El Salvador, a coffee producing country, in her history witnessed almost exclusive military control of political processes. The armed forces intermittently took complete charge of the nation's politics. The country has tropical climate, heterogeneous population, high rates of illiteracy (58 percent), one of the lowest per capita income ($670 a year)\(^1\), and primitive agricultural economies. In El Salvador, 60 percent of population is rural, the top 10 percent land owners control 78 percent of the arable land while the lowest 20 percent own only 0.4 percent, and over 40 percent of rural families own no land at all.\(^2\) According to an unofficial statistics 40 percent of the country's wealth is owned and controlled by a small number (about 15 families) of families.

El Salvador, thus, is one of the few most backward, least developed country in Latin America. Land and other forms of wealth and privilege are concentrated in the hands of

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the few, the middle group is relatively small and the common population have poor subsistence. In 1980, urban unemployment was estimated at over 50 percent. In such reality, militarism thrives and operates, and aggravates the worst economic and social problems of the country.

PAST UPRISINGS:

The struggle of the Salvadorean people for freedom and social justice began back in the 1930s. After the suppression of the popular uprisings in 1932 a brutal dictatorship was established and maintained for several decades only to bloody terror and active U.S. support. Between 20,000 and 30,000 peasants were massacred. There were again uprisings in 1944, 1948 and 1961. Under Napoleon Duarte, who came to power following the victory of Christian Democrats in the presidential elections in 1972, more than 40,000 Salvadoreans were murdered by the regime's forces, between October 1979 and December 1982, according to a report from the world Front of Solidarity with Salvadorean people. El Salvador was again on the verge of a revolutionary out burst when the ruling rightwing military once again stages a coupd etat on October 15, 1979 and removed the military regime of President Carlos Humberto Romero.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.
SUBVERSION OF ROMERO'S MILITARY REGIME:

The government of President Romero had been locked in combat with three well organised bands of leftist terrorists. One such group, the Armed Forces of National Resistance, had raised $40 million in the past two years by kidnapping foreign executives and holding them for ransom. Even more threatening for the government's stand point was the widespread support won by the 70,000 member popular Revolutionary Bloc, a broad-based movement that occupied the Cathedral in San Salvador in May 1979. US Assistant Secretary of State Viron Vaky, also paid a fact-finding trip to Central America in August 1979 and found that Romero had retreated into a defiant "bunker mentality". But Romero regime could not long exist and removed by a coup.

US REACTION:

The US was not involved in the coup but gave it a cautious welcome. The US was aware of the fact that the success of Nicaraguan revolution might directly encourage the revolutionary groups in El Salvador. The U.S., therefore, has already stepped up efforts in late 1978 to force the El Salvador military regime toward various reforms and dialogue with the moderate opposition. But Romero regime became more violent and indiscriminate particularly toward Left-wing demands. The coup was also largely taken over by less reformist officers.

5. Time, August 13, 1979, p.6.
who had opposed any inclusion of the left's organisation.

POLITICAL TURMOIL AND TUMULT IN EL SALVADOR FOLLOWING THE COUP:

The rightist element in the new junta attacked the reformist leaders and began to mobilise their ideological base. They also began to re-organise the "death squads." Major Roberto D'Abbuisson, an ultra rightist and closely linked with violent actions of the National Guard, the National Police and the Treasury Police, formed the National Broad Front (FAN) 6.

The left was also divided in its attitudes to the new Junta. The communist party welcomed the coup. Notably, the party was given posts in the new regime. Another leftist organisation - The Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN) proposed dialogue with the reformist civilians and officers to create a broad "anti-fascist front." The Popular Forces of liberation (FPL), however, denounced the coup as a US plot. 7


7. Ibid.
In such political confrontation and confusion, new junta also could'nt exist long. It couldn't handle dimensional ideological pressures. The armed forces didn't submit themselves to, in spite of the junta's ultimatum, to the authority of the new regime. Consequently, it led to junta's collapse in the first days of January 1980. In mid-January, the first Co-ordinating body of the popular organisations was formed. It showed its strength with 2,00,000 - strong demonstrators in the capital San Salvador.

Thus, the turn of the year 1979-80 was the crucial point for U.S. policy, as El Salvador began to collapse into war and political turmoil. The hostage crisis in Iran and the Soviet intrusion in Afghanistan sharpened yet further American sensitivities about losing anything else, especially in central America.

EL SALVADOR CRISIS AND U.S. POLICY OPTION IN 1980:

The possibility of any guerrilla triumph, several hundreds of whom reportedly earned their combat experience

9. Ibid, p. 23. In that same month, 309 people died at the hands of the army and security forces.

9. Carter was running for re-election in 1980, therefore, his administration was especially sensitive because of their electoral implications.
by joining the anti-Somoza struggle in Nicaragua, raised general fears of a chain reaction of instability, international unreliability and Marxist influence spreading northward. Significantly, there was no dynastic US backed dictator in El Salvador. There was no symbolic figure who could explain revolution as an unavoidable exception. The absence of such a figure also seemed to give the Salvadorean Left a more clearly ideological commitment to revolution and class-struggle than the heirs of Sandino. ¹⁰

However, the military coup and the general turmoil also meant that the US didn't have the option of simply propping up a threatened regime. US involvement in the crisis threatened only to associate it with violent repression. One alternative was, therefore, simply to stop all assistance on the grounds of massive human rights violations by the military and the lack of any real government to give it to. That would probably have led not to an immediate Left-wing triumph, but to an even greater blood-bath and an even more violent military regime facing a broader opposition. The subsequent worst case would have been a collapse into regional conflict, with obvious risks of broader confrontation. The best that the US could hope for would have been a military split and the relatively

¹⁰. Ibid.
quick replacement of the repressive regime by a broad Coalition government including the Left. But even that would effectively have been "another Nicaragua", and it was politically impossible at that time for the US to consider standing back and hiping. Another alternative was for the US to try actively to bring all parties, including the Left, into a transitional government of national reconciliation. However, there seemed little prospect of power being taken by the revolutionary groups, who tended to be seen in the U.S. as dangerous extremists lacking in public support. The US Administration, therefore, didn't see negotiations including the left as either necessary or desirable. Moreover, the US now had only very limited political influence over either, and the necessary combination of threats and promises to both simultaneously would have had no credibility. However, the US attempted half-heartedly to promote negotiations before the coup but that were proved fruitless. Significantly, it had brought criticism from the left who described it as "Yankee interventionism."

US POLICY UNDER PRESSURE:

In spite of this criticism, there was strong internal pressure for the US to take a more decisive and positive policy steps regarding El Salvador. There was, however, broad

support for active US steps to try to strengthen the political centre and moderate forces in El Salvador. In the meantime, the US Administration was firstly concerned to prevent hostile "external exploitation" of the Salvadorean situation. Notably, the US then perceived immediate security threat from Nicaragua, besides the Soviet Union and Cuba. The Salvadorean army, therefore, had to be preserved in order to contain the Soviet-cuban backed insurrection. It had therefore, to be included in any US-backed government, not only on the internal ground that without it there could be no stable government to support at all, but also from the external consideration that without it the only means to counter communist encroachment would be direct action by the US itself. 13

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF PDC BY US EFFORTS:

The US maintained that the repression and abuses were mainly the work of Right wing extremists associated more with the internal security forces than with the Army itself. The US in option helped to establish a new military junta—The Christian Democrat (PDC) which was formed on January 5, 1980. The PDC, it was assumed, would provide the civilian and reformist component necessary to offer a democratic alternative to armed revolution in El Salvador and to satisfy liberal opinion in the US as well. The US Administration also

13. Edward Best... op. cit, p. 25.
argued that the Salvadoean armed forces, professionalised by the US, would provide 'security shield' to contain extremists of the Left and the Right, and assist social reforms which would be instituted to undermine leftist's revolutionary appeal. After the establishment of new infra-structure of Salvadorean regime, the US stressed the need to restore law and order and to combat Marxism in El Salvador.

PDC SPLIT:

The US hope received a set-back when the PDC split at the beginning of March 1980, over its involvement in the Junta. It's left-wing splinter group the Popular Social Christian Party, the Social Democrats, the Communist Party, and a trade union grouping joined with the popular organisations in April 1980 to form the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR). It would be the political wing of an alliance with the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), created in October 1980 from the first union of the five guerrilla groups in May 1980. The FMLN, therefore, is considered an umbrella organisation for the five guerrilla groups.

SPLITLED TO CHAOS:

The PDC split led to Napoleon Quarte's entry, a staunch

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US supporter to the junta, A state of seize was declared, and various reforms were simultaneously. However, right-wing terror and armed insurrection led by the leftists were hindering their implementation. The violence grew further drawing international outrage with the murder of the Archbishop of San Salvador by a Right-wing death squad on 23 March, 1980. The government was in practice very weak. The left denounced Duarte as an ally of repression and as a puppet of US intervention. The PDC had already weakened and was being discredited. The chaos tended to drive many towards the social justice or order offered by the organised left and the Right. Notably, in April, 1980. D'Aubuisson\textsuperscript{17} attempted to organise a coup but was prevented by troops loyal to the remaining moderate military leader and arrested. The PDC threatened to resign if he was not tried but pressure from eight of fourteen garrisons brought about his release without charge. The PDC, however, did'nt resign, and US support continued to El Salvador.\textsuperscript{18}

CIVIL WAR AND US RESPONSE TO MURDERS OF US NATIONALS:

By late 1980, the situation was seemed to be moving towards civil war. The US had made a political commitment, but seemed to have insufficient political influence to make

\textsuperscript{17} He was described, by the U.S. media, as the "Mad Major," and a "pathological murderer" He was also allegedly involved.

\textsuperscript{18} Edward Best, ....... op. cit., p. 27.
it effective. The election of Ronald Reagan also exacerbated the US problem regarding El Salvador. He signalled that he would act much more firmly and with fewer conditions. While, the violent Right proceeded to kill five FDR leaders, partly to counter any possible interest in political negotiations. In December, 1980, National Guardsmen killed three American nuns and a Catholic lay worker. On 3 January, 1981, the Head of the Land Reform Agency and two US advisers were murdered. In response, the US suspended economic and military aid to El Salvador but economic aid was quickly restored after only a government reshuffle. This made Duarte President and effectively strengthened the political power of the military Right. He removed Col. Majono in reshuffle who was inducted after an unsuccessful coup attempt by Aubuission.

Soon the US also restored military aid to El Salvador conditional on a reduction of violence by the security forces, the transfer of the most brutal commanders and investigation of the church women's murder.

REVELUTIONARY'S PROFOUND RELIGIOSITY:

It is important here to know that Salvadoreans sympathy for armed insurrection arose directly as a response to repression initially directed against the church. Approximately four or

19. Ibid.
Five years ago priests began entering the region, preaching the new gospel of the "preferential option for the poor". The message was — "It is harder for a rich man to go to heaven than it is for a Camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Jesus Christ was poor, he loves the poor, do something to alleviate the suffering upon you by the rich." 

In response, the Salvadorean government sent hit squads to kill the priests and those who were organising in the catechist programme ("delegados de la palabra"). The salvadorean peasants responded with their hunting rifles and pistols. After a number of years of this incipient armed resistance and defenses, they organised formal structures of the FMLN. Thus, there is a strong messianic bent to the philosophy of life and political conceptions held by the revolutionary peasants. They articulate their world view in terms of the Bible and the homilies of the late Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero. 

FMLN'S FINAL OFFENSIVE AND US RESPONSE:

In late December 1980, the FMLN announced that it had planned a "final offensive" against the Government, with the

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21. Ibid.
am of winning a revolution victory before Reagan took office. In response, Pentagon urged a resumption and increase in aid. The fear of external exploitation of El Salvador situation made military assistance almost unavoidable.\(^{22}\)

The US Administration was sensitive to Cuban influence on the Salvadorean left and its close links with the countries of Soviet Bloc. The Administration also claimed that the Salvadorean left was receiving some material assistance from Cuba and Nicaragua. The US Administration also believed that Honduras may be used as a conduit for weapons into El Salvador by insurgents with Cuban support.\(^{23}\) The US also played a key role in signing a peace treaty between Honduras and El Salvador in 1980, which formally ended the 11 years of hostility between them.\(^{24}\)

MILITARISATION OF HONDURAS:

The fact that Honduras, the second poorest nation in Latin America after Haiti, shares borders with Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua is the main cause of Honduras growing militarisation and provides an almost unmitigated panorama of uncertainty obviously, the Honduran military is


\(^{23}\) See, Statements of Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence Franklin D. Kramer to House Sub-committee on Foreign Appropriations, 25 March, 1980.

\(^{24}\) Most prominent confrontation between El Salvador and Honduras was the "Football War", in 1969, following a qualifying match for the World Cup between the two.
strengthened by massive US aid in hardware.

Significantly, the US and Honduras concluded an agreement on May 7, 1982, as already mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, that provided US aircraft access to Honduran airbases at Puerto Lempiora, Comayagua and La Ceiba. Notably, the Reagan Administration requested 21 million for the fiscal year 1983 to improve airfields in Honduras. The US had also already reached to an understanding within the Honduran government to use its Pacific Ocean naval base in the Gulf of Fonseca, which borders on Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua. The Honduran government also leased the cisnes Island (Swan Island) in the Caribbean Sea for 90 years to the US, enabling the US Navy to monitor all shipping coming from the Caribbean Sea to the Gulf of Mexico.


26. The House and Senate Armed Services Committee approved $21 million to improve airfields in Honduras to which US forces would have access in case of trouble in the Caribbean. The project included the lengthening of the runways and expansion of the aircraft parking ramps to accommodate larger aircraft, and construction of underground fuel storage tanks. See, Congressional Quarterly, Weekly Report, Vol. 40, No. 25, June 19, 1982, p. 1485.

FMLN ALLEGEDLY BEGAN TO RECEIVE WEAPONS FROM NICARAGUA AND CUBA:

In September 1980, US intelligence reported that the FMLN had begun to receive some of the material support promised in the middle of the year 1980 from Soviet Bloc countries, and subsequently, Nicaragua was becoming the centre of the clandestine arms flow.  

However, Sandinistas assured the US that they would not export the material support to the revolutionaries in El Salvador. At the same time, they declared their open political and diplomatic support to the FDR-FMLN in El Salvador. But, the US state Department released an special report on communist interference in El Salvador on 23 February, 1981. However, the report could'nt provide clear evidence that the guerrillas were receiving sophisticated military hardwares from outside.

Cuba and Nicaragua, of course do extend political support to the FMLN and quite likely supply a small amount of arms to


it as a...taken of their commitment.\textsuperscript{30} But, there had been no evidence then that they acted as a major conduits for the supply of Soviet arms to the El Salvador insurgents. Their material support to the FMLN in no way compares to that rendered by the US to the ruling military junta.\textsuperscript{31}

US POLICY OPTIONS IN 1981:

In spite of fastly deteriorating internal political situation in El Salvador, the US, in principle, had much the same policy options at the beginning of January 1981 as the previous year—assist the El Salvador government, promote negotiations, or keep out altogether. A policy of non-intervention had in general been predicted on the assumption that other powers would also keep out if the US did. The limits beyond which Soviet and Cuban activities would be seen by the US as a failure on the part to keep out were not high in any region of the world. Moreover, US sensitivities and suspicious in this respect had been resurging globally in the later years of 'dentente' over developments in South-East Asia,\textsuperscript{32} the Middle East, and Africa, and had been brought to a peak with the Soviet intrusion in Afghanistan. In addition, the growing evidence of guerrilla support from Nicaragua and the Soviet Bloc, even

\textsuperscript{30} Achin Vanaik, "Crisis in Central America". \textit{The Times of India}, August 10, 1983.

\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{32} Edward Best, \ldots. \textit{op. cit.}, p. 29.
Figure 5.2 US ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME
(in million dollars, selected years)

if it couldn't be expected to militarily decisive, was not
enough to tilt the balance within the Carter Administration
in favour of military aid to El Salvador, and of an unequi-
vocal commitment to the survival of a US-backed regime.⁰³³

The US restored its military aid to El Salvador in
January 1981 and $5 million package of lethal aid including
the US military advisers were sent to El Salvador. The
US Administration believed, in fact, that the evidence of out-
side help to Salvadorean guerrillas has transformed the nature
of the insurgency movement in the country.⁰³⁴ The movement was
in fact, based on such assistance, it believed. The US Admini-
stration claimed that the guerrillas were getting more than
it was giving the ruling junta 'It is unacceptable to the US
to let El Salvador, fall into the hands of the Marxist-Leninists"
the US government stated.⁰³⁵

Thus, the basic lines of Reagan policy in El Salvador
were set down by the Carter Administration. Reagan inherited
much of the policy and many of the problems.

US POLICY INDICATIONS UNDER REAGAN ADMINISTRATION:

President Reagan's first comment, after taking office,
was, "We believe that government of El Salvador is on the frontline
of the battle that is really aimed at the very heart of Western
⁰³³ See, New York Times, January 6, 1979, p. 3:1
⁰³⁴ Raymond Bonner, ...........op.cit., p. 225.
President Reagan introduced the following policy framework for Central America:

- In response to decades of inequity and indifference, the US will support democratic reform and human freedom.

- In response to military challenge from Nicaragua and Cuba the US will support security of the region's threatened nations. The US does not view security assistance as an end in itself, but as a shield for democratisation, economic development and diplomacy.

- the US will support dialogue and negotiations.

- If Central America were to fall what would the consequences be for US position in Asia and Europe and for alliances such as the NATO. If the United States can not respond to a threat near its borders, why should Europeans and Asians believe that the US is seriously concerned about threat to them! If the Soviets can assume that nothing short of an actual attack on the United States will provide an American response, which ally, which friend will trust the US then!  

US POLICY FAVOURED MILITARY AID:

The Reagan Administration continued military aid to El


37. Ibid.
Salvador against guerrillas. However, there seemed no imminent threat of outright revolutionary victory but it assumed that lack of aid and assistance might allow the leftist guerrillas to put the $30,000 strong Salvadorean security forces at military disadvantage. A lack of U.S. support, it was believed in Washington, would demoralise the armed forces and increase popular support for the rebels. There was also fear of a subsequent blood bath by the far Right which would devastate the political centre and strengthen the Left in the long term. The dilemma for the US was how to balance the function of aid of giving military advantage and external reassurance with that of providing sufficient internal political leverage to assure the promised progress toward moderate democracy.  

REAGAN ADMINISTRATION LIFTED CONDITIONS FOR AID:

The Reagan Administration, finally, lifted all conditions of aid in February 1981. On the grounds that aid was vital necessity to save the Government from defeat. The Administration further asserted that the problem of security was immediate while the process of reform and development was long-term. The Reagan Administration identified the FDR-FMLN with a hostile external threat. The Administration argued that socio-economic development required political stability, but political stability

38. Edward Best,..... op. cit., p. 38.
required socio-economic improvements, while solution of the internal conflict depended upon ending external involvement, which depended upon solving the internal problems which attracted the military aid. The Administration argued that priority defeat of insurgency was not only in US security interests, but necessary to restore the conflict to internal dimensions, and to remove a deliberately destabilising political force which really prevented socio economic development, only then the US could "save the economy, stop the violence, have the elections, and ride into the sunset."

Thus, the United States was reluctant to assist El Salvador regime unconditionally, that was deeply involved in massive abuses and murders which were being perpetrated by the Army and security forces. It had widely publicised in the US by human rights organisations and the catholic Church.

HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS EXPOSED EL SALVADOR'S BLOOD-LETTING:

According to El Salvador's Human Rights Commission, El Salvador's notorious death squads had killed an estimated 40,000 people during 1979 to 1983. According to an enquiry by the Amnesty International London based human rights group, which visited the civil war torn C. American nation in July 1983

about 40 thousand people had been murdered by military and security forces and civilian clothea 'death-squads' in the past five years in El Salvador.\textsuperscript{41} Amnesty, in an international press release, said the blatant failure of the authorities to investigate the killings and bring these responsible to justice was one factor that suggested that "it is the authorities themselves who lie behind the wholesale extra-judicial execution of people from all sectors of Salvadorean society." The report asserted, "As a result, the existing system of certifying death seems... to facilitate the murder of individuals on a large scale, and it is impossible to establish and make known within El Salvador or abroad the number killed or those responsible." Mutiliation of corpses made it difficult to identify the victims and establish the cause of death and no attempts was made to hide the bodies. The corpses were routinely dumped in heavily patrolled areas near military establishments.\textsuperscript{42}

In response to these killings the doubts and opposition to an unconditional US commitment in El Salvador began to mount even among Congressmen. It was strengthened by doubts about the prudence of staking US credibility on the survival of a dubious and shaky regime.

\textsuperscript{41} Trouble on Two Fronts," \textit{Time}, December 12, 1983.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
IN RESPONSE OF KILLINGS, THE CONGRESS PUT LIMITATIONS ON US AID:

The Congress, therefore, put some limitations on the US aid to El Salvador Administration requests were cut in the authorising bills and, after stiff resistance in the House Appropriations subcommittee on Foreign operations in March 1981 to the reprogramming of $ 5 million, the President resorted more to his emergency drawdown authority. The greater part of the military aid, however, sent in the first two years had in fact to be sent through this means: $ 25 million in fiscal year 1981 and $ 55 million in 1982, out of totals of $ 35.492 and $86.3 million respectively. The result with regard to conditionality was an amendment to the 1982 Foreign Aid Bill which became law in December 1981 against the Reagan Administration resistance.\(^{43}\)
The President was required to certify every six months for the following two years, before providing aid, that the Duarte Government was making a 'concerted, significant effort' to improve the human rights climate and that the Salvadoreans were achieving 'continued progress' in implementing political and economic reforms. Congress also wanted assurances that the Salvadorean government was making "good faith efforts" to investigate and prosecute the murders of American Churchwomen and two American aid officials a year ago.

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\(^{43}\) Edward Best, \ldots op. cit., p. 39.
MYTH OF REAGAN CERTIFICATION THAT LAUDED HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRESS IN EL SALVADOR:

President Reagan initiated a certification, duly signed in February 1982, procedure that was needed to unlock $26 million in military aid and $40 million in economic assistance for El Salvador in 1982. It was a two page document with a six page appendix claiming that "despite formidable obstacles", the Duarte government had made a concerted significant and good-faith efforts to deal with the complex political, social and human rights problems it was confronting." The document made it clear that those problems were by no means solved. Thus, the US claimed that "progress was being made." While the fact was that as many as 1,000 people were then disappeared or were murdered each month in El Salvador by death squads of both the Left and the Right.

The Reagan certificate noted the October 1980 imposition of a new military code of conduct in El Salvador, the removal from command of military officers sympathetic to the 'violent right' and the scheduled elections for a new constituent Assembly on March 28, 1982. Reagan also landed the Salvadoran efforts at land reform, which so far had taken, with compensation, all


45. Time, February 8, 1982, p. 28.
farms of 1,235 acres or more, and redistributed them to tenant farmers. 46

US CERTIFICATION RECEIVED CRITICISM:

The Administration's report that El Salvador was improving its human rights performance arrived amid a barrage of criticism claiming just the opposite. The American Civil Liberties Union, in Conjunction with the New York-based Americas Watch Committee, released a 287 page human rights report on El Salvador in February 1982. The report, heavily documented with eyewitness accounts, held the Duarte, government responsible for "the great majority" of some 200 politically motivated murders a week in the use of torture by security forces, and other forms of systematic repression. It, thus, urged the denial of certification. 47

Notably, the US correspondents who had been led by guerrilla forces to a village in the remote Salvadorean department of Morazan, near the Honduran border, provided reports which proved the most devastating for the Reagan Administration. There and in surrounding hamlets, the journalists found decomposing bodies and other evidence of major massacres of civilians that allegedly took place in December 1981. As many as 900 people were killed in the incidents.

46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
According to surviving eyewitness, the massacres were carried out in cold blood by members of the Salvadorean army.48

It is here significant to know that six National Guards, believed responsible for the brutal murders of three American nuns and a US religious lay worker were appeared in February 1982 before a Judge for trial. The Judge ruled out that five of the men should be charged with homicide, the sixth, he found, had not been involved in the crimes. This, for the first time in El Salvador's four year old war against 4,000 to 6,000 Marxist guerrillas, that members of the government's security forces were being brought to judicial account over the death of non-combatants. In fact, the court appearance by the former guarnomen came only after prolonged US pressure on has civilian-military government to take action against them49. That pressure had been given additional urgency by the US congress which demanded assurances by the Reagan Administration of action on the murders before releasing military and economic aid to El Salvador.50

SECOND US CERTIFICATION - AN ANALYSIS:

President Reagan again put certification in August 1982 to congress that the government of El Salvador was making

48. Ibid.


"substantial progress in human rights, land reforms, and political solution to the civil war." Thomas Enders, Assistant secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs put the 48 page certification document on El Salvador before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in support of Reagan's certification. In fact, certification was legally necessary in order to keep El-Salvador eligible for military aid in 1983. Military victory of El Salvador government needed US financial assistance and such assistance required the certification.

Thomas Enders asserted before the House Foreign Affairs Committee that the Administration was by no means blind to the faults of the San Salvador government. He further insisted, "We believe the facts amply justify the certification required by law. Progress is marred but real." 51

The certification document offered no grounds for unalloyed optimism. The report, however, admitted that the overall improvement "has not been as great as hoped" and that "serious problems remain." On the human rights, the report claimed that the El Salvador government" is making a concerted and significant effort" to curb violation. The study presented statistics from five sources showing that the numbers of civilian deaths from political violence has dropped considerably. Enders said, "All

51. Time, August 9, 1982, p. 20.
available evidence suggests that the most serious violations are on a slow, downward curve."  

On the issue of land reforms, the report danced over tricky political ground. Admitting that the country's newly elected constituent Assembly in March 28, 1982 elections, led by its right-wing President, Roberto d'Aubuisson, has tried to undermine the reform laws, the study morethelsess contended that 10,000 provisional land titles had been handed over to former renters and share croppers in the past six months. President Magana, moreover, has led a campaign to return the land to farmers illegally evicted from their new holdings.

SECOND CERTIFICATION TOO RECEIVED BLOW BY DISCLOSURES:

Even, then, the US certification received widespread criticism. Abraham Lincoln once asked a friend "How many legs will a sheep have if you call the tail a leg?"

"Five" his friend answered.

"You were mistaken," Lincoln replied, "for calling a tail a leg does not make it so."

52. Ibid.

53. A detailed discussion regarding March 20, 1982 Presidential and constituent Assembly elections is followed later in the chapter.

54. A US educated economist who assumed the role of a political broker when he was appointed to the presidency after March 1982 elections. The nation's three political parties - The Nationalist Republican Alliance, the Christian Democrats, and the National Conciliation Party - were working together in his pluralist government.

Similarly, speaking like truth can not make it truth. The Administration's report received first blow by the disclosure in the first week of August 1982 of the brutal torture of a Salvadorean volunteer for the Green Cross, an international relief agency. The worker had been arrested by Salvadorean security forces on charges of providing supplies to guerrillas. Imprisoned for several days in a secret, soundproof room at police headquarters in downtown San Salvador, he was stretched on a rotating wheel, beaten severely and forced to swallow lime. The victim was also strung up by his hands and feet while his genitals were squeezed in a wire vise. 56

The American Civil Liberties Union also declared US certification a "sham". The question was how could the US certify improvement in the Salvadorean Government without becoming an accomplice in that crimes. In El Salvador, in the first four months of 1982 year, 2,334 political murders were committed by government forces or by right-wing death squads. During 1979 to 1982, the Salvador State had murdered 35,000 innocent civilians. Almost 5,000 civilians were murdered in 1982. 57 Not one officer or soldier was brought to trial for any such offence. If torture is criminal, then its certification itself becomes a crime. 58

56. Time, August 9, 1982, p. 20.


58. Ibid.
President Reagan had the self confidence that happenings in El Salvador were bad but getting better. The Reagan Administration, thus, seemed to win an unwinnable war while the American Congress was not in mood to allow the Administration to do anything that could lead to a repetition of Vietnam in Central America. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, like US Congress, was also sensitive to US aid to El Salvador and opposed all forms of military aid to El Salvador. It favoured a negotiated settlement between ruling junta and its lift-using guerrillas.

THE AMERICAN BISHOPS CALL FOR AN END TO US MILITARY AID:

In the first week of March 1982, a group of more than 350 Church leaders called for an end to US military aid to El Salvador. It was also reported that the US Ambassador to El Salvador, Deane Hinton, had cited the bishop's position as the most serious obstacle to the Administration's efforts to increase military aid to the Salvadorean government.59

The 372 American bishops were understandably influenced by the tragedies that had befallen a number of clergy and Church workers in El Salvador, including the slaying of liberal Archbishop Oscas Arnulfo Romero in March 1980 and the murders

of four American women missionaries later that year. Right wingers were suspected of killing the missionaries. The bishops contended that the US must not become too closely identified with the Salvadorean government. Notably, Archbishop James A. Hickey of Washington in 1981 told the House Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs, our position is to oppose military aid and intervention from all outside powers." The bishops, however, favoured diplomatic pressure to "stop the flow of arms from Cuba through Nicaragua to El Salvador, but simultaneously stated, "that we earnestly and vigorously, oppose the sending of US military assistance to El Salvador. 60

The bishops believed that the weapons would strengthen repressive elements in the security forces and drive more aid more people into the hills and into the hands of the guerrillas. Auxiliary Bishop John E. Mc Carthy of Galveston - Honston said that these 22 years old rebels were not risking their lives for the good of the Soviet Union or Cuba. They were risking their lives because they had seen their father murdered, their sisters raped and their home burned. He raised fears that the intensity and blindness of American policy would produce the opposite effect of what lovers of freedom wanted - a situation leading to a Communist take-over. The bishops, therefore, asked Washington to

60. Ibid.
refrain from massively increasing the destructive capability of the armed forces of El Salvador.61

EXODUS FROM EL SALVADOR:

It is here significant to note that miserable political and economic conditions compelled thousands of Salvadoreans to leave their own country. A substantial number of Salvadoreans have clandestinely crossed the US border patrol check points through Rio Grande Valley. Smugglers paid by Salvadoreans help them. However, thousands Salvadoreans were often captured in such risky efforts or found dead or nearly dead, condition. Few found in the tank of a petroleum distillate truck, sometimes badly dehydrated bodies crammed into a trailer. Sometimes, they became lost in range land near Rio Grande city and died. This list of such happenings were increasing. In 1981, more then 15,000 salvadoreans were intercepted while attempting to enter the US illegally across the Mexican border. Thus, with its economy virtually prostrated El Salvador's main export was its people. In 1982, officially some 600,000 Salvadoreans had left for other parts of central America, Mexico, and the U.S. Unofficially, another 400,000 were believed to had fled. Notably, the US government granted the "external voluntary departure" status to Nicaraguan refugees, but it was denied to Salvadoreans.62

61. Ibid.

Thus, despite the Administration's assurances, and a clearly articulated US policy toward El Salvador turmoil could not emerge. Real issues and options often lost in rhetoric. The exaggerations, distortions, and even misrepresentations by Administration figures created a clear 'credibility gap with many in Congress and the public and helped to provoke a wave of Counter-rhetoric. 63

ADMINISTRATION REVEALED SLOPPY EVIDENCE OF OUTSIDE ARMS SHIPMENTS

Facing a credibility gap at home and aboard, the Reagan Administration sought to prove that the five raging in El Salvador was primarily fueled by Soviet sponsored subversion spread by Cuban surrogates and the Sandinista government of Nicaragua, producing in March 1982 spy-plane pictures, closed door revelations of secret intercepts etc. documents. It might had been the most intense national security information campaign since President Kennedy went public with graphic documentation of the Cuban missible threat twenty years ago. 64

However, secretary of state Alexander Haig told a Senate Appropriations Subcommittee in mid-March 1982 that "this situation is global in character. The problem is worldwide Soviet interventionism that poses an unprecedented challenge to the free world. Anyone attempting to debate the prospects for a successful outcome in El Salvador who fails to consider the Soviet menace is dealing with only leg or the trunk of the elephant." 65

64. Time, March 22, 1982, p. 8
65. Ibid.
Significantly, Haig avoided any discussion of El Salvador in the State Department's briefing in March 1982 because there were not enough classified data available to make a compelling case for the outside link in El Salvador unrest. The Administration insisted that its evidence of outside arms shipments to the El Salvador rebels was based partly on information gathered by undercover agents, and couldn't be discussed without compromising confidential sources. 66

Administration critics in Congress remained skeptical about its evidence of outside arms shipments to the El Salvador rebels. Even Senate Republicans chided Haig for the absence of proof when he appeared before the Appropriations subcommittee. Wisconsin's Robert Kasten said, "Your policy is being questioned by the American people, and abandoned by friend and foe alike. If you have any evidence of outside interference in El Salvador, it is imperative it be brought forward. We want to support Administration policy, but we find it difficult to do so." However, despite its doubts about Administration policy, a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee voted in mid March 1982 to postpone action or a bill that would have prohibited any military aid for El Salvador. 67

In fact, the skepticism on Capitol Hill was partly a reaction to the Administration's overblown talk about outside influences.

66. Ibid. p. 11.
67. Ibid.
threatening El Salvador. Yet it was also a cause of such rhetoric. With its increased but scatter brained role in foreign affairs, congress was gradually tended to become a trouble some partner for the White House, undermining the ability of any Administration to sustain a wherent progress. Haig believed that the only way to avoid a paralysis of policy was to persuade congressmen that the fate of the Western world depends on their action.

REGIONAL AND OUTSIDE STATES ENCOURAGED PEACE EFFORTS:

There was massive public support in the western bloc for a political solution calling for unconditional discussions between the major political factions in El Salvador. The West German Government and the Socialist International, and Mexican French Declaration of August 1981 had also initiated for a negotiated settlement calling for talks to be held with the FDR-FMLN as a representative political force. 68

The Central American and the Caribbean states have also been actively participated in attempts to manage international conflicts within their own regions. Conflict management has traditionally characterised by massive foreign influence, particularly that of the United States, but recent unrest in Central America has tended to involve smaller states more directly in conflict. It has led them to become more concerned with conflict

68. Edward Best,.....op. cit., p. 40.
management. A series of proposals has been promoted by the minor republics of Central America aimed at relaxing tension and increasing stability and development in Central America and the Caribbean area.  

PANAMA: Panama, for instance, has also attempted to resolve the armed conflict in El Salvador by negotiations. The US Bowdler Plan was originated and backed by Panama when representatives of the US State Department and the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) of El Salvador held talks on peace initiatives in Tegucigalpa in January 1981. The plan contained five main points:

a) an immediate ceasefire, (b) reorganisation of the Salvadorean National Guard and a shake-up in the security forces, (c) reorganisation of the Salvadorean government to bring in FDR representatives, (d) elections to be held at a later date; and (e) a programme of economic reforms with US help. The FDR later rejected the ceasefire proposal as a precondition for further negotiations.  

Panama, however, has not ceased in its efforts to pursue a politically negotiated agreement for El Salvador. Actually, in July 1982, Panama managed to bring the Salvadorean armed forces, the opposition and a personal representative of Castow to the same table, for an informal meeting where they sought

70. Ibid., p. 55.
to work out the basis for a negotiated political settlement of the El Salvador, however, without result. 71

HONDURAS: Honduras, in the wake of armed involvement in the region, and deeply concerned that external forces were threatening the country's stability, has also called for a reduction of weapons and troops in Central America to levels strictly necessary for defense, territorial integrity and public order. 72

COSTA RICA: Costa Rica has endorsed the Honduras peace efforts she has also made efforts to mediate in the internal conflict of El Salvador by conducting discussions with both parties to the conflict, in order to reach at political solution.

Thus, a political solution was most broadly seen as the establishment of a functioning democratic system. It was also widely recognised that in the current circumstances elections alone could not solve the political problems, because it was unrealistic to expect rebel representatives to participate when they would face almost certain death at the hands of Right-wing death squads or the security forces themselves. The demands, therefore, were raised for discussions in order to guarantee a safe and stable environment for free democratic election.

71. Ibid.
INTERNAL PRESSURES FOR PEACE TALKS AND THE PERILS OF NEGOTIATIONS

As the civil war did worsen in El Salvador, enthusiasm did grow in the US to find some new way out of the bloodshed, and undefined "negotiated settlement" in place of the elections scheduled for March 28, 1982. The sentiment had spread from die hard liberals to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and had surged increasingly through capital Hill. The House of Representatives in the first week of March 1982 voted 396 to 3 for a carefully ledged resolution that sought "unconditional discussions" among the warring factions in El Salvador. In addition, 104 Congressmen, including twelve Republicans, signed a letter that in effect urged President Reagan to support Mexico's President Portillo's offer to inaugurate negotiations.\textsuperscript{73}

In addition, Pope John Paul II in March 1982 told thousands gathered in St. Peter's Square in Rome that the sins of the El Salvador junta have been "no less harsh and severe," than the terrorism of rebels. He called for a common effort without foreign exploitation," and advised plomats privately that be believed negotiations would achieve peace.\textsuperscript{74}

But the Reagan Administration and Duarte regime in El Salvador were steadfastly opposed to talks that might lead to

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Time}, March 15, 1982, p. 11

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
voluntary power sharing with the militant Marxists among the rebels one to US diplomat said. "It would be folly to negotiate." Thomas Enders said, "Negotiations would give the leftist minority a share of power it can not win on the battle field or earn at the ballot box." 75

In fact, the two sides on the issue of negotiations started .: with widely differing assumptions American backers of negotiations argued that giving the rebels some share of power was the only way to achieve a truce and thus stop the killings. The settlement supporters also invoked the American traditions of compromise and consensus, and argued that negotiations could produce a tolerant, pluralistic government. Democrat Congressman Michael Barnes of Maryland, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Inter. American Affairs insisted, "We can go to the table knowing what we will not concede - ultimate power. To say the only outcome is a Marxist - Linist Dectatorship is absurd." Senator Gary Hart, Democrat from Colorado added, "I am not wildly optimistic about negotiations working, but at least we could honest brokers rather than military promoters." 76

Many proponents of quick settlement argued that a chancy compromise was better than a sure loss - that the longer

75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.
fighting continues, the more likely the left is to win. Supporters further warned that if the militant Right-wingers gain power at the polls, they may trigger an even more brutal civil war of resistance. Underlying these arguments was a widespread liberal presumption that the rebels were the most representative group in El Salvador.77

Notably, the revolution in Nicaragua was settled by negotiations in 1979 in which the Marxist Sandinista guerrilla, who had driven dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle into exile, agreed to share power with the moderates. However, later moderates were forced out of office, or quit in frustration.78

Besides, a negotiated settlement, it was hoped that elections of 60 seat constituent Assembly in March, 1982 that will frame a new constitution, name an interim president and prepare for national elections, would put the PDC in power which would satisfy domestic critics and appear a plausible centrist alternative in El Salvador.79

VIOLENCE INCREASED BEFORE MARCH 1982 ELECTIONS:

Near the elections date, Government troops and Right-wing death-squads committed intensive brutalities

77. Ibid.
78. Detailed discussion is in the next chapter
particularly in rural area where guerrillas were most active. The guerrillas had control on strategic 62 mile stretch of Pacific Beach and room freely through most of the countryside. In such circumstances, the relevance of the election results as a real will of the people might be questioned.  

A Canadian Professor Mr. Alison Acker visited the El Salvador before the elections. He received reply by a Salvadorean in his inquiry, how he felt about the elections and whether Salvadoreans believed elections would help. "If the White House told us to have elections next weak, we'd have them. Why should we care? It's the Yankees who want them and they'll have them. We'll vote as usual; and as usual, we know that'll be a fraud."  

Thus, as the March 82 elections was drawn nearer, it was seemed certain that both the violence and the outcry it produced could only grow greater in El Salvador. Major Aubuisson, an ultrarightist, asserted before the elections that it might "justifiably" be necessary to kill 1,00,000 to 2,00,000 people to bring "peace" to El Salvador.  

GUERRILLAS CAPABILITY TO STRIKE WAS INCREASING AND US REACTIONS:

In response of the killings, the guerrillas were fighting in their own way. Members of the Marxist dominated Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in February 1982 slipped under cover of darkness among the open hangers at El Salvador's heavily guarded Ilopango military airport. They placed explosive charges around some of the country's fleet of venerable fighter aircraft and 14 US-built UH-IH "Huey" helicopters and about 28 aircraft.\(^{83}\)

The Ilopango bomb blasts had echoes in Washington, where the Reagan Administration was the principal backer of El Salvador's President Jose Napoleon Duarte. Following the raid, the State Department declared that we must be prepared to increase our economic and our military assistance to El Salvador as necessary. We are presently reassessing needs on an urgent basis.\(^{84}\)

GUERRILLAS STRATEGY: The FMLN, in fact, launched attacks on Salvador military positions in various parts of the country. The guerrillas were not trying to gain and hold large areas of territory. They were not capable of doing so, and in any

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84. Ibid.
case their strategy was evidently to kill as many soldiers as possible, exploit the army's human rights abuses, and disrupt the economy and the upcoming elections. In January 1982, the insurgents had aimed at destroying or dominating transportation and communication links. They had been highly successful. In August 1981, up to 75 percent of the country was without electricity at one time or another due to guerrilla attacks. El Salvador's gross national product, which grew by 4.4 percent as recently as 1978, shrank by 19.5 percent in 1981. A decline in world prices for such exports as coffee, cotton and sugar was a factor in the slump, but the war had brought new investment to a halt and driven many businessmen to close their doors and flee the country. 85

The guerrillas, therefore, were also trying to ruin the country's economy in order to cause chaos that they could further exploit. They made bridges, power stations, electrical pylons their targets. Their strategy was succeeding, between $700 million and $1 billion in private capital has fled El Salvador, another $1 billion in commercial credits has been withdrawn by nervous bankers. 86

Despite the guerrilla attacks, the military situation in El Salvador was in effect a standoff. The guerrillas were

running short of military hardware, though the Reagan Administration had made frequent accusations that significant numbers of weapons were being clandestinely supplied to the guerrillas by Nicaragua. According to some leftist sources, the main reason the insurgents failed to launch an expected offensive in mid-January 1982 was that their ammunition stocks couldn't sustain both a major attack and a longer range war of attrition.

Notably, there was initially, a lack of professionalism among the rebels. The FMLN was an irregular peasant army. Many of the FMLN fighters were landless labourers who treated them worse than cattle, because they were less "valuable" than the livestock.

WEAKNESS OF SALVADOREAN ARMY: The Salvadorean army also was plagued by lack of air transport communications equipment and non-commissioned officers. In October 1980, the US sent its first military advisers to El Salvador to improve the local army's antiguerrilla capabilities. In January 1982, the US began a basic training programme for some 1,500 Salvadorean troops at Fort Bragg, N.C., and Fort Benning, Ga. It was the largest programme of its kind undertaken by the US to train foreign troops on domestic soil.

88. Time, February 15, 1982, p. 8, also see.
THE US MILITARY TRAINING TO SALVADOREAN TROOPS:

A continent of 900 or so salvadorean soldiers arrived at Fort Bragg in mid-February 1982 to learn the skills of a US Army light - infantry battalian. The four month intensive course, (the equivalent of almost a full year's training for US tropps) was aimed at helping the Salvadoreans operate in co-ordinated fashion as a large-scale military unit. Notably, some 600 other salvadorean trainees, who arrived at Fort Benning in the first week of February 1982, were given a combined 14 week basic training and officer candidate course. The aim of this training was to build leadership qualities and to learn tactics like military operations in an urban terrain," meaning, among other things, the proper techniques for house to house searches.92

It is significant to note that the leftist guerrillas were under the political command of a man know as Federico, who had a shrewd assessment of the Salvadorean army's strengths and weaknesses. He admitted, "The US had made a significant difference." He added, "The technical abilities of the army are not great, although the bombs and artillery are really improved. The American training is visibly in special units, but on the ground the army is still not very good. The basic problem with the majority is morale. We can move anywhere. We are not going to fight a war of positions. There are too many

92. Ibid.
targets of opportunity."\textsuperscript{93}

The US military training was beneficial for El Salvador in the medium and long term, but Washington did hope for more immediate political benefits from its policies regarding March 28, 1982 presidential elections. The voting results were expected to be contentious, since all left-wing parties had announced a boycott of the proceedings in order to protest their exclusion from a share in political power. Thus, there was only eight parties in the fray, most of them far to the Right of President Duarte's Christian Democrats. It was believed that the guerrilla forces, who had control of some 30 Salvadorean municipalities, will do their utmost to disrupt the voting through intimidation or armed attacks.\textsuperscript{94}

FIGHTING AT GUAZAPA BEFORE THE ELECTIONS:

It became evident when the harsh fighting between El Salvador's army and the insurgents took place at Guazapa few days before the March elections, a bout 15 miles from the country's capital San Salvador. A guerrilla contingent had allegedly turned Guazapa into a formidable stronghold. About 1500 government soldiers swarmed around the rugged, inactive volcano of Guazapa. They pounded the area with heavy artillery, while support aircraft including the US helicopters rained down phosphorous bombs and 100 lb and 500 lb high explosive charges. The attack aircraft were hit by heavy ground fire

\textsuperscript{93} Time, March 15, 1982, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{94} Time, February 15, 1982, p. 8.
from machine, guns. In the fighting the army claimed to have 
suffered 16 dead and 31 wounded but casualty toll was substantially 
highly. A TIME photographer Harry Mattison, who witnessed 
the fighting, said that "dead bodies were being stacked like 
logs. The army decided to hit a wasps nest and was heavily 
stung." 

The US political and military analysts were increasingly 
pessimistic about the corrosive psychological effects of the 
drawnout fighting on the armed forces that buttressed the 
civilian-military government of El Salvador. A senior US 
military analyst said that we were trying our damnedest to 
keep this enthusiasm up. Significantly, a high ranking US 
specialist on central America warned, that the momentum has 
gone, and we are within inches of losing control over the 
situation entirely.

GRIM NATURE OF EVENTS IN EL SALVADOR:

In fact, in an atmosphere of terror and repression, 
critical Constituent Assembly elections of March 28 were 
going to be sponsored in El Salvador in order to prove legitimacy 
to the repressive Duarte's regime. The consequences of the 
war showed themselves on the city's dark underside—burglars and 
stick up artists who once carried knives as weapons had


obtained machine guns and grenades. Every day human rights workers used to patrol San Salvador's poorer neighbourhoods to look for corpses left in the streets by marauding death squads whose members were often reported to belong to the Salvadorean security forces. In addition, the Salvadorean middle and upper classes seemingly adopted a totalistic disregard for the coming elections.97

US FAVOURED DUARTE IN MARCH 82 ELECTIONS—CONSIDERED CRUCIAL FOR ESTABLISHING DEMOCRACY:

The US policy-makers, however, were counting heavily on the elections to augment the power and authority of Salvadorean civilians, notably President Duarte,98 in dealing with the militant left and the paramilitary Right. A Duarte victory in the 1982 elections, the US Administration assumed, would give his Christian Democrats a major say in redesigning El Salvador's political constitution and would also help dispel the suspicion that Duarte was critically dependent on the powerful local oligarchy.99

98. Torecall, Duarte, a longtime opponent of the right-wing landowners and military figures, who had dominated El Salvador for decades, was installed as President only after a "progressive" military coup in October 1979.
RISING INFLUENCE OF AUBUISSON AND US NERVOUSNESS:

Thus, the Christian Democrats were still the favourites for Washington in the election but an ominous dark horse party was gaining popularity fast. That group was ARENA (the Spanish acronym for National Republican Alliance), an ultra-rightist organisation headed by suave and ruthless Roberto D'Aubuisson, a former Salvadorean national guard intelligence officer.

But, Washington did hope that the March 28 elections will produce a solid majority for President Duarte's moderate Christian Democrats. A veteran politician, who returned from exile and joined the junta, Duarte's victory was essential to the political solution that US policy-makers were banking on. Roberto d'Aubuisson was assumed capable to sap Duarte's strength in the assembly. His victory it was believed in Washington, would be a blow to US aims in El Salvador and would increase the slaughter that had killed more than 30,000 Salvadoreans since 1979. However, Duarte did his best to drum up enthusiasm for the election.

In spite of its high stakes, an important question hanging over the Salvadorean election was whether enough voters will turn out to give the results any real legitimacy. There was considerable public skepticism about the electoral
process in a country where the military had stolen or manipulated elections since 1931. 100

US ROLE AFTER MARCH 82 ELECTIONS RESULTS THAT PROVED INCONCLUSIVE:

The PDC couldn't win a majority in March 28, 1982 elections. The constituent Assembly was dominated by the Right, and presided over by Aubuisson. However, the prospect of a Right-wing coalition government presided over by the infamous D' Aubuisson, was averted by a burst of proconsular activity by the US Embassy and a letter from Haig threatening to cut off aid. 101

The members of El Salvador's newly elected Constituent Assembly chosen Avaro Alfredo Magana 102 by a vote of 36 to 17. While his backer portrayed him as a competent moderate, his enemies in the ultraright National Republic Alliance denounced him as the biggest thief in El Salvador. 103

US PRODDING WITH SALVADOREAN ARMY:

Magana's election was part of a compromise worked out by the major political parties after strong prodding from the Salvadorean military and the US embassy. The same agreement

100. *Time*, March 29, 1982, p. 28
101. See, Edward Best, *....*, p. 41.
102. He studied economics at the University of Chicago from 1915 to 1955, and Subsequently worked for the Washington based organisation of American States.
also led to the election of three Vice Presidents instead of one—Representing the largest parties in the Assembly, they were Raul Molina Martinez of the rightist National Conciliation Party (PCN), Gabriel Mauricio Gutierrez Castro of ARENA, and Pablo Mawicio Alvergene of the Centrist Christian Democrats. The result gave at least the appearance of a political consensus. US Ambassador Deane Hinton declared, "A government of national unity is good news for El Salvador. Democracy is at work."

But, it was a fragile democracy of byzantine complexity that put Magna in the Presidential Palace. The selection of a provisional head of state capped a month of cutthroat political manoeuvring that began with the March 28 election for a constituent Assembly. That ballot had given 40 percent of the popular vote to the Christian Democrats, led by outgoing junta President Duarte and as already mentioned, supported by the US for its progressive land and banking reforms. But a right-wing coalition headed by ARENA and the PCN won control of 34 of the Assembly's 60 seats and boldly moved to seize power. It gave, therefore, the assembly presidency to ARENA Leader Rober to D. Aubuinsson, a former major with alleged links to the country's notorious death squads.

104. Ibid.
105. Ibid.
The right's relentless drive for total control of the new government was blocked by the US, as briefly mentioned earlier. The US pressure had convinced the country's military commanders that a rightist monopoly of the most important jobs in the government might cause congress to cut off military aid. Without Washington's largesse, which was expected to total $362 million in 1982, the military would be homestrung in its fight against the leftist guerrillas seeking to topple the government. The Salvadorean Generals, therefore, insisted on a respectable moderate as provisional President. Their preferred candidate was Magana, who was also acceptable to the US and to a faction of the PCN, the old political arm of the military regimes that ruled the country from 1961 until the October 1979 coup that ultimately brought outgoing President Duarte's civilian-military junta to power.106

The Salvadorean army commanders in response to US prodding, steeped up their pressure in favour of Magana's election. Aubuission and other political leaders were summoned to high command headquarters and bluntly warned that the military might mount a coup if the Right didn't go along with the army's demands. Faced with that ultimatum, the politicians quickly hammered together the deal that led

106. Ibid
to the election of Magana, and his three Vice Presidents. Notably, Magana's nomination by the army reportedly did stem from his practice of giving preferential interest rates to military officers during his 17 years as President of El Salvador's Banco Hipotecario.107

But even after the March elections, the killings of innocent civilians continued. The US threat in this regard, in fact, carried only limited weight.

US POLICY IN DILEMMA:

The US Administration, in fact, followed a low enthusiasm for the Salvadoreans reforms. Its vociferous commitment to drawing the line,108 against communism in El Salvador had an inevitable political impact in the country's politics itself. The credibility of US assertions of the need to end abuses, and its pressure on local anti-communists was undermined by statements issued by some Administration officials about the mistake of excessive conditionality, the vital importance of aid,109 and the need to avoid the mistake of treating El Salvador in its own local terms and to deal with this issue as a global problem of International

107. Ibid.
Communism. This was the reason that when the US threatened to cut off aid if the abuses do not stop, even the ultra-rightists were convinced that there would never be a real cutoff of aid, "Reagan will never let the Communists win here. It's just a complete bluff." However, the US Ambassador declared that if there was no substantial progress in human rights situation in El Salvador, "the United States, in spite of our other interests, in spite of our commitment in the struggle against communism, could be forced to deny assistance to El Salvador."

Thus, the US policy including the Salvadoreans, was in real dilemma. Salvadoreans would seem to be the more likely to respond to aid restrictions and threats, the greater the insurgent threat, and thereby the greater the importance to them of the aid. But the greater the insurgent threat, the less likely the US would seem to be cut off aid, and thereby the less convincing the pressures.

113. Edward Best, .......op. cit., p. 42.
114. Ibid.
EL SALVADOR RECEIVED MILITARY ASSISTANCE OTHER THAN THE US:

However, El Salvador, like most of Latin America, had in the 1970s increasingly acquired military equipment from sources other than the US. The core of the Air Force consisted of old French-manufactured jet aircraft brought from Israel, from which El Salvador had purchased some 80 percent of its arms imports between 1972 and 1980.115

Notably, in 1981-82, outright military victory by either side didn't appear imminent. The Salvadorean military didn't then believe that the guerrillas posed a threat to their survival116. While the US assumed that if El Salvador falls, no country in Central America would be safe and American security would be affected.

US SECURITY WAS AT STAKE:

The U.S. policy makers presumed that US couldn't defend her borders and meet her commitments around the world without a secure Western Hemisphere. The Reagan Administration warned the American people that for the first time in memory, the Americans did face real danger on their border and must protect the safety and security of the country.117

115. Edward Best, op. cit. p. 43.
116. Ibid.
Thus, President Reagan revived the old domino theory\textsuperscript{118} in considering El Salvador as a strategic frontier for the defense of the West.

The US Administration made it clear that it intended to draw a line in El Salvador, as part of its view that Soviet-Cuban backed subversion lies behind armed insurrection in the Western Hemisphere. The US policy-makers raised the question that if El Salvador was captured by a violent minority, who in Central America would not line in fear? How long would it be before strategic US interest were at risks?

In spite of continuing agony and murder of people in El Salvador, therefore, the US continued economic and military aid to El Salvador. There was/little doubt that Salvadorean security forces were involved in large number of brutal murders. However, the Reagan Administration concluded that political violence in El Salvador has declined in 1981. The US Administration began, particularly after March 1982 elections, to give more attention to present a convincing appearance of progress toward peace and democracy and played a key role in signing a pact in August 1982 between the three ruling parties the PDC, the National Conciliation Party (PCN), and Aubuisson's ARENA. The seven point agreement established political, human rights and peace committees to supervise its execution A new

\textsuperscript{118} The Theory, that if, the first in a line of standing dominees falls it knocks down all the others in the row, was first implemented by the US government to justify American engagement in South East Asia during the Vietnam war.
Constitution was to be ready for 1983, and Presidential elections held in 1984.\footnote{Edward Best, \textit{op. cit.}, p.43.}

CONCLUSION:

In El Salvador, the armed forces are in complete charge of the nation: politics and administration. The fighting between El Salvador's army and some 4,000 to 6,000 Marxist led guerrillas is growing bloody. Neither side could score a decisive victory, but the guerrillas were increasingly able to launch strikes in the countryside. The slaughter in this civil war has killed 40 thousand Salvadoreans.

The endemic violence in El Salvador, the tiny and heavily populated country, mainly attributed to the government's own security forces, especially right-wing security forces were blamed for many of the country's political killings. Although, the rebels too have been responsible for many random shootings but most victims of the violence have apparently died at the hands of security forces.

As various human rights organisations began to assail the US for supporting the El Salvador governments the Administration took a tough stand, arguing that El Salvador occupied an
important place in East-West struggle for dominance in Latin America. Therefore, it believed that to withhold assistance at this point would be to abandon El Salvador. The US Administration had fear that any slackening of US support might lead to a major opportunity in Central America for Soviet sponsored Cuba, abetted by the neighbouring Marxist dominated Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. US policy was, therefore, to aid and encourage the Salvadorean government in its anti-guerrilla efforts. The Reagan Administration was sharply critical of the Marxist-dominated Nicaragua, which the Administration accused of sending army to the Salvadorean guerrillas.

The Reagan's domino thesis, therefore, that if El Salvador falls, central America will collapse under communist sway, believe that the US national security is at stake in Central America. The US has projected an image that the Americans are fighting with the communists and Soviet threat in Central America. The US Administration, in this attempt, has identified the American interests with the interests of the Salvadorean government.

The Reagan Administration, however has promised that it would never send American troops in El Salvador. But, specially since 1980, the US has been drawn steadily into the internal affairs of El Salvador. The US military and economic aid has, in fact, fostered increasing dependency, and the large scale military aid may lead to the Salvador armed forces continuing
to ignore political reality.

However, El Salvador's March 28, 1982 constituent Assembly elections was seen in Washington as a crucial step toward returning the country to full civilian rule. But the legitimacy of that elections, in keeping view of El Salvador's political environment in mind, was doubtful. Nothing really changed, as the elections proved inconclusive. The death toll continued to mount before and even after the elections. Then an average of 200 to 400 people a week were killed in battle or by paramilitary death squads, whose members often came from the Salvador's security forces.

Various outside countries, other than the United states, have been honestly working for a political solution of civil war in El Salvador. The leading regional states and the Central American States have requested a systematic dialogue between the interested parties and a genuine readiness to grant mutual concessions without abandoning essential principles and legitimate interests. W. Germany, Sweden, Mexico, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Panama, and even Nicaragua, for instance, have searched for an acceptable mechanism to initiate the negotiations.

But the US administration has consistently maintaining a confrontational posture with the leftists. It saw serious drawbacks for the US in any negotiated settlement with the guerrillas. The US policy-makers believed that it would give
the guerrillas power that they had won neither on the battlefield nor at the ballot box. Negotiations would vindicate guerrilla warfare by abandoning the principle that an insurgency shouldn't be allowed to force a government to the bargaining table by means of violence. The talks, the US believed, would also be found to increase the momentum for an eventual leftist triumph. The US Administration also assumed that a negotiated settlement would undercut the US position in the East-West struggle with the Soviet Union. It would be a proof that the leading power in the West couldn't find a way to protect a friendly ally at close hand.

In addition, the US Administration also believed that it would have little chance of persuading right-wing elements to agree to a settlement that would include the guerrillas. The rightists in El Salvador would certainly see negotiations as being a prelude to their political defeat and possible extermination. The US experts who had been studying the increasing frustration, belligerence and obstinacy of the right in Central America did fear the ultraconservatives might join in an alliance against the left, creating an international ideological war in Central America. The US policy makers, significantly, were convinced that El Salvador was by no means a lost cause. Thus, the US Administration was, in fact, couldn't believe in negotiations. For, it did fear that a negotiated settlement would lead inevitably to a Marxist-Leninist takeover in El Salvador.
Above all, the US policy requires to recognise that everything has changed in Central America. The US, of course has a vital interest in Central America's future that interest, in fact, will ultimately depend on forming a genuine partnership with the countries of the region.

But, Reaganisation of Central America has resulted in the ultimate importance of a country that is forced to act out somebody else's drama, and hide its own. What is happening in El Salvador is now decided by the White House. It is the US dollars that pay the army and prop up a bankrupt economy of El Salvador.

Reagan policy has revealed his intentions that United states will more readily intervene to prevent hostile government in the region. The political objective of the United States is to keep as many as the Central America and the Caribbean countries as her client states.

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Military aid $10 million
Economic aid $38 million

CARIBBEAN SEA

Miskito Indians

El Salvador

Military aid $100 thousand
Economic aid $104 million

Nicaragua

Military aid $50 million
Economic aid $10 million

Costa Rica

Military aid $50 thousand
Economic aid $51 million

Panama Canal

San Juan del Norte

Militant figures

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