

El Salvador

A game of diplomacy . . .

By Ron Hunt
Of the Emerald

Uncle Sam hates to lose at dominoes.

But some games are more important than others: Uncle Sam thinks the stakes are higher now in El Salvador than they were in Vietnam.

Is he right? Is U.S. involvement in El Salvador essential to maintain national security? Or is elderly Sam dangerously close to repeating the game plan he used in Vietnam?

Dominoes. Is it the game? Or, as some of Uncle Sam's critics suggest, is the real action going on in another arena?

'Decisive battle'

The Reagan administration says the domino theory does apply: the outcome of the civil war in El Salvador is crucial for American security.

Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Enders told a Congressional hearing recently, "We believe that the decisive battle for Central America is under way in El Salvador. If, after Nicaragua, El Salvador is captured by a violent minority, who in Central America would not live in fear? How long would it be before major strategic U.S. interests — the (Panama) canal, sea lanes, oil supplies — were at risk?"

This belief has led the administration to allocate at least \$184 million in military and economic aid to Pres. Jose Napoleon Duarte's junta for 1982, to send at least 50 military advisors to the Central American country, and to train Salvadoran soldiers in Fort Benning, Ga., and Fort Bragg, N.C. This basic-training

program for about 1,500 soldiers, begun in January, is the largest program of its kind in U.S. history.

"I believe very strongly," says Deane Hinton, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, "that we have to give El Salvador what it needs to defend itself against communism."

Robert Cocklin, former U.S. Army major general, says, "I don't like to get into the buzzword business of saying we're saving people from communism," but "a stable Latin America is very important to the United States." He says he couldn't identify the objectives of leftist guerrillas but "any Communist subversion in Latin America" is dangerous for the United States.

Those who criticize U.S. training of Salvadoran soldiers have, says Cocklin, forgotten that American training of foreign soldiers has been going on for years — at the School of the Americas in Panama, for example.

"It gets out of context when people forget it's not a brand new thing."

William Taylor, director of political-military studies at the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies, says Pres. Ronald Reagan's assistance to the junta has been "very slow, very measured." Reagan is "appropriately cautious" and has made "no precipitous decision."

Is El Salvador caught in the middle of an East-West tug of war? Secretary of State Alexander Haig says, "The threat to democracy from opponents of peaceful change is particularly acute in El Salvador."

"If you assume," Taylor says,

"that the Soviets are behind all this, and the Cubans are as Soviet proxies, and the Cubans are able — with the help of the Soviets — to orchestrate revolutions in the area, then you'd certainly have to agree with Haig's position."

The debate over Cuban infiltration centers around a Feb. 23, 1981, state department white paper, "Communist Interference in El Salvador," which allegedly documents Cuban arms shipments to Salvadoran guerrillas via leftists in Nicaragua. The white paper has received extensive criticism regarding its accuracy.

"I think there is Cuban involvement," says Taylor. "I thought it was a pretty thorough report," he says, adding "some shortcomings" do not invalidate the report.

Doug Green, vice-chairer of the University chapter of College Republicans, says, "The Communist forces ought not to have carte blanche" in El Salvador.

Critics of U.S. policy in El Salvador, however, say the Central American nation is in civil war primarily because Salvadoran peasants are opposing an unjust economic system controlled by an elite group of landowners. Even if the state department's white paper is accurate, they say, the amount of Cuban arms is minuscule in comparison to the amount of U.S. arms sent to the junta.

Michael Klare, director of international security studies for the Institute for Policy Studies, says the extent of outside Communist influence envisioned by the Reagan administration is "a figment of their imagination." The Cubans are interested, he

in El Salvador and is sustained by the guerrillas' own efforts. The white paper was "established as a fraud," he adds.

The civil war is an "indigenous struggle against the ruling junta" and the reason the Reagan administration is trying to pin it on the Soviet Union is to "justly escalate American action," Klare says.

Laurence Shoup, author of "The Carter Presidency and Beyond: Power and Politics in the 1980s," says "I don't think the U.S. should be there at all." America needs a more sophisticated approach, he says, because most countries want independence from both the Soviet Union and the United States.

The U.S. government has supported the oligarchy pattern in "case after case" during the 20th century, Shoup says. In Guatemala, for example, the government initiated a moderate program of land reform — bruising the United Fruit Co. — so the U.S. sponsored a group to overthrow the government in 1954, he says.

"The oligarchies do the U.S. bidding," and oppressive regimes protect corporate interests, Shoup says, but adds that the geographical location of El Salvador is more important

to the United States than those economic considerations.

Margaret Thomas, of the Eugene Council for Human Rights in Latin America, echoes the point: the majority of Salvadorans are protesting an unjust system run by a "small ruling elite who are very tied in to international interests."

"Making it a test of East-West relations is an insult to the Salvadorans."

'Death squad'

Another key component in the El Salvador controversy is human rights violations —

primarily executed by government forces.

Since Duarte's government took power in October, 1979, about 35,000 Salvadorans have died in political violence, say religious and human rights groups; as many as 1,000 peo-



Or another Vietnam?

ple disappear or are murdered each month. These groups have repeatedly challenged the Duarte junta's record on human rights.

The U.S. Congress reacted to the allegations last December by demanding that Reagan certify that the junta has made a "concerted, significant" effort to eliminate brutality by its soldiers, made "continued progress" in economic and political reforms, and made "good faith efforts" to investigate and prosecute the murders of four American churchwomen at San Salvador on Dec. 2, 1980.

Five soldiers in El Salvador's National Guard were charged with murder in that case on Feb. 10. But there was some criticism: "Why all of a sudden are people arrested just as our President is trying to get more aid for the the Salvadoran government?" asked a sister of murdered nun Maura Clarke.

On Jan. 29, Reagan told Congress that the Duarte junta was making progress in human rights. On Jan. 31, 20 civilians were killed in a San Salvador slum.

Rep. James Oberstar, D-Minn., says he and two other congressmen were told in a meeting with Gen. Jose Guillermo Garcia, defense minister, that the civilians were caught in a crossfire between soldiers and leftist guerrillas.

Garcia's explanation "just doesn't wash; it was a massive cover-up," says Oberstar. Government soldiers "went into homes in the middle of the night, dragged people out and assassinated them," he says.

Taylor, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, says human rights violations are

"hotly debated" and he's withholding judgment until he sees both sides.

Green, of the College Republicans, says there are "atrocities on both sides" and the "Democrats smell blood," adding that El Salvador is a "very complex and difficult situation."

Author Shoup calls the junta's army a "death squad." Training Duarte's soldiers on U.S. soil "leads you to be somewhat responsible for what they do." Poland's president was trained in the Soviet Union, for example; "I don't think that's an insignificant fact."

A group of Salvadoran soldiers trained by the Green Berets, Shoup says, went through a village, killing 1,000 civilians. And, although he doesn't know the accuracy of the following, Shoup says the story by a Salvadoran deserter should be considered. The deserter says he observed Green Berets present at torture sessions conducted by government soldiers.

"It angers me," Shoup says; "it's denigrating" to our ancestors who founded the United States. "It doesn't help our national interest to help people do evil deeds."

ECHRLA's Thomas says Duarte realizes U.S. support depends to a large extent on how the junta handles the trial of the alleged nun-killers. "They have to look like they're doing something — which they haven't done for a long time."

'We say no'

Beseided by criticism, the Reagan administration appears to be awaiting the March 28 Salvadoran elections (leading to a new constitution) like a

student anxiously waits for a grade from an unpredictable professor — muted hope, restrained frustration.

The administration's hopes may turn sour, however. Duarte's Christian Democrat government appears vulnerable as strength grows for several far-right groups.

Roberto D'Aubuisson, of the Nationalist Republican Alliance, is Duarte's primary opponent. "Major Bob" has been labeled — by former U.S. Ambassador Robert White — a "psychopathic killer." His platform calls for Duarte and government officials to be tried for treason.

Duarte, however, says right-wing opponents like D'Aubuisson are guilty of "nothing short of treason." The president calls them "retrograds" and says, "If they succeed, the people will rebel, become more radicalized. The retrograds are fools and are succeeding only in helping the extreme left."

The left is boycotting the election. Ruben Zamora, in Washington, D.C., recently as a spokesman for the guerrillas, says "Our whole leadership is on a death list. Every day 15 people are assassinated and sometimes brutally tortured. We see a press controlled by the government. Under all these conditions they say, 'Come be a candidate.' We say no. We will not be crazy and get killed."

Instead, the left is pushing a negotiated settlement. "It seems to me," Zamora says, "a political settlement would strengthen the democratic process and strengthen pluralism."

While urging a settlement, the *Continued on Page 4B*

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Gabriel, who — can I be frank? — provided his electronic-wordsmith-blue pencil, as well as much-needed/appreciated encouragement at 11

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