

student, to whom the rhetoric may come easily, but who must learn what he can about tactics and coercion. This difficulty apart, and a slip-up which translates Stockholm from Sweden to Denmark, the book has no flaws.

In addition to the text, the book includes a good bibliography and two useful appendices. The reviewer recommends this book for anyone who may have some responsibility for responding to and managing a terrorist incident.

D.C.

Ambassador Frank J. Devine
El Salvador: Embassy Under Attack
Vantage Press, New York, 1981

As we watch the unfolding tragedy of El Salvador from the safety of our living rooms, we are apt to become so preoccupied with the daily television horror that we neglect the past and the future. If North Americans and Europeans are to contribute to the resolution of this conflict, they have to clear their minds of images and symbols, and of the propaganda that colours most reports from that unhappy land, and try to comprehend the present through study of the past. Only in the light of knowledge and understanding can we begin to address future options.

Frank Devine's book is a valuable source of knowledge. As United States Ambassador to El Salvador 1977-1980, the author was a close observer during the period when that country endured Marxist terrorism, counter terror by authority or by vigilante groups of the Right, a revolutionary coup that failed to resolve the conflict, and the slow, deadly slide towards civil war. As a diplomat, trying to interpret what were sometimes confused and contradictory instructions from Washington to Salvadorian leaders, Devine was at the centre of this storm. And he was also at the middle of two other, related tempests.

One concerned his personal safety. As Paul Wilkinson pointed out in the Spring 1981 issue of this journal,¹ the profession of diplomat must now rank as one of the most dangerous in the world. Devine's departure to his Salvadorian mission had to be postponed because rightist terrorists planned to kill him on his arrival. The conspirators' intention had evidently been to leave evidence pointing to Marxist culpability, thus turning American public opinion against the left and justifying a repressive counter. Hardly had he and his family settled into their new home when it became apparent that the Marxist groups were planning his kidnap. Careful and involved measures were needed to thwart this plan.

Additionally, in September 1978 and October 1979, the U.S. Embassy was attacked, and in June 1980 the Devine's residence was bombed. The successful defence of the embassy in the second and most determined assault demonstrated how good planning, strong leadership and cool nerves can repel armed attack. This admirable example was, alas, overshadowed only five days later by the debacle in Tehran. The western media, fascinated by disaster and recrimination, focussed public attention on Iran and neglected the Salvadorian success story.

The third hurricane that swirled around Ambassador Devine was generated by the Human Rights activists in the United States, who had a power base in the State Department. Inspired by noble motives, but blinded by ideology, this movement promoted their beliefs and policies with all the passion and much of the tyranny of the Spanish Inquisition. Devine writes:

“My own presence on the Salvadorian scene was somewhat questioned and resented by many human rights advocates. When I set out to determine the facts and form my own conclusions, they criticized me for not accepting their word that El Salvador was a human rights violator. They were also critical of my preference for quiet diplomacy as opposed to resounding public statements of condemnation. Some did not like my practice of seeking to utilize a mix of inducements as opposed to purely retaliatory ones. Perhaps, most revealing of all was the letter that one human rights activist wrote to another at the time when Assistant Secretary of State Terence Todman — also on their black list — was transferred from Washington to be Ambassador to Spain. The human rights activist wrote, ‘Now that Todman is gone, perhaps Devine’s position will be weakened. The trouble with Ambassador Devine is that he is neither pro-Government nor pro-Opposition. He thinks his job is to be objective!’”

With friends like these, the author really did not need enemies, but he had these in plenty too, both of the Salvadorian Right and Left. The objectivity in his profession is equally apparent in his writing. Nowhere does he claim superior insights or a monopoly of moral virtue, and he is content to tell his story without drawing too many conclusions. This is not a history book, but it contains much information that will be invaluable to those who will write the history of El Salvador's nightmare struggle. The style is easy, and the story of this modest man's astonishing tour makes compelling reading. To the general reader and Latin American specialist alike, this book is recommended.

M.T.

1. Paul Wilkinson, “After Tehran”, in *Conflict Quarterly*, Vol 1, No 4 (1981).