

**THE POWER OF THE PRESS IN THE FORMATION OF U.S.
FOREIGN POLICY: A CASE STUDY OF U.S. PRESS COVERAGE OF
PEASANT MASSACRES IN EL SALVADOR, 1981-1983**

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Introduction

Between 1976 and 1983, events moved El Salvador from the margins of U.S. foreign policy to its center. One key element in this transformation was the resurgence of a fervent anti-Communist ideology within the U.S. foreign policy establishment. Although President Carter initially had tried to link a concern for the treatment of human rights with the formation of foreign policy, by the end of his term, the fear of a Communist victory in El Salvador outweighed the concern for human rights. President Carter, at the end of his term, and President Reagan, from the beginning of his term, turned El Salvador into a test site of how the U.S. government would prevent Communist influence from spreading in the Western Hemisphere. President Reagan dramatically escalated the fear of a Communist takeover in Central America, and made it the guiding principle of foreign policy initiatives. The Reagan administration maintained that Nicaragua was under the control of the Soviet Union, and through this satellite, Communists would not only take over El Salvador, but also conquer its neighbors. Reagan stated that the Soviets would use their satellites, Nicaragua and El Salvador, to force Communism on Guatemala and Mexico, to the north, and on Costa Rica and Panama, to the south. Then, Reagan claimed, the Communists who were "only two days' drive from Harlingen, Texas, would mount an attack on North America."¹

¹Raymond Bonner. Weakness and Deceit: U.S. Policy and El Salvador. New York: Times Books, 1984. pp. 11 and 233; John A. Booth and Thomas W. Walker. Understanding Central America. 2nd ed. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993. pp. 140-141; Gerald M. Boyd. "Contra Aid Vital, Reagan Declares." The New York Times. 4 March 1986, p. A1; Lou Cannon and Joanne Omang. "Reagan Warns of Disaster If Hill Bars \$100 Million Contra Aid." The Washington Post. 4

Another essential element in the transformation of U.S. foreign policy was the perceived importance by the U.S. government of the treatment of human rights by the Salvadoran government. Since the 1930s, the Salvadoran military had been very influential in the survival of the various incarnations of the Salvadoran government. Military officers were either members of juntas themselves, or were key supporters of civilian politicians who were members. Starting in 1981, the Salvadoran armed forces received massive U.S. military aid and training. This was significant because U.S. military assistance was supposed to be contingent upon improvements in the respect of human rights by the Salvadoran military, which was notorious for carrying out massacres of noncombatants. By the time President Carter took office, the Salvadoran armed forces had a fifty-year history of murdering perceived opponents, especially peasants, to maintain power and frighten potential subversives. From a U.S. perspective, this history had added significance because many peasant massacres in the 1980s were committed by U.S.-trained troops, or by soldiers with U.S.-supplied weapons.

With varying degrees of ambition, the U.S. press attempted to cover human rights abuses in El Salvador. Peasant massacres were especially important because they illustrated the connection between U.S. foreign policy and the Salvadoran government's domestic policies. Adequate press coverage had the potential to influence the course of U.S. policy by influencing the U.S. public's perception of that

March 1986, p. A21; Eleanor Clift. "With Rebel Leaders at His Side, Reagan Presses for Contra Aid." Los Angeles Times. 4 March 1986, p. A8; and Pat M. Holt. "Just How Will the War in Nicaragua End?" The Christian Science Monitor. 6 August 1986, p. 14.

policy. If news about the gross human rights abuses of a U.S. ally had been printed on a regular basis in major U.S. dailies, perhaps the relationship between the U.S. and Salvadoran governments would have had to change.

Unfortunately, the U.S. press frequently failed to provide comprehensive coverage of peasant massacres. Part of the explanation for the minimal coverage involved pressure on the news media from the U.S. government. In January 1982, stories that documented the massacre of nearly one thousand civilians in the Morazán province were published in two of the most influential newspapers in the United States, The New York Times and The Washington Post. Times' reporter by Raymond Bonner and Post correspondent Alma Guillermoprieto documented that the massacre had been carried out by a U.S.-trained unit called the Atlácatl Battalion.² Their reports presented a picture that was diametrically opposed to that painted by the Reagan administration, which claimed that the Salvadoran government was improving its human rights record. The Reagan administration attacked the journalists, calling them leftist sympathizers, and criticized their stories as guerrilla propaganda.³ Instead of seizing the opportunity to report that the Reagan administration was misleading the public about the goals and effectiveness of U.S. foreign policy, the press recoiled and became

²Raymond Bonner. "Massacre of Hundreds Reported in Salvador Village." The New York Times. 27 January 1982, pp. A1 and A10; Alma Guillermoprieto. "Salvadoran Peasants Describe Mass Killing." The Washington Post. 27 January 1982, pp. A1 and A16.

³See Michael Massing. "About-face on El Salvador." Columbia Journalism Review. November/December 1983, pp. 42-49; Mike Hoyt. "The Mozote Massacre: It Was the Reporters' Word Against the Government's." Columbia Journalism Review. January/February 1993, pp. 31-34.

silent regarding the massacre at El Mozote, and later massacres in rural areas. Elements within the press also criticized the reports in The New York Times and The Washington Post in a manner similar to that of the Reagan administration.

On the surface, poor press coverage of human rights violations in El Salvador may not seem surprising or threatening; however, the Reagan administration's harsh criticism of reports about the massacre at El Mozote may be interpreted as an attempt to suppress coverage of that and other peasant massacres. This interfered with the U.S. press's role, which was established and protected by the First Amendment.⁴ That role involves providing U.S. citizens with information that comprises a public benefit,⁵ which the Founding Fathers considered essential for the survival of a democratic society. This information includes timely, relevant, and comprehensive reports on issues and events that enable the public to make informed decisions about policy and policy makers. (The so-called "watchdog"

⁴In the early eighteenth century, it was a crime to criticize the British Crown or its representatives in the colonies. The 1735 case involving John Peter Zenger ended this precedent. In this landmark case, Zenger was defended by Alexander Hamilton, who convinced the jury that the truth was not libelous, and was a permissible defense in sedition cases. See T. Barton Carter, Marc A. Franklin, and Jay B. Wright. The First Amendment and the Fifth Estate. Westbury, N.Y.: Foundation Press, p. 13; Donald M. Gillmor, Jerome A. Barron, Todd F. Simon, and Herbert A. Terry. Mass Communication Law: Cases and Comment. St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Company, 1990, p. 3; and Stephen Klaidman and Tom L. Beauchamp. The Virtuous Journalist. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 7-8.

The colonist's knowledge of the Stamp Act of 1711 and the British Stamp Act of 1765 also provided impetus for the creation of the First Amendment. See Carter, Franklin, and Wright, pp. 11-13.

It is also important to note that the Fourteenth Amendment protects the press from state laws that could infringe upon the rights of free speech and free press. See Gillmor, Barron, Simon, and Terry, p. 1; Carter, Franklin, and Wright, p. 14.

⁵Klaidman and Beauchamp, p. 5.

function of the press). Other elements of public benefit involve providing a public forum for the exchange of ideas and opinions, (which takes the form of letters, editorials, and guest columns); speaking out in defense of individual liberties; presenting information about issues that are important to the health, safety, and welfare of the public; and practicing preventive journalism, that is, reporting trends or issues that have the potential to cause serious problems in the future.⁶ If the press fails to fulfill these duties, then democracy suffers, because if people are ill-informed, they cannot become sufficiently involved in the political decision-making process.

One of the most important aspects of public benefit involves press coverage of foreign policy. The U.S. government's foreign policy has been one of the most influential forces in the formation of other countries' governments, especially in the Western Hemisphere, which the Monroe Doctrine declared is within the United States' sphere of influence.⁷ Some governments have been able to attain or remain in power for long periods of time because of large amounts of political, economic, and military support from the United States. Some examples include: the Somoza dynasty in Nicaragua from 1930 to 1979; the military-dominated government in Guatemala from 1954 through the mid-1990s; and the Panamanian government, from its inception after breaking away from Colombia in 1903 with support from by President Theodore Roosevelt to the present.

⁶Jacqueline Sharkey. Lecture in Ethics and the News Media on the news media's responsibility to provide a public benefit. University of Arizona. 6 February 1996. Also see Klaidman and Beauchamp, pp. 126-151.

⁷Howard Zinn. A People's History of the United States. New York: Harper Perennial, 1980. p. 290.

From 1950 to 1983--with a brief hiatus between 1976 and 1979, when U.S. aid was temporarily suspended--the various governments in El Salvador have been familiar with the effects of U.S. support.⁸ Often, new Salvadoran regimes sought good relations with the U.S. government because Salvadoran officials knew U.S. financial support would help them remain in power. These regimes were controlled by a small oligarchy that controlled the majority of the country's land and was supported by a strong military apparatus. Between 1980 and 1983, the Salvadoran government attempted to hide or discredit reports about human rights abuses because maintaining a facade of respect for human rights was essential to continued U.S. military assistance. Nonetheless, the Salvadoran armed forces enforced the status quo through the creation of a culture of fear. They carried out acts of terror, such as peasant massacres, to quell rebellions and suppress dissent. The use of massacres and other human rights atrocities to maintain the social dichotomy started with La Matanza, a massacre in 1932 in which an estimated 30,000 peasants were killed by the military.⁹ Mass murders of civilians by the armed forces continued through the

⁸By the mid-1950s, "Mutual Defense Agreements" linked the U.S. army with the armies of every Latin American country, except Argentina and Mexico, and the United States held a near-monopoly on the provision of military equipment and supplies to the region. See Michael McClintock. The American Connection. London: Zed Press, 1985. p. 9. In the early 1960s, U.S. training of Salvadoran military and police squads began to increase rapidly in El Salvador, the United States, and a U.S. training base in the Canal Zone. See McClintock, pp. 196-203.

⁹Bonner, p. 23; Booth and Walker, p. 37; James Dunkerly. The Long War. London: Junction Books, 1982. p. 29; Walter LaFeber. Inevitable Revolutions. Expanded ed. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1984. p. 10; McClintock, p. 99; Tommie Sue Montgomery. Revolution in El Salvador. 2nd ed. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995. p. 37.

1980s. These repeated human rights violations caused problems for U.S. policy makers until 1980, when fear of Communist influence in the hemisphere subdued concerns for human rights issues. Soon after the Reagan administration took office in 1981, the U.S. government collaborated with Salvadoran officials to conceal human rights violations committed by the Salvadoran government.

The Reagan administration attempted to cover-up events, such as the massacre at El Mozote, by impeding coverage of the U.S. press. To clarify the significance of the El Mozote case, this paper will review briefly key aspects of Salvadoran history, focusing on the period between 1932 and 1976. This period was characterized by La Matanza, military involvement in politics, and the continuation of unequal distribution of income, all of which foreshadowed events in the late 1970s and 1980s. The paper then will examine the foreign policies of the Carter and Reagan administrations to assess the influence of these policies on events in El Salvador. The next chapter of the paper will analyze the initial reports on the massacre at El Mozote by Bonner and Guillermprieto, along with criticism of their stories, to determine the effects of this criticism on follow-up reports about the massacre, and on U.S. news media coverage of subsequent massacres.

Coverage of five massacres, which occurred after El Mozote in Los Cerros de San Pedro, Las Hojas, Tenango and Guadalupe, Tenancingo, and Copapayo between August 24, 1982 and November 4, 1983 were investigated by the author to determine the extent to which U.S. press reports were timely and comprehensive; the research showed that the treatment of the Bonner and

Guillermoprieto in the wake of their stories on the massacre at El Mozote had a chilling effect on U.S. journalists covering El Salvador.¹⁰

In addition, information compiled by various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will be provided to help elucidate the effects that criticism of Bonner and Guillermoprieto had on coverage of peasant massacres. NGOs were able to obtain well-documented information about such massacres from numerous sources, which the press often failed to do. Most information that U.S. journalists obtained about these massacres, when they reported on these incidents at all, came from the U.S. embassy in San Salvador.¹¹

Following the analysis of press coverage and NGO reports, this paper summarizes the ramifications of the El Mozote case on the coverage of events in El Salvador, and the U.S. public's perception of these events.

¹⁰These two massacres include one in San Antonio Abad, in the Department of San Salvador, on January 19, 1982, in which twenty-seven noncombatants were killed by the army and security forces, and another in San José Flores, in the Department of Chalatenango, on February 2, 1982, in which fifty-seven civilians were killed by the army. See EPICA. Condoning the Killing: Ten Years of Massacres in El Salvador. Washington, D.C.: EPICA, 1990. pp. 27-29.

¹¹Several reporters relied heavily on the U.S. embassy for their sources. In addition, information from U.S. officials frequently was printed without any additional confirmation. See Frank Smyth. "'Official Sources,' 'Western Diplomats,' and Other Voices from the Mission." Columbia Journalism Review. January/February 1993. p. 35.

Chapter I: Background Information on El Salvador, 1932-1976

Historically, Salvadoran society has been characterized by a sharp class division; the country has a small landed elite and a large population of poor peasants. Since the nineteenth century, about sixty-seven families have controlled the production and exportation of coffee, sugar, and cotton.¹² However, it was the coffee industry that became the most influential force in shaping the formation of class relations.¹³ By the 1920s, the rapid expansion of the coffee market meant that the most fecund land had been taken over by plantations. This, in turn, had destroyed villages and the communal lands of the indigenous population.¹⁴ Because indigenous groups and peasants no longer had enough land to feed themselves adequately, they became a large labor pool on plantations that were designed to provide crops for the export market. Maize, beans, and other staple foods, which previously were grown in bountiful amounts, now were imported, and were subject to enormous price increases.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the military and the landed elites formed an alliance which enabled army officers to hold political offices, if in return they allowed the oligarchs free economic rein.¹⁶ This union between the elites and the army remained intact for nearly seventy years.

¹² Dunkerly, p. 7.

¹³ Dunkerly, pp. 7-8.

¹⁴ LaFeber, p. 70.

¹⁵ LaFeber, p. 71.

¹⁶ LaFeber, p. 70.

With the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, the export market collapsed. The price of coffee, which accounted for 85 percent of export revenue, fell 45 percent within six months, and eventually dropped by 57 percent.¹⁷ The depressed prices on the world market had led to a decline in the number of harvesting jobs available to peasants.¹⁸ In 1931, President Arturo Araujo attempted to lessen the effect of the Great Depression by passing tax reforms and reducing the military budget.¹⁹ Unfortunately, these reforms were never fully implemented. Meanwhile, Augustín Farabundo Martí, whose name later would be used by the guerrilla coalition that organized in December 1980, tried to instigate a Communist led, rural and urban rebellion against the oligarchy. In December 1931, the military ousted President Araujo and installed General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez as president. His name later was appropriated in the 1980s by a Salvadoran death squad.

Shortly after the 1931 coup, local elections were held. The elections had been scheduled for mid-December 1931, but had been postponed because of the coup. President Martínez decided to allow the Salvadoran Communist Party, led by Martí, to participate. The Communists won elections in several towns, but the army prevented them from taking office.²⁰ This cancellation of the results of the 1932 local elections was a major factor that led to a widespread revolt. The peasants had already lost their land to coffee plantations,

¹⁷Dunkerly, p. 22.

¹⁸Thomas P. Anderson. *Matanza*. Willimantic, Conn.: Curbstone Press, 1992. p. 101.

¹⁹Enrique Baloyra. *El Salvador in Transition*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1982. p. 9; LaFeber, p. 72.

²⁰LaFeber, p. 72.

and the drop in coffee prices on the world market had resulted in high unemployment and low wages. The elections were the last hope for the formation of a government that would try to improve the quality of life for the masses.

On January 22, 1932, shortly after the elections, peasants revolted against the coalition of landed elites and military officers. Workers went on strike and demonstrations were held. Peasants also rebelled without the support or guidance of the Salvadoran Communist Party.²¹ The army responded by murdering participants in the insurrection and eradicating any perceived enemies. Violence was most extreme in the western half of El Salvador, where the coffee industry was predominant and where to be an Indian was to be a Communist.²² Despite a lack of participation of urban political groups in the revolt, there were many casualties in the cities. Killings in the urban areas were guided by the racial and social criteria used by the military in the western region. Individuals known or suspected of left-wing sympathies were systematically executed.²³

The failed revolt resulted in an event known as La Matanza, a massacre by the armed forces of an estimated 30,000 peasants. Martí also was killed.²⁴ Trade unionists and members of opposition

²¹Shortly before the rebellion broke out, the leaders of the Salvadoran Communist Party became divided over how and when to try to instigate the revolt. Dunkerly, p. 27.

²²McClintock, p. 114.

²³McClintock, p. 114.

²⁴Those involved in the killing preferred that nothing be recorded on paper: Daily newspapers removed all material from the year 1932 from their archives, and government archives were purged of all documents that might be incriminating, and historians have found that Salvadoran military or civilian authorities have few records of the events in 1932. See Michael

political parties also were killed, even though most of them had little or nothing to do with the revolt.²⁵ The effectiveness of the 1932 Matanza in suppressing dissent was indicated by the fact that it was more than a generation before rural-labor organizing began again.²⁶ The Matanza also firmly entrenched the Salvadoran army in the country's political life, and initiated a culture of fear that the army sustained through the 1980s. In the early 1980s, mutilated corpses littered the streets of Salvadoran cities each morning: Sometimes the bodies were headless, or faceless, their features having been obliterated with a shotgun blast or an application of battery acid; sometimes limbs were missing, or hands or feet chopped off, or eyes gouged out; women's genitals were torn and bloody, indicating repeated rape; men's genitals often were found severed and stuffed into their mouths.²⁷ These grisly scenes served as a strong deterrent to potential reformers. The Organización Democrática Nacionalista (ORDEN), which was established in the late 1960s and eventually had as many as 80,000 members, maintained effective surveillance over every village and hamlet in the country, and summarily executed people even suspected of taking part in any protest.²⁸ The United

McClintock, p. 100. For the most thorough account of La Matanza, see Thomas P. Anderson. *Matanza*. Willimantic, Conn.: Curbstone Press, 1992.

²⁵McClintock, p. 101.

²⁶Noam Chomsky. *Turning the Tide*. Boston: South End Press, 1985. p. 95.

²⁷Mark Danner. *The Massacre at El Mozote*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993. pp. 25-26. Leigh Binford. *The El Mozote Massacre*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996. pp. 160-161.

²⁸Americas Watch. *With Friends Like These*. ed. Cynthia Brown. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985. p. 116. According to General José Alberto Medrano, a senior officer in the National Guard and the Armed Forces High Command, "ORDEN grew out of the State Department, the C.I.A., and the Green Berets during the time of Kennedy. We created these specialized agencies to fight the plans and actions of international Communism." See Montgomery, p. 55.

States government was well aware of these atrocities. According to a secret Central Intelligence Agency cable of October 1981, Salvadoran security and civil defense forces carried out "summary execution" of suspected rebel sympathizers and "many innocent people died falsely accused."²⁹

The Matanza was one of the most important events in Salvadoran history. The coalition of landed elite and military officers that organized the massacre ruled the country sixty years later, and opponents of the regime--both real and imagined--were murdered on a massive scale. From a U.S. perspective, the difference between the 1930s and the 1980s was that during the latter decade, the Salvadoran government frequently received millions of dollars in U.S. economic and military support as well as political support, despite these gross human rights abuses (see Appendix). Although there were a few brief periods during the early 1980s when U.S. aid to the Salvadoran government was suspended, the over-arching policy goal of preventing a leftist government from coming to power in El Salvador overcame U.S. policy makers concern with human rights, and resulted in a resumption of this assistance.³⁰

Members of ORDEN were recruited from the pool traditionally tapped by Salvador's security forces: the military reserves. See McClintock, p. 205. ORDEN also channeled information to local National Guard and Treasury Police commanders. Jenny Pearce. Promised Land: Peasant Rebellion in Chalatenango, El Salvador. London: Latin American Bureau, 1986 as cited in Binford, p. 46. Located in London, "the Latin American Bureau is a small, independent, non-profit-making research organization established in 1977. The Latin American Bureau is concerned with human rights and related social, political, and economic issues in Central and South America and the Caribbean." See James Ferguson. Dominican Republic: Beyond the Lighthouse. London: Latin American Bureau, 1992. p. 116.

²⁹Cynthia J. Arnson. Crossroads: Congress, the President, and Central America, 1976-1995. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993. p. 87.

³⁰Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 87.

The Carter Administration's Policy Towards El Salvador

In the late 1970s, during the first part of his term, President Jimmy Carter tried to end the traditional Cold War interpretation of events in Central America that existed between 1947 and 1976. Carter's foreign policy initially emphasized three goals: First, an increased respect for human rights; second, the formation of policy on a country-by-country basis;³¹ and third, an end to the long-standing assumption that any radical or revolutionary change threatened vital U.S. interests.³² Some examples of these policy initiatives included: negotiations with the new, revolutionary government in Nicaragua, and a treaty to return control of the Panama Canal to the Panamanians at the end of the century. El Salvador was not an issue in debates about military aid to the region during the first year of the Carter administration, because the Salvadoran government had rejected aid following criticism of their human rights record by the administration.³³

³¹Zbigniew Brzezinski. Power and Principle. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983. p. 135. Also see Lars Schoultz. Human Rights and United States Foreign Policy Toward Latin America. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press 1981. p. 114.

³²David Skidmore. Reversing Course. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996. p. 41. During a commencement address at the University of Notre Dame in 1977, President Carter remarked, "We are now free of that inordinate fear of Communism, which once led us embrace any dictator who joined us in that fear...."

³³Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 36. Also see Arnson, p. 27. This gesture was largely symbolic, because aid had been suspended by the Ford administration following the conviction of Salvadoran Army Chief of Staff Manuel Alfonso Rodriguez on charges stemming from the sale of U.S.-supplied machine guns to the Mafia. See: Arnson, Crossroads, p. 27. By mid-1977, President Molina pre-empted an expected U.S. decision to suspend military aid by renouncing it, but by this time El Salvador had largely completed refurbishing its land and air forces with the best equipment available in the world for counter-insurgency. See McClintock, p. 329.

On October 15, 1979, junior military officers staged a coup that ended the rule of General Carlos Humberto Romero. This coup would test President Carter's resolve to continue U.S. foreign policy initiatives. According to Walter LaFeber, a Professor of History at Cornell University, the junior officers: "Opposed senior officers closely associated with ORDEN and the oligarchy," were sympathetic to "moderate reforms that could safely redistribute some wealth," "wanted a close relationship with the U.S. government," and "possessed the power to fight the guerrillas while buying off moderates with reforms."³⁴

The Carter administration reacted to news of the Salvadoran coup in October 1979 with optimism and hope that the new government would remain in power and ameliorate civil strife. Initially, no major policy decisions or goals were established, because El Salvador was viewed as insignificant by many U.S. policy makers.³⁵ According to a senior State Department official who was in the Latin American bureau, "Nobody saw [El Salvador] as a major problem for which major decisions had to be made."³⁶ Three events quickly changed this viewpoint. First, the collapse of two governing coalitions within three months of the coup.³⁷ Second, the November assassination of the five leaders of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), which was allied with the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN),³⁸ by government forces. And third,

³⁴LaFeber, p. 248.

³⁵Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, p. 164.

³⁶Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, p. 164.

³⁷Arnson, *Crossroads*, p. 40.

³⁸For a complete explanation of the fifteen factions that composed the FMLN, see Montgomery, pp. 101-126. The policies supported by the FMLN included:

reports that one thousand people were believed to have been victims of political killings since the military coup.³⁹ El Salvador gained increased attention from the U.S. government as fears increased about whether a moderate government could survive; whether the guerrillas could achieve victory by ending the reign of power by the military and oligarchy⁴⁰; and whether a political solution to the civil war between the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation and the government could be reached.

The Carter administration changed the objectives of its Salvadoran policies. Instead of penalizing the Salvadoran military for human rights violations, as had been done during the first years of his term, Carter reversed his stance and allocated \$5.7 million

adherence to the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights and due punishment for those responsible for the "disappeared," the tortured, the murdered; the decentralization of power to municipalities; a foreign policy of nonalignment; the development of a popular army; nationalization of the banks and all "monopolistic enterprises in industry, commerce, and services;" and extensive agrarian and urban reforms; and new, more effective mechanisms of credit, especially for small and medium-sized business. See Montgomery, pp. 118-119. The Appendices contain a table created by Tommie Sue Montgomery that displays the factions of the FMLN, and when they were created.

³⁹Amnesty International. Political Killings by Governments. London: Amnesty International Publications, 1983. p. 11. After the 1979 coup, the Salvadoran security forces killed more people in the first month of the "reformist" regime than in the first nine months of 1979. See McClintock, p. 252.

⁴⁰One of the key factors behind the mobilization of guerrilla groups was to try and make a more egalitarian society for the masses. In the words of Raymond Bonner, "There are two worlds of El Salvador, the one of the middle class and rich and the far larger one of the poor." See Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 17. This tremendous disparity in wealth that existed between the upper and lower classes of El Salvador inspired political dissidents to organize, and to try and overthrow the coalition of landed elites and military officers. Other members of society participated in the revolution out of necessity. Robert White, a former U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, commented that: "There are substantial numbers of people who are fighting only because they have no choice. The great majority of the people who are fighting, indeed some of the leaders, are fighting because their farms were attacked and they were driven into the countryside and they cannot give up, because if they would give up they would be killed." See Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 88.

dollars of military aid to El Salvador in January 1980.⁴¹ During the first three months of 1980, nearly nine hundred civilians, primarily peasants and workers, were killed by government forces, more than during all of the preceding three years (1976-1979), when El Salvador was not receiving any U.S. military aid.⁴² Carter administration officials countered criticism of the U.S. military aid package by arguing that the Salvadoran junta offered "the best chance for social change, political liberalization and respect for human rights in El Salvador."⁴³ Starting in 1980, military training programs became the object of a consistent public relations effort by the U.S. government, which claimed that U.S. training would have a "civilizing" influence on the Salvadoran armed forces.⁴⁴

One month after Carter announced his decision to send military aid to the Salvadoran government, Archbishop Oscar Romero sent a letter to the president requesting that Carter not supply the aid. The archbishop wrote:

....the present junta government and above all these armed forces and security forces unfortunately have not demonstrated their capacity to resolve, in political and structural practice, the grave national problems. In general, they have only reverted to repressive violence, producing a total of deaths and injuries much greater than in the recent military regime, whose systematic violation of human rights

⁴¹Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, p. 174; LaFeber, p. 251; McClintock, p. 288.

⁴²Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, pp. 7-8.

⁴³Arnson, p. 42, and Chomsky, p. 103. The Reagan administration also would use this idea to justify massive military aid.

⁴⁴McClintock, p. 337.

was denounced by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.⁴⁵

President Carter ignored the Archbishop's plea. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance responded to the Archbishop with a letter stating: "We are concerned just as much as you that any assistance we provide not be used in a repressive manner."⁴⁶ Vance stated that U.S. equipment and training would "be designed to enhance the professionalism of the armed forces so they can fulfill their essential role of maintaining order with a minimum of lethal force."⁴⁷ In March 1980, Archbishop Romero was assassinated while saying mass.⁴⁸ The brutal murder of one of the most vocal and well-respected critics of the Salvadoran government sent a frightening message to opponents of the Salvadoran junta. The fact that Romero was murdered in front of many potential witnesses in a public place was a clear indicator of the prevalent culture of fear in El Salvador. The Salvadoran military forces knew that most of the witnesses would be too frightened to assist in an investigation into the murder. Despite massive evidence that the Salvadoran military was responsible for Romero's death, President Carter pressed for

⁴⁵"Archbishop Oscar Romero: Letter to President Carter (February 17, 1980)." The Central American Crisis Reader. New York: Summit Books, 1987. pp. 503-504.

⁴⁶Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 171.

⁴⁷Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 171. Apparently the Carter administration had been so disturbed by the Archbishop's opposition to its policies that it had secretly lobbied the pope to curb the archbishop. Carter sent former New York Mayor Robert Wagner to persuade the Pope to rein in Romero, which the Pope then tried to do. See: Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky. Manufacturing Consent. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988. pp. 48, 348.

⁴⁸For a thorough analysis of the press coverage of Romero's assassination, see Herman and Chomsky, pp. 48-59.

increased military aid to El Salvador. The Carter administration began to espouse a traditional Cold War mentality, using fear of a Communist takeover to justify military aid. The Administration's earlier idea of correlating military aid with the improved treatment of human rights ended. Policy analyst Cynthia Arnson, who later became a congressional staffer, and then Associate Director of Americas Watch, suggested that once the revolutionary movement threatened the survival of a traditional U.S. ally (in this case, the coalition of military officers and members of the landed elites), the Carter administration became ambivalent about the degree to which human rights considerations should determine U.S. foreign policy.⁴⁹

Two months after Archbishop Romero's murder, his fears that U.S. military support would "sharpen injustice and repression" came true. On May 14, 1980, the Salvadoran army, with assistance from the Honduran army, slaughtered six hundred peasants who were trying to cross the Sumpul River on the El Salvadoran-Honduran border. The peasants were trying to flee to Honduras to escape Salvadoran army attacks. The Honduran army stood on the other side of the riverbank and prevented the refugees from entering Honduras while the Salvadoran army and members of ORDEN shot at them. A priest who witnessed the massacre said, "There were so many vultures picking at the bodies in the water that it looked like a black carpet."⁵⁰ According to Noam Chomsky, "This massacre was not mentioned in the State Department's 'Country Reports on Human Rights Practices' produced by the Carter administration and was

⁴⁹Arnson, p. 24.

⁵⁰LaFeber, p. 250.

suppressed by the media for over one year, and then barely noted, though the facts had been reported shortly after the events in the foreign press and Church-based press in the United States."⁵¹

President Carter's support for the Salvadoran government was put to the test once again on December 4, 1980. On that day, the bodies of four U.S. churchwomen--Jean Donovan, Dorothy Kazel, Ita Ford, and Maura Clarke--were found on the side of a road in the countryside. They had been beaten and raped repeatedly. Carter immediately suspended economic and military aid to El Salvador. As one State Department officer noted: From an American perspective, it was one thing for 9,000 Salvadorans to be killed, and quite another for U.S. citizens, especially women, some of whom were nuns to be killed, because that was a horror that would inevitably be on the front page of every U.S. newspaper and on the evening news on television. It could not be ignored.⁵²

⁵¹Chomsky, p. 105. Also see: Partido Socialista de Honduras. "Informe de la Comisión Investigadora del Partido Socialista de Honduras de la Masacre del Sumpul." June-July 1980. pp. 5-20.

⁵²Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, p. 216. The Maryknoll order withdrew its members from El Salvador after December 1980. When, with permission from church authorities, the Maryknoll sisters decided to return two years later, death threats were renewed. No Maryknoll sisters were sent to El Salvador after these new death threats. McClintock, p. 284. The difference between the murder of these churchwomen and the thousands of others un-investigated and unresolved in El Salvador was that the families of those victims were Americans and pressed the case, eventually succeeding in getting Congress to focus on those particular murders as a test case and political symbol. See Herman and Chomsky, pp. 60-61. For more details on the analysis of the press coverage of the murders of the four churchwomen, see Herman and Chomsky, pp. 59-71.

The view that U.S. lives were more important than Salvadoran lives would be maintained throughout the Reagan administration as well. Unfortunately, large elements of the U.S. press also seemed to share this view, which was illustrated by the profuse coverage of the deaths of the four churchwomen, and the minimal coverage of the deaths of thousands of peasants in massacres.

Another case in which one murder stood out from the tens of thousands of others, involved Efraín Bamaca, who was a Guatemalan guerrilla leader who

Unfortunately, the suspension of aid was very short-lived. The Carter administration demanded an investigation into the murders and a re-shuffling of the Salvadoran government before aid would resume. Two weeks later, an investigation began, José Napoleón Duarte was named president,⁵³ and aid began to flow to El Salvador again. Congress withheld a portion of the aid package pending a favorable outcome in the trial of those accused of the murders.⁵⁴ Pat Derian, of the State Department human rights bureau, condemned the resumption of aid to El Salvador: "There are compelling reasons to maintain the suspension," she said.⁵⁵ Resumption of aid implied U.S. government "exoneration of security force involvement" in the killing of the women, "thereby prejudicing the outcome of the investigation."⁵⁶ Derian's assessment was correct. The Salvadoran officers understood that the ultimate sanction that the U.S. government could enforce--halting U.S. aid--threatened to hurt the Americans themselves as much as it would hurt the Salvadorans, because the U.S. government's fear that a Communist El Salvador would take its place alongside Sandinista Nicaragua had become an overriding policy consideration.⁵⁷ In addition, the Salvadoran

disappeared in May 1992. His wife, Jennifer Harbury, a U.S. citizen and Harvard-educated lawyer, turned the case into an international media frenzy.

⁵³Duarte was the most popular opposition candidate in the 1972 presidential election, but electoral fraud committed by the incumbent government had prevented Duarte's name from appearing on presidential ballots in many departments. See Montgomery, p. 63. Ever since 1972, Duarte became increasingly conservative and less politically potent which was why the military allowed him to become the leader of the junta. See LaFeber, p. 250.

⁵⁴Herman and Chomsky, p. 70.

⁵⁵Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, p. 222.

⁵⁶Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, pp. 222-223.

⁵⁷Danner, p. 40. It took three-and-one-half years for a trial to take place concerning the men accused in the deaths of the churchwomen. Two of the

guerrillas had announced a "final offensive" for January 1981, which the Carter administration used as a rationale to support its resumption of military aid.

When he first took office in 1976, President Carter had attempted to improve respect of human rights in El Salvador. After the failure of a "moderate" regime to end the civil war, and the threat of a guerrilla victory, however, he fell back on a traditional Cold War view by interpreting the revolution as a battle of Communism versus U.S. hegemony. In addition, President Carter did not want to appear "soft" on Communism in an election year, and feared being blamed for "losing" El Salvador to the Communists.⁵⁸ President Reagan would continue to support the idea that the Salvadoran revolution was caused by Communism and would call El Salvador a battleground in a war between democracy and Communism.

The Reagan Administration's Policy Towards El Salvador

Ronald Reagan defeated President Carter in the 1980 presidential election. Reagan's victory resulted partly from Carter's perceived foreign policy failures, such as the success of the Nicaraguan revolution and the Iran hostage situation. President Reagan's foreign policy was influenced principally by anti-Communist ideology. According to the Reagan administration's view, the key factor behind the Salvadoran upheaval was external support

three judges assigned to the case resigned out of fear for their lives, and the only independent defense attorney fled the country after being tortured at Salvadoran National Guard Headquarters. See Herman and Chomsky, p. 69.

⁵⁸Michael T. Klare and Cynthia Arnson. *Supplying Repression*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Policy Studies, 1981. p. 2.

by Communist nations, manifested by an arms flow to the Salvadoran guerrillas by Soviet-bloc nations through Cuba and Nicaragua.⁵⁹ Salvadoran political, economic, and social trends during the previous seventy years were not taken into account by the Reagan administration. This view enabled Reagan to support the Salvadoran junta in spite of its poor human rights record because, in his view, a more serious threat existed to the region. Reagan espoused a "domino theory" about Central America. During a policy speech as a candidate, Reagan asked rhetorically: "Must we let Grenada, Nicaragua, El Salvador, all become additional 'Cubas,' new outposts for Soviet combat brigades? Will the next push of the Moscow-Havana axis be northward to Guatemala and thence to Mexico, and south to Costa Rica and Panama?"⁶⁰ Reagan feared that Nicaragua, which he claimed was a Soviet-Cuban satellite, would force Communism on its neighbors. To ensure that the nations did not fall like dominos before this perceived leftist threat, the Reagan administration decided to "send a message to Moscow" that the United States was drawing the line against Communist aggression in El Salvador.⁶¹

⁵⁹Arnson, Crossroads, p. 55.

⁶⁰Arnson, Crossroads, p. 49. Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America Thomas Enders also supported a "domino theory" for the region: "There is no mistaking that the decisive battle for Central America is under way in El Salvador....If, after Nicaragua, El Salvador is captured by a violent minority, who in Central America would not live in fear? How long would it be before major U.S. strategic interests--the canal, sea lanes, oil supplies--were at risk?" See Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 233.

⁶¹Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, pp. 232-233, and Danner, p. 40.

President Reagan's message took the form of immense increases in military aid and advisers to El Salvador.⁶² In the first fiscal year of the Reagan administration, aid was \$82 million, five times the total aid El Salvador had received from the United States from 1946 to 1979.⁶³ To circumvent Congressional oversight of his decisions, Reagan frequently used Section 506(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act, which authorized the President to rush military assistance to another country when there is an "unforeseen emergency" and when failure to respond would "result in serious harm to vital U.S. security interests."⁶⁴ Reagan frequently cited the threat of international Communism to gain support for his policies. For example, charges that the Nicaraguans, Cubans, and Soviets were providing arms and training to the guerrillas were usually made when the administration was asking Congress for more aid, when it wanted to divert the public's attention from human rights atrocities, and when the war was not going well for the U.S.-trained Salvadoran army.⁶⁵ This was a carefully calculated strategy, because public

⁶²Within the first two months of President Reagan's administration, he increased the number of U.S. military advisers from nineteen to fifty-five; the purpose of these advisers was to train the Salvadoran military in improving their intelligence gathering, and in counterinsurgency techniques. See Richard Alan White. The Morass: U.S. Intervention in Central America. New York: Harper and Row, 1984, pp. 138-139. U.S. advisers in El Salvador also had reorganized the police academy, wrote a textbook for the treasury police, and trained special riot control units in the national police and national guard. See Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 55.

⁶³Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, pp. 11-12.

⁶⁴Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, pp. 270-271.

⁶⁵Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 260. From 1976 to the summer of 1980, conclusive evidence had been found to prove that the guerrillas were receiving military aid from Nicaragua, Cuba, or the Soviet Union. In September 1980, the Carter administration had evidence that Nicaragua was sending military aid to El Salvador, but after meetings between Deputy Assistant Secretary of State James Cheek and Daniel Ortega, and between U.S.

opinion polls and letters to the White House and State Department indicated that the majority of U.S. citizens disapproved of Reagan's policies in El Salvador,⁶⁶ but large segments of the public did fear Soviet influence,⁶⁷ which Reagan tried to use to gain support for his Salvadoran policy.

The Reagan administration also claimed that providing massive aid to El Salvador supported democracy in the region. In an address to the World Affairs Council on July 16, 1981, Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Enders commented: "Our assistance gives the Salvadoran people a chance to defend their right to self-determination by developing a political solution to the conflict..."⁶⁸ According to Jeane Kirkpatrick, U.S. envoy to the United Nations, "We

Ambassador Lawrence Pezzullo and Tomás Borge, who was in charge of the national police and state security organizations, the Sandinistas agreed to stop arms shipments in order to maintain good relations with the U.S. government and protect the Nicaraguan Revolution. See Robert A. Pastor. Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988. pp. 219-220 and 225-228. Also see Montgomery, p. 117.

Wayne Smith, the senior U.S. diplomat in Cuba from 1979 to 1982, later admitted, "We never had solid evidence of massive and substantial flow of arms from Cuba to Nicaragua and then to El Salvador." See Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 264. Despite having no evidence of Nicaraguan or Cuban military assistance for the Salvadoran guerrillas, the Reagan administration made a series of charges concerning arms shipments--and about the presence of Cuban military advisers in El Salvador--from Spring 1981 onward. See Montgomery, p. 117.

According to an experienced intelligence officer, captured weapons from the rebels frequently indicated that the guerrillas were using U.S.-made weaponry that had been taken from the Salvadoran army, the National Guard, and the police. See Drew Middleton. "Salvador Army's Troubles." The New York Times. 5 March 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 119).

⁶⁶United Press International. "Majority Opposes U.S. Involvement." Miami Herald. 21 February 1982 (as cited in ISLA, p. 134) and Associated Press. "Reagan Mail on Salvador Is Negative." Miami Herald. 22 February 1982 (as cited in ISLA, p. 133).

⁶⁷Ronald H. Hinckley. People, Polls, and Policymakers: American Public Opinion and National Security. New York: Lexington Books, 1992. p. 83.

⁶⁸"Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Enders: Policy on El Salvador (July 1981)." Central American Crisis Reader, p. 523.

are backing the democracies" in Central America.⁶⁹ "Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, all of Nicaragua's neighbors are democracies. We're supporting the good guys in every sense of the word."⁷⁰

The consequences of massive military aid to El Salvador were quite discouraging. According to the Salvadoran archdiocese's legal aid office, almost as many Salvadorans were killed in the first six months of the Reagan administration (7,152)⁷¹ as in all of 1980 (8,024).⁷² Throughout Reagan's first term, elements of the U.S. government consistently blamed both the "extreme right" and the "extreme left" for the large numbers of politically motivated killings, and denied any Salvadoran government involvement in the deaths. However, as during the Carter years, a trend emerged in which murder or displacement of civilians increased as U.S. military aid increased.⁷³ At the end of 1983, President Reagan said he suspected

⁶⁹Reuters. "U.N. Envoy Says U.S. Is Backing 'Good Guys.'" The New York Times. 25 April 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 69).

⁷⁰Reuters. "U.N. Envoy Says U.S. Is Backing 'Good Guys.'" To call the Honduran government a democracy was quite misleading. The Honduran government still was controlled by the military. In addition, to call Salvadoran government officials "good guys" was equally remarkable. If a government that murders thousands of its political (and, in many cases, non-political) dissidents each month were considered good, one can only imagine how the "bad guys" would be described.

⁷¹Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 324.

⁷²EPICA. Condoning the Killing, Appendix.

⁷³Between 1982 and 1983, the level of politically motivated deaths of civilians decreased, but this was not a result of improvements in the treatment of human rights by the Salvadoran military. There were three explanation behind the decline. First, by this time, many peasants had fled the country. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Salvadorans began fleeing their country en masse in April 1980. By the beginning of 1981, some 90,000 refugees were scattered throughout Middle America, the majority in Mexico and Honduras....The outflow accelerated in the first half of 1981, when an additional 150,000 people fled the country and subsided during the latter half of the year, when the net outflow was around 40,000. The amount of external displacement of Salvadorans in the region appears to have peaked at the beginning of 1982 when over 280,000 sought asylum in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Panama." See Americas Watch. El Salvador's Decade

that the death squad murders were actually committed by the left-wing guerrillas trying to smear El Salvador's reputation because "the right wing will be blamed for it."⁷⁴

In an attempt to regain control of U.S. military aid to El Salvador, Congress amended the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act. On December 29, 1981, Congress added Section 728 to the Foreign Assistance Act. This section was called "Human Rights Certification of El Salvador," and established that the president had to certify that a series of preconditions were being met every six months by the Salvadoran government in order for U.S. military aid to continue. These preconditions included: making a "concerted and significant effort" to comply with internationally recognized human rights; achieving "substantial control" over all elements of the armed forces in order to end torture and murder by those forces; making "continued progress" in land reform and other economic programs; commitments to hold free elections, and "good-faith efforts" to begin discussions with "all major political groups in El Salvador"; "good faith efforts" to investigate and prosecute the cases of Americans who had been killed in El Salvador.⁷⁵ Congress had no authority to challenge

of Terror. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991. p. 108. Second, the majority of government-inspired violence had moved to the countryside, where journalists were less likely to investigate and reports of abuses were more difficult to substantiate. Civilian deaths were mostly unreported. Third, after over 22,000 civilian deaths between 1979 and 1981, there were fewer civilians alive to target. Therefore, despite a lower death rate, a culture of fear still dominated society, and would impair attempts to negotiate an end to the Salvadoran civil war.

⁷⁴Americas Watch, With Friends Like These, p. 131.

⁷⁵Americas Watch, With Friends Like These, p. 13, and Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 343. For a copy of the actual text of the law, see: "U.S. Congress: Certifying Democratic Progress in El Salvador." Central American Crisis Reader, pp. 531-535.

the President's certification, but it had the ability to cut the requested funds from the foreign assistance legislation.⁷⁶ Both the Department of State and the Reagan administration lobbied against the certification provision, and Ambassador Deane Hinton, in a public address to Salvadoran businessmen, called the law "stupid."⁷⁷

President Reagan made his first certification of El Salvador on January 28, 1982, the day after the story of the massacre at El Mozote appeared in The New York Times and The Washington Post. Reagan asserted that "statistics compiled by our embassy in San Salvador indicate a declining level of violence over the past year and a decrease in abuses by security forces. There has been a definite trend in this regard."⁷⁸ Using the declining death toll to justify aid was very misleading. The Reagan administration's casualty estimate--5,331--was a conservative.⁷⁹ The administration obtained its figures from the U.S. embassy, which relied heavily on the Salvadoran military and Salvadoran newspapers for its death tolls. The U.S. embassy figures were understated for several reasons. First, U.S. officials did not make any attempt to take personal testimonies from relatives or question information given to them by the armed forces.⁸⁰ Second, many politically motivated killings occurred in the countryside, and were rarely reported in the Salvadoran press. Third, both major newspapers were ideologically conservative and

⁷⁶Americas Watch, With Friends Like These, p. 32.

⁷⁷Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 344.

⁷⁸Arnson, p. 86.

⁷⁹Chris Hedges. "Human Rights Violations in El Salvador: Up or Down?" The Christian Science Monitor. 25 January 1984 (as cited in ISLA, p. 63).

⁸⁰Hedges, "Human Rights Violations in El Salvador: Up or Down?"

more inclined to cover up than to expose human rights abuses.⁸¹ Fourth, only conservative dailies were allowed to operate by the government; the two main liberal newspapers, La Crónica and El Independiente, had been closed after being subjected to violence by government forces.⁸²

José Antonio Pastor-Ridruejo, the United Nations Human Rights Commission's special representative to El Salvador, said political murders in El Salvador were about double the number the Reagan administration cited in telling Congress that the Salvadoran junta had improved its human rights record.⁸³ Figures calculated by Tutela Legal, the human rights office of the Catholic archdiocese of San Salvador, and Socorro Jurídico, another Roman Catholic organization, for 1981 for politically motivated deaths in 1981 did not illustrate a declining trend. Between July and October 1981, the figures declined slightly (from 587 to 438 per month), but the totals began to rise again in November and December (819 and 1,395 respectively).⁸⁴ The total deaths calculated by Tutela Legal and Socorro Jurídico for 1981 were 13,535, compared to the U.S. Embassy's 5,331.⁸⁵

The first certification set an ominous precedent. Despite several substantiated cases of gross human rights violations

⁸¹Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 347; Danner, p. 131.

⁸²In 1980, the news editor and a photographer for La Crónica were hacked to death. See Americas Watch, With Friends Like These, p. 127. El Independiente closed after three attempts to assassinate the editor, threats to his family, occupation of the offices by the armed forces, and the arrest and torture of staff members. See Chomsky, p. 106.

⁸³Associated Press. "U.S. Is Said to Understate Salvador Deaths." The Washington Post. 16 February 1982 (as cited in ISLA, p. 56).

⁸⁴Socorro Jurídico as cited in White, p. 44.

⁸⁵EPICA. Condoning the Killing, Appendix; Socorro Jurídico as cited in Richard Alan White. p.44.

committed by Salvadoran armed forces, the Reagan administration certified that the Salvadoran government was meeting the preconditions set for continued aid three more times between January 1982 and November 1983. Political killings declined about the time the U.S. government was scheduled to make the second, third, and fourth certifications; however, fewer people were killed not because there was a newfound respect for human rights, but because there were fewer people to kill. "They were already killed or they got the hell out of the way," said a senior embassy officer.⁸⁶ The death rate was still about one hundred per week in 1982 and 1983.⁸⁷ From 1980 to 1988, the U.S. government provided the Salvadoran government six hundred times more military aid than in the previous thirty-three years.⁸⁸

Some members of Congress criticized Reagan's certification. For example, Congressman Gerry Studds (D., Mass.) stated: "If there is anything left of the English language in this city....it is gone now, because the President has just certified that up is down and in is out

⁸⁶Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, p. 350.

⁸⁷Proportionally, killings at this rate in the United States would have resulted in 235,000 casualties. Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, p. 350. In regard to the second certification, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) discovered--via documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act--that no research or analysis by any U.S. intelligence agency had been carried out to back up the Reagan administration's claims that improvements in the respect for human rights had occurred between January and July 1981. See Ruth Marcus. "ACLU Disputes Reagan Assessment of Conditions in El Salvador." *The Washington Post*. 9 July 1982, p. A4.

⁸⁸Between 1946 and 1979, U.S. military aid totaled \$14.3 million, while between 1980 and 1988, U.S. military aid totaled \$852.2 million. Tom Barry. *El Salvador: A Country Guide*. Albuquerque, N.M.: Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center, 1991. p. 178. See Table of U.S. aid to El Salvador in the Appendix.

and black is white. I anticipate him telling us that war is peace at any moment."⁸⁹

To combat Congressional criticism of certification, Reagan administration officials criticized Congress' role in the certification process. U.S. Ambassador Hinton viewed certification "as a way for the Congress....to be for and against something at the same time."⁹⁰ It was "a political cop-out by a lot of Congressmen," Hinton said.⁹¹ Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams added that Congress "could have simply cut off aid," but did not "because it did not want to risk being blamed, if the guerrillas won as a result, for 'losing' El Salvador. Instead, they required certification--which is to say, they agreed to fund the war while reserving the right to call us Fascists."⁹²

Regarding certification, Raymond Bonner, one of the most influential journalists covering El Salvador between 1981 and 1982, observed that although Congress did not give the Reagan administration all the aid it wanted for El Salvador, it gave enough to alleviate pressure on the Salvadoran military to reform.⁹³ One of the main goals of certification was to use military aid as an incentive for the Salvadoran military to increase its respect for human rights; however, as massive human rights violations continued, military aid flowed unabated.

Members of Congress who argued against military aid were criticized by members of the Reagan administration. For example,

⁸⁹Danner, p. 132.

⁹⁰Danner, p. 91.

⁹¹Danner, p. 91.

⁹²Danner, pp. 90-91.

⁹³Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, p. 368.

Elliott Abrams contended that lawmakers who argued for an aid cutoff were, in effect, arguing for a guerrilla victory, and that however badly the Salvadoran government behaved, its collective atrocities never could approach the general disaster for human rights that a victory by the FMLN would represent.⁹⁴ This criticism played an important role in the Congressional decision-making process. Reagan was such a popular president--despite his Central American policies--that his spokesmen could influence public opinion, which meant that it could be politically dangerous to oppose the Reagan agenda.⁹⁵ Therefore, the voices of many Congressional critics became muted.

Foreign policy analysts outside the U.S. government also criticized Reagan's certification of El Salvador for being false and misleading. Larry Birns, director of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA), stated that "certification was a charade."⁹⁶ However, he noted that at least "it was a charade that saved lives," because "just before and after each certification the death tolls went down."⁹⁷

The certification process ended in November 1983, after President Reagan pocket-vetoed a bill to extend the requirement. Some observers interpreted this maneuver as "a de facto acknowledgment that the human rights situation in El Salvador [was]

⁹⁴Danner, p. 91.

⁹⁵See Jacqueline Sharkey. "Back in Control." Common Cause Magazine. September/October 1986. pp. 29-30.

⁹⁶Larry Birns as quoted by Charles Mohr. "Bill on Salvador Killed by Reagan." The New York Times. 1 December 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 55). The purpose of COHA is "to promote the common interest of the hemisphere, raise the visibility and increase the importance of the inter-American relationship, as well as encourage the formulation of rational and constructive U.S. policies towards Latin America." See <http://www.coha.org/>

⁹⁷Larry Birns as quoted by Charles Mohr. "Bill on Salvador Killed by Reagan."

so bad that [Reagan] would have had difficulty in certifying."⁹⁸

Human rights conditions on aid to El Salvador had now ended, except for a requirement in a separate law that withheld thirty percent of military aid until there was a verdict in the case against those accused of murdering the four U.S. churchwomen in 1980.⁹⁹ Ending the certification requirement sent a clear message to the Salvadoran government that Reagan was more concerned with preventing a guerrilla takeover than with the Salvadoran government's abuses of human rights.

An understanding of how concern for human rights effected the formation of foreign policy during the Carter and Reagan administrations is crucial for understanding the U.S. government's responses to peasant massacres in El Salvador. Clear trends developed in Executive Branch responses to news of these peasant massacres, the way in which the U.S. press covered them, and the effects of press coverage on the formation of U.S. policy.

⁹⁸Americas Watch. As Bad as Ever: A Report on Human Rights in El Salvador. Fourth Supplement. New York: Americas Watch Committee, 1984. pp. 1-2.

⁹⁹Americas Watch, Helsinki Watch, and Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights. Failure: The Reagan Administration's Human Rights Policy in 1983. New York: Americas Watch, Helsinki Watch, and Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights, 1984. p. 33.

Chapter II: The Massacre at El Mozote, Morazán Province

During the first week of December in 1981, the Atlácatl Battalion of the Salvadoran army entered the town of El Mozote in a search and destroy mission.¹⁰⁰ After an extremely brief interrogation of the towns residents,¹⁰¹ the Battalion proceeded to murder almost every living being. The men were separated from the women and children, then were blindfolded, marched in small groups into the surrounding hills, and shot in the head at very close range.¹⁰² The Battalion then turned its attention to the women. Several women were raped and then murdered by the soldiers in the hills, other women were forced into houses and shot so their bodies fell one on top of the other.¹⁰³ Not even the children escaped the brutality of the Atlácatl Battalion. As one witness who is now known as Chepe Mozote observed, "They slit some of the kids' throats, and many they hanged from the tree....the soldiers kept telling us, 'You are guerrillas and this is justice. This is justice.'"¹⁰⁴

Death toll estimates range from three hundred and seventy¹⁰⁵ to four hundred and eighty-two.¹⁰⁶ The total estimated deaths from

¹⁰⁰Danner, p. 42.

¹⁰¹Danner, p. 69. According to Danner, the officers spent less than an hour questioning the hundreds of supposed guerrilla collaborators, which made it difficult to believe that they really expected to obtain useful intelligence from these people.

¹⁰²Binford, pp. 20-21; Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, p. 338, and Danner, p. 70.

¹⁰³Danner, pp. 71-73.

¹⁰⁴Danner, p. 77.

¹⁰⁵Binford, p. 27; Danner, pp. 280-292. (Danner's list came from Tutela Legal, and contains the names and relations of the victims.)

¹⁰⁶Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, p. 338. Of the four hundred and eighty-two victims, two hundred and eighty were under fourteen years old.

the army sweep ranges from seven hundred and thirty-three¹⁰⁷ to one thousand.¹⁰⁸ The exact number of victims was difficult to tabulate--according to Socorro Jurídico--because so many of the bodies were so badly disfigured that they could not be identified.¹⁰⁹ Counting the exact number was complicated because the mass murders of the inhabitants of the villages of La Joya, Cerro Pando, Los Toriles, La Ranchería, and Jocote Amarillo occurred simultaneously with the massacre at El Mozote. All these villages were located in the Morazán province, and these massacres often have been collectively called the massacre at El Mozote.¹¹⁰ This has caused confusion and unwarranted criticism of the messengers who brought news of the massacre to the public.

The Importance of the Massacre at El Mozote

Massacres throughout the countryside were hauntingly common throughout the Salvadoran civil war. The massacre at El Mozote, however, stood apart from other atrocities for four reasons. First, despite being situated in the Morazán province, where the majority of the inhabitants supported the rebels, the town of El Mozote was not known as a base of support for the guerrillas.¹¹¹ The people of El Mozote attempted to establish a neutral position

¹⁰⁷Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, p. 340.

¹⁰⁸EPICA. *Condoning the Killing*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁹McClintock, p. 309.

¹¹⁰Nongovernmental organizations, such as Amnesty International, Americas Watch, and the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, and scholars of the massacre at El Mozote, such as Mark Danner and Leigh Binford, all have called the series of massacres in the Morazán province in December 1981 as the massacre at El Mozote.

¹¹¹Danner, p. 17.

between the army and the guerrillas; troops from whichever side of the conflict had temporarily occupied the town received accommodations from the villagers.¹¹² El Mozote was so well-known for being a safe-haven from military attacks that Salvadorans from other regions sought safety there. In addition, many of the villagers were members of fundamentalist Protestant churches, and believed that the army would not attack them because of their conservative, anti-Communist beliefs.¹¹³

Second, the massacre at El Mozote differed from previous massacres in that it was a meticulously planned scorched-earth operation (ironically name Operation Rescue by the army).¹¹⁴ While the town of El Mozote was being destroyed, similar operations took place in the neighboring towns of La Joya, Cerro Pando, Los Toriles, La Ranchería, and Jocote Amarillo. The tactics in each town differed slightly, but the results were the same: the extermination of every human being and every animal that could be located, and the destruction of homes, beehives, sugar mills, and other personal and productive property.¹¹⁵ Previously, the Salvadoran army had tried to attack the guerrillas in a traditional face-to-face battle--with varying degrees of success. The strategy behind the scorched earth tactic was to decimate supporters of the guerrillas and attempt to destroy possible hiding places and supply networks. In theory, this scheme would weaken the guerrillas and force them to fight a more conventional battle in which they would be greatly outnumbered.

¹¹²Binford, p. 100, and Danner, p. 18.

¹¹³EPICA. Condoning the Killing, p. 25, and Danner, p. 19.

¹¹⁴Binford, p. 16.

¹¹⁵Binford, pp. 22-23.

A third difference between the massacre at El Mozote and previous human rights violations, especially from a U.S. perspective, was the direct link between the soldiers who committed the massacre and U.S. policy. Both Salvadoran and U.S. critics previously had linked U.S. military aid with an increase in human rights violations, but the massacre at El Mozote provided an undeniable example of this connection. The perpetrators of the massacre, the Atlácatl Battalion, had received extensive training from U.S. Special Forces. In addition, eight of the commanding officers had received training at the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia.¹¹⁶

A fourth characteristic that should have alarmed U.S. observers of the Salvadoran civil war involved tactics. The maneuvers of the Atlácatl Battalion resembled the performance of the U.S. army's "Phoenix" program during the Vietnam War, in which Provincial Reconnaissance Units interrogated and frequently killed alleged subversives in the South Vietnam countryside in an attempt to "neutralize" the guerrilla threat.¹¹⁷ The so-called "Vietnam Syndrome"¹¹⁸ still had a considerable influence on the U.S. populace, and any U.S. foreign policy decision that reminded U.S. citizens of the disastrous Vietnam War usually drew public disapproval.

¹¹⁶These officers included: Colonel Domingo Monterrosa, who was the commander of the Battalion, Major Armando Azmitia Melara, who was the operations chief; Major Natividad de Jesús Cáceres Cabrera, who was second in command of the Battalion; Colonel Alejandro Cisneros, Captain José Alfredo Jiménez, Captain Juan Ernesto Mendez Rodríguez, Captain Roberto Alfonso Mendoza Portillo, Captain Walter Oswaldo Salazar. Each was a commander of a company in the Battalion. See <http://derechos.org/soaw/grads/elsal-not.html>. School of the Americas Watch. "Notorious Salvadoran School of the Americas Graduates." pp. 1-8.

¹¹⁷McClintock, pp. 44-48.

¹¹⁸As a result of the Vietnam War, many members of the public feared prolonged U.S. involvement in armed conflicts the developing world.

The U.S. Government's Response to the Massacre

Two days after the stories of the massacre at El Mozote were printed in The New York Times and The Washington Post, the U.S. embassy in El Salvador began an investigation. Todd Greentree, who was the embassy's junior reporting officer, and former Marine Major John McKay, who was the defense attaché, were assigned the task of determining whether a massacre had occurred. The embassy report was based on four sources: briefings by Salvadoran army officers; a short helicopter fly-over of the area around El Mozote; interviews in refugee camps in San Francisco Gotera with people who had fled El Mozote and nearby hamlets (the interviews were done under military supervision);¹¹⁹ and visits and discussions with peasants in Jocoaitique, Perquín, and other towns accessible from the blacktop highway.¹²⁰ The investigators never set foot in the town of El Mozote; but this fact was not revealed to the U.S. public. The importance of the omission of a trip to the hamlet of El Mozote was recognized by at least one of the investigators: Major McKay concluded that "the fact that we didn't get to the site turned out to be very detrimental to our reporting--the Salvadorans, you know, were never very good about cleaning up their shell casings."¹²¹ This statement implied that if investigators had made it into El Mozote, they would have found conclusive evidence of a massacre.

¹¹⁹Danner, p. 107.

¹²⁰Binford, p. 50.

¹²¹Danner, p. 124. It is also important to note that the State Department declared that embassy investigators had "interviewed a wide variety of sources, including refugees from El Mozote, who said they had witnessed the events of December 11." But Greentree and McKay talked with no eyewitnesses, and the embassy cable specifically stated that civilian authorities, church officials, relief workers, and international Red Cross delegates "were unable to provide first-hand information." see Bonner, p. 342.

According to three of the most prominent experts on the massacre, journalists Ray Bonner and Mark Danner, and anthropologist Leigh Binford, the goal of the embassy report was damage control: to prove that a massacre did not occur in order to protect the allocation of U.S. military aid, and the legitimacy of the upcoming presidential elections.¹²² As result of their interviews with refugees, McKay came away with a clear impression that "something horrible happened," and Greentree was convinced "that there probably had been a massacre, that they had lined people up and shot them."¹²³ The report, however, did not mention these important observations.

Instead, the report concluded that "no evidence could be found to systematically confirm the massacre of civilians...."¹²⁴ It provided two possible scenarios for what had happened at El Mozote. The first was that civilians were unfortunate victims, caught in the cross-fire because callous guerrillas who failed to remove them from the line of fire.¹²⁵ Second, the civilians were legitimate military targets "mobilized" and perhaps armed by the FMLN to shoot back at the invading army. Under theses scenarios, it was the guerrillas who were responsible for the death of civilians, not the army.¹²⁶ This embassy report became the basis of the Reagan administration's denials--despite evidence from church groups, such as Socorro Jurídico, and NGOs such as Amnesty International and Americas

¹²²Binford, p. 61; Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 341; Danner, pp. 107-108.

¹²³Danner, p. 117.

¹²⁴Binford, p. 50.

¹²⁵Binford, pp. 50-51.

¹²⁶Binford, p. 51.

Watch--that a massacre occurred at El Mozote. Two days after receiving the embassy cable, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Thomas Enders told the House Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs that "there was no evidence to confirm that government forces systematically massacred civilians in the operations zone, or that the number of civilians remotely approached the seven hundred and thirty-three or nine hundred and twenty-six victims cited in the press."¹²⁷

The Salvadoran Government's Response to the Massacre

The Salvadoran government's version of events at El Mozote was primarily presented from four sources: radio broadcasts by provisional President José Napoleón Duarte; the Salvadoran ambassador to the United States, Ernesto Rivas Gallart; Colonel Domingo Monterrosa of the Atlácatl Battalion; and articles from a Salvadoran daily newspaper El Diario de Hoy. On December 31, 1981, the rebel radio station Radio Venceremos began to broadcast news about a massacre at El Mozote. The report had been delayed because the radio personnel had waited for El Mozote to be secured by the guerrillas before they went into the area to file a report.¹²⁸ In response to the Radio Venceremos broadcasts, President Duarte quickly took to the airwaves and claimed that the story was "a guerrilla trick" meant to smear his government at the very moment

¹²⁷Arnson, p. 89; Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 340; Danner, p. 126.

¹²⁸Binford, p. 25.

when the United States Congress was considering aid to El Salvador.¹²⁹

Ambassador Gallart made a statement that mirrored Duarte's in tone. The Ambassador, however, conceded that the army had been engaged in an offensive against the guerrillas in the region, but he "reject[ed] emphatically that the Army of El Salvador was engaged in killing women and children. It is not within the armed institutions' philosophy to act like that."¹³⁰ Furthermore, the Ambassador believed that stories of a massacre in Morazán were intended to "take credit away from the certification President Reagan must make to Congress."¹³¹ The responses of Duarte and Rivas to news of the massacre strongly suggested that they seemed more concerned with the possibility that military aid might be suspended than the possibility that the army had massacred hundreds of civilians.

Colonel Monterrosa's rather flippant explanation of events in the Morazán province provided more insight into what really happened. The commander of the Atlácatl Battalion not only acknowledged that the army had been active in the province during the dates of the "alleged" massacre, but also openly asserted that "noncombatant civilians occasionally die during combat operations," and that women and children were simply caught "in the crossfire

¹²⁹Danner, p. 89.

¹³⁰Guillermoprieto, p. A1, as cited in Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, p. 56.

¹³¹ Guillermoprieto, p. A1, as cited in Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. Also see Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. Salvador: Human Rights Dismissed. New York: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1986. p. 56.

between them [the guerrillas] and us [the army]."¹³² Colonel Monterrosa claimed that his Battalion did not kill civilians, but added, "once you have seen several twelve-year-olds in action, you can no longer dismiss the possibility that any twelve year old might be a guerrilla."¹³³ Although Monterrosa was attempting to disprove the possibility of a massacre at El Mozote, his statements gave credence to the notion that "something horrible happened" at El Mozote.

The coverage of the "alleged" massacre in El Diario de Hoy, a conservative newspaper, also added credence to reports that a massacre had occurred. El Diario de Hoy published a reconstruction of the events of El Mozote according to which guerrillas had "barricaded themselves in what seemed to have been a religious center and from there opened fire on the troops, making the deaths of children, women, and old people possible."¹³⁴ This newspaper story admitted that several civilians died, but like the U.S. embassy cable, blamed the guerrillas for the deaths of noncombatants.

U.S. Newspaper Coverage of the Massacre at El Mozote

It was almost two months before the story of the massacre at El Mozote appeared in the U.S. press. On January 27, 1982, both The New York Times and The Washington Post ran front-page stories that described in detail the Salvadoran army's brutal search-and-destroy mission in the Morazán province, which resulted in the mass-murder

¹³²McClintock, p. 310.

¹³³McClintock, p. 310.

¹³⁴Danner, p. 12.

of the villagers.¹³⁵ In the next two months, only six articles more articles were published (one in the Miami Herald, three in The New York Times, and two in The Washington Post) that even mentioned the massacre at El Mozote.¹³⁶ Anthropologist Leigh Binford commented that the press coverage of the massacre reinforced the distinction between the value of peasant lives and middle-class, urban lives. He cited a United Nations figure to strengthen his point:

According to the United Nations, between 1980 and 1983 there occurred in El Salvador an absolute minimum of two hundred and ninety-seven collective killings of five or more people committed by the military, security forces, and paramilitary forces linked to the military (ORDEN, Civil Defense). Yet the international press devoted fifty articles to the assassination of

¹³⁵Bonner, "Massacre of Hundreds Reported in Salvador Village," pp. A1 and A10; Alma Guillermoprieto. "Salvadoran Peasants Describe Mass Killing." pp. A1 and A16.

¹³⁶Charles Mohr. "Aid to Salvador Expected to Continue." The New York Times. 28 January 1982, p. A12; Christopher Dickey. "U.S. Envoy Expresses Doubts." The Washington Post. 30 January 1982 (as cited in ISLA, pp. 56-57); "El Salvador's Agony." Editorial. Miami Herald. 31 January 1982 (as cited in ISLA, p. 93); Barbara Crossette. "U.S. Disputes Report of Nine Hundred and Twenty-Six Killed in El Salvador." The New York Times. 2 February 1982 (as cited in ISLA, p. 65); Mary McGrory. "Killings, Atrocities, and Now Reagan Suggests a Gold Star?" The Washington Post. 2 February 1982 (as cited in ISLA, pp. 100-101); Crossette, "The Salvador Story." The New York Times. 4 February 1982 (as cited in ISLA, pp. 101-102); Dickey, "U.S. Diplomats in Central America See Gap Between Policy, Facts." The Washington Post. 5 March 1982, p. A21.

There were five other articles discussing the massacre at El Mozote in other newspapers: James Nelson Goodsell. "U.S. Doubts Salvador Massacre Report." The Christian Science Monitor. 29 January 1982 (as cited in ISLA, pp. 69-70); Daniel Southerland. "Did Salvadoran Troops Shoot Civilians?" The Christian Science Monitor. 29 January 1982 (as cited in ISLA, p. 71); N/A. "A Massacre and a Moral Anesthetic." Manchester Guardian/Le Monde. 7 February 1982 (as cited in ISLA, p. 63); Juan M. Vasquez. "Salvador Officer Admits Army Fought at Village." Los Angeles Times. 18 February 1982 (as cited in ISLA, p. 61). Anthropologist Leigh Binford also noted that from January 1983 through December 1989, "El Mozote" was cited in a mere fifteen articles published in major U.S. and Canadian newspapers. See Binford, p. 4. However, it is not clear why Binford started tracking articles from January 1983 instead of January 1982.

Archbishop Romero and only forty-four articles to sixteen rural massacres that occurred in 1980 and 1981.¹³⁷

Although Binford's statement is regrettably accurate, it does not completely explain the lack of coverage of the massacre at El Mozote. There were additional factors that stunted the coverage. The reporters who broke the story, Raymond Bonner of The Times and Alma Guillermoprieto of The Post, were harshly criticized by the U.S. government, elements of the U.S. press, and organizations that analyzed press coverage. It seemed that many journalists feared criticizing Ronald Reagan, who was one of the most popular presidents in U.S. history.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, the sparse and in some cases ineffective coverage of the massacre at El Mozote set an extremely poor precedent for coverage of future massacres. The U.S. press did not fulfill its role as a "watchdog" of the U.S. government; it failed to provide U.S. citizens with enough information to understand and evaluate the performance of their government.

The Executive Branch always has been aware of the power of the press in the formation of public opinion regarding foreign policy. The Reagan administration relied on the media to promote its policies.¹³⁹ In order to analyze the content of the coverage of the massacre at El Mozote, the news-breaking stories by Bonner and

¹³⁷Binford, pp. 143-144.

¹³⁸Michael Massing, a contributing editor to the Columbia Journalism Review, observed that President Reagan severely criticized coverage of Central America and that "the Great Communicator has cajoled major news organizations into helping sell his Central American policy" to the U.S. public. Massing, p. 42.

¹³⁹Kurt Ritter and David Henry. Ronald Reagan: The Great Communicator. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992. p. 93.

Guillermoprieto will be discussed first. Then the subsequent stories that mention the massacre will be examined.

Initial Coverage of the Massacre at El Mozote in The New York Times and The Washington Post.

Raymond Bonner of The New York Times and Alma Guillermoprieto of The Washington Post broke the story of the massacre at El Mozote on January 27, 1982.¹⁴⁰ Their stories contained many similarities and a few subtle differences. Both reporters had traveled to the village of El Mozote with guerrilla guides; both interviewed Rufina Amaya, one of the only known survivors of the massacre, who described the Salvadoran army's attack on the villagers; and both reporters observed several decomposing corpses and body parts that supported Amaya's claims.

One major difference between the two reports, as critics later pointed out, was their assertiveness. Guillermoprieto was "slightly more cautious,"¹⁴¹ and "took pains to say that reporters had been 'taken to tour the site by guerrillas....'"¹⁴² Bonner, on the other hand, stated, "it is clear that a massacre of major proportions occurred...."¹⁴³ Another difference was that Guillermoprieto's story included a photograph and a map of El Salvador. The Times story included neither. This was somewhat curious, because Bonner went

¹⁴⁰Bonner, "Massacre of Hundreds Reported in Salvador Village," pp. A1 and A10; Guillermoprieto, pp. A1 and A16.

¹⁴¹Hoyt, p. 32.

¹⁴²"The Media's War." Editorial. The Wall Street Journal. 10 February 1982, p. 16.

¹⁴³Bonner, "Massacre of Hundreds Reported in Salvador Village," p. A1.

to the village with a photographer named Susan Meiselas, who shot two rolls of film in the village.¹⁴⁴

Repercussions of The New York Times and The Washington Post Reports

Despite the similarities between Raymond Bonner's and Alma Guillermoprieto's stories on the massacre at El Mozote, Bonner became the main target of criticism by the U.S. government, elements of the U.S. press, and conservative press-analysis groups. Reagan administration officials derided the reports as "gross exaggerations."¹⁴⁵ The State Department supported Colonel Monterrosa's claim that the civilians who died were caught in the cross-fire, not massacred.¹⁴⁶ Both Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Thomas Enders and Ambassador to El Salvador Deane Hinton cast doubt on the reports. Enders attacked the stories before a congressional committee, saying that "no evidence could be found to confirm that government forces systematically massacred civilians," while Hinton accused Bonner of being an "advocate journalist" during a breakfast meeting with other reporters from The New York Times.¹⁴⁷ By the summer of 1982,

¹⁴⁴Danner, p. 99. Meiselas, an award-winning photojournalist who works for the Magnum Photo Agency, noted that she had "had to image a lot of death, bodies upon bodies " in El Salvador, and if she "thought [she] was there to *prove* that a massacre had happened I would have imaged many more bodies." Danner, p. 99. I have been unable to determine what happened to these photographs taken in 1982.

¹⁴⁵Hoyt, p. 33.

¹⁴⁶McClintock, p. 310.

¹⁴⁷Hoyt, p. 33.

Bonner was persona non grata at the embassy, and members of its staff repeatedly insulted him to his colleagues.¹⁴⁸

Alma Guillermoprieto was not criticized as severely as Bonner, but at one point a Reagan official wrote a letter to The Washington Post claiming that she once had worked for a communist newspaper in Mexico.¹⁴⁹ This was a clear attempt to link Guillermoprieto with leftist groups in order to discredit her and her reports.

The response of the press to the treatment of Raymond Bonner and his story set a terrible precedent. First, Bonner was removed from the El Salvador beat and transferred to the Metro department by A.M. Rosenthal, the editor of The New York Times. Rosenthal insisted the move was not motivated by politics and that Bonner was removed because he had never been fully trained in the Times' particular reporting methodology. Bonner, he said, "didn't know the techniques of weaving a story together....I brought him back because it seemed terribly unfair to leave him there without training."¹⁵⁰ The Mozote piece, however, was neither Bonner's first article for The New York Times nor his first story about El Salvador.¹⁵¹ Rosenthal did not seem to have had a problem with Bonner's other articles, both before and after the massacre piece. Bonner had also reported from Bolivia as a stringer for The Washington Post and Newsweek in

¹⁴⁸Massing, p. 44.

¹⁴⁹Hoyt, p. 33.

¹⁵⁰Hoyt, p. 34, and Danner, p. 138.

¹⁵¹For example, see: Bonner, "U.S. Envoy Vows Help for Salvador in Stopping Flow of Arms to Rebels." 16 January 1981 (as cited in ISLA, pp. 112-113); Bonner, "The Agony of El Salvador." The New York Times. 22 February 1981 (as cited in ISLA, pp. 61-65); Bonner, "With Salvador's Rebels in Combat Zone." The New York Times. 26 January 1982, pp. A1 and A4.

1979.¹⁵² In addition, Bonner was a Stanford-educated lawyer and previously had worked for Ralph Nader's consumer awareness group.¹⁵³ Undoubtedly, he had experience with research and writing. Tom McCoy, who wrote a journal article that analyzed the coverage of El Salvador by The New York Times, opined that in the case of El Mozote, Rosenthal's belief that Bonner did not know how to be a correspondent meant that "he did not understand the danger, professionally, of bucking the State Department policy line."¹⁵⁴

Next, Bonner was attacked in two of the most well-known publications in the United States: The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post. The Journal printed an editorial entitled, "The Media's War," in which Bonner was impugned as, "overly credulous," allowing himself to be duped by "a propaganda exercise" of the guerrillas.¹⁵⁵ He also was derided for romanticizing the revolutionaries.¹⁵⁶ The editorial also criticized The New York Times for "clos[ing] ranks behind a reporter out on a limb..."¹⁵⁷ The editorial also provided a brief jab at Barbara Crossette's "news

¹⁵²Massing, p. 44.

¹⁵³Tom McCoy. "The New York Times' Coverage of El Salvador." Newspaper Research Journal. Summer 1992, p. 69, and Hoyt, p. 34.

¹⁵⁴McCoy, p. 69.

¹⁵⁵"The Media's War." Editorial.

¹⁵⁶"The Media's War." Editorial. Ironically, one week after this editorial, the State Department received a cable from John Negroponte, who was the U.S. Ambassador to Honduras. The cable referred to a visit by an embassy official and a House Foreign Affairs Committee staff member to the refugee camp at Colomoncagua, Honduras, to which many of the refugees from Morazán had fled two months before. According to the cable, the refugees described to the American diplomat "a military sweep in Morazán in early December which they claimed resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties and physical destruction, leading to their exodus." The cable went on to say, "names of villages cited coincide with The New York Times article of January 28." This information was not made public. See Danner, pp. 136-137.

¹⁵⁷"The Media's War." Editorial.

analysis" (which will be analyzed in the next section) regarding how the U.S. government obtained its information. The editorial questioned why Crossette addressed "how U.S. diplomats gather[ed] information abroad," but not how reporters acquired their information.¹⁵⁸

A co-author of the editorial, George Melloan, continued his attack on Bonner during an appearance on *The MacNeil-Lehrer Report*. Melloan stated, "I think some reporters tend to identify with guerrilla and revolutionary movements to some degree....Obviously Ray Bonner has such an orientation."¹⁵⁹ Claiming Bonner was a rebel sympathizer created the perception that Bonner's judgment was not objective; such a pro-rebel ideology also would have made Bonner susceptible to believing and writing propaganda for the guerrillas, as conservative critics had charged.

The editorial also referred to an "excellent" monograph written by Freedom House, which charged that "political bias, ideology, poor sources and deliberate misinformation" were among the sins of the press covering El Salvador.¹⁶⁰ Freedom House also claimed that reporters did not generally speak Spanish, which led them to produce "simplistic" stories that tended "towards propaganda."¹⁶¹ The Journal, of course, did not mention the bias of Freedom House. According to Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, Freedom House has had connections to conservative organizations, such as Accuracy

¹⁵⁸"The Media's War." Editorial.

¹⁵⁹Massing, p. 44. This article by Massing did not disclose whether Bonner was given a chance to respond to these allegations on this program.

¹⁶⁰"The Media's War." Editorial, p. 16.

¹⁶¹COHA. "Media War Over El Salvador." 9 March 1982, p. 1. For the record, both Alma Guillermoprieto and Raymond Bonner are fluent Spanish speakers.

in Media (AIM), the World Anti-Communist League, Resistance International, and to U.S. government agencies, such as the Central Intelligence Agency.¹⁶²

Accuracy in Media also made a concerted effort to discredit Bonner. First, AIM charged both Bonner and Guillermprieto with conspiring to hold their stories until just before Reagan was required to certify that the Salvadoran government was making progress in human rights.¹⁶³ Second, in late July, AIM devoted an entire edition of its report to haranguing Bonner: The issue claimed that Bonner had been "worth a division to the Communists in Central America," and insinuated that Bonner was a leftist sympathizer.¹⁶⁴ The publication failed to mention his service as a Marine Corps officer during the Vietnam War.¹⁶⁵

A column in The Washington Post by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr. entitled, "Lovable Leftists at War in El Salvador," also attacked Bonner. Tyrrell called Bonner's reporting "bunk," saying it provided a romanticized account of the guerrillas, and, in Tyrrell's opinion, unfair criticism of U.S. policy and the Salvadoran government.¹⁶⁶ Tyrrell did not mention the report of Alma Guillermprieto, nor evidence disseminated by U.S. and Salvadoran non-governmental organizations that substantiated Bonner's story. Apparently, Tyrrell also did not read the story by Washington Post reporter Christopher

¹⁶²Herman and Chomsky, p. 28. Freedom House also had expended substantial resources in criticizing the media for insufficient sympathy with U.S. foreign policy, and excessively harsh criticism of U.S. client states, such as El Salvador.

¹⁶³Hoyt, p. 33.

¹⁶⁴Hoyt, pp. 33-34.

¹⁶⁵Hoyt, p. 34.

¹⁶⁶R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr. "Lovable Leftists at War in El Salvador." The Washington Post. 8 February 1982, p. A15.

Dickey, which contained a statement by U.S. Ambassador Deane Hinton regarding the initial reports of a massacre in the Morazán province. The ambassador stated that "there definitely must have been something" that occurred in El Mozote between the army and the guerrillas.¹⁶⁷ Although Ambassador Hinton's statement was a weak acknowledgment of the possibility that a human rights atrocity had occurred in the Morazán province, it nevertheless supports the idea that something did occur; it does not support the perception that Bonner's reports were "bunk."

Repercussions on Other Journalists

The response of other newspapers and reporters to criticism of Bonner and Guillermprieto reveals that the criticism had a chilling effect on coverage of the massacre at El Mozote. In a 1983 article for Columbia Journalism Review, Michael Massing, a contributing editor, commented that:

The episode has made reporters wary of provoking the embassy. Bonner's transfer, one reporter says, left us all aware that the embassy is quite capable of playing hardball, and as a result, people treat it carefully. If they can kick out the Times correspondent--a perception shared by several correspondents--you've got to be careful.¹⁶⁸

The removal of Bonner carried additional weight because of Bonner's character and work ethic. According to other correspondents in El Salvador, "Ray definitely set the pace"; "Ray made everybody work a

¹⁶⁷Dickey, "U.S. Envoy Expresses Doubts." The Washington Post. 30 January 1982 (as cited in ISLA, pp. 56-57).

¹⁶⁸Massing, pp. 45-46.

little harder, get up earlier and stay up later"; and "He broke the whole Salvador story."¹⁶⁹ Bonner was clearly one of the best and most influential reporters in El Salvador, and his removal had long-lasting effects on reporting of human rights violations.

Editors from other newspapers circulated The Wall Street Journal editorial to their correspondents in Central America with the message, "Let's not let this happen to us."¹⁷⁰ Mark Danner added that The New York Times' decision to remove "the most dogged and influential" reporter, who had been the focus of an aggressive campaign of Reagan administration criticism, undoubtedly had a significant effect on reporting from El Salvador.¹⁷¹ This fear of possible criticism exhibited by reporters and editors meant that the story of El Mozote quickly faded from the pages of the mainstream press. El Salvador was re-certified in July 1982 for making improvements in respect for human rights, and massive U.S. military aid continued to flow to the Salvadoran government. The U.S. public's attention was diverted from examining the horrendous treatment of peasants by the Salvadoran army. As Leigh Binford noted, "by March of 1982 the El Mozote case had been 'outrun' by other events, particularly the March Constituent Assembly 'demonstration elections,' which the North American press, parroting the State Department line, heralded as a major defeat of the FMLN and a harbinger of democracy in El Salvador."¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹Massing, pp. 44-45.

¹⁷⁰McCoy, p. 80.

¹⁷¹Danner, pp. 137-138.

¹⁷²Binford, p. 63.

U.S. Press Coverage After the Initial Reports

It is difficult to call the articles that were published after Bonner's and Guillermprieto's¹⁷³ "follow-up" stories, because most of them neither focused on the massacre nor continued the investigation started by the initial reports. These articles mention the number of civilian deaths, but not the corpses described by Bonner and Guillermprieto, who, unlike the U.S. embassy investigators, actually set foot in El Mozote. The later stories contained no references to the perpetrators of the massacre, the Atlácatl Battalion, nor to the survivors of the massacre. Only one of the journalists who wrote these stories, Christopher Dickey of The Washington Post, actually reported from El Salvador. It could be argued that reporters may have feared traveling into the Morazán province, which was controlled by the guerrillas. Anthropologist Leigh Binford had an adroit response: Not a single journalist bothered to track down the El Mozote residents who had fled to Honduras (whose government was extremely friendly with that of the United States), and who could have refuted many of the untruthful claims made by the U.S. government regarding the massacre at El Mozote.¹⁷⁴ In addition, members of nongovernmental organizations, such as

¹⁷³Charles Mohr. "Aid to Salvador Expected to Continue," p. A12; Christopher Dickey, "U.S. Envoy Expresses Doubts." The Washington Post. 30 January 1982 (as cited in ISLA, pp. 56-57); "El Salvador's Agony." Editorial. Miami Herald. 31 January 1982 (as cited in ISLA, p. 93); Crossette, "U.S. Disputes Report of Nine Hundred and Twenty-Six Killed in El Salvador." The New York Times. 2 February 1982 (as cited in ISLA, p. 65); McGrory, "Killings, Atrocities and Now Reagan Suggests a Gold Star?" The Washington Post. 2 February 1982 (as cited in ISLA, pp. 100-101); Crossette, "The Salvador Story," (as cited in ISLA, pp. 101-102); Dickey, "U.S. Diplomats in Central America See Gap Between Policy, Facts," p. A21.

¹⁷⁴Binford, p. 63.

Amnesty International and Americas Watch, were able to carry out interviews with survivors and relatives of victims of human rights abuses in El Salvador without repercussion. If NGOs could gather information from the Morazán province, then reporters could have, too. This background is essential for examining the stories published in the wake of the initial articles about the El Mozote massacre.

Charles Mohr wrote the first follow-up concerning the massacre at El Mozote. This story revealed that "despite reports of a large-scale massacre of civilians by Government troops in El Salvador, President Reagan [was] still expected to certify that the Salvadoran security forces [were] making a 'concerted and significant effort' to respect human rights."¹⁷⁵ This article also mentioned that the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA) would try to block military aid to El Salvador in Federal court. The article proceeded to describe the certification process and briefly discussed the land reform program in El Salvador. No new details on the massacre were provided

Both of Christopher Dickey's articles focused on the U.S. embassy. Dickey's first story, entitled, "U.S. Envoy Expresses Doubts," indicates that the journalist may have missed an opportunity to ascertain more facts about the case. During an interview with U.S. Ambassador Deane Hinton, Dickey questioned him on the validity of guerrilla and peasant claims that the army had massacred hundreds of civilians at El Mozote. Hinton replied, "From the details I read in the story, there definitely must have been something, but I don't

¹⁷⁵Mohr, p. A12.

think it's anywhere near what they say in the propaganda."¹⁷⁶ Hinton's response was extremely vague, and the reader was left with no idea of what Hinton believed about the possibility that numerous civilians might have been killed by the Salvadoran armed forces. It also was unclear what Hinton meant by "the propaganda." Was he talking about the guerrilla radio broadcasts on Radio Venceremos, or was he calling the articles in The Washington Post and The New York Times propaganda? Clarification of what Hinton considered "propaganda" would have enabled readers to decipher which sources of information the ambassador deemed credible in formulating his policy recommendations. Knowing where U.S. government officials obtain their information would have helped U.S. readers understand how and why policies are formulated, thereby helping them evaluate the performance of their government.

Despite being the only reporter in this group who actually was in El Salvador, Dickey did not interview any Salvadoran government or army officials regarding the massacre. Judging from the locations in the datelines of Dickey's articles, he did not venture outside the capital city to the hamlets where massacres had taken place. Dickey did, however, provide some information to advance the investigation of the massacre, and to inform the public about U.S. policy. His second article, "U.S. Diplomats in Central America See Gap Between Policy, Facts," revealed that the embassy investigation into the massacre, which had been the basis of the Reagan administration's claim that the Salvadoran army was not involved, was incomplete,

¹⁷⁶Dickey, "U.S. Envoy Expresses Doubts," (as cited in ISLA, pp. 56-57).

because investigators never actually traveled to El Mozote.¹⁷⁷ This observation severely weakened Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Enders' conclusion that the embassy investigation proved that "no evidence could be found" to substantiate the reports of a massacre by the Salvadoran army.¹⁷⁸

This information would have provided reasonable readers,¹⁷⁹ with the ability to judge for themselves the veracity of the Reagan administration's assertion that it had investigated the possibility of a massacre and had determined that one had not occurred. This claim became difficult to substantiate after the public learned that investigators had not visited the area where the massacre was reported to have occurred.

Coverage of the massacre at El Mozote also was ineffective in other major U.S. newspapers. For example, an editorial in the Miami Herald reflected the effects of the criticism of the original reports on El Mozote. This editorial mentioned that the "alleged" death toll was in the hundreds, that survivors blamed the Salvadoran army and had a list of the victims, and that the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador had substantiated the peasants' claims; however, the sentences containing these statements were filled with qualifiers. For example, the editorial states that "the survivors *were said* to

¹⁷⁷Dickey, "U.S. Diplomats in Central America See Gap Between Policy, Facts." p. A21. This was also the last article of the year to mention the massacre at El Mozote.

¹⁷⁸Danner, p. 126.

¹⁷⁹"The reasonable reader is to be understood from the point of view of a reader's needs rather than from the point of view of the routine practices or policies found in the media. The reasonable reader is a person with needs for information about matters such as the risks, alternatives, and consequences of what is being reported." See Stephen Klaidman and Tom L. Beauchamp. The Virtuous Journalist. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. p. 33.

possess lists...." and the Human Rights Commission "*was said*" to corroborate...."¹⁸⁰ The editorial stated, "If these reports are true, the horror is beyond words and the Administration's findings about the junta are false."¹⁸¹ This sentence epitomized the Miami Herald's journalists' attempts to tell the story, and avoid making any strong assertions that would engender criticism from either the U.S. government or other news media.

The editorial criticized both the timing and content of the reports on the massacre as "suspicious," and stated that "knowledgeable and impartial observers question their veracity." These "knowledgeable and impartial observers" were not identified. Without some idea about the identity of these observers--whether they were U.S. government officials, academics, non-governmental organization employees, press critics such as AIM--the reader could not possibly make an informed judgment regarding these criticisms. The editorial's support for the idea that the reports were "suspicious" also served to undermine the credibility of Bonner and Guillermoprieto, without naming them.

Mary McGrory's column in The Washington Post on February 2, 1982, entitled, "Killings, Atrocities and Now Reagan Suggests a Gold Star?" devoted one paragraph to the El Mozote story. The article focused on Reagan's certification that the human rights record of the Salvadoran government had been improving despite evidence to the contrary. McGrory wrote that Thomas Enders believed it was not possible to prove or disprove whether government troops had killed

¹⁸⁰"El Salvador's Agony." Editorial.

¹⁸¹"El Salvador's Agony." Editorial.

hundreds of peasants, but that if the army had done so, the rebels still were responsible because "the guerrilla forces did nothing to remove them from the path of battle."¹⁸² In one sentence, McGrory noted the irony of Enders' belief that the guerrillas deserved the blame for the massacre of civilians by the army, but she offered no further analysis regarding El Mozote. The article did criticize the Reagan administration's certification process, as many other articles previously had done, but otherwise it did little to mitigate the media silence regarding what happened or who was responsible for the massacre at El Mozote.

Barbara Crossette wrote two articles for The New York Times that referred to the massacre at El Mozote.¹⁸³ The first story, which appeared on February 2, contained a paragraph that was a mirror-image of McGrory's statement regarding Enders' sentiment that it could not be determined whether the Salvadoran army had massacred hundreds of civilians, but if soldiers had done so, the guerrillas were responsible.¹⁸⁴ The article also included a statement by Enders questioning estimates of the number of inhabitants in El Mozote at the time of the massacre, which originally had appeared in Christopher Dickey's article in The Washington Post on January 30.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸²McGrory, "Killings, Atrocities, and Now Reagan Suggests a Gold Star?"

¹⁸³Crossette, "U.S. Disputes Report of Nine Hundred and Twenty-Six Killed in El Salvador," and Crossette, "The Salvador Story."

¹⁸⁴Crossette, "U.S. Disputes Report of Nine Hundred and Twenty-Six Killed in El Salvador;" and McGrory, "Killings, Atrocities and Now Reagan Suggests a Gold Star?"

¹⁸⁵Crossette, "U.S. Disputes Report of Nine Hundred and Twenty-Six Killed in El Salvador;" and Dickey, "U.S. Envoy Expresses Doubts."

This story does contribute new information about the increases in the civilian death estimates from those reported in the initial Radio Venceremos broadcasts (192), initial reports in the U.S. press (733), to the numbers in reports from the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador (nearly 1,000). The State Department tried to use these different figures to prove that the scale of the massacre was exaggerated. Assistant Secretary of State Enders also claimed that the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador was "not a human rights organization at all."¹⁸⁶ Perhaps Enders was trying to suggest that the Human Rights Commission had provided false information on behalf of the guerrillas; however, this commission was affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, so such an allegation would not have been taken seriously. Although some clergy did harbor guerrilla sympathies, the commission did not have a reputation for disseminating propaganda. Furthermore, the Reagan administration frequently disputed findings of human rights groups, which painted an unfavorable picture of the Salvadoran government's human rights record.¹⁸⁷

Barbara Crossette's second piece focused on how the U.S. embassy obtained information regarding human rights abuses in El Salvador.¹⁸⁸ The article detailed the embassy investigation into the massacre, and mentioned that embassy officials did not actually travel to the towns where the massacre had taken place. She stated that "preliminary findings of the report were made public by the

¹⁸⁶Crossette, "U.S. Disputes Report of Nine Hundred and Twenty-Six Killed in El Salvador."

¹⁸⁷Americas Watch. With Friends Like These. p. 118.

¹⁸⁸Crossette, "The Salvador Story."

State Department in an effort to counter press reports of large-scale massacres by Government forces."¹⁸⁹ One important observation in the story was that the findings of the embassy investigation were called "preliminary" by Crossette; however, no additional reports were released, and, as mentioned earlier in this paper, the embassy report provided the Reagan administration with a rationale for denying that a massacre had occurred. Crossette's article also mentioned that even other sources of information on human rights in El Salvador from within the U.S. government were ignored in favor of the embassy report. For example, Senator Christopher Dodd had traveled to El Salvador himself to gather information that he subsequently tried to give to the State Department. According to the Senator, the response he received was a "thanks but no thanks."¹⁹⁰

Another crucial point in the article was that the U.S. government had released the information to counteract the impact of initial press reports about the massacre. The release of the embassy findings illustrated the power of the press. The results of the investigation were released with the intent of discrediting the articles by Bonner and Guillermprieto, because in order for the U.S. government's version of events at El Mozote to be true, the reporters' version had to be false.

Another important insight from Crossette's second article involved the State Department's procedures for handling the embassy report. Crossette interviewed Michael Luhan, a former Peace Corps volunteer and business reporter in Central America, who

¹⁸⁹Crossette, "The Salvador Story."

¹⁹⁰Crossette, "The Salvador Story."

was working for the Council on Hemispheric Affairs. Luhan had learned that "reports go from the embassies to the regional desks to the human rights bureau, but then they are forwarded to Thomas Enders's desk. He's the ultimate authority on the human rights reports; he has the right of editorial censorship."¹⁹¹

This was crucial information that the public needed to evaluate the veracity of the embassy reports that were the basis for Enders's strong statements denying that the Salvadoran army had been responsible for the massacre. Even if the embassy report had provided strong evidence regarding the possible culpability of the Salvadoran army, (which both investigators had noted in their original report), Enders had the ability to manipulate the information to suit the policy goals of the Reagan administration.

¹⁹¹Crossette, "The Salvador Story."

Chapter III: Newspaper Coverage of Massacres After El Mozote, January 1982-November 1983

U.S. press coverage of massacres between 1982 and 1983 suggested the continuation of a trend that started after the initial reports about El Mozote. Articles were written about the massacres, but the stories often lacked the necessary depth to perform a public benefit; the U.S. press failed to fulfill its role. Meanwhile, hundreds of Salvadorans suffered the consequences of the continuation of the Reagan administration's policy goal to eradicate the supposed Communist influence in El Salvador through massive military aid and training. Peasant massacres were a key component in the Salvadoran military's culture of fear, the goal of which was preventing political and social change. The effectiveness of this campaign was increased by the high levels of U.S. military assistance.

Los Cerros de San Pedro, San Vicente Department

The following case study clearly illustrates how a docile press corps can produce misleading information that can affect perceptions of U.S. foreign policy. On August 24, 1982, the Salvadoran army invaded nine villages in the San Vicente department, and the air force bombed the area heavily, which resulted in the deaths of three hundred noncombatants.¹⁹² The Salvadoran Defense Ministry called this maneuver a successful guerrilla sweep. Such sweeps were common throughout the country, and none of the journalists from the three newspapers analyzed in this report questioned the

¹⁹²EPICA. Condoning the Killing, p. 31.

commanding officers or inhabitants of the region to substantiate the Salvadoran government's claim. Reporters took the Salvadoran Defense Ministry's statement at face value, and wrote that one hundred and nineteen "leftist guerrillas" had been killed in a five-day guerrilla sweep.¹⁹³

Two weeks after these reports, the Los Angeles Times carried an Associated Press story that disclosed three peasant women had charged that Salvadoran government troops used U.S.-made fighter-bombers, grenades, and automatic weapons to massacre three hundred unarmed villagers during the August 24 operation.¹⁹⁴ The Associated Press report also stated that the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission, which was "generally considered careful about confirming such charges," supported the peasants' claim.¹⁹⁵ The article also mentioned that a Salvadoran government military spokesman said it was a common rebel tactic to claim that guerrillas killed were civilians. The spokesman's statement may have been accurate, but it also was very common for the army to murder civilians and claim they were guerrillas, which the Associated Press did not mention. Associated Press reports are available to all member newspapers, but the other three major U.S. papers analyzed for this thesis decided not to run the story.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³Associated Press. "Salvadorans Report Sweep Against Rebels." The Washington Post. 25 August 1982 (as cited in ISLA, p. 66). Associated Press. "Salvador Army Reports Killing One Hundred and Nineteen Guerrillas." The New York Times. 25 August 1982, p. A3.

¹⁹⁴Associated Press. "Salvador Troops Massacred Three Hundred, Women Charge." Los Angeles Times. 8 September 1982 (as cited in ISLA, p. 88).

¹⁹⁵Associated Press. "Salvador Troops Massacred Three Hundred, Women Charge."

¹⁹⁶The Associated Press is a co-operative to which any newspaper, radio or television station can become a member. The Associated Press has 1,500 U.S.

On September 9, 1982, The Washington Post finally ran a small article about additional evidence that a massacre had occurred in San Vicente.¹⁹⁷ The story revealed that a civil defense commander had substantiated the three peasant women's claim that government troops had massacred hundreds of unarmed villagers during the August 24 guerrilla operation. This article was less than two column inches long and was buried on page A20, in the "Around the World" section, which carries very short stories called "briefs." To correct earlier reporting, which had stated that casualties in the region had been guerrilla soldiers, the press should have published a longer and more in-depth story when it discovered the deaths were actually unarmed civilians. The news media also had a responsibility to do additional reporting, because this was an important story: It showed deception by the Salvadoran government regarding its military targets; the continuation of civilian massacres, despite claims to the contrary by the Reagan administration; and the ongoing use of U.S. military hardware to perpetrate human rights violations.

The last story that carried information about the San Vicente massacre was written by Bernard Weinraub for The New York Times.¹⁹⁸ This article, which focused on the rebels' military activities, devoted two paragraphs to the Salvadoran military operation in the San Vicente region. Apparently Weinraub missed the news that the supposed guerrilla sweep had been confirmed as a

newspaper members. For information about the Associated Press, access the following web site: http://www.ap.org/pages/aptoday/aptoday_faq.html#2.
¹⁹⁷"Account of Massacre Backed." The Washington Post. 9 September 1982, p. A20.

¹⁹⁸Bernard Weinraub. "Salvadoran Rebels Said to Extend Fighting to Quiet Parts of Country." The New York Times. 26 September 1982 (as cited in ISLA, pp. 91-92).

civilian massacre. He cited a Salvadoran official who referred to the incident as a "successful" operation against the rebels, that resulted in the deaths of "two hundred and fifty confirmed guerrillas." There were no references to the peasant women's claim nor to the civil defense commander's statement.

Ironically, five days after the massacre in San Vicente, The Washington Post ran an Associated Press article called, "Civilian Toll Reported Up in El Salvador."¹⁹⁹ This story did not mention the San Vicente atrocity. The article did contain an insightful statement by Larry Birns, the executive director of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, concerning the Salvadoran military and the U.S. press: "They've developed a great sensitivity to how the U.S. press works. You don't kill a lot of people when there's a big U.S. press delegation in the country. You wait until they leave."²⁰⁰ Perhaps the Salvadoran military and their advisers had a better understanding of the power of the press than U.S. journalists did. The fact that the U.S. press rarely investigated official claims facilitated the military's ability to perpetuate human rights abuses without fear of reprimand from the U.S. government, which was the principal source of military aid. The press has the power to move events onto the U.S. news agenda, but after El Mozote, the press rarely utilized this power in regard to continuing massacres of peasants in El Salvador.

¹⁹⁹Associated Press. "Civilian Toll Reported Up in El Salvador." The Washington Post. 29 August 1982 (as cited in ISLA, p. 67).

²⁰⁰Associated Press. "Civilian Toll Reported Up in El Salvador."

Las Hojas, Sonsonate Department

On February 22, 1983, the Jaguar Battalion attacked an indigenous farming cooperative located in Las Hojas, in the Sonsonate Department. Witnesses and relatives said the soldiers, who were accompanied by masked members of the civil defense, dragged seven men of varying ages and two children from their huts and shot the nine peasants in the head.²⁰¹ Next, the army seized nine more peasants, who later were found tied up and shot in the head.²⁰² According to the Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean,²⁰³ the soldiers murdered sixty cooperative members in nearby villages; the bodies were discovered by the Cuyuapa River.²⁰⁴ Adrian Esquina, the president of the National Association of Indigenous Salvadorans, said he thought the peasants had been killed because a landowner, who had asked the cooperative for permission to build a road across its property, had been denied, and told friends in the army that the peasants were subversives.²⁰⁵

Three graduates of the School of Americas participated in this massacre: Colonel Napoleón Alvarado, First Lieutenant Francisco del

²⁰¹Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. El Salvador: Human Rights Dismissed, p. 49. EPICA. Condoning the Killing, p. 33.

²⁰²Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 357; Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, p. 49; EPICA. Condoning the Killing, p. 33.

²⁰³According to its web page, EPICA, founded in 1968, is an independent non-profit organization serving a diverse U.S. constituency of churches, grassroots organizations, and individual reporters. The web page says that by combining theological reflection, political analysis, and social action, EPICA provides important resources towards building a movement of faith-based solidarity among the people of the Americas. See <http://www.center1.com/epica/about.html>.

²⁰⁴EPICA. Condoning the Killing, p. 33; Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, El Salvador: Human Rights Dismissed, p. 50.

²⁰⁵Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, pp. 357-358.

Cid Díaz, and First Lieutenant Carlos Sasso Landaverry.²⁰⁶ This massacre occurred one month after President Reagan had made his third certification that the Salvadoran government was improving its respect for human rights. The Salvadoran government's human rights commission pledged to investigate the massacre and prosecute those responsible.²⁰⁷

At first glance, the coverage of the massacre at Las Hojas appeared responsible. It not only broke the pattern of media silence, but also contradicted the repeated denials by the U.S. and Salvadoran governments concerning noncombatant murders. Eleven articles and one letter to the editor were printed in a timely manner concerning the massacre at Las Hojas;²⁰⁸ however, three of these articles only

²⁰⁶<http://www.derechos.org/soaw/grads/elsal-not.html>. School of the Americas Watch. "Notorious Salvadoran School of the Americas Graduates." pp. 1-2 and p. 6.

²⁰⁷Cristobal Alemán, a member of the Human Rights Commission, carried out a four-month investigation into the massacre. While conducting his investigation, Alemán noticed armed men in civilian clothes following him, and he began to carry a revolver. See Edward Cody. "Massacre Probe Shows Weaknesses of Salvadoran Justice System." The Washington Post 7 July 1983, p. A19.

²⁰⁸Lydia Chavez. "Salvador Regime Acts Swiftly to Investigate Slaying Report." The New York Times. 28 February 1983 (as cited in ISLA, pp. 105-106). Arthur Allen. "El Salvador Pledges to Probe Killings of Indian Peasants." The Washington Post. 28 February 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 106). Anthony Lewis. "Why Are We in Vietnam?" The New York Times. 6 March 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 149). Adrian W. DeWind, and Stephen L. Kass. "A Salvadoran Massacre's Message to the United States." Letter. The New York Times. 10 March 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 131). Los Angeles Times. "Embassy Removes Six U.S. Trainers from Garrison Accused in Killing." The Washington Post. 12 March 1983, p. A20. United Press International. "Army Killed Seventy-Four, Villagers Say." Miami Herald. 30 March 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 132). John Corry. "T.V.: El Salvador on the Evening News." The New York Times. 22 March 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 155). Sam Dillon. "Salvadoran Tangles With Congressmen Over Human Rights." Miami Herald. 29 March 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 133). Associated Press. "Salvadorans Seize Two Officers in Massacre and Kidnapping." The New York Times. 12 April 1983, p. A11. Dillon, "Army Officer Reported Detained for Salvadoran Massacre." Miami Herald. 13 April 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 53).

devoted a few sentences to the massacre, and a fourth was only three paragraphs long.²⁰⁹ The articles also utilized many of the same sources, and therefore did not differ greatly from one another. Some important discrepancies in the reporting, such as the death toll, were not sufficiently followed up or analyzed. In July, two more articles were published that followed up on the Salvadoran government's investigation into the massacre; however, these stories did not address some of the inconsistencies in the earlier reports, such as the death toll, or disclose the purpose of the U.S. advisers.²¹⁰ None of the articles mentioned that School of the Americas graduates had taken part in the massacre.

The first two reports on this massacre, by Lydia Chavez for The New York Times and Arthur Allen for The Washington Post, were printed on February 28, 1983.²¹¹ Both reporters filed their stories from the region in which the massacre took place. The articles understandably contained many similarities: both mentioned the verified death toll of eighteen peasants, the method by which the peasants were seized by the army, the suspected local motive behind the killings, the accusation by the army that the murdered peasants were "subversives," the promise of a government investigation, and

²⁰⁹Lewis, "Why Are We in Vietnam?" Los Angeles Times. "Embassy Removes Six U.S. Trainers from Garrison Accused in Killing." Corry, (as cited in ISLA, p. 155). Associated Press. "Salvadorans Seize Two Officers in Massacre and Kidnapping."

²¹⁰Chavez, "Salvadoran Tied to Killings Now in Intelligence Job." The New York Times. 9 July 1983, p. A2. Cody, "Massacre Probe Shows Weaknesses of Salvadoran Justice System."

²¹¹Chavez, "Salvador Regime Acts Swiftly to Investigate Slaying Report," (as cited in ISLA, pp. 105-106). Allen, "El Salvador Pledges to Probe Killings of Indian Peasants," (as cited in ISLA, p. 106).

peasants' fear that participating in an investigation could lead to army reprisals.

Some subtle but important differences existed between the two stories. Chavez noted in her article that "the speed with which the investigation [into the massacre] was begun was unusual for El Salvador."²¹² Chavez could have taken this a step further and stated that the Salvadoran government's public investigation into a peasant massacre might have been the first ever. Promises of investigations into human rights abuses had been made in the past; for example, when the four U.S. churchwomen had been murdered in 1980. According to Amnesty International, however, at this time the Salvadoran government never had conducted a genuine investigation into any of the thousands of cases of human rights violations.²¹³

Chavez did refer to the alleged death toll of seventy-four, which the residents at Las Hojas had told the coordinator of the peasants' union, but reported that "no mass grave or other hard evidence could be found to indicate that a massacre of that dimension had occurred."²¹⁴ Perhaps Chavez should have modified that statement to read "...no hard evidence exists at this time," instead of writing that proof did not exist. Often, mass graves seemed to be difficult to find in El Salvador. In addition, the massacre at Las Hojas took place by a river, which could have carried the bodies away, and the peasants were extremely frightened about assisting in any way with an investigation; they knew all too well the

²¹²Chavez, "Salvador Regime Acts Swiftly to Investigate Slaying Report."

²¹³Amnesty International. Summary of Amnesty International's Current Concerns in El Salvador. January 1982, p. 3.

²¹⁴Chavez, "Salvador Regime Acts Swiftly to Investigate Slaying Report."

consequences of assisting a probe into the human rights record of the military.

In his story for The Washington Post, Allen did not refer to the higher death toll, but he did report that it was the Jaguar Battalion, which at the time had ten U.S. advisors training them, that had been responsible for the massacre.²¹⁵ The serious implications of the presence of U.S. advisors among a battalion that had committed a massacre cannot be understated. Chavez mentioned the ten advisors, but did not link them with the Jaguar Battalion. Neither article made the connection among the presence of U.S. military advisors, the complicity of U.S.-trained Salvadoran officers in the Las Hojas massacre, and the involvement of U.S.-trained Salvadoran military officers in the massacre at El Mozote. Conspicuously missing from both of these stories were any comments by the U.S. embassy, the State Department, or the Reagan administration.

The next two pieces that mentioned the massacre, a column by Anthony Lewis and a letter to the editor, in The New York Times, used the incident as an example of how U.S. foreign policy in the region was ill-equipped to bring about a peaceful solution to social unrest in El Salvador.²¹⁶ The heart of Lewis' argument was that from the U.S. government's perspective, increased U.S. military aid and training were believed to be the solution for ending the Salvadoran civil war. The results of implementing this solution, however, were more civilian deaths and increasing violence. The column provided

²¹⁵Allen, (as cited in ISLA, p. 106).

²¹⁶Lewis, "Why Are We in Vietnam?" (as cited in ISLA, p. 149). DeWind and Kass. "A Salvadoran Massacre's Message to the United States," (as cited in ISLA, p. 131).

no new information concerning the perpetrators of the massacre, the death tolls, or the Salvadoran investigation into the incident. The letter to the editor that appeared in The New York Times four days later made similar points.

On March 12, 1983, The Washington Post printed a short story from the Los Angeles Times wire service. This story, which was only two inches long, provided a very brief update on the Las Hojas case.²¹⁷ The article disclosed that "six American military trainers have been withdrawn by the U.S. embassy from an Army garrison whose soldiers [were] believed to have participated in a massacre of civilians last month." The story does not mention what the advisors were doing, why they were removed, which garrison they were training, or how many advisors were operating in the area. Previous articles had mentioned the presence of ten advisors. What was the significance of their removal? Was it a subtle acknowledgment of U.S. complicity in the massacre? Why were four trainers left with the garrison? Why were correspondents from the Post or any other major U.S. news medium, not covering this story? The omission of information about these questions, and the use of unnamed correspondents, are additional indications that in the wake of U.S. government attacks on reporters who covered the Mozote massacre, about reporters feared reprisals if they carried out hard-hitting reporting of human rights violations in El Salvador.

The New York Times ran a story by its television critic, John Corry, on March 22 that criticized the coverage of El Salvador by

²¹⁷Los Angeles Times. "Embassy Removes Six U.S. Trainers from Garrison Accused in Killings." The Washington Post. 12 March 1983, p. A20.

television news programs.²¹⁸ Although it was not mentioned by name or location, the article described an NBC broadcast that made an ambiguous reference to the massacre at Las Hojas: "In El Salvador tonight, at least eighteen peasants are dead, executed by automatic weapons." Corry criticized the weak reference to the timing and location of a peasant massacre, but he did not make it clear enough to the reader that the television broadcast was making a feeble attempt to disclose the massacre at Las Hojas. Corry also did not make any references to the problems of the print media's previous reports on massacres in El Salvador.

Sam Dillon wrote a story for the Miami Herald that referred to the massacre at Las Hojas.²¹⁹ Two-thirds of this article focused on a confrontation between three U.S. Congressmen, Representatives James Oberstar (D., Minn.), Bill Richardson (D., N.M.), and James Jeffords (R., Vt.), and Salvadoran Defense Minister General José Guillermo García over the recent arrests of two U.S. journalists.²²⁰ The last three inches of the article recapped the motive for the Las Hojas massacre and the existence of eighteen victims. It also contained Colonel González's statement that the dead peasants were actually leftist guerrillas killed in a clash with the army, and Representative Oberstar's reply to the Defense Minister's statement: "Frankly, we don't believe his story."²²¹ Unfortunately, the rest of

²¹⁸Corry, "TV: El Salvador on the Evening News."

²¹⁹Dillon, "Salvadoran Tangles with Congressman Over Human Rights."

²²⁰The two radio reporters were arrested by the treasury police, but not charged with any crime; they were under investigation for "suspicion of subversive contact." The police believed the reporters discussed weapons shipments with the guerrillas, which both reporters vehemently denied. See Dillon, "Salvadoran Tangles With Congressman Over Human Rights."

²²¹Dillon, "Salvadoran Tangles With Congressman Over Human Rights."

the U.S. press did not display the same tenacity as Congressman Oberstar, and simply reported the Colonel's comments without questioning them. For example, the following United Press International story did not point out the inconsistency between the Colonel's version of events, and that of journalists' and peasants'.

On March 30, the Miami Herald carried a story from United Press International entitled, "Army Killed Seventy-Four Peasants, Villagers Say."²²² Unfortunately, this article raised more questions than it answered. The story started off with this sentence: "Survivors of an alleged army massacre Tuesday told visiting U.S. congressmen that soldiers rounded up seventy-four peasants, tied their hands behind their backs and shot them in the head." This massacre already had been documented by this time, so it was no longer "alleged." The point that had not been made clear was whether the death toll was eighteen or seventy-four. This article did not mention the evidence of eighteen victims, which had been cited in earlier articles. This story also alluded to the meeting among Representatives Bill Richardson, James Oberstar, and Colonel González.

The Colonel's statement that the victims were guerrillas contradicted his earlier explanation for the peasant's deaths cited in Chavez's article. At that time, he claimed the murdered farmers were on a list of subversives.²²³ Now, the Salvadoran army was changing its story right before the eyes and ears of the U.S. press, claiming that a military battle had taken place instead of a massacre

²²²United Press International. Army Killed Seventy-Four, Villagers Say."

²²³Chavez, "Salvador Regime Acts Swiftly to Investigate Slaying Reports."

of civilians. As mentioned earlier, the first eighteen bodies that were found by the Cuyuapa River had been tied up and shot at close range; these victims could not have participated in a battle while bound. Reporters did not challenge the apparent contradiction made by the colonel. Once again, the press neither challenged the turnabout nor reported it. This was similar to the lack of critical questioning of statements by the U.S. embassy that were diametrically opposed to the initial reports of the massacre at El Mozote.

This United Press International story also disclosed that when the Congressmen returned to Washington from their fact-finding mission, they planned to hold a news conference and review their findings. If this news conference took place, one would not know it from reading the press coverage of three of the most important U.S. newspapers--the conference simply was not covered.

The next two articles about the massacre at Las Hojas were an Associated Press report published in The New York Times on April 12, and an article by Sam Dillon in the Miami Herald on April 13.²²⁴ The Associated Press story simply stated that Captain Salvador Figueroa Morales and another officer had been arrested for the "slaying of at least eighteen peasants on February 22 in Sonsonate."²²⁵ Dillon's article also revealed the identity of Captain Figueroa and reviewed the charges: "Figueroa has been accused by several international and Salvadoran investigators of leading some two hundred troops who tied up and shot to death scores of men,

²²⁴Associated Press. "Salvadorans Seize Two Officers in Massacre and Kidnapping." Dillon, "Army Officer Reported Detained for Salvadoran Massacre."

²²⁵Associated Press. "Salvadorans Seize Two Officers in Massacre and Kidnapping."

women and children on and around the Las Hojas cooperative farm...."

Dillon also tried to resolve the death toll discrepancy. He wrote that eighteen bodies had been formally identified, but as many as fifty-six other bodies had been found scattered around the area--many of which were unidentifiable because they had been partially eaten by dogs and vultures.²²⁶ The article does not include any opinions from the U.S. government regarding the arrest, the additional fifty-six bodies that had been found, or the role of the U.S. advisers in the Sonsonate department.

After Captain Figueroa had been placed under arrest, his commanding officer at Sonsonate conducted his own investigation into the massacre. The commanding officer found that Figueroa and his troops were not guilty of misconduct and that the charges against his troops were part of a Communist plot by the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission and the National Association of Indigenous Salvadorans.²²⁷ The praise that the U.S. press had bestowed on the Salvadoran government for responding quickly and investigating the massacre turned out to be unwarranted. Figueroa had spent a short amount of time in custody, but by July 1983 he had been promoted to head of intelligence in the Sonsonate Department.²²⁸ These articles were printed about two weeks before Reagan was required

²²⁶Dillon, "Army Officer Reported Detained for Salvadoran Massacre."

²²⁷Bonner, Weakness and Deceit, p. 358; Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. El Salvador: Human Rights Dismissed, p. 51.

²²⁸Figueroa was arrested in April, but it was not clear in the articles whether he had spent one or two months in custody. Chavez, "Salvadoran Tied to Killings Now in Intelligence Job." p. A2. Cody, "Massacre Probe Show Weaknesses of Salvadoran Justice System."

to certify El Salvador's progress on human rights; however, these stories did not point out that the massacre at Las Hojas was a prime example of why certification should not be enacted, or that a pattern existed between continued U.S. military aid and human rights violations committed by U.S.-trained and supplied Salvadoran troops. In addition, these last two articles about the Las Hojas massacre did not mention the role of the ten U.S. advisers or resolve the different reports regarding whether eighteen or seventy-four noncombatants had been killed by the army.

Tenango and Guadalupe in the Cuscatlán Department

On March 1, 1983, following the bombing and rocketing of the area by the Salvadoran air force, the Atlácatl Battalion invaded the villages of Tenango and Guadalupe, located in the Cuscatlán Department; one hundred and fifty civilians were killed.²²⁹ Although the massacre took place in two neighboring villages, the incident was referred to as one human rights violation case. Despite the presence of hundreds of journalists, who were in El Salvador to cover the upcoming presidential election, not a single article was published in the Miami Herald, The New York Times, or The Washington Post concerning this massacre. Coverage in these newspapers from March through May focused on the Salvadoran presidential election, a visit by the Pope, and President Reagan's requests for increased U.S. military aid to El Salvador. The massacre was covered in the Dallas Morning News, by a reporter named Michael J. Luhan, who formerly had worked for the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, a non-profit

²²⁹EPICA. Condoning the Killing, p. 35.

research and policy analysis group.²³⁰ Luhan reported that the planes that carried out the attack were A37B Dragonflies. This type of aircraft, which can carry up to 5,680 pounds of ordnance, (see Appendix)²³¹ were part of the U.S. military assistance supplied to the Salvadoran air force.²³²

The lack of coverage of the massacre in the Cuscatlán Department has three possible explanations. First, memories of the castigation of reporters who wrote about the El Mozote massacre were still fresh in the minds of journalists. The El Mozote case had the effect of putting the press back in line; the initiative to analyze critically the U.S. government's version of events had been repressed by the Reagan administration's attack on Bonner and Guillermprieto. According to Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky during the election period, the U.S. news media closely followed the U.S. government's agenda.²³³ For example, the possible creation of a climate of fear by the repeated killings of civilians on a massive scale by the army and its allies was rarely even alluded to by the U.S. news media.²³⁴ The press even had a current human rights atrocity, the massacre in Cuscatlán, that could have been used to question assertions by the Reagan administration that El Salvador was in the process of

²³⁰Series of articles by Michael J. Luhan. Dallas Morning News. 9-13 March, 1983, as cited in Americas Watch and American Civil Liberties Union. "Report on Human Rights in El Salvador." Third Supplement. 19 July 1983, pp. 60-61.

²³¹NACLA. "Honduras/Nicaragua--War Without Winners." Report on the Americas. September-October 1982, p. 11.

²³²Six Dragonfly A37Bs were part of U.S. military aid. See: Americas Watch and American Civil Liberties Union. "Report on Human Rights in El Salvador." Third Supplement, p. 63; Edward Cody. "U.S. Planes Have Double-Edged Effect in Salvadoran War." The Washington Post. 15 February 1983, p. A9.

²³³Herman and Chomsky, p. 107.

²³⁴Herman and Chomsky, p. 108. For a detailed analysis of elections in El Salvador, see Herman and Chomsky, pp. 87-142.

becoming a democracy. The fact that the U.S.-trained Atlacatl Battalion took part in this massacre would have given added weight to the idea that U.S. policy not only was ineffective, but also was doing the opposite of what it claimed: the armed forces' respect for human rights had diminished, rather than improved, as a result of U.S. military assistance.

Second, as mentioned earlier, the press was more concerned with the fate of North American victims of human rights abuses than Salvadoran peasant victims. For example, the murder of the four U.S. churchwomen still was receiving thorough media attention in March 1983,²³⁵ but not a single piece was published that month about the Cuscatlán massacre, in which one hundred and fifty noncombatants were murdered.

Finally, it was much easier for journalists to report on the presidential election, which involved a massive public relations effort by the U.S. and Salvadoran governments.²³⁶ The U.S. government was trying to prove to the world that elections symbolized the Salvadoran government's move towards democracy. Therefore, plenty of sound bites, press packets, and government officials were available to U.S. reporters.

²³⁵See, for example, Stephen Kinzer. "Salvador Judge Delays Trials of Five in Nuns' Slaying." The New York Times. 17 March 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 126). "The Nuns' Case." Editorial. The Washington Post. 18 March 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 128). Bernard Gwertzman. "The Company It Keeps Puts U.S. on the Spot Once Again." The New York Times. 27 March 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 87).

²³⁶Herman and Chomsky refer to these types of electoral contests as "demonstration elections," which were strongly supported by the United States for image-enhancing purposes. See Manufacturing Consent. p. 87.

Tenancingo in the Cuscatlán Department

On September 28, 1983, U.S.-supplied Dragonfly aircraft were again used by the Salvadoran air force to massacre civilians. It was the third incident in 1983 that involved the use of U.S. military training or hardware in noncombatant deaths. The massacre at Tenancingo provided more evidence of the failure of U.S. training, which was the cornerstone of the Reagan administration's strategy to end the Salvadoran civil war, while improving the Salvadoran military's respect for human rights.

After being overrun by guerrillas in the village of Tenancingo, the Salvadoran army and members of the Atlácatl Battalion called in a bombing run that resulted in the deaths of fifty civilians.²³⁷ Within one week, four articles were published that dealt with the incident.²³⁸ The massacre was reported in a timely manner, but the coverage did not adequately put the events in context, and the reporting left unanswered questions.

The first article to mention the civilian massacre in Tenancingo appeared in the Miami Herald on September 28, 1983, and focused on peasant protests against rightist attacks on land reform. It mentioned the massacre in the closing paragraphs.²³⁹ Reporter Sam Dillon disclosed that "relief workers had reported dozens of civilian

²³⁷EPICA. Condoning the Killing, p. 37; Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Human Rights Dismissed, p. 45.

²³⁸Dillon, "Salvadoran Peasants Protest Opponents of Land Reform." Miami Herald. 28 September 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 66). Associated Press. "Salvadoran Colonel Apologizes for Bombs." The Washington Post. 29 September 1983, p. A28. Dillon, "U.S. Officials in Salvador Lament Bombing Mistake." Miami Herald. 1 October 1983 (as cited in ISLA, pp. 49-50). Cody, "Rebels Return to the Offensive in El Salvador." The Washington Post. 7 October 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 52).

²³⁹Dillon, "Salvadoran Peasants Protest Opponents of Land Reform."

casualties in Tenancingo after a U.S.-supplied A37B air force jet bombed the town." He cited U.S. television reporters who witnessed the air attack and called the bombing "indiscriminate." This article offered no analysis of the event, but did introduce the story to the public.

The second article that dealt with this massacre revealed that Colonel Domingo Monterrosa had apologized for the bombings and had claimed that "the situation was an exception."²⁴⁰ The article did not address Monterrosa's claim; however, the bombing of civilians was not an exceptional event. For example, on August 24, 1982, three hundred noncombatants were killed, and on March 1, 1983 one hundred and fifty civilians were murdered in bombing runs by U.S.-supplied planes. In addition, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights reported that Monterrosa also defended the pilot's actions, which he said resulted from interference with government radio signals.²⁴¹ The story did not cover this claim. The article did mention that the aircraft used in this bombing run was the A37B Dragonfly, a type of plane supplied as part of the U.S. military aid package, and that the U.S. embassy would investigate reports of indiscriminate bombing by U.S.-supplied planes. Neither this nor any other story mentioned when this investigation would begin, and no references to this investigation appeared in the mainstream press during the remainder of 1983.

²⁴⁰Associated Press. "Salvadoran Colonel Apologizes for Bombs."

²⁴¹Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Human Rights Dismissed, p. 45.

The third story, "U.S. Officials in Salvador Lament Bombing Mistake," was the only one to focus solely on the massacre.²⁴² Dillon was the first and only journalist to explain that not only were the planes in the raid supplied by the United States, but also that the pilots who carried out the raid had been trained at a U.S. air force base in Panama. The story also contained an anonymous quote from a U.S. official, who called the bombing a "serious mistake."²⁴³

This article also referred to Monterrosa's apology and claim that the bombing of civilians was "an exception."²⁴⁴ Dillon referred to one previous incident involving the bombing of civilians during combat in the village of Berlín in the Usulután Department, and stated that this "was the third known government air strike against Salvadoran towns in eight months."²⁴⁵ Dillon did not make it clear that these previous bombings had resulted in hundreds of civilian casualties, or that the Tenancingo case was another example of U.S.-trained troops carrying out a massacre of peasants. Unfortunately, these correlations had not been reported since the El Mozote massacre story.

The last article to cover this massacre was written by Edward Cody for The Washington Post.²⁴⁶ This story devoted only three sentences to the civilian massacre at Tenancingo--basically it was a brief recap--and did not provide any new information or details.

²⁴²Dillon, "U.S. Officials in Salvador Lament Bombing Mistake."

²⁴³Dillon, "U.S. Officials in Salvador Lament Bombing Mistake."

²⁴⁴Dillon, "U.S. Officials in Salvador Lament Bombing Mistake."

²⁴⁵Dillon, "U.S. Officials in Salvador Lament Bombing Mistake."

²⁴⁶Cody, "Rebels Return to the Offensive in El Salvador."

None of these articles mentioned Monterrosa's claim that the bombing of civilians occurred because of guerrilla interference with government radio signals.²⁴⁷ In addition, evidence provided by the guerrillas, that the army had intentionally bombed civilians, also was not reported by the U.S. press. The guerrillas had intercepted a radio communication from Colonel Adolfo Blandón, in which he instructed the air force pilots to bomb civilian targets because "anybody standing out there is an enemy."²⁴⁸

Copapayo Massacre, Cuscatlán Department

The massacre at Copapayo was the last known civilian massacre in 1983. The incident involved Copapayo and the neighboring towns of San Nicolás and La Escopeta. As with the El Mozote massacre, which also involved neighboring towns, this massacre was named after only one of the towns where the incident took place. The Copapayo massacre had many similarities with earlier peasant massacres: the U.S.-trained Atlácatl Battalion, with support from the air force, perpetrated the massacre, and dozens of people were killed as they tried to escape the initial attack.²⁴⁹ U.S. press coverage of the Copapayo massacre also continued the trend of reports on peasant massacres in the U.S. mainstream press. All three articles concerning this massacre were: attributed to wire services instead of named reporters; had contradictory information about the number of victims; and had no comments from the U.S. embassy or

²⁴⁷Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Human Rights Dismissed, p. 45.

²⁴⁸Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Human Rights Dismissed, p. 46.

²⁴⁹EPICA. Condoning the Killing, p. 39.

the Reagan administration.²⁵⁰ No reports provided follow-up information after these articles appeared.

On November 4, 1983, the Atlácatl Battalion carried out a so-called guerrilla sweep in Copapayo, San Nicolás, and La Escopeta. One hundred and eighteen noncombatants were killed;²⁵¹ this was the third civilian massacre in the Cuscatlán Department in 1983. Following reports of the massacre on Radio Venceremos, six journalists--including: two U.S., two Mexican, and two British citizens--traveled to the massacre sites.²⁵² The two U.S. reporters were identified as Reuters correspondents; however, no Reuters reports on the Copapayo massacre appeared in any of three newspapers analyzed in this paper.

Nevertheless, villagers gave the six reporters a list of one hundred and eighteen civilian victims from the military operation, and showed them one house that contained twenty dead bodies as well as some bomb craters.²⁵³ It seemed as if the peasants knew the

²⁵⁰Associated Press. "Salvadoran Troops Reported to Kill 100 Rebel Supporters." The New York Times. 18 November 1983, p. A12; Herald Wire Services. "Salvador Villagers Claim Troops Shot Unarmed Leftist Supporters." Miami Herald. 18 November 1983 (as cited in ISLA, p. 57); and News Services and Staff Reports. "Salvadoran Army Units Accused of Causing Deaths of 50 Civilians." The Washington Post. 19 November 1983, p. A21.

²⁵¹EPICA. Condoning the Killing, p. 39. Americas Watch reported the figure as 117. See Americas Watch and American Civil Liberties Union. "As Bad as Ever: A Report on Human Rights in El Salvador." January 31, 1984. New York: Americas Watch, 1984. p. 20; and Americas Watch. "Managing the Facts: How the Administration Deals with Reports of Human Rights Abuses in El Salvador." New York: Americas Watch, 1985. p. 8. The difference may be explained by the death of a man who had taken reporters to the site of this massacre. Therefore, he was not a direct casualty, but his death came as a result of his effort to bring news of the massacre to global attention.

²⁵²Associated Press, "Salvadoran Troops Reported to Kill 100 Rebel Supporters"; and Herald Wire Services, "Salvador Villagers Claim Troops Shot Unarmed Leftist Supporters."

²⁵³Associated Press, "Salvadoran Troops Reported to Kill 100 Rebel Supporters"; Herald Wire Services, "Salvador Villagers Claim Troops Shot Unarmed Leftist

reporters needed to see hard evidence to convince both them and their readers what had occurred had been a massacre of civilians, not a successful guerrilla sweep, as the army claimed. Although the villagers provided reporters with evidence that suggested the occurrence of a massacre, U.S. press coverage was sparse and incomplete.

Two of the three articles that were written about the Copapayo massacre were almost identical.²⁵⁴ Both reports were published on November 18, and they included almost the exact same wording and information. Both articles mentioned that the villagers had given reporters a list of the victims; that the U.S.-trained Atlácatl Battalion was responsible for the massacre; that the victims had surrendered to the army and were herded into house and killed by submachine-gun fire and grenades; that the reporters saw a house with twenty casualties inside; and craters from aerial bombing; and that six journalists from three different countries had viewed the massacre site.

The third article about the Copapayo massacre was printed on November 19 in The Washington Post.²⁵⁵ In this story, which appeared in the "Around the World" section, the it was reported that the death toll was only fifty, compared to the villagers' claim of one hundred and eighteen. This story also contained the same information as the previous two articles concerning the identity of

Supporters"; and News Services and Staff Reports, "Salvadoran Army Units Accused of Causing Deaths of 50 Civilians."

²⁵⁴Associated Press, "Salvadoran Troops Reported to Kill 100 Rebel Supporters"; Herald Wire Services, "Salvador Villagers Claim Troops Shot Unarmed Leftist Supporters."

²⁵⁵News Services and Staff Reports, "Salvadoran Army Units Accused of Causing Deaths of Fifty Civilians."

the perpetrators of the massacre, and the house containing twenty casualties. Unlike the other two stories, this article contained part of a communiqué by the Salvadoran army that explained their version of events: "The casualties of the terrorists came about when a column [of guerrillas] was surprised on the shore of the lake by the Atlácatl Battalion."²⁵⁶

The article also contained part of an interview with the leader of the Atlácatl Battalion that completely discredited the army communiqué. Colonel Monterrosa claimed that about thirty civilians had drowned after jumping into the lake to get away from crossfire.²⁵⁷ The colonel admitted that the thirty people who had drowned were civilians and not guerrillas. In addition, Colonel Monterrosa's implication that casualties resulted from fleeing a battle between the army and guerrillas was a common practice among the Salvadoran military. In the massacres at El Mozote and at Los Cerros de San Pedro, the army had blamed the guerrillas for the deaths of noncombatants.

The U.S. press coverage missed three important points relating to the Copapayo massacre. First, after adamantly denying the occurrence of a civilian massacre for weeks, Colonel Monterrosa finally admitted that a massacre had taken place. The colonel offered a very weak explanation: "[his troops had] confused the civilian population with guerrillas that operate in that zone."²⁵⁸ It is

²⁵⁶News Services and Staff Reports, "Salvadoran Army Units Accused of Causing Deaths of Fifty Civilians."

²⁵⁷News Services and Staff Reports, "Salvadoran Army Units Accused of Causing Deaths of Fifty Civilians."

²⁵⁸White, p. 173. In the beginning of December 1983, Colonel Monterrosa was promoted to commander of the Third Brigade, and three neighboring detachments. This promotion gave the colonel control over 6,000 soldiers. See:

difficult to imagine how an army colonel could be unable to differentiate armed soldiers from unarmed civilians. Nonetheless, the U.S. press did not report the Colonel's admission that his troops had massacred noncombatants in Copapayo.

A second important part of the story that the U.S. press failed to report dealt with the Atlácatl Battalion. At least the U.S. press did state that the Atlácatl Battalion was responsible for the deaths of civilians, but the reporters failed to make the connection with previous atrocities committed by the Battalion. The massacres at El Mozote, Tenango and Guadalupe, and Tenancingo all involved the Atlácatl Battalion. Copapayo was the fourth civilian massacre in two years that the Battalion had perpetrated. A very clear pattern was evident that showed the presence of the Atlácatl Battalion sometime resulted in the deaths of civilians, but the press repeatedly failed to report this connection.

A third element of the inadequate U.S. press coverage about the Copapayo massacre involved the fact that U.S. policy was ineffective in ameliorating the Salvadoran government's lack of respect for human rights. The Copapayo massacre was another example of the failure of U.S. military training to improve the army's human rights record. The massacre also illustrated that Reagan's certifications of El Salvador were false and misleading. The U.S. press did not report either of these facts.

Dillon, "Salvadoran Shuffle Thrusts Death Squads into Combat." Miami Herald. 5 December 1983 (as cited in ISLA, pp. 36-38). This article did not make any references to the four peasant massacres--at El Mozote, Tenango and Guadalupe, Tenancingo, and Copapayo--that the Atlácatl Battalion was involved in between December 1981 and December 1983.

Apparently, the Reagan administration realized that it could no longer maintain the charade of the certification process in the face of repeated human rights abuses by the Salvadoran military. On November 30, 1983, just three-and-one-half weeks after the Copapayo massacre, Reagan pocket vetoed the law requiring the extension of the certification process. If U.S. press coverage of civilian massacres had been more thorough during the preceding three years, the certification process might have ended sooner. Certification misled members of the U.S. public into thinking that the Salvadoran government had improved its treatment of human rights, and therefore deserved U.S. military aid. The inadequate coverage of peasant massacres after El Mozote suggested that U.S. reporters still had reservations about conducting extensive investigations into Salvadoran human rights abuses involving peasants. The Reagan administration tried to obstruct reporting on peasant massacres by attacking journalists and their stories; however, other U.S. organizations were able to obtain detailed information about these massacres.

**Chapter IV: Alternative News Sources with Information on
Massacres in El Salvador**

Starting in the mid-1970s, human rights activists organized non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Americas Watch, Amnesty International, Council on Hemispheric Affairs, Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean, and the Washington Office on Latin America.²⁵⁹ These NGOs, which were politically non-aligned, focused on promoting human rights around the world.²⁶⁰ They used various methods to achieve this goal, including newsletters, annual reports, press releases, and public discussions. NGOs obtained their information about human rights violations in Central America from numerous sources. NGO officials interviewed representatives of different segments of society in foreign countries, including government officials, military officers, soldiers, guerrillas, union leaders, indigenous groups, peasants, religious leaders, relatives of people who had been killed or "disappeared," survivors of abuses, refugees, and local grassroots organizers. Other information-gathering methods included: listening to short-wave radio, reading local newspapers, site visits, and surfing the Internet.

²⁵⁹Materials from the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) will not be used in this paper. Unfortunately, the current WOLA associates on El Salvador, Jenny Pearlman and Geof Thale, were unable and/or unwilling to provide any useful assistance regarding WOLA's response to peasant massacres in El Salvador. Joe Eldridge, one of the founding members of WOLA and now a professor at American University, was unavailable for comment. In addition, Ms. Pearlman stated that WOLA's storage facility had been flooded, so the organization did not have any copies of any work done before 1990.

²⁶⁰For the specific mandates of these NGOs, access these web sites: for Amnesty International, <http://www.amnesty.org/>; for Americas Watch, <http://www.hrw.org/index.html>; for the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, <http://www.coha.org/>; for the Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean, see <http://www.center1.com/epica/about.html>.

NGOs were very thorough in their efforts to verify allegations of human rights abuses.

Unfortunately, the U.S. press failed to take advantage of these vast resources of information on peasant massacres. At the very least, NGOs compiled annual reports regarding the treatment of human rights by governments, which were replete with examples. Usually, NGOs wrote updates to their annual reports as well as shorter reports detailing specific cases or recurring trends throughout the year. Unlike the U.S. press, the purpose of these organizations was not to provide daily reports to inform U.S. citizens and assist them in evaluating U.S. government policy. Nevertheless, the reports were produced on a regular basis, and the U.S. press could have used the NGOs to help verify reports of abuses or to obtain details concerning such abuses. NGOs had information that would have helped the U.S. public judge the performance of its government; however, the press failed to gather this information and present it to citizens. In order to illustrate the fact that details concerning peasant massacres in El Salvador were available, reports, books, and newsletters from Amnesty International, Americas Watch, The Council on Hemispheric Affairs, and the Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean will be analyzed. The findings will be presented in the chronological order in which the massacres occurred.

El Mozote (December 1981)

Amnesty International provided excellent coverage of human rights violations in El Salvador. In January 1982, Amnesty disclosed that all branches of the Salvadoran security forces were responsible for human rights abuses aimed at civilian members of the population who were not participating in guerrilla activity.²⁶¹ The following month, Amnesty International's work was widely cited among groups protesting U.S. policy in El Salvador. The National Council of Churches, along with a group of religious leaders from different denominations (including Jews, Roman Catholics, Methodists, Protestants, and Episcopalians), cited an Amnesty report that disclosed mass violations of human rights in El Salvador, and sent a letter to President Reagan requesting an end to military aid to El Salvador.²⁶² Only The Washington Post mentioned the existence of Amnesty's report, but did not explore the content of the report.

The January 12, 1982, edition of COHA's biweekly newsletter disclosed that numerous sources agreed that "the vast majority of [civilian] killings [were] attributable to the combined armed forces (Army, Treasury Police, National Guard, and the National Police) and to right-wing paramilitary organizations acting with the armed forces' complicity."²⁶³ Although it did not disclose any specific information about the massacre at El Mozote, the newsletter's contention that responsibility for most human rights violations lay

²⁶¹Amnesty International. Summary of Amnesty International's Current Concerns in El Salvador. January 1982, p. 1.

²⁶²United Press International. "Clergymen Urge End to Salvador Aid." The Washington Post. 22 February 1982, p. A16.

²⁶³COHA. "Human Rights in Latin America--1981." Washington Report on the Hemisphere. 12 January 1982, p. 4.

with the Salvadoran armed forces contradicted the claims by Reagan officials that human rights abuses were committed by both the "extreme" left and right, and that the Salvadoran government was not complicit in these activities. This information from COHA could have provided reporters with a place to start investigating the Reagan administration's claims that the Salvadoran government was improving its respect for human rights.

The Americas Watch series, "Reports on Human Rights in El Salvador," has provided some of the most detailed information concerning peasant massacres. The January 26, 1982 report did not mention the massacre at El Mozote. The most likely explanation for this omission was that the book already was at press by the time news of the massacre was published. This report did a thorough job of describing the environment in which peasant massacres were taking place and who was responsible. In addition, the report utilized the records of Socorro Jurídico, which had documented thousands of cases of atrocities perpetrated against the campesino population, such as the Sumpul River massacre in May 1980 and the Cabanas massacre in November 1981.²⁶⁴

The February 9, 1982, edition of the COHA Report on the Hemisphere discussed the falsity of President Reagan's certification that the Salvadoran government was improving its respect for and treatment of human rights. The article on certification also referred

²⁶⁴Americas Watch. Report on Human Rights in El Salvador. New York: Vintage Books, 1982. pp. 51-53. Americas Watch also produced an excellent report on the El Mozote massacre on 4 March, 1992 entitled, "The Massacre at El Mozote: The Need to Remember," but to ensure a fair comparison with press coverage, only NGO reports published about the time of the massacre will be discussed in detail.

to a January 11, 1982, article in The New York Times by Raymond Bonner, which revealed that U.S. advisors had witnessed training sessions by the Salvadoran army in which two children were tortured and killed "for the educational benefit of the troops."²⁶⁵ Another story in the February 9, 1982 COHA report, entitled, "U.S. Scholar Witnesses Salvadoran Massacre," did not mention El Mozote, but did discuss another massacre committed by the Atlácatl Battalion. This article described the experiences of Philippe Bourgois, who had witnessed (and nearly been a victim of) a massacre in the Cabanas Department on November 11, 1981, and the "hammer and anvil" maneuvers of the Atlácatl Battalion, which had perpetrated the massacre.²⁶⁶ Although these articles did not refer to Bonner's most recent article concerning the El Mozote massacre, the stories could have served as a signal to reporters to intensify their investigation into the success of U.S. foreign policy, and the treatment of human rights by the Salvadoran government.

In March 1982, an Amnesty International report called "El Salvador: A Gross and Consistent Pattern of Human Rights Abuses," mentioned that the Atlácatl Battalion repeatedly had been named and implicated in massive killings of noncombatant peasants in the Salvadoran countryside, including reports of the deaths of hundreds

²⁶⁵COHA. "Certifying the Uncertifiable." Washington Report on the Hemisphere. 9 February 1982, p. 3.

²⁶⁶COHA. "U.S. Scholar Witnesses Salvadoran Massacre." 9 February 1982, pp. 4-5. Bourgois, who was a 1978 Harvard graduate and at the time this article was published a Stanford University doctoral student, had traveled to the Cabanas Department to explore the possibility of carrying out an anthropological fieldwork project.

of peasants in Morazán in December 1981.²⁶⁷ As noted earlier, in March 1982, U.S. press coverage of the massacre at El Mozote dwindled away; however, at the same time, NGOs still were gathering information and reporting on the massacre.

The March 9, 1982 issue of Washington Report on the Hemisphere contained an article that mentioned the El Mozote massacre. A front-page story called, "Media War Over Salvador," provided a well-documented account of the "battle for public credibility" regarding coverage of events in El Salvador.²⁶⁸ The article described the attacks on reporters, non-governmental organizations, and church groups for supposedly providing misleading information concerning human rights abuses in El Salvador. While mentioning the credentials of the principal U.S. reporters in El Salvador from The New York Times and The Washington Post, the article stated that "Guillermoprieto and Bonner" reported the December massacre of several hundred civilians by the army in Morazán...."²⁶⁹ The newsletter described a consistent pattern of human rights abuses committed by the Salvadoran armed forces, and condemned El Salvador (along with Guatemala) as "the worst human rights violator in Latin America."²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷Amnesty International. "El Salvador: A Gross and Consistent Pattern of Human Rights Abuses." Amnesty International Newsletter. Supplement. March 1982, p. 5.

²⁶⁸COHA. "Media War Over Salvador," pp. 1 and 6.

²⁶⁹COHA. "Media War Over Salvador," p. 6.

²⁷⁰Unfortunately, The author has been unable to obtain a copy of this report from COHA, despite a visit to its headquarters. A New York Times article from 3 January 1984 mentioned that for the fourth year in a row, COHA had singled out Guatemala and El Salvador "as the worst human rights violators in Latin America." Therefore, I have inferred that such a report existed in 1982. See Associated Press. "Private Group Assesses Latin Record on Rights." The New York Times. 3 January 1984, p. A15.

Americas Watch released another report in June 1982, "U.S. Reporting on Human Rights in El Salvador: Methodology at Odds with Knowledge."²⁷¹ As the title implied, the report compared how information on human rights abuses was gathered by the U.S. government and Socorro Jurídico, and how well these methodologies succeeded in finding the truth. The El Mozote massacre was utilized as a case study for this report. Substantial details regarding the U.S. embassy investigation into the massacre²⁷² and witnesses' testimony about the Atlácatl Battalion's culpability in the massacre appeared in this report.²⁷³

On July 20, 1982, Americas Watch produced a "Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador."²⁷⁴ The supplement focused on the misleading nature of the Reagan administration certification process, and included details and statistics about blatant human rights violations committed by the Salvadoran army and its affiliated paramilitary groups. This report provided an extremely detailed account of what transpired at El Mozote: It provided a moment-by-moment scenario of how the military gathered the villagers together and began to murder women, children, and the

²⁷¹Americas Watch. "U.S. Reporting on Human Rights in El Salvador: Methodology at Odds with Knowledge." New York: Americas Watch, 1982.

²⁷²Americas Watch. "U.S. Reporting on Human Rights in El Salvador: Methodology at Odds with Knowledge," pp. 20-21, and pp. 63-65.

²⁷³Americas Watch. "U.S. Reporting on Human Rights in El Salvador: Methodology at Odds with Knowledge," pp. 42-43. The massacre at El Mozote was discussed again in: Americas Watch. "Managing the Facts: How the Administration Deals with Reports of Human Rights Abuses in El Salvador." New York: Americas Watch, 1985. pp. 6-7.

²⁷⁴Americas Watch and ACLU. Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador. New York: Americas Watch, 1982.

elderly.²⁷⁵ The supplement also provided evidence of the massacre, such as the discovery of piles of corpses by survivors from neighboring villages.²⁷⁶ Americas Watch utilized various sources, including Socorro Jurídico, eyewitness testimony, and journalists' reports. The supplement also discussed the denials of the U.S. and Salvadoran governments that a massacre had occurred, and the basis for their denials. Clearly, Americas Watch had access to the details of their report prior to the July 1982 release date, and could have provided reporters with at least some of this information in the early months of the year. With these types of facts, journalists could have defended the initial reports of Bonner and Guillermprieto, and could have provided important information regarding what the U.S. government was going to do (or not do) in response to the massacre.

In September 1982, another Amnesty report declared that in the Salvadoran countryside, regular army as well as the new, U.S.-trained rapid-deployment forces, such as the Atlácatl Battalion, frequently were cited by human rights groups as responsible for massive killings of noncombatants.²⁷⁷ Amnesty also mentioned the El Mozote massacre in its annual report on human rights for 1982;²⁷⁸ the U.S. press at this time was silent regarding that incident.

²⁷⁵Americas Watch and ACLU. Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador, pp. 27-29.

²⁷⁶Americas Watch and ACLU. Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador, pp. 29-30.

²⁷⁷Amnesty International. "Assigning Responsibility for Human Rights Abuses: El Salvador's Military and Security Units." September 1982, cited in In Contempt of Congress. eds. Jay Hackel and Daniel Siegel. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Policy Studies, 1985. p. 100.

²⁷⁸Amnesty International. Amnesty International Report, 1982. London: Amnesty International Publications, 1982, p. 134.

It has been extremely difficult to ascertain exactly how the Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean responded to the massacre at El Mozote in 1982. The staff employed at EPICA during 1981 and 1982 no longer are with the organization, and no substantial archive of their work exists.²⁷⁹ Anne Butwell, one of the Co-Coordiators of EPICA, stated in an interview that shorter publications, such as newsletters, usually detailed gross human rights abuses in El Salvador.²⁸⁰ Since that time, however, EPICA has published two important books dealing with human rights violations in El Salvador: Condoning the Killing: Ten Years of Massacres in El Salvador, which chronicled each massacre in El Salvador from March 1979 through February 1990; and El Salvador: A Spring Whose Waters Never Run Dry, which contains testimonials from human rights activists, refugees, survivors of massacres, and church leaders.²⁸¹

Los Cerros de San Pedro (August 1982)

On January 20, 1983, Americas Watch released the "Second Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador," which

²⁷⁹According to Anne Butwell, Co-Coordinator of EPICA, the organization was focusing more on Nicaragua in the early 1980s. She suggested that perhaps some of the smaller Latin American newspapers in Washington, D.C. might have contacted EPICA regarding the massacre, but didn't think that major U.S. news media, such as The New York Times or The Washington Post, contacted EPICA about the massacre. Anne Butwell. Interview. "Human Rights Coverage by EPICA." By David Schaeffer. Washington, D.C. 22 October 1997.

²⁸⁰Anne Butwell. Interview.

²⁸¹EPICA. Condoning the Killing; EPICA, Christians for Peace in El Salvador, and Religious Task Force on Central America. El Salvador: A Spring Whose Waters Never Run Dry. Washington, D.C.: EPICA, 1990.

included a reference to massacre at Los Cerros de San Pedro.²⁸² Americas Watch not only noted that a civil defense commander substantiated peasant claims that the Salvadoran army killed three hundred unarmed villagers in the San Vicente Department, but also that the death toll might have been as high as four hundred.²⁸³ Americas Watch stated that "the incident [was] illustrative of the way civilian deaths [were]....disguised in a period of open warfare," and that "those who monitor only local press reports, however, will miss entirely that civilians form all or part of what is reported as deaths of FMLN combatants."²⁸⁴ These statements alluded to the fact that because the U.S. embassy gathered its figures for noncombatant casualties from Salvadoran newspapers and the military, and because U.S. journalists frequently used embassy information as the basis of their reports, the number of civilian victims from army operations was seriously under-reported.

Las Hojas (February 22, 1983)

On July 19, 1983, Americas Watch released the "Third Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador," which devoted six pages to the massacre at Las Hojas.²⁸⁵ Included in the supplement was part of an interview with an eyewitness, who provided a detailed description of the Jaguar Battalion's attack on the

²⁸²Americas Watch and ACLU. "Second Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador." New York: Americas Watch, 1983. pp. 20-22.

²⁸³Americas Watch and ACLU. "Second Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador," p. 20.

²⁸⁴Americas Watch and ACLU. "Second Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador," pp. 20-21.

²⁸⁵Americas Watch and ACLU. "Third Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador." New York: Americas Watch, 1983. pp. 17-23.

cooperative. Americas Watch also provided evidence a statement by an unnamed U.S. embassy official that more than seventy people died as a result of the massacre.²⁸⁶ Americas Watch also stated that no disciplinary action had been taken against Colonel Araujo, the commander of the Jaguar Battalion, or any of the two hundred soldiers who took part in the massacre.²⁸⁷

The August 9, 1983 edition of COHA's Washington Report on the Hemisphere also contained information regarding the massacre at Las Hojas. Unlike newspaper accounts, the report used this peasant massacre as evidence that Reagan's certification process was misleading. In COHA's words, certification was a "promo package" that was designed to "buy time for the administration to pursue a military victory."²⁸⁸

Tenango and Guadalupe (March 1, 1983)

The Americas Watch "Third Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador" made references to the bombings of civilians by U.S.-supplied aircrafts in Tenango.²⁸⁹ It is important to reiterate that the three newspapers analyzed in this paper did not print a single article on this massacre. Americas Watch also pointed out that the Salvadoran armed forces were guilty of not making a genuine effort to avoid violating a tenet of the Geneva Convention

²⁸⁶Americas Watch and ACLU. "Third Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador," p. 18.

²⁸⁷Americas Watch and ACLU. "Third Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador," p. 21.

²⁸⁸COHA. "State Whitewashes Certification for the Fourth Time." Washington Report on the Hemisphere. 9 August 1983, p. 4.

²⁸⁹Americas Watch and ACLU. "Third Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador," pp. 60-61.

that provides protection for all "persons taking no active part in hostilities."²⁹⁰ Violations of the Geneva Convention have worldwide implications because the Convention established global rules for warfare in 1949.²⁹¹ Nonetheless, the coverage in the three newspapers analyzed in this study did not mention this violation or its potential effects.

Tenancingo (September 28, 1983)

The Americas Watch report, "As Bad as Ever: A Report on Human Rights in El Salvador," contained a section on the massacre at Tenancingo.²⁹² This supplement to the Report on Human Rights included an account of the massacre based on testimony from survivors, and a representative of Tutela Legal, who visited the site shortly after the incident. The report also referred to radio communications intercepted by guerrillas, and broadcast on Radio Venceremos, in which field commander Colonel Adolfo Blandón instructed the air force pilot to bomb civilian targets because "anybody standing out there [was] an enemy."²⁹³

²⁹⁰Americas Watch and ACLU. "Third Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador," p. 59.

²⁹¹Americas Watch and ACLU. "Third Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador," p. 59.

²⁹²Americas Watch and ACLU. "As Bad as Ever: A Report on Human Rights in El Salvador." Fourth Edition. 31 January 1984, pp. 18-20. The massacre at Tenancingo was mentioned in: Americas Watch. "The Continuing Terror: Seventh Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador." New York: Americas Watch, 1985. pp. 36-37. This section revealed that after the September 25, 1983 bombing, Tenancingo was abandoned by its inhabitants.

²⁹³Americas Watch and ACLU. "As Bad as Ever: A Report on Human Rights in El Salvador," pp. 19-20.

Copapayo (November 4, 1983)

The November 29, 1983 edition of COHA's Washington Report on the Hemisphere included a story on the Copapayo massacre.²⁹⁴ COHA mentioned this massacre as evidence that the treatment of human rights by the Salvadoran armed forces was not improving, and that sending more military aid to El Salvador was not the solution for ending the Salvadoran civil war.

The fourth supplement to the Americas Watch Report on Human Rights in El Salvador also included information about the Copapayo massacre.²⁹⁵ Details of the massacre and those responsible for it were provided. The report included a quote by U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador Thomas Pickering, who said he believed that "troops of the Atlácatl Battalion had actually been involved in a massacre."²⁹⁶ This admission was unprecedented, and unfortunately unreported by the Miami Herald, The New York Times, and The Washington Post.

As can be seen from the previous discussion, NGOs utilized various sources to gather detailed information on every peasant massacre from El Mozote to Copapayo. Although the U.S. press printed articles on most of the massacres, the stories often were brief, incomplete and not followed-up. Because NGOs were able to gather timely information on these human rights atrocities, U.S.

²⁹⁴COHA. "Increased Salvador Violence Sparks U.S. Concern." Washington Report on the Hemisphere. 29 November 1983, p. 6.

²⁹⁵Americas Watch and ACLU. "As Bad as Ever: A Report on Human Rights in El Salvador," pp. 20-22. The Copapayo massacre also was used as a case study in: Americas Watch. "Managing the Facts," pp. 8-9.

²⁹⁶Americas Watch and ACLU. "As Bad as Ever: A Report on Human Rights in El Salvador," p. 20.

journalists should also have been able to acquire similar data. At the very least, members of the press could have increased their communication with NGOs to obtain and verify accounts of peasant massacres. Information that NGOs had gathered in El Salvador would have assisted reporters in successfully carrying out their role of providing a public benefit, despite efforts by the Reagan administration to prevent the U.S. public from obtaining enough information to make informed judgments about policy and policy makers.

Conclusion

The U.S. press has the ability to influence the U.S. foreign policy agenda. For example, the prolific coverage of the murder of four U.S. churchwomen in El Salvador generated enough interest in the case to persuade the U.S. government to force the Salvadoran government to pursue the perpetrators and bring them to trial. When the U.S. press does not adequately report on foreign events, however, it prevents U.S. citizens from gaining access to information that would enable them to evaluate the performance of their government and its policies, and from participating in the political process in a meaningful way. This was the case regarding peasant massacres in El Salvador.

The inadequate coverage of these massacres suggests that journalists allowed the Reagan administration to dictate coverage. As Aryeh Neier, a vice-chairman of Americas Watch, stated in 1983, the Reagan administration has succeeded in "getting all reporters

interested in how good the Salvadoran government is."²⁹⁷ A former spokesman for the U.S. embassy in San Salvador, Howie Lane, added: "The press, which is supposed to be so critical of our policy, has sort of gotten off the track and no longer goes looking for that [critical] type of story any more....it seems that editors are trying not to concentrate on the errors of our friends."²⁹⁸ These statements indicate that the Reagan administration prevented the press from serving as a watchdog of the Executive Branch, which was one of the reasons the First Amendment was formulated.

Peasant massacres in El Salvador provided gruesome evidence of the failure of U.S. foreign policy in that nation. These massacres of noncombatants were not isolated instances, but rather part of a systematic campaign by the Salvadoran military to maintain the economic, political, and social structures that arose from the turmoil of the 1930s. La Matanza in 1932, set the political tone in El Salvador for the next sixty years. The military, which worked closely with the landed oligarchy, controlled the government and murdered opponents. Anyone who contested the legitimacy of the juntas was viewed as a subversive or Communist, and became a target of repression; not even religious or nonviolent resistance was tolerated. The high-profile assassination of Archbishop Romero in March 1980, and the murder of the four U.S. churchwomen in December 1980 were examples of this mentality. In addition, it was well-known that the Salvadoran military did not detain political prisoners, but killed them. In July 1982, the International Red Cross threatened to

²⁹⁷As cited in Massing, pp. 42-43.

²⁹⁸As cited in Massing, p. 42.

leave El Salvador because of human rights abuses by the armed forces, particularly "their practice of not taking prisoners."²⁹⁹ The significance of this practice was that it helped engender a culture of fear among the populace. Many of the murders and disappearances of so-called subversives occurred during daylight and in public; Archbishop Romero was assassinated while giving a sermon, with hundreds of people watching. The Salvadoran military apparatus did not fear witnesses to their acts of repression because potential witnesses and the names of people who spoke out against the government frequently were added to death squad lists, and subsequently became targets themselves for the violence they observed or protested.

Even people who did not actively oppose the Salvadoran government were murdered by the army and security forces. Many peasants fell into this category. Between 1981 and 1983, peasant massacres were perpetrated as part of the El Salvadoran military's strategy for repressing dissent; at least twelve civilian massacres occurred during those years (see chronology in Appendix). The massacre at El Mozote in December 1981 represented a turning point for U.S. foreign policy and U.S. press coverage of peasant massacres. By the second half of the Carter administration, U.S. foreign policy makers began supporting military aid and training for the Salvadoran armed forces by claiming that U.S. guidance would end the pattern of gross human rights violations committed by these forces.³⁰⁰ The El Mozote massacre was evidence of the failure of U.S.

²⁹⁹Chomsky, p. 19.

³⁰⁰Bonner, *Weakness and Deceit*, p. 63.

policy to improve the Salvadoran armed forces' respect for human rights. The U.S.-trained Atlácatl Battalion, which used tactics similar to those of the U.S. army in Vietnam, carried out the largest known civilian massacre since the 1932 Matanza when it killed nearly one thousand people in El Mozote during December 1981. This battalion committed three more peasant massacres during the ensuing twenty four months.

Despite this clear example of the inability of the U.S. government to make the Salvadoran military ameliorate human rights abuses, the Reagan administration certified that the Salvadoran government was making improvements in this area, and significantly increased in the amount of military aid between 1981 and 1983 (see Table in Appendix). The massacre at El Mozote highlighted the nearly immutable foreign policy of the Reagan administration, which was focused on eliminating a perceived Communist threat posed by leftist rebels in El Salvador by providing huge amounts of military aid and training to the Salvadoran government. The U.S. government sent this assistance despite opposition from members of the U.S. Congress, and a large percentage of the U.S. public, as well as Salvadoran human rights and political opposition groups.

U.S. press coverage of the massacre at El Mozote, and the news media's acquiescence to the protests and pressures of the Reagan administration, had two important ramifications. First, the coverage provides an excellent example of how U.S. officials use false statements, political pressure, and pointed criticism to undermine the role of the press in the U.S. democratic process. In its statement of

principles, the American Society of Newspaper Editors stated, "The primary purpose of gathering and distributing news and opinion is to serve the general welfare by informing the people and enabling them to make judgments on the issues of the time."³⁰¹ In order to be a watchdog of the government and provide a forum for the discussion of government policies, however, the press must be free to report all the facts and to present dissenting opinions.³⁰² Protecting the ability of citizens to criticize government policies, and to formulate independent opinions, was a key impetus behind the creation of the First Amendment.³⁰³ The Reagan administrations reactions to The New York Times and The Washington Post reports about the events at El Mozote illustrate how government officials undermine this mandate to ensure support for their policies, and what happens when major news media bow to this pressure.

The stories by Raymond Bonner and Alma Guillermoprieto contradicted the findings of the U.S. embassy investigation, which concluded that no evidence existed to support allegations of a large civilian massacre. The information in the articles was extremely damaging to President Reagan's Salvadoran policies, and the rationales he and his advisers presented for these policies. The El Mozote case had the potential to reduce public support by showing that the massacre was just one example of how U.S. foreign policy had failed in El Salvador. To combat the potential negative effects of the coverage, the Reagan administration criticized Bonner and

³⁰¹As cited in Klaidman and Beauchamp, p. 130.

³⁰²Klaidman and Beauchamp, p. 5.

³⁰³Carter, Franklin, and Wright, p. 13; Gillmor, Barron, Simon, and Terry, p. 3; and Klaidman and Beauchamp, pp. 7-8.

Guillermoprieto--and their newspapers-- in a deliberate attempt to suppress independent reporting from El Salvador, and to suppress dissent within the United States. Reagan administration officials thought this would prevent an erosion of public support, and would create the perception that U.S. officials were in control of events in El Salvador.

A second way that the El Mozote case served as a watershed can be seen in the coverage of subsequent peasant massacres. The treatment of Bonner and Guillermoprieto, and the fact that most of the press did not rush to their defense, sent a strong message to other U.S. correspondents: Instead of being rewarded for breaking stories about human rights abuses, reporters would be risking professional and personal attacks by the U.S. government and elements of the U.S. press. Clearly, this situation had a chilling effect on reporters' efforts to fulfill their role of providing the U.S. public with independent, complete coverage of the effects of U.S. foreign policy. With few exceptions, a pattern of superficial reporting on peasant massacres developed as a result of the lack of support for Bonner's and Guillermoprieto's reporting about El Mozote.

U.S. press coverage of peasant massacres between 1981 and 1983 had four major similarities. First, articles on most peasant massacres after the El Mozote case were printed in a timely manner, but did not adequately analyze or follow-up on these incidents. Within two weeks of their occurrence, four of the five massacres after the incident at El Mozote were reported in some major U.S. news media. The massacre at Tenango and Guadalupe, which was counted as one incident by human rights groups, received no

attention from the three newspapers examined in this study. Timely reporting is important, but it is just one element of a journalist's duty. It is also extremely important for reporters to place events in context, and to explain to readers the relevance of a specific act of violence. Reporters, however, rarely provided background information, seldom referred to established patterns of violence against peasants, and in most cases did not establish a correlation between the identity of the perpetrators of the massacres and their trainers. For example, the U.S.-trained Atlacatl Battalion was involved in three of the five massacres after El Mozote (Tenango and Guadalupe, Tenancingo, and Copapayo); U.S.-supplied aircraft were involved in two massacres (Tenango and Guadalupe, and Tenancingo); and three School of the Americas graduates took part in one massacre (Las Hojas). Nevertheless, no U.S. reporter working for the papers studied for this thesis pointed out the consistent connection between U.S. aid and training and the perpetration of serious human rights violations.

A second notable aspect of U.S. press coverage about peasant massacres in El Salvador included the scarcity of follow up stories. The massacre at Los Cerros de San Pedro provided the best example of how an unmotivated press corps can fail to report essential details, and thereby contribute to misinformation. Initial stories about this massacre reported that casualties in the army's sweep through this village were guerrillas; however, subsequent evidence proved that the victims were noncombatants. Only one small story was published--among all three newspapers analyzed in this study--that revealed the error in the initial reports. The press is supposed to

provide information so voters can make informed judgments on the performance of their government.³⁰⁴ The fact that the Salvadoran army killed noncombatants instead of guerrillas was crucial information, because continued U.S. military aid was supposed to be based on improved respect for human rights by the Salvadoran armed forces.

Other poignant examples of the failure of U.S. journalists to provide follow-up reports include the unresolved death toll at the Las Hojas massacre, and the lack of focus on the misleading statement by Colonel Monterrosa concerning the massacre at Tenancingo. Some stories about the Las Hojas massacre stated that eighteen people were killed, while other articles placed the death toll as high as seventy-four. The issue was credibility. The Reagan administration had cited different casualty reports presented in U.S. newspapers and on Radio Venceremos as proof that doubts existed about whether a massacre had occurred at El Mozote. The U.S. press should have verified body counts of all peasant massacres as part of its watchdog function.

At Tenancingo, Colonel Monterrosa claimed that the bombing of civilians "was an exception,"³⁰⁵ but this simply was not true. On at least two other occasions, on August 24, 1982, and March 1, 1983, noncombatants were bombed by the Salvadoran air force. This indicated the existence of a deliberate pattern of human rights abuses; at the very least, it was another example of U.S.-trained members of the Salvadoran armed forces killing civilians on a large

³⁰⁴Klaidman and Beauchamp, pp. 128-129.

³⁰⁵Associated Press, "Salvadoran Colonel Apologizes for Bombs."

scale, and of the failure of U.S. training to improve the respect for human rights.

A third component of the pattern of U.S. press coverage involved field reporting. In many cases, it was unclear whether reporters actually visited the sites where the massacres had taken place. The bylines on five of the eight articles on the massacre at Las Hojas, three of the four stories about the massacre at Tenancingo, and all three articles about the Copapayo massacre indicated that the journalists were not reporting from the villages where the massacres had occurred. This was extremely important, because often the U.S. and Salvadoran governments denied that massacres had taken place. Even if the areas where the massacres occurred were under guerrilla control, journalists could have traveled to the sites in question and obtained evidence from the locations instead of relying solely on government claims. The importance of such reporting was proven by journalists that wrote about the massacres at El Mozote and Las Hojas.

A fourth element of U.S. reporting on peasant massacres was the repeated failure of the U.S. press to analyze critically official statements by U.S. and Salvadoran officials. Statements by the Reagan administration throughout the early 1980s, which constantly attributed human rights violations to the extreme left and the extreme right instead of the government,³⁰⁶ were rarely examined. Examples of this failure included: the lack of verification of the Salvadoran Defense Minister's statement that the Los Cerros de San

³⁰⁶Arnson, *Crossroads*, p. 43.

Pedro sweep only targeted guerrillas, and Colonel Monterrosa's claim that the bombing of civilian targets in Tenancingo was an aberration.

These four characteristics of this press coverage show clearly that U.S. news media failed to inform the public adequately about the effects of U.S. foreign policy in El Salvador. The large amount of U.S. military assistance to the Salvadoran government led observers of El Salvador, such as Americas Watch, Amnesty International, COHA, and EPICA, to believe that the U.S. government shared complicity for the murders of thousands of peasants. The potential effect that prolific coverage of these peasant massacres could have had on changing the U.S. foreign policy agenda cannot be understated.

This case study of U.S. press coverage of peasant massacres illustrates the importance of the press in the formation of the U.S. foreign policy agenda. The Reagan administration committed itself to the maintenance of a Salvadoran government that achieved the U.S. policy goal of an anti-Communist government at any cost. The price that the Reagan administration was willing to pay to obtain its objective was the death of at least twenty-three thousand Salvadorans between 1981 and 1983, and the displacement of thousands more.³⁰⁷

Unfortunately, the U.S. public was not provided with detailed reporting on peasant massacres that illustrated the results of the

³⁰⁷For the death toll, see: EPICA. Condoning the Killing, Appendix. For numbers of displaced Salvadorans, see: Americas Watch, El Salvador's Decade of Terror, p. 108; Lawyers Committee for Human Rights and Americas Watch. El Salvador's Other Victims: The War on the Displaced. New York: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights and Americas Watch, 1984. p. 29. This report cited a Senate staff report that revealed that approximately 468,000, or ten percent of the population, had been displaced as a result of the four-year-old civil war.

Reagan administration's campaign to eradicate this perceived Communist threat. Perhaps comprehensive stories about peasant massacres committed by U.S.-trained troops using U.S.-supplied weapons would have provided a strong impetus for the public to mobilize a more adamant opposition to President Reagan's policy in Central America. In the wake of the massacre at El Mozote, however, the Reagan administration nullified the power of the press by casting doubt on the integrity of U.S. reporters and intimidating executives at two of the most influential newspapers in the United States. This directly affected the efforts of journalists to report on massacres after the El Mozote incident. This successful effort to keep the press from providing U.S. citizens with adequate information on the effects of this foreign policy initiative prevented journalists from being an effective watchdog of the government, and therefore undermined democratic processes in the United States. This, in turn, had disastrous ramifications for the people of El Salvador.

Politically Motivated Killings by the Salvadoran Military

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number of Deaths</u> ¹
1979	1,030
1980	8,024
1981	13,353
1982	5,169 (Jan. to June 2,829) (July to Dec. 2,340)
1983	5,142 (Jan. to June 2,527) (July to Dec. 2,615)

U.S. Aid to El Salvador²

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Military</u>	<u>Economic, Development, and Food</u>
1946-1979	\$14.3 million	\$172.4 million
1980	\$5.7 million	\$59 million
1981	\$35.5 million	\$121 million
1982	\$82 million	\$220 million
1983	\$81.3 million	\$245.2 million

¹Figures from 1979 to 1981 are from "Boletín Internacional de Socorro Jurídico, 1979-1981." Boletín figures are cited in Richard Alan White. The Morass: U.S. Intervention in Central America. New York: Harper and Row, 1984. p. 44.

Figures for January to June, 1982, are from Tutela Legal, as cited in Americas Watch. "Supplement to the Report on Human Rights in El Salvador." July 20, 1982. p. 12. Figures for July to December 1982, and January to June 1983, are from Tutela Legal, as cited in Americas Watch. "Report on Human Rights in El Salvador." July 19, 1983. p. 12. Figures from July to December 1983 are from Tutela Legal, as cited in Americas Watch. "As Bad As Ever: A Report on Human Rights in El Salvador." January 31, 1984. pp. 7-8.

²Figures from 1946-1979 are from "U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants: Obligations and Loan Authorizations July 1, 1945 to September 30, 1983," U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of Planning and Budgeting, as cited in Tom Barry. El Salvador: A Country Study. p. 178. For military aid from 1980, see: Raymond Bonner, Weakness and Deceit. New York: Times Books, 1984. p. 174; Walter LaFeber. Inevitable Revolutions. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984. p. 251; Michael McClintock. The American Connection. London: Zed Press, 1985. p. 288. Military aid between 1981 and 1982 is from LaFeber, p. 286. Military aid for 1983 and economic aid from 1980-1983 are from El Salvador: A Briefing Book on U.S. Aid and the Situation in El Salvador. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 1989 as cited in EPICA. Condoning the Killing: Ten Years of Massacres in El Salvador. Appendix.

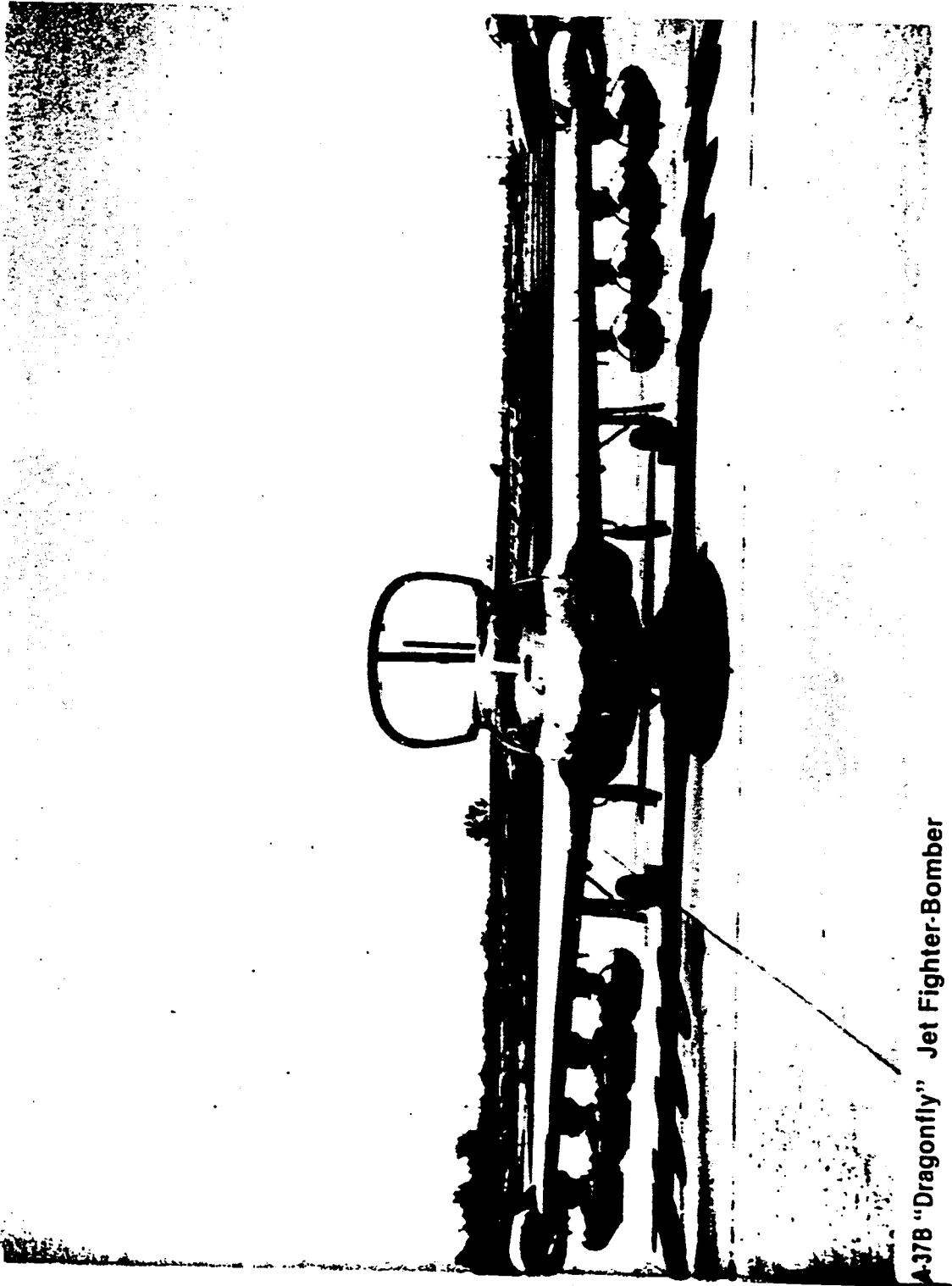
TABLE 4.1 The Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN)

<i>Political-Military Organization</i>	<i>Popular Organization^a</i>	<i>Armed Forces</i>
Popular Forces of Liberation (Fuerzas Populares de Liberación, FPL-1970)	Popular Revolutionary Bloc (Bloque Popular Revolucionario, BPR-1975)	Popular Forces of Liberation (Fuerzas Populares de Liberación, FPL-1970)
National Resistance (Resistencia Nacional, RN-1975)	United Popular Action Front (Frente de Acción Popular Unificada, FAPU-1974)	Armed Forces of National Resistance (Fuerzas Armadas de Resistencia Nacional, FARN-1975)
Party of the Salvadorean Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Salvadorena, PRS-1977)	28th of February Popular Leagues (Ligas Populares 28 de Febrero, LP-28-1978)	Revolutionary Army of the People (Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo, ERP-1972)
Communist Party of El Salvador (Partido Comunista de El Salvador, PCS-1930)	Nationalist Democratic Union (Unión Democrática Nacionalista, UDN-1967)	Armed Forces of Liberation (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación, FAL-1979)
Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos, PRTC-1976)	Popular Liberation Movement (Movimiento de Liberación Popular, MLP-1979)	Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos, PRTC-1976)

Note: Years cited are dates of founding.

^aThe popular organizations ceased to exist by late 1980.

This table came from: Tommie Sue Montgomery. Revolution in El Salvador. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1995. p. 102.



A-37B "Dragonfly" Jet Fighter-Bomber

This photograph came from: North American Congress on Latin America. "Honduras/Nicaragua: War Without Winners." NACLA Report. September-October 1982, p. 11.

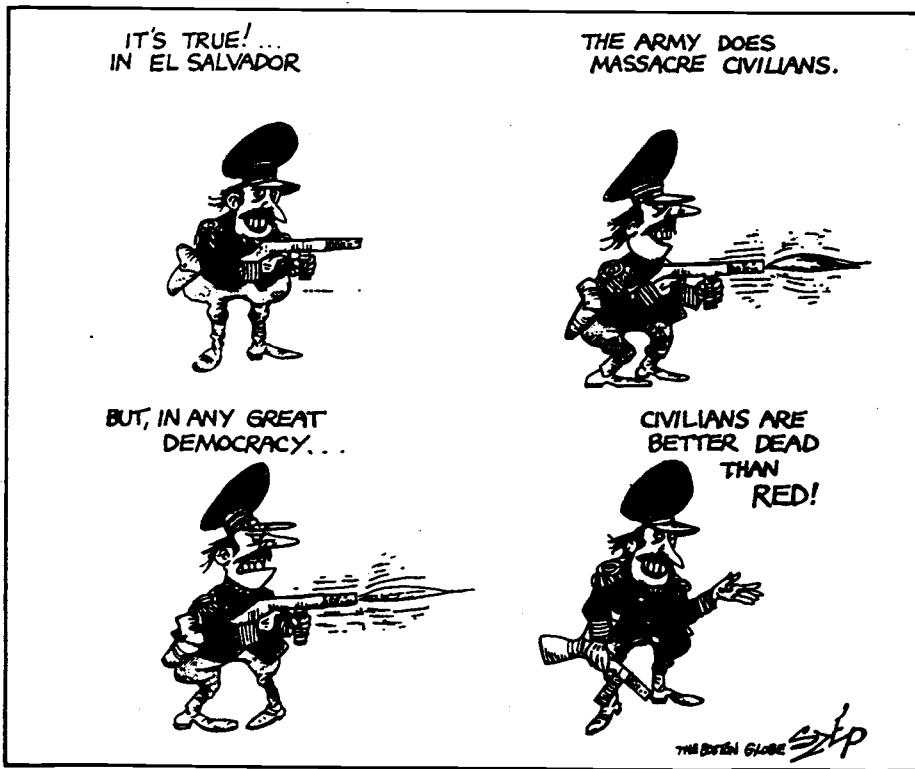
This cartoon from Ben Sargent was printed in: Philip L. Russell. El Salvador in Crisis. Austin: Tex.: Colorado River Press, 1984. p. 122.



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PAUL SZEPE
Courtesy Boston Globe

This cartoon from Paul Szep was printed in: Best Editorial Cartoons of the Year, 1983. ed. Charles Brooks. Gretna, L.A.: Pelican Publishing Company, 1983. p. 94.

Massacres in El Salvador

- Jan. 1932 La Matanza: The Salvadoran armed forces murdered at least 30,000 people after a failed uprising.
- March 1979 Treasury police murdered ten youths in San José Las Flores, Department of Chalatenango.
- 29 Oct. 1979 Army and security forces massacred eighty-six demonstrators in San Salvador.
- 31 Oct. 1979 National Guard massacred twenty-nine demonstrators in San Salvador.
- 5 May 1980 Sumpul River Massacre at Las Aradas in the Department of Chalatenango: six hundred peasants, that were trying to flee to Honduras, were killed by the Salvadoran army, National Guard, treasury police, and ORDEN.
- 9 July 1980 National Guard and army executed thirty-one in San Pablo Tacachico in the Department of La Libertad.
- 18 March 1981 Lempa River Massacre. As was the case with the Sumpul River massacre, Salvadoran peasants who were fleeing from army attacks in Las Cabañas attempted to cross into Honduras for safety. Honduran troops blocked their entry while Salvadoran troops opened fire on the refugees.
- 8 July 1981 Treasury Police executed thirty-four people at Guazapa in the Department of San Salvador.
- 30 July 1981 Armenia Massacre: twenty-three killed by the army soldiers and civil defense members at Armenia in the Department of Sonsonate.
- 7 Dec. 1981 El Mozote Massacre: one thousand killed in the Department of Morazán by the Atlacatl Battalion.

- 19 Jan. 1982 First Infantry Brigade and security forces killed twenty-seven people in San Antonio Abad in the Department of San Salvador.
- 31 Jan. 1982 San Antonio Abad Massacre: twenty-seven people were killed by the First Infantry Brigade and security forces.
- 2 Feb. 1982 Salvadoran army troops killed fifty-seven in San José Las Flores in the Department of Chalatenango.
- 24 Aug. 1982 Army and air force massacred three hundred in Los Cerros de San Pedro in the Department of San Vicente.
- 22 Feb. 1983 Jaguar Battalion massacred seventy-four peasants in Las Hojas.
- 1 March 1983 Army and air force massacred one hundred and fifty peasants in Tenango and Guadalupe in the Department of Cuscatlán.
- 25 Sept. 1983 Air force bombing killed fifty in Tenancingo in the Department of Cuscatlán.
- 4 Nov. 1983 The Copapayo massacre: the Atlácatl Battalion killed one hundred and eighteen in the Department of Cuscatlán.

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