Berghof Conflict Research

Alberto Martín Álvarez

From Revolutionary War to Democratic Revolution

The Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador

9

Berghof Transitions Series
Resistance/Liberation Movements and Transition to Politics

Alberto Martín Álvarez:
From Revolutionary War to Democratic Revolution: The Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador.

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Berghof Conflict Research
Altensteinstraße 48a
D–14195 Berlin, Germany
Tel. +49/(0)30 - 844154-0
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Resistance/Liberation Movements and Transition to Politics

Editors
Véronique Dudouet and Hans J. Giessmann

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About this Publication Series

This case-study is one of a series produced by participants in an ongoing Berghof research programme on transitions from violence to peace (*Resistance and Liberation Movements in Transition*). The programme's overall aim is to learn from the experience of those in resistance or liberation movements who have used violence in their struggle but have also engaged politically during the conflict and in any peace process. Recent experience around the world has demonstrated that reaching political settlement in protracted social conflict always eventually needs the involvement of such movements. Our aim here is to discover how, from a non-state perspective, such political development is handled, what is the relationship between political and military strategies and tactics, and to learn more about how such movements (often sweepingly and simplistically bundled under the label of *non-state armed groups*) contribute to the transformation of conflict and to peacemaking. We can then use that experiential knowledge (1) to offer support to other movements who might be considering such a shift of strategy, and (2) to help other actors (states and international) to understand more clearly how to engage meaningfully with such movements to bring about political progress and peaceful settlement.

Political violence is a tool of both state and non-state actors, and replacing it by political methods of conflict management is essential to making sustainable peace. With this programme we want to understand better how one side of that equation has been, or could be, achieved. Depending on the particular case, each study makes a strong argument for the necessary inclusion of the movement in any future settlement, or documents clearly how such a role was effectively executed.

We consciously asked participants to reflect on these movement's experience from their own unique point of view. What we publish in this series is not presented as neutral or exclusively accurate commentary. All histories are biased histories, and there is no single truth in conflict or in peace. Rather, we believe these case-studies are significant because they reflect important voices which are usually excluded or devalued in the analysis of conflict. Increasing numbers of academics, for example, study "armed groups" from outside, but few actually engage directly with them to hear their own points of view, rationales, and understandings of their context. We are convinced that these opinions and perspectives urgently need to be heard in order to broaden our understanding of peacemaking. For exactly this reason, each case study has been produced with the very close co-operation of, and in some cases authored by, members of the movement concerned. As the results amply illustrate, these perspectives are sophisticated, intelligent, political and strategic.

The reader may or may not agree with the perspectives expressed. But, much more importantly, we hope that the reader will accept that these perspectives are valid in themselves and must be included in any attempt at comprehensive understanding of violent conflict and its transformation. We urgently need to understand in more depth the dynamics of organisations who make the transition between political violence and democratic politics, in order to improve our understanding of their role, and our practice, in making peace.

For further information on the project, please contact:

Véronique Dudouet (Project Coordinator)
v.dudouet@berghof-conflictresearch.org

Prof. Hans J. Giessmann (Director, BCR)
giessmann@berghof-conflictresearch.org

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Introduction

In the context of an authoritarian regime, controlled by the military in alliance with a powerful landowning oligarchy, Salvadoran political-military organisations sprung up throughout the 1970s. Political and economic exclusion were the basis from which a wide popular movement arose – one that was to be almost immediately confronted with massive and indiscriminate repression. Faced with the closing of arenas for political participation, huge numbers of activists joined the ranks of the guerrilla army during the late 1970s. The five Salvadoran revolutionary organisations[1] created the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (*Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*, FMLN) in October 1980, with the joint aim of both procuring the government's defeat as well as creating a socialist project.

Following the defeat of the "final offensive" launched by the FMLN to oust the government in 1981, the conflict turned into a longstanding civil war that only came to an end when the main leaders from both sides became convinced it was impossible to attain military victory. The January 1992 Chapultepec Agreements that were to end the conflict paved the way for the democratisation of the regime, for political demilitarisation and for the FMLN to become a political party.

The study of the transition process of the FMLN meets a series of criteria that make it particularly interesting. On the one hand, in military terms, it was Latin America's most powerful guerrilla movement. During the Front's strongest periods there was one guerrilla for every 500 people. (In Colombia, this figure reached perhaps one guerrilla per 3,000 people). On the other hand, the Front decided to negotiate and disarm itself without having suffered a military defeat, while it still had a very important armed force and considerable social backing. Another very notable element is that once it became a political party, the FMLN's performance was very successful. It became the opposition's leading political force, overcoming political parties with greater experience in electoral politics. Since 2000 it has become the leading strength within the Legislative Assembly, and went on to win the presidency in March 2009.

This work analyses the emergence, dynamics and the transformation of the FMLN into a political party. The report pays particular attention to the causes that led to the armed struggle in El Salvador and the factors that made a negotiated solution to the armed conflict possible. Finally it identifies some important elements of the development of the FMLN as a political party. The work is based on thirty-five in-depth interviews and life stories of former commanders of the five armed organisations that composed the FMLN. The fieldwork was conducted in several waves in 1998, 2008, 2009 and 2010, and focused especially on former members of the FMLN General Command, as well as former members of the different political or central committees of the five organisations. Some of the key informants were interviewed on more than one occasion. Additionally, interviews by other researchers have been used, as well as literature on various aspects of the Salvadoran armed conflict.

1 Namely: the Popular Liberation Forces Farabundo Marti (*Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Marti*, FPL), People's Revolutionary Army (*Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo*, ERP); National Resistance (*Resistencia Nacional*, RN); Revolutionary Party of the Central American Workers (*Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos*, PRTC) and Salvadoran Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de El Salvador*, PCS). For purposes of clarity, the original Spanish names have been omitted from this text, but can be consulted in Annex 1.

1. Historical context and the rise of political-military organisations

1.1 The roots of the conflict

The leading causes of the Salvadoran conflict are found, on the one hand, in the persistence throughout the 20th century of a primary-export economic structure that was founded on the concentration of land ownership and income in the hands of a small economic elite. On the other hand, they can be traced to the existence of an authoritarian and exclusionary political regime that was dedicated to defending the interests of this elite and confronted the widespread popular mobilisation with the use of indiscriminate repression. The political and economic exclusion of the majority of the population helped spread the revolutionary ideology and the growth of guerrilla groups created in the early 1970s. Given the lack of institutional channels that would resolve the political, economic and social crisis prevalent in this decade, a great part of Salvadoran society viewed armed struggle as the only possible way to face structural violence.

1.1.1 The crisis of the primary-export economic model

Present day Salvador's social and economic foundations were set during the so-called "liberal period" that went from 1881 to 1921. At this point in time an economic model based on the growth and export of coffee was strengthened, and it became the country's main source of income in the 1930s. Adopting this primary-export economic model had major repercussions on the social and political arenas. It caused the ownership of farming land – which was the country's main productive resource and thus its greatest asset – to become heavily concentrated. It is worth stating that in 1970, while 86% of the population that worked in the farming sector received 24% of the generated revenue, only 2% of the population received 46% of this revenue (Gordon 1989: 33). Most of the income was held by a small, powerful, land-owning oligarchy which exerted almost complete dominion over Salvadoran economy and society throughout the 20th century. At the other end of the spectrum were the peasant masses, cast out from the country's central and western areas given over to the coffee expansion, and who sought refuge in the mountain areas of marginal agricultural lands located to the north. Forced to work in very low yield plots and lacking sufficient income to survive, they hired themselves out as seasonal hands on the coffee plantations. It was precisely within this rural sector that guerrilla organisations found their greatest support in the 1980s.

The economic modernisation that took place during the second half of the 20th century, fuelled by a growth in international demand, featured a branching out of commercial crops. Sugar cane and cotton crops were added to coffee crops during the 1950s, and thus, the best farming lands were monopolised. In a small country lacking an agricultural frontier to expand, the development of these export crops brought about an increase in the lease of farming lands, which resulted in many rural families being driven out, as they owned no land and were unable to meet the new demands. As a result of this process, the number of non-landowning rural families practically tripled from 1961 to 1971, and reached almost 30% of the total number of families in the country, while in 1971 almost 64% of families owned less than a hectare of land (Gordon 1989: 56).

The creation of the Central American common market in 1960 also brought with it

a limited process of import substitution industrialisation, which resulted in the expansion of trade, industry, construction and finance. Under the umbrella of this economic diversification, the Salvadoran social structure suffered great changes during this period. There was significant rural migration to urban areas, especially towards the capital city, San Salvador. Also, the middle classes experienced great growth during those years, especially teachers and public officials, as a consequence of the growth of the state apparatus. This growth was also reflected in the spectacular increase of the university population which went up by 224% from 1961 to 1971 (Gordon 1989: 49). When guerrilla groups started coming together in 1970, most of the leaders actually came from within the university student ranks.[2]

The so-called "Soccer War"[3] that took place between El Salvador and Honduras in the summer of 1969 and the international economic crisis of 1973 caused a decrease in real salaries, a rapid growth in inflation and high unemployment rates in the industrial and manufacturing sectors. The war forced over 130,000 Salvadoran agricultural workers living in Honduras to repatriate. This in turn resulted in a greater shortage of farming land in a country with a rural population of 60% in the mid 1970s. Thus, the percentage of landless rural families increased to 40% in 1975 and to almost 65% by 1980 (Almeida 2008: 114). This succession of economic problems fuelled discontent amongst rural and urban workers. The demand for an agrarian reform and the implementation of effective measures against inflation and unemployment were the main demands of the strong popular movement that sprung up in the late 1970s. This movement was the expression of an alliance between peasant, worker, student and teacher organisations. As will be stated below, many activists of the popular movement joined the guerrilla organisations at a later date.

1.1.2. Political exclusion

From the political point of view, an authoritarian regime founded on the alliance between the landowning oligarchy and the military was instituted in El Salvador. It was grounded on the continuity of a system of privileges for the oligarchy through the use of coercive labour relationships secured by the armed and security forces. The cornerstone of this pact between the economic and state elites rested on the "bifurcation" of power (Parkman 2006: 52). The military became the political elite for almost 50 years, while the oligarchy maintained almost complete control of the country's premier economic institutions. In an economy that depended on the export of labour-intensive agricultural produce, which was established through coercive methods, recourse to repression became a structural need of the great producers, who competed with their international peers based on low salaries. Given these starting points, the political regime suffered almost permanently from a lack of popular legitimacy, which forced it to systematically face opposition with the intensive use of repression. To address the constant danger caused by social discontent, armed and security forces took charge of the protection of the economic elite in exchange for them releasing their hold on state institutions (Stanley 1996). This scheme for the bifurcation of power, established under the threat of the peasant revolt of 1932, persisted way beyond the concrete historical conditions that had given rise to it. Throughout the 20th century the repressive apparatus acquired considerable autonomy from the economic elite, and the military

2 For example: Joaquin Villalobos Huezo, Ana Guadalupe Martínez and Rafael Arce Zablah of the ERP, Francisco Jovel and Nidia Diaz of the PRTC, Eduardo Sancho and Carlos Eduardo Rico Mira of the RN, Felipe Peña Mendoza, Medardo González and Atilio Montalvo of the FPL, among many others.

3 The "Soccer War" was a brief armed conflict fought by Honduras and El Salvador in July 1969. The war was caused by tensions arising from the presence of several hundreds of thousands of Salvadoran immigrants in Honduras. The triggers of the conflict were clashes between football fans of the two countries in the context of a qualifying round for a soccer championship.

secured a series of privileges they would spend all of this period defending.

It is necessary to point out that since the mid 1960s the political regime took on a façade of representative democracy by adopting an electoral system of proportional representation. This system allowed for the electoral rise of the main opposition political party, the Christian Democratic Party (PDC). However, when the increase of popular support experienced by the PDC threatened to remove the military's National Conciliation Party (PCN) from power, the regime responded with electoral fraud in 1972 and 1977. It also countered the strong demands for agrarian reform and political democratisation coming from the popular movement of the mid 1970s with increased repression.[4] The agrarian reform threatened the basis of the economy of the landowning oligarchy, while democratisation risked the benefits obtained by the military as a result of their control over the state. Although the regime had engaged in repression of political opponents in the various crises it had undergone – 1944, 1960-1961, 1968 – repression had been selective and had been implemented mainly through incarceration and torture. However, from 1972 onwards, the repression exerted by the regime changed both qualitatively and quantitatively; it became a mass repression, and utilised different tools. From this moment on, "disappearances" became common. They were usually enforced by death squads, namely, by non-uniformed personnel from the security forces acting under the direction of intelligence services. As an example of this, from 1966 to 1972, Legal Christian Aid – one of the country's main human rights organisations – had only registered one case of forced disappearance. Figures soared, however, and reached 48 cases from 1973 to 1976 and 611 from 1977 to 1980 (Almeida 2008: 152). This increase in repression greatly eroded the legitimacy of the political regime and contributed to radicalising the militants of the popular movement. They went from making specific demands according to the different productive sectors they represented to mass identification with the revolutionary project upheld by the guerrilla movements, which they rapidly joined as of the late 1970s. Ongoing electoral fraud (1972-1977) was perceived by guerrilla activists as confirmation that a peaceful democratisation of the political regime was impossible. This belief also played a part in the perception that the alternative project embodied by the guerrilla organisations was the only one that was feasible.

1.1.3. The boom of the revolutionary counterculture

The growth of the urban population and the exponential increase of university students associated with the process of economic modernisation mentioned above took place in a historical era – the mid 1970s – marked by the boom of a revolutionary counterculture that was prevalent in all Latin America. The victory of the Cuban revolution was, in the eyes of thousands of young Latin Americans, a successful example of social and political change through arms. To quote Martí (2004: 110), "the Cuban victory brought about a change in the cultural repertoire of collective action in Latin America." From the Cuban revolution onwards, the creation of guerrilla groups and the ensuing seizing of power through armed struggle became acceptable solutions in the eyes of those attempting to define how to truly change a reality seeped in poverty, inequality and political authoritarianism. The Cuban revolution contributed to portraying violence as the means for achieving social and political transformation in the eyes of a considerable number of young people. As a result of the influence of the Cuban example, revolution and armed struggle became practically a moral imperative for thousands of Salvadoran youths. Parallel to this, the acceptance of the Cuban revolutionary way also signified the rejection of political proposals geared towards a

4 Examples of this are the repression of the student demonstration on 30 July 1975, which caused the deaths of dozens of students, the massacres of peasants in La Cayetana, Tres Calles and Chinamequita in 1974, or the shooting of demonstrators in the Plaza Libertad on February 27, 1977.

gradual path to socialism – as was advocated by the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS) – and of those which revolved around the possibility of making reforms within the frame of capitalism, as was the case with the Democratic Christian Party (PDC).

Another element which marked the revolutionary counterculture of that time in El Salvador was Marxism-Leninism. However, as opposed to the textbook Marxism exported by the Soviet Union and spread by the PCS, which was the dominant version of Marxism prevalent in Salvadoran universities (the breeding ground that yielded most of the revolutionary organisations' founders) in the late 1970s, there was the so-called "Western Marxism". The works of Antonio Gramsci, Herbert Marcuse or Louis Althusser in particular and readings by economists aligned with Trotskyism such as Ernest Mandel, as well as the work of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, the Vietnamese Marxism of Truong Chinh or the thoughts of Ché Guevara were the sources for the version of Marxism-Leninism that the first militants of the Salvadoran guerrilla groups drew from.[5] From these influences, the activists extracted a series of basic assumptions. Firstly, the state's lack of autonomy was viewed as an expression of the ruling class' interests, namely, those of the landowning oligarchy. The rejection of democracy, which was seen as a façade created to hide the dominion of the oligarchy, in turn led to the rejection of elections as a means of attaining power. The belief that it was impossible to procure social justice within the framework of capitalism led activists to criticise all reform strategies, to aspire to the construction of a socialist society and to view armed struggle as the only possible way they would attain power. Last of all, there was also the belief regarding the necessary role of a 'vanguard' of professional revolutionaries that were to unleash the anti-capitalist revolution, defeat the regime's army and capture the state apparatus (Grenier 1999: 75).

The other main element of the cultural repertoire in which the first guerrilla militants were socialised politically was liberation theology. Catholic priests inspired by this movement sought to approach the poor and excluded members of their societies, promoting an active desire to transform their reality and instilling a criticism of the fatalistic visions that had characterised these sectors for centuries. In the Salvadoran case, religious leaders who followed liberation theology implemented it mainly, though not exclusively, by developing association structures between the rural populations of the most depressed areas in the country: Christian base communities and peasant associations. This new interpretation of Christianity also influenced the youth sectors of the PDC. Many young people affiliated with youth organisations linked to this party, such as the Salvadoran University Catholic Action (ACUS), were also frequently committed to the Catholic church's pastoral endeavours and were involved in supporting rural communities through various means, such as literacy campaigns utilising the method of Brazilian educator Paolo Freire.[6] These endeavours made it possible for the middle class youth to see the misery that thousands of Salvadoran agricultural workers lived in. Many of these youths, infused with profound religious beliefs, found in the teachings of liberation theology a legitimisation to fight for an improvement in the living conditions of agricultural workers, even with weapons in their hands, while Marxism-Leninism and the Cuban example provided them with the organisational strategies and ultimate political goals necessary for this struggle.

It should be stated that the intellectual environment of the University of El Salvador (UES) in the late 1960s stimulated the spread of this revolutionary counterculture. On the one hand, the curriculum afforded all students access to social science subjects – even to those coming from the experimental sciences. Since 1965, it was mandatory for first year university students to sign up for classes from the social sciences curricula – the so-called "Common Areas". This exposed them

5 Roberto Cañas, author interview, San Salvador, August 11, 2009.
6 Maria Marta Valladares Mendoza, author interview, San Salvador, October 5, 1998.

to the ideas of the Marxist classics, as well as to those of dependency and Latin American critical theory scholars, which constituted the dominant approaches of the university at that time. This was also favoured by the fact that the UES welcomed exiled university professors from the Southern Cone,[7] who helped spread Marxism and dependency theory amongst the student body. The university was the scene where hundreds of young Salvadorans were socialised politically. Student associations became the focus for the dissemination of critical thinking and micro-mobilisation spaces, from which students were linked to the popular movement, especially labour and teacher struggles of the second half of the decade.

It is also interesting to note that this revolutionary counterculture stimulated the adoption of a new political role for the women in El Salvador. Although gender claims were not part of the political agenda of the revolutionary movement, it is noteworthy that Salvadoran women were strongly incorporated into the revolutionary struggle (estimated figures are close to 30% of the total strength of the FMLN). These women developed all kind of tasks within the movement and in many cases reached leadership positions in organisations. The People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) is in this sense the most representative, since in its political committee during the eighties, which consisted of seven members, three were women. The development of the revolutionary movement constituted the initial stage of the incorporation of Salvadoran women into the political struggle.

1.2 The onset of armed struggle

The first two guerrilla groups that were created in El Salvador in the 1970s were the FPL, founded on April 1, 1970, and the ERP, officially founded on March 2, 1972.

1.2.1. The FPL

In the case of the FPL, its founding fathers were union workers and university students, all of whom were former members of the PCS. The then Secretary General of the PCS, Salvador Cayetano Carpio, promoted a split in the heart of the party in April 1970, which was to result in the creation of the FPL. Carpio argued that the PCS's strategy on penetrating the union movement and on peaceful political struggle had reached its end. One factor that influenced his change in position was the government's repression of the teachers' strike held by the June 21 National Association of Salvadoran Educators (ANDES-21). The teachers' union called for this strike in February 1968 in response to the educational reform carried out by the Fidel Sánchez Hernández administration. The demonstrations that ANDES-21 called for were backed by university students, through the General Association of University Students (AGEUS), and by secondary school students, many of whom would soon become student leaders and guerrilla group founders. The ANDES-21 strike was cruelly repressed by the state's security forces. As a result, two workers who were members of the Communist Party's Salvadoran Union Unitary Federation (FUSS) – which had supported the strike – were assassinated, and at least thirty movement leaders were incarcerated. The mutilated corpses of the two assassinated workers were found a few days later. This played a major role in changing the students' and educators' perceptions of the state, and was one of the key factors which drove PCS dissidents to break with the party and turn to the violent practice of politics. Along with this, the impact of the PCS's official position on the El Salvador-Honduras war in the summer of 1969 must be stated: the PCS's Central Committee supported the government in this conflict, while the Secretary General and a small critical sector of the party youth opposed it.

7 The 'Southern Cone' of Latin America comprises Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay.

From its initial small nucleus, the FPL developed a strategy for expansion in various social sectors, in particular within the university, which began from a cell in the Faculty of Medicine.[8] At the outset, the FPL was divided into two urban commandos. Members of each commando were instructed to create their own 15-member network[9] around their designated commando. Through the new activists recruited at the university, the FPL also came in contact with social-Christian groups and with the structure of the grassroots communities organised by the Catholic church, aligned with the social doctrine of the Catholic church which emanated from the Second Vatican Council and the Medellín Episcopal Conference.

These organisations promoted an attitude of active commitment to reality and to the transformation of this reality through solidarity and liberating education. Through the contacts that some FPL members – who were in turn activists of these organisations linked to the Catholic church – had with progressive priests, the guerrilla organisations introduced themselves in the grassroots communities to the north and centre of the country, starting with the department of Chalatenango in late 1972. The peasant support base in the north of this department was mostly made up of small landowners settled in very low yield plots, who often hired themselves out as seasonal hands on the plantations in the west of El Salvador. This rural base, along with that of the Morazán and San Vicente departments, turned out to be the most inclined to join the guerrilla groups, thus turning these departments into strongholds of insurgency throughout the 1980s.

FPL militants, on their part, reproduced the expansion strategy that had traditionally been implemented by the PCS at the university. They created Marxism study groups and, later on, their own student associations. At the university, the first activists of this guerrilla organisation began these study groups with the aim of recruiting the more radicalised students. They frequently contacted classmates, friends or acquaintances, and those with whom they had often been active during the 1968 student mobilisations.[10]

1.2.2. The ERP and its schisms

With regard to the ERP, it was the by-product of the flux of at least three different groups of youths, most of whom had a history of political militancy. The first of these groups was made up mostly of university students of social-Christian extraction. Some of them had taken part in literacy campaigns in Catholic church organisations when they were still secondary school students. Later on, they joined the student strikes of 1968 as members of the Social Christian Student Movement (MESC), a youth branch of the PDC. "The Group" was joined by other younger activists who came from ACUS and by the Union of Young Patriots (UJP), the youth wing of the PCS. Among these were Joaquín Villalobos[11] and Rafael Arce Zablah, two key activists in the future development of the ERP. They were classmates at the Salvadoran Lyceum, a prestigious Catholic school in El Salvador, and had worked together in peasant literacy campaigns. As UES students and members of ACUS, they took part in the organisation of student mobilisations in 1969, and joined the budding ERP around 1970. Rafael Arce Zablah, as an ERP member and thanks to his proximity to progressive priests, met Father Miguel Ventura in 1974. Ventura was a parson in the north of the Morazán department, and he introduced Arce Zablah to the Christian Base Communities he had organised in the Torola/Villa El Rosario/San Fernando region (Binford 2004: 122). This region became ERP's area of greatest development and its stronghold during the civil war. Arce Zablah's work in the rural communities

8 Domingo Santacruz, author interview, San Salvador, August 3, 2009.

9 Medardo González, author interview, San Salvador, September 2, 1998.

10 Atilio Montalvo, author interview, San Salvador, October 1, 1998.

11 The highest ranking ERP leader from 1977 to 1993.

of Morazán was continued upon his death in 1975 by a philosophy student called Juan Ramón Medrano,[12] among others.

The third nucleus of activists who made up the ERP was composed of secondary school students from the José Celestino Castro Labor Institute, most of whom were also affiliated with the PCS's UJP. This institute was created in 1967 with funding from the Salvadoran University Workers' Union (STUS), a part of the unitary FUSS, which was in turn controlled by the PCS. The institute's goal was to shape future union leaders, and its administration and teaching staff also held important positions in the ANDES-21 teachers' association (Almeida 2008: 81). Among others were Mario Medrano, former Secretary General of this union, Emma Guadalupe Carpio, daughter of Salvador Cayetano Carpio, founding father of the FPL, and Armando Herrera.[13] There were UJP cells at the institute which promoted student involvement in the 1968 mobilisations. From 1970 to 1972 some of these activists contacted militants from "The Group" and joined them; this resulted in the 1972 creation of ERP. In 1969 and 1970 these activists stepped away from the gradualist strategy and the participation in political elections supported by the PCS, and devoted themselves to the task of organising an armed group. History repeated itself in this case: the 1968 repression led them to believe that the only possible way to fight for democracy and social justice was through revolution and armed struggle.[14]

The third armed organisation to appear in the 1970s was the by-product of a split in the ERP. The RN was established in May 1975, when an important group of ERP militants reacted against the assassination of two fellow comrades: Roque Dalton and Armando Arteaga. They had been accused by the ERP leadership of endangering the organisation's military accumulation and of being CIA agents. In response to this, a considerable number of militants, including Ernesto Jovel, Lil Milagro Ramírez and Eduardo Sancho left the ERP and created the RN. This nucleus of activists came from a group which, when it was still a part of the ERP, maintained a stronger link to the popular movement, in particular with union and Catholic church sectors, which from the outset provided them with a considerable social support base.

The ERP also created the foundations from which another guerrilla group was to rise: the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC). Disagreements at the heart of the ERP with regard to the party's role and their means of combat led a group of activists to leave the ERP and establish the Workers' Revolutionary Organisation (ORT) from 1973 to 1974. In this group were Fabio Castillo Figueroa, Dean of the University of El Salvador in the 1960s, Francisco Jovel, María Marta Valladares, Mario López and Roberto Galeano, among others.[15] This group went on to establish the PRTC on January 25, 1976. It should be mentioned that from its birth and until October 1980, this party was created as a regional structure which was also present in Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala.

1.2.3. The PCS

Finally, the PCS began to seriously discuss the possibility of militarising its structures in April 1977, at a time in which the political regime had entered a phase of non-selective repression of political opponents. Likewise, in February of that year, the regime had orchestrated a glaring electoral fraud to prevent the victory of the opposition. Militants construed this to mean that the possibilities for a reform path had all but vanished into thin air. However, the decision to create

12 He became a Commander and a member of the Political Commission of the ERP. Juan Ramón Medrano, author interview, San Salvador, October 1, 1998.

13 Sonia Aguiñada Carranza, author interview, San Salvador, August 11, 2009.

14 Sonia Aguiñada Carranza, author interview, San Salvador, August 11, 2009.

15 Maria Marta Valladares Mendoza, author interview, San Salvador, October 5, 1998.

an armed structure was not made until the party's 7th congress was held in April 1979, when El Salvador was already in the midst of an insurrectionary situation. From 1972 to 1979, Communists continued to support a strategy for participation in elections via their electoral platform, the Nationalist Democratic Union (UDN), through which they joined the National Opposition Union (UNO), a wide coalition of opposition parties that faced the military party from 1972 to 1979.

2. Urban guerrilla warfare and mass struggle (1974 – 1980)

2.1. Creating a new political actor: the mass fronts

Since 1974, the various Salvadoran guerrilla organisations implemented a rapprochement strategy towards the popular movement, which had two main directions. On the one hand, they sought to infiltrate their own militancy into existing labour, peasant or student organisations and from that place take control of the now infiltrated organisations. Their intention was to get their own militants elected to leadership positions within these organisations, through democratic means. Organisations were also created by the guerrilla groups themselves. On the other hand, since 1974, different guerrilla organisations had taken to creating coordinating committees of popular organisations whose goal was to articulate and coordinate the struggles of the various organisations under their control. This idea came largely from the knowledge they had of the Vietnam experience, where the formation of a broad front of national liberation had been the key to bringing together a diverse set of sectors under the hegemony of the revolutionaries.[16] To a large extent, this is how the United Popular Action Front (FAPU), the first coordinating committee to appear, was established in June 1974. The FAPU was an initiative against the high cost of living that united peasant and student organisations controlled by – or under the influence of – the guerrilla organisations, along with some progressive Catholic priests of the region of Suchitoto. In the formation of FAPU, a significant role was played by some student activists identified with the National Resistance trend, at that time still belonging to the ERP. Unlike FAPU, which briefly united activists from the ERP, FPL and PCS, the coordinating committees that appeared later were initiatives of a single guerrilla organisation with the purpose of building coordinating structures of the popular organisations under its control. Thus emerged the Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR) promoted by the FPL in 1975, the February 28 Popular Leagues of the ERP in 1977 and the Movement for Popular Liberation (MLP) of the PRTC in 1979.

The rapprochement between the popular movement and the guerrilla groups took place in the context of an escalation in repression by the regime and the use of mass electoral fraud in 1972 and 1977, to prevent the victory of a political opposition that now seemed united against the military's party.[17] This authoritarian regression gave rise to a process of escalation in demands of the popular movement and to a change in the frame of how grievances were interpreted. In turn, this led to the emergence of a new collective identity geared no longer towards the claims of the different productive sectors, but towards a complete change in the political and economic system. Thus union, student and peasant organisations' demands and expressions of protest became more radical in response to the closing of political arenas, which resulted in guerrilla organisations appropriating the popular movement's infrastructure.

16 Roberto Cañas, author interview, San Salvador, August 11, 2009.

17 The Communist Party – under the electoral label of the UDN – came together with the social-democratic National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) and the PDC under the electoral ticket of the UNO.

Following the decree of the Law for the Defence and Guarantee of Public Order in 1977, the amount of assassinations, arrests and forced disappearance of unionists, peasant organisation members and student organisation activists at the hands of security forces and the paramilitary increased. From July 1977 to October 1979, the state was responsible for the assassination of 461 people, and for the forced disappearance of 131. In 1980, the mean number of assassinated people per month was around 1,000, and the trend maintained this pace until 1982 (Almeida 2008: 151).

Despite this repression, 1978 and 1979 were years marked by strong social unrest. Popular organisations intensified demonstrations and the seizing of ministries in protest against repression and in demand for the democratisation of the regime. Guerrillas also intensified their armed actions against security forces, as well as their propaganda actions and fundraising through kidnappings.

2.2. The coup of October 1979 and the convergence of the revolutionary movement

The Salvadoran political context experienced a strong turning point as of October 15, 1979, when a coup took place that put an end to the authoritarian regime established in 1932. Since then, a civic-military junta created a government with representatives from the centre and the centre-left of the political spectrum, together with progressive members of the military, and with the support of the PCS. Control over the army and over internal security corps remained, however, in the hands of the branch of the military that was in favour of repressing the social movement and annihilating the guerrillas. It was, in fact, the lack of control over the military and paramilitary apparatus that rendered the junta's governing body unable to end repression, which peaked from this moment on. Due to this, the junta's civilian members left the government in early January 1980, and created a new executive power made up by representatives of the PDC and the armed forces.

In mid-1979, the guerrilla forces, with the mediation of the Cuban government, initiated a dialogue with the aim of establishing a common coordinating platform. As a result of these negotiations, on December 17, 1979, the PCS, RN and FPL established a new coordinating structure, the Political-Military Coordination (CPM), which was made public on January 10, 1980. The following day, the multi-sectorial organisations of the social movement controlled by the guerrilla groups announced the creation of the Revolutionary Coordinating Committee of the Masses (CRM) with the aim of implementing an armed insurgency as a means of solving the crisis faced by the regime.

Afterwards, following the murder of the San Salvador archbishop, Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, on March 24, 1980, and as repression at the hands of the National Guard and ultra-right paramilitary groups escalated, it became easier for the centre-left opposition and the guerrillas to converge under the latter's hegemony. One product of this convergence was the creation of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) in April of that year. The FDR grouped together, among others, PDC dissidents who went by the name Social Christian Popular Movement (MPSC), with Rubén Zamora as a prominent leader; the social-democratic National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), led by Guillermo Manuel Ungo; the Jesuit Central American University (UCA) and the University of El Salvador (UES), alongside the coordinating structures of the social movement controlled by the guerrillas. The Unified Revolutionary Direction (DRU) was established on May 22, 1980, which grouped together the FPL, RN, ERP and PCS. Finally, on October 10, 1980, and after much hardship, the FMLN was created, and was joined by the PRTC in December of that year.

By late 1980, the FMLN and FDR had established a strategic alliance that was to last throughout the war. This alliance adopted the Platform of the Revolutionary Democratic

Government programme. It was a political programme of consensus between the guerrillas and the social-democrat and Christian-democrat groups represented by the FDR, and its demands were, among others, the dissolution of the army and security forces; agrarian reform; the dissolution of state powers and the passing of a new constitution. The programme made no reference to socialism as a political project, and in general considerably downplayed the armed organisations' previous demands.

Although the declarations the revolutionary leaders made back then seemed to indicate the opposite, the five organisations that made up the FMLN were separated by profound differences. Despite the fact that the five guerrilla groups defined themselves as Marxist-Leninist, each of them had different interpretations of Salvadoran realities. Moreover, there was a deep set distrust between the different organisations, in particular between the ERP and its former RN comrades. In turn, they were all wary of the Communist Party, which viewed the remaining guerrilla groups as 'petit-bourgeois thrill-seekers'.

There were also important nuances from the strategic and tactical point of view, for instance on the politics of alliances with non-revolutionary forces. The FPL, and in particular its leader Cayetano Carpio, maintained a radical opposition position against any agreement with the military. By contrast, the RN maintained right from the outset a policy of rapprochement to the armed forces with the aim of creating an alliance between the guerrilla groups, the social movement, the Christian Democracy and progressive military members, in order to cast out the hard-core military whose power centre lay in the National Guard and the police corps.[18] The loss of control of the security forces by the government of the Revolutionary Junta installed in October 1979 and the ensuing repressive escalation against the popular movement stimulated the RN's rapprochement towards the rest of the armed organisations and led it to adopt a strategy of open confrontation against the armed forces. And last but not least, all five organisations intended to represent the true revolutionary vanguard and become the true interpreters of Marxism-Leninism. These elements impeded the unification of the five guerrilla groups during the 1980s, and explain why each organisation within the FMLN kept its own military, logistic and chain of command structures.

Despite the above, the creation of the Front implied the creation of shared structures between all the organisations, such as the General Command (*Comandancia General*, its highest directive organ) or various specialised commissions in which each FMLN organisation was represented, such as the finance, solidarity and propaganda commissions. One that deserves a separate mention is the political-diplomatic commission, made up of representatives of the Front's five organisations and those of the FDR, which monitored the FMLN's relationship with foreign governments and political parties.

By 1980, thanks to their implantation in the popular movement, the guerrilla organisations had gone from being small urban organisations with few commandos to becoming a widespread suburban and rural guerrilla movement. However, from a military point of view, these organisations were undoubtedly weak. Although they had several thousand organised activists,[19] their training and arms left a lot to be desired.

18 Leo Cabral, author interview, San Salvador, September 30, 1998.

19 Especially the FPL and ERP, the two largest organizations, thanks to whom a strong peasant support base had been growing since the late 1970s, mainly in the Chalatenango, Cuscatlán, Cabañas, San Vicente, Morazán, San Miguel and Usulután departments.

3. The revolutionary war (1981 – 1990)

Since it became evident in late 1979 that the government had no control over the radical ultra-right sectors, or over intelligence and security services, the guerrilla organisations reached the decision to overthrow the government, which was then made up of an alliance between the military and PDC conservative sectors, headed by Napoléon Duarte as its figurehead, and relied on the support of the United States of America. The strategy of the guerrilla groups was to combine a military offensive with a general strike and urban insurgency.[20] With this in mind, on January 10, 1981, the FMLN launched a "final" national-scale offensive with the aim of defeating the armed forces and taking power. The Front intended to do so before Republican candidate Ronald Reagan took office, as guerrilla commanders anticipated that this would bring greater US support for the Salvadoran government and, eventually, a US military occupation. The Front was now around 2,500 men strong, all armed and trained (Menjívar 2008: 66). There was also an indeterminate number of militia who would protect the local population and take part in local actions. The offensive was launched from safe camp sites in the rural area, and two thirds of the country witnessed a series of severe clashes. However, the lack of arms and training, as well as the lack of coordination among the different organisations, stopped the FMLN from reaching its strategic goal. Also, the mass popular insurgency that the guerrilla groups had expected did not take place. The very severe repression implemented by the regime had a demobilising effect on the population. One week after the launch of the offensive, the FMLN began a tactical retreat.

From that moment on, the guerrilla organisations retreated to the rural north and northeast areas of the country, and the conflict turned into a grand-scale civil war. Most of the social movement activists who were collaborating with the guerrilla groups moved away from cities. The areas controlled by the FMLN were defined, and the so-called "popular powers" began to develop, with the aim of organising production and political management in these areas.

The FMLN divided El Salvador into four fronts – four geographic fronts, and a fifth one in charge of diplomacy and international relations.[21] There was a military presence of almost all organisations in all geographic fronts, with the exception of the western front, which only had ERP, FPL and RN forces. [22]

The FMLN organisations devoted themselves to the task of establishing or reinforcing their contacts with foreign governments and political parties, with the aim of attempting to solve the logistic, financial and diplomatic problems created by a long drawn-out war. Although the guerrilla groups had each, on their own, established international contacts throughout the 1970s, the creation of the FMLN implied having greater access to a superior level of resources. Through Cuban and Nicaraguan mediation[23] they were able to access support in arms, ammunition and logistics from countries such as Vietnam, Czechoslovakia or the German Democratic Republic. Financially, the FMLN was pretty autonomous throughout the war, as it extracted most of its resources from the aid provided by the network of solidarity committees created in the US, Mexico and Europe and, to a lesser degree, from kidnapping and war taxes. From the diplomatic point of view, the FMLN was at this first moment capable of garnering considerable political support from the Socialist International and from its member political parties, especially from the French

20 Atilio Montalvo, author interview, San Salvador, October 1, 1998.

21 The network of militants held in Salvadoran prisons was also sometimes known as the "Fifth Front".

22 PCS and PRTC forces were seriously scarce throughout the war.

23 The Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) headed Nicaragua's revolutionary government from 1979 to 1990.

Socialist Party. This was facilitated by the fact that the MNR, a member of the FDR and thus an FMLN ally, belonged to the Socialist International. Guillermo Ungo, its leader, was a renowned politician who was respected by social-democrats around the world, which afforded the Front an important support base from which to extend its international contacts. One example of the diplomatic capacity developed by the FMLN-FDR was the Franco-Mexican declaration of August 1981, whereby both governments recognised the FMLN-FDR alliance as a representative political force and legitimised it so that it would in future play a leading role in finding a political solution to the Salvadoran crisis. This declaration was a diplomatic victory for the FMLN, and contributed to the political isolation of the Salvadoran government, which was at that time strongly discredited by the ongoing complaints of massacres perpetrated by the armed and security forces.

3.1. Resisting, growing and moving forward (1981 - 1983)

The FMLN's military strategy from 1981 to 1983 was to "resist, grow and move forward". Insurgents drove the armed forces away from the north and northeast areas of El Salvador that were close to the Honduran border, and built their rearguard there. They also initiated "economic sabotage" actions, as well as commando actions against military facilities, including an assault on the Ilopango airfield in January 1982, where they destroyed most of the aircraft of El Salvador's Air Force. They also attempted to counter the government's political strategy, which centred on holding elections and creating a new institutional framework with the intention of politically marginalising the revolutionaries. In this sense, the FMLN attempted to sabotage the Constitutive Assembly elections in March 1982, but succeeded only partially. From mid-1982 to late 1983, the Front peaked in terms of military strength, and controlled at least a quarter of the country's territory. It was now 10,000 to 12,000 men strong (Byrne 1996: 84). The military development of the guerrilla organisations superseded political action in the revolutionaries' strategy during this period, although the latter never completely disappeared, as will be seen below. The Front was able to build military units the size of a brigade (1,500 men), and had two of them: the ERP's Rafael Arce Zablah Brigade (BRAZ) and the FPL's Felipe Peña Mendoza Battalions Grouping. With this capacity for concentrating troops and arms, the guerrillas placed the armed forces in a critical situation throughout 1983. During this year, the war initiative was clearly favourable to the FMLN. Its strength was made manifest by the fact that it took over an important number of towns and small cities – such as Berlin in the Usulután department – and military strongholds, such as the headquarters of the Fourth Infantry Brigade in El Paraíso, in the Chalatenango department.

In light of this situation, the Salvadoran armed forces began to develop a new strategy centred on the training of small units such as the immediate reaction battalions, which had the capacity to penetrate FMLN-controlled territory. The military also developed civic action plans, which comprised the building of schools, paving of roads and provision of health benefits in areas where the guerrilla groups were expanding, and which were of high strategic and economic value, such as the San Vicente and Usulután departments. In January 1983, the army implemented the CONARA (National Comittee for Restoration of Areas) Plan which, along with all of the above, also comprised the organisation of paramilitary civic defence units (Byrne 1996: 86). Despite an initial decrease in the FMLN's activity in the San Vicente department, CONARA failed in late 1983 due to the armed forces' inability to distract an important contingent of forces from combat. This was a moment of clear superiority for the guerrilla groups.

However, the strategy for a marked concentration of forces developed by the FMLN also began to exhibit severe limitations. On the one hand, the great guerrilla contingents were

highly vulnerable to air raids and to penetration by the armed forces, and on the other hand, they demanded a level of financial and logistic resources that was not sustainable. Also, the ongoing need to recruit new militants led some FMLN organisations to implement forced recruitment, which resulted in high desertion rates, loss of support in the rural areas where this practice was implemented, and in the wearing down of the international image they portrayed (Byrne 1996: 105).

On the other hand, the political strategy of the revolutionaries during this period was subject to priorities of a military order. The FMLN was convinced that they could win the war, so the contacts they maintained with the government were merely tactical in nature. As will be seen below, from mid-1981 to mid-1983 some guerrilla leaders strongly opposed all types of negotiation, in particular within the ranks of the FPL. With regard to the Salvadoran government and the US administration, which had become an internal actor in the conflict, they were opposed to negotiating with the insurgents during this period and instead made the military defeat of the guerrilla groups their priority. Their long-term strategy was to create a new political regime that would hold periodic "demonstrative" elections, which would give an appearance of democratic normalisation, as well as to implement a series of reforms that would detract social support away from the insurgency movement (the agrarian reform being the first of these). This would allow them to appear before the US Congress and justify financing the military effort, which was their indisputable priority.

3.2. A "sea of guerrillas and organised people" (1984 - 1989)

The Front's obvious incapacity to defeat the armed forces led to a change in strategy. The warring style developed up until 1983 had solely emphasised the creation of a great military contingent by militarising all the insurgency's human resources. Revolutionaries had sought a strictly military defeat of the government, leaving aside the need to carry out political work with the population of the cities, where at the end of the day the war would ultimately be settled. Since 1984 the main goal was no longer to vanquish the government army in decisive battles in the short run, but rather, to wear it down through a war of attrition – a strategy that was closer to the FPL's original intentions. The FMLN emphasised the combination of armed struggle with the political struggle of the masses to weaken the government and launch a large counteroffensive that was to be implemented in the very moment of a popular insurgency (FMLN 1986). With this perspective in mind, the FMLN dispersed their forces throughout the Salvadoran territory, dividing them up into small units with sufficient communication and mobilisation capacities to rapidly concentrate them when necessary, which allowed them to launch actions of a certain magnitude. Alongside this, they also intensified their economic sabotage actions, ambushes, attacks by snipers and use of landmines. They also began to reconstruct the popular movement in cities which had been practically dismantled in 1981. As a result of all this, the FMLN was able to wage war in 10 of the 14 departments in the country and prevented local authorities from being established in almost half the municipalities in the late 1980s.

The turn towards the political organisation of the masses became the FMLN's priority in this period. In this sense, the development of dual powers in the areas under control of the guerrilla groups and in the areas of dispute against the armed forces became a central part of political control in these sectors. The idea was to create legal structures which were formally disconnected from the guerrilla organisations, and which would utilise even government resources. They would also be capable of maintaining a clandestine support structure for the revolutionaries. The guerrilla groups made a great effort to obstruct the establishment of civil defence patrols – paramilitary groups organised by the armed forces – and to stop the ongoing work of the local and judicial administrations in the places where the government had no direct military control of the territory. In this sense, they carried out kidnappings and executions of mayors and administration officials

who were identified as being agents of the government's repressive apparatus, given their capacity to stop autonomous popular organisation.[24]

Finally, the Front took advantage of the malaise caused in the lower income groups by the economic crisis that shook El Salvador in the mid-1980s. In 1984 a series of strikes began against the freezing of salaries and the loss of purchasing power; they were to last until 1986. According to Byrne (1996: 143), industrial salaries in 1987 were 51% of those in 1980, while agricultural production had experienced a 32% decrease from 1980 to 1989. In this renaissance of protest demonstrations, insurgents saw an opportunity to radicalise the popular movement which, duly orientated by the FMLN, could lead to an insurrection that would be supported by an offensive of the insurgency on a national scale.

Despite these developments and organisational efforts deployed by the guerrilla organisations, the situation from a military point of view pointed to a stabilisation of the conflict and to a military stalemate in which neither of the two parties had a real shot at winning the war, at least in the mid-term. The electoral victory of Christian-Democrat candidate Napoleón Duarte in 1984 represented a political victory for the strategy conceived by the US. The succession of electoral processes throughout the 1980s and the FMLN's lack of meaningful military actions in urban areas threatened to politically marginalise the insurgents. The Front needed to change the direction the war was taking if they were to avoid losing it in the political arena. It was in fact this need to change the relation of the forces from the political and military point of view that lead insurgents to unleash a grand-scale offensive in November 1989. Their goal was to force the new government of the conservative Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) to start a process of substantial negotiation with the FMLN. Some guerrilla commanders certainly held on to the hope that the offensive might unleash a popular insurrection that would overthrow the regime (Lungo 1996: 178). The action had been being prepared since late 1988, but the trigger that precipitated it was the bombing of the National Union Federation of Salvadoran Workers (FENASTRAS) headquarters in late October 1989. San Salvador was the main scenario for the offensive, in which the FMLN introduced over 2,000 combatants, who remained in place for 14 days. However, the indiscriminate use of air raids against popular neighbourhoods where the guerrilla organisations were strong and, above all, the realisation that the population was not rising *en masse* to the aid of the insurgents, led the Front to make an orderly retreat back to the areas they controlled.

In the offensive at least 1,000 civilians were killed and thousands fled the air raids and the crossfire. Also, on November 16, five days after the beginning of military operations, six Jesuit priests were assassinated, as well as two of their assistants at the UCA. Among them was the dean of the university, Ignacio Ellacuría, and priests Segundo Montes and Ignacio Martín Baró, internationally renowned intellectuals. These assassinations were ordered by the high command of the armed forces, led by Colonel René Emilio Ponce.

The result of the November offensive and the UCA crimes helped create the necessary conditions for the negotiated ending of the war. On the one hand, the most recalcitrant sectors of the ARENA governing party were convinced that the FMLN had sufficient military strength to continue waging war over an extended period of time. Also, the population's lack of response in that they failed to support the insurgents *en masse* demonstrated the fact that they were not in a state of insurgency and that the people's support for the Front was not as great as some guerrilla commanders had expected. Although during the first few days some hundreds of people who lived in the labour belt of San Salvador joined the guerrilla groups, their response was not at all a mass one. The assassination of the Jesuit priests, for its part, caused US policy towards El Salvador to be questioned within the US Congress itself. From that moment on, US military aid became a pressure tool to force the Salvadoran military to accept a negotiation with the FMLN.

24 This strategy was developed in particular by the ERP.

3.3. Armed negotiation (1990 - 1991)

From 1990 to late 1991, the armed struggle of the FMLN exerted pressure on the government to reach a negotiation in the best possible terms. Both parties agreed to begin negotiations with United Nations (UN) mediation on April 4, 1990. This mediation was supported by the US, whose acquiescence had been requested by the UN in December 1989. Also, the negotiations were supported by the so-called "Group of friends of the Secretary General", composed of the governments of Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela and Spain. This first agreement was the pillar on which all later negotiations were grounded. In May 1990 the parties met in Caracas and agreed to a negotiation agenda split into two parts. The first comprised a series of political agreements on different areas that would create the conditions necessary for a ceasefire: armed forces, human rights, electoral and judicial systems, constitutional reforms, economic and social issues and UN verification of the agreements. Once the ceasefire was declared, a second phase of negotiations would begin in which the same issues would be addressed once more with the ultimate aim of establishing a series of guarantees to reintegrate the FMLN members into Salvadoran politics and society (Levine 1997: 223). The Front created a negotiating commission that was composed of the five members of FMLN's General Command: Shafick Handal (PCS), Leonel González (FPL), Francisco Jovel (PRTC), Joaquín Villalobos (ERP) and Eduardo Sancho (RN), as well as members of the political commissions of the Front's five organisations: Joaquín Samayoa (FPL), Ana Guadalupe Martínez (ERP), Roberto Cañas (RN), Nidia Díaz (PRTC) and Dagoberto Gutiérrez (PCS).

On July 26, 1990, the parties met again in San José de Costa Rica and after several days, reached an agreement not to carry out actions that would contravene international human rights treaties. What was later to become the San José Agreement was the first important commitment reached in the framework of negotiations. From that moment on, the UN Secretary General played a key role by offering to undertake a verification mission of the agreements and by proposing that changes be made to the agenda negotiated in Caracas. The first issue on this agenda was the discussion of the role of armed forces, which immediately turned out to be one of the main stumbling blocks of the negotiation. Until that moment, the FMLN had insisted on the disappearance of the armed forces and the dissolution of immediate reaction battalions and intelligence organisations, as well as on the prosecution of the officers responsible for particularly severe violations to human rights – all of which were rejected by the military and the government. Thus, the UN arranged for the first issue on the table to be that of respect for human rights, and for the more controversial issues to be dealt with at a later date, once a climate of trust had been established among the parties. Despite this initial success, negotiations came to a momentary standstill in January 1991, after the FMLN shot down a combat helicopter that was transporting a group of US military consultants who were captured, then executed.[25] Once this hurdle had been overcome, peace talks continued in Mexico, in April of that year. In this round of dialogue the issues that were discussed simultaneously were reforms to the armed forces, constitutional reforms and the terms of the ceasefire (Samayoa 2003: 148). The negotiations were carried out under the pressure that the constitutional reforms that were to be negotiated had to be approved before the end of the mandate of the Salvadoran Legislative Assembly. The country's constitution required that any constitutional amendments should be approved by two consecutive Assemblies. Thus, if this process was not completed by April 1991, negotiators would need to wait for two years until the new legislative power was partially renewed. On April 27, the negotiating parties signed the Mexico Agreement, which was the second most important commitment of the negotiations. This agreement contemplated the reform of the armed forces – the FMLN's demand that they be dissolved had to be abandoned – together with the creation of a civic national police force

25 Since November 1990 there had been a military escalation following the FMLN's launching of a strong offensive.

that was to be independent from the military. Another series of reforms were also agreed on: reforms of the electoral system, human rights – including the creation of the *ombudsman* figure and the establishment of a truth commission that would investigate the most serious violations that had taken place during the war – as well as reforms of the judicial system, which featured a restructuring of the supreme court, and last of all, a series of constitutional reforms.

On July 26, 1991, the first elements of the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) were deployed. However, pressure from the UN and the Group of Friends was necessary for the negotiations to unblock, as neither of the parties wanted to make further concessions on the negotiation table without the implementation of a ceasefire. Until that moment, both parties sought to win positions through military pressure. In order to move forward in the negotiation process, an ad hoc commission was created which reached agreements to purge the military high commands involved in violations of human rights, and secure the participation of the FMLN in the future Civic National Police (PNC), in exchange for the guerrilla groups giving up on their demands of becoming a part of the armed forces. Given that the FMLN's concerns were satisfied with regard to demilitarisation and impunity of the armed forces, a new round of negotiations was held in New York, where a new agreement was signed on September 25, 1991. Basic agreements were made in New York that dealt with the future of the armed forces, their purging and reduction, their new doctrine and training. The dissolution of the National and Treasury Police forces and of the National Guard, which were to be replaced by a sole police force – which would feature up to a 20% membership of the FMLN combatants – was agreed. Issues pertaining to the economic agenda, featuring the distribution of land ownership, were discussed, and the National Commission for the Consolidation of Peace (COPAZ)[26] was created as an organisation whose mandate was to supervise the upholding of the agreements. After this first New York agreement, the FMLN announced a unilateral ceasefire. Negotiations continued in December to discuss some particularly sensitive issues such as the reduction of the armed forces and the transfer of land ownership to former FMLN combatants, as well as the guarantees that FMLN members would be awarded so that they could reincorporate themselves into civilian life. Finally, on December 31, 1991, the Second New York Act was signed, putting an end to a war which had been going on for almost twelve years. On January 16, 1992, a solemn ceremony for the signing of the peace treaties was held in Chapultepec Castle, Mexico. A total of 15,007 FMLN militants (comprising both combatants and "politicians") were demobilised from July to December 1992.

4. Factors of the transition to peace

From its inception, the FMLN maintained a political and military strategy. However, as mentioned above, from 1980 to 1983 the Front prioritised military aspects in its strategy and subordinated them to the political struggle. Since late 1983, the hope for a speedy defeat of the government vanished, which along with a series of internal changes allowed the Front to begin to promote a strategy of negotiation and armed struggle. In the end, following the 1989 offensive, guerrilla groups maintained military pressure as a way to obtain better conditions at the negotiation table. This section provides an analysis of internal (intra-party) and external (societal, national and international) factors that shed light on the gradual change of the Front in terms of its position regarding the use of violence.

26 This was made up of representatives from the government, the FMLN, Catholic church, UN and leading political parties.

4.1. External factors

4.1.1. Liberalisation of the political regime

The new political alliance that took power in 1980, which was to govern the destinies of El Salvador until 1989, was responsible for implementing a reform project that had two main goals: the military defeat of the FMLN and the implementation of a programme for economic and political reform. The latter had the intent of both depriving the insurgency of its social support base and undermining the economic foundations of the landowning oligarchy's power. The central elements of this reformist project were realising an agrarian reform in the economic arena and establishing a polyarchy in the political one. However, the coexistence of the latter alongside the goal of landing a military defeat of the insurgency in the context of civil war resulted in the fact that, throughout the 1980s and given the persistence of the military and the upper class as key political actors, the Salvadoran regime was a mixed case half-way between a collective military regime and electoral democracy (Wickham-Crowley 1992). Despite this, the gradual liberalisation of the regime throughout this decade made for a limited opening of the political system, as well as for the holding of periodic elections.[27] Despite its marked counterinsurgency purpose, and despite the fact that elections fundamentally sought a demonstrative effect, namely, proving to international public opinion that El Salvador was well on its way towards democracy, the electoral processes held in the 1980s served to legitimise the new institutional framework that arose from the 1979 coup, and to politically weaken the FMLN. The Front was not able to win the support of important sectors of the population that became the basis for sustaining PDC, and later ARENA, governments. Also some sectors, in particular the middle class ones, progressively withdrew their support of the insurgency as its chances for victory vanished and the political regime showed signs of opening up.

In particular during the early 1980s, the PDC was the organisation that most directly disputed popular FMLN support, through the reform measures it implemented over the period it was heading the government. These reforms were accompanied by the creation of union organisations from among their beneficiaries, especially those of the agrarian reform. These organisations created the support bases necessary for the reformist model implemented by the PDC, thus contributing to its legitimatisation.

The opening up of the political system also had repercussions on the relative reduction of repression in the cities. According to Brockett (2005: 235), civilian deaths that were a product of repression decreased considerably between 1984 and 1988. While over 18,000 people were killed by the armed and security forces in 1981, the yearly number of casualties went down to 6,000 from 1982 to 1983, and to less than 4,000 in 1984. It remained under 2,000 until 1989. The same can be said for the figures pertaining to missing people. From the 1,117 missing people in 1982, the figure dropped to 526 in 1983 and to around 200 in 1984. From then on, it remained at 200 to 300 per year for the duration of the war.

The decrease in repression since the mid-1980s, together with some of the guarantees awarded to the electoral processes, such as the effect of international pressure in general, and the Esquipulas II[28] process in particular, on the Salvadoran government offered the guerrillas' civil

27 Elections were held to compose the National Constitutive Assembly in 1982, and also the 1984 and 1989 presidential elections won by the PDC and by ARENA respectively, as well as legislative and municipal elections in 1985, 1988 and 1991.

28 The Esquipulas II Agreement of August 1987 was an initiative of the Central American governments to resolve the wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador, as well as the problem of the militarization of Honduras by the United States. The measures adopted in the agreement include the cessation of all support to irregular forces from the Central

allies the possibility of starting a legal political struggle. By late 1987, the FDR decided to return to El Salvador and insert itself into the political system, participating in the March 1989 elections under the Democratic Convergence (CD) party's ticket. Their presence allowed the FDR to prove there were guarantees to defend their proposals in a peaceful fashion. The greater transparency of electoral processes, the insertion of the FDR into the political system and the great political power of the parties helped to present the electoral route as a credible one in the eyes of the armed organisations.

4.1.2. Changes in the economic elite

The Salvadoran landowning elite was heavily transformed throughout the war, both in the economic and in the political arenas.

The civil war produced an acute crisis in export agriculture, which was the traditional economic basis of the Salvadoran elite. The structural reforms undergone by the reformist government after 1980, namely agrarian reform and the nationalisation of banks and foreign trade, undermined the pillars of the agro-export model that the Salvadoran economy had rested on, and thus, the dominion of the economic elite. Despite the great difficulties faced in applying the agrarian reform, and although its scope was limited, it strongly affected the elite's economic foundations, in particular with regards to coffee production. According to Cardenal (2002: 88), the strongest 136 coffee producers were affected by the reform. Within these were the eight family groups who monopolised most of the production. Along with the reform, the impact of the war caused around 88,000 hectares to be abandoned – close to 43% of the country's farming land. This, as well as the disappearance of infrastructure and the tax demanded by the guerrilla groups, contributed to a decrease in producers' earnings. Thus, both war and agrarian reform caused a strong impact on the land ownership structure, undermining the oligarchy's economic foundations. Besides this, the nationalisation of foreign trade, whose aim was, among others, to procure an important source of income for the state, also affected coffee and cotton producers, who were ultimately the ones to pay the highest price for this measure.

All these changes, in turn, produced a fragmentation and a reconstitution of the economic elite. The sector which was the most dependent on land ownership for the extraction of its wealth was strongly hit by the reforms implemented in the 1980s. A second group, made up of financiers, exporters and industrialists who had a greater capacity to sail through the crisis that derived from war, began to diversify its investments during this period with the help of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The development of the services sector (including those of a financial nature), of the *maquila* industry and non-traditional agricultural exports were the mainstay of this productive diversification strategy. The modernisation of the Salvadoran economic structure through the creation of non-traditional exports was a fundamental aim of the US government, who found a valid interlocutor in this modernising sector of Salvadoran entrepreneurship. The US also contributed to the political modernisation of this sector of the economic elite through promotion and consultancy services as well as through the creation of think tanks such as the Salvadoran Foundation for Social and Economic Development (FUSADES) (Robinson 2003).

When this elite was confronted with the possibility of a revolutionary change in the political and economic system caused by the victory of the FMLN, it was encouraged to create its own political party, ARENA, in September 1981. The founders of the party came mostly from the oligarchic (landowning, industrial and financial) sectors, the armed forces and the paramilitary

American governments. This agreement was a first step in the negotiated resolution of the crisis in Central America, and served as the basis for the peace accords in El Salvador and Guatemala.

groups. In its first years, the organisation was characterised by a belligerent style, by the use of confrontational rhetoric and by resorting to violent tactics and ways of struggle. However, the transformations in the economic structure of the country, the US support of the right's political renovation and the exile of some of the main representatives of the old landowning oligarchy helped increase the political influence of the modernising sector of the economic elite, which was also reflected in ARENA's internal balance. The radically anti-communist landowning sector that dominated the party in its early years was substituted following its electoral defeat in the 1985 legislative elections by a group that came from the modernising bourgeois. Alfredo Cristiani's 1988 nomination as presidential candidate for the 1989 elections was representative of a new dominating coalition that ruled the ARENA from that moment on. The consecutive electoral victories of 1988 and 1989 strengthened this group's position and prestige within the party.

This sector of the elite, which now headed the party, had a greater interest in putting an end to war than in keeping it alive.[29] The magnitude of the conflict made it impossible for them to fully engage in their financial and commercial activities while, on the other hand, the demands postulated by the FMLN on land issues with the aim of ending conflict no longer presented a threat to their survival. The fact that land ownership and traditional agro-export had lost economic importance, as well as the fact that the nucleus of the creation of wealth had shifted towards the trade and service sectors, made it unnecessary to maintain the coercive structure which had formerly guaranteed control over the workforce since the 1930s. Also, in the scenario of the new polyarchy that was now established in the country, the modern entrepreneurial elite no longer felt the need to turn to the armed forces for representation and defence of their interests, but rather, they now had their own instruments such as ARENA and FUSADES, and they were better adapted to the new national and international political and economic environment (Cardenal 2002: 111). As compared to their predecessors, Alfredo Cristiani and the forces he represented were structurally in a much better place in the government to engage in peace negotiations with the FMLN. Thus, when the circumstances were right following the 1989 offensive, this group was willing to make a series of political concessions that were under their control and did not contradict their core economic interests, which at the end of the day facilitated reaching an agreement with the Front.

4.1.3. Changes in US policy towards El Salvador

Until the 1970s, the implication of the US government in El Salvador was not very meaningful as compared to its involvement in other countries in the region. However, it increased as the political crisis got worse, and was more evident after the Sandinista victory in July 1979.

When Jimmy Carter took office, his administration (1977-1981) changed its foreign policy by having the defence and promotion of human rights become one of the premises of the United States' relationship to developing nations. The US State Department was instructed to provide annual reports on the progress achieved in the human rights arena by the countries who were recipients of US aid, which was contingent on their demonstrating a meaningful improvement in this area, or at least, on proving that they were making serious efforts to this end. Thus, the US meant to put pressure on democratising their allied authoritarian governments. However, it soon became evident in the Salvadoran case that the alleged moral commitment that was guiding the new US foreign policy was, in reality, a diplomatic tool that easily gave way to strategic interests. In 1978, the US government dispatched a 10-million-dollar financial aid package to General Carlos Humberto Romero's government, despite the existing abundant incriminating evidence of the assassinations and disappearances perpetrated by the security forces and death squads since

29 Roberto Cañas, author interview, San Salvador, August 11, 2009.

Romero's rise to power. Confronted by the boom of the revolutionary movement in El Salvador, and following the victory of the Sandinista Front in Nicaragua in July 1979, Carter chose to prioritise US security interests. In light of the possibility that a revolutionary victory would take place in El Salvador, the US administration backed the moderate sector of the armed forces in an attempt to pry the most conservative groups of the military from the state's control. The goal of US foreign policy from that moment on was that of politically isolating both the Marxist-Leninist left and the extreme right, and laying the foundations for the construction of a representative democracy that was aligned with Washington. The Revolutionary Government Junta that took power following the October 15, 1979 coup was, in the eyes of the US, an instrument that would allow them to meet both goals (Leogrande 1998: 41).

When the Junta resigned in January 1980, the US administration devoted themselves to the task of looking for a political figure with democratic credentials who would also be acceptable to the Salvadoran military. This figure was Napoleón Duarte, the leader of the conservative sector of the PDC, who would be promoted from that moment on by the Department of State as an image of moderation. The new government junta, controlled by the military and now exclusively supported by the PDC, would thus become the ideal platform from which to launch a series of structural reforms geared towards weakening the insurgency and undermining the economic grounds of the landowning oligarchy's power. Duarte's reputation as a democratic leader who had for years opposed the military dictatorship gave the US government the possibility to offer El Salvador enough military support to defeat the revolutionaries.

Facing the progressive rapprochement of the armed left towards the moderate left represented by the FDR, Carter chose to unreservedly support the military and the PDC. Neither the assassination of Archbishop Romero in March 1980, nor that of three US nuns, or even the murder of the FDR's own leadership orchestrated by sectors of the security forces in that year were enough to cancel US military aid to the Salvadoran government, who received almost six million dollars from the US in early January 1981.

When President Ronald Reagan took office (1981-1989), US foreign policy in El Salvador became militarised. This was the product of a heavily ideologised reading of the causes of the Salvadoran internal conflict. For the new US administration, El Salvador was a playing field for the East-West confrontations, and it was seen as the place where, to quote Secretary of State Alexander Haig, "the line would be drawn" (Leogrande, 1998:80). In other words, it was the place where Cuban-Soviet expansionism would be stopped, after the defeat faced by western interests in Vietnam, Iran or Nicaragua. The Reagan administration saw the creation of a Marxist regime in the region as an intolerable risk that could turn into a threat for its maritime supply lines, or lodge hostile military forces. Because of this, El Salvador's political instability – and all of Central America's for that matter – was, from Reagan's perspective, an issue of national security.

It must be stated that Reagan's aggressive foreign policy found a certain counterbalance in the Chamber of Representatives, which was controlled throughout this period by the Democratic Party (Walter 2008: 201). The democrats criticised Reagan and his team's aspiration of escalating the Salvadoran conflict, which they refused to view as a product of the East-West confrontation.[30] As Walter states, to counter the Chamber's opposition and face the criticism voiced by an important sector of public opinion with regard to the US intervention in Central America, the Reagan administration systematically overplayed the threat that Central America posed to US national security.

With this in mind, the Reagan policy resulted in an exponential increase of US military aid to El Salvador throughout the 1980s. This aid was not restricted to providing funding and arms, but also extended to CIA participation in covert operations in El Salvador, the deployment

30 The FMLN itself had access for much of the war to several House Democrats (Eduardo Sancho, author interview, Madrid, May 29, 2003).

of military consultants and the training and organisation of the infamous Immediate Reaction Infantry Battalions (BIRI). According to Walter (2008: 202), US military aid to El Salvador surpassed 950 million dollars from 1980 to 1989. The tangible result of this support was that the Salvadoran armed forces were able to resume the military initiative from 1984 onwards – and up until the Front's offensive in 1989 – thus forcing the FMLN to renounce concentrating troops and to utilise a "hit and run" strategy, which decreased their chances of implementing large-scale offensives that could threaten the government's stability. In the long run this resulted in a military stalemate which had a high political cost for the FMLN, as it became apparent over time that the insurgents were unable to attain power, while growing war costs contributed to dwindling popular support for the guerrilla organisations.

Since June 1981, as a result of Thomas O. Ender's promotion to Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, a new strategic line was added to the initial focus of the Reagan administration, which had been founded almost exclusively on the mass provision of military aid to defeat the insurgency: the promotion of democracy. Enders saw holding elections and liberalising the Salvadoran political regime as a strategy to politically marginalise the FMLN and garner the necessary backing of US military support, both in the US as well as overseas. The creation of a representative democracy thus had an instrumental function that was subordinated to the main goal: the defeat of the insurgency through military aid. As per Enders' strategy, if the left did not agree to take part in the political system, it would be proven that they refused to renounce violence, as elections were the only political exit to war. In doing so, they would negate the possibility of negotiating with the insurgency, in which the latter might acquire what it had been incapable of getting on the battlefield (Leogrande 1998: 127). Despite its instrumental function, the holding of regular elections would open up political space, which would in turn allow the FMLN's civil allies to be inserted into the political system in 1988. This contributed to the Front experiencing a change of perspective with regard to the possibilities of representative democracy.

Parallel to this was another crucial aim of US economic aid: upholding an economy that was being sorely weakened by war. Walter (2008: 203) believes this aid was an estimated 2,685 million dollars from 1979 to 1989, and that it stabilised the Salvadoran economy, which would otherwise have collapsed in the midst of conflict. The intervention of the US government and, in particular, its capacity to influence the strategy of the Salvadoran armed forces, to design the new political system and to both finance the war effort and sustain the country's economy in practice turned the US government into an internal actor of Salvadoran politics during the conflict.

Since 1987, Reagan's policy towards Central America was weakened by the Iran-Contra affair; by the Esquipulas II Agreement of August 1987, which indirectly condemned US support of the Nicaraguan *contras*; and by the Democratic Party once again taking control of the US Senate. Later, the distension between the US and the Soviet Union (USSR), and George H. W. Bush's arrival to the White House in January 1989, resulted in Central America having considerably less weight on the US security agenda. Unlike the Reagan administration, the Bush administration had a far less ideologised vision of the conflict, and was determined to decrease its costly involvement in the region. The USSR's position, which had since the mid-1980s been in favour of a negotiated solution to Central American conflicts, and the victory of Nicaragua's Violeta Chamorro in February 1990, also played a part in this.

Thus, following the assassination of the Salvadoran Jesuit priests in November 1989 and the ensuing pressure of the US Congress to cut by half the military aid given to the Salvadoran armed forces, conditioning it to progress being made on investigating these murders, the US executive was able to change its standpoint in the conflict at no great political cost. Since 1990, the US government exerted pressure and favoured negotiations between the Salvadoran government and the FMLN.

4.1.4. Changes in the position of the FMLN allies

The Cuban government remained committed to a position of promoting revolutionary internationalism, which was translated into sustained support for the FMLN throughout the war. The contacts of Salvadoran political-military organisations with Cuba went back to the early 1970s, although they kept a low profile until 1979.[31] This was mainly due to the fact that the conditions Havana and the Latin American communist parties had agreed on in 1975 for the former to support armed organisations on the continent remained unmet: high chances for success, Soviet consent and unity of the revolutionary forces (Castañeda 1995: 101). These conditions came together in 1979.

The example of the unification of the three trends of *Sandinismo* and the victory of the Nicaraguan revolution, combined with the military weakness of Salvadoran political-military organisations, stimulated the latter to come together. Along with this, Fidel Castro's personal intervention made it easier to overcome distrust among the different groups, paving the way for the attainment of the agreements that gave rise to the FMLN. As well as participating in the former, Castro also facilitated further negotiations among the different organisations in December 1979, in Havana; according to some, he played an important part in the creation of the FMLN by conditioning his support to unity among the Salvadoran organisations. From this moment on, Cuba was to become a logistic platform, training field, hospital and political ally of the Salvadoran insurgency.

Although this support did not disappear at any time throughout the war, it took on a lower profile as of 1982. The North American threat to "go to the source" of Salvadoran insurgency (Lafeber, 1993: 278), the USSR's conservative position and the impossibility of the FMLN attaining a rapid military victory in El Salvador caused the Cuban government to become cautious. All this led the latter to recommend that the FMLN leaders promote a strategy for conducting armed struggle and negotiation in parallel by late 1982. Cubans attempted to persuade Salvadoran revolutionaries of the expediency of reaching an understanding with their government as a way to placate the Reagan administration, seeking through this to guarantee the survival of the Nicaraguan revolution.

With regard to Nicaragua, some sectors of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) leadership cooperated with the Salvadoran revolutionaries throughout the war. Like Cuba, Sandinistas prided themselves on their revolutionary internationalism, yet they also contributed to paying the debt of solidarity they had with their Salvadoran companions.[32] Nicaragua served as a corridor and logistic deposit of supplies, provided constant political support – even allowing the FMLN to openly set up office there for several years – and procured arms throughout the conflict. It must be noted that the hardening of the US position forced Nicaraguans to lower the profile of their official relationships with the FMLN from 1983 onwards. Proof of this lies in the fact that the support Salvadorans received from Sandinistas from then on came from sectors of the party leadership and the army, but not from the Nicaraguan government as such.[33] The electoral defeat of the FSLN in February 1990 resulted in revolutionary Salvadorans facing further challenges when it came to receiving supplies via Nicaragua.

As for the Soviet Union, the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev (1985-1991) redefined Soviet foreign policy priorities, as it sought to reassign its already depleted economic resources and

31 Actually, the military training of Salvadoran activists went back to at least 1961 when, as part of the creation of the United Front of Revolutionary Action (FUAR), a handful of communist militants went to Cuba for training (Domingo Santacruz, author interview, San Salvador, August 3, 2009).

32 According to Américo Araujo, former member of the PCS's Central Committee (author interview, San Salvador, August 23, 2008), small FPL, RN, PRTC and PCS contingents fought alongside the Sandinistas in the insurgency that put and end to the Somoza dictatorship.

33 Atilio Montalvo, author interview, San Salvador, September 1, 1998.

channel them towards meeting domestic needs. Since 1988 it became clear that the Gorbachev administration had transformed Soviet third world policy by recognising that the US had legitimate national interests and that it was necessary for both powers to respect their given areas of influence. The USSR renounced its exporting of the revolution and stopped providing military solutions to the numerous regional crises that were in effect at the time, and rather, they began a negotiated exit to armed conflicts within the scope of cooperation with the US. These changes had an important impact on the Central American crisis. In the case of El Salvador, in 1990 the Soviets insisted repeatedly on the FMLN negotiating with the government in the presence of the UN, and suggested that if the US stopped supporting the Salvadoran government, the Front would need to abandon arms. In February of that year, the Soviets even seemed to have reached an agreement with the US on finding a negotiated solution to the Salvadoran conflict.

4.2. Internal factors

4.2.1. Change in the balance of power inside the FMLN

The defeat of the 1981 offensive showed that within the FMLN there existed at least two well-differentiated conceptions of the strategy and the goals of the revolution. The first one was represented by the leader of the FPL, Salvador Cayetano Carpio. To him, the revolution should be conducted by a worker-peasant alliance, and victory would only be achieved through armed struggle and through using a strategy of prolonged popular war. In practice, this translated into Carpio refusing to make alliances with other social forces, and to consider negotiation with the government as a synonym for betrayal of the revolutionary movement, which should only be used for tactical purposes. Besides this, Carpio viewed the FPL as the true expression of the revolutionary vanguard, and had a deep-rooted distrust of all the other armed organisations and of the PCS, and suggested that the FPL should have a presence in all the Salvadoran territory.

By contrast, the majority position inside the FMLN, championed by the PCS Secretary General Shafick Handal, was based on developing a closer relationship with the more moderate sectors of the PDC and on initiating a negotiation process to end the war. Carpio's standpoint was rejected by the majority of the FMLN guerrilla commanders in the summer of 1982, who agreed instead to promote a dual strategy of armed struggle and negotiation with the government – a strategy Carpio was opposed to, but that he was forced to accept given the pressure exerted by Fidel Castro and the rest of the organisations. The purpose of this dual strategy was for the FMLN to occupy positions in a future coalition government alongside the Christian Democracy, and from there, with the popular support the Front thought they would obtain, implement their political project. The possibility of taking power and having exclusive control over the state apparatus via armed struggle was not ruled out, but a second route opened up that would put an end to the conflict in a scenario of shared power.

Carpio's position was rejected also by a majority of the commanders of his own organisation at a meeting of the FPL's Central Command held in Managua in January and February 1983, where the position favouring a strategy that combined armed struggle and negotiation upheld by Mélida Anaya Montes (aka Ana María) and other commanders prevailed. This conflict was the trigger to the assassination of Anaya Montes in Managua, on April 6, 1983, and to Carpio's suicide a few days later, on April 12.[34]

34 The FPL's Political Commission, based on the initial research carried out by Nicaraguan security forces, held Carpio responsible for the assassination. Given this accusation, and as per the written testimony he left before his passing, Carpio chose to commit suicide. The investigation of Anaya's assassination that was conducted later, led by a

The death of its Secretary General allowed for the political opening of the FPL, which was now in the hands of a generation of younger and more pragmatic militants. As Facundo Guardado stated: "all the debate that was created around Anaya´s assassination in a large measure helped de-fanaticise the FPL".[35] The new leadership, made up of Salvador Sánchez Cerén as Secretary General and Dimas Rodríguez and Salvador Guerra as numbers two and three respectively, had a greater capacity for articulation and rapprochement towards the rest of the revolutionary movement, as well as a better disposition towards reaching political compromises.

4.2.2. Strategic shift

The disappearance of Carpio, leader of the FMLN's most powerful organisation, made it easier to adopt the dual strategy of armed struggle and negotiation that the Front pursued until 1989. One of the first results caused by this strategic shift was the publishing of the *Government of Broad Participation* (GAP) proposal on January 31, 1983, two months before the presidential elections. The GAP, which became the Front's official political platform, proposed creating a plural executive of "national salvation" that was to include the "non-oligarchic bourgeois" and should call for elections in the shortest time-frame possible. In order to compose this government, the Front suggested starting a process of dialogue and negotiation, and offered a ceasefire once the process was well underway. Despite its tactical motivations, this document demonstrated an important political change of the guerrilla organisations. The GAP proposal meant that the FMLN-FDR alliance was opting, from that moment on, for a negotiated solution if certain conditions were met, including the guarantees for its militants' physical well-being and official recognition of their representation as a political force.

This change in perspective, and the rise to power of the PDC, created the conditions necessary for the first public talks between the government and the guerrilla groups, in La Palma in October 1984 and in Ayagualo in November of that year. These talks ended on account of the pressure exerted by the armed forces, who did not view a negotiated solution to the conflict as an acceptable option. In May and October 1987 there would be further contact with a government that was extremely debilitated by the prolonged war and the economic crisis, and by its incapacity to assert itself over the armed forces, backed by the US in their decision to overthrow the insurgents. The FMLN, for its part, was convinced that the masses were becoming radicalised and that a defeat of the government was a possibility in the near future. With these perspectives, the talks were merely tactical in nature for both parties and yielded no substantial results. This also happened in the talks between the FMLN and ARENA government representatives held in Mexico and San José in September and October 1989. For the Front, these talks were a part of a strategic counteroffensive in which the demonstration of military strength would be necessary to force the government to negotiate (Dunkerley 1994: 68).

The results of the November 1989 offensive backed the position of those within the FMLN who supported a negotiated solution to the conflict. The fact that no popular insurgency took place, as some commanders expected it would, showed that the Salvadoran people were tired of war, and that more than insurrection, what they craved for was the end of the war at all costs. The population was depleted after so many years of conflict, demonstrated by the increasing

Managua court, found the intellectual author of this crime to be Rogelio Bazzaglia (Commander Marcelo), Anaya´s own Chief of Security, who had acted on his own initiative, motivated by his disagreement with the political views imposed by Anaya within the FPL.

35 Facundo Guardado, author interview, San Salvador, August 19, 2008.

difficulty for the guerrilla groups to recruit combatants.[36] Meanwhile, international solidarity was diminishing and changes in the Eastern Bloc placed a high degree of uncertainty on the future of national liberation struggles the world over. All of this contributed to pragmatism prevailing within the FMLN, following the 1989 offensive.

4.2.3. Change of goals and means

The extension of the conflict and the inability to attain definite military victory unleashed a gradual political and strategic change of the FMLN. Around 1983, the Front shifted from its initial political position in which revolution and socialism were viewed as the only solution to the country's troubles, and armed struggle was seen as the only way to reach them, to a progressive recognition of political negotiation as an alternative option. A third approach sprung up in 1989, based on holding transparent elections, the independent functioning of the judicial power and demilitarisation becoming the struggle's main goals – a struggle that was to combine negotiation with military pressure. In other words, implementing reforms within the framework of a representative democracy and market economy was identified with a revolution that was now termed a democratic one. From then on, the Front's strategy would lie in participating in elections as a means to take over power, and to then begin the transition towards becoming a new society. The "Democratic Revolution" project was presented in several documents published in 1989 and 1990. In January 1989 the Front made public its *Peace proposal to turn elections into a contribution to peace*, in which it agreed to attend the presidential elections that were to be held in March if they were postponed for six months and as long as some minimal pre-requisites for assuring their transparency were met. Simultaneously, Joaquín Villalobos, the ERP leader, published a paper titled *Perspectives for Victory and Revolutionary Project*. This paper posited the need to realise a revolution that was adapted to the Salvadoran reality in which workers and peasants, but also the middle class, became engines in this process. It challenged the wisdom of adopting a one-party system and accepted elections as a valid means to attain political power, as long as they were held in a climate of equal opportunity for all contestants. Also, it accepted the existence of private property, political pluralism, freedom of press and the role of the Catholic church. Once the negotiations were underway, the FMLN published its September 1990 *Proclamation to the Nation. The Democratic Revolution*, outlining further the programme it meant to reach through the talks, and the political opening position mentioned above.

From 1990 onwards, the use of violence came to occupy a subordinated role to the progress of negotiations. The demilitarisation of the state became the central theme of negotiations, over socio-economic transformation. The Front assumed the latter would take place once the revolutionaries had reached power through elections, although the guerrilla commanders did, during the negotiating process, seek landowning guarantees for the agricultural workers who were members of their army or their support bases.

The disarming of the FMLN was discussed from September 1991, when some of the most important agreements in the negotiations had been reached, as guerrilla groups were not willing to dismantle their armed structures without having reached solid commitments. In this month, the FMLN adopted a unilateral ceasefire that would not be violated. The fact that the ceasefire and the discussions on disarming the Front took place at a very advanced point in the negotiations gave the guerrilla commanders time to discuss with combatants the decisions that were being made, and to gain the support of the militancy in laying down their arms (Buchanan and Chávez 2008: 21).

36 Sonia Aguiñada Carranza, author interview, San Salvador, August 11, 2009.

5. Transition to democratic politics

The Chapultepec agreements made it possible for the left to access the political system, for the repressive system to be dismantled, and civic-military relationships to change, which set the basis for the demilitarisation of society. In return, the FMLN had to renounce modifying the economic order, despite the fact that it had denounced the economic system as one of the causes of the war. It can be said that the heart of the agreement between the insurgents and the government was the demilitarisation and democratisation of the regime in exchange for an acceptance of market economy.

5.1. Implementation of the peace accords

As a result of the negotiations, the armed forces underwent a reform process. First of all, their mission was reduced to defending national sovereignty and territorial integrity, depriving them of the function stated in article 221 of the 1983 constitution, which awarded them the role of maintaining domestic order. From this constitutional reform agreed as part of the peace agreements, the military can only maintain domestic order as an exception and with prior consent from the president. Also, the armed forces were reduced and purged, albeit to a limited extent (see section 3.3. above), and the basis for changing their educational system was established. With regard to dismantling the repressive system, the National Guard and the Treasury Police were dissolved, and a calendar was set for the dissolution of the National Police. They were substituted by the PNC, which was made up of former guerrilla fighters and former members of the National Police, as well as personnel who had recently joined their ranks.[37] Also, the National Intelligence Agency was dissolved and a new State Intelligence Organ, headed by civilian leadership, was created.

The Truth Commission was created to oversee the investigation and resolution of human rights violation claims. However, despite its recommendations, the Legislative Assembly, controlled by ARENA, passed a general amnesty law for those implicated in political crimes which, in practice, prevented anyone found responsible for violations from being sanctioned.

As for economic and social issues, the agreements regularised land ownership in conflict areas and foresaw some measures to alleviate the social cost of the structural adjustments, promoting the creation of a Forum for Consultation. This last measure, aiming to seek consensus in the design of economic policy and labour regulations, barely worked, as it was non-binding. Last but not least, the agreements made it possible to reform the justice system and created the figure of Prosecutor for the Defence of Human Rights. The electoral code also underwent reforms.

5.2. Political evolution of the FMLN

As a consequence of the peace accords, the FMLN was demobilised on December 15, 1992, and was then registered as a political party. This marked the beginning of a new era for the organisation – from now on it was a legitimate political party. As a partisan organisation, the Front experienced slow but ongoing growth, until it became the premier political force in the country and won the presidency in 2009.

37 According to the peace agreements, twenty percent of the new recruits of the PNC would be former FMLN combatants, another twenty percent would be former members of the National Police and the remaining sixty percent would be non-combatants.

This itinerary was not without its difficulties. The ending of the war, the crisis of socialist ideology and the internal power struggles all dented the cohesion of the former revolutionary organisations. Since the signing of the agreements, it became evident that within the Front there were ideological differences and power struggles. In 1994 and 1995 the most obvious differences were between the RN and ERP and the rest of the Front. These two organisations considered it necessary to abandon Marxism-Leninism and make the FMLN a social-democratic party. Both organisations also objected to the decision-making process within the Front that systematically harmed them, since their positions were always in a minority compared to the other three groups. This conflict ended with the RN and the ERP leaving the FMLN in 1994 and creating a new (failed) political party. It was clear that the FMLN was unable to manage its internal conflicts in a constructive way. In 1995 the three remaining organisations (PCS, FPL and PRTC) chose to dissolve and then re-create the FMLN as a unified organisation. From that moment on, the creation of internal factions could be observed within the Front. These factions represented different perspectives on what the ideological definition and the political strategy of the party should be. The result of these differences was the expulsion of the leaders of minority factions or those with less weight in the structure of the organisation. Thus Facundo Guardado, former FPL commander, was expelled in October 2001, and Francisco Jovel, former PRTC Secretary General, was also expelled in 2002.

One constant that has been shown throughout these years is that while for some former commanders the peace agreements signified the culmination of the great transformations the country needed, for others they were the starting point from which deeper changes in the economic and social structure of El Salvador would be realised.

Since the end of the war and up until 2004, the Front went through a period in which its ideology and political project were in dispute. Some sectors, supporters of keeping the FMLN as a highly ideological Marxist-Leninist organisation (the socialist revolutionary wing) clashed with those who favoured a shift towards becoming a centre-left party (the renovating wing). From 2004 onwards, following the socialist revolutionary wing's rise to power under the leadership of Shafick Handal, the party adopted a strategy of transition to socialism that went through an initial phase of taking power from the state and moving deeper into democracy. The possibility of creating a series of broad political alliances with non-revolutionary sectors as a means of attaining power was posited. This policy was one of tactical collaboration with those political forces that the leadership of the FMLN considered to be democratic, but not leftist.[38]

In its core, this strategy is highly similar to that postulated by the PCS in the 1970s: taking power through elections in alliance with other political forces and, from there, beginning to transform the political and economic system. There are obviously qualitative differences with regard to the meaning of the concept of socialism that the Front currently upholds. This socialist project no longer rejects the existence of private property, although it does reduce its role in the economy and subordinate it to social interest. It does not oppose representative democracy on principle, although it intends, at least on paper, to take it to deeper and more radical levels through what it terms "popular control".

Despite the internal struggles, by 2000 FMLN had become the leading force within the Legislative Assembly and for many years held on to the mayor's office of San Salvador. It was in fact the greater ideological cohesion and programmatic coherence of the party, as well as the autonomy of its leadership, that allowed it to form alliances with sectors unrelated to the FMLN, based on journalist Mauricio Funes' nomination as presidential candidate for the 2009 elections.[39]

38 Statements made by Jose Luis Merino, one of the PCS and FMLN's past leaders, to the Salvadoran newspaper "El Faro" on November 7, 2005.

39 His bid was supported by the "Friends of Mauricio" civic movement. This is a small group of medium-sized business leaders, previously excluded from the circles of businesspeople favoured by ARENA governments, linked by ties of

The presidential ticket, with Salvador Sánchez Cerén running for Vice President, was made public in November 2007.

The FMLN beat ARENA for the first time in the March 2009 presidential elections by almost 70,000 votes, and it obtained an absolute majority in the first round (51.3% against ARENA's 48.7%). The Front also beat the Salvadoran right-wing party in the legislative elections (35 seats for the FMLN against 32 for ARENA). Almost thirty years after its foundation, the FMLN governs El Salvador's destinies today.

Conclusion

The Salvadoran revolutionary movement arose in response to an authoritarian political regime that kept the majority of the population in a situation of political and economic exclusion. Against the closure of spaces for political participation, and the repression of the popular movement's demands for democratisation and economic improvements, some dissident sectors of the Communist Party and the radical Catholic youth opted for the armed struggle as a means of achieving a comprehensive political and economic transformation of El Salvador. The strong roots of the guerrilla organisations in the popular movement allowed them to develop into a broad revolutionary movement that faced the state in a civil war for almost twelve years.

To meet the challenge posed by the FMLN, the Salvadoran state, supported by the United States, launched a political reform strategy and an increase in military activity. Liberalisation of the political regime, agrarian reform, and the modernisation and increase in numbers of the armed forces were the main elements of the government's strategy. Ultimately, this strategy prevented the military success of a revolutionary army whose external support was much lower than its opponent's, and which failed to convince broad sectors of the population of the legitimacy of its political project.

The inability to defeat the government triggered changes in the balance of power inside the FMLN and unleashed gradual changes in the revolutionaries' strategy and political project. During the eighties the Front shifted from a political position in which revolution, armed struggle and socialism were considered the only possible solutions to the national crises, to a position at the end of the decade where holding clean elections, having an independent judicial power and demilitarising the state became the main goals of the struggle – a struggle that would combine negotiation with military pressure. This would be the agenda and the strategy that the FMLN maintained regarding the peace negotiations.

All this shows that in the Salvadoran case, adapting the goals of the movement was a pre-requisite for the transition to a political strategy. Despite the image of ideological rigidity that some of the Salvadoran revolutionary organisations projected, they were actually quite flexible and responded continuously by adapting their strategy and discourse to the changing political and military environment. The role of the leadership was crucial regarding this adaptation. Given the organisational features of these organisations (clearly defined hierarchy, levels of authority and responsibility), the major strategic decisions and redefinition of the objectives of the fight were taken within small leadership groups and later accepted by the militancy.

The Chapultepec peace agreements were a very effective instrument to insert the revolutionary left into the political system and to demilitarise the state. In this sense, the transition to democracy in El Salvador, which was a result of the agreements, was the product of the

friendship to Funes. The group established its own ad hoc electoral propaganda machine and civic movement in 2008. The "Friends" attained a presence in more than half of the municipalities and raised substantial campaign funds (Gerardo Cáceres, author interview, San Salvador, August 13, 2008).

challenge posed by the insurgency, although representative democracy was not part of the initial agenda of either the insurgents or the armed forces. While there were some incidents of violence after the agreements – notably, the killing of two PRTC commanders – it can be said that the security guarantees offered to the demobilised guerrilla fighters operated effectively. The presence of peacekeepers from the UN, the international community's pressure on the government and the military, the dismantling of the security forces and the construction of a new civilian police force integrating former FMLN combatants, are some elements that explain this result.

However, these agreements have left some important issues unresolved. The economic structure remained untouched, which explains why El Salvador has remained one of the countries with the highest index of income inequality. On the other hand, the transition to peace was accompanied by the implementation of neoliberal economic policies. The reduction of public spending in the context of an economy severely damaged by war, and the blockade of any hint of redistributive economic policy, have prevented an improvement of the economic situation for most Salvadorians. As a result, during the last two decades the Salvadoran economy has remained unable to create enough jobs for the thousands of young people entering the labour market. This is at least one of the reasons that explain the high levels of social violence in the country today. Furthermore, although the international community invested heavily in the immediate implementation of the agreements, that support was greatly reduced once the UN mission finished. A poorly-resourced country, devastated by a twelve-year war, would have needed a plan of economic reconstruction financed by the international community that could help make the Salvadoran economy viable in the long term. This point highlights the behaviour of the most important international actor in the region, the government of the United States, who was able to invest a million dollars a day for nearly a decade to defeat the insurgency, but did not make a similar effort to help El Salvador to rebuild its economy after the war.

Regarding the FMLN, with the advent of peace it became clear that, to a large extent, the Front had been an alliance of convenience to fight a common enemy. After the war, ideological differences surfaced as well as in-fighting for control of the Front in the new circumstances. The inability of the Front leaders to resolve their differences constructively, and to agree on a party model that satisfied all their internal factions, became evident during the 1990s. It was also clear that these conflicts were largely struggles between the party elite, because the former commanders who were expelled from the FMLN were not followed by the militancy on a massive scale.

Once the internal conflicts were resolved, at the beginning of the decade of 2000, the FMLN was able to offer the Salvadoran electorate an image of internal cohesion and ideological coherence that contributed to projecting it as a party fit to rule the destinies of the country.

Finally, the revolutionary movement left behind another long-term legacy. The experience of armed struggle and political involvement changed the lives of many women involved and made way, after the war, for the creation of women's and feminists' organisations, such as "Las Dignas" or "Las Mélidas". Also, dozens of NGOs and social organisations of all kinds have been built by former revolutionary militants. The role of these organisations as providers of different services in a context of unwillingness or inability of the state to resolve economic and social problems of the population has been crucial. Besides this, during the last decade, some popular organisations founded by former middle-rank FMLN activists have been the protagonists of some of the most important contemporary mobilisations in El Salvador. The struggles against the free trade agreement with the USA, against highly polluting mining enterprises, or in general in favour of a deeper democratisation of the Salvadoran society, have been led by former activists of the Front. It can be said that the insurgency bequeathed a culture of citizen mobilisation and participation among sectors of society that were previously excluded from political life.

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Annex 1: Acronyms

ACUS	*Acción Católica Universitaria Salvadoreña* (Salvadoran University Catholic Action)
AGEUS	*Asociación General de Estudiantes Universitarios Salvadoreños* (General Association of Revolutionary University Students)
ANDES -21	*Asociación Nacional de Educadores Salvadoreños* (National Association of Salvadoran Educators)
ARENA	*Alianza Republicana Nacionalista* (Nationalist Republican Alliance)
BPR	*Bloque Popular Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Popular Bloc)
BRAZ	*Brigada Rafael Arce Zablah* (Rafael Arce Zablah Brigade)
CD	*Convergencia Democrática* (Democratic Convergence)
CONARA	*Comisión Nacional para la Restauración de Áreas* (National Comittee for Restoration of Areas)
COPAZ	*Comisión Nacional para la Consolidación de la Paz* (National Commission for the Consolidation of Peace)
CPM	*Coordinadora Político – Militar* (Political Military Coordinating Committee)
CRM	*Coordinadora Revolucionaria de Masas* (Revolutionary Coordinating Committee of the Masses)
DRU	*Dirección Revolucionaria Unificada* (Unified Revolutionary Leadership)
ERP	*Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (People's Revolutionary Army)
FAL	*Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación* (Liberation Armed Forces)
FAPU	*Frente de Acción Popular Unificada* (Unified Popular Action Front)
FDR	*Frente Democrático Revolucionario* (Democratic Revolutionary Front)
FDS	*Frente Democrático Salvadoreño* (Salvadoran Democratic Front)
FENASTRAS	*Federación Nacional Sindical de Trabajadores Salvadoreños* (National Union Federation of Salvadoran Workers)
FMLN	*Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front)
FPL	*Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí* (Popular Liberation Forces Farabundo Martí)
FSLN	*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (Sandinista National Liberation Front)
FUAR	*Frente Unido de Acción Revolucionaria* (United Front of Revolutionary Action)
FUSADES	*Fundación Salvadoreña para el Desarrollo Económico y Social* (Salvadoran Foundation for Social and Economic Development)
FUSS	*Federación Unitaria Sindical Salvadoreña* (Unitary Federation of Salvadoran Unions)
GAP	*Gobierno de Amplia Participación* (Government of Broad Participation)
JEC	*Juventud Estudiantil Católica* (Young Catholic Students)
LL	*Liga para la Liberación* (League for Liberation)
LP - 28	*Ligas Populares 28 de Febrero* (February 28 Popular Leagues)
MESC	*Movimiento Estudiantil Social – Cristiano* (Social Christian Student Movement)
MLP	*Movimiento de Liberación Popular* (Movement for Popular Liberation)
MNR	*Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario* (National Revolutionary Movement)
MPSC	*Movimiento Popular Social Cristiano* (Popular Social Christian Movement)
ONUSAL	*Misión de Observación de las Naciones Unidas en El Salvador* (United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador)

ORT	*Organización Revolucionaria de Trabajadores* (Workers' Revolutionary Organisation)
PAR	*Partido de Acción Renovadora* (Renovating Action Party)
PCN	*Partido de Conciliación Nacional* (National Conciliation Party)
PCS	*Partido Comunista Salvadoreño* (Salvadoran Communist Party)
PDC	*Partido Demócrata Cristiano* (Christian Democratic Party)
PNC	*Policía Nacional Civil* (National Civilian Police)
PRTC	*Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos* (Revolutionary Party of the Central American Workers)
PSD	*Partido Socialdemócrata* (Social Democratic Party)
RN	*Resistencia Nacional* (National Resistance)
STUS	*Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Universidad de El Salvador* (Salvadoran University Workers Union)
UCA	*Universidad Centroamericana* (Central American University)
UDN	*Unión Democrática Nacionalista* (Nationalist Democratic Union)
UES	*Universidad Nacional de El Salvador* (National University of El Salvador)
UJP	*Unión de Jóvenes Patriotas* (Union of Young Patriots)
UN	United Nations
US	United States of America
USSR	Soviet Union
UNO	*Unión Nacional Opositora* (National Opposition Union)

Annex 2: FMLN chronology

1969 December: Creation of "The Group" (El Grupo) predecessor to the ERP.

1970 April: Establishment of the FPL.

1971 Creation of the ERP.

1972 February: Presidential elections. The government stages electoral fraud to prevent the victory of José Napoleón Duarte, UNO candidate.

March: The ERP goes public.

1974 Creation of the FAPU.

1975 Creation of the RN.

July: Creation of the BPR, the FPL's masses coordinating committee.

1976 January: Establishment of the PRTC.

1977 February: Presidential elections. The government stages electoral fraud to prevent the victory of Ernesto Claramount, UNO candidate.

Creation of the February 28 Popular Leagues (LP-28), the ERP's coordinating committee.

1979 Creation of the MLP, the PRTC's coordinating committee.

March: The PCS militarises its structures.

October: Civic-military coup.

December: Creation of the Political-Military Coordinating Committee (PCS/RN/FPL).

1980 January 10: The Political-Military Coordinating Committee goes public.

March: The Liberation Armed Forces (FAL), the armed branch of the Salvadoran Communist Party, is officially established.

March 24: Assassination of Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador.

April 18: The FDR is established.

May 22: The ERP, FPL, RN and PCS create the Unified Political-Military Revolutionary Leadership.

October 10: Creation of the FMLN.

October 27: Six FDR leaders are assassinated.

December 5: PRTC joins the FMLN.

1981 January 10: The FMLN launches its "Final Offensive."

August 28: Franco-Mexican declaration.

1982 March: Elections for the Constitutive Assembly.

August: Apaneca treaty – creation of a national unity government headed by Álvaro Magaña.

October: The FMLN-FDR offers the Salvadoran government the chance to engage in dialogue.

1983 June 4: The FMLN-FDR presents the *Five issues for a political solution* proposal, in response to an initiative by El Salvador's Peace Commission.

December: A new Constitution is passed.

1984 January 31: The FMLN publicises the GAP Platform and undergoes strategic readjustment. Guerrillas maintain their hold on 90 of El Salvador's 261 municipalities.

March: Presidential elections. Victory of Napoleón Duarte (PDC).

October 15: La Palma meeting for dialogue between the government and FMLN-FDR.

October 30: Ayagualo meeting for dialogue.

1985 Legislative elections: PDC victory.

1986 July 16: FMLN offers to engage in political dialogue with the government.

1987 May 26: FMLN publicises a *Proposal of a Transcendental Agreement for the Humanisation and Reduction of the Economic, Social and Political Impact of War.*

August 7: Central American presidents sign the Esquipulas II Agreement in Guatemala.

August 27: The FMLN offers the government a ceasefire.

October 4: The FMLN and the Salvadoran government meet at the Vatican Delegation in San Salvador.

October 21 to 23: New meeting in Caracas (Venezuela).

October 26: Assassination of Herbert Anaya Sanabria, president of El Salvador's Human Rights Commission.

November 7: The MNR and the MPSC join the PSD and create the CD.

1988 Legislative elections: victory of ARENA.

1989 January: FMLN presents the *Perspectives on victory and revolutionary project* manifesto.

March: Presidential elections with CD involvement. Victory of ARENA.

October 16: The Salvadoran government and the FMLN meet to seek a political resolution to the conflict.

November 11: The Front engages in a general offensive.

December: The government and the FMLN request United Nations mediation.

1990 January 11: FMLN negotiation proposal.

May 20: An agreement is signed in Caracas, bearing the topics for negotiation.

July 26: Negotiating parties sign an agreement on human rights in San José de Costa Rica.

September 24: The FMLN makes public its *Proclamation to the nation: the democratic revolution*.

1991 March: Legislative and municipal elections. Victory of ARENA.

April: The negotiating parties agree to the realisation of important constitutional reforms in Mexico City.

September 25: The government and guerrilla groups agree to work on a condensed negotiation agenda to expedite the implementation of a ceasefire.

November 16: The FMLN declares an indefinite unilateral truce.

December 31: The negotiating parties sign the New York II Act.

1992 January 16: Signing of Peace Agreements in Chapultepec (Mexico).

February 1: Commencement of the official ceasefire.

July 1: The first 20% of FMLN forces are demobilised.

September 24: The second 20% of the Front's troops are demobilised.

October 31: The third 20% of FMLN combatants are demobilised.

December 1: Another 20% of the Front's contingent is demobilised.

December 15: The remaining 20%, out of a total of 15,009 activists, are demobilised.

1993 The FMLN officially becomes a political party.

1994 December 6 and 13: ERP and RN leave the FMLN.

1995 The FPL, PCS and PRTC are dissolved. The FMLN becomes a unitary party.

1997 March: The FMLN wins the majority of the votes in the capital city and 1/3 of all legislative seats.

2001 October: Facundo Guardado (leader of the renovating wing) is expelled from the party.

2002 December: Francisco Jovel (one of the leaders of the renovating wing) is expelled from the FMLN.

2005 June: Several renovating deputies leave the party and form the FDR

2009 March: The FMLN's candidate Mauricio Funes is elected president of El Salvador.

About the author

Alberto Martín Álvarez holds a Ph.D. in Latin American Studies from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and he is currently a researcher at the University Centre for Social Research in the Universidad de Colima (Mexico). His research topics are political violence, social movements and armed actors in Latin America. He is the editor of "The Latin American Revolutionary Left", Plaza y Valdes/Universidad de Colima (forthcoming) and author of several articles and book chapters about the FMLN, based on extensive fieldwork and several dozen interviews carried out with former FMLN leaders since 1998. He is currently conducting a research project about the origins of the revolutionary left in El Salvador.