

WHY DO GUERRILLA GROUPS THAT HAD ENOUGH CAPABILITIES TO CONTINUE IN  
AN ARMED STRUGGLE SHIFT THEIR STRATEGIES FROM MILITARY TO POLITICAL  
AND PARTICIPATE IN NEGOTIATIONS?

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By

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my loved ones, whose consistent love, support and encouragement has motivated me to never give up. Thank you to my parents and siblings who have inspired me in every way possible. Lastly, a special thanks to my advisor Dr. Katherine Collin and committee member Fr. Matthew Carnes who have guided me throughout the process.

Many thanks,  
Gabriela Murillo Armijo

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Peace processes throughout the world have greatly differed throughout time. The events that occur during war time are evidently what will determine the outcomes of a peace process. This includes who are the main actors of the war and the peace process, what are the internal and external circumstances that this is happening under, and also, what are the goals of each party and are these viable for a resolution. While the phenomena on civil wars and their characteristics are puzzles within itself, one of the greatest questions to ask is how does peace arise after years and decades of conflict and strife? More interestingly, why do the parties make the decision to negotiate? The decision to negotiate on behalf of both parties is not something that would typically occur abruptly, but rather a series of events throughout the conflict emerge that influence the way in which a rebel group might view negotiations as a pathway to peace. Reasons why a government might choose to extend the offer to begin dialogue with a rebel group differs over the reasons that a rebel group would accept and begin pursuing negotiations, and vice-versa. For these reasons, it is important to highlight the agency that rebel groups have in making the decision to come to a negotiated settlement and how external and internal circumstances throughout the conflict have gradually affected this change in strategy from, say, military to political.

This research paper seeks to analyze this phenomenon by asking, *why do rebel groups that had enough capabilities to continue fighting choose to then negotiate and advocate for peace?* Hypothesizing that guerrilla groups choose to negotiate as a way to shift their strategies from military to political in order to achieve their goals. By turning to the case of El Salvador, this paper will focus on a single case study to research the way in which peace processes also rely on the agency of rebel groups in order to achieve a peaceful resolution. This paper will use the case of the Salvadoran guerrilla group, the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN)*,

to look at why, when, and how peace was achieved in El Salvador. The country had been one of five Central American countries that experienced a brutal civil war in the 1980s. Like its neighboring countries, the Salvadoran civil war featured vast international intervention, mainly from the United States, the United Nations, and regional actors, all of which were detrimental throughout the peace process and contributed to its outcome. What makes this case distinct is the fact that unlike Nicaragua or Cuba, the Salvadoran war concluded without a military victory on either side, rather, it was a political framework that led to negotiations and put an end to the conflict.

Existing hypotheses and theories generally prioritize the state over rebel groups, making claims that other factors are what contributed on a greater scale to war termination and the conclusion of a peace process, specifically through a negotiated settlement. What these alternatives fail to highlight is the agency that rebel groups possess, additionally greatly lacking narrative from the insurgents themselves. This paper seeks to emphasize the narrative of the FMLN and their decision to negotiate as participation in the peace process, arguing that it would be foolish to solely look at external causes of peace and ignoring the agency that rebel groups like the FMLN had in pursuing their own goals.

This paper will present three main existing explanations and analyze them through general literature that explains the nature of these theories and arguments. A section will follow that consists of testing the independent variables of the existing explanations' effect on the dependent variable of this study, which will predominantly be analyze through primary sources with secondary sources to provide supporting evidence and discussion. The last section will be a series of chronological events that occurred since the late 1970's when the FMLN was in the midst of forming their united front up until the early to mid 1990's when the war had ended and the FMLN

became a successful legitimate political party. The purpose of this section will be to retell the war from the perspective of the guerrillas. Looking at how the FMLN acted, reacted, and interacted in response to the changing conditions of the war, this will give the audience a better understanding of the amount of agency that the FMLN had within the peace process and their decision to negotiate. Moreover, the voices of the former insurgents will be highlighted to better understand how existing literature has not sufficiently accounted for rebel groups' agency when faced with external, internal and intra-related conditions to the war.

## CHAPTER 2. EL SALVADOR

El Salvador was one of the dozen Latin/Central American countries where civil war emerged in the mid to late 1970's. The country was not immune to the oppressive authoritarian dictatorships that abused their power and marginalized communities, committed human rights violations, genocide, executions, all mixed with corruption and fraud. During the time of the Cold War, communist beliefs and ideology began to spread across Latin America and influenced many of civilians to take up arms and fight for more fair and just conditions in their countries. In the early 1970's, five different rebel groups began to organize together in search for a solution to the mounting economic, social, and political problems that continued to arise by the day. The five groups were known as: the *Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí* (FPL), the *Resistencia Nacional* (RN), the *Ejercito Popular de la Población* (ERP), the *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos* (PRTC), and the *Partido Comunista Salvadoreño* (PCS).

In 1980, these five leftist guerrilla groups formed the FMLN, which despite domestic pressures, would persist as a cohesive armed opposition pre- and post-civil war.<sup>1</sup> While the joining of forces between the distinct groups seemed promising, they were not yet developed enough as a united force to pose any real threat towards the Armed Forces or the Salvadoran state in general.<sup>2</sup> The guerrillas then attempted to execute a coup in October of 1979 which resulted in the formation of a "Revolutionary Governing Junta" which then frightened military hardliners and conservative elites, causing the start of the war by 1980.<sup>3</sup> By the end beginning of that same year, the rise of

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<sup>1</sup> Call, Charles T. "Assessing El Salvador's Transition from Civil War to Peace," in *Ending Civil Wars*, ed. Stephen J. Stedman, Donald Rothchild, and Elisabeth Cousens. (Boulder, Colorado, Lynne Rienner Press, 2002): 546.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 545.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



military and civilian led juntas along with the support that ultra-right political sectors had for the violence being executed by growing death squads were all factors that resulted in the start of the civil war.<sup>4</sup>

The FMLN endured a twelve-year long war against the military-led junta of El Salvador known as the Armed Forces (AF) or Fuerzas Armadas. El Salvador became home to thousands of deaths owing to casualties on both sides of the warring parties as well as civilian casualties, amounting to approximately 75,000 deaths – some later to be known and referred to as genocides by the international community.<sup>5</sup> El Salvador soon became known for the mounting human rights violations that were occurring, becoming infamous for their death squads and war strategies that involved rape, sexual assault, assassination and torture, coupled with other numerous tactics. One of the most referenced war crimes that have been referenced throughout civil war and Latin American war history was the killing of six Jesuit priests which will be discussed in greater detail in the evidence section.

One of the main actors in the Salvadoran civil war, as well as the general Latin American region at the time, was the United States. Fighting against the spread of communism and in an attempt to assure that communist ideology and influence would not take over Latin America, Washington had established counterinsurgency strategies to secure a military victory by the Salvadoran government. In efforts to secure this victory, the U.S. trained, equipped, and financially supported the Salvadoran Armed Forces. The United States received great backlash from this type of support both domestically and internationally, the greatest reason being that the training and

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<sup>4</sup> Meyer, Mary Kathryn. “Latin American diplomacy and the Central American peace process: The Contadora and Esquipulas II cases,” *Doctoral Dissertations 1896*, 1992: 159-160.

<sup>5</sup> “El Salvador,” The *Center for Justice and Accountability*, 2021. Available at: <https://cja.org/where-we-work/el-salvador/>

weapons that were being provided to the Salvadoran military by the U.S. was being used to carry out mass war crimes such as the killing of the Jesuits and the genocide that occurred in El Mozote.

By the mid 1980s, the FMLN knew that they needed more people within their groups that had specific skills such as being able to handle technology such as radios, skills to write, propaganda, etc. The FMLN then looked towards the middle class with educational backgrounds to join the movement. Throughout the recruitment process, the FMLN was able to gain mass support and followers, so much so that there was this concept of dual sovereignty in El Salvador where the rebel group had as much autonomy over different areas of land throughout the country as the government did.<sup>6</sup> The FMLN acted as their own government as they would tax the people within their refugee camps, provide education to children, food, shelter, and other basic necessities. The extent of this extensive power that the FMLN called for a very strict hierarchy to be established within the camps. FMLN leaders had ultimate control over everything that occurred within their camps, down to the point where guerrilla members had to ask permission to camp leaders if they were able to date and have certain relations with one another. This hierarchy helped establish rule and order within the camps and prevented any one member from going out of line. Certain abuses or the breaking of rules were dealt through either death or exile.

As the war continued to progress, the escalating conflict caused a multitude of regional and international implications. For one, many of the Central American wars were interconnected with one another. Many of the rebel groups within the region looked towards the Sandinistas in Nicaragua for hope in achieving their revolutionist goals. The Sandinistas in Nicaragua were able to obtain power through their guerrilla movement. The Sandinistas would provide political support, arms, weapons, and resources to the FMLN along with other countries in the region.

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<sup>6</sup> Wood, Elisabeth Jean. *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Because all these wars were interrelated, president from Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela and Panama would come together to form the Contadora Group in order to find a solution to the Central American wars. Another initiative known as Esquipulas I and Esquipulas II would also emerge. These efforts were in attempt to put an end to the regional conflicts through a negotiated settlement.

Signatories of the Esquipulas Agreement would promise to start a dialogue and a peace agreement with their countries corresponding rebel group. The purpose of these regional efforts was to evade U.S. intervention and from Washington enforcing their own politics into the regions business. The United States was primarily concerned with ending the spread of communist ideologies and vowed to defeat the rebels. El Salvador was one of the top countries to have ever received the most amount of financial aid during war, reaching up to \$137 million in military aid by the late 1980's.<sup>7</sup> The U.S. wanted to see the military defeat of the FMLN and became heavily involved in the peace process along with the United Nations and the other regional actors.

The Salvadoran peace process is one that is often remarked as one of the United Nations greatest successes as the negotiations were able to produce successful dialogue between the two paring parties and made efforts towards successful guerrilla military DDR (disarmament, demobilization, reintegration) national reconciliation.<sup>8</sup> The United Nations was present in El Salvador since the early 1980's through the UNDP, UNICEF, and the UNHCR.<sup>9</sup> Towards the end of the war the United Nations became more heavily involved as escalating human rights violations and war crimes became more and more grave. El Salvador became the first United Nations mission that was initially deployed prior to a ceasefire between the warring parties was ever established.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Call, Charles T. "Assessing El Salvador's Transition from Civil War to Peace," 547.

<sup>8</sup> Montgomery, Tommie Sue. "Getting to peace in El Salvador: The Roles of the United Nations Secretariat and ONUSAL," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 37, no. 4, 1995: 146.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-147.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

The United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) was the first UN intervention in an internal armed conflict with a mandate to try and resolve it, being considered a “pilot mission” working towards guerrilla and military disarmament/demobilization.<sup>11</sup> The UN’s contributions in the peace process ranged from negotiations, mediation, human rights confirmation, verification on the peace agreement and elections, along with a handful of other tasks.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

### Case Selection

What makes El Salvador individual is the fact that unlike its regional neighbors, the war in El Salvador did not end in a military victory for either of the warring parties, but instead, it were the political efforts pioneered by the parties that allowed negotiations to take place and eventually resulted in a settlement that concluded the conflict. Moreover, the case of El Salvador is unique in that it was the only guerrilla group that was successful in becoming a political party with unequivocally competitive strength of their opponents.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the FMLN was able to be successfully reintegrated into civil society and become an efficacious political party post-war where they obtained the presidency in 2003. Call notes how El Salvador's transition from civil war to peace is among one of the most frequently cited successful peace processes and peace agreement implementation, stating how post-war, the FMLN was able to fully demobilize by 1994, transition into a political party, and become the second most powerful party in El Salvador by the mid-90s.<sup>13</sup>

While there are a variety of different puzzles within the Salvadoran civil war, such as why five distinct groups with different goals and motives joined together to become a single unit, or why the FMLN established this hierarchy that did not include sexual violence and rape within their repertoire of violence, or why the Salvadoran Armed Forces did engage in the strategies/tactics they did, one critical question to ask is why did the FMLN choose to advocate for negotiations when they had the capabilities to continue fighting? Similar cases such as Colombia, Guatemala, and Nicaragua have also presented evidence regarding the transition from military to political, all which participated in wars similar to that of El Salvador. The cases of Nicaragua and Colombia in fact resulted in the formation of political parties of former rebel groups known as the FSLN, also

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<sup>12</sup> Medrano, Juan. *Memoria de un guerrillero*. San Salvador, 2006: 9.

<sup>13</sup> Call, 543.

known as the Sandinistas, (Nicaragua) and the FARC-EP (Colombia), but the distinction with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua is that the group won militarily. In Colombia, the peace process endured over three decades and while it also produced a negotiated settlement that resulted in the formation of the FARC as a political party, it was not the political framework that led to the negotiations and eventually concluded the conflict.

In other cases, like in Guatemala, while there were similar circumstances such as the desire to engage politically towards a negotiated settlement, the outcome of the peace process is largely considered a failed event. A few of the reasons behind this statement is that the Guatemalan peace accord was hardly implemented, there was also a lack of political will to implement the Guatemalan accords, mainly from policymakers. The greatest issue was that the commission in charge of overseeing successful implementation lacked decision-making power, authority, enforcement power coupled with a lack of consensus on key issues that arose during the negotiation process such as disagreement regarding popular participation.<sup>14</sup>

For these reasons, looking at El Salvador's extensive evidence can be appropriately compared to cases that are most-similar and most-different from it, both regionally and internationally. This research paper will focus on a single case study: El Salvador. For this research, only qualitative data will be used, specifically, archival data, news reports, interviews, recordings, and ethnographies. The main focus of this research will be on what the transitional changes and turning points that caused rebel groups and their leader to change their strategies from military to political and how negotiations were a part of this shift. Bennett discusses the importance

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<sup>14</sup> Stanley, William and David Holiday. "Broad participation, diffused responsibility: Peace implementation in Guatemala," in *Ending Civil Wars: The implementation of Peace Agreements*. Ed., Stephen J. Stedman, Donald Rothchild and Elizabeth M. Cousens. (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002): 22.

of case selection for researchers, stating that “the primary criterion of case selection should be relevance to the research objectives of the study” which in this case includes *theory testing*.<sup>15</sup> Theory testing is when the case studies chosen for the research are able to “assess the validity and scope conditions of single or competing theory.”<sup>16</sup> The primary reason this single case was selected was due to the nature of the conclusion of the civil war. As previously noted, the Salvadoran war came to a conclusion without a military victory from the FMLN nor the Salvadoran government. Rather, the war came to its end through a political framework that led towards negotiations. Moreover, there is sufficient qualitative research, both from primary and secondary sources, on El Salvador’s FMLN and pre/post-negotiations to justify a single case selection to meet Bennett’s requirements for theory testing. As Bennett states, the relevance to the research objectives is what is most critical when selecting a case and El Salvador is one of many possible studies for that objective.

### **Research Design**

The objective of this research is to compare theories and present a possible addition to existing hypothesis to the several that exist regarding rebel groups and negotiations. The first existing explanation will be the Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS) theory proposed by William Zartman and his discussion on “ripeness.” Other alternatives will be the way in which third-party intervention shifted the conditions of the war and caused the FMLN to seek no other alternative to the war but to negotiate for a resolution. The main third parties that will be analyzed will be the United States intervention, the United Nations intervention mainly through the observer mission known as ONUSAL, and lastly, regional intervention by groups known as Contadora and its

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<sup>15</sup> Bennett, Andrew. *Case Studies and Theory Development*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 2004): 63.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

support group and a regional peace process known as Esquipulas. The other main alternative will be military exhaustion, primarily caused by a neglect of international financial support and other external and internal conditions and events, such as the dissolution of the USSR and the fall of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

These alternative hypotheses can be summed up in the idea that there were external, internal, and intra-related circumstances that were changing the conditions of the war. The hypothesis proposed in this paper does not present a single answer to the theory question this is independent of alternative theories, rather, it adds to them. This paper acknowledges that MHS, military exhaustion, etc., do in fact play a role in the guerrilla's decision to switch to a political strategy and opt for a negotiated settlement. But it is critical to note that these conditions progressed over time and the FMLN's decision to shift strategies from military to political was not an overnight spurred decision based on a single event that occurred during the war that persuaded, coerced, or forced them to negotiate. All of these hypotheses impacted the decision to negotiate but neither takes into account the fact that the FMLN got to the point of wanting to negotiate in the mid 80s as a way to pursue their goals rather than because there was a MHS or they were perceived as militarily weak, or any other alternative. The decision to negotiate as a way to execute their political strategy was a gradual transition rather than a decision made in response to one specific internal or external event as other theories and hypotheses would imply. More specifically, this research is looking at existing primary sources and evidence to analyze the alternatives through an interconnected lens, arguing that these hypotheses are missing the narrative of the guerrillas to explain the conditions of the war that influenced them to change their strategy from military to political and participate in negotiations. For the reasons stated, a comparative case study or large/medium N case study is not necessary to test the alternative theories.



There is sufficient research on El Salvador, specifically qualitative data on the inter-workings and strategies of the FMLN to fulfill the research objectives of this study. Moreover, qualitative data for a single case study would work best in narrowing down and focusing on the root causes versus quantitative data what would trace and compare different events over a longer period of time. Additionally, looking into existing ethnographies with former rebels will be important to look into while also keeping in mind existing biases that can be present in former members responses to interviews. The primary sources feature memoirs, interviews, and diary entries written by former commandants and guerrillas of the FMLN, all recounting their time as FMLN members and how the context of the was consistently changing based on internal, external, and intra-related events. By analyzing these accounts, one will be able to see the agency that the rebels had in making their decision to negotiate and switch to a political strategy.

The evidence within this paper will provide the narrative that existing explanations are missing and will demonstrate how the FMLN had more agency in their decision to participate in the peace process than alternative theories might account for. Agency in this context is defined as the ability for the FMLN to make their own choices free of persuasion coercion by other actors and conditions within the war. One will be able to see this agency through the primary sources that discuss the FMLN's responses to conditions of the war and their ability to act independently. Current theories and hypotheses are missing this first-person narrative and focus their discussion on the state and the international structures influence on the peace process and war termination, while these primary sources will give insight on the innerworkings of rebel groups and their response and adaption to the changing conditions of the war. The main voices that will be heard throughout this paper are ERP leaders Joaquin Villalobos and Schafik Handal, Commandants Balta, Leonel Gonzales and Jesus Rojas, as well as members such as Salvador Samayoa, Ana

Guadalupe Martinez, Juan Medrano and Salvador Ceren. Accounts from these FMLN members will give insight on different levels of command from within the rebel group. Schafik Handal and Joaquin Villalobos were the primary actors within the decision-making process and had opposing views on engaging in negotiations. While Commandants lower-ranking members that are featured in this paper had political roles that were critical to the negotiation process. All of these primary sources with the exception of one are in Spanish and quotes in this paper have been translated accordingly.

Additionally, while these accounts contained a vast amount of information and because the Salvadoran civil war lasted a total of twelve years (1980-1992), data will primarily be collected from 1970-1993, these range from the years that the FMLN began to form into a single unit all the way up to the point that the war ended, and a peace agreement was signed and the FMLN transitioned into a political party. Moreover, primary qualitative sources will be used to analyze this transition and test the following hypotheses:

*H<sub>1</sub> = Rebel groups make the decision to negotiate in response to international and domestic circumstances and do so in the process of changing their strategies from military to political .*

The two variables that this paper will test will be how choosing to negotiation (dependent variable) will be affected by external, internal, and intra-related events and conditions (independent variable). Primary sources will be analyzed to test the extent to which the independent variables of the existing explanations have had a direct effect on the dependent variable of this study. Findings will show how the FMLN had more agency in the peace process than existing explanations give them credit for. With the support of primary and secondary sources, the paper will demonstrate how the FMLN had been advocating for peace since the beginning of the war,

but considering the intra, external, and internal circumstances and events that were occurring throughout the war, the FMLN had to modify their strategies and adapt to the everchanging conditions. The continuous changes that the FMLN had to make in order to obtain their goals inevitably caused them to change their strategy from military to political, as a result of these changing circumstances throughout the war. A retelling of chronological events that occurred from the late 1970s to the early to mid 1990s from the FMLN's perspective and narrative will help show the innerworkings of the guerrillas and how they shifted their strategy from military to political through in order to achieve their goals, which they believed would be attainable by participation in the peace process through negotiations.

## CHAPTER 4. EXISTING EXPLANATIONS

### Literature Review

Scholarship on El Salvador is vast and the brief overview of the war provides insight on the complex nature of, not only the peace process, but the way in which several external and internal circumstances influenced a large amount of the events that occurred during the war and why certain scenarios during the peace process occurred the way they did. Current literature discussing the negotiation process that occurred during the civil war in El Salvador highlights the success of mediation efforts led by Alvaro de Soto, the inclusion of victims at the negotiating table, and a human-rights centered initiative. Most notably, literature surrounding the topic typically accentuates step-by-step what occurred throughout the process that resulted in the signing of the Chapultepec Peace Accords. Conversely, there are three main theories and hypotheses that most explain why the FMLN made the decision to negotiate. The three main explanations that this paper will focus on are the Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS) theory, the pressure from third-party actors that are involved in the peace process, and lastly, military exhaustion due to internal and external circumstances.

The basis of these explanations relies on the fact that the Latin American civil wars created an escalating number of complications for neighboring countries and their allies/interested supporters. This then caused a multitude of actors to intervene, such as the United States, which was the largest actor that was internationally involved consistently throughout the wars, alongside the United Nations that later on became invested when there were mounting human rights violations and war crimes that were not able to be overlooked by the international community. While some believe that it was due to these efforts that provoked the FMLN and the Salvadoran government to negotiate, other scholars would argue that it was the international circumstances

that created the space for the parties to come to an agreement. Specifically, the collapse of the USSR and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Several scholars would argue that the transition from military to political was based on external and internal conditions and circumstances that forced the FMLN to change their strategies and agree to a negotiated settlement because the guerrillas knew that there was no positive outcome towards a military victory for them. Scholars such as Seed go as far as arguing that the FMLN originally opposed a negotiated solution and solely sought a military victory.<sup>17</sup> Seed makes a case for this argument by citing popular evidence regarding the withdrawal of financial support from the USSR, a military stalemate, and the growing strength of the Salvadoran Armed Forces, stating that by 1989, FMLN leadership had no other option but to reach a politically negotiated solution with the Salvadoran government.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the argument progresses to claim that because the FMLN and the government realized that “complete military domination was not possible” that both parties had to seek mediation from the United Nations to advance the negotiation process, a process which the “two parties initially refused any form of negotiated resolution.”<sup>19</sup> Considering the events that took place in the domestic and international arena, it is easy to mistake the FMLN’s shift in strategy as a last-minute hasty decision made by guerrilla leaders in order to prevent from being militarily defeated. But primary accounts written by ex-guerrilla commandants and members of the FMLN have pointed to a rich telling of what occurred throughout the civil war.

Literature discussing the Salvadoran peace process similarly discuss the way in which the ever-changing conditions of the civil war inherently led to the FMLN’s shift in strategy, as well as affected the overall peace process. For one, Stanley claims how the “changing international

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<sup>17</sup> Seed, Patrick C. “Building an inclusive peace: Lessons from El Salvador,” *International Development, Community and Environment* 147, 2017: 21.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

climate” affected FMLN leaders’ decision to negotiate and believed that more would be accomplished at the negotiating table versus continuing the armed struggle.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Stanley adds how by the start of the 1990s, the international, domestic, military, political, and economic conditions all opened the door for a successful peace process and essentially allowed for negotiations to take place and result in an optimal outcome.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, Call argues how the “class-based nature of the conflict,” coupled with the MHS, the changing international environment and interests of the international actors that were involved within the conflict such as the United States, along with other domestic circumstances, all took part in creating a space that fostered political will and capability, from both parties, that worked towards a negotiated settlement.<sup>22</sup> Conversely, Holiday adds to this by stating how the civil war in El Salvador as well as its negotiated settlement were both outcomes of external influences that conditioned the war, regardless of the violent events that took place throughout it.<sup>23</sup>

When these theories and claims stand alone it is difficult to say that one is the sole explanation for the way that the peace process unraveled and why there was a decision to negotiate. These theories and hypotheses would be better supported if they were seen through an interconnected lens. It is critical to understand that what occurred regionally and internationally did in fact effect the way that both parties viewed negotiations. This paper argues that rather than look at these theories independent of one another, one should analyze how they are all interconnected, and all affected why the FMLN shifted their strategies from military towards political. Arguably, all of these hypotheses impacted the decision to negotiate but neither takes

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<sup>20</sup> Stanley, William and David Holiday. “Peace mission strategy and domestic actors: UN mediation, verification and institution-building in El Salvador,” *International Peacekeeping* 4, no. 2, 1997: 26.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Call, 544.

<sup>23</sup> Holiday, David and William Stanley. “Building the Peace: Preliminary Lessons from El Salvador,” *Journal of International Affairs* 46, no. 2, 1993: 417.

into account the fact that the FMLN reached the point of wanting to negotiate in the mid 1980s as a way to pursue their goals and come to power rather than because there was a MHS, they were perceived as militarily weak, or because they lost support from the Sandinistas and the USSR/Berlin Wall fell.

Neither of the existing explanations take into account the narrative of the guerrillas or highlight the agency that they had throughout the process. While in fact these existing explanations have variables that had a role in the peace-making process, the complete story is not being told and is putting too much emphasis on external and internal circumstances without applying a first-person narrative on the story. The existing explanations that recount why the FMLN changed their approach from military to political are valid arguments that lay out important variables that influenced the way in which the FMLN operated throughout the war, but, these explanations are looking at one specific period in time, i.e., the time of the event – MHS, third-party intervention, external events – rather than looking at the conflict from the beginning and understanding what, why, and how unfolding events since the start of the war might have shifted the FMLN's perspectives on pursuing a political solution. Rather than oppose these existing or alternative explanations, this paper is proposing adding to these hypotheses by incorporating the voices of the rebels and understanding how they acted and reacted in response to the changing circumstances of the war and how they were slowly preparing for peace through the decision to negotiate.

The following section will now analyze literature surrounding each existing explanation while applying it to the case of El Salvador. Additionally, it will then present results from both primary and secondary sources that will not refute these alternative explanations, but rather add to the conversation with new existing evidence. Emphasizing and highlighting the FMLN's

experiences and most importantly, their thought process for strategically changing their course of action from military to political and moving towards peace.

### *Mutually Hurting Stalemate*

An outstanding number of scholars would argue that when a war is reaching its end, a period of a Mutually Hurting Stalemate occurs where the losses of war (financially, personnel, politically, etc.) are far greater than any benefit they might be reaping from the conflict. MHS theory claims that it is during these conditions where both warring parties make the decision to negotiate in order to come to a settlement that would benefit both parties. Ripeness and Mutually Hurting Stalemate are theories that were originally introduced by scholar William Zartman. Zartman views a MHS as a condition that is “necessary but insufficient” for the beginning of negotiations, arguing that one needs to look at how “ripe” a situation is in order to better understand if negotiations or mediation will occur.<sup>24</sup> Pugh uses ripeness and MHS theory to identify the causes that led to the negotiations between the FMLN and the Salvadoran government, explaining that “indications of ripeness” cause the two warring parties to recognize that there was a MHS.<sup>25</sup> According to Zartman, the greatest significant quality of ripeness is the pain that symbolizes the mutually hurting stalemate.<sup>26</sup>

Both of the two warring parties must feel like there is no other option to the conflict and must be aware of the pain that they are experiencing from the war. Ohlson would agree by arguing that often times, parties come to a negotiated agreement or make the decision to solve their conflicts by coming to the conclusion that there is no other alternative to the violence to achieve

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<sup>24</sup> Zartman, William. “Mediation: Ripeness and its challenges in the Middle East,” *International Negotiation* 20, no. 3, 2015: 480.

<sup>25</sup> Pugh, Jeffrey. “The structure of negotiations: Lessons from El Salvador for Contemporary Conflict Resolution,” *Negotiation Journal* 25, no. 1, 2009: 83-105.

<sup>26</sup> Zartman, “Meditation: Ripeness and its challenges in the Middle East,” 480.



their goals and therefore, must look at other options.<sup>27</sup> It would be in these conditions where a mutually hurting stalemate and a ripe moment would thus emerge for the initiation of negotiations. Gardner claims that ripeness is then only a circumstance of conflict resolution, and consequently not essentially the singular reason to a successful negotiation.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the argument features the hypothesis that the parties do not seek an outlet or way out of the conflict prior to the moment being ripe, rather, a mediator can intercede and initiate a peace process and create the conditions necessary.<sup>29</sup>

Zartman adds to this by introducing the concept of a Way Out and a Mutually Enticing Opportunity (MEO) to understand under what conditions there might be a successful negotiation process. A mutually enticing opportunity is not an outside component controlling the parties like the MHS, but instead, it is the formation of the parties themselves managing within the negotiations.<sup>30</sup> Where the conditions under a mutually hurting stalemate are caused by external forces, like that of what occurred in El Salvador, a mutually enticing opportunity is then created by the parties in order to reach a positive outcome. Ohlson comments by adding that a MEO produces mounting inter- and intra- party trust between the adversaries.<sup>31</sup> This could then eventually lead towards changing attitudes between the two warring parties and advance the peace process that can result in Mutually Obtained Rewards (MOR). In a different piece by Zartman, he argues that parties are not obligated to detect a precise solution, rather, they should only sense that

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<sup>27</sup> Ohlson, Thomas. "Understanding Causes of War and Peace," *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 1, 2008: 134.

<sup>28</sup> Gardner, Hannah-Jean. "Mutually Hurting or Mutually Thriving," *Aalborg University Denmark*, 2020: 14.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Zartman, "Mediation: Ripeness and its challenges," 481.

<sup>31</sup> Ohlson, "Understanding causes of war and peace," 144.

a negotiated resolution is achievable for the search and that the other negotiating party shares that consciousness and the disposition to search too.<sup>32</sup>

In the case of El Salvador, these conditions as well as others were present at the time of dialogue that could have prompted the FMLN towards the negotiating table. For one, there was the concept of third-party intervention, that some would argue have distinctive effects on a MHS and the conditions of negotiations. Schrodt argues that mediators can use carrots, sticks, or other tools of persuasion as leverage in order to either alter the neutral circumstances on the field or the opinions of the parties prior to them advocating for a negotiated settlement.<sup>33</sup> Mooradian asks the important questions of if mediators are the ones that predominantly persuade parties towards the negotiating table, answering by stating that opposing parties resolve their dissimilarities when they perceive that it is the right time to relinquish independent means for accomplishing a settlement, also known as Zartman's "ripeness" theory.<sup>34</sup> Gardner makes a contrary claim by stating that the initiation of the negotiation process does not always have to start on the basis that there is a ripe moment, rather, negotiations are able to be produced without the opening of a ripe condition within the conflict.<sup>35</sup>

General literature on peace processes and war termination often first refer to a mutually hurting stalemate, or a stalemate in general, as one of the initial conditions that open the door towards negotiations and potential settlements. Ramsbotham states how war termination can be a result of either one party defeating the other militarily, or a military stalemate between the two can

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<sup>32</sup> Zartman, William. "The timing of peace initiatives: Hurting stalemates and ripe moments," *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 1, no. 1, 2001: 9.

<sup>33</sup> Schrodt, Philip. "Evaluating ripeness and hurting stalemate in mediated international conflicts," *Center for International Political Analysis*, 2003: 3.

<sup>34</sup> Mooradian, Moorad. "Hurting stalemate or mediation? The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, 1990-95," *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 6, 1999: 711.

<sup>35</sup> Gardner, 15.

often be the primary event that leads towards a formal peace agreement and negotiations.<sup>36</sup> Call goes on to add how the “strategic stalemate” that occurred between the two warring parties is what caused the peace accords to emerge from these conditions and that the FMLN needed so that the Salvadoran government would be unable to defeat it militarily.<sup>37</sup> LeoGrande similarly contends that the military stalemate was what “[provided] the last opportunity for arranging a political solution” in El Salvador.<sup>38</sup>

The independent variable working in this alternative explanation is the mutually hurting stalemate, which is causing, not just the FMLN to make the decision to negotiate but the Salvadoran government as well. Arguing with the causal logic that both parties came to a realization that during this time of the conflict, a military victory would not be possible and thus both had to turn to negotiations as the only way out of the conflict. This variable is necessary to understand why the FMLN was prompted to negotiate but it is also insufficient. The primary reasons being that it does not take into account the other conditions and circumstances that did in fact allow the FMLN to continue fighting nor does it include the FMLN’s decision made in response to the mutually hurting stalemate. It only implies that there was a stalemate and negotiations followed and therefore this meant that it was the FMLN’s only option. The next section will lay out some of the gaps within this existing explanation.

### *Third-Party Intervention*

While some may argue that it was because of the UN mission in El Salvador, ONUSAL, and others might claim that it was Reagan and Bush’s geopolitical strategy that forced or coerced

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<sup>36</sup> Ramsbotham, Oliver. “Reflections on UN post-settlement peacebuilding,” *International Peacekeeping* 7, no. 1, 2000: 169.

<sup>37</sup> Call, 548.

<sup>38</sup> LeoGrande, William M. “A splendid little war: Drawing the line in El Salvador,” *International Security* 6, no. 1, 1981: 51.

the Salvadoran government into finding an end to the war, and lastly, many believe that it was regional peacebuilding efforts that led the Salvadoran government to agree to engaging with the involved parties to conclude the conflict. A regional peace process began in the early 1980's when Central American presidents and a Group of Friends began the Contadora initiative. Contadora were the efforts of the five Latin American countries coming together to find a solution to their civil wars and a way to end them. These efforts eventually progressed into what became known as Esquipulas I and Esquipulas II meetings conducted by the five Central American presidents whose countries were undergoing civil war. Here is where tentative peace agreements that the countries presidents agreed to abide by the and commence dialogue and work towards a negotiated settlement with the other warring parties took place.

Given the amount of assistance and resources brought by third-party intervention, peace processes are typically difficult to conclude with a positive outcome without some sort of third-party present. Often times, the distrust and hatred between warring parties prevents them from seeking a way out of the conflict regardless of a mutually hurting stalemate. Mediators are the connecting neutral points of contact between the two parties where dialogue can either progress into negotiations or, when not suitably conducted, the conflict can then escalate and the presence of a third-party can only exacerbate the violence. In the context of El Salvador, literature points to three separate particular actors that are often regarded as the pioneers of the peace process and influenced the start of negotiations and helped advance dialogues. The United Nations, regional groups, and the United States have been highly noticed for their successes and failures during the Salvadoran peace process, all contributing in distinct ways to it.

Intervention by the United Nations had increased post-Cold War and specifically in Central America. Montgomery credits the United Nations for being the driving force for the Salvadoran

peace process. Montgomery notes that the existing mutually hurting stalemate between the two warring parties had increased the United Nations role in the negotiation process, giving it greater responsibilities and agency for finding a resolution.<sup>39</sup> Zamora and Holiday add to this by stating that conditions in El Salvador were ripe for a negotiated settlement to take place and that the United Nations was the dominant party that helped resolve the internal conflict.<sup>40</sup> Conversely, Studmeister notes how the success of the negotiation process cannot be discussed without first crediting the role that the United Nations had in the peacebuilding process.<sup>41</sup> Koops adds by stating that the ONUCA mission was instrumental in the greater peace process and helped support regional efforts through its mandate.<sup>42</sup> The United Nations role in El Salvador was undoubtedly an important presence in the peacebuilding process, but what specific actions or strategies did the UN engage in to create a vast majority of the international community and scholar to conclude the UN's role within the process?

Holiday remarks ONUSAL, the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador, as the primary factor that led the country towards not only successful negotiations, but also towards the establishment of a peace agreement and its implementation.<sup>43</sup> According to Holiday, ONUSAL's presence in El Salvador had specific elements that allowed it to affect the direction in which the peace process moved.<sup>44</sup> For one, it impacted the way that human rights were viewed in the country

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<sup>39</sup> Montgomery, "Getting to peace in El Salvador," 142.

<sup>40</sup> Zamora, Ruben and David Holiday. "The struggle for lasting reform in El Salvador," in *Justice Prevention: Vetting public employees in traditional societies*, ed., Alexander Mayer-Rieckh and Pablo de Greiff. New York, Social Science Research Council, 2007: 105.

<sup>41</sup> Studmeister, Margarita. "El Salvador: Implementation of the Peace Accords," *United States Institute of Peace*, Peaceworks no. 38, 2001: 33

<sup>42</sup> Koops, Joaquim A. "United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA)," *The Oxford Handbook of U.N. Peacekeeping Operations*. Ed., Joachim A Koops, Thierry Tardy, Nomie MacQueen and Paul D. Williams. (Oxford University Press, 2015) 5.

<sup>43</sup> Holiday, "Building the Peace: Preliminary Lessons from El Salvador."

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

and allowed for a greater respect towards them; the ONUSAL mandate gave its officials access to any part of the country without prior notice to officials which created a “dissuasive” or “preventive” influence on the operation; and lastly, the sizable range and presence of ONUSAL deterred the FMLN and Salvadoran government from leaving the negotiating table.<sup>45</sup> Holiday adds that the fact that there was early deployment of UN personnel and the fact that ONUSAL’s mandate had a large human rights monitoring/verification component to it is what created a climate that would be more conducive to find a negotiated settlement for both parties.<sup>46</sup> Montgomery would argue that one of the primary reasons there was great success surrounding the negotiation process in El Salvador is the “quality and tenacity of the UN negotiating team” which was led by Murrack Goulding and Alvaro de Soto.<sup>47</sup>

While the role of the United Nation in the Salvadoran peace process is undeniable, other scholars would credit the participation of regional actors as the most influential condition that brought about a successful peace effort. Howard notes how in El Salvador, there were a multitude of different internal and external actors that played definitive roles in the negotiation process and that this internal conflict had begun to escalate due to intrastate conflicts in Central America that began creating greater tensions for all the ongoing wars in the region.<sup>48</sup> Meyer address that the call for peace in El Salvador can be attributed to former Mexico president, Lopez Portillo’s efforts in 1982 as he called for a comprehensive development of negotiations to convey peace in El Salvador, with Mexico acting as the “bridge between the polarize forces in such a negotiation process.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 422.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 435.

<sup>47</sup> Montgomery, 161.

<sup>48</sup> Howard, Lise Morjé. “El Salvador: Centrally propelled learning” in *UN Peacekeeping in Civil Wars*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 90.

<sup>49</sup> Meyer, “Latin American diplomacy and the Central American peace process,” 170.

The arguments posed by these scholars point to the amount of influence and power that a third-party had in the negotiation process, specifically, getting the actors to the negotiating table. What is essentially being argued is that a third-party force such as a band of countries, the United Nations, or a hegemon such as the United States, has enough power and influence that it could persuade or coerce a party to agree to certain conditions they are setting during the peace process. In El Salvador, whether it was a reason for political motives that would help advance the greater FMLN strategy or not, scholars would argue that efforts made by regional forces, the United Nations, and the United States prompted the FMLN's decision to continue with the negotiation process and works towards a negotiated political settlement rather than continue participating in the armed struggle.

In specific, one of the most highly cited regional efforts in Central America is the Esquipulas process. Esquipulas was the process of the five Central American presidents of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Honduras coming together to find a solution to their civil wars collectively rather than have the Contadora or the United States intervene in their domestic affairs. From these efforts, an agreement known as the Esquipulas II agreement or the Guatemalan Plan was created, which would serve as the basis for the five countries to find a negotiated political solution to their civil wars and all signatories will be held responsible for abiding to its conditions. McKenna regards the Esquipulas Accord as one of the "best changes for real peace in Central America" and that it was able to generate more domestic support than Contadora was.<sup>50</sup> Koops contends that the combination of the efforts made by the Central American presidents coupled with the end of the Cold War is what allowed for the opening of a

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<sup>50</sup> McKenna, Peter. "Nicaragua and the Esquipulas II Accord: Setting the Record Straight," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 14, no. 2, 1989: 68.

promising peace process and negotiations.<sup>51</sup> The Esquipulas agreement opened the door for political and diplomatic efforts and the signing of the accord embodied a great achievement for the region.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, one cannot ignore the amount of influence that the United States had not only during the Salvadoran war, but in the negotiation and peace process. Many would argue that successful counterinsurgency strategies produced by Washington are what primarily brought the FMLN and the Salvadoran government to the negotiating table. A publication by the U.S. Embassy stated how a ceremony was conducted post Salvadoran civil war and former President Salvador Sánchez Cerén gave the United States government a special recognition for their contributions to their government during the war and to the peace process.<sup>53</sup> Specifically, the report states that it was Washington's "friendly" attitude towards the country and their support for peace through dialogue that essentially helped conclude the war.<sup>54</sup> Quan would add how increasing tensions from the end of the Cold War and internal opposition in Washington towards U.S. support to the Salvadoran regime caused the United States to increase pressure to the parties for a negotiated solution.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Howard notes how the United States and the United Nations worked in tandem with one another to find a solution to the Salvadoran war, specifically though the United States support of the UN's decision-making.<sup>56</sup> Lastly, former member of the U.S. military, Rosello recounts his days in El Salvador and states how it could be tempting for many to believe that the

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<sup>51</sup> Koops, "United Nations Observer Group in Central America," 2.

<sup>52</sup> McKenna, "Nicaragua and the Esquipulas II Accord," 68.

<sup>53</sup> US Embassy in El Salvador, "El Salvador recognized the support of the United States in the 1992 Peace Accords," 22 January 2019. Available at: <https://sv.usembassy.gov/el-salvador-recognized-the-support-of-the-united-states-in-the-1992-peace-accords/>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Quan, Adan. "Through the Looking Glass: U.S. Aid to El Salvador and the Politics of National Identity," *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 2, 2005: 280.

<sup>56</sup> Howard, "El Salvador," 94.



successful outcome of a politically negotiated settlement can be credited to the United States economic and military assistance, but in reality, it is a result of the United States' political assistance that paved the way for greater social conditions and promotion of human rights.<sup>57</sup> Rosello believes that it was the "ESAF's institutional conversion to a professional military" and the intense progress of its human rights record that established the victory of the peace process and it intrinsically affected the way the FMLN perceived the conversions to El Salvador's altering political climate.<sup>58</sup>

Rosello argues that by 1987, the FMLN's political window of opportunity had closed due to an improved, stronger, and more efficient ESAF and therefore, the FMLN was unable to combat or counter this improved force, causing it to agree to the negotiation process.<sup>59</sup> One could argue that regional efforts were the segway towards negotiations, but, they miss the element of what shifted in the FMLN strategy or mindset that allowed them to go from militaristic to political strategies. International pressure alone cannot be credited to a party's shift in strategy or being afraid of repercussions that they decide to agree to a negotiated settlement. Additionally, Seed notes the relationship between the FMLN and the Mexican government and regards to the idea that the FMLN was pressured into ending the armed struggle by its ally Mexico in order to continue receiving support from the government.<sup>60</sup> This would suggest that the FMLN was prompted towards a negotiated settlement in fear of losing their allies and the beneficial resources, such as economic, that came from Mexico that was helping support the guerrillas during the war.

Similar to the explanation that the MHS theory presented, this alternative surrounding the amount of influence that third-parties have on the negotiation process is incomplete to justify why

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<sup>57</sup> Rosello, Victor M. "Lessons from El Salvador," *W.S. Army War College*, 1993: 102.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>60</sup> Seed, "Building an inclusive peace: Lessons from El Salvador," 21.

rebel groups shift from military to political strategies. For one, the independent variable in this hypothesis is intervention by an outside actor, with the causal logic that the resources, politics, agenda, and strategies of this one actor is greatly influential in the peace process that the two main domestic warring parties are going to act based on what these international actors are proposing. While in fact the presence of a hegemon such as the United States and the amount of power and influence that an organization such as the UN has, as well as the strategic partnership and alliance that regional actors might bring, these interventions typically targeted the Salvadoran government more than it did the rebel groups. In specific, policies by the United States aimed towards war termination centered around the dissolution and military defeat of the FMLN. The United Nations also strategized their peace process with a focus on the government's role in the negotiation process. Therefore, to argue that the actions of these external actors were the primary reason that persuaded the FMLN to shift their goals is insufficient. Although, one cannot deny that external intervention did bring a different element to the table as will be presented in the following section.

### *Military Exhaustion*

Some argue that a series of events unfolded internationally and regionally that heavily affected the FMLN operated. Specifically, some scholars claim that it was the fact that the United States cut off ties with the Salvadoran government after a series of human rights violations were internationally broadcasted. Many believe that in fact it was what was occurring regionally with the defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, a guerrilla group that was able to claim power and supported the FMLN and other regional clandestine groups in several ways such as financially and politically that mostly affected the FMLN's strategies. The mutually hurting stalemate theory and ripeness are conditions that are both results of outside factors affecting the conflict. Specific to El

Salvador, several scholars lay out a couple of these conditions and argue that it was this that caused the FMLN to seek a negotiated solution by the late 80's as a way out of the war. What these arguments have in common is the fact that they all allude to the FMLN being militarily weak and unable to continue in the war, having exhausted their capabilities and therefore reaching a MHS.

Evans states that by 1989, the FMLN had been militarily exacerbated and was not able to continue fighting.<sup>61</sup> Karlen would offer an explanation by pointing to the claim that external support to rebel groups reduced the likelihood of negotiations between the two warring parties.<sup>62</sup> Support from Russia had decreased in the years leading to a mutually hurting stalemate, possibly leaving the FMLN more weak and vulnerable without the material capabilities to further support it during the war. Holiday adds by stating that by the early 90s, both the FMLN and the Salvadoran government were more accepting of negotiations during this time because for one, the FMLN had a realization that it "lacked the military power to overthrow the government" and that it would not be able to launch a popular insurrection.<sup>63</sup>

Cunningham argues that the development of a new leader within the rebel group can be one possible explanation as to why there is a shift in the decision making of entering negotiations.<sup>64</sup> Cunningham elaborates by stating that new leaders can provide information to the state about the possible unity of the rebel group.<sup>65</sup> This would then affect the state's perception of the viability of a rebel group as a possible negotiating party. Holiday goes on to argue that the Salvadoran military had provide unable to militarily defeat the rebels which is what essentially shifted the Salvadoran

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<sup>61</sup> Evans, Ernest H. "The El Salvadoran peace process five years on: An assessment," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 21, no. 2, 1998: 171-179.

<sup>62</sup> Karlen, Niklas. "Escalate to De-Escalate? External state support and government' willingness to negotiate," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 10, no. 1080, 2020: 1-21.

<sup>63</sup> Seed, "Building an inclusive peace," 22.

<sup>64</sup> Cunningham, Kathleen G. "Conflict Negotiations and Rebel Leader Selection," *Journal of Peace Research*.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

government's decision to negotiate, mixed with the cut-off of economic aid from the United States.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, this in tandem to domestic pressure from civil society and deteriorating economic conditions in El Salvador is argued to be the primary factors leading towards negotiations.<sup>67</sup> While one can appreciate the fact that external and internal conditions were shaping the way that the negotiation process was evolving, existing evidence points to a possible different reason as to why the FMLN decided to partake in such events. It is one thing for the government to feel the pressures of other governments and international organizations forcing it to find a peaceful negotiated solution to its conflict from fear of sanctions or other sticks, but an insurgent guerrilla group does not have the same fears to consider and therefore, cannot be prompted to the negotiation table for the same reason a government would be.

Tuohy offers an analysis that explains how the emergence of negotiated settlements can be the result of outside support to counter- and insurgent groups, specifically how external states supporting rebellions are linked with local governments restraining their intentions in insurrections, and in attaining a stalemate leading to negotiations.<sup>68</sup> Distinctly, DeLugan looks towards local actors and in specific, leaders from social groups that worked together in El Salvador to advocate for a peace process and negotiated settlement.<sup>69</sup>

The events that occurred internationally and regional had profound effects on a global scale. In fact, this alternative explanation is the one that analyzes the way in which the FMLN was most affected and gives insight into how the leadership reacted to the loss of support from the international and regional allies. Although, similar to the other two existing theories, this

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<sup>66</sup> Holiday and Stanley, "Building the peace," 418.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Tuohy, Brian P. "The role of outside states in shaping the entrance into negotiations with insurgents," Master's Thesis (Georgetown University, 2011): iii.

<sup>69</sup> DeLugan, Robin Maria. "Peace, culture, and governance in post-civil war El Salvador (1992-2000)," *Journal of Human Rights* 4, no. 2, 2005: 239.

hypothesis alone is not sufficient to understand the full transition from military to political. Similar to the other two, this argument is basing the decision of the FMLN to come to a negotiated settlement based on a specific event that occurred during one specific period of time. The hypothesis is not taking into account other factors that were affecting the FMLN such as internal divisions or the fact that they were heavily participating in UN peacebuilding efforts. In specific, it was the FMLN's agency that allowed them to participate as much as they did in UN peacebuilding rather than inclusion by the UN. The FMLN took it upon themselves to continue dialogue with the UN and propose their own strategies and resolutions to them. Although, this variable is equally as important to consider in the analysis of what is affecting the dependent variable, – i.e., the decision to negotiate – existing evidence will help explain why one cannot only take into account these independent events and rather, produce a more wholistic and interconnected explanation. The accounts on their own are insufficient to explain the transition but once they are incorporated with the voices of the FMLN and they are observed through an interconnected lens, these hypotheses will help understand why the FMLN changed their strategies from military to political.

### **Key Findings**

Literature surrounding the peace process in El Salvador point towards the FMLN's transition to a more politico-military strategy throughout the years. LeoGrande states how the two warring parties in the Salvadoran civil war recognized that the most viable solution to the conflict was a political rather than militaristic approach and that negotiations would be the most optimal way to achieve this.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, primary sources from former leaders such as Leonel Gonzalez, Commandant Balta, Rico Mira, Joaquin Villalobos, and Lorena Peña tell a story of a broken society

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<sup>70</sup> LeoGrande, "A splendid little war," 50.

that suffered decades of mass repression and an ever-changing war environment, calling for adaptation to the conflict and strategic realigning of war tactics. Over a dozen primary sources have pointed to the FMLN engaging in military tactics since their formation in 1980 with goals to overthrow the Salvadoran government but have slowly and strategically shifted towards a more political approach as the war progressed.

These stories tell of a guerrilla group that sought a negotiated settlement from as early as the 1970's but had not been able to evolve their political strategies due to the consistent changing nature of the war which was primarily being affected by international, regional, and domestic conditions. Existing explanations give valid points considering the way in which the events during the war unfolded, but first accounts of guerrilla leaders show the way in which the FMLN consistently acted as formal political actors, built and grew their political strategies and executed them at an appropriate time, fostered a relationship with the United Nations and governments from across the world as they tried to build international relationships, and would constantly advocate and present solutions and requests for dialogue with the Salvadoran government but were regularly rejected by them.

Since the beginning of the war, the FMLN operated like a formal actor as they established a politico-diplomatic commission within the organization to monitor the negotiation process, to maintain contact/allies that the FMLN had, to coordinate new meetings and where they were going to meet.<sup>71</sup> This shows how the FMLN did not invest all their means and personnel into developing their military capabilities, rather, since their creation, the rebels organized their resources to cultivate their political capabilities, regardless of whether it was to address the war or internal conflict. Additionally, the guerrillas had established offices worldwide, including in Washington,

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<sup>71</sup> [Interview with Ana Guadalupe Martínez, June 19, 1997] / interviewer, Jean Krasno; translator, Michael Lachin.

which comes to show that they were expanding politic-diplomatic relations throughout the war as they found necessary.

The next section will present first-hand accounts from rebel leaders that will add a different element to the existing explanations that were previously presented as well as arguments from other scholars that display the FMLN's political nature throughout the war. The primary sources will add the narrative of the rebels that is missing from the mutually hurting stalemate theory, the hypothesis regarding military exhaustion, and the argument consisting of third-party intervention. The evidence will demonstrate how the termination of the war and the progression of the peace process consisted of more FMLN agency than the existing literature accounts for.

#### *Mutually Hurting Stalemate & Military Exhaustion*

The mutually hurting stalemate theory is centered around the notion that external or internal forces have potentially weakened both parties to the point that neither will be able to advance in the war with the hopes of militarily defeating the other. This theory holds an assumption that the last scenario that can be partially beneficial is to succumb to negotiations and lay down their arms and seize the armed struggle. The theory implies that the warring parties did not have an alternative strategy and that negotiations were the most optimal choice to achieve some beneficial outcome through a negotiated solution as both parties were sought what was previously referred to as a "way out." For the rebels, the MHS was prompted after external conditions and circumstances presented themselves once Nicaragua, Cuba, and the USSR began to withhold military support to the group.

The events leading up to the MHS are important to discuss in order to show how the FMLN was in fact militarily affected to a certain level and was mutually hurting on this front, but the other half of this narrative that focuses on the agency of the rebels is missing from this argument. For

one, the FMLN heavily relied on the arms and weapons provided by the Sandinistas but most importantly, they were role model support for the FMLN and their cause. The FMLN saw the success of the Sandinistas as an inspiration to their movement and believed that there was hope and possibility that similar outcomes could occur in El Salvador. Former FMLN member Salvador Samayoa discusses the impact that Nicaragua had on the FMLN as he recalls that the loss of the Sandinistas in the '90 elections was both a positive and negative event; for one, it helped the FMLN realize the reality of what was going on regionally and help put their revolutionist goals into perspective and on another note, other members such as ERP leader Joaquin Villalobos felt like the FMLN took a hard blow and would not be able to recover after the loss of the Sandinistas.<sup>72</sup>

In regard to the MHS, what prompted the FMLN to negotiate was not necessarily the loss of military support and the realization that they could not win militarily, but it was largely their ideological strength that was weakened by the loss of the Sandinistas. Regardless of how the FMLN would come to obtain power, whether it be through militaristic or political means, the Sandinistas stood as the political base support for the FMLN. Samayoa states that the FMLN depended drastically on Humberto Ortega, Nicaraguan military leader, on supplying the group with weapons and other resources and upon the fall of the Sandinistas, ERP leader Joaquin Villalobos felt that at this moment the FMLN was not in the most favorable position to negotiate and were politically weakened.<sup>73</sup> This statement would reject the argument of a MHS which relies heavily on the militaristic capabilities that both parties have, emphasizing the desire to only win through an armed struggle rather than engaging in political discussions only after it is their last

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<sup>72</sup> [Interview with Salvador Samayoa, June 19, 1997] / interviewer, Jean Krasno; translator, Michael Lanchin.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.



resort. For the FMLN, it was their political strength that was weakened and felt that once they were militarily weak, negotiations were the last option they could take as a “way out.”

While the MHS could have influenced the decision to advance dialogue and negotiations, this was not the last resort for the FMLN. The mutually hurting stalemate did not hinder the FMLN’s capabilities to continue in the armed struggle. Rather, the guerrillas were able to adapt to their weakened military front and rebuild their political strategies after the loss of the Sandinistas. What occurred in Nicaragua with the fall of the Sandinista government in fact delayed the negotiation process and hindered the FMLN’s ability to propose their desired requirements for the tentative agreement,<sup>74</sup> but it was not the primary reason on why the FMLN did or did not choose to engage in negotiations as a strategy when shifting from military to a more political tactic to pursue their revolutionist goals. Regarding the argument presented in this paper, the independent variable of a MHS is not the primary variable that is causing a direct reaction to the dependent variable, the decision to negotiate and end the war. Rather, what was occurring internationally and globally influenced the FMLN’s decision not to negotiate at the time of the MHS. Moreover, the agency of the FMLN should be taken into account and one must analyze the way in which the FMLN responded to the changing conditions rather than interpreting their participation in negotiations post-MHS as their last option and only “way out.”

One can see this unfolding as the occurrences in Nicaragua would help the FMLN strategize and realistically adapt and change their tactics, accordingly, giving legitimacy to their cause of conquering and implementing an authentic democratic regime in the country.<sup>75</sup> Howard notes how regardless of the financial and resource-based support provided by the USSR to the

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<sup>74</sup> [Interview with Schafik Handal, June 19, 1997] / interviewer, Jean Krasno; translator, Michael Lanchin.

<sup>75</sup> FMLN. *FMLN: por la paz y la democracia, definiremos la Guerra en las ciudades*, El Salvador: Ediciones Liberacion, 1989: 46.

FMLN, the guerrilla group already had more than sufficient capabilities to sustain their army and eventually became more independent from all its allies that were supporting it, being, the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Nicaragua.<sup>76</sup> While the fall of the Sandinistas did affect the FMLN and some leaders believed that it would affect them on the battlefield, the guerrillas did not settle for defeat. Rather, the FMLN began to grow and expand their political strategies and tactics while their military resources were being modified.

For one, rebel leaders such as Schafik Handal maintained constant communication with other governments throughout the war as Handal notes that the extent of the relationship and representation that the FMLN had with other governments was comparable to that of ambassadors with highly developed diplomatic systems.<sup>77</sup> Former FMLN leader Villalobos reports how “throughout its history, the FMLN has shown a remarkable ability to adapt to changing situations” and adds that “the FMLN ... has displayed great ability to maintain political influence among the masses and to face up to the challenge of political debates.”<sup>78</sup> This not only shows the fact that the FMLN had a political strategy from the beginnings of their formation, but it shows how regardless of external conditions and a MHS the FMLN adapted to the conditions and continued to pursue their goals, now through a predominantly political strategy since their military front had been weakened. Although they were weakened, this did not mean or imply that the FMLN was weak.

Moreover, Howard discusses how the FMLN experienced an ideological shift after the fall of the USSR and acknowledges the way in which the FMLN had to adapt to these new changes, advocating for a negotiated settlement.<sup>79</sup> Regardless of the external conditions, former FMLN

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<sup>76</sup> Howard, 95.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Schafik Handal.

<sup>78</sup> Villalobos, Joaquin. “A Democratic Revolution for El Salvador,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 74, 1989: 106-107.

<sup>79</sup> Howard, 91.

commandant Ramiro states how the FMLN argued that they were still able to establish a strategy that would keep them afloat.<sup>80</sup> Samayoa claims that the FMLN was fearful of coming off as militarily incapable and/or weak to the Salvadoran government and in the international community.<sup>81</sup> This image would have forced them into accepting any agreement that would be presented to them and so, the FMLN believed that because many events were unraveling that were not in their favor, at the moment, it was best to prepare for an offensive that would display their military strength. For this reason, the argument made that a mutually hurting stalemate is was prompted the FMLN to the negotiating table is not sufficient in the case of El Salvador. First person narrative shows how the FMLN was continuing to build their military forces and were not looking for a way out once they were seen as militarily incapable. Rather, the most beneficial approach, regardless of the halt of resources and arms from their allies, would have been halt the pursuit of negotiations until they were able to be seen as equals at the negotiating table, which at the time of the mutually hurting stalemate, it would not have been possible.

ERP leader Villalobos acknowledges the changing circumstances that the war presented and argues that the FMLN was able to appropriately acclimate to the events and grow politically in order to achieve their goals.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, the guerrillas goal from the beginnings of the war was to see a democratic El Salvador, which leaders within the FMLN knew would not be possible without a politically negotiated solution. This then prompted the FMLN to be the main advocates for negotiations since the early 1980s. Regardless of internal divisions that dealt with the FMLN's political goals and strategies, the FMLN knew that the confrontation with the Armed Forces and the Salvadoran government would not have only been a military one. Moreover, the FMLN was

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<sup>80</sup> Merino, Jose. *Comandante Ramiro: Revelaciones de un guerrillero y líder revolucionario Salvadoreño*. San Salvador, Ocean Sur, 2011: 105.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Salvador Samayoa.

<sup>82</sup> Villalobos, "A Democratic Revolution for El Salvador," 107.

aware of the fact that they had to continue to develop their political tactics and most importantly, be strategic about when they execute this.<sup>83</sup>

Additionally, while the FMLN sought to rebuild their military strength, the insurgents had to build a diplomatic front that would give their struggle and revolution legitimacy and that would allow them to create a favorable image in international public opinion, political forces, and the government of other nations.<sup>84</sup> Commandant Balta of the FMLN noted that “the Salvadoran reality, however, due to the very nature of the national conflict, pushed for a different solution, which did not respond to the interests or expectations [that the FMLN was fighting for]: it was the political solution, without winners or losers.”<sup>85</sup> Moreover, this applies to the MHS theory regarding how the conditions of the war had exhausted the FMLN’s ability to win militarily and therefore had to agree to negotiate. Arguably, the statement by Commandant Balata shows how it is evident that while the original interests and goals of the FMLN had been possibly to overthrow the government, the conditions that the war presented to the organization created the opening of different tactics and strategies to find an end to the conflict, which would only be possible through a political solution. Arguing against MHS theory, this did not mean that the conditions of a mutually hurting stalemate are what pushed the FMLN towards the negotiation table. On the contrary, the FMLN found that this was an opportunity for them to expand their political solution to the war, something that they had been advocating to their adversaries from the beginning.

### *Third-Party Intervention*

Theories claiming that the FMLN was prompted to the negotiation table due to pressure by third-party actors such as the United Nations and the United States often derive from the amount

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<sup>83</sup> Merino, *Comandante Ramiro*, 98

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-99.

<sup>85</sup> Medrano, *Memoria de un guerrillero*, 119.

of influence that these two actors had on the war. Moreover, scholars such as Seed credit the important role that the Catholic Church played in the peace process alongside other multiple local actors such as other members in the Jesuit community, moderate businessmen, local organizations, and the Salvadoran community as a whole.<sup>86</sup> These groups and individuals would assist in mediating internal conflicts at the same time that Mexico and the U.S. were pushing towards a negotiated settlement.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, the FMLN was able to foster a relationship with the United Nations and optimize this relationship to gain a certain level of international representation that would provide legitimacy to their cause and movement. At the same time, international actors that were supporting both groups were similarly advocating for a negotiated solution and actively pursuing viable outlets towards advancing the peace process.<sup>88</sup>

Although, considering the fact that there were a multitude of actors that took part during the negotiation process, it was inevitable that at times it hindered any progression or potential towards a positive outcome. For one, the two warring parties had completely opposing conditions on what they expected from a resolution or settlement. On the other hand, third parties such as the United States had their own ideal resolutions that they perceived as the best option for the overall peace process. While originally Washington consistently advocated against the FMLN, as the peace process progressed, the United States took backseat and allowed room for the United Nations to lead the negotiations once it saw that the Salvadoran military would not be able to defeat the FMLN through an armed struggle. Moreover, the governments in Europe were consistently expressing their support for a negotiated political settlement while advocating moving away from U.S. support towards the Salvadoran Armed Forces and their support for the military.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Seed, 21-22.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> LeoGrande, 42.

Additionally, Howard notes how the FMLN eventually grew to appreciate the role that the United States was playing throughout the peace process.<sup>90</sup>

*The United Nations and the United States*

Several theories posit that the presence of powerful international actors, such as the UN, can provide a certain amount of pressure simply by being in the same space that the conflict is taking place. With the presence of the United Nations, there was a sense of caution that the combatants had to take after knowing that any war crimes and human rights violations that occurred would be internationally and publicly reprimanded. This would hurt both parties as one, the FMLN would not be able to obtain the support they needed from powerful international actors to pursue their political goals, while the Salvadoran government would also lose political support and possibly legitimacy. Moreover, both parties were in need of international political legitimation that the United Nations would have been able to provide them.<sup>91</sup> For the FMLN, it would have granted legitimacy towards the guerilla's movement and would have established them as a political actor. While the United Nations played a critical role in the Salvadoran peace process, the presence of the United Nations did not promote the FMLN's decision to negotiate but rather, the FMLN used the UN as a resource to promote their own political strategies and goals.

As for the United States, Washington had a heavy hand in the war and the overall peace process although the Reagan administration was hesitant to see the Salvadoran government negotiate with the guerrillas. As the previous section noted, scholars had argued that the United States was the entrepreneur of the negotiation process and were internationally heralded for their work in El Salvador's peace process, although, evidence demonstrates how this argument is misleading. For one, as the war progressed, American policy that was supportive of seeing a

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<sup>90</sup> Howard, 94.

<sup>91</sup> Stanley, 23.

military defeat of the rebels, mixed with the assistance for democratization were proving to be contradictory efforts by Washington.<sup>92</sup> In their efforts to move towards a democratic country, the U.S. pursued strategies that would cause political issues that stymied the negotiation process. Moreover, the growing forces of the Salvadoran military that received training and funding from Washington did not seize their human rights abuses, if anything the consistent financial support only exacerbated the crimes as these forces were now better equipped and trained.<sup>93</sup> Once these crimes became evident in Washington, American policy supporting the Salvadoran military changed and the U.S. withdrew themselves during the negotiation process.<sup>94</sup>

LeoGrande credits United States intervention for the successful opening of the negotiation process. For one, he notes how leadership in Washington, specifically the guidance of Ambassador Robert White, prompted a four interrelated objective in 1980 that attracted the moderate left from its relationships with the insurgents, consequently opening the door for a resolution that would have left the FMLN completely isolated on the political periphery.<sup>95</sup> He then discusses the amount of power that the United States had over the Salvadoran Army and concludes that this was one of the key drivers towards the decision to open up the negotiation process. LeoGrande states that it was due to Washington's contributions in military aid that allowed it to retrain the Armed Forces efforts towards a military victory over the guerrillas and rather persuade the government to start making advances towards the negotiating table and reassure that it would abide by any settlement that was reached.<sup>96</sup> The general argument that the United States as a third-party are what mainly influenced the FMLN's decision to negotiate is too centered on the idea that they had power over

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<sup>92</sup> Howard, 94.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> LeoGrande, 32-33.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 51.

the rebels and it was their hegemonic influence that prompted the FMLN to shift their strategy. On the contrary, the U.S. had the greatest effect on the Salvadoran government and their decision to negotiate, not on the rebels. While the Salvadoran government was adjusting to the withdrawal of military and political support from Washington, this benefited the guerrillas as they saw their adversaries become weaker on both fronts.

Rosello adds how there were times where the United States would blatantly and directly express their reservations and apprehension over certain conditions that were unfolding in El Salvador, one being the new ARENA government that came to power in 1989.<sup>97</sup> For one, it was mainly due to the fact that the ARENA party was associated with El Salvador's historical death squads and ultra-right extremists.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, Rosello argues how ARENA coming to power was one of the greatest circumstances that could have emerged for the progression of peace talks, specifically direct contact and talks between the FMLN and the Salvadoran government.<sup>99</sup> Rosello concludes that Cristiani's leadership was what had brought the war towards a negotiated settlement, despite American's disapproval and skepticism.<sup>100</sup> This demonstrates how internal domestic conditions such as presidential elections were the main turning point for the negotiation process and war termination during this time. Moreover, the United States was adamant about Cristiani coming to power because he was a strong advocate of resolving the conflict through a peaceful settlement rather than through a military victory. As for the FMLN, it was Cristiani's presidential win that would have guaranteed them a position at the negotiating table, alongside the support of the United Nations. Nowhere in this equation did the United States promote the

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<sup>97</sup> Rosello, "Lessons from El Salvador," 102.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.



participation of the FMLN in the negotiation process, the only way that it directly affected it was when they were advocating against it and hindering the peace process.

In addition to this, it is important to mention the amount of financial aid that was provided to the Salvadoran government by the United States. Involvement in El Salvador cost as much as \$4 billion through USAID and was channeled through other methods such as military aid, counterinsurgency policies and development aid aimed towards tackling what Washington believed to be the root causes of the conflict – i.e., poverty, corruption, economic inefficiency, and lack of political/civil liberties.<sup>101</sup> What is most critical to note about U.S. aid to El Salvador is the effect that it had on the war and the outcomes of the peace process. For one, the FMLN would not be able to win militarily, the amount of money and resources that were pouring into the Salvadoran Armed Forces would prevent the FMLN from a military victory.<sup>102</sup> Additionally, the U.S. supported the oligarchies hold on power within El Salvador and promoted their governance.<sup>103</sup>

This essentially would then cause the FMLN to have to re-shift their strategies to one, either enhance their military forces or two, begin reorienting their strategy to a political focus, allowing them to find other means of obtaining a victory and a hold on power. As the war progressed, the FMLN in fact moved away towards a military-dominant force and towards focused on becoming a political powerhouse. Seed notes how the FMLN reoriented away from their guerrilla tactics aimed at economic and social reform towards a political organization that primarily fought to open political spaces for their participation in competitive elections and advocating for justice towards the gross amount of human rights abuses that were carried out during the war.<sup>104</sup> As time went one, the United States, with the new Bush administration, were advocates towards a negotiated

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<sup>101</sup> Quan, “Through the looking glass,” 276.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Seed, 22-23.

resolution and did not tolerate the Salvadoran governments human rights violations and suspended military aid to prevent from egregious war crimes escalating. This reorientation by both the FMLN and the United States, coupled with the presidential win of Cristiani, in turn would have guaranteed the FMLN's inclusion in the Salvadoran political system and the peace agreement signed.

*Regional: Contadora and Esquipulas*

Regional efforts had both direct and indirect influence on the FMLN's decision to negotiate. To start, the Contadora and Esquipulas processes were aimed towards the Central American governments efforts towards a peaceful resolution and initiating dialogue and negotiations with the rebels. In sum, the processes were strictly aimed at the government's participation in the regional processes and how they would conduct their domestic affairs. Contadora was a result of the Reagan administrations counterinsurgency policies and its fortitude to end the root cause of the Marxist insurgency in El Salvador.<sup>105</sup> This, coupled with Secretary of State Alexander Haig's request to blockade Cuba in order to seize the flow of arms into the guerrilla's offensive caused for the four governments of Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela and Panama to form the Contadora group and find a Latin American solution to the regions internal conflicts rather than one produced by Washington.<sup>106</sup>

The types of agreements that arose from Contadora and Esquipulas were less than satisfactory for the FMLN and rejected their conditions towards peace. Former guerrilla leader Schafik Handal states that from the get-go the FMLN rejected the Esquipulas agreement and that more so the UN mission, known as ONUCA, that arose from that agreement.<sup>107</sup> Handal and other FMLN leaders believed that ONUCA and Esquipulas were a representation of U.S. interests in El

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<sup>105</sup> Weiner, Laruden. "The Contadora Process: Something for everyone, solving nothing," *The National Interest*, no. 4, 1986: 67.

<sup>106</sup> Meyer, 185.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Schafik Handal.

Salvador and that the agreement would benefit their geopolitical strategies of combating communism in the region.<sup>108</sup> ONUCA benefited the Salvadoran government as they continued to receive weapons and ammunition from the United States and worked towards hindering the FMLN, in retaliation, the FMLN would vow to rid the country of ONUCA and continue to pursue a fair and just negotiation processes, unlike those proposed by Esquipulas and ONUCA.<sup>109</sup>

Moreover, the discussion between Contadora and El Salvador were largely a failure at establishing certain conditions that the country had to abide by for the war.<sup>110</sup> Conversely, El Salvador's president Duarte was known to be one of the leaders that was unsupportive of many of the Contadora efforts, protesting against some of its conditions. Additionally, Howard notes how Contadora's negotiation efforts were "largely ineffective" for El Salvador.<sup>111</sup>

While the Contadora Group planned strategies towards a political conclusion to the Central American wars, Daniel Ortega, a Nicaraguan junta leader at the time, proposed a peace plan, talks with Washington, and other initiatives aimed at controlling the armed conflicts through political means and finding a peaceful resolution.<sup>112</sup> This was coupled with Contadora's framework for ongoing negotiations, attempting to construct a political space where the Central American countries could find an original diplomatic alternative for settling their conflicts.<sup>113</sup> Contadora often relied on the presence of the United Nations to help create traction towards their initiative, knowing that it was difficult for the Central American presidents to agree to requests being made by regional actors that were not involved in their domestic affairs. For one, the Contadora group

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Howard, 90.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>112</sup> Meyer, 171.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 185.

would continuously seek the assistance of UN negotiator Alvaro de Soto for guidance on exerting pressure on the parties to negotiate and make credible commitments.<sup>114</sup>

The Esquipulas peace process led by the five Central American presidents is often regarded as a greater success than that of Contadora. For one, it was the culmination of efforts by the direct parties that were involved in the armed struggles in the region, not by a third party that had geopolitical interests in their domestic affairs. The start of the process was originally launched in May of 1986 where all the leaders pledged to introduce measures, such as increasing the regularity of informal military communication, to reduce the level of tension in the region.<sup>115</sup> While the process appeared promising at first, it took up to a year for there to be some kind of political momentum.<sup>116</sup> Throughout the process, Salvadoran president Duarte would state that there was “insufficient preparation” towards the Esquipulas summit meetings and refused to attend, which is a probable reaction to pressure from Washington to not negotiate.<sup>117</sup> In 1987, on August 7<sup>th</sup>, the five presidents settled on an agreement known as the Esquipulas II Accords. Some leaders such as Duarte were reluctant to sign the agreement as McKenna argues that international pressure and fear of being perceived as the “enemies” of peace is what drove them to sign it.<sup>118</sup> The Esquipulas II Accord is often proclaimed as a major achievement in Central American political life and a major accomplishment that had a united front between the five presidents that pledged their support and commitment to the agreement.<sup>119</sup>

Contadora and Esquipulas did in fact hold the Salvadoran government accountable for initiating dialogue with the FMLN in efforts to conclude the fighting and the casualties. The

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<sup>114</sup> Howard, 81.

<sup>115</sup> McKenna, 63.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 62.

agreement allowed Duarte to open up the Salvadoran political system and permitted the FMLN to organize freely.<sup>120</sup> While these regional efforts and circumstances did not directly persuade the FMLN to negotiate, they still played a big role in the negotiation processes and execution of the negotiations. The FMLN released a statement noting that “[Esquipulas] is a favorable conjuncture to open the strategic negotiation, it is necessary to take advantage of it.”<sup>121</sup> The Esquipulas initiative opened up a political avenue for the FMLN to exercise and establish their political goals and agenda with the support of the United Nations and those involved in the overall peace process. Contadora helped the FMLN begin to recognize that while the military aspect of the war was critical and was certainly a factor that conditioned the negotiating table, it was only half of what was important, rather, the political factor was able to greatly strengthen or weaken the FMLN’s position.<sup>122</sup> Conversely, with the presence of the UN, the FMLN had been able to use the fact that the UN was attempting to find a resolution to the conflict in a way to help them to pursue their own political agenda. Samayoa exclaims that without the United Nations there would not have been able to be any negotiations or an agreement.<sup>123</sup> Recognition from the United Nations would give legitimacy to the FMLN’s cause and political goals, the ability for them to be at the negotiating table with the Salvadoran government would have made them equal to the government and therefore, their movement.

The FMLN had been at the center of the conflict, as were the other guerrilla groups in the region such as the URNG in Guatemala, yet there had not been any type of mechanisms to include the FMLN in the official dialogues. Although Contadora did informally allow them to participate

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>121</sup> Ceren, Salvador. *Con sueños se escribe la vida: Autobiografía de un revolucionario Salvadoreño*. San Salvador, Ocean Sur, 2008: 216.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Salvador Samayoa.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

by staying in constant communication with one another and allowing the FMLN to present them with documents and proposals that were taken into account during the peace process.<sup>124</sup> While not acting as a legitimate political actor, the FMLN by the start of the 80's were already shifting their strategies, steering not necessarily away from military tactics but beginning to engage more with the politics of the war. By 1984 in October, President Duarte obtained the political space to campaign for his office on a platform that advocated seeking a political solution to the armed conflict and had the ability to make credible commitments by inviting the FMLN to La Palma to commence the negotiation process.<sup>125</sup>

While Contadora worked towards a negotiated settlement, the United States advocated and acted in efforts to the defeat of the FMLN and their surrender. On October 15, 1984 in La Palma, the FMLN was offered with an offer of dialogue that was aimed towards the surrender of the FMLN and was promptly rejected by the group as former leader Fer stated that they are working towards winning the peace and that a correlation of forces would be working towards a negotiated solution towards this.<sup>126</sup> In La Palma, the FMLN and the Salvadoran government agreed to establish joint commissions that would “get an internal peace process under way” but soon fell through as the resurgence of political conflicts began to stymie the negotiation process.<sup>127</sup> Former FMLN commandant Ricardo Gonzalez stated that the decision to start a dialogue with the Salvadoran government and engage in negotiations were part of their political strategy, which does not mean that it was in contrast or opposition to the armed struggle, nor did the fact that they proposed to engage in negotiations mean that it excluded their primary objectives of taking power,

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<sup>124</sup> Seed, 23.

<sup>125</sup> Meyer, 239.

<sup>126</sup> Sancho, *Cronicas entre los espejos*, 260.

<sup>127</sup> Meyer, 239.

but rather it indicated a parallel of forces that will help pursue their political aims.<sup>128</sup> This shows the evolution of the FMLN's strategies to achieve their same initial goal of taking power. Whereas before the primary tactic was using military force and guerrilla warfare, as time progressed, the FMLN's strategy progressed into a politico-military one. Meyer states that by 1985, Duarte was unable to seize the opportunity to reach a political solution to the war and it was no longer a viable alternative.<sup>129</sup> Once peace talks began to fall, Contadora and the Support Group urged the governments that they must resume the negotiation process and emphasized that this was the only method that would result in peace.<sup>130</sup>

The evolving inter/intra/external conditions that had been occurring opened up the spaces for the FMLN to adapt to these circumstances and develop new strategies that would optimize their chances of winning the war. Montgomery notes how both the internal and international conditions that were occurring this time are what gave impetus to the negotiations and the eventual ONUSAL mission.<sup>131</sup> For one, as discussions continued, it was evident that the United States did not support the pursuit of a negotiation process from El Salvador.<sup>132</sup> Although, it is critical to note that at a certain point in the 1980's it was evident that neither side was going to be able to win the war militarily, the forces of each adversary were too strong to defeat through military means and it is here where the FMLN began to develop political strategies. Additionally, the fact that they could not fully militarily defeat the Salvadoran government and Armed Forces did not mean that they were not able to continue the armed struggle. Regardless of the regional and international conditions that had been occurring the FMLN continued to display to everyone on a domestic and

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<sup>128</sup> Harnecker Marta and Iosu Perales. *Guerra en El Salvador: Entrevistas con comandantes del FMLN*. San Sebastian: Tercera Prensa, 21.

<sup>129</sup> Meyer, 239.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Montgomery, 160.

<sup>132</sup> Call, 548-549.

international level that they were still militarily strong and were not weakened by what had been going on nor would they be able to be defeated. Despite the lack of support from Washington towards advancing negotiations, President Duarte initiated peace talks with the guerrillas first in 1984 and would later try again in '86 and '87 but all times resulting in more delays and prolonging of the war.<sup>133</sup>

By 1984 and 1985, the FMLN had begun recognizing the amount of political and military strength they were receiving. While their ability to progress, the war was reliant on their military capabilities and political tactics of forming international allies, the FMLN knew that this was not enough. The FMLN started a campaign aimed towards gaining support from the masses which would have allowed them to grow militarily and politically.<sup>134</sup> The support of the masses would've have one, allowed them to gain more troops and combatants which would have helped them grow militarily and two, it would have guaranteed them the victory against a political standoff with the Salvadoran government. Sprenkels notes that with political tyranny within El Salvador fading post-1984, the FMLN established what they referred to as a "civil-political front" which would build on the revolutionary networks from prior to the start of the war in the 70s.<sup>135</sup> During that time, the five factions of the FMLN were able to develop robust clandestine relations with civil organizations.<sup>136</sup> The FMLN referred to this as "two-faced power" where "while the guerrillas would represent the movements insurgent, revolutionary face, the civil-political front represented the movements moderate, civilian face."<sup>137</sup> By 1986-1988 the FMLN had become an unstoppable politico-military force that engaged in a specific process that would not allow the Armed Forces

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Harnecker and Perales, *Guerra el El Salvador*, 69.

<sup>135</sup> Sprenkels, Ralph. "Ambivalent Moderation: The FMLN's ideological accommodation to post-war politics in El Salvador," *Government and Opposition* 54, no. 3, 2018: 542.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.



or the Salvadoran government the defeat of the insurgents. Rosello notes how in 1987, Guillermo Ungo and Ruben Zamora, two of the most important figures of the FMLN's political wing, came to the conclusion that the FMLN was "no longer [able] to maintain its military campaign and popular support; both depended on the belief that political conditions in El Salvador were still stuck in the climate of the late 70s and early 80s."<sup>138</sup>

Their politico-military strategy consisted of a deteriorating of the military forces in the country, which meant engaging in a series of military offensives aimed at weakening the Armed Forces and on the political front, the FMLN was able to garner nearly six-hundred solidarity committees worldwide spanning from the United States to Europe.<sup>139</sup> The FMLN now had offices and representatives in almost all the cities and capitals that were internationally significant and could give the FMLN a pathway towards negotiations and the completion of their goals of democratizing the country and ridding it of the oppressive authoritarian regimes that were present with the establishment of the oligarchies.

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<sup>138</sup> Rosello, 104.

<sup>139</sup> Merino, 110.

## CHAPTER 5. CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

The transition from military to political was a steady and gradual shift of strategies. In nearly a dozen accounts that were analyzed for this study, the FMLN has stated their intentions towards a political settlement whereas the government had been consistently denying their proposals towards peace since the early 1980s. Research has shown that the FMLN had political goals, motives, and strategies since their formation in 1979 but, the conditions during the 70's presented the FMLN with the only option to develop and grow their military structures but after a series of changing events on the international, regional, domestic, and inter-guerrilla sectors arose, the FMLN was able to begin executing their political strategies. The shift in strategy, whether it would have been from political to military, or in this case military to political, is to secure the rebels goals. In the case of the FMLN, in order to achieve their goals, they had to promote negotiations and heavily advocate for and engage in the peace process towards war termination and a settlement. The existing explanations presented in the previous sections focus on singular events that occurred in moments during the war that scholars have argued either forced or left the FMLN with no other option but to negotiate. A chronological retelling of the events that occurred during the war through the narrative of the FMLN will show how the rebels responded to the conditions of the war, internally within the FMLN command, domestically within El Salvador, and externally on an international scale.

This can be seen as former FMLN member Gonzalez states that every militaristic strategy has to have a political agenda or a political goal that is tied to it, that the militaristic and political structures are contingent of one another and they may not nor cannot be separated.<sup>140</sup> The main goal was not solely to change the government but rather, to reform the state apparatuses: political,

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<sup>140</sup> Harneker and Parelás, 25.

economic, and military. Former FMLN leader Jesus Rojas claims once you reform the country of these corrupt structures and build new ones, only then can you modify the nature of the system of domination so that once power is seized, it can then be defended through this.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, scholars such as Holiday argue how the post-Cold War environment created a space for the FMLN to revise its ideological focus from that of revolution towards a more politico-diplomatic strategy and aim towards a democratic transformation for the country and believed that the way to achieve this goal was only through negotiations.<sup>142</sup>

The FMLN recognized that their group does not consist of a military, they were not in the armed struggle by vocation, rather if the need presented itself to lay down their arms and substitute their military structures for a political confrontation, then they would have consider this a triumph of their thesis against the Salvadoran regime and its ally the U.S.<sup>143</sup> On the contrary, if the Salvadoran Armed Forces desired a war that primarily consisted of an armed struggle, then this is the type of war that the FMLN would have adopted.<sup>144</sup> Former FMLN leader goes on to add that a political victory for the FMLN consists of a democratic revolution and this cannot be achieved though militaristic tactics by engaging in coup mechanisms.<sup>145</sup> Rojas similarly notes that the war presented the FMLN with a distinct amount of opportunities that required the group to change their priorities. The FMLN's strategy had become a politico-military one in which they tried to combine the growth of their military forces with a political movement that called for the reactivation to the masses to mobilize, which would essentially create the opening of political spaces for the FMLN

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<sup>141</sup> Perales, Iosu and Marta Harnecker, *La estrategia de la Victoria: entrevistas a los Comandantes del FMLN Leonel González, Jesús Rojas, Ricardo Gutiérrez*. El Salvador: Ediciones Farabundo Martí, 1989: 92-93.

<sup>142</sup> Holiday, 417-418.

<sup>143</sup> Harnecker and Perales, 20.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

internally and externally.<sup>146</sup> A majority of the structures within the FMLN wanted to see the organization transition into a political force and optimize this in every possible space as a way to help them advance their goals.<sup>147</sup>

To better understand these key findings, the research will be presented in the following order: *the formation of the FMLN*, which will retell how the group united in the late 70s and discuss their political and military views and goals as well as their disagreements; this section will be followed by *the start of the civil war* which will be the main section that analyzes the different external, internal and domestic events that arose throughout the armed struggle, mainly analyzing how the FMLN adapted to each of the conditions; the next section will *the 1989 offensive* which is critical to note because this was the major turning point in the war that created the political space for negotiations; this will be followed by the *moving towards peace and the end of the war* section which took place in the early 1990s and the FMLN was in the process of concluding negotiations and signing the Chapultepec Peace Accords in 1992; the last section will describe the FMLN's *post-war reflections* as a legitimate political party. The format of these sections through chronological order are meant to display the way in which the FMLN gradually shifted their strategies from military to political in order to achieve their goals.

### **The Formation of the FMLN**

The FMLN was originally founded in October 1980 when five different leftist guerrilla organizations decided to come together to order to combat the Salvadoran military forces and overthrow the authoritarian government. Before the official start of the war in 1980 and the formation of the FMLN, the five distinct factions all had differing revolutionist strategies. At the time, the ERP was led by Rivas Mira, Joaquin Villalobos and Vladimir who all had militaristic

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

views and preferences whereas the RN led by Lil Milagro, Cienfuegos, and Jovel had more clandestine viewpoints on how to achieve their goals. The ERP believed in militarizing the party, dissolving the guerrilla in order to convert the whole structure into a series of military committees.<sup>148</sup> The RN on the other hand advocated for organizing the military committees and the party in a way that could be used towards linking the masses to the FMLN through the National Guard.<sup>149</sup>

Discussion on the transition from militaristic strategies towards political began in 1975 when revolutionist Roque Dalton initiated debates on switching the ERP's tactics to embody one that is more political and that can create structural change rather than a forced overthrow of the government to obtain power. For some in the ERP, the idea of shifting strategies that did not promote the strengthening of the military forces and rather advocated for a negotiated settlement and dialogue with the Salvadoran government caused group leaders to plot against those that had viewpoints that could have potentially endanger the group. Dialogue within the ERP became centered around eliminating those that threatened the military livelihood of the ERP and Roque Dalton was at the top of the list. Roque was the proponent of a politico-military strategy that had more political qualities than military.<sup>150</sup> The turmoil within the ERP in reality began when Dalton was proposed for the new national leadership position and suddenly became a political threat to the ERP leadership in 1975 with his political ideas.<sup>151</sup> Secret meetings between different parts of EPR leadership began taking place to discuss the arrest and execution of Dalton in early May.

After a series of these meetings, Roque, along with other political proponent Armando Arteaga, were executed by other ERP members. ERP leader Rivas Mira gave the order to kill the

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<sup>148</sup> Sancho, Eduardo. *Cronicas entre los espejos*. San Salvador, 2002: 115.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Medrano, 17.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

two upon their arrest in 1975.<sup>152</sup> Former guerrilla member known as Commandant Balta refers to this murder as one of the gravest and most tragic events that could have occurred for the ERP that significantly stifled the groups livelihood.<sup>153</sup> Balta argues that the death of Dalton denied the ERP of growing into a resilient force and become a contingency with a vision and to be reckoned with, one that had more than just a militaristic viewpoint but rather had an integral vision that consisted a political and military strategy.<sup>154</sup> Balta exclaims that had Roque's life been preserved, the ERP would have been able to maintain and expand their political relations with different Salvadoran social sectors which would have benefited their cause, but rather, Dalton's death was not only a statement of the political division within the ERP but it was also provoking a vendetta within the ERP.<sup>155</sup>

### **The Start of the Civil War**

1980 constituted the first year of the war and the formation of the FMLN as a united front against the Salvadoran government and the Armed Forces. As noted in the previous section, in the 70's the rebel groups pursued highly militaristic strategies with differing goals. Ex-FMLN commandant Jesus Rojas noted that what went from scattered efforts of five distinct organizations into a single unified force helped the FMLN begin to build unity of the Salvadoran avantgarde.<sup>156</sup> This had resulted in the purification of their different theories, theses, discussions, and internal political debates that helped constitute a political line that would help develop a strategy to take power.<sup>157</sup> Since the start of the war, FMLN and FDR members proposed that the conflict was bound to end in a political negotiation but the transition into the political arena was not something

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>156</sup> Perales and Harnecker. *La Estrategia de la Victoria*, 118.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

that was viable at the time for the FMLN. During this time, one of the guerrillera leaders that was second-in-command in the FMLN was killed for her preference towards a negotiated settlement versus an armed struggle.<sup>158</sup>

The debate between moving towards a politically-dominant strategy over militaristic tactics at the time created greater turmoil for the guerrillas as some thought it was the most viable option for them to win the war while others thought it was best to grow their military forces to overthrow the government and defeat the Armed Forces. In the early 80s the process of shifting strategies that reflected their political goals was difficult to execute. For one, they did not have the mass support of civil society, they were not yet militarily strong, they did not have a definite political agenda, nor did they have many international allies. In 1981 the FMLN had still been divided in a few fronts and did not have a unique conception, which then caused them to go in a general offensive that combined a certain amount of military action coupled with insurrectionary action.<sup>159</sup> The FMLN at the time had not been a strong militarily united or consolidated unit which limited their militaristic strategies and what they were and were not able to execute.

The shift towards a more political strategy began with the Franco-Mexican Declaration in 1981. The Declaration claimed that El Salvador's war could only come to an end through a negotiated solution and that the FMLN should participate without fail in these negotiations along with the fact that the Declaration acknowledged the FMLN as a "representative political force."<sup>160</sup> By this time of the war, the spaces opened up for the FMLN to start developing a political strategy that could potentially lead them towards a victory. During the 70s, the FMLN was not able to express their political views because the war was highly militarized, the only option at the time

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<sup>158</sup> Bourgois, Philippe. "The power of violence in war and peace: Post-Cold War lessons from El Salvador," *Ethnography* 2, no. 1, 2001: 19.

<sup>159</sup> Perales and Harnecker, 107.

<sup>160</sup> Interview with Schafik Handal.

was for the FMLN to engage in the armed struggle through military tactics. This could then help explain the killing of Roque, considering that regardless of the fact that many of the FMLN members knew a political revolution and path was needed to combat their adversaries, it was neither the moment nor time for these strategies to take over the military structures that were being formed. The Salvadoran Armed Forces and army were too strong militarily for the FMLN to combat their war tactics through a political strategy, rather, the FMLN had to pour all their capabilities into developing strong military forces during the 70s and reject any political ideas.

The Franco-Mexican Declaration stated that “the FMLN is a representative political force, the war is an internal conflict, it cannot have any other solution than the negotiated political solution and the FMLN must participate in that negotiation.”<sup>161</sup> It was here where the FMLN was able to optimize the opening of the political space that Contadora presented to them by acknowledging them as formal political actors in the war. The FMLN had no longer only been a guerrilla insurgent group, rather, now on the international stage, their cause was given a political and legitimate meaning, allowing the FMLN to develop politico-diplomatic tactics that they had been unable to previously express. With this newly founded political recognition and space, the FMLN did not stop developing and growing their military capabilities.

Ex-FMLN leader Leonel Gonzalez stated that at no moment during this political awakening did the FMLN cease to underestimate the possibility that the FMLN would be able to achieve a military victory over the government.<sup>162</sup> The Franco-Declaration opened up a political space for the FMLN where they were able to be internationally recognized as a belligerent force and were acknowledged as having political objects, but this did not contradict the fact that they were still militarily capable of continuing the armed struggle and potentially winning through military

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Harnecker and Perales, 24.



means.<sup>163</sup> Meyer also notes that the blatant call for negotiations that was set forth by the Declaration appealed to many in the international community to work within the context of the United Nations to defend the citizen populace and also work towards and promote a politically negotiated settlement that can create a space for national reconciliation in the country.<sup>164</sup>

Gonzalez exclaims that “being able to impose a serious negotiation involves military convincing ... but at the same time the growth of the military can lead us to the gates of the seizure of power ... we do not rule out any alternative.”<sup>165</sup> This shows that at the time, the FMLN was unable to make the full transition from military to political but rather, a politico-military strategy was used and necessary to stay militarily strong and at times dominant over the Armed Forces. The moment did not call for a complete seize of military forces on behalf of the FMLN, the external and internal conditions would not have permitted any type of change to occur had the FMLN not continued developing their military structures. For one, the Armed Forces were also at their prime as they continued to receive massive support from the United States. At the same time, the FMLN had not garnered enough support from the masses/civil society which would have helped them in the long run against the government. Instead of fully committing to a political strategy, the FMLN worked towards militarily weakening the Armed Forces while expanding their political efforts by growing their relationships with external forces such as governments in Central America and Europe.

Considering the amount of influence the United States had in the war, the FMLN had made several attempts at engaging in dialogue with Washington as part of their political agenda. The Franco-Mexican Declaration did not produce any advancements towards this goal for the FMLN

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Meyer, 169-170.

<sup>165</sup> Harnecker and Perales, 24.

but it was able to strengthen their cause as the resolution was signed by two influential countries, France and Mexico, that gave the FMLN's insurgent cause legitimacy and opened the spaces for the FMLN to develop greater relations with other governments. The FMLN expanded their network worldwide in the early 1980's by sending diplomatic representatives to numerous countries. A vast majority of these international political parties and governments were receptive to the political proposals that were being recommended by the FMLN which over the years with the large accumulation in the diplomatic field that they were able to garner helped the FMLN's pursuit of a negotiated political solution when coupled with their military strength.<sup>166</sup>

From 1980 up until 1983, the FMLN mainly would operate in rural areas, typically in units ranging from a dozen to a hundred combatants.<sup>167</sup> These areas were known as the FMLN's "control zones" where from 1983 to the end of the war in 1992, the FMLN began to operate in much smaller units and shifted towards a political strategy that would aim towards establishing its support amongst the people.<sup>168</sup> This would be done through the providing certain provisions and services such as education and healthcare while also establishing local "popular" government, this relationship with the rural population would prove to be imperative to the FMLN's strength and their greater political strategy.<sup>169</sup> This shift in strategy made a significant difference in the FMLN's schemes against the Armed Forces. As the war progressed, the FMLN was able to grow their military capabilities and become a stronger armed force by 1983 when they launched a new offensive. In an interview with former commandant Ricardo Gutierrez, the interviewer had noted

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<sup>166</sup> Ceren, *Con sueños se escribe la vida*, 203.

<sup>167</sup> Call, 546.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 547.

that there were those in El Salvador that believed and claimed that the FMLN won the war by 1982-1983 when the offensive severely damaged the Armed Forces military force.<sup>170</sup>

Gutierrez responded to this claim by arguing that while there was a sense of military victory with the weakening of the Salvadoran government and its military structures, there was a lack of political action and in order to take power, the other fundamental component aside from military was the lacking participation of the masses which was needed to develop their political strategy.<sup>171</sup> The FMLN proposed to lead their people and the country into a more “advanced stage of development,” had democratic goals for the country, did not believe that the army would be able to defeat them militarily and rather than the FMLN lay down their arms, they had to endure the armed struggle,<sup>172</sup> while also developing and being able to execute their political agenda. At the same time, the United States was keeping a watchful eye on the progression of the FMLN throughout the years and its counterinsurgency politics had played a decisive role in the conflict. Because the FMLN was evidently close to winning the war by 1983, Washington took the initiative of increasing military aid per fiscal year to El Salvador to prevent the Salvadoran government from collapsing.<sup>173</sup> U.S. spending in El Salvador rose a total of \$29 million in a single year. From 1980 to 1981 it increased from \$6 million to \$35 million on military aid and by 1984, it rose to \$197 million.<sup>174</sup> To prevent the guerrillas from winning, the United States went as far as drafting a new constitution in 1983 and spent a total of \$1.8 million into the 1984 Salvadoran election to secure that José Napoleón Duarte of the Christian Democrat party would win.<sup>175</sup>

### **The 1989 Offensive**

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<sup>170</sup> Perales and Harnecker, 101.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>172</sup> Villalobos, “A democratic revolution,” 122.

<sup>173</sup> Call, 547.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

Since the end of 1987, the FMLN had been preparing to launch an offensive considering the amount of losses the group was facing. On the one hand, the war had been enduring for a total of seven years, not including the prior years of continued mass repression, and veteran combatants began to grow fatigued with the prolonged war. This internal circumstance was only one of the multiple strides that led towards the '89 offensive. By October of this year, the FMLN and the Salvadoran government initiated and engaged in their first dialogue aimed towards a negotiated solution to the war.<sup>176</sup> These diplomatic measures did not continue long after the talks first began as an explosion in Union Hall killed a significant amount of people during a meeting.<sup>177</sup> Outraged, the FMLN instigated a renewed concentrated offensive and took the fight directly to the capital in San Salvador as a result of concluding that the government was not serious about progressing any form of negotiated settlement<sup>178</sup> Montgomery argues that the offensive made two points evident, the first being the Salvadoran military's lack of competence and the second being the FMLN's inability to incentivize popular insurrection.<sup>179</sup>

In addition, the masses began to grow tired of the war that was depriving them of basic necessities such as food, water, shelter. Regionally, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua were slowly trying to ally themselves with the United States, meanwhile, the Salvadoran army was receiving weapons that became more and more sophisticated making it difficult for the FMLN to counteract.<sup>180</sup> The FMLN had to find a way to end the conflict, not as a means to give up their goals, but shift their strategy in a way that would bring a solution or an end to the fighting. Ana Guadalupe, ex-FMLN member, notes how the organization tried to generate better conditions for

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<sup>176</sup> Howard, 91.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 91-92.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Montgomery, 141.

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Ana Guadalupe.

the war in a way that would allow the FMLN to find a solution through political means, giving them the possibility of finding a space to catch some air and recruit more combatants or supporters of their cause; through this, either there would be a political solution or it would increase and grow the FMLN's guerrilla contingent that had members from as far back as the 60's that were already worn out from the war.<sup>181</sup>

The goal of the offensive had been to produce one of the two possible outcomes: either more recruits or a political solution, which Guadalupe exclaims that it is not to be confused with a surrender of power or change in objectives. The FMLN was still pursuing a claim of power in El Salvador and aimed to take over the government, but the purpose of the offensive was that regardless of which outcome was going to occur, it would have helped the FMLN get to their end goal of claiming the government. The purpose of the 1989 offensive was to primarily serve as a gateway towards negotiations; it would have created the necessary conditions for the government to agree to the possibility of reaching a solution with the FMLN through a politically negotiated settlement. Stanley comments on the offensive stating how it was a turning-point within the context of the war for both the FMLN and the Salvadoran government.<sup>182</sup> For one, the FMLN realized that the popular support they obtained in the rural areas would not be enough or sufficient for a successful insurrection, and secondly, this created no other alternative besides pursuing ongoing attrition and economic sabotage, coming to the conclusion that a military victory would not have been possible.<sup>183</sup>

While Stanley's claim on the '89 offensive being a turning point appears to be partially supported, the presumption that the FMLN was not militarily capable to overthrow the Salvadoran

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Stanley, 26.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

Armed Forces or government requires some more discussion. Former FMLN leader, Roberto Cañas, notes how at the time, the FMLN was a political and military force that was able to develop each respective sector to the point where they were recognized internationally for their vast success, owing to their sophisticated communications system, strong national networks, high-level military strategies and large international representations ranging from Western Europe to the United states.<sup>184</sup> Cañas notes that what was important about this highly developed guerrilla system that had both military and political sectors that were notable, was that after accumulating this amount of power, regardless of the form that the war took whether it be an armed struggle or a political confrontation, the FMLN was able to adapt and commit to either form of the struggle as the means to come to power.<sup>185</sup>

The 1989 offensive was one of the major critical events that shaped the context of the war and specifically the FMLN's shift in strategies and pursuit of a politically negotiated settlement. By this time, the FMLN was already at a point in their political and military structures that would allow them to make advancement towards a negotiated settlement and progress the dialogues that have remained stagnant since 1984. The events that unfolded during the offensive are what helped solidify this kind of power. For one, on November 16, 1989, six Jesuit priests from the Canas University of Central American, along with a housekeeper and her daughter were brutally murdered by the Salvadoran military. Howard notes how these killings ignited international outrage against the anti-FMLN militias and specifically within Washington since the perpetrators were militarily trained by U.S. personnel.<sup>186</sup> Most importantly, Howard acknowledges how while the '89 offensive was unsuccessful in overthrowing the Salvadoran government, it was able to

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<sup>184</sup> [Interview with Roberto Cañas, June 19, 1997] / interviewer, Jean Krasno; translator, Michael Lachin.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Howard, 92.

make a statement to those that thought it was militarily weak and show that they would not be able to be defeated.<sup>187</sup>

As the war continued, the FMLN stayed in contact with officials from the United Nations informally.<sup>188</sup> This was in addition to the already existing secret meetings that the FMLN was having with special assistant to the UN Secretary-General, Alvaro de Soto, to discuss the negotiation process.<sup>189</sup> About one month after the deaths of the Jesuit priests, there had been certain efforts to move towards a resolution. On December 6, 1989 the FMLN initiated a meeting with the United Nations through their New York office but the UN was simultaneously already planning a meeting with FMLN representatives.<sup>190</sup> The FMLN listed a series of demands during this meeting that included primarily electoral, executive, and constitutional changes, all which the Salvadoran government refused to accept.<sup>191</sup> The back and forth between the government and the FMLN and lack of compromise between the both resulted in the prolonging of the dialogue and set back the negotiation process. Instead of attempting to negotiate a compromised solution on critical points, the FMLN and the Salvadoran government would only continue to postpone the process.<sup>192</sup> It was here where a third-party intervention was recognized as being necessary for the advancements of the peace process and calls for UN mediation were recognized.

These meetings were a result of the opening that the FMLN saw in how, not only the war had been progressing, but how they have politically and structurally been progressing. It had been evident that a mutually hurting stalemate was upon them and that neither of the two warring parties would have been able to claim a military victory over the other. For one, the international

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Montgomery, 141.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Interview with Salvador Samayoa

<sup>191</sup> Howard, 92.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

circumstances perceived the FMLN to be militarily deteriorating with the withdrawal of support from the USSR who advocated for a negotiated settlement before the launch of the offensive. Moreover, the Armed Forces continued to display their military strength through strategic attacks like that of the killing of the Jesuit priests. By 1989, the FMLN knew that it was time for an offensive that would shake up the war and show that the FMLN is still a force to be reckoned with. Not only was it for the FMLN to militarily announce that the armed struggle has not concluded, but they believed that it was time for an organization with the United Nations caliber to step in and intervene in the war.<sup>193</sup>

Given the international and regional circumstances, the FMLN's adversaries had been under the impression that the organization was on the brink of military defeat. In the eyes of the international community, the FMLN had lost their two main allies – the Soviet Union and Nicaragua, both of whom were the largest providers of resources to the insurgents. The FMLN's greatest fear during the time was being subject to an agreement or a settlement that was not a reflection of the goals they had been fighting nearly a decade for and with the perception of being both militarily and politically weak, which could have closed the door for a relatively appropriate solution that reflected some sort of structural change towards democratization and societal reform. For these primary reasons, the 1989 offensive was a critical pivot towards demonstrating that the war has not been won and the FMLN was still a dominant force with a growing contingency with potential to come to power in El Salvador. Contrary to the belief of many, while in fact the dissolution of the USSR, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Sandinistas did impact the decision to negotiate at the moment, it did not weaken the FMLN's political or military forces or persuaded them towards negotiations. Cañas states that the government and army believed that the

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<sup>193</sup> Interview with Salvador Samayoa.



international circumstances provided some sort of logic that the FMLN was weakened but rather, the political and military health of the FMLN in that period was at its strongest and the 1989 offensive was going to be a way to demonstrate that strength.<sup>194</sup>

The results of the offensive were more than successful for the FMLN and their goals. Although, Call classified the 1989 offensive as a military failure but a political success, stating that it showed how the FMLN was unable to win through a massive insurrection, but it allowed guerrilla commanders that were originally against a negotiated settlement to agree that at this point of this war it was necessary for their goals.<sup>195</sup> The '89 offensive was broken down into a series of military actions and strategies that recruited thousands into the guerrilla army.<sup>196</sup> Post-offensive, the Salvadoran government had realized that the dialogue that had been ongoing since 1984 was reaching a stalemate, neither side was shown to be militarily weakened, their adversaries were becoming politically stronger even if they themselves were growing militarily. It was here where the Salvadoran government decided to take the dialogue and transform it into negotiations.<sup>197</sup>

The offensive was a “psychological blow” to the Salvadoran oligarchy and the FMLN referred to it as a “political coup” and had the event not occurred, the Salvadoran civil war would have endured much longer than it did with each side consistently attacking the other trying to weaken their forces without any success.<sup>198</sup> The main goal of the offensive had also been to militarily weaken the Salvadoran Armed Forces and show that the counterinsurgency policies of the United States were not going to affect the FMLN or determine their military or political livelihood in the war. Rather, the idea was to open the gateway towards the end of the oligarchical

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<sup>194</sup> Interview with Roberto Cañas.

<sup>195</sup> Call, 550.

<sup>196</sup> Merino, 101.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 116.

claim on power and steps towards rebuilding society. The FMLN worked towards this by proposing a postponement for six months of the Salvadoran presidential elections as a way of seeking a political solution aimed towards advancing negotiations and to demonstrate that the FMLN was making efforts towards preventing an escalation of social tension that was on the verge of exploding due to growing grievances caused by the war.<sup>199</sup>

### **Moving Towards Peace and the End of the War**

After the 1989 offensive, the FMLN had a militaristic advantage over the Armed Forces and was in a position to continue expanding their political agenda. With a weakened Salvadoran military and the government slowly losing authority, the FMLN was able to cease this opportunity to recruit more supporters. The killing of the Jesuit priests in 1989 created an opening for negotiations for the FMLN considering that the governments image in the international community had been tarnished and coming to a negotiated settlement in order to end the war was becoming more favorable to them. In 1990, poet Alfonso Hernandez published one of Roque Dalton's old pieces and the FMLN then claimed this as one of their communist strategies and tactics.<sup>200</sup> From 1975 when Dalton was executed for his political viewpoints to 1990 where the FMLN was then reviving his former statements on his political strategies and beliefs shows the evolution of the guerrilla's strategies and how drastically their goals and how to achieve their goals have changed.

Corr states that in 1994, the presidential elections established the FMLN as being El Salvador's "second-strongest political force in the democratic process."<sup>201</sup> This can point to the large backing that the FMLN had during the war and could be a possible pathway in understanding their need and desire to obtain political legitimacy considering their profound success post-

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<sup>199</sup> Villalobos, 119.

<sup>200</sup> Sancho, 180.

<sup>201</sup> Corr, 144.

conflict. Moreover, Sprenkels adds by noting that the FMLN was able to successfully embrace electoral democracy in the country and that throughout time, the FMLN in fact changed ideological orientation in order to engage more with the country's political system.<sup>202</sup> The FMLN had been preparing for the opportunity to be represented on a national stage since they were able to get mass support from international actors and also the Salvadoran population. In January 1990 the FMLN displayed a clear transition from militaristic guerrilla strategies to political tactics when they proposed laying down their arms and gearing towards a political solution under the condition that an agreement that focused on the democratization of the country was feasible.<sup>203</sup> Former commandant Leonel Gonzalez states that the FMLN's proposal contemplates certain points that are centered on the transformation of the political marker in the country with an emphasis on the reform of the judicial system and the constitution.<sup>204</sup>

Considering the FMLN's large success post-1989 offensive in the political sector, they began preparing for two final offensives, one in 1990 and one in 1991. These would help solidify the FMLN's strength and dominance regardless of the loss of their allies, Nicaragua and Cuba. To help them finalize the negotiation process and the peace agreement the FMLN went through extraordinary military efforts in order to break the Armed Forces militaristic will and show them that the most beneficial solution for them was to engage in dialogue with the FMLN.<sup>205</sup> The 1991 offensive was regarded as the FMLN's "final offensive" for its military campaign. The goal of this final offensive was to ignite a popular overthrow of the government and come to claim power

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<sup>202</sup> Sprenkels, "Ambivalent moderation," 536.

<sup>203</sup> Harnecker and Perales, 15.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>205</sup> Merino, 120-121.

through this strategy, but, other events unfolded as the Salvadoran government and U.S. counterinsurgency offset the attack.<sup>206</sup>

In 1990, the rebels was able to reach an agreement in Venezuela that established a political agenda that would help establish the FMLN as a legitimate political party.<sup>207</sup> This same year, the United Nations took the initiative to lead the negotiation process, specifically through mediation efforts which had the full support of the Security Council.<sup>208</sup> With the help and backing of the United Nations, the FMLN was able to grow politically into a force that had a chance to stand against the government in elections or a political standoff. Once the FMLN agreed to a ceasefire and handing in all their arms, the FMLN made the decision that it was time to dedicate their full attention to their political agenda. Former guerrilla Salvador Ceren stated that the political development of the FMLN and its strength were most important in order to become the main guarantor of compliance with the peace agreement.<sup>209</sup> Ceren further states that once the decision was made to rid the FMLN of their military structures, they became “iron-clad” political combatants who were able to raise issues regarding the social transformation that had to be made in the country.<sup>210</sup> This new political platform allowed them to achieve the necessary political organization and goals they had without having to take up arms and revert back to guerrilla tactics and engage with their adversaries in an armed struggle.<sup>211</sup>

After the '89 offensive, dialogue between the FMLN and the Salvadoran government was able to move into negotiations and the peace process was able to start making advancements

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<sup>206</sup> Howard, 90.

<sup>207</sup> Ceren, 221.

<sup>208</sup> De Soto, Alvaro and Graciana del Castillo. “Obstacles to Peacebuilding Revisited,” *Global Governance* 22, no. 2, 2016: 209.

<sup>209</sup> Ceren, 223.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

towards a settlement between the two warring parties. By November 14, 1991 the FMLN announced that it would start a unilateral truce on November 16<sup>th</sup> in honor of those that were murdered at UCA.<sup>212</sup> This was yet another one of the ways in which the FMLN was turning towards a political solution over tactical military strategies to counter their adversaries. Once the negotiation process commenced, the FMLN agreed to take the approach of focusing the agreement to take a human rights approach, one that would take the appropriate measure of taking into account the gross amount of human rights violations that occurred prior and throughout the war and agree to a settlement that tackled this systematic issue.

This was a concern that did not exclusively have the consensus of the entire Front. Previous patterns in the division of decision-making that were prevalent before the war would emerge throughout the negotiation process. Where some leaders believed it necessary to agree to proceed with the peace process with the first steps at monitor human rights before any other part of the agreement can be formed, others in leadership positions did not share a mutual belief.<sup>213</sup> Those that did agree thought that without the monitoring of human rights, the credibility of the peace and negotiating process would have eventually definitely been lost and political complications would have emerged.<sup>214</sup> It is evident that by this time, the FMLN was fully invested in continuing the process politically rather than militarily considering that they were making decisions regardless of disagreements, based on what would be most politically beneficial.

The negotiation process was a mutual consensus among the FMLN, but the proposed content of what the agreement would contain and how to achieve said goals produced division throughout the organization. For one, leader Joaquin Villalobos was not in favor of the Peruvian

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<sup>212</sup> Montgomery, 145.

<sup>213</sup> Interview with Salvador Samayoa.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Perez de Cuellar, from being part of the processes whereas Salvador Samayoa thought the contrary.<sup>215</sup> Having a Hispanic Secretary-General was considered beneficial for the FMLN, believing that a common and mutual relation between them can help advance their goals. Regardless of whether this was proven true, leaders within the FMLN did not all agree that a strong UN presence would be necessary for the achievement of a politically negotiated settlement. Although, as previously noted, it would later show that the inclusion of the United Nations helped tremendously in the FMLN's evolution into a political actor and advancing their political goals. Samayoa notes how the importance was decisive of the UN recognizing the FMLN as a legitimate political party during the negotiations and that the process would not have been possible without the involvement of the UN.<sup>216</sup> The FMLN was not able to admit that they had a different status than the government did considering that they were a guerrilla group and the government was an established legitimate regime, so the power that UN recognition gave the FMLN was decisive in that it established the FMLN as equal to the Salvadoran government, legitimating their cause.<sup>217</sup>

Once the FMLN reached the negotiating table, they arrived at a series of demands for the Salvadoran government. For one, the FMLN called for the complete abolition of the Armed Forces, Villalobos stated in 1990 that there were a total of three choices but all included militaristic reform.<sup>218</sup> It is evident to note the fact that the FMLN was a party in the negotiating table, which was a major advancement in the development of their political structure. Although, Salvador Samayoa notes that the peace process was never one that solely involved the two warring parties, rather it was a collective effort that included the voices of those that were in political, social, and

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Karl, Terry Lynn. "El Salvador's Negotiated Revolution," *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 2, 1992: 155.

economic sectors.<sup>219</sup> The reason that a diverse group of sectors were involved was so that they could accompany the FMLN primarily because they were an illegal insurgent group and did not have legitimacy and therefore, could not openly engage in political activities without certain conditions.<sup>220</sup> The transition in becoming a legitimate political actor was part of the FMLN's political goals in their efforts to democratize the country. The negotiation process would guarantee that the FMLN would transition into a legitimate political actor and would reassure their ability to go up against the present Salvadoran government and rid the country of their oppression through democratic political means rather than through rebel-insurgent strategies.

### **Post-War Reflections**

With legitimacy, the FMLN would be able to transform their international political support and their domestic backing into a platform that can help guarantee them the opportunity to claim power through democratic means. The transition towards legitimacy began when the United Nations verified the handing in of weapons and the head of the UN mission called a meeting at the Operations Center where a document would be signed transfiguring the FMLN into a legal political party.<sup>221</sup> After this, social transformation and democracy in El Salvador was able to commence. Ceren confirms that the FMLN became a political-electoral force in order to continue the fight they initially stood for and achieve their goals of social change and a democratic revolution.<sup>222</sup> The FMLN stated “*El FMLN llega hasta aquí en el marco de la lucha armada, ahora nos desarmamos y desmontamos la estructura militar pero la convertimos en fuerza política para continuar la*

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<sup>219</sup> Interview with Salvador Samayoa,

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Merino, 121.

<sup>222</sup> Ceren, 200.

*lucha revolucoinaria en El Salvador*,”<sup>223</sup> which directly address the end of their military structures and converts their power and influence into a political force.<sup>224</sup>

The FMLN used their new platform to promote a political and institutional framework that would put an end to the military dictatorship that was established in the country through the United States and the Salvadoran oligarchy.<sup>225</sup> Although, critical to note, the FMLN did not fully want to rid themselves of their military structures. For one, after the signing of the Chapultepec peace accords, the FMLN failed to destroy all their weapons as a result of internal political conflict between the different factions of the FMLN.<sup>226</sup> While this demonstrates that there was not a full transition towards political strategies, it mainly highlights the internal differences that were evident within the FMLN. If anything, it demonstrates how regardless of these blatant political differences, the FMLN still chose to shift their strategies towards a politically dominant one and engage in the negotiation process and sign the peace agreement. Regardless of certain factions and leaders wanting to continue the armed struggle and continue building their military, the decision to execute a political strategy overpowered any means of attempts towards continuing the armed struggle.

Since the beginning of the war and prior, the revolutionists involved shared a vision of seeing an end to the dictatorship and the oligarchies hold on power. For some, this was only possible through democratization of the country whereas for others, this called for a total militaristic overthrow of the regime. By the time the peace agreement had been in the process of incorporating certain demands, the FMLN proposed a settlement that called for a democratic construction that would create the space for the end of an authoritarian conception and advance

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<sup>223</sup> Translation: The FMLN has come here in the framework of the armed struggle, now we disarm and dismantle the military structure, but we turn it into a political force to continue the revolutionary struggle in El Salvador

<sup>224</sup> Ceren, 230.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>226</sup> Montgomery, 140.



the country towards a new democratic society.<sup>227</sup> This objective resembles the FMLN's steady and gradual shift in perceptions throughout the war. Where Villalobos and other members of the ERP were strong proponents of a militaristic overthrow and achieving their goals through military strength, the conditions that they were presented by the presence of the UN, the fact that one, the Salvadoran Armed Forces was not militarily defeated, two, the guerrillas became militarily weakened, and three, there was a growing amount of strain that original FMLN guerrillas were facing, all of which began to convince those that were not in favor of a political shift to consider it as the most optimal avenue to achieve their greatest goals, which was the end of the dictatorships oppression.

In a memoir written by former guerrilla member, Eduardo Sancho, he recalls a conversation between him, and a leader known as Fer who stated to him "*Lo militar no sirve para nada si no hay una politica real. Eso ocurre, puedes proseguir,*"<sup>228</sup> which continues to demonstrate the way in which the FMLN had been fully conscious of the necessity to endure the pursuit of the war through a political agenda.<sup>229</sup> Scholar Karl notes that international factors lead Samayoa and other FMLN leaders to detachment themselves from their conviction in socialist revolution and instead call for a pluralist democracy, which was considered a "self-reassessment" that would help lead towards peace.<sup>230</sup> This self-reassessment prompted the FMLN to drop their persistence on a power-sharing agreement and gear towards a settlement that would guarantee their participation in future elections.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Ceren, 225.

<sup>228</sup> Translation: The military is useless if there is no real politics. If that happens, you can continue

<sup>229</sup> Sancho, 260.

<sup>230</sup> Karl, "El Salvador's Negotiated Revolution," 151.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

Rebel groups decisions to partake in a negotiation process vary from case to case and are circumstance of a variety of conditions that shape the war environment. While mutually hurting stalemate and ripeness theory can be one possible explanation as to why warring parties agree to come to a negotiated settlement, further analysis regarding the internal, external and intra-circumstances that are occurring throughout the time of the war is important to take into consideration. Most importantly, through these different analyses, implementing the voice of the rebels themselves and observing the amount of agency they possessed throughout the entire peace process will help observe these different theories through an interconnected lens. A mutually hurting stalemate in the late 1980's to early 90's in fact prompted the push towards a negotiated solution, as did the fact that the FMLN was no longer receiving aid and resources from its allies and had some percent of pressure from regional forces, but, neither of these events were the sole reason that the FMLN decided to negotiate.

Rather, the all of these external, inter-group, and domestic circumstances that conditioned the war were factors that contributed to the FMLN's decision to become a legitimate political party and participate in negotiations in order to achieve their goals through this method. The FMLN had advocated towards a political solution since as early as the 1970s but did not have the appropriate resources or capabilities to execute any type of political strategy. Often times, one concludes that rebel groups are forced or coerced into the negotiation process once they are militarily exhausted and there is no other way out of the war, forcing them to seize the armed struggle and settle for a negotiated solution that might not be as favorable as continuing in the war and obtaining power through militaristic methods. The case of the FMLN shows that rebel groups have more agency in the peace processes when presented by external, internal and domestic conditions that some have

argued otherwise presented them with circumstances out of their control, prompting them to negotiations.

In the case of El Salvador, the FMLN's evolution towards a political party was a steady and gradual conversion. The different circumstances during the war inevitably changed the way that the FMLN viewed the most optimal way to achieve their goals which in sum, was simply to come to power in order to evoke real structural change to the Salvadoran political system and other social and economic structures. From the start of the conflict in the 1970's when the FMLN began to form itself into a single unit, the atmosphere of the armed struggle did not allow for the FMLN to adopt a political strategy, rather, they had to invest all their capabilities in developing their military strategy. At the time, the FMLN did not have enough capabilities or resources to challenge the Armed Forces or government that would have helped them produce a positive outcome for the guerrillas. For these reasons, the FMLN adopted a full military strategy in the 1970s and disapproved and condemned any political strategies or views that were presented to the group. Examples can be seen through the execution of Roque Dalton and certain FMLN leaders that would propose a politically negotiated settlement.

In the 1980s several events began to affect the way in which the FMLN viewed negotiations and political settlements. The FMLN started to receive recognition from the United Nations and governments such as those of France and Mexico that gave legitimacy to the FMLN's cause and movement. With this newly found recognition, the FMLN was able to expand their network and began growing as a political force once their allies spanned from the United States to Europe. At the same time, regional peace processes such as those from the Contadora Group and Esquipulas presented promising proposals towards peace. Throughout the processes, the FMLN would be included in dialogues and discussions, allowing the FMLN to be recognized as political actors on

an international scale and would gain them the support and recognition from other governments and international organizations. Moreover, the fall of the Sandinistas and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in fact affected the FMLN. Leaders began to worry that without their support the FMLN would not be able to continue in the armed struggle. While the guerrillas took a hard blow to their ideological structures, it did not prevent them from continuing in the armed struggle, and so, the rebels launched an offensive in 1989 to display their military power and demonstrate that they were still capable of fighting. While the FMLN was still militarily strong, they began to take more advantage of their political power once they started to realize that the Armed Forces would not be able to be defeated militarily. Instead the FMLN would have to expand their political forces and win the government through these methods.

After the '89 offensive, the opportunity to advance negotiations opened up. The negotiation process that began in 1984 began to slow down until the FMLN executed the '89 offensive and stated that the only way the war would end would have to be through negotiations. The Salvadoran government and its allies such as the United States were left without options and began to make the efforts towards finding a negotiated resolution through the help of the United Nations that had a major role in the process, specifically through mediation. By the 1990s the FMLN was a political powerhouse and dedicated most of their resources and capabilities to finding a settlement, originally in hopes for a power-sharing agreement that would allow them to participate in coming elections. The FMLN by this time had realized that through the electoral process, they would be able to win against the Salvadoran government since they had mass support of the civilian population – which was a result of their political strategies through the 1980s (gaining the trust and support of the populace). While the FMLN had predominantly been conducting political methods in achieving their goals, they did not completely abandon military strategies

considering that the armed struggle persisted, and a ceasefire was not in place yet. Moreover, there were still internal conflicts within the FMLN as leaders disagreed on wanting to abandon their military strategies and laying down their arms versus participating in negotiations and agreeing to a ceasefire. While internal conflicts persisted, in 1992 the FMLN signed the Chapultepec Accords and began the disarmament, demilitarization, and reintegration process (DDR) and became a legitimate political party that participated in elections and eventually won the presidency.

## **Discussion**

This research was able to contribute to the existing explanations that other scholars and general literature presents by adding the narrative of rebel groups and demonstrating how insurgents have more agency in the peace processes than other alternatives account for. The major strengths of the approach taken to produce this research was the inclusion of primary sources from accounts written by former leaders, commandants, and lower-ranking members of the FMLN. These ethnographies, memoirs, and interviews were able to be analyzed through an interconnected framework, connecting the three distinct existing explanations together and concluding how they are all interrelated. Moreover, certain limitations presented themselves throughout the study. For one, bias had been the biggest concern while reviewing these sources considering that they were written by guerrilla members that had predisposed beliefs and understandings of how the war was unraveling. Additionally, because the primary sources were written in Spanish, appropriate interpretation had to be made to prevent from any misunderstood conclusions. Lastly, there were several times that the sources presented vague statements regarding the FMLN's strategies, beliefs, or goals. Caution from making inappropriate assumptions had to be made by reviewing other primary or secondary sources that disclosed more information about certain matters, such as ERP and RN disagreements about political goals and strategies.

Through the retelling of the war through the perspective of the FMLN, one can better understand how they consisted of more than insurgents engaging in an armed struggle through guerrilla tactics. Rather, the group was an organization that operated similar to that of a government by establishing political commissions, sending members abroad that embodied the role of ambassadors, presented the legitimate Salvadoran government with potential solutions to the war, – but were consistently reject – the FMLN also maintained a close relationship with other legitimate governments and international organizations across the world such as France, Mexico, and the United Nations. Moreover, these characteristics that the FMLN possessed helped them pursue their cause and eventually led them to their goal, which was complete reform of the Salvadoran government and eventually obtained power through free and fair democratic elections.

For El Salvador, this helps one better understand the multi-dimensional and multi-actor peace process that occurred in the country. While the FMLN had not been formally included in the peace process by regional efforts from Contadora or Esquipulas, and while the Salvadoran government refused to seriously negotiate with the rebels until after the '89 offensive, the FMLN continued to insert themselves in the process and be strong advocates for a negotiated solution. Regardless of formal inclusion in the process, the FMLN engaged in their own pathway to peace and pursued avenues towards it by optimizing their relationship with the United Nations and governments abroad that would help secure the FMLN's eventual seat at the negotiating table. Moreover, the negotiation process itself is one that can be better understood through this research. The process is more than a “way out” of the conflict for groups. Negotiations are opportunities for a party to advance their goals. The FMLN were strong proponents of the negotiation process from the beginning of the war because they knew that an armed struggle was not the only avenue that

the conflict could endure, rather they needed their goals which were political in nature, to be settled through an equally political solution.

Lastly, with this view on negotiations and rebel strategies, further research on rebel leadership can be done to give greater insight on the decision-making process. Something this research did not highlight but only accounted for was how the FMLN consisted of five distinct guerrilla groups that were once independent of one another. These groups all had different goals, views, strategies, and motives. Why these distinct factions decided to unite in pursuit of war is one question that can also be researched but, for this particular study, looking into the way each faction operated, how they engaged and interacted with one another, how different leaders decided what strategies the overall group should take would be beneficial. This paper noted the amount of internal disagreement that was present within the FMLN as well as the opposing, and at times clashing, goals the groups had. A more detailed look into how the FMLN operated through these differences and what the decision-making process was like during the time of war adaptation and changing of strategies would be valuable for this research.

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