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<sup>14</sup> Chaliand, *Revolution in the Third World*; and L.S. Stavrianos, *Global Rift: The Third World Comes of Age*, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1981.

<sup>15</sup> Greene, *Comparative Revolutionary Movements*, p.95.

<sup>16</sup> John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980.

revolutionary actions. First, most regimes threaten extremely severe punishment for revolutionary actions. Repression by the government or by private paramilitary forces can prevent people from getting active. Even if the repression is not very intense, it is difficult to give up the relative security of a regular life for the uncertain hardship of guerrilla warfare. Second, the discontent people may lack the self-confidence and the organizational abilities to stand up for their grievances. Long-time experiences of subjugation have often resulted in passivity. Excluded from the decision-making processes, these people often lack the knowledge and confidence to promote their interests. Third, the discontent people may be isolated and in competition with each other. Workers might compete for their jobs and peasants for land or for the sale of their products. In the case of the peasants, their interests often crosscut class lines as a consequence of kinship or of the fact that a peasant may be landowner, renter, and wage laborer at the same time. Fourth, regional conditions can prevent revolution. The landscape can be unsuited for guerrilla warfare. The population density can be too low, as in most parts of Africa. Cultural factors, such as the existence or absence of a tradition of resistance, also play a role.

A fifth point is given by Mancur Olson's rational choice theory.<sup>17</sup> Olson's theory is based on the assumption that people's behavior is driven by an economic rationality. People try to maximize the utility of their actions according to the principle of minimal costs and maximal benefits. For the concrete example of a revolution, this means that for the single individual participation in a revolutionary movement is usually not rational. It is highly unlikely that the success or the failure of a revolution is dependent on one single individual. Generally, the contribution of a single individual towards the success of a revolution is negligible. So, why should he participate in the revolutionary movement and pay the costs such as the loss of his job, imprisonment or even death? If he does not participate, he will still receive the same benefits which he would receive when participating. Therefore, the rational choice for the single individual would be to stay out of the revolutionary movement. It would only be rational to join the revolutionary movement when he can significantly influence the development of the revolution, for example as a leader, or when he can

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<sup>17</sup> See: Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965.



expect additional personal benefits after a revolutionary success, such as privileges in future land distributions. In the view of the author, Olson's approach focuses too much on an pure economic rationality of people's actions. It neglects that psychological factors, such as hatred and wishes for revenge by people that have been affected by repression, can drive them into actions that can not be explained by an economic rationality. Nevertheless, Olson's approach seems at least helpful for explaining why revolutions occur relatively seldom. In world history, situations of widespread popular discontent are much more frequent than outbreaks of revolutions.

According to these thoughts on the relation between injustices, discontent, and revolutionary actions, revolutions need mechanisms which make people aware of prevailing injustices and help them to express their discontent. As the chapter on the role of the Church will show, Liberation Theology plays this role in Latin America. First, it makes people conscious of existing injustices, by telling them that each human being has the right to a decent live on earth and by relating their concrete situation to the texts of the Bible. Situations of extreme inequality are not any longer depicted as God's will. Second, once people are aware of injustices, the Christian Base Communities help them to organize to express their discontent and to fight for change. This fight is initially non-violent and within the established rules of the society but it soon encounters strong repression, which drives the involved people and even some extremist representatives of the Church towards armed insurrection. Therefore, by making people conscious of injustices and by organizing them and giving them the self-confidence to fight for their rights, Liberation Theology increases the likelihood of success in the first and the second stage of the revolutionary process. It helps to form a revolutionary movement and it mobilizes people for the mass insurrection.

The factors that influence the success of the third stage, the social revolution, get little attention in revolutionary theory. Since this analysis only deals with the political revolution, they will not be discussed here. But it is obvious that the composition of the revolutionary coalition is important. If the revolutionary coalition does not break into strong conflicting factions, the chances for the success of the third stage are better.

Finally, a short remark might be allowed concerning the role of the peasantry in revolutions, since the two examined revolutions take both place in agricultural societies. Traditionally, peasants

have a conservative image. Samuel Huntington believes that this is true only in traditional societies. He states that in modernizing societies peasants are more susceptible to revolution than urban classes.<sup>18</sup> The advent of capitalism even in the most remote countryside of the developing nations has fundamentally changed the structure of the traditional agriculture. Land has become a commodity that can be bought and sold. This can result in a dramatic shift in land tenure patterns, as David Mason shows in a study on El Salvador:

Client populations are displaced from the land as the market price of those export crops that could be raised on a plot of land comes to exceed the market value of the goods and services the client could pay in exchange for the use of land. Tenants can simply be evicted and smallholders pressured through indirect means (such as more stringent credit terms or a reduction in other services that serve as disaster insurance) to sell off their land to those with the capital to convert it to export crop production.<sup>19</sup>

Through this process, the peasants lose not only their land but also the disaster insurance which the traditional relationship to the landlord had provided them so far. In other words, capitalism threatens to deteriorate the living and working conditions of the peasantry. On the other hand, through the improvement of the communication and transportation network and the appearance of the radio and the television, capitalism also reduces the isolation of the peasantry. The peasants become more aware of their situation when comparing their rural life with the life in the cities. Furthermore, the improved communication makes it easier for them to organize and turn their discontent into revolutionary struggle. Through these two factors, the deterioration of the living conditions and the improvement of the communication, capitalism has increased the revolutionary potential of the Third World peasantry. Peasants have been an important factor in all major revolutions.<sup>20</sup> They mainly fight for their own interests rather than for a general revolutionary vision. Nevertheless, often it has been their massive uprising in the countryside which made it possible to overthrow an existing regime. In this regard, peasants play a crucial role in the Third World revolutions.

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<sup>18</sup> Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, p.292.

<sup>19</sup> David Mason, "Land Reform and the Breakdown of Clientelist Politics in El Salvador", in: *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol 18, Iss 4, Jan 86, p.493.

<sup>20</sup> For the case of the French, Russian, and Chinese revolution see: Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*.

In the context of the study of revolutions, this thesis deals with the second stage of the revolutionary process. As explained above, this is the stage of the actual struggle for power by the revolutionary movement, the political revolution. The major question is thereby, what factors are conducive to the success of a revolutionary movement, once it has reached the second stage. When a mass supported revolutionary movement has emerged in a society, which factors can prevent it from gaining power or can make revolutionary success more likely?

To shed more light on this question, this thesis undertakes a most-similar systems analysis involving two revolutions with a different outcome of the power struggle. It compares the revolutions of Nicaragua and El Salvador in their second stages, that means Nicaragua in the seventies and El Salvador in the eighties. The Salvadorean revolution is still in the second stage and may eventually reach the third stage. But even then the outcome can be considered different, since it took a much longer time to succeed for the Salvadorean revolutionaries. Therefore, the conditions must be less conducive to revolutionary success in El Salvador. The thesis asks if the four factors which have been introduced above and which are considered as major determinants of revolutionary success can explain the different outcome in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

As already mentioned in the introduction, this design will not provide a basis for determining if the four factors are really the major determinants of success for revolutions in general. Neither will a case study of two countries involving four major factors allow us to draw conclusions about which factors are more important and which factors less. But it will show if the relationship between revolutionary success and these four factors is as the theories of revolution predict. In this sense, the thesis is a contribution to the general research on the question which conditions have to be fulfilled to make it possible for a revolutionary movement to seize power.

## 2. The Historical Development of the Two Revolutions

### 2.1. Nicaragua

The origins of the revolutionary movements, both in Nicaragua and in El Salvador, go back to the late twenties and early thirties of this century. In Nicaragua, following a U.S. intervention in 1909 to depose a nationalist president, Jose Santos Zelaya, the Marines occupied the country almost continuously from 1912 to 1933. In 1926, Augusto Cesar Sandino, the son of a small landholder and an Indian woman, joined an armed insurrection of the Liberal Party against the ruling Conservatives. Despite a peace settlement between the Liberals and the Conservatives, Sandino continued fighting, aiming at Nicaragua's liberation from the U.S. occupation. Since his troops had suffered heavy casualties when using conventional strategies, Sandino developed guerrilla tactics and cultivated the support of the local peasantry. Besides the fight for national liberation, Sandino's ideology aimed at improving the lot of the rural poor. But he never manifested a doctrinaire ideological stand. His ideology was "populist and reformist, but not Marxist."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John A. Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, second edition, Boulder: Westview Press, 1985, p.42.

Ultimately the Marines and the government troops found themselves confronted with a costly guerrilla war, which they could not win militarily and which was unpopular within the United States. Finally, in 1933, the marines withdrew. They left behind a strong U.S. trained National Guard, which was designed to take over the functions of the marines. Anastasio Somoza Garcia, the commander of the Guard, who had been chosen by the United States, would soon take over governmental power and found the 43-year dictatorship of the Somoza family.

Shortly after the withdrawal of the Marines, Sandino signed a peace agreement with the Nicaraguan government of President Sacasa. The agreement called for a cessation of the hostilities and guaranteed amnesty for Sandino's men. Nevertheless, in 1934, after a meeting with President Sacasa, Sandino was captured and executed by the National Guard, which afterwards massacred several hundreds of his followers, including women and children.<sup>22</sup> Augusto Cesar Sandino was to become the spiritual father of a revolutionary movement, which 45 years later would overthrow the dictatorship founded by the commander of the National Guard that had murdered him.

Somoza seized power in 1936. He was the dictator of Nicaragua for the next nineteen years and the founder of the dictatorship of the Somoza family. Until the late 1960s, the Somozas' political tactic to stay in power consisted of three main elements. The family tried to keep the National Guard and the United States as their two major sources of support and they tried to prevent the emergence of a strong domestic opposition. The Somozas tried to maintain the support of the National Guard by encouraging corruption and exploitation, therefore isolating them from the people. They also tried to secure the support of the United States by strongly supporting U.S. foreign policy. Furthermore they tried to co-opt important domestic power contenders through corruption.<sup>23</sup>

Anastasio Somoza Garzia was assassinated in 1956 by a young poet. His successor became his son, Luis Somoza Debayle, who ruled Nicaragua either directly or through a puppet government until his death from a heart attack in 1967. His term showed some cosmetic liberalizations.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp.51/52.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas W. Walker, *Nicaragua: The Land of Sandino*, second edition, Boulder: Westview Press, 1986, p.27.

He was convinced that in order to preserve the system, the family had to lower its dominant position in politics and economics. He was also committed to modernization and economic development of his country.<sup>24</sup> The GNP grew rapidly but the economic development had little impact on the poor majority of the Nicaraguans. Generally, the living conditions even became worse. "Somehow lower class Nicaraguans were getting poorer as their country grew richer."<sup>25</sup> Anastasio Somoza Debayle, who succeeded his brother in 1967, was less skillful in the politics of keeping power. Whereas Luis had tried to build up a civilian power base, Anastasio basically relied on the military power of the National Guard. Furthermore, while Luis had tried to limit or even decrease the influence of the family in politics and economics, Anastasio showed an unrestrained willingness to use his position for personal enrichment and to expand the position of his family in the Nicaraguan economy.<sup>26</sup> The incompetence and corruption of his government and his unrestrained lust for political and economic power, in connection with the deteriorating living conditions of the poor, would finally bring down his dictatorship.

Throughout the years of the dictatorship of the Somoza family, there had been several attempts of armed revolt to overthrow their rule, among others by former members of Sandino's guerrilla army. The revolutionary movement that finally would play the key role in overthrowing the last Somoza ruler was formed in July 1961 in Tegucigalpa. Three former members of the pro-Soviet Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN), Carlos Fonseca, Silvio Mayorga, and Tomas Borge founded the Sandinista Front of National Liberation (FSLN). They were disappointed with the reformist line of the PSN, which adopted the Soviet view that conditions were not ripe for a proletarian revolution. "The founders of the FSLN were determined to create an authentically Nicaraguan revolutionary movement, based on the tactics and sociopolitical objectives of Augusto Cesar Sandino."<sup>27</sup> The FSLN adopted the "foco strategy" of guerrilla war. They launched small-

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.29.

<sup>25</sup> Morris J. Blachman et al. (eds.), *Confronting Revolution: Security Through Diplomacy in Central America*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1986, p.90.

<sup>26</sup> Walker, *Nicaragua*, p.30.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.41.

size attacks on the National Guard from their sanctuaries in the Nicaraguan mountains. The goal of the attacks was to harass the government and to incite a widespread popular insurrection. But their foco strategy proved to be unsuccessful. In 1967, the FSLN guerrillas experienced a major setback. That year the FSLN launched a major military campaign in the region around Pancasan. As a reaction, National Guard troops deployed by helicopters surrounded the guerrilla forces and imposed a heavy blow on them. Many Sandinistas, including the founding member Silvio Mayorga, as well as a part of their peasant supporters were killed. For the next seven years, the FSLN temporarily retrenched the confrontations with the National Guard and concentrated on organizing peasants and the urban poor against the dictatorship.<sup>28</sup>

The strong mass movement against the Somoza dictatorship started in the early seventies. Two acts of Anastasio Somoza Debayle strengthened the already existing opposition. The first was Somoza's exploitation of the earthquake of 1972. On December 23, 1972 a powerful earthquake shook Nicaragua's capital, Managua. It destroyed the capital, leaving 8,000-10,000 persons dead and hundreds of thousands homeless. Anastasio Somoza was bold enough to transform this national tragedy into personal financial gain. "He accomplished this by channeling aid through his companies and purchasing the parts of the city where he planned to undertake reconstruction. He also encouraged Guard leaders to profit from the foreign aid and the reconstruction opportunities in the city."<sup>29</sup> Partly, the foreign aid went directly into private pockets, or was used to build expensive houses for National Guard officers instead for the reconstruction of Managua's poor neighborhoods. The abuse of the misery of the people and the misuse of the foreign aid further alienated the lower classes, as well as the business community, from Somoza's regime.

The second act of Somoza that strengthened the opposition movement was Somoza's reaction to an event in late December 1974. On the evening of December 29, a reception for U.S. ambassador Turner B. Shelton took place at a private villa in Los Robles, Managua. This reception was attended by several prominent Nicaraguans and friends of Somoza. As their first major armed op-

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<sup>28</sup> George Black, *Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua*, London: Zed Press, 1981, pp.82-86; and Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, p.140.

<sup>29</sup> Robert A. Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p.36.

eration since 1967, the FSLN attacked this party and took the guests as hostages. Although the U.S. ambassador had already left at the time of the attack, the operation proved to be a full success. Through the negotiation of Managua's archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo, Somoza gave in to the demands of the Sandinistas. He released Sandinista prisoners, paid a \$2 million ransom, published and broadcasted several FSLN communiques, and granted safe passage for the guerrillas and prisoners to Cuba. In reaction to the success of the Sandinistas, Somoza imposed the state of siege, which was not lifted until September 1977. The repression, the strict press censorship, and the excesses of the National Guard during this time further contributed to the domestic and international discontent with Somoza's dictatorship.

The opposition against Somoza developed on two tracks in the seventies. The moderate opposition was led by the business community. The upper class was discontent with the corruption and the repression of the government, and with the increasing concentration of the Nicaraguan economy in the hands of the Somoza family. Its primary goal was to remove Somoza from power. In December 1974, this movement formed the **Democratic Liberation Front (UDEL)** as an anti-Somoza coalition of liberal bourgeois formations and some organizations representing the workers' movement.<sup>30</sup> Its strategy to undermine Somoza's rule were political declarations, demonstrations, and joint management-workers strikes. The leader of UDEL was Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, the editor of Nicaragua's only important independent, anti-government newspaper "*La Prensa*".

The second track was the radical opposition led by the FSLN. Besides the removal of Anastasio Somoza from power, it aimed at the promotion of major social and economic changes. The social changes would include the transformation of the capitalist economy into a mixed economy, land reform, and the improvement of the situation of the poor majority by promoting the health care and education system. In an internal dispute over the best strategy, the FSLN split in 1975 into three different groups, called tendencies.<sup>31</sup> The "Proletarian Tendency" emphasized the organization of the urban proletariat as its main strategy. The "Prolonged Popular War

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<sup>30</sup> Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, p.153.

<sup>31</sup> For a description of the three different tendencies see: Donald C. Hodges, *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp.225-255.



Tendency” focused on a war of attrition in the countryside. The third tendency, the “*Terceristas*”, aimed at a mass insurrection to overthrow Somoza and was therefore in favor of a broad coalition. After the weakening of its organization through the internal split, the FSLN experienced another major setback as its leader Carlos Fonseca was killed in combat in November 1976.

The link between the two tracks was built by the “Group of Twelve”. This group of twelve prominent Nicaraguans - lawyers, businessmen, priests, academics and other professionals - first appeared in October 1977, when they published a document about the situation in Nicaragua. The document, which was published in *La Prensa*, stated that no solution to the political crisis could be found without the full participation of the FSLN. Later on the Group of Twelve played an important role in bringing together the two tracks of the opposition.

The last act of the fall of Somoza’s dictatorship, the broad-based popular insurrection with massive anti-regime violence, began in 1977. The lifting of the state of siege in September 1977 released the whole popular discontent. *La Prensa* started immediately with heavy attacks on Somoza’s regime. The liberal bourgeois opposition increased their demands for reform. The FSLN, which had been weakened by the internal split and by a massive counterinsurgency campaign of the National Guard, launched attacks against National Guard posts in several cities in October 1977. An additional catalyst was the assassination of *La Prensa* editor and UDEL leader, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, on January 10, 1978. Although it is still unclear if Somoza was involved in this assassination, the Nicaraguans blamed Somoza for it, and the murder of Chamorro became a symbol for the terror of Somoza’s regime.

In February 1978, spontaneous popular uprisings broke out in the Indian neighborhood of Monimbo in Masaya. The inhabitants of Monimbo set up barricades, declared Monimbo a free territory, and resisted the National Guard for a whole week with homemade weapons. After a week-long fighting, the Guard could regain control. As retaliation the National Guard devastated the neighborhood and killed or abducted dozens or hundreds of inhabitants.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, pp.160/161; and Walker, *Nicaragua*, p.35.

In May 1978, the liberal bourgeois opposition was restructured. In March 1978, the industrialist Alfonso Robelo had formed the Nicaraguan Democratic Movement (MDN), an opposition party of progressive business interests and professionals. This party, together with the Group of Twelve, joined the UDEL in May 1978, to form a new opposition coalition, the **Broad Opposition Front (FAO)**. During the next ten months, the FAO organized a series of general strikes by both business and labor. On the other side of the opposition spectrum, the FSLN formed a coalition of leftist opposition groups. The **United People's Movement (MPU)** was a coalition of leftist political parties, trade unions, and popular organizations. Its political program basically corresponded to the program of the FSLN.<sup>33</sup>

On August 23, 1978 the FSLN launched a risky attack on the National Palace in Managua, the successful end of which further incited the popular insurrection. 25 FSLN guerrillas under Eden Pastora, disguised as Somoza's special battalion of the National Guard, seized the National Palace and captured more than 2000 hostages, including most members of the Chamber of Deputies, 20 journalists, and several high ministerial and judicial officials. After two days of siege, Somoza released key Sandinistas from prison, paid \$500,000 ransom, published a FSLN manifesto calling for public insurrection, and granted the guerrillas free passage out of the country to Panama and Venezuela. Thousands of Nicaraguans cheered the guerrillas on the way to the airport.<sup>34</sup> The National Palace operation was a full success for the FSLN. It demonstrated the FSLN's role as the vanguard of the increasingly broad-based insurrection and captured the excitement of the Nicaraguan youth, thereby promoting the recruitment of new guerrilla fighters.

The National Palace victory triggered massive popular uprisings in late August and September 1978. Supported by Monimbo-type rebellions, the FSLN took over and temporarily held Leon, Esteli, Masaya, and several other towns. In the second half of September, the National Guard succeeded in retaking these towns step by step. The brutal retaliation of the National Guard thereafter promoted the steadily growing international reaction against Somoza. The FSLN had

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<sup>33</sup> Black, *Triumph of the People*, p.121.

<sup>34</sup> Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, pp.163/64.

proved unable to hold the captured cities against the National Guard, but the intensity of the uprisings showed that the revolutionary movement was stronger than ever before.

In October, after the September uprisings had clearly shown the danger of a take-over by the leftist Sandinistas, the United States tried to negotiate an agreement between the FAO and Somoza, which would have forced Somoza to step down, but which would have preserved the political system. The political formula of the United States to solve the Nicaraguan crisis was therefore called "Somozism without Somoza". The United States wanted to preserve the National Guard, which was the only force that could prevent the Sandinistas from seizing power. A national plebiscite was to decide if Somoza had to step down.<sup>35</sup> If the results of the plebiscite were against Somoza, he would have to step down and a transitional government under the predominance of the FAO would have to be formed. At this point of the negotiation process, the FAO started to disintegrate. The Group of Twelve and other organizations left the FAO when they realized that the negotiations did not aim at a change of the system, including the restructuring of the National Guard. This split weakened the liberal bourgeois faction and strengthened the leftist faction within the opposition against Somoza. The negotiation process went on until February 1979, but was finally broken off as a consequence of Somoza's unwillingness to make sufficient concessions.

On February 1, the Group of Twelve, some trade unions, and some minor bourgeois groups, which had split from the FAO, formed together with the MPU, the **National Patriotic Front (FPN)**. From now on the leftist sector of the opposition clearly led the revolutionary movement. On March 26, the three tendencies of the FSLN reached an organizational fusion, after they had already set up a unified command structure in December 1978.

At the end of May, the FSLN started the final offensive. Seven different fronts of FSLN fighters started to move towards Managua, taking over the provincial cities. The advancement of the FSLN forces was supported by popular uprisings in the cities. In June, the uprisings spread to Managua and the FSLN controlled parts of Managua for more than two weeks. Unable to take over the capital yet, the FSLN forces made a tactical retreat to Masaya on June 27.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, pp.105-119.

<sup>36</sup> Black, *Triumph of the People*, pp.157-167.

On June 16, Radio Sandino announced the formation of a provisional five-member junta. The members were industrialist Alfonso Robelo; Violeta de Chamorro, the widow of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro; Sergio Ramirez from the Group of Twelve who was also a member of the FSLN; Moises Hassan, a Sandinista leader of the FPN; and Daniel Ortega Saavedra from the FSLN Directorate.<sup>37</sup>

In a last attempt, the United States tried to prevent a Sandinista victory. On June 21 Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, presented a plan for an international peacekeeping force to the OAS. This force should have stopped fighting between the FSLN and the National Guard after Somoza's departure, therefore preserving the National Guard and preventing an FSLN victory. The proposal found no support among the other OAS members.<sup>38</sup> Finally recognizing that his position was hopeless, Somoza left the country on July 17, after having appointed Francisco Urcuyo as interim president for the transition to the new regime. In a last attempt to maintain the old regime, Urcuyo called on the National Guard to defend his government. But the Guard was already dissolving and its top leaders had left the country with Somoza. On July 19, the Sandinista troops entered Managua, the Urcuyo government fled the country, and Mexico's presidential jetliner flew the cabinet of the new government to Nicaragua.

## 2.2. El Salvador

El Salvador is the smallest but most densely populated country in Central America. This makes the problem of landownership especially grave in this country. El Salvador has an extremely unequal distribution of land. A small oligarchy by and large still controls the export agriculture and the national economy. The oligarchy, which originally consisted of fourteen families, includes now

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<sup>37</sup> Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, p.138.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.141-151.

according to Libby 244 families in a country of five million people and controls 50% of the total national income.<sup>39</sup> In 1979, 2% of the Salvadoreans owned 60% of the land.<sup>40</sup> About two thirds of the peasant population are landless or own plots so small that they barely provide marginal subsistence.<sup>41</sup> Over the last decades, the situation has not improved but even deteriorated. Real earnings declined between 1970 and 1975. In 1961, 12% of the rural families were landless, in 1971 this number had increased to 29% and in 1975 to 41%.<sup>42</sup> A majority of the Salvadorean people is badly educated, malnourished, and has no sufficient health care.

The misery of the peasants was the cause of peasant revolts in this century and in the last century. The last peasant revolt, before the current upheavals, took place in 1932 and was led by Augustin Farabundo Marti. Today, the umbrella organization of the Salvadorean guerrillas is named after him. In the twenties, Marti was a founding member of the Central American Socialist Party. He also fought in Sandino's army, but they broke over ideological differences. In contrast to Sandino, Marti wanted a social revolution with a Communist program and not just national independence.<sup>43</sup> Compared to other Central American countries, El Salvador had a relatively high degree of organization of the lower classes and the Communist party existed legally at that time. After electoral fraud against the Communists, Marti and other radical leaders unleashed a peasant insurrection in January 1932.<sup>44</sup> But it was not successful. Marti was captured before the beginning of the insurrection. The rebels took over five smaller towns but were driven back and defeated afterwards.

Following the suppression of the rebellion, Marti was shot and the opposition was extinguished in a bloody massacre, known as *La Matanza*. At least 30,000 people were killed, only 10%

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<sup>39</sup> Ronald T. Libby, "Listen to the Bishops", in: *Foreign Policy*, Iss 52, Fall 83, pp.84/85.

<sup>40</sup> Cynthia Arnson, *El Salvador: A Revolution Confronts the United States*, Washington: Institute for Policy Studies, 1982, p.5.

<sup>41</sup> Libby, "Listen to the Bishops", pp.84/85.

<sup>42</sup> Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, London: SCM Press, 1984, p.113.

<sup>43</sup> Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: Origins and Evolution*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1982, p.51.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.52/53

of which had participated in the uprising. Peasant unions and other political organizations were prohibited.<sup>45</sup>

The Salvadorean oligarchy concluded a close alliance with the military to maintain its privileges. The military secured the economic power of the oligarchy, while the oligarchy left the political power in the hands of the military. This pattern of power sharing continued throughout the seventies. Whenever progressive officers or civilians attempted to implement moderate reforms, the conservative faction within the military became stronger again and prevented them from doing so. The military and the oligarchy controlled political power through an official party, which changed its name over the years. Since the early sixties, this was the **National Conciliation Party (PCN)**. Electoral fraud guaranteed that the oligarchy-military coalition stayed in power.

In 1971, the **Christian Democratic Party (PDC)**, together with two parties that were formed in the late sixties, the social-democratic **Revolutionary National Movement (MNR)** and the legal front of the Salvadorean Communist Party, the **National Democratic Union (UDN)**, formed a coalition, called **National Opposition Union (UNO)**. On the ticket of UNO, Christian Democrat Jose Napoleon Duarte and his vice-presidential running-mate Guillermo Ungo from the MNR won the presidential elections in 1972, but were prevented from taking office by electoral fraud and a military coup. The rule of the military continued throughout the seventies, while the social tensions increased markedly. When General Molina tried to implement a moderate land reform in 1976, the oligarchy and the conservative military blocked it once again.<sup>46</sup>

The deteriorating situation of the poor majority and the intransigence of the oligarchy to promote even moderate reforms led to increasing radicalization on the left. In the early seventies, the two largest guerrilla groups that are today operating in El Salvador were founded.<sup>47</sup> The first guerrilla group, the **Popular Liberation Forces (FPL)**, was founded 1970 by Salvador Cayetano Carpio ("Marcial"). Carpio was the Secretary General of the Salvadorean Communist Party before

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.52/53.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.90.

<sup>47</sup> For an overview of the Salvadorean guerrilla groups see: Philip L. Russell, *El Salvador in Crisis*, Austin: Colorado River Press, 1984, pp.131-134; and Tom Barry and Deb Preusch, *The Central American Fact Book*, New York: Grove Press, 1986, pp.203-204.

he became dissatisfied with the political line of his party. The Communists were not in favor of an armed struggle for social reforms and endorsed the Salvadorean government during the "soccer war". The strategic line of the FPL was a "prolonged people's war".<sup>48</sup> The second guerrilla force, the **People's Revolutionary Army (ERP)**, was formed in 1972 by radicalized members of the Christian Democrats, coming from a middle class background. This group adopted the "foco strategy".<sup>49</sup> Today, the main strategist of this group is Joaquin Villalobos.

In 1975, a major split appeared within the ERP. The ERP had elevated to its leadership Roque Dalton Garcia, El Salvador's most famous poet, essayist, historian and Communist Party member. Since the foundation of the ERP, an alternative wing had developed within its membership, which rejected the foco strategy and was in favor of a "mass line". Finally, this led to an internal struggle in 1975. Dalton was accused as agent of the CIA, sentenced to death and shot together with another member of the ERP.<sup>50</sup> The assassination of Dalton was enormously damaging to the image of the ERP. The followers of Dalton left the ERP and founded a third guerrilla force, the **Forces of National Resistance (FARN)**.

Two additional guerrilla armies were founded in the second half of the seventies. The **Central American Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRTC)** was founded in 1976. It emphasizes a regional focus for the revolutionary work. It has connections to the Communist influenced unions, but has not yet developed into a major force. Finally in 1979, the Communist Party founded the **Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL)**. The party had changed its original position, noted above, and started to back the armed struggle after the failure of a reformist junta, which had taken power in October 1979.

Each guerrilla force is linked to a mass organization to build a base of popular support. These popular organizations organized the lower classes of the Salvadorean society, especially the peas-

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<sup>48</sup> Prolonged people's war means organization of the masses to fight a long-term conflict, gradually altering the balance of forces until the final take-over.

<sup>49</sup> This strategy assumes that the insertion of a small nucleus of revolutionary fighters into the countryside will act as a spark for mass peasant rebellion.

<sup>50</sup> James Dunkerley, *The Long War: Dictatorship and Revolution in El Salvador*, London: Junction Books, 1982, pp.92-94.

ants. In the second half of the seventies, the popular organizations and other mass organizations, such as the Christian Federation of Salvadorean Campesinos (FECCAS), were the major driving force for social change. At the end of the seventies, they were decimated and their activities were suppressed by the security forces and by death squads.<sup>51</sup> The actual guerrilla armies did not have a massive size until the late seventies. As late as 1978, the number of guerrilla fighters was estimated at only 100.<sup>52</sup> During the seventies their main tactic was to kill members of the right-wing vigilante organization ORDEN, to bomb army barracks and offices of multinational companies, and to kidnap or kill members of the Salvadorean oligarchy, foreign ambassadors and foreign business men.<sup>53</sup>

On October 15, 1979, a coup d'état led by some sixty junior officers overthrew the government of General Carlos Humberto Romero. The recent overthrow of Somoza in Nicaragua had shown to these officers that changes were necessary in El Salvador in order to prevent a similar development. They made immediately clear that they intended to implement far-reaching reforms. In a proclamation they promised to put an end to violence and corruption, to guarantee the observance of human rights, and to adopt measures to bring about an equitable distribution of the nation's wealth.<sup>54</sup>

The coup leaders appointed a five-men junta composed of Ramon Mayorga, rector of the Jesuit-run University of Central America in San Salvador; Guillermo Ungo, Secretary General of the social-democratic Revolutionary National Movement (MNR); Mario Andino, a manager and representative of private enterprise; and two military officers, Colonel Adolfo Majano and Colonel Jaime Gutierrez. The latter was considered to be conservative, whereas the former was widely respected as politically independent.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Death squads are secret organizations, usually composed of members of the military and the security forces, that abduct, torture, and assassinate promoters of social change, such as leftist politicians, members of mass organizations, church people, or human rights observers.

<sup>52</sup> Russell, *El Salvador in Crisis*, p.133.

<sup>53</sup> Steffen W. Schmidt, *El Salvador: America's Next Vietnam*, Salisbury, NC: Documentary Publications, 1983, pp.82-96.

<sup>54</sup> Arnson, *El Salvador*, p.41.

<sup>55</sup> Liisa North, *Bitter Grounds: Roots of Revolt in El Salvador*, Toronto: Between the Lines, 1981, p.81.



The opposition parties, the Christian Democrats, the social-democratic MNR, and the Communist-leaning UDN, agreed to participate in a new government. But the progressive military and the new government were almost immediately attacked from right and left. The High Command of the army disregarded the authority of the junta and shot, despite orders to the contrary, at unarmed strikers and protesters, killing at least 160 people during the first week of the new government.<sup>56</sup> Death squad attacks and political assassinations were stepped up massively by the right-wing in order to counter the new government's tolerance of leftist organizations.

On the other side, the guerrilla forces and their popular organizations rejected dialogue with the junta, perceiving the coup as a betrayal of their cause. "By failing to appreciate divisions within the military and between the civilian and military representatives of the junta, the left played into the hands of the coup's betrayers. [...] The attitude of the left caused the younger officers to feel that they, too, were regarded as the enemy."<sup>57</sup>

In addition to the pressure from right and left, the United States did little to support the reformist junta, since it was discontent with the leftist elements in the government. By the end of the year, the death toll from confrontations between civilians and the military and security forces had clearly increased and the junta had failed in implementing reforms against the resistance of the conservative sector of the military and the oligarchy. Realizing their powerlessness and not wanting to be used as window-dressing for the de facto rule of the conservative military, Ramon Mayorga, Guillermo Ungo, and the civilian cabinet ministers resigned on January 3, 1980.

The only party willing to renew the pact with the military were the Christian Democrats. In mid-January, a new junta was formed with two members of the PDC. Meanwhile the repression and violence by the military and the death squads continued. On January 22, a mass demonstration to commemorate the uprising of 1932 took place in San Salvador. It was attended by at least 200,000 people.<sup>58</sup> During the demonstration, the crowd was attacked by sharpshooters from the rooftop of the National Palace. According to estimations of the Salvadorean Human Rights

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<sup>56</sup> Arnson, *El Salvador*, p.43.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44.

<sup>58</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, pp.128-130.

Commission, 67 demonstrators were killed and 250 wounded.<sup>59</sup> Other sources mention 20 to 50 killed demonstrators.<sup>60</sup>

Unable to stop the repression or to produce reforms, one of the Christian Democratic junta members, Hector Dada, resigned on March 3. At a party convention on March 10, a minority faction of delegates withdrew from the party, stating that the PDC "should not participate in a regime which has unleashed the bloodiest repression ever experienced by the Salvadorean people."<sup>61</sup> They formed a new social-christian party, the **Popular Social Christian Movement (MPSC)**, the leader of which became Ruben Zamora. By November 1981, at least 60% of the original PDC members had resigned and most of them entered the MPSC.<sup>62</sup>

The Christian Democrat Jose Napoleon Duarte, the betrayed winner of the 1972 presidential elections, replaced Hector Dada in the junta. Duarte was to play a major role in El Salvador's politics for the next eight years. In December 1980, he became president of the junta. After Duarte had entered the junta, the involvement of the United States in El Salvador's politics increased dramatically. Washington had realized that the left could be contained only through ending the violence of the security forces and through immediate reforms.<sup>63</sup> It therefore pressed the junta to implement reforms.

In early March, the government announced a land reform and the semi-nationalization of the country's banking system. The land reform plan was one of the most far-reaching land reform projects in the Latin American history. It was composed of three phases. Phase I was to turn over all properties of more than 500 hectares to peasant cooperatives. Phase II was to expropriate all haciendas of the size between 150 and 500 hectares. This phase affected the heart of El Salvador's coffee land. Phase III was to make the sharecroppers owners of their plots and was therefore named

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<sup>59</sup> Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution*, Boston: South End Press, 1982, p.134-136.

<sup>60</sup> Arnson, *El Salvador*, p.48; and Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, pp.128-130.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52, quoted from Foreign Broadcast Information System.

<sup>62</sup> Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: Origins and Evolution*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1982, p.168.

<sup>63</sup> Arnson, *El Salvador*, p.50.

“land-to-the-tiller”. Once more, the implementation of the reform was blocked by the military and the oligarchy. Phase II, which would have redistributed the largest amount of land and which would have hurt the coffee growing oligarchy the most, was postponed and is unlikely to be ever implemented as originally planned. Phase III was implemented to a much lesser extent than planned. Most of the small peasants did not apply for land titles because they lacked the means to do so or because they were intimidated by their landlords. Of all the phases, the implementation of phase I went the farthest. Nevertheless, even there the situation of the peasants did not change much, since they were not granted any real participation in their cooperatives. All three phases of the land reform excluded the large poorest sector of the peasantry, the landless agricultural laborers, from any benefit.<sup>64</sup>

The third junta was not able to stop the violence. On March 24, 1980, San Salvador’s archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero was gunned down by death squads while saying mass in a hospital chapel. Archbishop Romero had been an outspoken supporter of the rights of the poor and had strongly attacked the repression against the popular organizations. When on March 30 a huge crowd gathered around the cathedral of San Salvador for Romero’s funeral service, security forces caused a mass panic among the mourners with shooting and a bomb explosion. The incident killed 26 people.<sup>65</sup>

On June 27, government troops invaded the National University in El Salvador, which had been a center of communication and coordination for the popular movement. Tanks, armored cars, and 600 armed troops occupied the campus and troops fired into classroom buildings, killing sixteen students.<sup>66</sup> The repression continued throughout the whole year. The Legal Office of the Archdiocese counted 7476 assassinations in 1980 that were directly related to the repression. This

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<sup>64</sup> For information on the agrarian reform project see: Americas Watch Committee and the Civil Liberties Union, *Report on Human Rights in El Salvador*, New York: Vintage Books, 1982, pp.22-34, and the supplements of this report; and Laurence Simon and James C. Stephens Jr., *El Salvador Land Reform 1980-1981: Impact Audit*, second edition, Boston: OXFAM America, 1982.

<sup>65</sup> Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, *El Salvador: The Face of Revolution*, Boston: South End Press, 1982, pp.150-152.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.164.

figure does not include 3400 campesinos that were massacred in major operations by the Salvadorean Army at Sumpul, Trifinio, San Vicente, and Morazan.<sup>67</sup>

The failure of the junta to implement reforms and the increasing violence against the opposition led the opposition to shift from mass activity to guerrilla warfare. In March 1980, the **Unified Revolutionary Directorate (DRU)** was formed to coordinate the activities of the five guerrilla groups. In April, the political parties from center-left to left, the Christian Socialists (MPSC), Social Democrats (MNR) and Communists (UDN), the Independent Movement of Professionals and Teachers, and the **Revolutionary Coordination of the Masses (CRM)**, which is a umbrella organization of the five mass organizations linked to the guerrilla groups, formed the **Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR)** to coordinate their activities. In October 1980, the Unified Revolutionary Directorate was replaced by an umbrella group of the five guerrilla armies, the **Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN)**, named after the leader of the peasant uprising in 1932. FMLN and FDR unified to one single Salvadorean opposition organization, the FMLN-FDR, with the FMLN as the military branch and the FDR as the civilian branch. FMLN and FDR are linked together by a seven-person diplomatic commission.<sup>68</sup>

By the end of 1980, the guerrilla forces had become so strong that international observers considered a guerrilla victory in the near future as possible. In January 1981, the FMLN launched a major military offensive. Its goal was to overthrow the Salvadorean government before the inauguration of Ronald Reagan, who had already announced his full support for the government in San Salvador. At the beginning, the offensive seemed to be successful. The province Morazan and its capital San Francisco Gotera fell into the hands of the rebels. Parts of the Second Brigade at Santa Ana revolted and went over to the insurgents. But after some days, the FMLN had to announce a tactical retreat, the end of the offensive. Reasons for the failure of the offensive were the missing of a unified war plan, little coordination among the commanders, and tactical errors, such as not

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<sup>67</sup> North, *Bitter Grounds*, p.88.

<sup>68</sup> For a diagram of the structure of the FMLN-FDR see: Robert S. Leiken (ed.), *Central America: Anatomy of Conflict*, New York: Pergamon Press, 1984, p.113.

to cut the supply lines of the army.<sup>69</sup> Generally, the commanders lacked the experience to lead large military operations.

Since the January offensive of 1981, El Salvador is in a situation of permanent civil war. The military situation is marked by a stalemate that makes a military victory of either side unlikely. The number of guerrilla fighters has doubled since 1980 to an estimated number of 8000 fighters.<sup>70</sup> The strength of the armed forces of the government has more than tripled, from 15,000 in 1980 to 52,000 in 1986.<sup>71</sup> By early 1985 the FMLN controlled about 20 percent of El Salvador's territory.<sup>72</sup> El Salvador is now characterized by a situation of dual power. The FMLN distinguishes between three different zones, according to its influence. In the "zones of popular control" the FMLN has complete control, there is no presence of government troops and the FMLN has set up its own governmental structure. In the "zones of dispute" exists a situation of dual power. The armed forces as well as the FMLN are present and the FMLN has formed its own governmental structure clandestinely beside the structures of the Salvadorean government. Finally, the "zones of government control" are completely controlled by the Salvadorean government.

In the last years, the bombardment and depopulation of guerrilla-held regions by the regular army reduced the size of the traditional zones of guerrilla influence, but the insurgents have extended their presence to areas where they had never operated previously.<sup>73</sup> For their attacks, the guerrillas possess land mines and mortars. Today the FMLN is not only able to carry out small-group guerrilla attacks, but also to coordinate large military operations, involving up to 500 fighters.

By attacking a major army base in El Paraiso, Chalatenango, on March 31, 1987, the FMLN proved that it is still able to carry out major operations and disproved the rumors that the war has turned against the guerrillas. This attack was one of the most damaging guerrilla raids in the seven

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<sup>69</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, pp.138/39.

<sup>70</sup> Estimated numbers vary between 6,000 and 10,000. See: Barry/Preusch, *The Central American Fact Book*, p.202; *Christian Science Monitor*, April 2, 1987, p.9/10; *Christian Science Monitor*, April 28, 1987, p.3; Alvin H. Bernstein and John D. Waghelstein, "How to Win in El Salvador", in: *Policy Review*, Iss 27, Winter 84, p.50.

<sup>71</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, July 30, 1986, p.22; *Christian Science Monitor*, April 2, 1987, p.9/10.

<sup>72</sup> Barry/Preusch, *The Central American Fact Book*, p.202.

<sup>73</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, April 3, 1987, Part II, p.7.

year old war and the third attack on a major army base within two years. The El Paraiso attack caused on the side of the army about 200 casualties, half of them being killed. The guerrillas lost 11 fighters in this attack.<sup>74</sup>

After President Reagan's installation in office in January 1981, he promised to draw the line against communism in El Salvador. The policy of the Reagan administration had a military as well as a civilian component. Militarily, Reagan wanted to build up a strong army that could eradicate the guerrillas. U.S. military advisers were placed at the Salvadorean headquarters to plan the counterinsurgency campaigns. Massive amounts of military and economic aid were sent to El Salvador. This policy made El Salvador one of the highest per-capita receiver of U.S. aid. Since 1980, the United States has spent more than \$800 million in military aid for El Salvador. Including economic aid, El Salvador received almost \$3 billion in U.S. aid since 1979.<sup>75</sup> Today, U.S. aid makes up more than 50 percent of the Salvadorean national budget. The war has caused almost \$2 billion in economic damages in the past eight years.<sup>76</sup> There is hardly any doubt that the Salvadorean economy would have collapsed without the massive U.S. aid.

In the civilian sector, the Reagan administration sought to strengthen Duarte's Christian Democrats in order to form a moderate center which could push through some necessary reforms, but which would keep the left out of power. The rule of the Christian Democrats was to be legitimized through elections. In elections to a Constituent Assembly in 1982, the Christian Democrats received a relative majority of 40% of the votes. The two other major parties in the Assembly were the **Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA)**, a party of the extreme right, founded in November 1981 by Roberto D'Aubuisson, who is known as death squad organizer, and the **Party of National Conciliation (PCN)**, the old official party of the military-oligarchy coalition. When ARENA and

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<sup>74</sup> *Christian Science Monitor*, April 2, 1987, p.9/10; *Washington Post*, April 2, 1987, p.A27.

<sup>75</sup> For numbers of military and economic aid from the United States see table 4 in chapter 6.

<sup>76</sup> *Washington Post*, April 2, 1987, p.A27; *Washington Post*, January 5, 1988; Barry/Preusch, *The Central American Fact Book*, p.213; Margarita Studemeister (ed.), *The New El Salvador: Interviews From the Zones of Popular Control*, San Francisco: Solidarity Publications, 1986, p.iii.

PCN formed a majority alliance to elect Roberto D'Aubuisson as provisional president, U.S. pressure forced them to appoint the politically unknown banker Alvaro Magana instead.<sup>77</sup>

In 1984, Duarte came back to office. In the run-off presidential elections, he won with 54% of the votes over D'Aubuisson.<sup>78</sup> In the 1985 elections for the Legislative Assembly, the Christian Democrats gained control over the 60-seat assembly by receiving 33 seats. ARENA won 13 seats, PCN 12, and two seats went to two small parties.<sup>79</sup>

The left political parties that belonged to the FDR did not participate in these electoral processes. Dozens of important left-wing politicians and even Christian Democrats had been killed by death squads. This made a regular electoral campaign for the left impossible. Furthermore, the experience of 1979 had shown that civilian governments were powerless against the military. Since Duarte's return to office in 1984, several meetings for a negotiated settlement of the civil war have taken place between the government and the FMLN-FDR. At the last round in fall 1987, the main demands of the FMLN-FDR for a negotiated settlement were the following:

1. Unification of the guerrilla forces with the regular army.
2. Sharing of power by both parties of the conflict before elections are held, in order to guarantee a regular election campaign, considering the threats from the death squads against left wing politicians.
3. Recognition of the FMLN-FDR as a legitimate political force.<sup>80</sup>

So far, all attempts to find a negotiated settlement have failed.

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<sup>77</sup> North, *Bitter Grounds*, pp.104/105.

<sup>78</sup> *Der Fischer Weltalmanach: Zahlen, Daten, Fakten '88*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987, p.245.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1987, Part II, p.7.

The repression continued throughout the early eighties. According to the Legal Aid Office of the Archdiocese in San Salvador, more than 13,000 civilians were killed by the security forces and their allied paramilitary groups in 1981.<sup>81</sup> The mid-eighties showed a reduction of the right-wing terror, corresponding to the decreased activity of the decimated leftist mass organizations. In the second half of the eighties, the mass organizations gained strength again. A new umbrella organization of the trade unions and mass organizations was formed, the **National Unity of Salvadorean Workers (UNTS)**. It has become the broadest organization of this type in Salvadorean history. Corresponding to the stepped up activities of the leftist mass organizations, death squad killings have increased again since 1987.

In early summer 1988, El Salvador's future looks uncertain. In the March 1988 elections to the 60-seat Legislative Assembly, ARENA won 30 seats, the Christian Democrats 23, and PCN 7. ARENA did not accept the official election results, claiming that electoral fraud by the Christian Democrats had prevented ARENA from getting an absolute majority.<sup>82</sup> At the day of the first meeting of the Assembly, Christian Democrats and PCN on one hand and ARENA on the other hand installed two separate legislatures.<sup>83</sup> ARENA threatened with open confrontation on the streets. One of the leaders of ARENA has even called for a national insurrection to overthrow the Duarte government.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, the Christian Democrats are deeply split. Holding two separate conventions, they could not agree on one single candidate for the 1989 presidential elections.<sup>85</sup> In June, President Duarte, one of the remaining integration figures of the party, was flown to the United States for a cancer surgery that leaves little hope that he will survive the next six months.<sup>86</sup> ARENA has meanwhile managed to gain the absolute majority in the Legislative Assembly through the defection of a PCN legislator to ARENA. The disintegration of the Christian

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<sup>81</sup> North, *Bitter Grounds*, pp.102/103.

<sup>82</sup> *Washington Post*, April 3, 1988, p.A21.

<sup>83</sup> *Washington Post*, May 2, 1988, p.A26.

<sup>84</sup> *Washington Post*, April 18, 1988, p.A24.

<sup>85</sup> *Washington Post*, April 30, 1988, p.A17.

<sup>86</sup> *Washington Post*, June 8, 1988, p.A23.



Democratic Party and the growing strength of ARENA are likely to lead to increased polarization during the next years. This will probably strengthen the base of support for the guerrillas and the left.

## 3. The Breadth of the Revolutionary Coalition

### 3.1. Nicaragua

In Nicaragua, a broad anti-Somoza coalition developed in the seventies, which included all major classes. The lower, middle, and upper class finally united in a nationalist coalition against a hated family dictatorship which had been kept in power for decades through strong support from the United States. Nevertheless, the objectives of all the actors in the opposition were not identical. Basically, the opposition developed on two tracks. On the one hand there was the bourgeois opposition which was led by the business community. The business community was discontent with the Somoza regime because Somoza used his position to increasingly concentrate the Nicaraguan economy in his own hands. His privileged position made him an almost invincible economic competitor. The business community was also discontent with the deteriorating political and economic situation in the early seventies and it criticized Somoza's human rights abuses. It was looking for a replacement for Somoza and some elements also wanted political reforms. But they did not favor social changes as the second track did. It only aimed at a political revolution.

The second track was led by the Sandinistas. In addition to the political revolution they wanted to establish a leftist regime and implement social change. They united Marxist and more moderate leftist positions. At least for a transitional phase, the capitalist economy should be trans-

formed into a mixed economy. They further planned an income and land redistribution and they wanted to improve the health care and education system for the poor majority. Therefore, their goal clearly exceeded simple political revolution. Beside the removal of Somoza they wanted to implement a social revolution.

The first major bourgeois opposition front against Somoza, the **Democratic Liberation Union (UDEL)**, was built in December 1974. It was led by the editor of the oppositional newspaper *La Prensa*, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro. It included the Conservative National Action and the Independent Liberal Party (PLI), splinter factions of the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party, the two major traditional Nicaraguan parties. Furthermore it included the Liberal Constitutionalist Movement, the Nicaraguan Social Christian Party (PSCN), a Christian Democratic party that stood for peaceful social change, and the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN), the Nicaraguan Communists. The stance of the PSN at that time was not in favor of a socialist revolution, since it believed that the conditions in Nicaragua were not ripe for it. The workers were represented in the UDEL by two of the four major trade unions existing at that time, the reformist Nicaraguan Worker's Confederation (CTN) and the Independent General Worker's Confederation (CGTI), which had close ties to the Socialist party. The UDEL included working and middle class people, but within the organization the upper-class interests predominated.<sup>87</sup>

During the seventies, the two major business organizations grew more and more critical about the Somoza regime. The Superior Council of Private Initiative (COSIP) and the Nicaraguan Development Institute (INDE) demanded greater honesty in government and social reforms.<sup>88</sup> After the assassination of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro in January 1978, Alfonso Robelo, the president of the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP), organized a three-week long business labor general strike.<sup>89</sup> The COSEP was the follow-up organization of COSIP. An additional bourgeois opposition group was the **Group of Twelve**. It constituted a link between the two opposition tracks since it called for a full participation of the FSLN in any solution of the political crisis. This group

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<sup>87</sup> Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, pp.153,315.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p.102.

<sup>89</sup> Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, p.59.

included twelve prominent Nicaraguans, among them four major representatives of the business community: Joaquin Cuadra Chamorro, a wealthy lawyer for the Banco de America group; Emilio Baltodano Pallais, manager of Nicaragua's largest coffee-processing company; Felipe Mantica, owner of a supermarket chain; and Arturo Cruz, a banker with the Inter-American Development Bank.<sup>90</sup>

In May 1978, a new umbrella group of the bourgeois opposition was formed, the **Broad Opposition Front (FAO)**. It included the UDEL, the Group of Twelve, the Nicaraguan Democratic Movement (MDN), a party of progressive business interests founded by Alfonso Robelo from the COSEP, and the official wing of the Conservative Party as well as two of its splinter factions. The FAO called for political democracy and also for certain social reforms. It represented a broad spectrum of middle and upper class interests. The FAO organized several major demonstrations and strikes, among which one four-week long business-labor general strike in August 1978.<sup>91</sup> These nation-wide strikes virtually shut down the national economy. The FAO disintegrated during the U.S. sponsored negotiation process with Somoza in late 1978. When it became clear that the negotiations would at best lead to a replacement of Somoza without a system change, several formations as the Independent Liberal Party (PLI), the Group of Twelve, the People's Social Christian Party (PPSC), which was a faction of the Nicaraguan Social Christian Party (PSCN), and the Nicaraguan Workers' Confederation (CTN) left the FAO and joined the Sandinista opposition track. At this moment the bourgeois opposition had clearly lost its leading role to the more radical Sandinistas.

The Sandinistas, the second track of the anti-Somoza opposition, were, since their foundation in 1961, throughout the sixties and the early seventies rather a small avant-garde organization than a mass opposition front. After the split in three different tendencies in the mid-seventies, the third tendency, the *Terceristas*, promoted the formation of a broad opposition movement, which would also include reformist middle and upper class elements. The *Terceristas* had seen that only a broad

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<sup>90</sup> For a list of the members of the Group of Twelve see: David Nolan, *The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami, 1984, p.72.

<sup>91</sup> Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, pp.123, 153/154, 315.

multi-class coalition would be able to overthrow the Somoza system. In July 1978, the Sandinistas formed the **United People's Movement (MPU)**. It included twenty-two civic and political organizations. Among them were the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN) and its splinter, the Communist Party of Nicaragua (PC), several trade unions, the Association of Rural Workers (ATC), the associations of teachers and national employees, the women association AMPRONAC, and several student and youth organizations. The political program of the MPU was by and large identical with the program of the Sandinistas. The MPU organized neighborhoods and rural communities to support the FSLN's war efforts.<sup>92</sup>

After the disintegration of the FAO, some of its formations joined the MPU and formed a new opposition alliance, the **National Patriotic Front (FPN)**. As a consequence of its broader range, the program of the FPN was somewhat more moderate than the program of the MPU had been. The FPN was a broad-based opposition front under the leadership of the FSLN, which included elements of all major classes. Even Nicaragua's major business organization COSEP joined the FPN.<sup>93</sup> For the final victory over Somoza, the peasants, the workers, the students, the middle-class organizations and the business community all played a significant role.

### 3.2. El Salvador

Concerning the revolutionary coalition, El Salvador presents a much different situation than Nicaragua. Whereas the Nicaraguan revolution was an all-class insurrection against a narrowly based family dictatorship, the conflict in El Salvador can be characterized as a class conflict. It is basically a conflict between a traditional oligarchy, which has controlled the economy and the wealth of the country up to now, and the peasants, workers, and parts of the middle class, which

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, pp.154, and 316.

<sup>93</sup> Manus I. Midlarski and Kenneth Roberts, "Class, State, and Revolution in Central America: Nicaragua and El Salvador Compared", in: *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol 29, Iss 2, June 85, p.180.

demand a more equal distribution of the country's resources. This conflict is heightened by two circumstances. First, El Salvador has a high land scarcity as a consequence of a high population density. This has led to an extremely unequal distribution of arable land and an especially intense struggle for the scarce land between the oligarchy and the peasants. Second, the entire upper class is dependent on its land as a source of its wealth. El Salvador has not developed an independent bourgeoisie that draws their income from commerce and industry. These sectors of the economy are also bound to the old landed oligarchy. The oligarchy controls not only the export agriculture, but commerce and industry and at least until the reforms of 1980 also the banking system.<sup>94</sup> These two conditions make a compromise between the conflicting interests of the upper and the lower class especially difficult.

Unlike Nicaragua, the Salvadorean oligarchy has always been extremely intransigent with regard to any kind of social reforms. Through its business organizations and its political parties, the oligarchy tried to prevent even moderate land reforms. Since the early eighties, the main political party that represents the interests of the oligarchy is the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA). It promises to reverse the reforms of the Christian Democrats and to finish the civil war quickly with military means. ARENA intends to reestablish the traditional dominance over the state by the coalition of the oligarchy and the military. ARENA is a splinter from the Party of National Conciliation (PCN), the old official party of the oligarchy-military coalition. The PCN represents also upper class interests but it is less extremist than ARENA. During the eighties it has entered coalitions with the Christian Democrats as well as with ARENA.

The major business organizations support the intransigent stance of the oligarchy. In the seventies, the National Association of Private Enterprise (ANEP), the most important private sector organization, fought against the very moderate agrarian reform plans of President Molina. In the eighties, the Productive Alliance (AP) and ANEP, which represent the majority of the private capital, strongly opposed Duarte's land and banking reforms and demanded a retraction of the reforms once they were started. In July 1981, President Duarte called the private sector his principal

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<sup>94</sup> Enrique Baloyra, *El Salvador in Transition*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982, p.30.

enemy and warned that it was in the final offensive to overthrow his government.<sup>95</sup> After the elections to the Legislative Assembly in March 1988, ANEP supported ARENA in the voting dispute with the Christian Democrats and threatened with a business-led general strike, which would shut down the national economy, if ARENA was not awarded the absolute majority of the seats.<sup>96</sup>

Some members of the oligarchy were willing to back social reforms. Enrique Alvarez, the first Secretary General of the FDR, was a member of the fourteen families.<sup>97</sup> In July 1987, the National Council of Salvadorean Entrepreneurs (CONAES) stated that the FMLN-FDR should be included in any peaceful solution to the nation's conflicts.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, these positions were exemptions. The upper class by and large took an intransigent stance that tried to keep the status quo by any means.

The leftist opponents of the oligarchy are united in the FMLN-FDR. It includes a broad spectrum of political positions, reaching from Marxists to Social Democrats and Social Christians. The ideology of the guerrilla organizations of the FMLN is strongly influenced by Marxism. In 1985, the FMLN tried to unify its rebel groups in one revolutionary, Marxist party.<sup>99</sup> It is difficult to estimate the amount of support the FMLN gets from the Salvadorean population. The kidnappings and killings of the seventies, the bloody internal conflicts, and the strategy of economic sabotage have certainly hurt the FMLN's image with large sectors of the Salvadorean population. Nevertheless, it seems impossible that a guerrilla army of the strength of the FMLN could survive in a densely populated country like El Salvador, not having an external sanctuary and facing a heavily U.S. supported army, without some kind of popular support. Even the former commander of the U.S. military trainers in El Salvador, Colonel John D. Waghelstein, has admitted that the

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp.55 and 147; Arnson, *El Salvador*, p.76.

<sup>96</sup> *Washington Post*, April 3, 1988, p.A23.

<sup>97</sup> Baloyra, *El Salvador in Transition*, pp.45 and 154.

<sup>98</sup> *Alert!*, Vol 6, No 1, February 1988, p.3.

<sup>99</sup> Kenneth E. Sharpe, "El Salvador Revisited: Why Duarte is in Trouble", in: *World Policy Journal*, Vol 3, Iss 3, Summer 86 p.478.

FMLN enjoys popular support at least among the peasants from the Chalatenango and Morazan provinces.<sup>100</sup> The position of the FMLN was definitely strengthened when the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) decided to form a coalition with the guerrillas. Although many elements in the FDR held a more moderate political position, the FDR saw that it was powerless against the military-oligarchy coalition without its own weapons.

The FDR was formed in April 1980 by the three major parties left of the Christian Democrats, the five popular organizations linked to the guerrilla groups, 49 labor unions, the Independent Movement of Salvadorean Professionals and Technicians (MIPTES), and the student association AGEUS. "In essence, the Frente is a broad coalition of petit bourgeois and working class elements led by intellectuals, technocrats, and trade union activists."<sup>101</sup> The trade unions that joined the FDR represented 90% of the organized working class at the time of its foundation.<sup>102</sup> In the early eighties, the FMLN-FDR enjoyed strong support among the Salvadorean population and the conditions seemed to be ripe for a mass insurrection. Murat W. Williams, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador 1961-1964, estimated that the heterogeneous left made up approximately 80% of the Salvadorean population at that time.<sup>103</sup>

The situation of the Salvadorean civil war is further complicated by two additional actors, the Christian Democratic Party and the armed forces. Traditionally, the oligarchy had formed a coalition with the military in order to control the state. The oligarchy used the state as an instrument to secure the continued existence of its economic power, but it left the political power by and large in the hands of the military. This situation changed at the beginning of the eighties. From 1980 to 1982 and again since 1984, Jose Napoleon Duarte from the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) formally controlled the government. De facto the military certainly had more influence on the

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<sup>100</sup> Alvin H. Bernstein and John D. Waghelstein, "How to Win in El Salvador", in: *Policy Review*, Iss 27, Winter 84, p.50-52.

<sup>101</sup> Baloyra, *El Salvador in Transition*, p.154.

<sup>102</sup> Armstrong/Shenk, *El Salvador*, p.154.

<sup>103</sup> North, *Bitter Grounds*, p.84, according to *New York Times*, December 29, 1980.



Salvadorean politics than Duarte, but Duarte's reforms and his economic policy were radical enough for the oligarchy to give rise to vehement anti-government opposition from this side.

Duarte took a centrist stance in the Salvadorean conflict. He tried to implement reforms that threatened the economic power of the oligarchy and simultaneously he fought against the leftist opposition. Therefore, he made enemies of the oligarchy as well as the FMLN-FDR. In the mid-eighties, the FMLN-FDR lost popular support to the Christian Democrats. Duarte's PDC seemed to be the only political force that gave hope for a quick end of the civil war. In 1984, Duarte was elected president and in 1985, the Christian Democrats won an absolute majority in the elections for the Legislative Assembly. Duarte's base of support included middle-class professionals, some small and medium-scale private entrepreneurs and centrist peasant and labor organizations, that belonged to the U.S.-sponsored umbrella organization Popular Democratic Unity (UPD).<sup>104</sup>

A 1984 opinion poll showed that an absolute majority of 51% of the Salvadorean population favored a dialogue as the best means of resolving the war. This was the official position of the FMLN-FDR. Only 10% advocated a military extinction of the armed opposition.<sup>105</sup>

Since 1984, the PDC has lost an important part of its supporters, especially among the lower classes. The peasants and workers are disappointed with Duarte's policy. Duarte did not stop the civil war as promised before the elections. He was not able to reinstall the order of law and to prosecute the crimes of the military and the death squads. In addition, he imposed an economic austerity program which passed the costs of the civil war mainly on the lower classes. Important parts of the centrist unions withdrew their support, among others the UPD. The centrist unions joined the more leftist organizations and formed in February 1986 a new umbrella organization of labor and peasant unions and other mass organizations, the National Unity of Salvadorean Workers (UNTS).<sup>106</sup> UNTS has become the broadest based organization of this type in Salvadorean history. It does not formally belong to the FDR, but by demanding a negotiated settlement of the civil war,

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<sup>104</sup> Sharpe, "El Salvador Revisited", pp.479/480.

<sup>105</sup> Terry Lynn Karl, "After La Palma: The Prospects of Democratization in El Salvador", in: *World Policy Journal*, Vol 2, Iss 2, Spring 85, p.320.

<sup>106</sup> Sharpe, "El Salvador Revisited", p.485; and Jose Z. Garcia, "El Salvador: A Glimmer of Hope", in: *Current History*, Vol 85, Issue 515, Dec 86, p.410.

the replacement of the Duarte government, and land and income redistribution it basically fights for the same political goals.

Another key actor beside the Christian Democrats is the military. Traditionally, the military has been strongly aligned with the oligarchy. But the banking and land reforms of 1980 have opened a serious rift between parts of the military and the oligarchy. In 1982, the military helped to prevent a complete takeover of the ultra-rightist ARENA party. An ARENA government is not in the interest of the military for two reasons. First, it would hinder the flow of U.S. support for the Salvadorean military. Second, it would polarize the country and might make "guerrillas out of the majority of the population".<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, the military opposes a negotiated settlement of the conflict since this would involve a purge of the army before a unification with the guerrilla forces. The military has also strongly intervened against too far-reaching reforms of Duarte. The military is not a homogenous unit, it includes ultra-conservative and more reformist factions. A few high-ranked officers have even deserted to the guerrilla forces. It is definitely not any longer a sole instrument of the oligarchy. Recently announced sweeping changes in the command of the army let expect for the future a harder and more rightist line of the military leadership. The majority of the command posts are to be filled with graduates of the 1966 class of the military academy, who announce a more aggressive combat strategy and less room for a negotiated settlement.<sup>108</sup>

### 3.3. Conclusion

As was shown in chapter 1, several authors on revolution stress the importance of broad coalitions for the success of revolutionary movements:

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<sup>107</sup> Enrique A. Baloyra, "Political Change in El Salvador?", in: *Current History*, Vol 83, Iss 490, Febr 84, pp.55-57.

<sup>108</sup> *Washington Post*, July 3, 1988, p.A31.

Revolutionary movements do not succeed where only the workers are mobilized, or only the peasants, or only the middle classes. They succeed only where a critical mass of most or all of the major classes in the society is mobilized in the revolutionary process.<sup>109</sup>

In this regard, Nicaragua and El Salvador show important differences.

The Nicaraguan revolution shows a broad multi-class alliance against the dictatorship of a single family and a small group of collaborators. This coalition included all major classes. Workers, peasants and students as well as middle-class organizations contributed significantly to the victory of the FSLN. But in addition, the majority of the business community also strongly opposed Somoza and was willing to support the Sandinistas as the lesser evil when it had to decide between Somoza and the FSLN. "Anastasio Somoza Debayle had driven away many of his erstwhile allies among the upper class with his disastrous economic policies, his political maladroitness, and his greed, all of which threatened the economic well being of the propertied and entrepreneurial class."<sup>110</sup> Alfonso Robelo, the president of COSEP, the major business organization in Nicaragua, organized several joint business-labor general strikes which shut down the national economy for several weeks and hurt the already deteriorating economy. In May 1979, Robelo fled to Costa Rica and helped the FSLN to set up a new government. He himself became member of the FSLN's first junta. There are even examples of business leaders that took up arms against Somoza. Alfredo Cesar, manager of the San Antonio sugar mill, joined the armed insurgents to fight against the National Guard in the 1978 September insurrection.<sup>111</sup> This broad-based coalition, which included also the business interests, was certainly crucial for the success of the revolutionary movement in Nicaragua. This fact is also admitted by Humberto Ortega, the top strategist of the *Terceristas*:

In order for the insurrection to be implemented nationally, it was necessary for us to unite the whole nation in all sectors that had contradictions with the Somoza regime. Without that very broad policy, we would not have achieved an insurrection...<sup>112</sup>

In El Salvador we find a different situation. Instead of an all-class struggle against a family dictatorship, the Salvadorean conflict is a class conflict between an oligarchy, which controls most

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<sup>109</sup> Thomas H. Greene, *Comparative Revolutionary Movements*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974, p.39.

<sup>110</sup> Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, p.125.

<sup>111</sup> Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, p.124; *Washington Post*, June 7, 1988, p.A18.

<sup>112</sup> David Nolan, *The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami, 1984, p.71.

of the country's wealth, and the poor majority of the population, which demands income and land redistribution. The revolutionary coalition is therefore not as broad based as in Nicaragua. It includes only peasants, workers, and parts of the middle class. The different position of the upper class can easily be seen when looking at the different role of the business organizations. Whereas the Nicaraguan COSEP fought against Somoza with joint business-labor strikes, the Salvadorean ANEP uses business strikes as a tool to oppose the reformist government of Duarte and to reestablish the traditional dominance over the state by the military-oligarchy coalition through the ARENA party.

The situation in El Salvador is further complicated by the centrist position of the Christian Democrats. Up to the late seventies, the opposition against the oligarchy-military coalition was united, including Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and Communists. In 1980, this coalition broke when the left wing of the PDC, the Social Democrats, and the Communists joined the FDR. The remaining faction of the Christian Democrats tried to build a center between the left and the oligarchy, which further weakened the anti-oligarchy opposition.

In summary, the nature of the conflict allowed a broader based revolutionary coalition in Nicaragua than in El Salvador. In Nicaragua, this coalition included the whole middle class and also the large majority of the upper class. This fact makes a success of the revolution in Nicaragua more likely than in El Salvador.

## 4. Military Strength and Strategies

### 4.1. Military Strength of Guerrilla Troops and Government Forces

Exact numbers on the strength of the guerrilla groups are difficult to obtain. Estimates are usually based on statements of the guerrilla forces themselves and on information from U.S. intelligence. In Nicaragua, the FSLN was a small vanguard until 1977. According to Henry Ruiz from the FSLN, the Sandinistas had approximately 150 cadres in 1974. The State Department estimated that the FSLN had about 50 fighting men in June 1977. The number of fighters rapidly increased with the growing violence and popular resistance in 1978. During the September uprisings in 1978, the FSLN forces consisted of an estimated 1,200 fighters. This number further increased after the suppression of the insurrection. National Guard repression against young Nicaraguans virtually drove them into the ranks of the Sandinistas. During the final offensive, the number of FSLN fighters was probably over 7,000.<sup>113</sup>

The size of the Nicaraguan National Guard also increased during the armed conflict. During the September insurrection, Somoza's National Guard had 7,500 men under arms. After that, the

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<sup>113</sup> For estimates of the strength of the FSLN see: Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, pp. 40, 49, 84, and 130; Nolan, *The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution*, p.44; Neale J. Pearson, "Nicaragua in Crisis", in: *Current History*, Vol 76, Iss 444, Febr 79, p.84; and Thomas W. Walker, "The Sandinista Victory in Nicaragua", in: *Current History*, Vol 78, Iss 454, Febr 80, p.58.

number of Guardsmen increased to 11,000 in March 1979 and up to 15,000 during the FSLN's final offensive.<sup>114</sup> In his comparative book on revolutionary movements, Thomas H. Greene states that "the defeat of a guerrilla insurgency requires a personal ratio of at least five to one in favor of government forces."<sup>115</sup> Other authors mention a ratio of up to ten to one as a necessary prerequisite for a defeat of the guerrillas. In the case of Nicaragua, this ratio is 6:1 for the September uprising in 1978 and 2:1 for the final offensive. Therefore, the Sandinistas were militarily too strong in 1979 to be defeated by Somoza's Guard.

Table 1. Strength of Government and Guerrilla Forces in Nicaragua

	National Guard	FSLN	Ratio
June 1977	-----	50	---
Sept. 1978	7,500	1,200	6:1
June 1979	15,000	over 7,000	2:1

**Source:**

Estimations of the author based on the sources indicated above.

In El Salvador, the actual guerrilla armies did not have a numerous size until the late seventies. As late as 1978, the number of guerrilla fighters was only estimated at 100. In 1981, the FMLN forces had grown to an estimated 4,000 fighters. The number of the guerrilla fighters further increased during the early eighties. For 1983/84, the number was estimated between 8,000 and 12,000. Since then, the number seems to have decreased. It can be estimated between 6,000 and 10,000.<sup>116</sup> The

<sup>114</sup> For numbers on the strength of the National Guard see: Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, pp.84 and 123; and Black, *Triumph of the People*, p.178.

<sup>115</sup> Thomas H. Greene, *Comparative Revolutionary Movements*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974, p.84.

<sup>116</sup> For estimates of the strength of the FMLN see: Baloyra, *El Salvador in Transition*, p.161; Gabriel Zaid, "Enemy Colleagues: A Reading of the Salvadorean Tragedy", in: *Dissent*, Winter 1982, pp.13-40; Alvin H. Bernstein and John D. Waghelstein, "How to Win in El Salvador", in: *Policy Review*, Iss 27, Winter 84, p.50; Robert S. Leiken (ed.), *Central America: Anatomy of Conflict*, New York: Pergamon Press, 1984, p.118; Russell, *El Salvador in Crisis*, p.133; Jose Z. Garcia, "El Salvador: A Glimmer of Hope", in:

strength of the armed forces massively increased throughout the eighties, financed by U.S. military aid. In 1980, the armed forces had 15,000 men under arms. This number increased to 40,000 in 1984, 52,000 in 1986, and about 55,000 today.<sup>117</sup> These numbers do not include the security forces - National Police, National Guard, and Treasury Police - and the Civil Defense organizations. On the other hand, the guerrillas claim to have an additional number of 100,000 militias beside their regular troops.<sup>118</sup> According to these numbers, the manpower ratio of the armed forces to the guerrillas is less favorable for the FMLN than it was for the Sandinistas. The ratio was 4:1 in 1981 and stayed on this level in 1983/84, before declining to a ratio of 7:1 today.

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**Table 2. Strength of Government and Guerrilla Forces in El Salvador**

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	Armed Forces	FMLN	Ratio
1978	-----	100	---
1981	15,000	4,000	4:1
1983/84	40,000	8,000-12,000	4:1
1988	55,000	6,000-10,000	7:1

**Source:**

Estimations of the author based on the sources indicated above.

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Beside the bare military manpower of both parties, the armament and training of the troops is another important factor. Information about that is even more difficult to obtain. Generally, one can assume that the Salvadorean government forces as well as the guerrillas are better equipped and

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*Current History*, Vol 85, Iss 515, Dec 86, p.409; *Wall Street Journal*, July 30, 1986, p.22; *Christian Science Monitor*, April 2, 1987, p.10 and April 28, 1987, p.3; and *Washington Post*, July 26, 1988, p.A17, and July 29, 1988, p.A15.

<sup>117</sup> For numbers on the strength of the armed forces see: Heyward G. Hutson, "Are the Salvadorean Armed Forces Ready to Fold?", in: *World Affairs*, Vol 146, Iss 3, Winter 83/84, p.267; Bernstein/Waghelstein, "How to Win in El Salvador", p.50; *Wall Street Journal*, July 30, 1986, p.22; *Christian Science Monitor*, April 2, 1987, p.10; and *Washington Post*, July 29, 1988, p.A15.

<sup>118</sup> Leiken, *Central America*, p.118.

trained than their Nicaraguan counterparts were. The Salvadorean armed forces received large supplies of modern American weapons, among them Dragonfly A-37 bombers, combat helicopters, and helicopter gunships.<sup>119</sup> The armed forces also received extensive U.S. military training, especially several special counterinsurgency battalions. Furthermore, U.S. military advisors bring their knowledge into the headquarters of the Salvadorean army. On the other side, the Salvadorean guerrillas are known as the best organized and best equipped guerrillas in Latin America. Until the mid-eighties, when the Salvadorean army improved its air capacity, the FMLN was able to coordinate large-scale military operations involving up to 500 fighters. For their attacks, the guerrillas possess land mines and mortars. After the FSLN attack on a major army base in El Paraiso in March 1987, 81mm and 60mm mortar shells were found.<sup>120</sup> The Sandinistas on the other hand were rather poorly armed, especially before 1979. Thomas W. Walker mentions the superiority of Somoza's arms as one of the reasons for the failure of the September 1978 uprising. Somoza had received modern U.S. military equipment - among others thousand M-16 rifles - as late as the last quarter of 1977, whereas the Sandinistas had to fight with shotguns, .22-caliber rifles, and pistols.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, equipment and training of Somoza's National Guard is not comparable to the situation in the U.S. built Salvadorean army.

When comparing the strength of the two armies and the guerrilla forces, one also has to keep in mind the different geographical conditions of the two countries. Although roughly six times larger than El Salvador, Nicaragua has much less population. The high population density makes it more difficult for the Salvadorean rebels to find internal sanctuaries where they can retreat and hide from the armed forces. For the Sandinistas, on the other hand, it was relatively easy to hide from the National Guard in the Nicaraguan hills.

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<sup>119</sup> Sharpe, "El Salvador Revisited", p.475/476.

<sup>120</sup> *Christian Science Monitor*, April 28, 1987, p.3.

<sup>121</sup> Thomas W. Walker, "The Somoza Family Regime", in: Harvey F. Kline, *Latin American Politics and Development*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979, p.331.



## 4.2. The Strategies of the Revolutionary Movements

In Nicaragua, the Sandinistas split in three different tendencies in the mid-seventies, each tendency following a different strategy. The “**Prolonged Popular War**” tendency favored a war of attrition in the countryside. It intended to massively incorporate the peasants into the armed struggle. It was based on the theory of People’s War by General Vo Nguyen Giap. The struggle had to be prolonged in order to alter the balance of forces. Initially in favor of the existing regime, this balance could only be changed through a long-term war. According to this theory, guerrilla forces are able to defeat a regular army in the long run, even when they are militarily inferior, since the guerrillas confront the army with an insuperable dilemma. The army either has to concentrate its forces or to disperse them. In the first case it will lose territory, and in the second case it allows the guerrillas to carry out major blows by concentrating their forces.<sup>122</sup>

The second tendency was the “**Proletarian Tendency**”. Instead of armed struggle in the mountains, it favored organizational work in the factories and in the poor neighborhoods, to mobilize a resistance movement. It wanted to strengthen the revolutionary movement by doing political work among the masses and by building Sandinista trade unions rather than through armed insurrection. It was understood as a defensive strategy against the repressive regime. A counteroffensive would follow only in the long run. The short term goals were the defense of the trade union rights and the right to strike, the struggle against unemployment, for welfare benefits for the unemployed, for better housing, for rent and price controls, and for the rights of the political prisoners.<sup>123</sup>

The third tendency, the “**Terceristas**” favored a general insurrection, including urban guerrilla warfare and the mobilization of the middle sector. Contrary to the Prolonged Popular War tendency, the *Terceristas* thought that the center of the armed struggle had to be in the cities. But they favored immediate armed action of the workers, not only organizational work as the Proletarian

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<sup>122</sup> Donald C. Hodges, *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp.225-233.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.233-239.

tendency. The dictatorship was to be defeated quickly through general strikes, paralysis of the transportation, occupation of factories, and takeover of entire neighborhoods. In order to be successful, the *Terceiristas* could not rely solely on the peasant and worker class. They therefore tried to attract also middle and upper class members that were dissatisfied with Somoza. For this reason, they had to moderate their ideology in order to be more acceptable for these groups.<sup>124</sup> The development of the Nicaraguan revolution proved the *Terceiristas* to be right. It was the coalition of the Sandinistas with middle and upper class elements which finally overthrew the Somoza regime in a general insurrection. National strikes, popular neighborhood insurrections, and military attacks by the FSLN guerrilla forces together finally sealed Somoza's fate.<sup>125</sup> Therefore one can consider the insurrectional strategy as the dominant strategy within the FSLN during the last two years of the revolutionary struggle.

In El Salvador, the different guerrilla organizations adhered to different strategies as well, before they coordinated their activities by forming the FMLN. The strongest guerrilla group, the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), pursued an insurrectional strategy. According to this strategy, the revolution should unfold in stages, leading to mass insurrection. The ERP consisted of 40% of the fighting forces of the Salvadorean guerrillas.<sup>126</sup> The Popular Liberation Forces (FPL), which included 20% of the guerrilla fighters, were in favor of a Prolonged Popular War strategy. They refused to build a broad united front which would include reformist middle and upper class elements, because this would liquidate the class contradictions. The Forces of National Resistance (FARN), which consisted of 15% of the guerrilla forces, pursued an insurrectional strategy as the ERP did. FARN was the most open to a compromise with reformist elements in the middle class and in the military. It was the only group that was willing to negotiate with the junta after the coup in October 1979.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., pp.239-255.

<sup>125</sup> Thomas W. Walker (ed.), *Nicaragua in Revolution*, New York: Praeger, 1982, pp.34-37.

<sup>126</sup> Leiken, *Central America*, p.212.

<sup>127</sup> For information on the differences between the guerrilla groups see: Leiken, *Central America*, pp.111-130; and Russell, *El Salvador in Crisis*, pp.131-135.

After coordinating their activities in 1980 by forming the FMLN, the Salvadorean guerrillas by and large agreed to pursue an insurrectional strategy.<sup>128</sup> By building a coalition with the FDR, they concluded an alliance with reformist center forces. A year before, they had refused to negotiate with these forces, when they were part of the reformist junta. Since June 1981, the FMLN-FDR is willing to end the conflict with a negotiated settlement.<sup>129</sup> The FMLN-FDR recognized that a short term victory was rather unlikely against the strongly U.S. backed Salvadorean government. In addition, the FMLN-FDR saw the necessity of a future cooperation with the United States to rebuild the damaged Salvadorean economy.

The Salvadorean guerrillas put more emphasis on organizing the masses than the Sandinistas.<sup>130</sup> Each of the five guerrilla groups has its own mass organization. The largest of these organizations, the FPL's Revolutionary Popular Bloc (BPR), has 60,000 to 100,000 members.<sup>131</sup> These mass organizations include beside peasants also workers, students and urban slum dwellers. Despite the stronger mass organizations, the Salvadorean guerrillas were not able to incite significant neighborhood uprisings in the cities to reinforce their military offensives. Joaquin Villalobos, one of the top commanders and military strategists of the FMLN, admits that a lack of decisive activity of the popular movement prevented the FMLN in 1983 - despite military victories - from reaching more significant changes in the correlation of forces.<sup>132</sup> In Nicaragua, on the other hand, the FSLN could profit from spontaneous neighborhood uprisings. Sandinistas joined these uprisings to advise the local inhabitants. They started to set up local Civil Defense Committees in the neighborhoods, which coordinated the uprisings and took over also civil administrative and organizational functions. Several authors stress the importance of the urban neighborhood uprisings for

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<sup>128</sup> Hodges, *The Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, p.255.

<sup>129</sup> Robert Pastor, "The Target and the Source: El Salvador and Nicaragua", in: *Washington Quarterly*, Vol 5, Iss 3, Summer 82, p.118. For the demands of the FMLN-FDR for a negotiated settlement see chapter 2.

<sup>130</sup> Tommie Sue Montgomery, "Cross and Rifle: Revolution and the Church in El Salvador and Nicaragua", in: *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 36, Iss 2, Fall/Winter 83, p.209.

<sup>131</sup> Numbers vary. See: Leiken, *Central America*, p.116; and Russell, *El Salvador in Crisis*, p.130.

<sup>132</sup> Joaquin Villalobos, *The War in El Salvador: Current Situation and Outlook for the Future*, San Francisco: Solidarity Publications, 1986, p.9.

the success of the Nicaraguan revolution.<sup>133</sup> In summary, the Sandinistas did less organizational work among the masses but could nevertheless profit from more spontaneous insurrectional mass activity.

At least three reasons may have prevented the revolution in El Salvador from reaching the stage of general mass insurrection. It seems reasonable to assume that the average Nicaraguan citizen had to get over less high barriers to become involved in revolutionary activities. First, due to the different nature of the conflict, there is no common consensus in the Salvadorean society that the regime has to change. In Nicaragua such a consensus existed and most of the economic and political elite endorsed revolutionary actions, as we have seen in the chapter on the breadth of the revolutionary coalition. This made it easier to risk revolutionary actions for people who are used to obey the orders of their employers or landlords.

Second, the killings of the death squads in El Salvador may have deterred people from revolutionary actions. Whoever was known as a supporter of the revolution had to take into account his assassination any time. The Salvadorean National Guard was very repressive too but it was not as systematical in killing revolutionaries of every level, and in absolute numbers there is no comparison between the killings of the Nicaraguan National Guard and the death squad assassinations in El Salvador. The repression by the death squads in El Salvador threatened mainly people with leftist leanings. By staying apolitical, one could strongly reduce the risk to be affected by the repression. In Nicaragua during the last stage of the political revolution, the whole population was threatened by the National Guard. At this moment, joining the revolutionary movement could provide protection against the repression of the National Guard. Furthermore, the death squads are private clandestine organizations of the oligarchy, not the official armed forces of the government. This makes it more difficult to fight against them and they are more unpredictable. Nobody knows if his neighbor is not a secret member of the death squads. The death squads allowed the intransigent oligarchy-military coalition to extinguish many revolutionary leaders and activists without directly damaging the legitimacy of the government since they were private organizations. A third

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<sup>133</sup> See: Walker, *Nicaragua in Revolution*, p.31; and Josef Gugler, "The Urban Character of Contemporary Revolutions", in: *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol 17, Iss 2, Summer 82, p.65.

reason for the continuing lack of general mass insurrection in El Salvador can be the moderating role of the Duarte government. This will be discussed in the next section.

In 1984/85, the FMLN-FDR revised its strategy. New counterinsurgency tactics of the government, combined with a considerable reinforcement of the Salvadorean Air Forces, and the strong U.S. support for the government had convinced the guerrillas that a fast victory was unlikely. They therefore prepared for a long war against the armed forces and the economic system of El Salvador. The new strategy, which they call “**War of Attrition**”, has four main elements.<sup>134</sup> First, the FMLN aims at inflicting as many casualties on the army as possible. Capturing weapons is no longer the primary goal, since arms can be replaced by the United States, but not soldiers and officers. It should also help to undermine the moral of the troops. To pursue this strategy, the guerrilla broke down into groups of eight to twelve fighters. This also protected them against the air supervision of the armed forces. By laying land mines in the path of approaching troops, they were able to inflict heavy casualties without exposing themselves to combat.

Second, the guerrillas expanded the war to new war zones, where they had never been previously. Whereas in 1983 the fighting was by and large restricted to the seven eastern departments, in 1986 12 out of 14 departments were war zones. Third, the guerrillas put increased emphasis on the destabilization of the war economy by sabotage. The FMLN launched major attacks against the transportation system, power plants, productive infrastructure, and coffee, cotton, and sugar cane crops. The Sandinistas rarely used sabotage of the economy in the anti-Somoza struggle. The economic sabotage has certainly helped to damage the image of the FMLN. In an early 1983 communique, the ERP justified the destruction of the infrastructure:

The Salvadorean dictatorship, its armed forces and imperialism know perfectly well that the economy is the basic pillar of political and military power and that in every way the basic economic areas are military objectives. [...] Sabotage has a strong impact on the economy, which reduces the dictatorship's capacity for continuing the war. Therefore, it reduces the offensive potential of the armed forces.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> See: Joaquin Villalobos, *Revolutionary Strategy to Defeat U.S. Intervention: A Political-Military Analysis of the War in El Salvador*, Morazan: Radio Venceremos Publications, 1985.; and Sharpe, “El Salvador Revisited”, pp.476-478.

<sup>135</sup> Leiken, *Central America*, p.128.

Fourth, the FMLN-FDR put renewed emphasis on political action. Recognizing that a victory will not be possible without a mass base in the cities, the FMLN-FDR has started to organize new mass protests in the cities and tries to align with the independent labor unions and mass organizations that demonstrate against the Duarte government. A formal redefinition of the relationship between FMLN and FDR has also taken place, making the two actors more independent. The FMLN makes now its own military decisions and the FDR is freer for independent political activities and for criticizing guerrilla actions.<sup>136</sup> The FMLN knows that the “war of attrition” can last a long time, but it is confident that time is in favor of the guerrillas. As Joaquin Villalobos said: “If necessary, we will carry the destabilization to the point that the Yankees will have to bring from the U.S. breakfast, lunch, and dinner for Napoleon Duarte.”<sup>137</sup>

### 4.3. The Counterstrategies of the Two Governments

Somoza’s strategy against the Sandinistas helped to strengthen the popular support for the FSLN. He intended to suppress the revolutionary movement with massive repression. After the spectacular FSLN attack on the Los Robles Christmas party in December 1974, Somoza imposed the state of siege for 33 months. This time was marked by far-reaching repression, including numerous disappearances and killings by the National Guard.

The repression during the years 1974 through 1977 was nothing compared to the excesses of the National Guard during and after the September uprisings in 1978. During this time, several cities were in the hands of the insurgents. Somoza’s strategy was to allow the temporary occupation of these cities and then to recapture them one after another by concentrating the National Guard forces.<sup>138</sup> The recapturing of these cities involved heavy violence against the civilian population. The

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<sup>136</sup> Sharpe, “El Salvador Revisited”, p.486.

<sup>137</sup> Villalobos, *Revolutionary Strategy*, p.14.

<sup>138</sup> Black, *Triumph of the People*, p.160.

National Guard used to attack the occupied neighborhoods with aerial bombardment and artillery fire, and sometimes even prevented the population from fleeing. After the bombings, in so called "mopping-up" operations, the Guard entered the neighborhoods and summarily executed numerous non-combatants that had been living there. Once the insurrection was defeated, the repression continued. Especially young people suffered from indiscriminate persecution. This persecution proved to be the best recruiting drive for the Sandinistas, since youngsters fled to the FSLN for protection against the National Guard.<sup>139</sup> The brutalities of the Guard not only increased the domestic hatred of Somoza, but also helped to isolate him internationally. A report of the Organization of American States (OAS) on the events in fall 1978 strongly helped to erode the support of Somoza among the Latin American states.<sup>140</sup>

During the final offensive of the FSLN, this strategy continued. His strategy also helped to further alienate the upper class. To punish the upper class opposition, Somoza selectively bombed their factories.<sup>141</sup> But this time, Somoza was not able any more to recapture step by step the cities that had fallen into the hands of the FSLN. The urban uprisings and the war front shifted unpredictably from day to day and the step-by-step strategy from September 1978 did not work any more.<sup>142</sup> The Sandinistas could advance towards Managua from all sides and finally forced Somoza to flee.

In El Salvador in the early eighties, the army tried to fight the guerrillas in large-scale confrontations and to keep control of the Salvadorean territory. In 1983, this concept of permanent territorial defense was abandoned. The army started to retreat when disadvantageously attacked and to defend only strategic economic infrastructure and barracks permanently.<sup>143</sup> The new strategy, named "Low Intensity War", aims at preventing the FMLN from large-scale offensives. Rather

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p.136.

<sup>140</sup> For information on the repression by the National Guard during the September insurrection and afterwards see: Organization of American States, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Nicaragua*, Washington: General Secretariat of the OAS, 1978, especially pp.31-54.

<sup>141</sup> Black, *Triumph of the People*, p.165.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p.160.

<sup>143</sup> Villalobos, *The War in El Salvador*, p.9.

than through direct attack, the guerrillas should be weakened by cutting off their supply lines and by destroying their mass basis. The armed forces try to depopulate the zones of traditional guerrilla control and to create "free fire zones", where every inhabitant can be considered a guerrilla. The new strategy also included the acquisition of modern air force equipment. The Air Force improved its air-borne fire power, increased intelligence flights over guerrilla held territory, and started to drop elite troops in rearguard areas. The increased air war capacities have restricted the guerrillas in moving large units of 400 to 500 fighters, but could not prevent them from spreading the civil war from the eastern departments to the whole country.<sup>144</sup>

Since the beginning of the civil war, the Salvadorean army's first priority in its fight against the FMLN was the destruction of potential resources for the guerrillas. It put less emphasis on winning the support of the peasantry.<sup>145</sup> This has not changed. The depopulation operations of the government and the war activities have caused more than 1,000,000 refugees and displaced people. Several massacres of peasants and refugees by government troops are reported, among them the Sumpul River massacre from May 1980, where at least 600 fleeing peasants, including many women and children, were killed.<sup>146</sup> The depopulation operations use often violence to drive peasants out of certain areas. It is thereby common for the armed forces to cover a chosen village with mortar fire or aerial bombardment before invading it with ground forces. Killings of people that remained behind and destruction of houses and infrastructure are not unusual. These tactics have been denounced by national and international observers, among others by Archbishop Rivera y Damas of San Salvador.<sup>147</sup> In September 1984, President Duarte himself ordered to reduce civil casualties from air strikes, but he did not have the power to enforce compliance with his directives.<sup>148</sup> For Americas

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<sup>144</sup> Jose Z. Garcia, "El Salvador: Legitimizing the Government", in: *Current History*, Vol 84, Iss 500, March 85, p.103. For a presentation of the new counterinsurgency strategy see: Sharpe, "El Salvador Revisited", pp.475/476.

<sup>145</sup> Baloyra, *El Salvador in Transition*, p.140.

<sup>146</sup> Americas Watch, *Report on Human Rights in El Salvador*, pp.166-172 and its third supplement, pp.17-23.

<sup>147</sup> Americas Watch, *Third Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador*, pp.59-63; and Margarita Studemeister (ed.), *The New El Salvador: Interviews from the Zones of Popular Control*, San Francisco: Solidarity Publications, 1986, p.iii.

<sup>148</sup> Sharpe, "El Salvador Revisited", p.476.



Watch it “is clear ... that the Salvadorean armed forces kill many times as many civilians as guerrillas even when they use weapons with which it is possible to be very discriminating.”<sup>149</sup>

Another measure that damaged the image of the army was the practice of forced recruitment, which was widely used especially before the initiation of conscription. Occasionally, forced recruitment was also used by the guerrillas. Nevertheless, it was not a systematic policy and the FMLN command tried to stop it when it saw the negative effects.<sup>150</sup> Human rights violations occur on both sides of the Salvadorean civil war. But the government forces have a much worse record, qualitatively as well as quantitatively. For example, it is practice of the government troops to kill and burn guerrillas on the spot when they make captives. The FMLN, on the other hand, has a long-standing policy of returning government soldiers to the International Committee of the Red Cross. This does not mean that execution of soldiers do not occasionally occur with the guerrillas.<sup>151</sup>

Beside the actions of the military, the economic policy of Duarte hardly helped to gain popular support. An austerity policy, called “*paquetazo*”, by and large transferred the costs of the war to the workers and the peasants. They were hit especially hard by the rapid inflation after the implementation of the austerity measures.<sup>152</sup>

Nevertheless, it seems reasonable that the center position of the Duarte government helped to cool down some of the revolutionary steam. In Nicaragua, Somoza was extremely intransigent and refused to make any concessions to the opposition. In this situation, people must have lost the hope for peaceful change. In El Salvador, the oligarchy-military coalition was not less intransigent. But the Duarte government promised reforms and implemented some changes. This has certainly raised hopes that a transition could be possible without the dangers and destructions of a general

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<sup>149</sup> Americas Watch, *Third Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador*, pp.61/62.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p.67-70.

<sup>152</sup> Department of Social Sciences, Universidad de El Salvador, “An Analysis of the Correlation of Forces in El Salvador”, in: *Latin American Perspectives*, Iss 55, Vol 14, No 4, Fall 87, pp.438-440.

insurrection. This may be another reason why general insurrection has not yet taken place in El Salvador.

#### 4.4. Conclusion

The examination of the military strength shows that both parties in El Salvador, the armed forces as well as the guerrillas, have more manpower and better equipment and training. The armed forces have been supplied with modern U.S. weapons and are advised by U.S. counterinsurgency specialists. The FMLN is known as the best organized and armed guerrilla force in Latin America. The manpower ratio of government forces to guerrilla forces has decreased from 6:1 in 1978 to a favorable 2:1 in summer 1979 in Nicaragua. In El Salvador, this ratio has been less favorable. The ratio of 4:1 in the first half of the eighties has increased to a ratio of 7:1 today.

The strategies of the revolutionary movements are similar. In Nicaragua as well as in El Salvador, an insurrectional strategy has finally gained dominance within the guerrilla forces. This strategy favors the building of a broad coalition of oppositional forces. The Salvadorean guerrillas have put a stronger emphasis on building mass organizations for popular support. Nevertheless, this strategy has not yet paid off. On the contrary, the Sandinistas - in contrast to the FMLN - were supported during their offensives by massive, spontaneous neighborhood uprisings. Several reasons can explain the lack of mass insurrections in El Salvador. In El Salvador, no common consensus exists that change is necessary. The support for the revolution by the majority of the economic and political elite made it easier for the average citizen in Nicaragua to risk insurrection. The systematic assassinations by the death squads also helped to deter people from taking revolutionary actions. Finally, the reformist Duarte government has created some hope for non-violent change.

Another difference in the strategies of the guerrillas is the use of economic sabotage. The FMLN has massively used economic sabotage to destabilize the Salvadorean regime. Since such

actions usually hurt the population as well, they have damaged the image of the Salvadorean guerrillas. The Sandinistas hardly used this tool in their fight against Somoza.

The counterstrategies of both governments have used repressive means. Rather than eliminating the causes of support for the guerrillas through reforms, the strategies tried to deter people from supporting the guerrillas by force. Repressive measures in both cases have helped to strengthen support for the guerrillas. The U.S.-led counterinsurgency in El Salvador can be considered more sophisticated and more systematic than Somoza's campaign against the Sandinistas. Somoza, for example, did not conduct systematic large-scale depopulation operations, in order to separate the guerrillas from their popular base.

In summary, it seems that the Sandinistas had a more favorable military constellation in their final offensive against Somoza than the FMLN ever had in eight years of civil war against the Salvadorean government. Concerning their strategies, it is to note that they were similar but that the policy of economic sabotage has hurt the image of the FMLN. The counterstrategy of the Salvadorean government is more comprehensive and systematic than Somoza's counterstrategy was. The armed forces of both countries have used repression as a means to contain the revolutionary movement, thereby undermining the support for the government.

## 5. The Role of the Church

### 5.1. Changes in the Latin American Church Since the Sixties

Since the sixties, the Latin American Church has undergone fundamental changes. For centuries, the Church was allied with the ruling elite and the military, caring little about the fate of the common people. By urging the people to obey the “god-given” authorities of this world, it played a major role in supporting the existing power structures. Since the sixties, large sectors within the Church have radically changed their position. Liberation Theology strongly supports social change. The Church has started to educate and organize peasants and the urban poor, leading them, as a consequence, to struggle for their rights. Some priests even went so far to join guerrilla groups and take up arms against the government.

Two major events of the sixties were crucial for this change in the attitude of the Church. The first is the Second Vatican Council, held from 1962 to 1965, which “urged the Christians to address contemporary social concerns and to shape their teachings according to the signs of the times.”<sup>153</sup> In its closing document *Gaudium et Spes*, the council asserted that “the church is in and of the

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<sup>153</sup> Ronald T. Libby, “Listen to the Bishops”, in: *Foreign Policy*, Iss 52, Fall 83, p.79.

world, with concerns well beyond the purely spiritual.”<sup>154</sup> The practical consequences of the Second Vatican Council for Latin America were discussed in Medellin, Colombia, where the Latin American bishops gathered for the Second Episcopal Conference (CELAM II) in 1968. Medellin deeply analyzed the situation in Latin America and translated the results of the Second Vatican Council for Latin America. It described Latin America as beset by “internal and external colonialism.”<sup>155</sup> According to the results of Vatican II, each human being had the right to a decent life on earth. The existing power structures and the capitalist structures of the economy prevented a majority of the people in Latin America from a decent life. The existence of these structures was therefore called a *structural sin*. Against the violence of guerrilla groups, the conference posed the idea of *institutional violence* by governments which deny their people political rights, sufficient nutrition, and education. A radical sector within the Church interpreted this institutional violence in a way that it justified the taking-up of arms in defense against it.

As the main result of Medellin, the Latin American Church advocated a “preferential option for the poor”. Among others, this option should be realized through two principles, *conscientization* and *participation*. Conscientization means “the awakening of the masses to consciousness so that through their participation in the realization of change and in the common effort to create a new society, they may become the true agents of their own liberation.”<sup>156</sup> Participation means that the people start to become master of their own destiny and actively promote their liberalization. One of the documents of Medellin states that “justice, and therefore peace, are won through the dynamic action of the awakening and organization of the popular sectors of society which are capable of pressing action by public officials who are often impotent in the carrying out of their social projects without popular support.”<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, p.99.

<sup>155</sup> Bryan J. Hehir, “A View From the Church”, in: *Foreign Policy*, Iss 43, Summer 81, p.84.

<sup>156</sup> Daniel H. Levine (ed.), *Churches and Politics in Latin America*, Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979, p.46.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

The main method to implement the results of the conference of Medellin was the establishment of **Christian Base Communities (CEB)** all over Latin America. The Christian Base Communities attempted "to bring the laity into the life of the Church, to teach that the Christian community is a community of equals before God in which all have obligations to each other and responsibilities to share."<sup>158</sup> Christian Base Communities are small groups of thirty or less believers that meet regularly for Bible study. At the beginning, the CEB are usually led by a priest. Later on, the group chooses its own leadership which receives further training in special centers of the Church. The CEBs elect lay teachers, called *catechists*, and lay preachers, called *Delegates of the Word*. Delegates of the Word not only lead worship, but also promote development in health, agriculture, and literacy.<sup>159</sup>

At the meetings of the Christian Base Communities, the group usually reads a passage of the Bible. Afterwards, this passage is discussed in the context of the every-day experiences of the participants. Thereby, connections between poverty and malnutrition and the political and social system would be discussed and the groups would start to organize themselves to help each other. The ruling elites which defended the status quo soon realized the revolutionary potential of the Christian Base Communities. The CEB became preferred targets of governmental repression. Hundreds of Delegates of the Word and of CEB members were killed by the security forces and by death squads, especially in El Salvador.

Liberation Theology and Christian Base Communities help to destabilize the status quo and to form broad-based revolutionary movements. This happens through two different effects. First, the teachings of Liberation Theology (e.g. "structural sin") undermine the legitimacy of the existing regimes. Second, Christian Base Communities help to organize and educate the lower classes of the society, making them aware of their situation and leading them to fight for their interests. Therefore, we can expect that the likelihood of revolution and revolutionary success increases with the growing strength of the progressive sector within the Church. The following sections will examine the Churches of Nicaragua and El Salvador with regard to this question.

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<sup>158</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, p.103.

<sup>159</sup> Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, London: SCM Press, 1984, p.60.

## 5.2. The Church Hierarchies

Within the Church hierarchy, El Salvador shows more controversy and more extreme positions than Nicaragua. Throughout the seventies and the early eighties, four of the five bishops in El Salvador adhered to a preconciliar theology that emphasized traditional institutions and hierarchical authority and that supported the existing regime.<sup>160</sup> The non-conservative faction within the hierarchy was strengthened in the early eighties when the conservative bishop Pedro Arnaldo Aparicio, owner of a large hacienda and therefore inclined to share the views of his fellow landowners, retired and when the pope elevated an additional auxiliary bishop, Gregorio Rosa Chavez.<sup>161</sup>

The Nicaraguan hierarchy experienced a complete generational change between 1968 and 1972. Of the nine bishops in 1968 only three remained bishops in 1972. Four bishops were ordained during this time, leaving a total of seven in 1972.<sup>162</sup> Two bishops supported Somoza, but they were not inclined to speak out as the bishops in El Salvador do. Five bishops supported - or at least did not oppose to - the insurrection against Somoza.<sup>163</sup>

The ratio of conservative to moderate or progressive forces in the Nicaraguan and Salvadorean hierarchy could lead to the assumption that the latter is more conservative. Nevertheless, more important than the ratio of forces is the stand of the archbishops. In El Salvador, Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero as well as his predecessor Luiz Chavez y Gonzales, Archbishop of San Salvador

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<sup>160</sup> Tommie Sue Montgomery, "Cross and Rifle: Revolution and the Church in El Salvador and Nicaragua", in: *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 36, Iss 2, Fall/Winter 82/83, p.210.

<sup>161</sup> Libby, "Listen to the Bishops", p.84.

<sup>162</sup> Philip J. Williams, "The Catholic Hierarchy in the Nicaraguan Revolution", in: *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol 17, Part 2, Nov 85, pp.352/353.

<sup>163</sup> Montgomery, "Cross and Rifle", p.215.

from 1939 to 1977, and his successor Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas all adhered to a moderate Liberation Theology that stresses popular pastoral activity but does not incorporate Marxist class analysis. The influence of the archdiocese on the Salvadorean Church is strong, since 40% of the population and 57% of the priests belong to the archdiocese.<sup>164</sup> In Nicaragua, the Archbishop of Managua, Miguel Obando y Bravo, was less inclined towards Liberation Theology. Politically, Obando supported Somoza's ouster but not leftist revolution. He basically sided with the moderate opposition of the business sector.

Immediately after Medellin, Archbishop Chavez began to implement the new theological line of the Latin American Church in El Salvador and encouraged the formation of Christian Base Communities. When Oscar Romero was appointed as his successor in 1977, the progressive church people feared a reversal of the reform process. Their preferred choice, Arturo Rivera y Damas, had been passed over and Romero was known as "quiet and noncontroversial" and was suspected to have ties with the oligarchy.<sup>165</sup> But Romero, when confronted with the repression and misery in his archdiocese, developed into one of the most outspoken and radical defenders of the rights of the poor against the oligarchy.

In August 1978, Romero issued a pastoral letter called "The Church and the Popular Organizations". The very fact that he issued a pastoral letter on organizations that were labeled "Communist" by the oligarchy was remarkable. In the letter he stated that it was natural that the Church should feel sympathies for popular organizations, but he insisted that the two are not fused and that for Christians the faith should be the ultimate frame of reference. Only in exceptional cases, priests should become involved in the political tasks of these organizations.<sup>166</sup> Romero regarded the mass organizations more and more as the main instrument to achieve social justice:

Today...more than ever I believe in the mass organizations....I believe that the mass organizations are the social forces that are going to push and pressure, that are going to achieve a genuine society with social justice and freedom.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p.211.

<sup>165</sup> Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador*, p.110.

<sup>166</sup> Daniel Levine (ed.), *Religion and Political Conflict in Latin America*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986, pp.70/71.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., cited from an interview in February 1980.



Romero refused to issue a “blanket condemnation of Marxism.” He saw Marxism as a useful method to analyze the society and the economy, but considered its materialism as incompatible with Christianity.<sup>168</sup> In February 1980, Romero appealed to President Carter to stop the support of the junta with military aid.<sup>169</sup> This was at a time when the Christian Democrats had formed a junta with the military. In the last weeks before his assassination, Romero came close to endorsing armed resistance against the military and the government. Shortly before his death, he stated:

...Christians do not fear combat; they know how to fight, but they prefer to speak the language of peace. However, when a dictatorship seriously attacks human rights and the common good of the nation, when all becomes unbearable, and the channels of dialogue, of understanding, of rationality are closed; when this occurs, the Church speaks of the legitimate right of insurrectional violence.<sup>170</sup>

One of the most influential tools of Romero in the struggle for social change was his weekly Sunday morning mass, which was broadcasted by the Christian radio station YSAT. His homily usually lasted an hour and a half. It always started with a theological exposition on the scriptural reading of the day, which he then would relate to the reality of life in El Salvador. It always ended with the recitation of the events of the week, including the reading of the list of the persons who had been killed, assaulted, tortured, or that disappeared. The broadcast of his Sunday homily became the single most listened to program in El Salvador and Romero was called the “voice of the voiceless”, since he spoke out the grievances of the ordinary people.

Romero’s successor Rivera y Damas took a less outspoken and radical stance. He might have been forced into a more moderate position by threats from the death squads and by pressure from the Vatican; until 1983, he was only named as apostolic administrator and was therefore less independent.<sup>171</sup> Nevertheless, the Salvadorean Church still sticks to its condemnation of the contemporary regime in El Salvador. The Church sees the intransigence of the oligarchy as the principal barrier to social justice in El Salvador. The Church is against U.S. military aid, since it considers the domestic social and economic ills as responsible for the crisis, not foreign agitation. It is strongly

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<sup>168</sup> Libby, “Listen to the Bishops”, p.86.

<sup>169</sup> Hehir, “A View from the Church”, p.87.

<sup>170</sup> Arnson, *El Salvador*, p.53.

<sup>171</sup> Tommie Sue Montgomery, “The Church in the Salvadorean Revolution”, in: *Latin American Perspectives*, Iss 36, Vol 10, No 1, Winter 83, pp.82-85.

in favor of a negotiated solution to the conflict, including the FMLN-FDR, and therefore against the position of the current government and especially the United States.<sup>172</sup>

Nevertheless, Archbishop Rivera y Damas does not endorse armed revolutionary struggle, arguing that not all nonviolent means are exhausted. He has outlined four points in order for a popular insurrection to be justified: 1) those with political power must seriously abuse their power, 2) all peaceful alternatives to eliminate the abuse must have failed, 3) the ills accompanying the insurrection must be no greater than the present ills, and 4) the people must believe that the insurrection will succeed. He considers only the first point as fulfilled.<sup>173</sup>

In Nicaragua, the hierarchy is more homogeneous according to its theological and political stand. The present archbishop, Miguel Obando y Bravo, was appointed in 1970. As already mentioned, he was less inclined towards implementing the results of Medellin. Nevertheless, politically Obando clearly opposed the dictatorship of the Somoza family. Shortly after having been appointed as archbishop, he sold Somoza's gift of a Mercedes Benz and gave the money to the poor. In 1971 he refused to attend a ceremony celebrating a pact between Somoza and the Conservative Party and he stated that he would not vote in the forthcoming elections.<sup>174</sup> In 1974, the bishops abstained from Somoza's presidential inauguration.<sup>175</sup> In several pastoral letters, the bishops criticized the political order, but it needed pressure from priests and laity for them to strongly denounce the government's human rights abuses in January 1977.<sup>176</sup>

By and large, Obando y Bravo did not demand social change but rather more democratic government structures. He clearly opposed the Sandinistas and backed the moderate opposition. Towards the end of Somoza's rule, he gave some indications that social change may be necessary, as in the pastoral letter from 2 August 1978, where he and his bishops called for a new socio-

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<sup>172</sup> Libby, "Listen to the Bishops", pp.84, 86, and 94.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p.87.

<sup>174</sup> Williams, "The Catholic Hierarchy in the Nicaraguan Revolution", p.352.

<sup>175</sup> Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, p.37.

<sup>176</sup> Williams, "The Catholic Hierarchy in the Nicaraguan Revolution", p.357.

political order based on human conditions for the majority of the people in nutrition, health, education, housing, work, land, salaries, and human rights.<sup>177</sup>

In the final days of Somoza, the Nicaraguan bishops upheld the right of the oppressed people to defend itself against the tyranny:

All of us are hurt and affected by the extremes of revolutionary insurrections, but its moral and juridical legitimacy cannot be denied in the case of evident and prolonged tyranny, which seriously threatens the fundamental rights of the individual and undermines the common good of the country.<sup>178</sup>

But Obando y Bravo still did not want to accept a leftist solution. The same day the FSLN entered Managua, he took part in negotiations in Venezuela, aiming at creating a moderate transition government that would prevent the FSLN from assuming power.<sup>179</sup> This position was clearly different from the stance of the Salvadorean Archbishop who seeks a solution through a negotiated settlement with the left. In the first months after the victory over Somoza, Archbishop Obando y Bravo and the Nicaraguan bishops took a supporting position towards the Sandinista revolution. In November 1979, the Nicaraguan bishops issued a pastoral letter which endorsed the Sandinista revolution as strongly as no previous official statement of the hierarchy did.<sup>180</sup> Nevertheless, the situation soon changed. Simultaneously with the break of the anti-Somoza bourgeoisie from the revolutionary process, the Catholic hierarchy started to criticize the Sandinistas and became a strong antagonist. Two reasons can explain this changing position. First, Archbishop Obando y Bravo has always been on the side of the bourgeois opposition, as already noted above. Second, with a state increasingly dominated by the FSLN and parts of the Church strongly connected with the Sandinistas and Marxist ideology, he might have feared to lose the control over the Church to the Sandinistas.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p.359.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p.361.

<sup>179</sup> Michael Dodson, "The Politics of Religion in Revolutionary Nicaragua", in: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, Vol 483, Jan 86, p.42.

<sup>180</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, p.236.

<sup>181</sup> For the development of the hierarchy's position towards the Sandinista revolution see: Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, pp.226-267.

### 5.3. Clergy, Christian Base Communities, and Catholic Universities

The situation within the Salvadorean clergy reflects the split within the hierarchy, but here the progressive wing is much stronger. Approximately 25% of the clergy adhere to a conservative preconciliar theology. 50% support a moderate Liberation Theology stressing popular pastoral activities, and 25% hold to a radical Liberation theology that incorporates Marxist class analysis.<sup>182</sup> Within the Nicaraguan clergy, a split exists too. A part of the clergy supports the FSLN despite the anti-Sandinista line of the hierarchy. Two members of the Group of Twelve were priests, Father Fernando Cardenal and Father Miguel D'Escoto.

The formation and development of Christian Base Communities reflect the different stance of the archbishops. In El Salvador, Archbishop Chavez took seriously the new social doctrine of the Church and began immediately after Medellin to encourage the formation of CEBs. The pastoral work resulted in hundreds of CEBs, thousands of catechists and delegates, and a religiously and politically more aware laity. In Nicaragua, Christian Base Communities were also formed but not in a systematic manner. There was no impetus from the Nicaraguan hierarchy to develop them.<sup>183</sup> For El Salvador it was estimated in 1982 that at least two third of the CEB members adhered to a radical Liberation Theology.<sup>184</sup> But even in regions with systematic CEB-work, only a minority of the people is incorporated in the CEBs.<sup>185</sup> Nevertheless, for Nicaragua, Dodson and

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<sup>182</sup> Montgomery, "Cross and Rifle", p.211.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p.212.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p.211.

<sup>185</sup> Levine, *Religion and Political Conflict in Latin America*, p.77.

Montgomery state that by 1978 a majority of the Christians were not only anti-Somoza but also pro-Sandinista.<sup>186</sup>

In Nicaragua, Protestant Churches had also a certain influence in the revolutionary process, through the building of Christian Base Communities. Compared to other Latin American countries, Nicaragua has a high proportion of 10% to 12% Protestants. Their activity started somewhat later than that of the Catholic Church, promoted by the events after the Managua earthquake.<sup>187</sup>

The Christian Base Communities had a strong effect in making people conscious of their situation and in leading them to political actions, even when the priests did not induce them to direct political activity. Through the work of the CEBs, "people emerge from a passiv world view and begin to feel that their action can make a difference, that indeed God is on their side as he was with the Israelites in their Exodus."<sup>188</sup> Through the CEBs, they also learn a basic form of organizing themselves. Therefore, it is not surprising that members of the Christian Base Communities soon started to be politically active to promote social change.

By 1980 in El Salvador, thousands of lay leaders and CEB members had entered the revolutionary organizations as political organizers or combatants. Dozens of revolutionary leaders have been catechists or Delegates of the Word.<sup>189</sup> The Christian Base Communities played an important role in the formation of the popular organizations. At least two of the five popular organizations, the United Popular Action Front (FAPU) and the Revolutionary People's Bloc (BPR), were founded in churches, where priests and sisters were present. This represents the first case of such direct Church involvement in revolutionary organizations in Latin American history.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Michael Dodson and Tommie Sue Montgomery, "The Churches and the Nicaraguan Revolution", in: Thomas W. Walker (ed.), *Nicaragua in Revolution*, New York: Praeger, 1982, p.172.

<sup>187</sup> Montgomery, "Cross and Rifle", pp.217/218 and Dodson/Montgomery, "The Churches and the Nicaraguan Revolution", pp.166/167.

<sup>188</sup> Levine, *Religion and Political Conflict in Latin America*, p.64.

<sup>189</sup> Montgomery, "Cross and Rifle", p.212.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, p.214; Tommie Sue Montgomery, "The Church in the Salvadorean Revolution", in: *Latin American Perspectives*, Iss 36, Vol 10, No 1, Winter 83, p.64; Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, p.111.

In Nicaragua before the fall of Somoza, there was no movement towards mass peasant organizations in a comparable extent.<sup>191</sup> One religious organization that promoted peasant organization was CEPA, a training center for rural lay leaders, founded by Jesuits in 1969. It integrated biblical reflection and technical agricultural training. By the time of the insurrection, CEPA had cut its formal ties with the Church and was closely allied with the FSLN.<sup>192</sup> Building on the conscientization work of CEPA, the Sandinistas started to organize agricultural workers. This organizational work finally led to the formation of the Association of Rural Workers (ATC), which is today the official Sandinista union of agricultural laborers.<sup>193</sup>

The indirect involvement of the Church in revolutionary activities caused repressive reactions by the security forces and death squads. According to the stronger involvement of the Church in El Salvador, the repression was much stronger and more direct in this country. In the decade beginning in 1972, eleven priests were assassinated and dozens were abducted and tortured. At least sixty priests were expelled or forced into exile.<sup>194</sup> Leaflets from the death squads began to circulate with the request "Be a Patriot! Kill a Priest!". In June 1977, one of the death squads, the White Warriors Union, threatened to systematically eliminate all Jesuits if they would not leave the country within thirty days. A few priests were driven by the repression to join the revolutionaries as guerrilla fighters, as Father Ernesto Barrera, who was killed in combat in 1978.<sup>195</sup> In Nicaragua, the repression against the Church was less intensive. It was basically limited to lay leaders of Christian Base Communities and their communities.

The same differences in the commitment of the Church to radical social change can be found when looking at the Universities of Central America (UCA) in Managua and San Salvador, which are run by Jesuits. The foundation of the UCA in San Salvador was initially sponsored by the

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<sup>191</sup> Levine, *Religion and Political Conflict in Latin America*, p.67.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.73/74 and 84/85.

<sup>193</sup> Ilja A. Luciak, "Popular Democracy in the New Nicaragua: The Case of a Rural Mass Organization", in: *Comparative Politics*, October 1987, p.41.

<sup>194</sup> Montgomery, "The Church in the Salvadorean Revolution", p.81.

<sup>195</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, pp.126, 127, and 135.

oligarchy, who wanted to prevent their children from attending the left-leaning University of El Salvador (UES). Nevertheless, the Jesuits "regarded it as their mission to teach the children of the ruling class about the social and economic reality in which a majority of their fellow citizens lived, to create a sense of responsibility for changing this reality."<sup>196</sup> The UCA San Salvador played a major role in the revolutionary process. It was directly involved in the reformist coup of October 1979. Ten members of UCA San Salvador participated in the new government after the coup. In late summer 1981, UCA San Salvador adopted a political position that was in favor of a political-military solution to El Salvador's struggle, including the FMLN-FDR. UCA Managua on the other hand, before the ouster of Somoza, played not as important a role for the revolutionary process as UCA San Salvador. Leftist Jesuit Fernando Cardenal, member of the Group of Twelve, was forced out of the university and had to work at the National University.<sup>197</sup>

The above outlined differences of the involvement of the Church in the revolutionary process should not lead to the conclusion that religion was not an influential factor in this process in Nicaragua. Since the vast majority of the Nicaraguans are Catholic and since the anti-Somoza movement was very broadly based, a large number of practicing Christians took part in the revolution. This was recognized by the FSLN after the victory over Somoza:

Christian patriots and revolutionaries are an integral part of the Sandinista Popular Revolution, not starting from now but many years ago. ... A large number of FSLN combatants and militants found in the interpretation of their faith reasons for joining the revolutionary struggle and consequently the FSLN.<sup>198</sup>

After the victory, three priests joined the government in the rank of ministers. Father Miguel D'Escoto became foreign minister, Father Fernando Cardenal became minister of education, and Father Ernesto Cardenal minister of culture.<sup>199</sup> The alliance between the Sandinistas and progressive Christians was more than only a tactical alliance. Revolutionary Christianity was included into the Sandinista ideology as one of the three main currents beside historical materialism and the thought

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<sup>196</sup> Montgomery, "The Church in the Salvadorean Revolution", p.74.

<sup>197</sup> Montgomery, "Cross and Rifle", pp.215-217 and Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, p.64.

<sup>198</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, p.251.

<sup>199</sup> Hodges, *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, p.270.

of Sandino.<sup>200</sup> The Sandinista literacy campaign, an opportunity for the Sandinistas to promote their ideology, was led by Father Fernando Cardenal and was joined by more than 300 religious. Thomas Borge, known as a Marxist hardliner within the Sandinista leadership, ordered himself eight hundred thousand popular-language New Testaments for the Nicaraguan literacy campaign.<sup>201</sup> In fall 1980, the National Directorate enunciated the official Sandinista policy towards Christianity in a nine-point document. This document grants religious freedom and acknowledges the contribution of Christians to the revolution. The FSLN accepts religious believers within its ranks but perceives itself as a lay organization. The FSLN refrains from interfering in Church matters, as long as the Church stays apolitical. The FSLN considers the revolutionary state to be a lay state since it represents the interests of both believers and nonbelievers.<sup>202</sup>

## 5.4. Conclusion

In Nicaragua as well as in El Salvador, the reformed post-conciliar Catholic Church has played an important role in the revolutionary struggle. Through the work in Christian Base Communities, which was not directly political, people became more conscious of their situation and learned to organize in groups. In addition, the lay leaders that were trained by the Church started to use their acquired skills also for political objectives. The CEBs had therefore a mobilizing effect for the revolutionary movement.

Comparing the influences of the Church on the revolutionary movement, this influence is definitely stronger in El Salvador. Montgomery comes to the same conclusion about this involve-

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<sup>200</sup> Richard Harris and Carlos M. Vilas (eds.), *Nicaragua: A Revolution under Siege*, London: Zed Books, 1985, p.166.

<sup>201</sup> Hodges, *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, p.270/271; and Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, p.241.

<sup>202</sup> Hodges, *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, p.270; and Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, p.252.



ment of the Church in the revolutionary process: "The Salvadorean Church especially, through its CEBs, catechists, and committed priests, has been more involved in the process than was the case in Nicaragua."<sup>203</sup> The rapid growth of the popular organizations in El Salvador cannot be explained without taking into account the role of the Christian Base Communities. In El Salvador, the Church hierarchy, or better the archbishops, were more inclined towards implementing a moderate Liberation Theology than in Nicaragua. All three Salvadorean archbishops since Medellin have deliberately promoted the foundation of Christian Base Communities. In Nicaragua, CEBs were also formed but there was no impetus from the hierarchy to develop them. In addition, Archbishop Romero played an important role for the promotion of social change in El Salvador, with his outspoken critique of the social situation and his support for the popular organizations.

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<sup>203</sup> Montgomery, "Cross and Rifle", pp.219/220.

## 6. External Influences

### 6.1. The United States and the Nicaraguan Revolution

The influence of the strongest power in the hemisphere, the United States, is completely different in the two cases of Nicaragua and El Salvador. During the Nixon and Ford administration, the United States strongly supported Somoza's regime. While the overall economic and military aid to Latin America from the United States declined in the 1970-1975 period, military and economic aid to Nicaragua increased dramatically.<sup>204</sup> When President Carter came into office in 1977, this policy changed. Nicaragua became one of the main targets of his human rights policy. This resulted in a sharp decline of U.S. aid for Nicaragua. For the period 1977-1978, the annual average economic assistance dropped some 75 % in real terms. For the military aid, the drop was 43% in the same period. In absolute numbers, the United States provided Nicaragua with \$9.3 million economic aid and \$2.8 million military aid during the period 1977-1978.<sup>205</sup>

Carter's policy helped to destabilize Somoza's regime for two reasons. First it helped to further discredit Somoza's dictatorship, especially in the view of the business community. The United

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<sup>204</sup> Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, p.128.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. For more information about U.S. economic and military aid to Nicaragua see the table at the end of this section.

States had been one of the main supporters of Somoza and now suddenly turned away. This strengthened the domestic opposition. As a second effect, the Carter policy reduced the resources of the National Guard and diminished the regimes military capability. "Somoza had to turn to increasingly desperate international borrowing and international fiscal measures to raise money to buy arms and to pay the Guard."<sup>206</sup>

Nevertheless, the reduction of the U.S. aid should not lead to the assumption that Carter's administration was in favor of a Sandinista revolution. Carter wanted an end to the human rights abuses and a change from the family dictatorship towards a more democratic regime. But he strongly objected to include the Sandinistas in a future government. Until the last days of Somoza, the U.S. policy tried to keep the FSLN out of power and sought to preserve the National Guard, in order to prevent the takeover of the guerrillas. The United States pursued this policy despite the anger of the Nicaraguan people at the National Guard, which was responsible for most of the human rights abuses.

Carter's policy was often wavering and it sent ambiguous signals to Somoza and the Nicaraguan opposition. In June 1978, Somoza held a press conference promising to invite the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and to allow the return of the Group of Twelve to Nicaragua. In addition, he announced that he would consider signing the American Convention of Human Rights and to declare an amnesty for political prisoners.<sup>207</sup> In reaction to this press conference, Carter sent a letter to Somoza, congratulating him for promises to improve the human rights situation in Nicaragua. Robert Pastor, Director of Latin American and Caribbean Affairs on the National Security Council at that time, claims that Carter rather intended to encourage Somoza to improve the human rights situation and to implement his promises, than to congratulate him for progress in the field of human rights.<sup>208</sup> But under the current circumstances in Nicaragua, the letter must have been perceived as an endorsement for Somoza. The still persecuted Nicaraguan opposition was irritated and Somoza used the letter as a proof for U.S. support.

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p.129.

<sup>207</sup> Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, p.66.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p.70.

With the brutality of the counterinsurgency campaign increasing, the United States introduced tougher measures against Somoza in fall 1978. In September, the United States suspended its military aid and froze its economic aid for 1979. In November, the United States supported the postponement of a loan which the Nicaraguan government had requested from the International Monetary Fund.<sup>209</sup>

On the other hand, concern was growing in the Carter administration about the increasing strength of the Sandinistas. The administration realized that time was in favor of the left and that a solution of the crisis between the moderate opposition and Somoza had to be found if the Sandinistas were to be kept out of power. In October, the United States formed a multilateral negotiation team with representatives from the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and the United States and started negotiations between Somoza and the moderate opposition organization, FAO. The basic elements of the negotiation plan were an internationally supervised plebiscite to decide if Somoza had to step down and the formation of a transitional government with predominance of the FAO in this case. The plan would have retained Somoza's party, the Liberal Nationalist Party (PLN), and the National Guard, which were Somoza's principal instruments of power. It was therefore called "Somocism without Somoza" by the sectors of the opposition that wanted more than simply a removal of Somoza. It led to a split within the FAO, when the Group of Twelve and other sectors realized that the negotiations did not intend a change of the system. The negotiations finally failed in February 1979, because Somoza did not agree to the conditions under which the plebiscite was to be held.

As a reaction to the failure of the negotiations, a U.S. military group was withdrawn and the suspended military assistance program was terminated. Furthermore, no new aid programs were considered, but the programs that were "well advanced" and aimed at "the basic human needs of the poor" were continued. All Peace Corps volunteers were withdrawn and the size of the U.S. embassy was reduced from 82 to 37.<sup>210</sup> Nevertheless, in spring, the Carter administration grew more

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<sup>209</sup> Dennis R. Gordon and Margaret M. Munro, "The External Dimension of Civil Insurrection: International Organizations and the Nicaraguan Revolution", in: *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs*, Vol 25, Iss 1, Febr 83, p.77.

<sup>210</sup> Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, p.119.

and more concerned about a possible Sandinista victory. In May 1979, the United States supported an IMF standby arrangement of \$65.7 million for Nicaragua. This was an obvious reversal of the U.S. policy from November 1978, when the United States supported the postponement of a IMF loan for Nicaragua. The IMF decision also helped to release some \$88 million from private banks.<sup>211</sup>

In June, the United States undertook a last initiative to keep the Sandinistas out of power. On June 21, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance presented a plan before the OAS which intended to form a multinational "Peacekeeping Force" to supervise the transition from Somoza to a new government. The multinational force would have prevented the Sandinistas from gaining power, while preserving Somoza's National Guard. The U.S. plan was rejected by the OAS and instead a resolution was adopted which called for the immediate resignation of Somoza and for the installation of the Junta named by the FSLN on June 16.<sup>212</sup>

In summary, the U.S. policy resulted not in active support for the Sandinistas, but it nevertheless helped the Sandinistas to gain power. By reducing the financial assistance and finally cutting it off, and by attacking Somoza for its human rights abuses, the United States helped to weaken the regime. The U.S. attempts to replace Somoza by "Somocism without Somoza" split the moderate opposition and further strengthened the leftist forces, since a part of the moderate forces allied with the FSLN afterwards.

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<sup>211</sup> Gordon/Munro, "The External Dimension of Civil Insurrection", pp.77/78.

<sup>212</sup> Black, *Triumph of the People*, pp.176/177.

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Table 3. U.S. Aid to Nicaragua

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	Economic Aid	Military Aid
	(millions of dollars)	(millions of dollars)
1953-61	3.74	0.21
1962-66	13.64	1.48
1974-76	25.53	3.33
1977-78	9.29	2.76

**Source:**

John A. Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution*, second edition, Boulder: Westview Press, 1985, p.128.

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## 6.2. The United States and the Salvadorean Revolution

Contrary to the situation in Nicaragua, the United States strongly intervened in favor of the existing government in El Salvador, especially since President Reagan came into office. Already President Carter started to increase U.S. aid at the end of his term. In March 1977, during Carter's human rights campaign, President Molina had terminated U.S. military aid, to forestall a suspension of the aid by the United States.<sup>213</sup> In March 1980, Carter quietly resumed "nonlethal" military aid to the Duarte junta, simultaneously pressing for land reform. The aid was suspended again after the assassination of four nuns from the United States. In January 1981, when the rebels launched their "final offensive", Carter resumed the "nonlethal" aid and also started with "modest lethal aid".<sup>214</sup>

When Reagan came to power in 1981, he promised to draw the line against communism in El Salvador. He chose El Salvador as the major target for his policy to stop the expansionism of

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<sup>213</sup> Armstrong/Shenk, *El Salvador*, p.91.

<sup>214</sup> Adam M. Garfinkle, "Salvadorians, Sandinistas, and the Superpowers", in: *Orbis*, Vol 25, Iss 1, Spring 81, pp.4,5, and 9.

the Soviet Union and its allies. In his view, the socio-economic conditions were not the cause of the Salvadorean conflict. He perceived the conflict as a conflict imposed on the country by outside forces, namely, by the Soviet Union and the leftist Latin American regimes in Cuba and Nicaragua. He therefore favored a military solution of the conflict. The guerrilla forces had to be eradicated by military means. In February 1981, the state Department issued a "White Paper" to document Communist interference in El Salvador. The document tried to prove massive arms shipments from Communist powers to the rebels through Cuba and Nicaragua.

Reagan's policy to defeat the guerrillas had a military and a political component. Militarily, Reagan provided massive amounts of military aid to build up the Salvadorean army. Between 1980 and 1986, the strength of the Salvadorean army more than tripled, from 15,000 to 52,000.<sup>215</sup> The Salvadorean army has been trained in counterinsurgency warfare by U.S. instructors. U.S. military advisors entered the headquarters of the Salvadorean army to help planning the counterinsurgency operations. In the period 1980-1987, El Salvador received roughly \$810 million military aid from the United States.<sup>216</sup> In addition to the military aid, El Salvador received high amounts of economic aid to compensate for the economic damage of the war which was estimated at roughly \$2,000 million for the period 1980-1987. El Salvador received during this period approximately \$2,140 million in economic aid from the United States. This makes El Salvador one of the highest per-capita recipients of U.S. aid. Today, U.S. aid makes up more than 50% of the Salvadorean national budget.

Politically, Reagan tried to build a democratic center between the left, which is united in the FDR, and the right, which is supported by the oligarchy. The center force was to be Duarte's Christian Democrats. As Carter in Nicaragua, Reagan did not want to include the left in the government. He therefore opposed a negotiated settlement. A democratization process should legitimize the Duarte government and strengthen the Christian Democrats. The leftist political parties which had joined the FDR were invited to participate in the election, if they left the FMLN-FDR, but the government was unable to guarantee their security.

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<sup>215</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, July 30, 1986, p.22; *Christian Science Monitor*, April 2, 1987, p.9/10.

<sup>216</sup> For the exact amount of military and economic aid for each year see the Table 4 at the end of this section.

Reagan put little emphasis on internal reforms in El Salvador. When the Salvadorean private sector attacked Duarte's reform program, the Reagan administration insisted that the government abandoned phase II of the land reform, in order to reconcile itself with the private sector to get broader support.<sup>217</sup> The Reagan administration clearly wanted Duarte in office, but tried to pressure him towards a more rightist position. Instead of including leftist elements into a center coalition, the administration favored a coalition with elements of the business community.<sup>218</sup> The Reagan administration also disliked Duarte's promises of 1984 to reach a negotiated settlement of the war. Contrary to Carter's position towards Nicaragua, the Reagan administration never publicly criticized the atrocities of the military and the security forces which produced more victims than the historical "Matanza" of the thirties. Not even the well-documented massacres of unarmed refugees by the armed forces were ever publicly condemned.<sup>219</sup>

In summary, the Salvadorean government has gotten the strongest possible support from the United States since Reagan came into office. It is doubtful, whether the government would have been able to survive without the enormous U.S. military and economic aid. The claim of FMLN strategist Joaquin Villalobos, that without U.S. aid the army would have reached the point of collapse and the FMLN would have taken over, may be justified.<sup>220</sup> A symbolic event, the kissing of the U.S. flag by President Duarte during a visit to Washington in spring 1988, showed the strong dependency of the Salvadorean government on the U.S. support.

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<sup>217</sup> Enrique Baloyra, *El Salvador in Transition*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982, p.143.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p.141.

<sup>220</sup> Joaquin Villalobos, *The War in El Salvador: Current Situation and Outlook for the Future*, San Francisco: Solidarity Publications, 1986, p.8.



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**Table 4. U.S. Aid to El Salvador**

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	<b>Economic Aid</b>	<b>Military Aid</b>
	<i>(millions of dollars)</i>	<i>(millions of dollars)</i>
1979	11.4	0.0
1980	58.6	5.9
1981	116.3	35.5
1982	185.6	86.5
1983	261.9	81.3
1984	223.1	206.5
1985	428.8	136.2
1986	317.0	126.9
1987	552.1	134.0

**Source:**

*The Miami Herald*, August 2, 1987, p.1A, 25A, 26A,  
based on U.S. State Department, U.S. Embassy, and Central Bank of  
El Salvador.

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**Remark:** The number for economic aid in 1987 includes \$182.3 million in earthquake relief. When comparing the numbers for El Salvador and Nicaragua, one has to keep in mind that Nicaragua's GNP in the late seventies was approximately a factor 0.8 smaller than El Salvador's GNP in the mid-eighties, El Salvador's population had nearly twice the size of Nicaragua's, and El Salvador's land surface is roughly six times smaller than Nicaragua's.

### **6.3. Other External Influences on the Nicaraguan Revolution**

The policy of Costa Rica, Nicaragua's southern neighbor, strongly helped the FSLN in overthrowing the Somoza regime, especially during the last two years. Since the early sixties, Costa Rica provided sanctuary for the Nicaraguan guerrillas. Sandinista guerrillas that stayed on Costa Rican soil were occasionally arrested, but by and large they could operate without interference. After President Rodrigo Carazo had come to office in 1978, Costa Rica permitted the FSLN to have training bases on Costa Rican soil and to stage strikes into Nicaragua from this sanctuary.

Nicaraguan opposition politicians and persecuted guerrillas regularly received political asylum in Costa Rica. Costa Rica also allowed the transport of arms shipments to the Nicaraguan rebels through its territory. These shipments entered the country by truck and by plane from Panama. The Ministry of Public Security even provided personnel to convoy the transports. In November 1978, Costa Rica broke diplomatic relations with Nicaragua after border incidents resulting in four Costa Rican casualties and called for Nicaragua's expulsion from the OAS. In May 1979, the Nicaraguan opposition was permitted to establish a revolutionary government in exile in Costa Rica.<sup>221</sup> John A. Booth stresses the importance of the Costa Rican support for the Sandinista victory: "Without the sanctuary, the training camps, and the moral, diplomatic, and logistical support of Costa Rica, the rebels would undoubtedly have required much longer to oust Somoza, had they been able to do so at all."<sup>222</sup>

Several other Latin American countries, especially Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela, strongly disliked the Somoza regime and were willing to back the Sandinistas in order to oust him. Venezuela's president Carlos Andres Perez was "obsessed with overthrowing Somoza."<sup>223</sup> In 1977, Perez established a National Security Council, the first task of which was a study on the overthrow of Somoza. Perez used Venezuelan funds and arms to strengthen his country's influence with the Sandinistas.<sup>224</sup> His successor Luis Herrera was more cautious in this issue but he continued to secretly provide the Sandinistas with arms.<sup>225</sup> Another sign for the increasing recognition of the FSLN by some Latin American states was the destination of the plane that brought the guerrillas and the released prisoners out of Nicaragua after the seizure of the National Palace by Eden Pastora in 1978. Whereas the Sandinistas involved in the Christmas Party attack of 1974 had to flee to

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<sup>221</sup> Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, pp.130-132; Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, pp.125/126; Gordon/Munro, "The External Dimension of Civil Insurrection", p.72.

<sup>222</sup> Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, p.132.

<sup>223</sup> Robert Pastor, "The Target and the Source: El Salvador and Nicaragua", in: *Washington Quarterly*, Vol 5, Iss 3, Summer 82, p.119.

<sup>224</sup> Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition*, p.65.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p.127.

Cuba, Eden Pastora's group flew to Panama and Venezuela.<sup>226</sup> In September 1978, Panama and Venezuela had plans to directly attack Nicaragua. Venezuelan airplanes, which were stationed in Panama, were to bomb Somoza's bunker in Managua. The action was stopped by the United States in the last minute.<sup>227</sup> In May 1979, Mexico broke diplomatic relations with Nicaragua and urged other Latin American countries to follow this example.<sup>228</sup> On the OAS meeting in June, where the United States tried to find support for a multinational peace force, Panama allowed Miguel D'Escoto, the foreign minister of the provisory Nicaraguan government in exile, to present the point of view of the Nicaraguan opposition as a member of the Panamanian delegation. As the first country to do so, Panama thereby recognized the FSLN's recently built junta.<sup>229</sup> At the same OAS meeting, the decision of the Latin American states against the U.S. proposal for a multinational - peace force to keep the Sandinistas from taking power showed that the FSLN had considerable support from the Latin American states. Already in November 1978, a OAS human rights report on the cruelties of the National Guard after the September uprising had strongly accused the Somoza regime and helped to erode its support with the Latin American states.<sup>230</sup>

The Nicaraguan opposition also got support from the members of the Andean Pact.<sup>231</sup> The Andean Pact was formed in 1969 as an economic organization to create a regional common market. Its member nations are Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela. After requests from Venezuela in May 1979, the other four countries withdrew their recognition for the Somoza government and recognized the provisory revolutionary junta in Costa Rica.<sup>232</sup> When this junta entered Managua in July after the fall of Somoza, it was accompanied by the foreign ministers of the five

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p.72.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., pp.87-93.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p.131.

<sup>229</sup> Black, *Triumph of the People*, p.176.

<sup>230</sup> Gordon/Munro, "The External Dimension of Civil Insurrection", p.72.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., pp.65,67.

<sup>232</sup> Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, p.132.

Andean Pact nations.<sup>233</sup> Naturally, the FSLN got also diplomatic and material support from Cuba. Nevertheless, this support should not be overestimated. In the overall arms flow to the insurgents, the Cuban assistance played a minor role. Cuba did not want to provoke a U.S. intervention, while the FSLN was able to mobilize enough support from other Latin American countries. In 1979, at least half a dozen other Latin American states provided more help to the FSLN than Cuba.<sup>234</sup> Despite the U.S. critique of Somoza and the considerable support of the Nicaraguan opposition among Latin American states, Somoza was supported by several Western and Latin American countries. After the United States had stopped their arms shipments to Nicaragua, Somoza received weapons from other countries such as Israel, Portugal, Spain, Argentina, and Guatemala - by some of them until his final weeks. As already mentioned, Somoza also received credit from the International Monetary Fund and foreign private banks until 1979.

#### 6.4. Other External Influences on the Salvadorean Revolution

Contrary to the situation in Nicaragua, the two neighbors of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, support the Salvadorean government against the FMLN. The guerrillas never had a sanctuary beyond the Salvadorean border except in the early years, when a part of the border region was demilitarized after the "soccer war" of 1969 between El Salvador and Honduras. In December 1980, El Salvador normalized its relations with Honduras. Since then, El Salvador and Honduras have even carried out joint military operations against the guerrillas and Salvadorean troops were allowed to cross the Honduran border to persecute rebels.<sup>235</sup>

The FMLN has gotten much less support from the other Latin American states than the Sandinistas. The OAS tried to evade an involvement in the Salvadorean civil war. Several Latin

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<sup>233</sup> Gordon/Munro, "The External Dimension of Civil Insurrection", p.59.

<sup>234</sup> Thomas W. Walker (ed.), *Nicaragua in Revolution*, New York: Praeger, 1982, p.69.

<sup>235</sup> Baloyra, *El Salvador in Transition*, p.141.

American states, as Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela, and Brazil, opposed a stronger U.S. military involvement in El Salvador and favored a negotiated settlement of the conflict. But they generally did not support the FMLN. Panamanian strongman, general Manuel Antonio Noriega, has been involved in arms trafficking with the Salvadorean rebels since the early eighties, according to reports of his former aid Jose Isabel Blandon, Panama's former consul in New York.<sup>236</sup> Nevertheless, the reason for Noriega's involvement seems to have been personal enrichment rather than ideological support for the FMLN. As a positive sign towards the Salvadorean opposition, Panama allowed Guillermo Ungo to establish his permanent residence there. Venezuela, in the seventies a supporter of the Sandinistas, supported the Christian Democratic government of President Duarte. The European governments took a similar stance. They disapproved the U.S. military engagement and searched for a political rather than a military solution. But this meant rather disapproval of the Reagan policy than support for the FMLN. In 1980, West Germany, Denmark, Canada, and Mexico went one step further when they blocked an Inter-American Development Bank credit to El Salvador.<sup>237</sup>

France and Mexico took a more radical position. In August 1981, the two states recognized the FMLN-FDR as a "representative political force, prepared to assume the obligations and to exercise the rights that derive therefrom." The statement did not grant the rebels belligerent status, but it was without any doubt an important endorsement of their legitimacy.<sup>238</sup> The reaction of the Latin American states to this recognition of the FMLN-FDR shows once more their different position towards the FMLN-FDR, as compared to their position towards the Sandinistas. Key Andean Pact countries which were once supporters of the Sandinistas, attempted to issue a counterresolution against the French-Mexican statement.<sup>239</sup> The final statement criticized France and Mexico for intervening in El Salvador's internal affairs and asserted that a political and democratic solution should be found without foreign intervention. It was not signed by Peru and

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<sup>236</sup> *La Prensa*, Panama, January 31, 1988, p.1A.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, p.145; Arnson, *El Salvador*, p.72; Garfinkle, "Salvadorians, Sandinistas, and the Superpowers", p.9.

<sup>238</sup> Arnson, *El Salvador*, p.78.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

Ecuador, but besides the remaining three Andean Pact countries Venezuela, Colombia, and Bolivia it was also signed by Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Guatemala, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic.<sup>240</sup> Besides France and Mexico, the Socialist International supported the FMLN-FDR against the Salvadorean government.<sup>241</sup>

In addition to the different assessment of the situation in El Salvador as compared to Somoza's Nicaragua, U.S. pressure helped to bring the European states to support Duarte against the FMLN-FDR. Generally, Reagan tried to pressure Europe to follow U.S. policy in Central America. France stopped its arms sales to Nicaragua, when the Reagan administration threatened with retaliatory moves if the arms shipments to Nicaragua would continue.<sup>242</sup> After Napoleon Duarte's return to office in 1984, the climate became even less favorable for the FMLN-FDR. Mexico restored full diplomatic representation, West Germany and Great Britain resumed their financial assistance, and the European Economic Community renewed its assistance as well.<sup>243</sup>

The FMLN-FDR gets political support from Nicaragua and Cuba. It was also allowed to establish headquarters in Nicaragua. In the early eighties, Nicaragua and Cuba admitted that they were delivering arms to the Salvadorean rebels. Nevertheless, the amount of arms that were shipped to the FMLN according to the Reagan administration's "White Paper" seems strongly exaggerated. The paper, which tried to prove massive Soviet arms shipments through Cuba and Nicaragua, does not bear close examination. According to the Wall Street Journal, "the only concrete instance of Soviet aid delivered to the Salvadorean rebels reported in the 19 documents was an airplane ticket from Moscow to Vietnam for one guerrilla."<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Garfinkle, "Salvadorians, Sandinistas, and the Superpowers", p.7.

<sup>242</sup> Eusebio Mujal-Leon, "European Socialism and the Crisis in Central America", p.286, in: Howard J. Wiarda (ed.), *Rift and Revolution: The Central American Imbroglia*, Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1984, pp.253-302.

<sup>243</sup> Jose Z. Garcia, "El Salvador: Legitimizing the Government", in: *Current History*, Vol 84, Iss 500, March 85, p.104.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p.74.

The FMLN had other sources for weapons beside Cuba and Nicaragua. From kidnappings in the seventies, the guerrillas had obtained more than \$50 million in ransom.<sup>245</sup> In addition, the FMLN received money from solidarity groups, mainly based in Western Europe, which raised funds for the revolution in El Salvador. With this money, the FMLN made extensive purchases on the international arms market. The arms sales were sent to El Salvador via Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, Cuba, or Nicaragua.<sup>246</sup> Several arms deliveries from Costa Rica and Panama to the Salvadorean rebels by truck as well as by plane are reported.<sup>247</sup> Some government officials seem to have been involved in these arms transfers, but the reason for this involvement seems to have been corruption rather than a systematic policy. A part of the arms transfers from Costa Rica to the FMLN is likely to stem from arms shipments to the Sandinistas that were left over in Costa Rica after the Nicaraguan revolution. In addition to these arms deliveries, the FMLN captured weapons from the Salvadorean military. It also produces simple forms of weapons, such as hand grenades or mines, by itself.<sup>248</sup>

## 6.5. Conclusion

The results of this chapter show that the external influences made a victory of the insurgents easier in Nicaragua than in El Salvador. This can be seen by looking at the role of the United States, the most powerful nation in the hemisphere, as well as the role of the other actors. In Nicaragua, the policy of the United States was unfriendly towards Somoza and helped to destabilize his regime, although it did not give support to the Sandinistas. In El Salvador on the other hand,

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<sup>245</sup> North, *Bitter Grounds*, p.94.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Jeffrey Saint John, "The Guns of Costa Rica", in: *Policy Review*, Iss 20, Spring 82, pp.55/56; and *La Prensa*, Panama, January 31, 1988, p.1A.

<sup>248</sup> *Washington Post*, March 9, 1988, pp.A16,A19.

the United States strongly supported the existing government and made a victory over the insurgents a key policy issue. The Sandinistas also got broader support from other countries and international organizations. Especially important was the support from Nicaragua's southern neighbor Costa Rica. The Costa Rican sanctuary, the training camps on Costa Rican soil, and the arms shipments to the FSLN through Costa Rica strongly helped the Sandinistas. The Salvadorean insurgents do not have any comparable assistance, since their neighbors back the existing government.

In his memoirs, Somoza blamed the United States and Latin American states for his ouster:

Our nation was truly delivered into the hands of the Marxist enemy by President Jimmy Carter....His most active accomplices were Venezuela, Panama, and Cuba.<sup>249</sup>

This interpretation certainly leaves out of consideration Somoza's own mistakes and the other factors that contributed to his overthrow. But there is no doubt that the external influences generally were in favor of the Nicaraguan insurgents. As Booth puts it: "...the policies of foreign governments generally weakened the Somoza regime and strengthened the insurgents."<sup>250</sup> This is not the case in El Salvador.

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<sup>249</sup> Booth, *The End and the Beginning*, p.127.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.



## Conclusion

The last four chapters have shown that three out of four examined factors favored success of the revolution in Nicaragua rather than in El Salvador. The breadth of the revolutionary coalition, the military strength and strategies, and the external influences were in favor of the Sandinistas. Only the role of the Church favors the Salvadorean revolutionary movement.

When looking at the revolutionary coalitions, one finds different constellations in Nicaragua and in El Salvador. The Nicaraguan revolution is a struggle of a broad multi-class coalition against a narrowly based family dictatorship. The coalition included also the upper class, which was discontent with Somoza's economic policies. Somoza tried to gain control over the Nicaraguan economy by using his political position. For the purpose of this thesis it does not matter that this coalition broke down after Somoza had been ousted. The conflict in El Salvador, on the other hand, is by and large a class struggle. A relatively small upper class defends its historically-held privileges against the demands for social change from the side of the peasants, workers, and parts of the middle class. Therefore, the Salvadorean upper class and parts of the middle class are not included in the revolutionary coalition. In Nicaragua, the business community had played an important part in ousting Somoza and was represented in the first post-revolutionary junta. As a consequence of the different nature of conflict, the Salvadorean revolutionary movement is not as broad based as the Nicaraguan opposition against Somoza was. As was argued in chapter 1 based on several au-

thors on revolution, this makes the success of the revolution less likely. In addition, the policy of the Christian Democrats split the forces that wanted change in a reformist and a revolutionary wing.

The second factor that was examined, military strength and strategies, also favored the Nicaraguan revolutionaries. During their final offensive, the Sandinista fighters had a manpower ratio of roughly 1:2 when compared to the government forces. The corresponding ratio for the FMLN in El Salvador was more disadvantageous. It fluctuated between 1:4 and 1:7 throughout the eighties. The Salvadorean rebels are better armed, but the same is also true for the Salvadorean armed forces in comparison to the Nicaraguan National Guard. The strategies of the two revolutionary movements are similar. Within the Sandinistas as well as within the FMLN-FDR a strategy of general insurrection gained dominance. One difference is the strategy of economic sabotage that the FMLN pursues. It has hurt its image while U.S. economic aid basically made up for the losses. The results of this strategy are therefore doubtful. On the other side of the conflict, both governments have used repressive measures to crash the insurgencies, thereby alienating the affected people. The Salvadorean counterstrategy with its large-scale depopulation operations and its use of the air force can be considered more systematic and more effective than Somoza's counterstrategy. Hence, the military strength and the counterstrategies of the government favored the Sandinistas. In the case of the strategies of the guerrillas the situation is less clear. But even here there are elements that can be considered as disadvantageous for the FMLN.

The third factor which was in favor of the Sandinistas are the external influences. The United States helped to destabilize the Somoza regime, although they did not support the Sandinistas. In El Salvador, on the other hand, the U.S. support contributed heavily in keeping the existing government alive. It is doubtful if the current regime would have survived without the massive military and economic aid from the United States. Similarly, the Latin American states have played a much more supportive role in the case of the Nicaraguan revolution than in El Salvador. Especially helpful for the Sandinistas was the policy of Costa Rica, which provided them with a sanctuary, allowed the building of training camps, and channeled the flow of weapons into Nicaragua. The neighbors of El Salvador, on the other hand, supported the government against the rebels and the Honduran and Salvadorean army even carried out joint operations against the guerrillas. In addi-

tion, the policy of other states and of several international organizations was more supportive to the Sandinistas than to the FMLN.

The only factor which favors revolutionary success in El Salvador is the role of the Church. The heads of the Salvadorean Church were much more inclined to endorse the progressive reforms of the Latin American Church after Medellin. The Salvadorean archbishop started to promote the development of Christian Base Communities immediately after Medellin. In Nicaragua, CEBs were also formed but not in a systematic manner, since there was no impetus from the Church leadership to do so. The emergence of large mass organizations of peasants and workers in El Salvador to press for social change can at least in part be attributed to the work of the progressive clergy. In the formation of some of these organizations, members of the clergy were directly involved. The stronger involvement of the Church in the revolutionary process in El Salvador is also reflected by the work of the Catholic Universities of Central America (UCA). UCA San Salvador played a major role in the revolutionary process. Ten of its members participated in the first government after the coup of October 1979. UCA Managua, on the other hand, did not play a major role in the revolutionary process before the ouster of Somoza. A key role in the fight of the Salvadorean Church for social change played Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero. With his homilies, which were listened to all over the country, he doubtlessly helped to form the mass consciousness necessary for social revolution. The Nicaraguan Church did not have a figure like Archbishop Romero.

The author considers the above summarized results as enough evidence to explain the success of the Nicaraguan revolution and the continuing failure of the Salvadorean revolution in terms of the model of the four chosen factors. The application of the four factors shows that the Salvadorean revolutionary movement has to act in an environment that is less favorable to revolutionary success. The model is a very simple one. It does not try to lay down the strength of the influence of each of the four examined factors on the success of the revolution. It furthermore does not take into account that some of the factors are related to each other. For example, more favorable external influences contribute to more military strength of the government, when it receives massive military aid from foreign countries. Or, a broader revolutionary coalition can more easily convince foreign governments of its case, and therefore makes the external influences more favora-

ble. The exact specification of a causal model seems not to be necessary when considering the overwhelming evidence presented in the last four chapters. It seems reasonable that the stronger revolutionary influence of the Church in El Salvador cannot make up for the disadvantages of the Salvadorean revolutionary movement concerning the other three factors. The speculative task of setting up an exact causal model can therefore be evaded.

What does this research contribute to the theory of revolution? The findings of the comparative analysis support the theoretical work on revolutions, since the applied factors explain the observed differences in revolutionary success. This can increase our confidence in this theory. Nevertheless, the design of the analysis does not allow to rule out alternative rival hypotheses. The number of cases is too small and the number of factors too large to do that. The relationship between the four factors and the revolutionary success could be simply coincidental. When we have only two cases and we choose a factor randomly to build a theory, this theory will be supported with a 50% chance even when there is no causal relationship existing. Instead of a quantitative analysis with a large number of cases, this thesis has tried to make the assumed causal relationships more evident by showing how the factors worked in the development of the revolutionary process.

One of the advantages of this proceeding is that it allows to gain new insights into revolutionary processes which would hardly be received through a quantitative study. One of the observations in this study is that the relation between mass mobilization and revolutionary success is not as simple as expected. One would expect that the more people are mobilized for the revolutionary cause, the more likely is the revolution successful. The examples of Nicaragua and El Salvador show that this is not necessarily the case. The mobilizing force of Liberation Theology and other factors led to much stronger revolutionary organizations in El Salvador. But at the same time, this development led the militant oligarchy to the formation of death squads, in order to extinguish the revolutionary forces. The death squads were without any doubt a very successful tool against the revolutionary movement. Therefore, Liberation Theology has helped to increase the revolutionary potential but, at the same time, indirectly helped to strengthen the anti-revolutionary forces, thereby making revolutionary success less likely.

At this point, a discussion of the question of popular support is necessary. In newspapers and elsewhere, one often finds the opinion that the Salvadorean revolution has not been successful, because - in contrast to the Nicaraguan revolution - it enjoys no popular support. The author hopes that this thesis has made clear that the situation is much more complex and that many additional factors have influenced the revolutionary success. The statement about the popular support has a kernel of truth in it. Due to the nature of the conflict, the group that is opposed to change is larger in El Salvador than in Nicaragua. In El Salvador it is a whole class, whereas in Nicaragua it was a small clientele around Somoza. Nevertheless, this difference can hardly delegitimize the Salvadorean revolutionary movement and legitimize the overthrow of Somoza, as is often done. In both cases, we have a conflict of the interests of a small minority against the interests of a large majority. It is hard to believe that the FMLN would have survived for eight years without having popular support, when one takes into account the population density of El Salvador and the massive U.S. military aid for the Salvadorean Army.

Perhaps the strongest argument that a revolutionary potential exists in the Salvadorean population and that the FMLN-FDR is not an isolated group of a few thousand Soviet equipped rebels and some leftist politicians is given by the militant elements of the oligarchy themselves. Through their actions, they admit that they believe that the potential for revolution exists in Salvadorean society. Why otherwise would they have to kill tens of thousands of Salvadoreans through death squad assassinations, in order to keep the status quo?

This author does not claim that all the peasants and the workers back the revolutionary struggle. Neither does he think that every member of the oligarchy is opposed to reforms. A lot of peasants, for example, cooperated with the oligarchy and joined the vigilante organization ORDEN. Nevertheless, when looking at the organizations that constitute the two major antagonists in the conflict and at the demands they make, it can hardly be denied that the FMLN-FDR represents the interests of the lower classes and the ARENA party and the conservative parts of the military represent the interests of the oligarchy.

The reader might ask why the Salvadorean revolution has not yet reached the stage of general mass insurrection when the FMLN-FDR really enjoys popular support. Despite of much larger

popular organizations, the FMLN-FDR has not gotten support from neighborhood uprisings during its offensives, in contrast to the Sandinistas. The missing uprisings in the cities in El Salvador are certainly one of the reasons why the FMLN has not been able to seize power through military victory. The lack of such uprisings could indicate that even the lower class people do not back the revolutionary movement as strongly as they did in Nicaragua. Whether this is the case, is difficult to answer. At least it has to be noted that missing support for social change is not the only possible explanation for the lack of spontaneous revolutionary actions. Chapter 1 already tried to show that the intensity of revolutionary actions does not directly correlate with the intensity of the discontent within the corresponding population.

As already mentioned in chapter 4, at least two factors might have made it easier for the average Nicaraguan citizen to participate in revolutionary activities. First, most of the economic and political elite in Nicaragua endorsed revolutionary actions. Business leaders themselves called for strikes. In El Salvador this is not the case. There is no common consensus that the regime has to change. This makes it more difficult to risk revolutionary actions for people who are used to obey the orders of their employers or landlords.

Second, the systematic killings by the death squads may have played a role in deterring people from revolutionary actions. Whoever became known as a supporter of the revolutionaries had to take into account his assassination by the death squads. Somoza's National Guard did not hesitate to use any kind of repression either. But it did not work in the same systematic way and in absolute numbers there is no comparison between the assassinations of the Nicaraguan National Guard and the Salvadorean death squads. In El Salvador, mainly people with leftist leanings were threatened. Salvadoreans could therefore strongly reduce the danger by simply staying apolitical. In Nicaragua, during the last stage of the political revolution, the National Guard repression threatened the whole population, and especially the youth, without making distinctions. Joining the FSLN could give protection against the National Guard. In addition, the death squads are clandestine paramilitary organizations, not the official armed forces of the government. This makes it more difficult to fight against them and they are even more unpredictable. Nobody knows if his neighbor is not a secret member of the death squads. The death squads eliminated a large number of revolutionary leaders

and activists, without directly damaging the legitimacy of the government since they were private organizations.

A third factor might have prevented the Salvadorean people from general insurrection despite widespread discontent. This is the moderating role of the Duarte government. In Nicaragua, Somoza's rule was marked by an absolute intransigence concerning concessions towards the opposition. This can be seen when looking at Somoza's position in the U.S. sponsored negotiations in winter 1978/79. The conservative oligarchy-military coalition in El Salvador is not less intransigent. But beside that there existed the centrist government of Duarte which promised reforms and implemented some changes. It seems reasonable to assume that the Duarte government created some hope for change without the dangers and destruction that a mass insurrection would bring about. In Somoza's Nicaragua, there was no reason for such hopes. It remains to be seen how the population will react to a government of the ARENA party, which is likely to win next year's presidential election. The end of the moderating role of the Christian Democrats could increase the potential for mass insurrection. The observation of the development in El Salvador over the next years may help to clarify this question.

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