

ANATOMY OF RESISTANCE

by Robert Leiken

In early March of last year I received an invitation to meet with the leaders of the Salvadoran guerrillas in Managua, Nicaragua. I was told that they had already translated and discussed the testimony on Central America I had prepared for a congressional subcommittee the previous September and had found it "educational." Now they wanted a "broad exchange of views" and also to transmit a "message" to the State Department before the Salvadoran elections scheduled for March 28.

My intermediary placed one curious condition on the invitation: that I conceal from the Nicaraguan government the true reason for my visit. As a result, while by night I met clandestinely with the Salvadorans, by day I met officially with members of Nicaragua's Sandinista government.

The bulk of my evening conversations was with Ferman Cienfuegos, commander of the National Resistance Forces (FARN), one of the five groups that make up the Faribundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), the umbrella revolutionary organization in El Salvador. Cienfuegos is one of the FMLN's three chief leaders and has special responsibility for foreign relations. He told me the FMLN was anxious to talk about the possibility of opening up a private line of communication with the Reagan administration before the elections. He foresaw a victory for the right-wing coalition led by Major Roberto D'Aubuisson's ARENA party and was convinced that, with the "fascists" in control, no internal negotiations would be possible. The FMLN feared that a victory for the Right could lead to direct U.S. intervention, which he saw foreshadowed in the recently initiated U.S. covert operations in Nicaragua.

Cienfuegos anticipated a small turnout for the elections and some "partial insurrections" in various parts of the country on election day. The FMLN's predictions, like those for the "final offensive" of January, 1981, have proved spotty. Cienfuegos was correct about the victory of the rightist coalition but wrong about the turnout and the "insurrections." And, of course, the ARENA victory did not lead to a U.S. intervention. Yet the fear that the United States will intervene directly and massively once all other resources are exhausted remains great in the FMLN. On

the one hand this reflects its confidence that any U.S. measures to shore up the Salvadoran army *short* of direct intervention will prove unsuccessful. On the other it demonstrates a somewhat monolithic view of the U.S. in general and the Reagan administration in particular—a view shared by much of the Latin American Left—which fails to appreciate constraints within the U.S. body politic.

Concern about an eventual U.S. intervention is one of the factors that has led the FMLN to seek a negotiated settlement in El Salvador. It is also one of the factors that has encouraged the organization to keep a cautious distance from the USSR. "We recognize that the USA has legitimate security interests in the region. We do not want to be part of the East-West struggle," Cienfuegos insisted.

On the vexed question of outside arms supplies and Soviet bloc dependence, his response was direct and unromantic: "In the mid-1970s our organization [the FARN] carried out multiple kidnappings. This was part of our war preparations. Our objective was to accumulate through ransoms enough money to enable us to purchase arms ourselves and to preserve our independence from outside powers. We accumulated \$60 million. We wouldn't have bothered if we were Soviet-Cuban proxies."

Cienfuegos said he disliked the Brezhnev Doctrine and thought that the Soviet Union "had to learn to respect national sovereignty." On Afghanistan he refused to "accept the Soviet argument that its national security justified an invasion"; that argument would legitimize a U.S. invasion of El Salvador. He also said that he himself, and probably a majority of the FMLN, would have condemned a Soviet invasion of Poland.

GENEALOGY

Historically, Cienfuegos's National Resistance Forces has been the most independent of the FMLN groups. While on many issues he spoke for the FMLN as a whole, he was careful to indicate that there were internal differences on international questions. These differences are rooted in the singular and complicated history of the FMLN grouping. Indeed, it is perhaps because the evolution of the FMLN is so intricate that U.S. discussion of the rebel movement in El Salvador has been somewhat simplistic.

The FMLN has two main sources: radicalized religious activists and the Salvadoran Communist party. Vatican II and the 1968 Conference of Latin American bishops in Medellín, Colombia, had an especially powerful impact on the Salvadoran clergy. "Christian base communities,"

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small Bible-study groups disseminating liberation theology's message of Christ's "preferential option for the poor," were formed in many parishes and later often served as rear-guard zones for the guerrillas. The mass "popular organizations" formed in reaction to the electoral frauds of the early 1970s drew many of their activists and leaders from these Christian communities.

The same was true for the "political-military" fronts that split off from the Salvadoran Communist party. In 1970, Salvador Cayetano Carpio, a former seminarian and the secretary-general of the Party, resigned and took into the underground the first cells of the Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL). They quickly recruited radicalized members of the Christian base communities. Shortly thereafter other Party members left and joined young Christian Democratic party dissidents, religious activists, and student revolutionaries to form the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), which went public in 1972. Two more organizations, Cienfuegos's FARN and the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC), were later to split from this grouping. The fifth guerrilla organization, the Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL), was established by the Communist party between 1977 and 1979. Thus in varying degrees all of the guerrilla organizations are products of the prolonged and turbulent struggle within the Salvadoran Communist party.

The main divisive issue, dating back to the Cuban Revolution, was the question of armed struggle. During the 1960s there developed in the Party currents that favored the Cuban and Chinese criticisms of the Soviet line of "peaceful transition to socialism." Followers of the Cuban line were to form the FPL, followers of the Chinese the ERP. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and enunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine—each in turn endorsed

by Fidel Castro and sharply opposed by the Chinese—sharpened the division both in the Party and between its dissidents. By the early 1970s the FPL, like the Cubans, began to line up with the Soviet Union on international questions. The groups engaged in ferocious polemics in the newspapers, in the National University, and in the "popular organizations" then beginning to form.

The first of the popular organizations was the United Popular Action Front (FAPU), a broad coalition of peasant, trade union, teacher, and student organizations, professors, radicalized clergy, and members of the Communist party, the FPL, and the ERP. By then the ERP itself was beginning to subdivide into a "military" and a "political" wing. The latter, which eventually would become the National Resistance (RN), was responsible for work inside the FAPU. The differences within the FAPU between what was to become the RN and the FPL would reemerge years later, after the formation of the FMLN, on the key questions of political and military strategy for the revolutionary war. Inside the FAPU back in 1974-75 they diverged on the role of reform versus revolution, the working class versus the peasantry, popular insurrection versus "protracted war," and on the matter of alliances with the middle class. The ERP-RN conceived the revolution as unfolding in stages leading to mass insurrection. Actions should correspond to "the historical moment," especially the state of consciousness and organization of the masses. The struggle for reforms was necessary to consolidate the mass organizations, to gain political space, and in order that the masses come to apprehend "from their own bitter experience" (Lenin) the futility of reformism. The same flexibility was to be applied when making alliances. All "democratic sectors" should be united in a broad "antifascist united front." This would include not only the central allies, the workers and the peasants (with emphasis on the trade unions), but also broad sections of the middle class and "democratic army officers."

The FPL considered the peasantry the key element in a worker-peasant alliance for a "protracted people's war." The FPL rejected the "antifascist united front" for "liquidating class contradictions." The reform struggle and alliances with the middle class and the military would lead to cooptation. It was the mass organizations that would provide the recruiting grounds for protracted war. Perhaps partly because of the large number of radicalized Christian militants, the FPL leadership inculcated a messianic spirit of self-sacrifice—in Cayetano Carpio's words, "a mystique...so that the members...are disposed to sacrifice their life...in any moment." The RN, by comparison, was a body of irresolute "politicians," disposed to compromise with the enemy.

As a result of these differences and the bitter competition for leadership among member organizations, the FAPU split, and, in July, 1975, the FPL formed its own popular organization, the Revolutionary Popular Bloc (BPR). But even as this split was developing, the ERP itself was splitting, expelling the political wing that would become the RN.

By 1978 each of the three main guerrilla groups led a "popular organization." The FPL-led BPR was the largest, with nine affiliated organizations and a membership of sixty thousand. Its main base was among the agricultural workers and peasants demanding wage hikes, reductions in land

A Guide to Acronyms

- BPR** (Revolutionary Popular Bloc): "popular organization" formed by the FPL, 1975
- CRM** (Revolutionary Coordinator of the Masses): union of five "popular organizations," established 1980
- ERP** (People's Revolutionary Army): one of five groups composing the FMLN
- FAL** (Armed Forces of Liberation): one of five groups composing the FMLN
- FAPU** (United Popular Action Front): first of several "popular organizations" opposed to the government
- FARN** (National Resistance Forces): one of five groups composing the FMLN, and the military wing of the RN
- FDR** (Revolutionary Democratic Front): political coalition of opposition parties and revolutionary mass organizations united with the FMLN
- FMLN** (Faribundo Martí National Liberation Front): coalition of the five guerrilla groups
- FPL** (Popular Forces of Liberation): one of five groups composing the FMLN
- LP-28** (Popular Leagues of February 28): "popular organization" formed by the ERP, 1978
- MLP** (Popular Liberation Movement): "popular organization" formed by the PRTC, 1979
- PRTC** (Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers): one of five groups composing the FMLN
- RN** (National Resistance): derived from the political wing of the ERP

rents, and credits. The BPR frequently occupied haciendas and uncultivated land. The RN-led FAPU (about half the size of the BPR) was strong among the urban trade unions of the National Federation of Salvadoran Workers (FENESTRAS). Belatedly, in February, 1978, the ERP organized its popular organization, the Popular Leagues of February 28 (LP-28). In late 1979 the PRTC founded the Popular Liberation Movement (MLP). By this time the Communist party had a guerrilla wing, the Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL). Back in the 1960s the Party had gained control of the National Democratic Union (UDN) and organized it as an electoral front. With the affiliation of trade unions and teacher organizations it too gradually took on the character of a popular organization. By May, 1980, all five popular organizations had united in the Revolutionary Coordinator of the Masses (CRM).

In 1975, FAPU demonstrators were gunned down in San Salvador. Thereafter mass demonstrations and meetings were accompanied by small contingents of discreetly armed militants. Government repression solidified the links between the popular organizations and the guerrilla groups. The former became not only the popular base but also the recruiting ground for the latter. Demonstrations grew steadily in size and, in January, 1980, the popular organizations announced a demonstration to celebrate their unification. Estimates of the size of the demonstration vary widely, but it certainly was the largest in Salvadoran history. It was fired upon by the Salvadoran security forces, leaving dozens dead and hundreds injured. This and the massacre that accompanied the funeral of Archbishop Oscar Romero in March ended the period of large street demonstrations in San Salvador. The center of activity of the revolutionary organizations shifted to their rear-guard bases in the mountains; and in May, 1980, they announced the formation of a Unified Revolution Directorate, the precursor of the FMLN.

The revolutionary organizations had reacted in different ways to the reformist military coup of October, 1979. The Communist party welcomed the coup and prepared to join the government. The ERP called for an insurrection and set up barricades in San Salvador's suburbs. Later, in an about-face, it agreed to "study" any offer of participation in the junta. The FPL called the ERP's insurrections "suicidal" but opposed the junta as a U.S. plot. The BPR occupied the headquarters of the Economic, Planning, and Labor ministries, taking three hundred hostages to exchange for political prisoners, wage increases, and price controls. For the RN the coup was a hesitant step forward in the struggle against fascism and the junta's "reformist emergency government." It was in favor of a dialogue between the government and the popular organizations.

The October junta was composed of reformist and traditional military officers as well as Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and Communists who later united with the popular organizations in the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR). The revolutionary organizations' attitudes toward it were consistent with past and future divergencies. The ERP leapt at the prospect of armed insurrection. The FPL was cautious militarily but intransigent politically. The RN perceived an opening toward an "antifascist front" and sought an understanding with the reformist middle-class politicians and military officers. When the junta collapsed under the weight of its own internal contradictions,

all sides could claim vindication. But Cynthia Arnson's assessment is more persuasive:

By failing to appreciate divisions within the military and between the civilian and military representatives of the junta, the left played into the hands of the coup's betrayers. The High Command and sectors of the Army security forces furthest to the right ordered a stepped-up campaign of violence and repression on the premise of restoring "law and order." The junior officers acquiesced to their superiors.... The attitude of the left caused the younger officers to feel that they, too, were regarded as the enemy.

TAKING SIDES

The legacy of the FMLN's prehistory is one of lingering and sometimes overt internal differences as well as a linkage with a large number of mass organizations. These have provided not only a reserve of guerrilla fighters and sympathizers but also the bulk of the "militias" that now play an important role in the FMLN military structure. Along with five-to-six thousand guerrillas, the FMLN claims to have up to a million sympathizers, including a hundred thousand militias. The latter, according to Cienfuegos, provide food, storage, a postal service, intelligence, and back-up support in military operations. Militia members "keep a gun and some ammunition in their hut or farm" and "follow a certain discipline." In the cities they are supplemented by block and neighborhood committees that stockpile arms, ammunition, food, water, and medicine and provide logistical support, erect barricades, and dig trenches during conflicts.

As the war has deepened the guerrillas have consolidated their support system, but their reservoir of popular sympathy has diminished. They have consistently overestimated the state of evolution of the war and the readiness of the masses to support their tactics and heed their calls for strikes and insurrections. Their onslaught on the economy has destroyed factories, stores, buses, private cars, and public utilities, causing widespread disruption, suffering, unemployment, and misery. Last January, trade union leaders sympathetic to the guerrillas' objectives, if not their methods, told me that three years before, at the time of the great street demonstrations in San Salvador, "the guerrillas spoke for all the people," but this no longer was the case. This is one reason why an incipient "third force" has emerged in El Salvador from among the unions and other sectors. It supports neither the FMLN nor the government but peace talks.

Nevertheless, the elections of March, 1982, reflected not so much a repudiation of the guerrillas as of the war. When elections are carried out under conditions of civil war, such as those held in South Vietnam in 1967 or Zimbabwe-Rhodesia in 1979, the results are deceptive. In the case of El Salvador the elections reflected, among other things, the changing conditions of its war. As is customary in Third World revolutionary wars, the locus of guerrilla power had shifted to the countryside. The government controlled most of the major cities (though they remain subject to guerrilla incursions) and the guerrillas much of the eastern and northern countryside. The election turnout was heavy in the government-controlled cities and quite light in areas dominated by the guerrillas.

Since the elections the guerrillas have carried out three offensives, each larger, better coordinated, and more dam-

aging than the last. In guerrilla assessments of the war this past winter, the divergent approaches of the major groups became apparent once again. Ana Guadalupe, second in command of the ERP, displayed characteristic ERP military triumphalism. The war had undergone "a qualitative change"; the army was entering "a stage of decomposition and collapse." Within nine months to a year victory might well be in sight, unless of course the U.S. intervened.

Spokesmen for the other two big groups were more prudent. They did not expect the army's imminent collapse but "the beginning of a process in which the unstable military equilibrium inclines in our favor." The armed forces still had abundant tactical resources, they maintained control over "key points of the economy," and "the masses are not insurrectionary."

The FMLN has united around the more restrained assessment of the current military situation. In this they do not appear to have been assisted by Havana or Managua, where views even more optimistic than those of the ERP were predominating last winter.

The RN and the ERP have shown the greatest independence in developing their views and in their international dealings. For the RN, non-alignment has been a principal and integral part of its world view even as strong sympathies for Cuba prevail among its cadre. The ERP is fiercely nationalistic and suspicious of "socialist" solidarity. Both the ERP and the RN have been quite critical of the Cuban presence and influence in Managua. ERP leaders have said that they would not want to see "so many Cuban doctors, teachers, and advisors in El Salvador." A leading RN official considers Nicaragua's press censorship a serious error. "If they didn't like *La Prensa*, they should have created a better newspaper." He was critical too of the Cuban role in Sandinista economic planning and thought that together they are leading the country toward economic disaster. But the Sandinistas' greatest error has been in "not incorporating the masses into the revolutionary process."

Historically, the FPL has been the group closest to Cuba and Nicaragua. It is especially intimate with the Protracted People's War faction of the Sandinistas, which has proved to be the most proficient at in-fighting in Managua. Cuban officials consider the FPL to have "the most developed Marxist-Leninist analysis of Salvadoran reality." Nonetheless, FPL intransigence on negotiations with the Salvadoran Government, which Cuba supports, sometimes has led to tensions between them. With respect to the Soviet

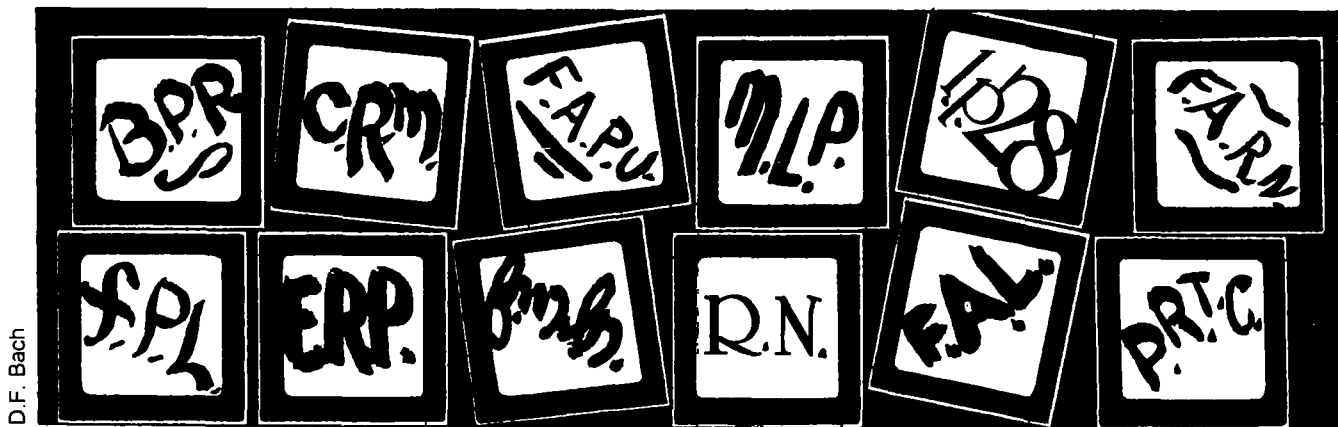
Union, the FPL appears to have two orientations. The original leadership that split from the Salvadoran Communist party has few criticisms of Moscow now that the USSR has abandoned its line of "peaceful transition" for Central America. They defend the invasion of Afghanistan and martial law in Poland. Those with Christian activist origins, on the other hand, are extremely radical and consider the Soviet Union corrupt and oppressive.

The Salvadoran Communist party, with its Armed Forces of Liberation, remains firmly in the Soviet camp. It has gained some measure of influence within the PRTC, hitherto quite independent. Nonetheless, a recent PRTC congress reaffirmed its independence and non-aligned stance internationally.

The FPL is the largest of the FMLN groups in membership but not in armed guerrillas. The ERP, with about 36 per cent of the guerrillas, is by far the biggest and most effective fighting force. The FPL is next with 22 per cent, followed by the FARN with 16 per cent. The FAL and the PRTC each have about 9 per cent of the guerrillas, and the remainder is not permanently attached to any one group. A major argument against negotiations with the FDR-FMLN is that "the Marxist-Leninists have the guns." Yet among these "Marxist-Leninist" guerrillas it is the organizations that stand at the greatest distance from the Soviet Union which control nearly two-thirds of the fighting force.

There is no basis for blind confidence that the FMLN will pursue real non-alignment. The Cubans recently have been courting the ERP, with whom they share a militarist orientation. The PRTC, as we have seen, is vulnerable to penetration by the Salvadoran Communist party. Furthermore, as the war drags on and threatens to regionalize, the FMLN tends to draw closer to its Nicaraguan and Cuban allies. On the other hand, the obscure and violent deaths of the two top leaders of the FPL—Elvira Amaya Montes ("Ana Maria") and, more recently, Salvador Cayetano Carpio—has revealed this group to be anything but a solid wedge for Cuban-Soviet penetration.

In Central America, as in the rest of the Third World, revolutionary groups display a variety of attitudes toward the Soviet bloc. But in the American "backyard" the Left is more inclined to Soviet alignment than in other parts of the Third World. Many Central Americans have come to regard world events as a contest between "reactionary forces" led by "Yankee imperialism," of which they have had firsthand experience, and "progressive forces" led, or



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at least assisted, by the Soviet Union, of which they have had none. A history of U.S. opposition to legitimate change in Central America, revolutionary or otherwise, has been the main factor propagating this view. Currently the principal justification for resumption of such policies has been the assumption that revolutionary movements eventually will be linked to Soviet expansionism. Yet the diversity and even collision of views among the Salvadoran revolutionary groups in particular, and Central American groups in general, should force us to examine this assumption. In a number of Asian and African countries, revolutionary regimes have spurned alignment with the Soviet Union. Marxist-Leninist China, with a quarter of the world's population, remains a bulwark against Soviet hegemonism. Marxist-Leninist Yugoslavia receives U.S. military aid.

NEW TERRAIN

The most neuralgic point of difference within the FMLN has been the question of negotiations. The RN view now prevails among all the FMLN organizations. Jointly they have proposed unconditional negotiations with the Salvadoran Government to reach a political settlement of the armed conflict.

What has led the other guerrilla organizations down the path from no dialogue with the reformist October junta, which included their current associates in the civilian wing of the FDR, to unconditional negotiations with the present right-of-center government? In the light of the guerrillas' steady military progress, weakness cannot be the explanation. The guerrillas do acknowledge war-weariness, but they give more stress to the toll on the civilian population. The importance of the FMLN's links with the popular organizations has never been properly understood in Washington. The popular desire for peace is one reason the majority of organizations in the FMLN have rejected the strategy of protracted war.

The FMLN believes that a military victory over the Salvadoran armed forces is possible, but it recognizes that a government produced by a military victory would have serious internal and external problems. Among the external problems would be the hostile attitude of the United States. The reconstruction and development of the war-devastated economy would become insuperably difficult should the U.S. seek to embargo the Salvadoran economy—one far more industrially developed and hence more dependent on foreign imports than that of Cuba or Nicaragua.

These factors help to explain why the FDR-FMLN has progressively softened its negotiating position even as it has gained ground militarily. The FMLN has now agreed to the preservation of the "institutionality of the army" in a negotiated settlement. They are also prepared to participate in elections and to guarantee a non-aligned foreign policy.

This presents a framework for negotiations that could safeguard legitimate U.S. security interests. In this framework the security forces would be cleansed, professionalized, and placed under the effective jurisdiction of the Interior Department, where it could be integrated with FMLN forces into a territorial militia. The Salvadoran army's officer corps would be preserved, and only individual officers guilty of major abuses and convicted after proper investigation and due process would be retired with compensation. The same would be true for members on

both sides of the territorial militia.

Pluralism does not come about because one individual in government desires it; there must be a certain balance of power to underwrite it. There was no such balance of power in Nicaragua when the Sandinistas came to power. In the Nicaraguan case, it was the failure of previous mediation efforts that led to the Sandinistas' enjoyment of a virtual monopoly of military and political resources when they gained power. This has been a major factor in Nicaragua's evolution toward a monolithic political apparatus and its alignment with the Soviet bloc.

Should there be negotiations in El Salvador, a multiplicity of political actors, each with military and political resources, will contend for power. Among them will be the moderate progovernment political parties; the civilian parties in the FDR; the different FMLN groupings with their different internal and external agendas; military reformers and more conservative military officers; and the trade unions. Negotiations will not end the struggle but they will shift it to different terrain—the political and economic. On this terrain the Cuban-Soviet bloc is at its weakest.

The violent internal struggle within the FPL appears to have strengthened the faction that supports negotiations and may weaken Cuban influence within the FMLN. The conflict in the FPL does not seem to prefigure fissures within the FMLN itself. On the contrary, it appears to be closing ranks around lending its support to a political settlement. It is unlikely that the FMLN will split before a political settlement is achieved in El Salvador. It is just as unlikely, though, that the "democratic elements" of the FDR-FMLN can be split off from the revolutionary organizations. This tack has been pursued by both the Carter and the Reagan administrations. It has little chance of succeeding as long as its civilian adherents believe that a rupture of their alliance with the FMLN would deliver them into the hands of the armed oligarchy. With the disappearance from San Salvador in October of several associates of the FDR just as the latter was proposing negotiations, such fears seem justified.

Furthermore, the drawing of hard and fast distinctions between the "democratic" and the "violent" members of the opposition is becoming increasingly irrelevant. This is not only because the "democrats" support the armed struggle but also because the FMLN and the civilian organizations of the FDR are becoming increasingly interrelated. The real line of demarcation within the FDR-FMLN is not between democracy and revolution but between alignment with the Soviets and non-alignment.

Over the past decade U.S. policy-makers have learned to distinguish leftism, even some varieties of Marxism-leftism, from Sovietism. However, they have been reluctant to do so in the U.S. "backyard." This distinction will have to be made if the U.S. is to live peaceably with its southern neighbors. By ignoring this distinction and by its wholesale opposition to the entire Central American Left, U.S. policy pushes the non-aligned Left into the arms of those who are pro-Soviet. U.S. national security would indeed be threatened by Soviet-aligned regimes in the Caribbean Basin, but not necessarily by independent leftist regimes—even if they do speak the language of Marxism. The ability to discriminate in more sophisticated fashion among organizations of the Central American Left is fundamental to developing viable U.S. policies for the region.