



# UPDATE

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## LATIN AMERICA

### El Salvador: US Pushes Ahead with Military Aid Against Advice of Archbishop Romero

On March 4th the Carter Administration advised four committees in Congress of its intent to reprogram \$5.7 million for foreign military sales (FMS) credits to the government of El Salvador. Widely understood in Washington and elsewhere in this country as the first instance of U.S. military assistance to the faltering junta, the \$5.7 million in communications equipment and vehicles—approved a month later by the two subcommittees holding congressional review power—in fact comes on the heels of two earlier U.S. attempts to influence reform-minded Salvadorean officers and soldiers through military aid.

In November 1979 the Salvadorean government received from the U.S. \$205,541 in anti-riot equipment, primarily tear gas and protective vests. Six men from the U.S. military traveled to El Salvador to train local military in the use of this equipment. In mid-December, the Carter Administration reprogrammed \$300,000 in IMET (international military education and training) credits, again with the purported aim of drawing the Salvadorean military away from their decades-old practice of using violence to repress the population. While anti-riot equipment and IMET credits had drawn relatively little public or governmental attention, two incidents in early 1980 provoked a sudden awakening and outcry within the United States regarding U.S. involvement in El Salvador, forced Congresspersons to study what had rapidly become a controversial policy issue and led to a bitter debate in the hearing and voting session of the House Subcommittee on Foreign Operations (chaired by Rep. Clarence Long, D-MD) before its eventual decision to approve the Administration plan.

The most significant of these incidents was a February 17th letter to President Carter by Archbishop Arnulfo Romero, recently returned to his country following a visit to the Vatican. In his

November 4th homily, the Archbishop had urged that any military assistance from the U.S. be conditioned to purification of the security forces, a satisfactory resolution of the disappeared and bringing to justice those responsible. Recalling the anti-riot equipment sent in late November and noting the sharp increase in repression by government forces in 1980, Mgr. Romero in his letter charged that the vests and tear gas, rather than proving a moderating influence on the military as had been hoped, in fact had provided better personal protection for soldiers as they used lethal weapons against the citizenry.

The Archbishop called on Carter as a Christian to stop any additional military aid to El Salvador and thereby to allow the Salvadoreans the possibility of resolving their own problems without outside influence.

The other incident responsible for evoking a first in-depth look at El Salvador by many had been the discovery that the IMET credits offered to the military-civilian junta in December were to be used for sending twelve-man U.S. military mobile training teams to El Salvador for extended periods. A February 14th *Washington Post* article on the training teams by Karen de Young, a study on military aid to El Salvador by the Institute for Policy Studies and a few dissident voices in the State Department were in great part responsible for forcing the Administration to put a hold until time of this writing on this particular aspect of U.S. military aid to El Salvador. According to a State Department official, U.S. policy towards El Salvador, within its military assistance program, had hoped (or still hopes) to provide United States "trainers"—curiously differentiated by State from "advisers"—for help in a "clean anti-subversive war" in El Salvador.

Debate on the question of U.S. military aid to El Salvador began, in a limited way, as early as the fall

each year, any failure in 1980 distribution or supply lays the basis for famine in the next, in a continuing cycle which must be broken if the country is to reach any economic — or political — stability.

There is one major rice harvest brought in from the fields from November to January. If this harvest is bad, two consequences ensue. The staple food begins to run out by

have no rice of their own within a few weeks. A lucky 15 per cent of villages have enough rice until the end of July. The relatively well-fed children of today could soon be a dim memory, and chubby little arms and legs shrink once again to sticks.

The extra burden of the next two to three months is that the rice planting begins toward the end of April, and the farmers need both food and seed rice.

but still have a right to rice at an assured low price. Apart from the fact that this amounts to the sale of free aid rice — a transaction donors will find difficult to accept — it means that government employees retain their position of relative privilege.

As soon as there ceases to be enough rice gross inequalities arise, and the population may be told, as they were last year, that they must "solve their

are not talking about saving Kampuchea. We are talking about degrees of tragedy. We can't feed the whole country and give it the strength to get into the fields and plant.

"At the very best, it is going to be a hard year, and what we are trying to do is to reduce the quantity of human suffering... At the worst, it will be terrible because, this year, we have the chance to do so much more."

## Archbishop Romero's final advice to Washington

*In an interview two days before he was assassinated last week, Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero outlined his support for El Salvador's recent agrarian reform, but warned that the armed forces are carrying out repressive acts against the people in the countryside. He urged the United States not to aid the security forces. The interview was conducted by John Clements and Arnoldo Ramos for radio station KPFA-FM, Berkeley, California.*

**Q:** The Carter administration wants to give El Salvador about \$55 million in economic aid and what U.S. officials describe as "nonlethal" military aid. What is your response to this offer?

**A:** I have made this quite clear in my letter to President Carter last month. We appreciate this aid, but the conditions accompanying the aid will decide whether it will be welcome. What is important for us is that the aid not be used to repress our people. The aid must not bring U.S. intervention against our people. If those are the conditions the aid will not be welcome by our people.

**Q:** Do you think such aid constitutes intervention?

**A:** The aid in itself is not intervention, and it is necessary. But this aid is only to the government, and it reinforces the government's program. It

does not support a program drawn up by the people as a whole.

**Q:** Recently, the civilian-military junta now ruling El Salvador passed an agrarian-reform law. Critics charge that it is being used to cover up increased repression in the countryside.

**A:** The agrarian reform is, by all means, a good thing. It has taken away all the landholdings larger than 1,200 acres, and they are to be given to the people. In itself, this is good. But the danger is that along with the reform has come a state of siege, supposedly to keep the right from interfering with the reform. But, in reality, repression against the people has increased tremendously. In areas not affected by the reform, the military is quite active, the people are being repressed. People are fleeing the countryside, coming here to San Salvador, or going into the mountains to sleep, because if they are found at night by the security forces they will be killed. Armed troops search farmhouses, burn peasants' possessions and kill people. Terror is rampant in the countryside. The agrarian reform is in itself a good thing, but it is accompanied by torture and repression which distorts the good will implicit in reform, and therefore the law is not supported by the people. I cannot verify repression against specific organizations, but, since the reform is being carried out by the armed forces, the people fear it will lead to the militarization of the countryside.

**Q:** Recent press reports say there may be a significant number of U.S.

military advisers in El Salvador. Is that true?

**A:** I've heard of this. In my letter to President Carter, I asked him to refrain from direct military intervention in our country, because it would mean support for the repression of our people. Carter says any military aid would be in noncombat activity such as transport, communications and logistics. But this answer does not satisfy me, because the aid is going directly to the security forces, and it is well-known that they are repressing the people. I don't deny that there are provocations by the left, but the response by the security forces is totally out of proportion. In many cases the repression comes down with no provocation at all. In fact there is a clear program aimed at destroying the popular organizations. Leaders of unions and other popular organizations are being systematically persecuted. Some people, looking just at the right wing, think that social injustice is responsible for all the violence. And there are those who see provocations from the left as the only problem, but really there are three sources of violence: the right, the left and the government. The people are confused, but we cannot see the popular outburst as just the demands of the left. The popular organizations are voicing the needs of the people. The demands of the people are just. But sometimes the people's anger goes too far and there are acts of violence which I do not support.

**Q:** Some observers consider the current upheaval to be caused by an extremist minority. Is this true?

**A:** There is a terrorist minority within the left... But, in the left there are two sectors, the popular organizations and the armed clandestine organizations. But they support the popular organizations because they articulate the basic needs of the people.

**Q:** The Carter administration believes that unless the people of El Salvador support the junta, only chaos will occur.

**A:** Those are not the only two alternatives. The United States is ignoring the alternative presented by the people, who are already involved in their liberation process.

**Q:** You have been criticized for overstepping the bounds of the church as a shepherd of your flock. How do you respond to this?

**A:** In good conscience I can say that I am very comfortable with my role as what you call the shepherd of my flock... The church cannot separate itself from the politics and daily life of the people. I must illuminate with evangelical light. I will criticize the bad and support what is good. Within this lies the autonomy of the church. I am not at the service of any ideology. I am at the service of the popular organizations, although not with the violent groups. I feel complete freedom to tell you, in this interview, the areas in which I disagree with the popular people.

## Archbishop Romero's final advice to Washington

organizations and the areas in which I agree with them. And I have tremendous hope in the popular organizations. By involving myself in the people's struggle, I am not making an opportunistic move. I am taking the position which the church has to take.

**Q:** The Christian Democratic Party along with members of the armed forces make up the government. Does it have a broad, popular backing?

**A:** They have lost a lot of ground. Their intentions are good; they are operating in good faith, but, on the level of actions, it is clear that the people see them as responsible in part for the repression which is being carried out against them. Perhaps they are responsible for the reforms which, I repeat, are good, but they are also responsible for the broadening of repression. This confuses the people. They pass their reforms as if everything would be OK, and this makes the reaction by the popular organizations appear unjust. But the popular organizations are not reacting to reform. They are reacting to repression. And their moves are just.

**Q:** Do you have a message for Salvadorans in the United States?

**A:** Yes, Salvadorans: Regardless of your faith, I think God has given us the role of supporting the people's struggle. Whether you live in El Salvador or not, you must participate in the Salvadoran process; you cannot regard the United States as a refuge. You can do magnificent things for your people.

April 6, 1980

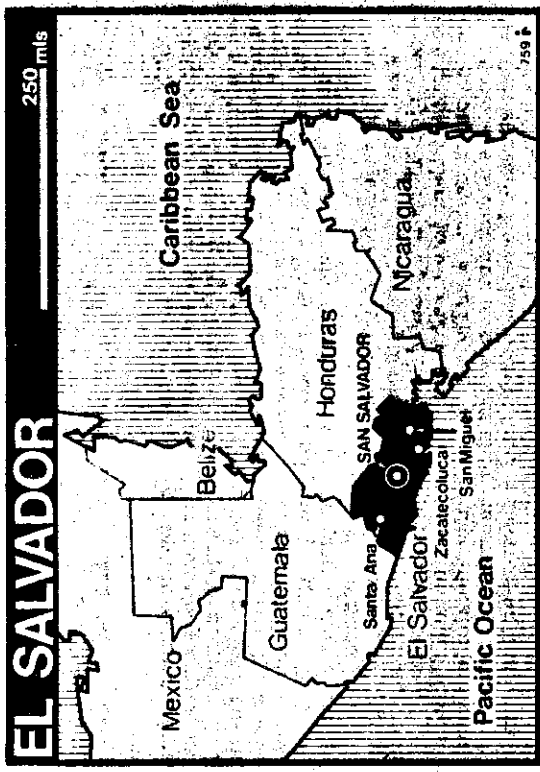
Manchester Guardian

El Salvador

File: El Salvador



Fighting in the streets of San Salvador



# Will Reagan 'save' El Salvador from the Left?

MORE THAN 2,000 people have been killed in the course of the year in the political violence in El Salvador. The prolonged crisis in the country has been described by the former American ambassador, Frank Devine, as "pre-revolutionary", and there are few who would disagree with the definition. Now, the with prospect of a new President in Washington, government and opposition are carefully examining the future.

Top level government officials in San Salvador have never disguised their enthusiasm for a Reagan victory, while the various revolutionary groups — never happy about the role of the Carter administration — now feel that there is greater danger of direct United States intervention in their country's affairs.

Although the local press in San Salvador carries frequent breathless charges of Cuban, Nicaraguan, Chinese, Soviet and North Korean involvement in the local revolutionary movement, the only substantiated charges at present have

governments, outside Central America to see if they would provide token military forces in support of American military intervention, should that prove necessary. Since only Venezuela expressed willingness to participate in such a plan, the US has been forced to turn once again to its more unconditional allies — the military governments of Guatemala and Honduras.

The danger, of course, is that the swiftly growing guerrilla movement in Guatemala itself could launch a major offensive the moment that Guatemalan troops were distracted to El Salvador. Such a development could set the entire region on fire.

The US role in El Salvador has not found a universal welcome abroad. According to Enrique Alvarez Cordoba, the president of the opposition Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), who has just returned from a world tour, several non-aligned countries are now prepared to sever relations with the

Alma Guillermoprieto reports from the Central American flashpoint

After 11 years of stalemated negotiations a hastily-arranged peace treaty between the two countries has been announced. The Salvadorean army is making every effort to flush out the guerrillas before the area is opened to anybody. Cross-border operations have become much more difficult for the guerrillas since the treaty was signed on November 1.

## Guerrilla war

THE CRISIS in El Salvador is interpreted differently — at least in public — by each one of the clashing elements involved. The ruling Christian Democrat military Junta says that it is staging a clean-up campaign that will make El Salvador safe for democracy.

The Left, according to Dr Antonio Morales Erlich, a member of the Junta, is angry because the Junta's peaceful revolution has stolen the masses away from it. Without popular support, he claims, the military problem is reduced to fighting the few terrorists who throw the bombs. That is not so, says the Left, still engaged in preparations for an all-out national war, and indeed so are the armed forces, despite all declarations to the contrary.

## Will Reagan 'save' El Salvador from the Left?

Dr Morales explained that the first stage of the agrarian reform affected holdings of more than 1,250 acres, the richest land in the country. The second stage will affect holdings of 250 acres or more. This is where the wealth lies, since it is this land that is used for growing coffee — the country's main export and the support of the ruling classes. "We are looking forward to the second stage," Dr Morales said. "It will begin right after the harvest and then we'll see a decrease in violence. The guerrillas will have been defeated."

The second stage of the reform is very ambitious, which may be one reason why it has been announced as imminent several times since May. The first stage seems to be working well in some fitness. Santa Barbara is a suspicious well-touted sugar plantation overlooking a huge reservoir. About 150 former labourers, now cooperative members, are diversifying crops, building a machine-repair shop, and

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US involvement in Salvadorean affairs — even before President Reagan takes over. These stretch from the public pronouncement on virtually every aspect of the country's domestic affairs by Robert White, the American ambassador, to the drafting of the government's agrarian reform law by Roy Prosterman, an adviser from the American Institute for Free Labour Development, who once performed the same task in Nguyen Van Thieu's Vietnam.

The reason for such open interventionism is no secret. Several State Department spokesmen have firmly declared that the US will not allow a Marxist triumph in El Salvador. To this end the US participated in the planning of the military coup last year that culminated in the establishment of the present junta — which rules with some Christian Democrat support. According to one former member of the cabinet, the US has also canvassed a number of foreign

an alliance of the middle class, the working class and the peasant organisations opposed to the present regime.

It is an alliance comparable to that put together by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Its leadership is expected to make up the new government if the guerrillas are successful in overthrowing the junta.

Of course the revolutionary protagonists in El Salvador's highly polarised crisis will not receive the same kind of universal and highly emotional support that the Sandinistas obtained in their national war against Anastasio Somoza. Costa Rica, Nicaragua's strategic neighbour during that war, remains aloof from the Salvadorean revolutionaries.

After returning from his tour, Alvarez Cordoba felt that the national correlation of forces was beginning to favour the FDR. Now, with the victory of Reagan, the tide may begin to flow the other way. The result of the US elections may

themselves indicative of the dimensions of the conflict. In the rugged northern Morazan area, the army has been pushing through one guerrilla camp after another over the last three weeks.

Colonel Guillermo Garcia, the Defence Minister, declined to reveal how many of his troops are involved, but the guerrillas estimate the number in their communications at 5,000, out of the armed forces combined total of 17,000 men.

Estimates of the guerrillas' own strength in the area are also hard to come by. There are probably a few hundred at most in Morazan, and they are known to be poorly armed. However, the government's military problem there involves thousands of peasants, many of whom not only support the guerrillas but have now taken up arms with them as well. Morazan shares a border with Honduras, and a 2-mile wide strip of territory between them has been disputed since the 1969 three-day war.

three of whom were killed. The repulsion felt by a majority of the population for the succession of military regimes since 1932 fed the clandestine guerrilla structures and the broad front popular organisations with an unceasing stream of members.

The first popular coalition was the Popular United Broad Front, created in 1975. Since then it and the other groups, the Peoples Revolutionary Block and the Popular Leagues have grown to the point where they now provide the militia base for the new, three-tiered Farabundo Martí Liberation Front (FMLN).

## Land reform

DR ANTONIO Morales Erlich has put on some weight, gained experience in dealing with the press, and acquired a new enthusiasm for his job as a member of the five-man Christian Democrat military Junta, in power for a year.

The former lawyer, who has a soft spot for the guerrilla movement and throughout a day-long excursion to a sugar plantation and a cattle ranch, both recently affected by the agrarian reforms.

This Junta is staking its own and the system's survival on its success in persuading the peasantry to support the reforms and abandon revolutionary movements. "The Left is finished," Dr Morales said cheerfully. "They are forcing the peasants to work for them at gunpoint. That's why there are so many refugees from the countryside."

We were travelling through the flat fertile plains where peasants attempting a land takeover last March were rounded up and shot by the army, on our way to one of the three reformed fincas in the area. The cane is growing tall and ripe, and the rice is already being

when it is an agrarian reform a success. Dr Morales asked rhetorically as we drove away, "When production increases, when yield increases, when pacification of the countryside ensues. When is it a failure? When the countryside goes bankrupt to finance it and production declines."

So far, the Government has invested about £3 million (payment for land to former owners not included) to reform 269 fincas, or approximately 40,000 acres of land. Estimates of this year's crops should be in by December. Many of the technicians at the Reform Institute do not share Dr Morales' optimism. As one of them commented, this may be the only agrarian reform in history in which the technicians have gone on strike a month after it began, demanding a better programme.

To some extent, the political demands of much of the peasantry are juxtaposed to the reform's goal — pacification. The redistribution of land went on through May, and it was then common to have the army move in after the technicians. After the right-wing peasant is identified the left-wingers, the latter would be lined up and shot. It was a schizophrenic public relations approach.

On the way to the second finca, where 150 peasants tend 1,000 cattle, Dr Morales explained his attitude towards the army and the para-military, right-wing forces. "You can't change attitudes overnight. Besides, those death figures are inflated. As you well know, the Human Rights Commission and other organisations like it are partisan. They're very good at publicity and we have failed in that regard."

The cattle ranch was a depressing sight compared with our previous stop. The peasants were listless and divided. Each one had taken about three acres to till on his own. There was almost no machinery.

## OBITUARY

### Andrei Amalrik: persistent dissident

ANDRE AMALRIK, who died in a car crash last week on his way to the European security conference in Madrid, was one of the most penetrating and most intractable of Soviet dissidents — persisting in his dissent even after he was ejected from Moscow in 1976.

Despite his comparative youth, Amalrik, who was 42, did as much as anyone in the Soviet Union in the past 10 years to give coherence and force to the unofficial opposition. He was at his most incisive with a book entitled *Will the USSR Survive until 1984?* which was published a couple of years after the toppling of Czechoslovakia in 1969.

He acknowledged in this book that he had been against the Soviet system as he saw it since he was a

Journey to Siberia, Amalrik produced one of the most graphic accounts of the conditions imposed on internal exiles.

Scenes on the long train journey are depicted with a disturbing humour.

But most useful for students, and members of the "opposition" in the Soviet Union was his work in forwarding the Chronicle of Current Events. This brings together accounts of the treatment meted out by the courts to dissidents. Amalrik's considered view was that not only intellectuals but also workers and collective farmers, opposed Soviet Government.

Andrei Amalrik