

Understanding the FMLN: A Glossary of Five Words

by
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In a recent article, William M. LeoGrande portrayed the Salvadoran Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) as a moderate political force, struggling to achieve "military reforms that Washington itself has long sought."¹ On the other hand, Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley contends that "by both act and ideology . . . the Salvadoran guerrillas have set themselves apart from almost all other regional revolutionaries," and that "the closest parallel to their acts seems to be *Sendero Luminoso* . . ."² The FMLN has many faces, and apparently, an analyst for each of them. After a decade of war, numerous communiqués, interviews and peace proposals, one can still ask: What is the FMLN and what does it want ?

The primary concern of this article is to interpret the nature and political orientation of the FMLN through five key organizational and positional aspects.³ First, it examines the FMLN's configuration as a "front"; that is, a unification of various organizations sharing the conviction of being the vanguard of the Salvadoran people. Then, the article tries to understand its political orientation by explaining its position on four interconnected issues: National Liberation, Peace, Elections, and War. It attempts to demonstrate that the FMLN is an aggregate of politico-military groups which, pending the conquest of power and the implementation of radical socio-economic and political changes in El Salvador, strives to deligitimize the current regime, and to be recognized by the other political actors as a legitimate member of their club. The essay concludes with two conditions which must be fulfilled by the FMLN in order for it to have meaningful negotiations with the government and ultimately reach a durable peace in El Salvador.

FRONT

Among the major contemporary guerrilla movements in Latin America, the Salvadoran's has proven to be the most composite, aggregating tens of officially distinct organizations. Therefore, before discussing the FMLN's political agenda, it is necessary to draw a portrait of its somewhat elusive organization. A front usually means a coalition of various organizations, united for a specific goal and in which each retains its own identity. The FMLN was formed on 10 October 1980.⁴ Its main components are the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL, founded in 1970), the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP-1972), the National Resistance (RN-1975), the Central American Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRTC-1976), and the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS-1932). These groups are considered either as pure military organizations, or as broad "political-military" organizations, encompassing specific military wings such as the Popular Armed Forces of Liberation (FAPL/FPL), the Armed Forces

of National Resistance (FARN/RN), the Popular Armed Forces of Liberation (FARPL/PRTC) and the Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL/PCS).

All these military wings, sometimes called the Popular Army of Liberation (EPL), were first coordinated by the Unified Revolutionary Direction (DRU-1980). However, since the DRU was sometimes called the Unified Revolutionary "Political-Military" Direction (DRU-PM), it is difficult to know what groups—the military or the political-military—this Direction coordinated. Moreover, it remains unclear whether the DRU (PM) has been supplanted by the FMLN. Today, the highest executive body seems to be the General Command of the FMLN, although the function and importance of the FMLN's Joint Chief of Staff (*Estado Mayor General Conjunto*) remains unclear. No definitive evidence leads us to affirm that all these acronyms and appellations reflect permanent hierarchical or political distinctions.

Originally, these organizations were linked to "popular organizations" formed during the late 1970s.⁵ In January 1980, the Revolutionary Coordination of the Masses (CRM) was created to unify them. Basically, the "popular organizations" were "federations" mobilizing from above some fifteen unions and student's organizations.⁶ None of these organizations are still active today, as a result of both the heavy repression in the early 1980s and the FMLN's narrowly militaristic orientation.⁷ After its unsuccessful "final offensive" in January 1981, the FMLN moved into the countryside and neglected the "masses" for most of the remaining decade. For urban support, the FMLN now relies more informally on such organizations as the National Union of Salvadoran Workers (UNTS) or the Committee of Mothers and Relatives of Political Prisoners, Disappeared, and Assassinated (COMADRES) as well as on other more or less independent groups and institutions (the "popular church," the National University, the various solidarity networks, etc.).⁸ The popular movement network in El Salvador is indeed in an endless process of renewal.⁹

Finally, the FMLN is linked strategically to the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR-1980). In fact, both are often presented as a single front: the FDR-FMLN (or the FMLN-FDR.) The FDR was primarily a front of fronts, bringing together the CRM and the so-called Democratic Front (FD).¹⁰ This was before the virtual disappearance of the CRM and its components—hence the near symmetry between the FDR and the recently created *Démocratic Convergence* (CD). Today, the FDR is basically a coalition of two "political parties:" Guillermo Ungo's MNR and Rubén Zamora's MPSC; the Social Democratic Party being relatively new and weak.¹¹ The FDR is still linked to the FMLN through a Politico-Diplomatic Commission (CPD-1981), but officially remains an "autonomous" organization.¹²

This portrait is doubtless sketchy. A complete picture should also include the "brigades" and the urban "commandos" whose undeniable (and possibly growing) autonomy in the FMLN remains to be systematically elucidated.¹³ Given all these uncertainties, the self-confidence with which most observers present the Salvadoran "revolutionary movement" (with significant variations from one author to another) is somewhat amazing.¹⁴

For the FMLN the notion of front also strongly suggests a notion of leadership. In the early 1980s, according to its Leninist mind-set, the FMLN openly proclaimed itself as the “vanguard” of the Salvadoran people¹⁵ before starting to deny — rather confusedly — having any hegemonic ambition.¹⁶ Who exactly belongs to this vanguard is not an easy question to answer. It seems, for example, that almost every rebel who can give an interview, and they are several, is a *comandante*. During the last military offensive, the FMLN general command’s communiqués (unlike 1989’s peace proposals) were all signed by the same five commandants: Eduardo Sancho (nom de guerre: Fermán Cienfuegos), Francisco Jovel (Roberto Roca), Jorge Shafik Handal, Salvador Sánchez Ceréen (Leonel Gonzalez) and Joaquín Villalobos (René Cruz). Whether they are “more equal” than other *comandantes* — like Claudio Armijo, Leo Cabral, Nidia Diaz, Facundo Guardado, Ana Maria Guadalupe Martinez, among many others — is still an open question.

This *vanguardismo* raises the very important question of the FDR’s role in the “revolutionary movement.” Its official position is somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, the 1987 political pact with the FMLN stated that both fronts are distinct and autonomous. Officially, “the FDR is not the FMLN’s political wing, nor is the latter the FDR’s military wing.”¹⁷ As a matter of fact, the FDR’s participation in the “counter-insurgency plan” (the last presidential elections) under the CD’s banner, along with the FDR’s disagreement with the commanders’ decision to break off talks with the government in Fall 1989, are the last indicators of its growing autonomy.¹⁸

On the other hand, according to the 1987 pact, both organizations coincide in struggling for the “defeat of the counterinsurgency project” and for the “triumph of the democratic revolution, anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialistic.” They are supposed to take decisions by “consensus” and to consult one another for the elaboration of a “common tactic and action plan.” True, they do not officially share the same “final program” and “ideology,” but they still fight to “reach together the political power in El Salvador.”¹⁹ The CD’s programmatic platform repeats almost textually the FMLN argument against elections, making its decision to participate in the March 1989 contest somewhat contradictory.²⁰ All in all, the FDR agenda and strategy remain unclear, as does for that matter, the CD’s. The FDR might be part of the “revolutionary vanguard” and pursue the FMLN’s agenda by other means. But as a politico-military organization, the FMLN is clearly what Régis Debray called the “vanguard of the vanguard.”²¹ Therefore, to agree on substance with the FMLN while diverging on style and tactics is a doubtful and risky business.²²

In summary, the creation and consolidation of the FMLN in the 1980s has meant a qualitative step toward the unity of the revolutionary forces in El Salvador, though probably not a definitive one. The elusiveness of its organizational structure, in spite of tremendous ideological homogeneity,²³ suggests that the issue of power is not yet settled amongst the different groups, levels, zones, and leaders. In fact, the definitive unification seems to be contingent upon the fate of the “revolution” itself and not just of the FMLN’s organization

stricto sensu. Ultimately, the FMLN must be the unique front of all the Salvadoran people; the FMLN must be the people. Hence the link between the front and its goal: the national liberation of the Salvadoran people.

NATIONAL LIBERATION

The FMLN's original mind-set is clearly rooted in the ideas of the Latin American Castroite generation. In fact, all the guerrilla movements of the 1960s and 1970s, at least in Central America, have been deeply influenced by the ideology developed by Castro and its followers after the downfall of Batista.²⁴ Even the so-called "fifty years" of "Sandinista" insurrection is largely a myth, since the FSLN was formed almost thirty years after the assassination of Sandino, and was all but a group of Leninist university cliques before the 1970s. These guerrillas have little in common with previous Latin American revolutionary movements (Bolivia, Guatemala and Mexico), let alone the fundamentally "defensive" Spanish guerrillas of the early nineteenth century.²⁵

For these contemporary guerrilla movements, national liberation appears as an anti-imperialist, anti-oligarchic and anti-capitalist struggle, and, furthermore, as a will to build a new egalitarian society under the guidance of a virtuous politico-military vanguard. The "revolutionary process" is one of deep political and socio-economic transformations but it is also one in which the current contradictions of modernity — between the city and countryside, intellectual and manual work, men and women, rulers and the ruled, etc. — are addressed and hopefully resolved. The outcome is a new society and a "new man," who works with enthusiasm, participates actively in the implementation of revolutionary policies, and abides by the highest moral standards.²⁶

This communalistic vision of the world is very common amongst the contemporary guerrilla movements in Latin America and has been "hegemonic" for almost three decades in the cradle of all guerrilla movements in Latin America: the national (and some catholic) universities.²⁷ It is currently epitomized by the Peruvian Shining Path, which brings out very clearly the nearly religious inspiration that distinguishes the contemporary Latin American guerrillas from the more Promethean European socialist movement. It might be interesting in this regard to consider the Shinning Path as an "ideal-type" to analyze the other guerrilla movements in Latin America. Lead by a professor and composed mainly of university students, the *Sendero Luminoso* is very dogmatic and believes in the pedagogical aspect of military actions. Highly paternalistic toward the lower classes, it mistrusts whoever is not under its control. At the same time, it resents and fears the cities, the birthplace of vice and alienation. Since the cities are also the cradle of guerrillas, the rebels absolve themselves by taking refuge in the mountains, a sort of purgatory of suffering and loneliness. However, their sins could not be totally absolved short of an apocalyptic change in every aspect of social life (*Revolución...*), or short of their own personal sacrifice (*...o muerte*). In Central American leftist movements, it is very likely that this ideological eclecticism, both "progressist" and "pre-modern", has been strengthened by the strong influence of radical priests during the last twenty years.²⁸

National liberation is also a practical goal, not just a theoretical one. In this regard, the FMLN has already sent signals that it is becoming more flexible. The former rector of the Jesuit University who was assassinated in November 1989, Ignacio Ellacuría, even said in early 1989 that the FMLN was experiencing its "Vatican II"!²⁹ Calls for "socialism" or the recognition of the two armies have given place in most of its recent communiqué to dry military reports and calls for peace, negotiation and democracy. So much so that Joaquín Villalobos, the FMLN's most talkative *comandante*, is almost right to proclaim that the Army Proclamation of October 1979 sounds more radical than the FMLN's public platform.³⁰

Here we must understand that the FMLN's call for peace and democracy does not contradict its commitment to armed struggle or its Leninist inspiration. The FMLN has belatedly learned that national liberation is not just a goal but a *process*, with consecutive stages.³¹ From the mid-1980s on, the FMLN proposed to join with any other forces in a Government of Broad Participation (GAP) on certain conditions, which were unacceptable to the government. In its proposal of 31 January 1984, explicitly aimed at the formation of a GAP, the FMLN claimed as "immediate measures" the abolition of the 1983 Constitution, the recognition of the "Popular power" (e.g. the territory under FMLN's military control), the dissolution of the security forces and the purge of the military, among others demands. Once these immediate measures were fulfilled, the FMLN identified some guidelines for a transition toward a Revolutionary Democratic Government (GDR) and negotiation of a military truce. Although, the FMLN discarded the idea of immediate hegemony, it clearly formulated its own conditions for the formation of the GAP and set the agenda for the transition to the GDR.

In some recent peace proposals discussed below, the conditions claimed by the FMLN for a *rapprochement* with the other political forces seem less constraining. However, the GDR is still the ultimate goal.³² Yet it is hard to know exactly what the FMLN means by that. The "GDR's seven points" announced by the "DRU of the FMLN" in December 1980 are almost meaningless as a political platform. They are general guidelines, not policy proposals. The FMLN obviously realized that the lengthy Marxist CRM platform of February 1980, allegedly summarized by the "seven points", was a political embarrassment.³³ Typically, the only relatively clear points are those dealing with *who* will be admitted to participate: those who "contributed actively in the overthrow of the fascist dictatorship" and the "patriotic" sectors of the armed forces.³⁴

In short, one can say that the GDR is "strategically" transitional.³⁵ It is a direction, a path toward socialism.³⁶ Notwithstanding his willingness to highlight the "important historical and strategic relationship with social democracy by means of the FDR-FMLN alliance," Villalobos makes very clear that the FMLN, and for that matter the Salvadoran revolution, should not be confused with the social democratic movement and its agenda: "We do not intend to present the Salvadoran revolution as a social democratic revolution; that, in addition to being false, would be schematic."³⁷ Not surprisingly, the platform presented by the CD (also labeled "GDR") during the last elections was seen by

Villalobos as a mere “way to move forward to a negotiated solution” — that is, a preliminary step.³⁸ This does not contradict with the FMLN’s public approval of the CD program: it could even approve a far more moderate program, or even the idea of having no program at all. Again, the FMLN is not a political party searching to mandate a specific platform, but the vanguard of a “revolution,” which is both an end and a process, or as suggested previously, a direction.

The GDR is now toned down, like most contentious issues likely to thwart FMLN endeavors to gain recognition by the political club. In fact, the GDR is being replaced by the word “peace”; both mean a consensual society in which the FMLN no longer has reason to wage war.³⁹ In spite of this new approach, however, there is no evidence that the FMLN has given up its Leninist conception of the state and the revolution. When talking about the FMLN’s “Vatican II”, Ignacio Ellacuría rightly added that “as in the Council case, [this new approach] does not mean a rupture with the essence of its inspiration and its intentions.”⁴⁰

A few months before the November 1989 offensive, Villalobos said straightforwardly: “It would be dishonest and ridiculous to deny the influence of Marxism and Leninism within the FMLN The FMLN understands Marxism-Leninism as a scientific discipline for analyzing reality and as an organizational theory for struggle. But we do not convert the tenets of Marxism-Leninism into dogma that might isolate us from reality.”⁴¹ In the early 1990s, this “but” is not as reassuring as it would have been (at least) a decade earlier. Besides, one must emphasize that Villalobos is quoted from his article published in *Foreign Policy*, that is, under extraordinary incentive to sound “moderate.”

The FMLN remains consistent in its appraisal of the current political situation in El Salvador, in its condemnation of capitalism and imperialism, and in its reluctance to consider the Salvadoran government and army as little more than Yankee puppets. In the first part of his article quoted above (*Foreign Policy* published only the second part), Villalobos contends that “the capitalist modernization and the pseudo reformism [in El Salvador] failed, and there is actually no feasible way out for the system.”⁴² He also qualifies the Castroite regime as a “people’s democracy.”⁴³ In its year-end message in January 1990, the FMLN interpreted the recent events in East Europe and Soviet Union very much like the very conservative French Communist Party: “This renewal process has been victoriously interpreted by the United States as the interment of communism. In fact, communism has never existed until today.” As for the assessment of “real” socialism, the FMLN is startlingly positive: “The socialist system has clearly proved that it is a more human system and that it is capable of facing the greatest challenges that mankind will encounter in the next millennium.”⁴⁴

Equally important is the way the FMLN perceives its actions and the other political players. Acts of sabotage and killing of opponents, even civilians, are still viewed as necessary in the process of raising the masses’ consciousness.⁴⁵ Referring to these attacks — and particularly to the “Zona Rosa” operation, during which American advisors and unarmed individuals were machine-gunned at a San Salvador terrace⁴⁶ — Villalobos stated that they “not only hit the principal enemy, but they did it in the fundamental zone,

where the classes and the social contradictions are expressed more acutely and shamefully for the popular movement." In his view, "those acts moralize the people and demoralize the enemy."⁴⁷

The "war" justifies not only assaults against military barracks, but also against presumed "informants" and civilian officers. Even innocent civilians are easily sacrificed for the sake of the Revolution. The argument can be made that if the rebels launched the offensive in the most crowded neighborhood of San Salvador in November 1989, it was not in spite of but because they expected a violent and indiscriminate response from the military.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the use (and misuse) of heavy artillery by the rebels against military targets located in densely populated areas have caused numerous casualties amongst innocent civilians. It has been repeatedly criticized across the board, even by FMLN sympathizers concerned with the political cost of such operations. However, it has not led to any significant change in the FMLN's behavior.⁴⁹ All these indicators raise doubts about the intellectual evolution of the FMLN's leadership and rank-and-file, whose radicalism is certainly unparalleled in Latin America, including Cuba and Nicaragua during their insurrectional periods.⁵⁰

In summary, it is difficult to see how national liberation can be matched with any pluralistic conception of political action and social change. What will happen if the FMLN does not feel represented enough in an eventual government of broad participation, keeping in mind that it does not intend to lay down arms at this stage or ever?⁵¹ How can the FMLN end its struggle for national liberation without eliminating most of the current political players? These questions are now postponed by the FMLN. It no longer wants the central question of power sharing to rest explicitly on the short-term agenda, as in the past. Villalobos enunciated this in a puzzling formula: "Ultimately it is not a question of sharing or not sharing power, but of forging a true democracy in El Salvador."⁵² All the FMLN wants for the moment is *to move forward*. So the *comandantes* talk about peace and sometimes elections, but firmly hold onto their weapons.

PEACE

If the elections are a major part of the counterinsurgency plan, the peace proposals are equally a part of the insurgents' strategy. The vast majority of the Salvadoran people want peace; that is, a final and rapid end to the hostilities. Attentive to the people's will, all political actors in El Salvador strive for peace. In fact, every single actor in the lingering Central American civil war — belligerent, observer, arms dealer, foreign government, fellow traveller and of course "Latin Americanist" — is warmly favorable to a peaceful settlement. There is probably no other conflict in recent history that has brought so many peace lovers into existence. However, peace could also be seen as a long range goal, for which it is first imperative to eliminate the "enemies of peace;" which means waging war. In this perspective, nothing could be more peace-oriented than a military offensive, the machine-gun being the necessary complement to the white dove.⁵³

Over the last ten years, the FMLN has presented many peace proposals. The first one was typically presented in an international forum. That was in September 1981, when Daniel Ortega read the FMLN's "proposal for direct negotiations" to the United Nations' General Assembly. From then on, FMLN's representatives have met numerous times with civil and military officials, in and out of El Salvador. But none of these initiatives have come close to achieving a significant and lasting agreement.

On 23 January 1989, less than two months before the presidential elections, the FMLN formulated a comprehensive peace proposal, certainly its most successful ever. The up-coming elections in March 1989, the fifth since the war began, promised to be another set-back for the insurgents, above all with the embarrassing participation of the FDR through its new electoral vehicle, the CD. There are also indications that this bold move was a response to a perceived decrease in popular support, including among its own troops.⁵⁴ Essentially, the FMLN's proposal agreed to recognize the electoral result, provided the elections constitutionally due in March were postponed until September 15; that is, more than three months after the end of Duarte's constitutional mandate. The proposal included other specific and sound requests, such as the integration of the CD into the Elections Central Council, the reform of the electoral code and the possibility of Salvadorans living abroad to cast their vote. The FMLN also announced that it would support the CD candidates and platform. *But the fundamental point is the recognition of the electoral results, without any claim to power sharing or the fusion of the two armies (at this stage).*

This proposal is a landmark for two basic reasons. First, unlike the previous proposals, acceptance of power sharing and recognition of the two armies do not appear as preconditions to an agreement. Second, for the first time the FMLN agreed to recognize the legitimacy of an electoral process under the current regime. Even if the proposal has been greeted with sentiments ranging from caution to suspicion by the other political forces, one can say that in light of the legacy of war and mistrust, the response, as a first step, was rather positive and encouraging.⁵⁵

The proposal also reveals the limits of the FMLN's "new thinking". First, the FMLN proposed a military truce starting just four days before the elections and lasting until four days after the elections. Later, it was extended to sixty days: thirty days before the elections and thirty days after. Following this pause, military pressure would resume, which indicates clearly that by recognizing "the legitimacy of the electoral result", the FMLN did not intend to recognize the legitimacy of the new government, let alone the regime. There is no evidence whatsoever that the FMLN was about to lay down its arms after the elections. In the proposal, it is said that if all its conditions were respected, it would make "possible an irreversible political solution to the conflict." In other words, it would make possible a process of reconciliation, which, as we will see below, involves other dramatic steps.

This confusion suggests that the reason the FMLN did not formulate that proposal four months earlier (which would have deprived the Duarte

government and the army of their constitutional excuse to reject it) was precisely to show its lack of concern for the current political rules in El Salvador.⁵⁶ If accepted by the government — a possibility perhaps unforeseen and unwanted by the commanders — this “let’s-forget-the-constitution” proposal would have in fact replaced the “counter-insurgent” endeavor toward legalistic rule and institution building (successful or not), with the traditional FMLN approach which favors an equal status for all “belligerents”.⁵⁷

Second, this was not a final proposal to end the war, but rather one to “convert the elections into a contribution toward peace.”⁵⁸ After many debates and discussions, the political parties met with the FMLN representatives on 20 and 21 February in Oaxtepec, Mexico. The rebels presented a new set of conditions “so that the implementation and realization of our proposal on elections might lead to a definitive end to the war.”⁵⁹ Thus, they asked 1) for the prosecution and indictment of all individuals involved in the massacres and political crimes during the decade; 2) for the reduction of the army from about 55,000 troops to its size in 1978 (12,000 troops); and finally 3) for the complete restructuring of the Security Forces (National Police, National Guard and Treasury Police) into a new single force headed by the civilian-led Ministry of the Interior.

Were they accepted, these conditions would have marked a very positive step toward political democratization in El Salvador. But it was unacceptable to the army, and therefore unacceptable to the government. The FMLN must have known that it would be next to unthinkable for the army to accept a thorough purge in its ranks for the crimes committed over the last ten years; especially if the purge was more or less directly monitored by those unpunished “terrorists”, who spent this period storming military barracks, among other military and non-military targets. During the transition in Argentina, the Montoneros were in jail, not among the prosecutors.

The reduction of troops by almost eighty percent and the dissolution of the current security forces were hardly imaginable without a foreign military intervention. The argument can be made that the *comandantes*, knowing their enemies very well, foresaw that these conditions could not be accepted by the Salvadoran army.⁶⁰ It is therefore tempting to consider that this peace proposal was a continuation of war by other means.

On 6 April 1989, the FMLN came back with a new proposition, on the grounds that the presidential elections and their results “do not represent the desire and will of the majority of the Salvadoran people,” and consequently that the ARENA government was “illegitimate.”⁶¹ The FMLN asked for new elections and new negotiations on three conditions: 1) an “agreement on democratization”; 2) an “agreement to set basis on which the structural causes of war could be resolved”; and 3) an “agreement to attain peace.” Basically, this proposal included no new demands except some vague claims for “real democracy”, for addressing the “structural causes of the war” and for a “new society.” Among the structural causes traditionally underlined by the FMLN, the agrarian structure is clearly the most important. A few months before the April proposal, Villalobos said: “So long as El Salvador’s agrarian structure is

not profoundly transformed, the war will go on for many years, not because some leaders order conflict, but for a simple social reason: too many Salvadorans live in a very small area."⁶² Very interestingly, were all these conditions accepted, the negotiations on "cease-fire" might finally "start" to determine not an end to hostilities but the "territorial delimitation and the mechanism to make it respected by all sides." So the government and the army were asked to go through all those steps toward reconciliation only to be finally confronted with the option of negotiating the size of the national territory conceded to the FMLN.

The April proposal is clearer than the January proposal for two reasons. First, it clarified that the rebels were ready to talk about a truce, not about a surrender. They would give up neither armed struggle nor the so-called liberated zones.⁶³ Second, the radical socio-economic reforms for which they started fighting in the first place were at least mentioned. There is no evidence that the FMLN might lay down arms before the "structural causes" of the war were addressed. In September 1989, the FMLN presented a new proposal that did mention the conditions for a definitive ending of hostilities (among which, a constitutional reform to *advance* the 1991 legislative and municipal elections), but these were vague and unrealistic, and lacked the political impact of the January proposal.⁶⁴ Moreover, one suspects that the *comandantes* were already planning the military offensive launched less than two months later.⁶⁵

The most recent round of negotiations within the framework set by the Geneva agreement in April 1990, have stalled amid growing intransigence from both sides.⁶⁶ The FMLN, for one, has bolstered its demands, particularly concerning what it calls the "demilitarization" of the Salvadoran society. Since August 1990, the FMLN asks nothing less than the "total abolition of the army."⁶⁷ Moreover, in its "Program" of September 1990, the FMLN asks explicitly for the creation of a "new socio-economic order" and a "new constitution," among other demands. All in all, the gap between the FMLN and government has not been this wide since the mid-1980s.

All these remarks do not mean that the FMLN's proposals are valueless. The FMLN is pointing out some real obstacles to democratization in El Salvador, e.g. the size and composition of the current army and security forces. Moreover, it provides some leeway for other players to push their own agenda in the short run. One should remember that uncertainty is a fundamental ingredient for democratization. As the recent developments in Nicaragua suggest, the opening of the political space may bring about unpredictable outcomes. However, the cost of meeting the rebels' concessions, even on an "installment plan," appears as high as ever; even higher, since Fall 1989. Without casting doubt about their will as individuals to end hostilities (after all, they are also victims of this war), it is hard to avoid the conclusion that their political objective is not primarily to attain peace, but to alter the basis on which negotiations have taken place so far. That is, from the current one, which bestows legitimacy to the Cristiani government (based on the current constitution and electoral system), to one that denies it this advantage. The FMLN does

not just want peace; literally, to quote Villalobos, it wants to “put peace *above existing laws*.”⁶⁸ All its peace proposals have this common denominator: they ask the government to admit publicly its illegitimacy. They vary only in what the next step should be.

ELECTIONS

In the FMLN’s January 1989 proposal the legitimacy of elections is typically separated from that of the government and the regime, something hardly thinkable in a liberal bourgeois perspective. For self-proclaimed Leninists, elections could be a useful device in specific conditions, but certainly not the cornerstone of democracy. Since the “revolution” aims at achieving social justice, it is largely a zero-sum game. This is not easily compatible with a bourgeois bill of rights, as demonstrated among others by Hannah Arendt in her classic essay on the French and the American revolutions. Furthermore, the poor score achieved by the CD in the last elections confirms the *comandantes*’ premonition that revolution and elections are not easy things to conjugate.⁶⁹

In early 1989 Villalobos condemned the coming elections as a “fundamental political component of the low intensity war plan” — which is the truth, though not all the truth. He goes on: “The US embassy hopes that the FMLN will concede to a truce during the elections and by doing so, along with the CD participation, will renew the interest of the masses for elections. But the elections can neither dismantle the social outbreak nor turn the correlation of forces to the counterinsurgency’s advantage. The elections are a much insufficient tool to fix such a deep economic and political crisis and for overcoming the dimension of this war.”⁷⁰ On the other hand, the FMLN does not reject elections as such; but then, who does? For Villalobos: “The FMLN is not against elections in principle. It is against elections realized during a war, when the country is subdued to the United States, which is the country that actually determines the fate of El Salvador. If the national sovereignty is not restored and a national solution to the war is not found, there will be no true elections in El Salvador.”⁷¹

These two last statements summarize the FMLN’s position on elections. First, the elections are not very important at this point. Second, numerous changes must be brought about before free and fair elections can take place, much beyond the security of its members (e.g. the “national sovereignty” must be “restored” and a “national solution to the war” must be found.) In other words, the FMLN does not rule out the ballot box as a possible option during the “revolutionary process” as long as it does not bog down or interrupt the rebels’ course toward national liberation. And, although the FMLN decided early this year, for the very first time, not to disrupt the electoral process, there is no evidence that it abided by the results to the point of bestowing more legitimacy on the government or the regime.

In summary, it seems that for the FMLN, as for many other political actors in Latin America, elections are legitimate inasmuch as they do not allow

the enemy—typically “anti-democratic”—to capture the central power. It also echoes an old revolutionary principle, which states there should be “no freedom for the enemies of freedom” (Saint-Just). Typically, in its statements on elections since 1982, the FMLN indifferently claimed that it did not participate because the elections were unfair, and that the elections were unfair or not really significant because it did not participate.⁷³ The link between elections and legitimacy is loose at best; almost non-existent between elections and power. What matters is who wants (and is authorized) to play in the political competition, and under what conditions.

WAR

To understand the political orientation of the FMLN one should not be confounded either by its peace proposals, or by its timely statements on democracy and elections. One must pay more attention to the adamant resolution with which the FMLN claims to preserve and even expand its military capability. War (or armed struggle) is, along with national liberation, the key concept in understanding the FMLN.

The rebels have proposed military truces but have never contemplated renouncing armed struggle short of a significant victory on both the military and political fronts. For the FMLN arms are tantamount to power: the people's power. This power is absolutely non-negotiable, because the fate of peace and democratization in El Salvador lie on one fundamental and almost exclusive factor: the “correlation of forces.” The rebels can go back and forth on elections, power sharing or military truces, from one proposal to the next. These issues are not fundamental to the FMLN. However, since they are fundamental to its enemies, the rebels have learned to use them periodically—above all before elections. These issues are “money,” following the Parsonian metaphor, in the negotiation with the Salvadoran government and the Yankees. However, to give up one machine gun would be a sacrilege. The arms should be like the people: one and indivisible. Sometime in the future this power, still virtual and almost mythical, will be reconciled with reality.

To begin, commandante Roberto Roca (of the PRTC tendency) put it bluntly: “We always have had a policy of negotiated settlement to this conflict and we have launched successive calls for dialogue and negotiation . . . but we always said and we reiterate it before the government that we will never lay down our arms, ever. The arms represent a huge conquest for the democratic and revolutionary forces, linked to the clearest interests of the broad masses. Neither Duarte nor Reagan can ask the FMLN, the people's revolutionary vanguard, to concede on the [bargaining] table what they couldn't achieve on the battle field.”⁷⁴ As a reply to the question “What are the minimal conditions to lay down the arms?” commandante Villalobos replied very clearly: “Lay down the arms? We don't have any conditions because we are not about to lay down arms, ever.”⁷⁵

Armed struggle is the very *raison d'être* of the FMLN as vanguard of the revolution and the Salvadoran people. The correlation of forces which

determines the FMLN's destiny will ultimately determine the destiny of the revolution. "El Salvador needs a revolutionary change to establish a democratic and pluralistic society; that change needs to be guaranteed by military power," said Villalobos.⁷⁶ Logically, revolutionary changes are more likely to be carried out if the correlation of forces favor the FMLN. If there is just an equilibrium the FMLN can try to improve its position, through negotiation and/or bullets.⁷⁷ If there is a perceived imbalance at the expense of the FMLN, then the rebels must put the revolutionary agenda and the negotiations aside and improve their power position by force. Whatever the scenario, the FMLN's power lies in its military might.

A recent illustration of this approach is indeed the major military offensive called "Out With The Fascists; Febe Elizabeth is Alive" launched on 11 November 1989.⁷⁸ It seems that for many combatants on the spot, and maybe some senior commanders in Managua, November 1989 was a "final offensive", as in January 1981.⁷⁹ A few days after the offensive began, the FMLN ordered its troops and the population under its control to form "popular governments" and "to get stronger until the total control of the country [is achieved]."⁸⁰ One of the most prominent leaders of the Politico-Diplomatic Commission of the FDR/FMLN, Salvador Samayoa, said emphatically: "There is no longer a possibility to back away. Now, the only possible negotiation is on the basis of the overthrow of the Cristiani government."⁸¹ Unlike in January 1981, however, most commandants foresaw that the whole operation might end up as a successful military operation, but not a total victory. So they refrained from proclaiming a "final offensive" unless it turned out to be feasible.⁸²

The FMLN's official justification for this operation is quite similar to that adopted after the failure of the "final offensives" early in 1981. The objective was to prove the FMLN's military capacity to escalate the war, with the ultimate goal being to improve correspondingly its political leverage with the government, the army and its sponsor, the United States.⁸³ The FMLN specifically targeted what they perceived to be the two pillars of the counterinsurgent strategy.⁸⁴ First, it successfully challenged the assumption that the FMLN was a desperate and crippled army. For the first time, the FMLN extended its attack across the rich neighborhoods of San Salvador with remarkable mobility and — most important for the rebels — before the eyes of a very important visitor, the General Secretary of the OAS, Dr. Baena Soares.⁸⁵ Second, it challenged the idea, increasingly accepted even among the democratic left, that the "moderate" faction of ARENA was now in command of both the government and the army. Here, the similarity with the rebels' reaction to the formation of a reformist government in October 1979 is striking: in both cases they forced the supposedly moderate government to "show its true face" by launching military attacks in the highly populated areas (Ayutuxtepeque, Ciudad Delgado, Ilopango, Mejicanos, Soyapango, Zacamil). To put it bluntly, they provoked the army.⁸⁶

In the final analysis, everything happened as if the FMLN's mentor was not Lenin or Castro, but the US scholar Charles Anderson. More than twenty years ago, Anderson contended: "One may say that the most persistent

political phenomenon in Latin America is the effort of contenders for power to demonstrate a power capability sufficient to be recognized by other power contenders, and that the political process consists of manipulation and negotiation among power contenders reciprocally recognizing each other's power capability."⁸⁷ However, the FMLN apparently failed to understand that as emphasized by Anderson, this kind of strategy only works under specific conditions. For him, "new power contenders will be admitted to the system only when they do not jeopardize the position of established contenders. . ."⁸⁸ The last peace proposals were apparently too few too late to reassure the contenders, and to convince them that the FMLN was a legitimate political force. Hence, as in the Hannah Arendt's model, violence appears as a substitute for power, not as a demonstration thereof.⁸⁹

It is doubtful, though not impossible, that the military pressure will allow the FMLN to attain its objective.⁹⁰ But according to Rubén Zamora, the FMLN "has created a tragic paradox" in launching its 1989 general offensive: "While it demonstrated that there is no military solution to the costly civil war, it has hardened the armed forces' opposition to serious negotiations and to the democratic forces that support this alternative."⁹¹ In Washington, President Bush's first reaction was to ask Congress to increase aid for El Salvador. (In 1981, the FMLN's final offensive caused resumption of US military aid, before Reagan took office.) Last Fall, the assassination of the Jesuits and the lack of will and capacity to prosecute its perpetrators, not the so-called "genocide" committed by the army during the offensive, provided the reason for withholding 50 percent of the US military aid to El Salvador (\$42.5 million). Finally, the offensive's impact on the Central American scene has been negative. In the San Isidro de Coronado's declaration of December 12, the five Central American presidents (including Daniel Ortega) pleaded for the "demobilization" of the FMLN, adding that "the presidents of Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua expressed their decisive support of Salvadoran President Alfredo Cristiani and his Government, as a faithful demonstration of their unvarying policy of supporting governments that are the product of democratic, pluralistic and participatory processes."⁹²

The assumption that a perceived weakness in the insurgent camp would induce the government to seek a military solution to the crisis is certainly sound and realistic. But the conclusion the rebels drew from this assumption, ie. that a perceived strength would force the government to negotiate, is less convincing. The reason is simple: while there is still some evidence that the military is confident about winning the war, there is no evidence of the military's fear of losing it. By "escalating the war," the FMLN ended up escalating the army's impatience to finish it at any cost. One should bear in mind that the army's reaction during the last offensive was not to rush to the negotiating table, but to "behead" (*descabezar*) the civilian leftist leaders, like the Jesuits of the UCA.⁹³

In spite of its impressive military performance during the offensive, the FMLN admitted afterward that it had failed to shake the government's and military's perception of its ineffective military (and therefore, for the FMLN,

its political) power: "We view as gravely erroneous the persistence of a government policy based on the idea of the FMLN's alleged military weakness. This position, *similar to the one presented prior to November 11* will only lead the country to greater levels of confrontation."⁹⁴ This statement suggests that, beyond the obvious but almost unverifiable structural causes of the Salvadoran internal war, one of the principal obstacles to peace is a by-product of this decade-long war itself; that is, the triumphalist complex. Both sides picture the other as an essentially weakened and isolated force, supported by a hostile foreign country. Throughout the 1980s and in an astonishingly surrealistic way during the 1981 and 1989 offensives, both camps endlessly claimed victory, even against blatant evidence to the contrary. In fact, one sometimes has the impression that they are not talking about the same war. All actors thus have more incentive to challenge the adversary's assumption, by escalating the war as well as the level of misinformation, than to bring the war to a conclusion. This macho triumphalism and the political blindness it engenders is a powerful and underestimated impediment to real negotiation and peaceful settlement in El Salvador.

CONCLUSION: TWO CONDITIONS FOR NEGOTIATION AND PEACE.

To identify all the conditions that must be fulfilled by all sectors of the Salvadoran political class to reach a peace settlement is beyond the scope of this article. As Ted Gurr (among others) has pointed out, many variables, societal as well as psychological, can determine the magnitude of political violence in a given country, and hence the obstacles to peace. However, based on the FMLN's conception of national liberation, peace, elections, and war, it is possible to suggest that two minimal conditions must be fulfilled by the rebels for true negotiations and peace to occur in El Salvador. First, one cannot come to terms with the FMLN without knowing *exactly* under what conditions the FMLN would cease the national liberation struggle and dismantle itself as a military organization. Second, the rebels must realize that in a democratization process, not everything is negotiable at the top and as a precondition to initiate it. A purge of the military and satisfactory human rights guarantees are negotiable, with sufficient US and international pressure. The remainder of its agenda, more or less implicitly formulated, is not. It means that the social and economic reforms, which are the *raison d'être* of this insurgency, must be submitted to the voters, not bartered for peace. Democracy is not only the result of democratization; it is also its main instrument. In summary, in order to engage in a genuine process of negotiation for democratization, the FMLN must give up the sacred Revolution.

Endnotes

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1. William M. Leogrande, "Now, for Peace in Salvador," *New York Times*, 17 March 1990, p. 15.
2. Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, "Understanding Failed Revolution in El Salvador: A Comparative Analysis of Regime Types and Social Structures," *Politics and Society*, 17, no. 4 (1989), p. 519.
3. This paper will not deal with the "causes" of the Salvadoran internal war. One can agree with Michael Radu when he contends that "one of the most amazing things about the abundant bibliography on Latin America's revolutionary traditions and movements is the almost total absence of a serious analysis of the revolutionaries themselves." See Michael Radu, ed., *Violence and the Latin American Revolutionaries* (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction, 1988), p. 1.
4. See "Comunicado de la Dirección Revolucionaria Unificada (DRU-PM) anunciando la formación del Frente "Farabundo Martí" para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN)," *Estudios Centro Americanos* (ECA), 384/385 (October-November 1980), pp. 1092-1093.
5. The People's Revolutionary Bloc (BPR-1975) was linked to the FPL; the People's Leagues of the 28th of February (LP28-1978) were linked to the ERP; the United People's Action Front (FAPU-1974) was linked to the RN; and finally, the Popular Movement of Liberation (MLP-1979) was linked to the PRTC. The UDN was first considered as the PCS' electoral vehicle and sometimes as its popular organization; now it is a small political party devoted (without much reciprocity) to the FMLN.
6. See for example Salvador Samayoa and Guillermo Galvan, "El movimiento obrero en El Salvador-Resurgimiento o agitación?," *ECA*, 369/370 (July-August 1979), pp. 591-600. It should be stated that radical priests have played an important role in the political mobilization of both graduated students and peasants in these organizations. Basically, they brought them through a "religious conversion," and then to a "political conversion" against the "structural sin", that is, the socio-economic system and its political regime. See Carlos Rafael Cabarrús, *Génesis de una revolución, Análisis del surgimiento y desarrollo de la organización campesina en El Salvador* (México: La Casa Chata, 1983); Rodolfo Cardenal, *Historia de una esperanza, vida de Rutilio Grande* (San Salvador: UCA editores, 1987); Edelberto Torres-Rivas, *Centroamérica: La democracia posible* (San José: EDUCA, 1987), pp. 130-32. (It is deplorable that the rather optimistic title chosen by Torres-Rivas for this book has been changed in the English edition [Boulder: Westview, 1989] for a trendier *Repression and Resistance: the Struggle for Democracy in Central America*).
7. This militaristic orientation at the expense of the masses' mobilization is sometimes criticized among the Salvadoran left. See for example the special issue of *ECA*, 465 (July 1987).
8. As for the external military support, the Cubans and Sandinistas are probably the principal suppliers of arms and ammunition, the latter even after the election of Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. The FMLN also has access to the black market, which was fueled in the region by the Nicaraguan *contras*. See Clifford Krauss, "Nicaraguan Says Arms Still Flow," *New York Times*, 20 June 1990, p. A4; Mark Speck, "Accounts support Managua link to arms plane," *The Miami Herald*, 4 December 1989, p. 10A; "Salvador Rebel Says Contras Supplying Arms," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 December 1990, p. 13A; "Sandinistas admit arming FMLN rebels," *The Times of the Americas*, 9 January 1991, p. 3.

9. This situation is clearly a result of the ongoing repression against the leftist opposition. However, the struggle for the control of the "revolutionary movement" at all levels is probably an important factor. For an illustration, see "La problemática urbana del área metropolitana de San Salvador (AMSS) y el movimiento popular", *La Universidad (Revista de la Universidad de El Salvador)*, no. 6, (June-July 1988), pp. 31-42.
10. The FDR regrouped the CRM, the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR-1965), the Social Christian Popular Movement (MPSC-1980), the General Association of Salvadoran University Students (AGEUS), the National Conference of the Popular Church (CONIP), numerous unions and union federations, and other less significant groups.
11. The PSD's leader, Reni Roldan, was Ungo's running mate during the last presidential election (March 1989). For Ungo, the difference between their two parties is basically that the PSD is "social-democrat" whereas the MNR is "socialist-democrat." See his interview in *Análisis*, 9-10 (Sept-Oct. 1988), pp. 60-71.
12. FDR-FMLN, "Pacto político," *ECA*, 461 (March 1987), pp. 281-282.
13. One encounters, for example, the Rafael Antonio Arce Zablah Brigade (ERP), the Urban Commando Mardoqueo Cruz (PRTC), the Pablo Castillo Metropolitan Front (FPL), and also the Clara Elisabeth Ramírez Metropolitan Front, allegedly a splinter of the FPL (and of the FMLN) but which still broadcasts communiqués from *Radio Venceremos*. With regard to the urban commandos' relative autonomy, one notices that many initiatives recently undertaken by them have provoked surprise and embarrassment at the FMLN's top level. For example, the CPD's leader Ana Guadalupe Martínez first rejected the FMLN's responsibility for the killing of former president of the Supreme Court, Dr. Francisco José Guerrero, in November 1989. Then she shifted and assessed the operation as a "mistake". See "Crónica del mes", *ECA*, 493/494 (Nov.-Dec. 1989), p. 1152.
14. See for example Robert Armstrong and Janet Shenk, *El Salvador, The Face of Revolution* (Boston: South End, 1983), pp. 253-54; Raúl Benítez Manaut, *La teoría militar y la guerra civil en El Salvador* (San Salvador: UCA editores, 1989), pp. 222-24; Cabarrús, 1983, p. 320; CINAS, "El proyecto popular," in Edgar Jiménez et al., eds., *El Salvador: Guerra, Política y Paz (1979-1988)* (San Salvador: CINAS & CRIES, San Salvador, 1989), pp. 175-193; Javier Rojas, *Conversaciones con el comandante Miguel Castellanos* (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Andante, 1986), p. 183; James Dunkerley, *The Long War, Dictatorship and Revolution in El Salvador* (New York: Verso, 1985), p. 303; Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador, Origins and Evolution* (Boulder: Westview, 1982), pp. 124, 137; *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1988). Over the last two or three years, the FMLN and its sympathizers have refrained from talking about "factions" inside the FMLN, dismissing it as little more than a fiction thought up by the enemies of the revolutionary process.
15. Even in the FMLN's agreement with the so-called young officers (*Juventud Militar*) in January 1981, it is said that "the new army will accept the FMLN-FDR as the vanguard of the people and the revolution, and obey the Democratic Revolutionary Government (GDR)." See FMLN and *Juventud Militar*, "Pacto político de la Juventud Militar y las Fuerzas del FMLN," *ECA*, 387/388 (January-February 1981), p. 92.
16. "Regardless of the decisive role the FMLN may play," contends Villalobos, "the leading edge of revolutionary change cannot be limited dogmatically to it." But in its year-end message transmitted by *Radio Venceremos* last January, the FMLN still emphasized its leading role, and not just in the Salvadoran struggle: "Comrade militants, leaders, and combatants, our struggle is at the vanguard of social changes that will continue to be made around the world through the struggle of the masses. Victory in El Salvador is guaranteed by an exemplary heroic people, whose most faithful representatives are the FMLN fighters . . . our struggle, which is essentially for self-determination and democracy, is in the capitalist world the spearhead of the struggle of all Latin American and Third World countries, which demand these transformations." See

- Joaquín Villalobos, "A Democratic Revolution for El Salvador," *Foreign Policy*, no. 74 (Spring 1989), p. 114; "FMLN General Command Issues Year-End Message," broadcasted on *Radio Venceremos* (2 January 1990), and translated in *FBIS-LAT*, 90, 005 (8 January 1990), p. 25.
17. FDR-FMLN, "Pacto político," p. 282.
 18. See Rubén Zamora (on Salvadoran television), "Zamora on Political Solution to Conflict," in *FBIS-LAT*, 90, 021 (31 January 1990), p. 18; Guillermo Manuel Ungo, "FDR Leader Ungo on Government, FMLN," in *FBIS-LAT*, 90, 003 (4 January 1990), p. 21.
 19. FDR-FMLN, "Pacto político," p. 281.
 20. See "Plataforma programática de la Convergencia Democrática," *Relaciones Internacionales*, 24-25 (September 1988), pp. 147-148.
 21. Régis Debray, *Lutte armée et lutte politique en Amérique latine* (Paris: Maspéro, 1967), p. 94. Generally speaking, the actors who use violence can hardly consider those who don't as their equals. As the French sociologist Julien Freund pointed out, "the consequence of resorting to violence is to oust the other means or to subordinate them to its strength." Max Weber also noticed that "the bearer of arms acknowledges only those capable of bearing arms as political equals. All others, those untrained in arms and those incapable of bearing arms are regarded as women, and are explicitly designated as such in many primitive languages." See Julien Freund, *Sociologie du conflit* (Paris: PUF, 1983), p. 99; Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (New York: Bedminster, 1968), vol. 2, p. 906.
 22. See Enrique A. Baloyra, "Negotiating War in El Salvador: The Politics of Endgame," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 28, no. 1 (Spring 1986), pp. 135-36.
 23. While reading the different communiqués of the FMLN's components since the end of the 1970s, one cannot help but notice the uniformity of their comments on the Salvadoran situation, as well as the similarity in the rhetoric being used. It seems that all communiqués have been written by the same person. Also, the FMLN's theoretical considerations on workers, peasants, masses, cities and countryside, offensive, counter-offensive, insurrections and general strikes, are as confused as the organization itself. One can draw the hypothesis that, as in Cuba, these so-called guiding principles were in fact produced *a posteriori*, according to the correlation of forces between the rebels and the government on the one hand, and amongst the rebels on the other. For a glimpse of the doctrinal confusion of the FMLN's "spokesmen", see for example Sara Miles and Bob Ostertag, "FMLN New Thinking," (Special Issue on the FMLN) *NACLA, Report on the Americas*, XXIII, no. 3 (September 1989).
 24. Talking about its early ideological influences, the Sandinista *comandante* Omar Cabezas summarizes this point in one sentence: "I know and came to Sandino through Che." Omar Cabezas, *Fire From the Mountain: The Making of a Sandinista* (New York: Crown, 1985), p. 12. See also Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley, "Winners, Losers, and Also-Rans: Toward a Comparative Sociology of Latin American Guerrilla Movements," in Susan Eckstein, ed., *Power and Popular Protest, Latin American Social Movement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), p. 139; Yvon Grenier, "Guérilla et terrorisme en Amérique latine," *Études Internationales*, 19, no. 4 (December 1988), pp. 613-627; Steven Palmer, "Carlos Fonseca and the Construction of Sandinismo in Nicaragua," *Latin American Research Review*, XXIII, no. 1 (1988), pp. 91-109.
 25. See for example Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla, A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977).
 26. One can speculate that, like the citizen of the Greek *Polis*, the "new man" does not exist as an individual but as a member of a political entity. He enjoys "rights" as long as he is a part of the "people"; that is, if he abides by the revolutionary line. For numerous and easily accessible illustrations of the original FMLN's mind-set, see the "Documentación" supplement in *ECA* from the late 1970s to the early 1980s. See

- especialmente FAPU, "Este es el programa del gobierno que el pueblo necesita," *ECA*, 377/378 (March-April 1980), pp. 353-356; Coordinación Revolucionaria de las Masas, "Plataforma Programática para un Gobierno Democrático Revolucionario de la Coordinadora Revolucionaria de Masas," *La Prensa Gráfica* (San Salvador, 28 February 1980), pp. 36-37; Carlos Rafael Cabarrús, *Génesis de una revolución*; Mario Menéndez Rodríguez, *El Salvador, una auténtica guerra civil* (San José: EDUCA, 1981); Torres-Rivas, (1987), pp. 130-132; López Vallecillos, "Fuerzas sociales y cambio social en El Salvador," *ECA*, 369/370 (July-August 1979), pp. 570-575, 589.
27. In Central America the outburst of social sciences in the 1970s produced not less but more confusion between science and politics, social theory and ideology, ideal types and utopia. For numerous illustrations, see the special issue of the *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* (University of Costa Rica, no. 33, September 1986) on the "Social Sciences in Central America." See also Edelberto Torres-Rivas, "Ciencia y conciencia sociales en Centroamérica," *Polémica*, no. 8 (1989) p. 12; and Carlos Rangel, *Del buen salvaje al buen revolucionario, mitos y realidades de América latina* (Caracas: Monte Avila Editores, C.A., 1973), Chapter VIII.
 28. Edelberto Torres-Rivas, *La democracia posible*, pp. 130-32. One can hypothesize that this influence is chiefly noticeable in the fact that for many guerrillas, the revolution is basically looked upon like religious consciousness-raising, that is, like a *process*. The end appears less urgent than in some other insurrectionist movements. One can find many examples of this in the *Protracted Popular War* tendency. Furthermore, the careful study of earlier influences, such as Anarchism (Spanish and Mexican) and even Spiritism, remains to be done for El Salvador, as Donald C. Hodges did for Nicaragua.
 29. Ignacio Ellacuría, "Una nueva fase en el proceso salvadoreño," *ECA*, 485 (March 1989), p. 175. Ellacuría was assassinated by a death squad linked to the army on 16 November along with five other Jesuits associated with the Centro American University, their housekeeper and her daughter. He was perhaps the most prominent and influential spokesman for peace in his country.
 30. Joaquín Villalobos, "Villalobos on Military purge, Other Issues," *FBIS-LAT* (24 November 1989), p. 21. Of course, this is not a new attitude. The "common platforms" destined for a large audience at the national and international levels, have always been relatively free of Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, compared with timely communiqués, interviews given by individual "spokesmen" to sympathetic journalists, etc. See for example FDR-FMLN, "Propuesta del FDR-FMLN para negociaciones directas, leída por el comandante nicaraguense Daniel Ortega en la asamblea general de la ONU," *ECA*, 396/397 (October-November 1981), pp. 1052-1053, as opposed to Mario Menéndez Rodríguez, *El Salvador*. This carefulness seems to be applied across the board, probably because many fewer individuals spoke out publicly on behalf of the organizations than in the early 1980s, as well as other factors.
 31. Fermán Cienfuegos, another senior *comandantes* from the RN faction, expressed this in a funny way: "We first have to develop our minimal program, then later look for bases to construct socialism, and even later on the bases for communism—which we think will develop in this country around the year 3000." See his *Veredas de la audacia* (San Salvador: Ediciones Roque Dalton, 1989), quoted in Sara Miles and Bob Ostertag, "FMLN New Thinking," p. 37.
 32. The transition from GAP to GDR is seen as necessary for the FDR as well. For Guillermo Ungo, "the government of broad participation is a partial and immediate expression, that later makes possible the realization of the Revolutionary Democratic Government, which for us is the only valuable alternative and the only one." See MNR, *El Salvador: Diálogo y negociación* (San Salvador, 1987), p. 13.
 33. See CRM, "Plataforma Programática para un Gobierno Democrático Revolucionario de la Coordinadora Revolucionaria de Masas." Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley summarized the distinction between the CRM platform and the Sandinistas platforms after 1976: "For one thing, the anti-imperialist language is very much toned down in the

- Sandinista documents, and the constitutionalist and electoral procedures are given a much heavier emphasis, as opposed to the more radical substantive changes emphasized in the CRM's platform. The CRM's program speaks clearly of "collective and socialized enterprises" and expropriation of "monopolized businesses", in language heavily redolent of the Marxist left. The Sandinistas toned down such language. . . ." Wickham-Crowley, "Understanding Failed Revolution in El Salvador," p. 534, note 37.
34. CINAS, "El proyecto popular," in Edgar Jiménez et al. (eds.), *El Salvador: Guerra, Política y Paz (1979-1988)* (San Salvador: CINAS & CRIES, 1988), p. 185.
 35. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
 36. It must be emphasized that the rebels' preferences are not the only factors shaping the outputs, let alone the outcomes, of a hypothetical government led by the FMLN. The internal and external pressure, the fate of socialism in the Eastern bloc, and the geopolitical situation could influence the course of events even more, as illustrated by the last presidential election in Nicaragua. For a typology of the factors that can influence the outputs and the outcomes of a revolutionary regime, see Ekkart Zimmermann, "Comment évaluer les résultats des révolutions, considérations préliminaires," *Revue française de sociologie*, XXX (1989), pp. 535-558
 37. Joaquín Villalobos, "A Democratic Revolution for El Salvador."
 38. Joaquín Villalobos, "La propuesta del FMLN: un desafío a la estrategia contrainsurgente," (interview with Villalobos conducted by Marta Harnecker) *ECA*, 485 (March 1989), p. 218; CD, 1988; FDR, *¿Quién integran el FDR ?* (El Salvador: Documentos, Serie 1, 1980).
 39. In its September 1990 *Proclama*, the FMLN proclaimed very clearly that "the Democratic Revolution is the definitive peace." See FMLN, "Proclama del FMLN a la nación, la revolución democrática" (24 September 1990), p. 2.
 40. Ignacio Ellacuría, "Una nueva fase en el proceso salvadoreño," p. 175.
 41. Joaquín Villalobos, "A Democratic Revolution for El Salvador," p. 105.
 42. Joaquín Villalobos, "Perspectivas de victoria y proyecto revolucionario," *ECA*, 483/484 (Jan.-Feb. 1989), p. 13.
 43. Joaquín Villalobos, "A Democratic Revolution for El Salvador," p. 110.
 44. FMLN, "FMLN General Command Issues Year-End Message," broadcasted on *Radio Venceremos* (2 January 1990), and translated in *FBIS-LAT*, 90, 005 (8 January 1990), p. 24.
 45. See the criticisms formulated by the Central American University's human rights institute (IDHUCA) and by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in *Proceso* (San Salvador), no. 449 (23 October 1990).
 46. The operation — named "Yankee Aggressor, Another Vietnam Awaits you in El Salvador" — occurred on 19 June 1985. The victims were four US Marines, two American businessmen, one Chilean and five Salvadorans.
 47. See "Entrevista con Joaquín Villalobos (*Radio Venceremos*)," in *El Volcan en Guerra, El Salvador, 1979-1987* (Madrid: Editorial Revolución, 1988), pp. 160-161. It was not necessary to wait for the Martín-Baró survey in 1987 to know that the population in El Salvador, like anywhere else in the world, is not encouraged but frightened by violence, and by a wide margin prefers dialogue and negotiation. On the other hand, such indiscriminate attacks doubtlessly encourage the extreme right. See Ignacio Martín-Baró, *Así piensan los salvadoreños urbanos (1986-1987)* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1987).
 48. See for example Americas Watch Report, *Carnage Again: Preliminary Report on Violations of the Laws of War by both Sides in the November 1989 Offensive in El Salvador* (24 November 1990), and *Update on El Salvador: The Human Rights Crisis Continues in the Wake of the FMLN Offensive* (16 December 1989). Also, "Informe anual sobre

- El Salvador de la Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos”, in *Proceso*, nos. 444 and 445 (19 and 26 September 1990); and Lindsey Gruson, “Salvador Abuses Seen on Two Sides,” *New York Times*, 25 November 1989.
49. See for example “El FMLN intensifica su accionar,” *Proceso*, no. 449 (23 October 1990), pp. 4-5. It goes without saying that the Salvadoran army and security forces are constantly engaged in such indiscriminate actions.
 50. The argument is often made that if the FMLN is more radical, it is because the Salvadoran conflict has turned into a class war, instead of a cross-class national liberation war as in Somoza’s Nicaragua and Batista’s Cuba. This deterministic explanation is based on a questionable assumption: that the FMLN represents a class or a combination of classes, and not a political current without a clear class composition or constituency. Of course, the mixed and elusive nature of the current Salvadoran regime is a fundamental factor in understanding the reluctance of most social sectors to join the rebels in armed struggle, or even to oppose the regime pacifically. However, it can hardly explain either the FMLN’s proclivity for Leninism, or the murderous fanaticism of the extreme right. For a discussion of the class content of the “revolutionary subject” in Central America, see Edelberto Torres-Rivas, *La democracia posible*, pp. 122-132.
 51. One should remember that the extreme left furiously attacked the reformist coalition (also called the “UCA government”) in 1979-80, and purposely provoked the military into “unmasking” the new regime. One can speculate that the LP28’s very brief hesitation to follow its comrades in condemning the new junta and government in 1979 stems from its participation in the Popular Forum, and therefore its frustrated expectation to “participate” in the new government.
 52. Joaquín Villalobos, “A Democratic Revolution for El Salvador,” p. 122.
 53. In one of its communiqués, the Anticommunist Secret Army (ESA) fit its misdemeanors in the scope of its “military campaign for peace and democracy.” This communiqué ended with those paradoxical slogans: “The dialogue is a manœuvre / Death to the traitors / For peace and democracy.” Ejército Secreto Anticomunista, “Comunicado del ESA, atribuyéndose las acciones terroristas del 6 de septiembre de 1983,” *ECA*, 420 (October 1983), pp. 903-904. Likewise, “peace” is a strong leitmotiv for the FMLN and its sympathizers. The word itself often means the FMLN and its agenda, especially in the United States: hence the various groups “for peace in El Salvador” (in fact, supporting the FMLN), or “for peace in Central America”, and so on.
 54. The various surveys conducted since 1987 by Ignacio Martín-Baro and his team from the Central American University (San Salvador) clearly show that the dissatisfaction and mistrust of the population for its government (in no way exceptional in Latin America) is not easily transferable into some kind of support for the FMLN. Moreover, these surveys and others indicate a strong popular disapproval of the rebels’ economic sabotage and indiscriminate military attacks in highly populated areas (like the north-eastern part of the capital). True, with the permanent repression of the opposition, fear and mistrust in the population could have skewed the results as in Nicaragua before the last presidential elections. Among its own troops the FMLN admits to a problem with desertion, and to having carried out forced recruitment. For Villalobos: “The fact that today the FMLN is the one which defends more firmly the cause of peace, and that at the same time, it is perceived as the guarantee with which the peace could actually be implemented results in the fact that the combatants when coming into contact with the masses, feel that now they enjoy far more popular support, and this encourages them to keep fighting. . . .” See “La propuesta del FMLN: un desafío a la estrategia contrainsurgente,” p. 222. For the lack of popular support for FMLN, see the publications of the University Institute of Public Opinion of the Central American University (IUDOP-UCA).
 55. Positive reactions came from Julio Adolfo Rey Prendes, leader of the Authentic Christian Movement (MAC); Fidel Chávez Mena, of the Christian Democratic Party (PDC);

the Popular Union (UP), who even agreed to postpone the elections if only the FMLN agreed to lay down arms; the Central Elections Council (CCE); the Permanent Comity of the National Debate, promoted by the Church; and even from the US State Department. The ARENA leader Roberto D'Aubuisson proposed a 72 hour "temporary amnesty" [sic] in order to allow the FMLN to spell out its proposal before the legislative Assembly. However, most political parties, including the PDC and the ARENA, who both represent the country's executive and legislative powers, as well as the army, refused to override the Constitution. On 10 February, the political parties presented some questions to the FMLN with regard to its proposal. Ten days latter in Mexico the FMLN came back with new demands. Those political parties included the ARENA and PDC on the governmental side; the AD, PAR, PCN, MAC and UP of the rightist opposition; and finally, the CD and the UDN, respectively an offshoot and a member of the FMLN. After this reunion President Duarte proposed vainly to hold a referendum on the issue of postponing the elections. See Carlos Acevedo, "La propuesta de paz más viable del FMLN," *ECA*, 483/484 (January-February 1989), pp. 53-77; Ricardo Córdova Macías, "El tema de la paz en el debate electoral," Paper presented at the XV Congress of LASA, Miami, 4-6 December.

56. For Jorge Shafik Handal, the Salvadoran Constitution is "a pact behind the back of the people, in which the only ones who participated were the oligarchy, the Christian Democratic Party and the United States embassy, who ordered the Christian Democrat leaders to be conciliatory to the oligarchy . . . We thus said and repeat today that we do not recognize any legitimacy to this constitution." The commander Roberto Roca (real name: Francisco Jovel) is even more outspoken: "To pretend that we can reach a political solution to this serious conflict through the narrow limits of the actual constitution is truly absurd." Equally clear is the great "elasticity" of the Constitution when interpreted by the army, especially when calling upon the *derecho del pueblo a la insurrección* to justify its military coups. See the interviews with Jorge Schafik Handal, Roberto Roca and others in *El Volcan en Guerra*.
57. There is no indication that the permanent position of the FMLN in this matter, clearly stated in its 1985 proposal, has been modified: "We agree to a dialogue with the Government and the Armed Forces, neither because they exert authority and power on all the national territory, nor because we respect their legitimacy, but because they are our belligerent's counterpart." FMLN, "La posición del FMLN en el proceso de diálogo-negociación," in *El Volcan en Guerra*, p. 177.
58. FMLN, "Propuesta del FMLN para convertir las elecciones en una contribución a la paz," *ECA*, 483/484 (January-February 1989), pp. 133-134.
59. FMLN, "Posición para que la implementación y realización de nuestra propuesta sobre las elecciones conduzca a una finalización definitiva de la guerra," *ECA*, 483/484 (January-February 1989), pp. 139-140
60. See "UCA Commentary Analyses Costa Rica Talks," *FBIS-LAT*, 89, 227 (28 November 1989), p. 12
61. FMLN, "Posición del FMLN frente al futuro gobierno de ARENA y propuesta para alcanzar una democracia real, una nueva sociedad y la paz," *ECA*, 486/487 (April-May), pp. 403-405.
62. Joaquín Villalobos, "A Democratic Revolution for El Salvador", p. 116.
63. During its major offensive in November 1990, the FMLN asked the government to "accept that its armed forces has lost many territories and municipalities. . ." See *Proceso*, no. 455 (5 December 1990), p. 4.
64. FMLN, "Propuesta del FMLN para lograr la democratización, el cese de hostilidades y la paz justa y duradera en El Salvador," in Ricardo Córdova and Raúl Benítez Manaut, eds., *La Paz en Centroamérica: Expedientes de Documentos Fundamentales, 1979-1989* (Mexico: Centro de Investigaciones Interdisciplinarias en Humanidades, UNAM, 1989), pp. 169-171.

65. In September (Mexico) and October (Costa Rica), the FMLN and the government's representatives met twice, but the FMLN broke off the talks allegedly after a bomb exploded in a FENASTRAS office on 31 October, killing ten union leaders and injuring some thirty other persons. On 13 February 1990, the FMLN made a new proposition. However, like its May 1987 proposal, it was above all about limiting the scope of the war to "military targets." Five weeks later, the Salvadoran government and the FMLN agreed to resume talks in April. See Lindsey Gruson, "El Salvador and Guerrillas Agree to Peace Talks," *New York Times*, 22 March 1990, p. A5.
66. Notwithstanding this relative failure, one can underline two positive results of this agreement and its aftermath: 1) the United Nations' growing involvement in the negotiations between the government and the FMLN; and 2) the San José agreement on human rights, signed on 26 July 1990. See "Acuerdos suscritos en Ginebra, Suiza, por el gobierno de la república y la delegación del FMLN, ante el Secretario General de la Naciones Unidas," *ECA*, 498/499 (April-May 1990), pp. 361-362; "Posición del FMLN para desmontar el militarismo, alcanzar el cese de fuego y avanzar a la democracia sin armas," *Proceso*, no. 440 (22 August 1990), pp. 13-16; and from the government, see "Sobre acuerdos relativos a la Fuerza Armada, para la concertación del cese del enfrentamiento armado y de todo acto que irrespete los derechos de la población civil," *La Prensa Gráfica*, San Salvador (25 July 1990). See also "Acuerdo de San José sobre derechos humanos," *Proceso*, no. 37 (25 July 1990), pp. 13-16.
67. See "Posición del FMLN para desmontar el militarismo. . ."; "Proclama del FMLN a la nación, la revolución democrática," San Salvador, mimeo (24 September 1990), p. 2.
68. Joaquín Villalobos, "A Democratic Revolution for El Salvador," p. 134. Emphasis added.
69. In February 1989, Villalobos was convinced that a free and fair election would ensure an overwhelming victory for the FMLN. Without even taking into account the result achieved by the CD during the last elections (3.8 percent of the valid votes and 12 percent in 1991), let alone various surveys, this assumption seems unrealistic given an old law of electoral behavior which Europeans and North Americans have taken centuries to understand: the people vote in a very cautious, conservative way. Consequently, to have the people voting for a self-proclaimed revolutionary party, it is possible to assume that it must first become the ruling party, which is perhaps what the commandants mean by the "minimal conditions" for free and fair elections.
70. Joaquín Villalobos, "Perspectivas de victoria y proyecto revolucionario," p. 26. See also FMLN, "La necesidad de EE. UU. de controlar las próximas elecciones," Comisión de Análisis y Documentación del FMLN, in *El Volcan en Guerra*, pp. 51-62.
71. Joaquín Villalobos, "Perspectivas de victoria y proyecto revolucionario," p. 27.
72. On the elections in general from 1982 to 1988 and on the reaction by the FMLN in particular, see the excellent synthesis by José Z. García, "El Salvador: Recent Elections in Historical Perspectives," in John A. Booth and Mitchell A. Selligson, eds., *Elections and Democracy in Central America* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 60-92.
73. Roberto Roca, "Entrevista con Roberto Roca (*Radio Venceremos*)," in *El Volcan en Guerra*, p. 150.
74. Joaquín Villalobos, "Entrevista con Joaquín Villalobos," (*Radio Venceremos*) in *El Volcan en Guerra*, p. 159.
75. Joaquín Villalobos, "A Democratic Revolution for El Salvador," p. 122.
76. For example, in the FMLN agenda the fate of the regular army is not fixed once and for all: it will be determined by the correlation of forces, that is according to the FMLN's power capability. Villalobos expressed that very clearly: "Change does not necessarily mean destruction of the army. Its future will depend on whether there is a negotiated

- solution to the war or a revolutionary victory." Joaquín Villalobos, "A Democratic Revolution for El Salvador," pp. 121-22.
77. The offensive was named after Febe Elizabeth Velásquez, one of the union leaders (of the FENASTRAS) killed on 31 October 1989. However, it does not mean that the offensive was merely a response to the murder of the unions leaders, as the FMLN suggested more or less directly. In a conference held at the University of Pittsburgh on 2 March 1990, a "U.S. Representative of the FMLN", Mr. Jaime Suriano, was very proud to inform his audience that the rebels and their civilian allies had begun to carry arms and ammunitions into San Salvador "three weeks before the offensive," in spite of tight military surveillance. This confirms the obvious hypothesis that this military offensive was planned long before the extreme right provided the FMLN with justification to move on. This also meant that the offensive was under preparation before and during the talks with the government in Costa Rica, and for that matter before the talks had officially broken down on 24 October. Here, a somewhat visionary commentary by Ignacio Ellacuría in March 1989 comes to mind: "It is not in vain if the General Command of the FMLN has been in meeting since May 1988", he said, taking note that this has "no precedent since 1982." And he goes on: "The fact that the five supreme commandants decided to leave the country simultaneously and for such a long time is another proof that something new is being prepared." Ignacio Ellacuría, "Una nueva fase en el proceso salvadoreño," p. 175.
 78. Mike Zielinski, "FMLN's Push for Power," *The Guardian*, 22 November 1989, pp. 1-2; "FMLN Catches Most Everyone Napping," *Latin American Weekly Report*, 46 (23 November 1989), p. 2
 79. Guillermo Espinosa and Jose Meléndez, "Declara el FMLN "territorios liberados"," *Excelsior*, (15 November 1989), pp. 1, 10A.
 80. Marta Anaya, "Ofensiva que no es para tomar el poder, pero si hay oportunidad, se hará: FMLN," *Excelsior*, (14 November 1989), pp. 10A, 42. A journalist reported that "in the city . . . FMLN field commanders were openly telling journalists that their orders were to hold the positions they had occupied. They also began to admit that the offensive, far from being a spur-of-the-moment response to the FENASTRAS bombing, had been carefully planned some time back." See "FMLN Catches Most Everyone Napping," *LAWR*, 46 (23 November 1989), p. 2.
 81. Marta Anaya, "Ofensiva que no es para tomar el poder, pero si hay oportunidad, se hará: FMLN."
 82. *LAWR*, 6 (23 November 1989), p. 2.
 83. Joaquín Villalobos, "La propuesta del FMLN: un desafío a la estrategia contrainsurgente," pp. 212-13.
 84. For an interpretation of the FMLN's strategic goal in extending its offensive into the wealthiest part of the capital, see Marco Antonio Grande (former rebel of the FPL faction), "La ofensiva "hasta el tope" — parte II," *Análisis* (San Salvador, Universidad Nueva San Salvador), no. 24 (December 1989), pp. 1212-13.
 85. For a critical interpretation of the rebels' position during the transition in 1979-80, see Gabriel Zaid, "Colegas enemigos, una lectura de la tragedia salvadoreña," in Octavio Paz et al. (eds.), *Frustraciones de un destino: la democracia en América latina* (San José, C.R.: Libro Libre, 1985), pp. 221-282. The guerrilla's preference for right-wing dictatorship over democratic and/or reformist government is discussed in Pablo Giussani, *Montoneros, la soberbia armada* (Buenos Aires: Sudamerica/Planeta, 1984).
 86. Charles W. Anderson, *Politics and Economic Change in Latin America, The Governing of Restless Nations* (Princeton, N.J., D. Van Nostrand, 1967), p. 97.
 87. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
 88. Hannah Arendt, "Reflexions on Violence," *Journal of International Affairs*, 23, no. 1 (1969), pp. 1-35.

89. Recently, the head of the United States Southern Command, Gen. Maxwell R. Thurman, told Congress that it was not possible to defeat the FMLN militarily and that negotiation was the only way out of this conflict. See Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. General Says Salvador Cannot Defeat the Guerrillas," *New York Times*, 9 February 1990, p. 9.
90. Rubén Zamora, "For Salvador, Democracy Before Peace," *New York Times*, 24 January 1990, p. A15.
91. See "Declaración de San Isidro Coronado," *ECA* 495/496 (Jan.-Feb. 1990), p. 122-24.
92. Most of the other prominent leaders of the opposition went into hiding, namely in embassies.
93. FMLN, "FMLN Communique on UN Mediation, Cease-Fire," broadcasted on *Radio Venceremos* (1 February 1990), and translated in *FBIS-LAT*, 90, 022 (1 February 1990), p. 9.