

El Salvador: First test of Reagan's foreign policy

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By Franz Schurmann

Nowhere in the world was there such a strong conviction that Ronald Reagan's victory would signal a big difference in U.S. foreign policy as in Central America. Reagan's stunning triumph was celebrated wildly by right-wing forces in El Salvador, while Havana gloomily marked it as a return to U.S. interventionism.

Throughout the campaign, Reagan vowed a tough policy toward communism in the Americas. He called for a blockade of Cuba, and his advisors openly disparaged Cuban and communist involvement in the El Salvador conflict and in post-Somoza Nicaragua.

The whole record of the last two Republican Administrations, those of Nixon and Ford, suggests that the United States will veer sharply from what had been a liberal and cautious policy toward Latin America under Carter to a tough hard-line approach under Reagan. Indeed, one of the earliest and most dramatic consequences of the election may be a direct U.S. involvement in the bloody civil war now tearing El Salvador apart.

Since the U.S. is already involved in backing the so-called "centrist" junta in the form of weapons shipments, financial aid and the presence of advisors -- shades of Vietnam when Kennedy assumed office in January 1961 -- it is not difficult to imagine how Reagan might easily allow this involvement to grow quickly.

But as in those early days of U.S. - Vietnam involvement, when success seemed mainly a function of a bigger quotient of money and fire power, so now the strident demands

of the Central American right for just a little more aid to secure final victory obscure the full landscape. Take off the covers and one will see massive pitfalls and quicksand that could easily plunge the Reagan Administration into another Vietnam-type situation well before it has a chance to try out its approaches to setting the United States on the right course again.

The bitter conflict in El Salvador involves more than the hapless people of that country. Already drawn in, directly and indirectly, are Guatemala and Honduras which support the right wing and Nicaragua supporting the left. Also involved are Costa Rica, Panama and Venezuela, who, while suspicious of the radical leftism of the El Salvador insurgents, fear even more the possibility of a return to U.S. interventionism which could easily evoke a tidal wave of anti-Americanism in countries with fairly conservative and repressive regimes.

The powerful symbolism of "el imperialismo yanqui" throbs everywhere in Latin America, much as hatred of Russia does among the Poles.

But these are elements in the political landscape which Reagan's advisors are fully aware of. They have been constants in the Latin American political scene for a long time.

However, two new swellings appear on the landscape which Reagan advisers may be inclined to dismiss as easily as Johnson's advisers dismissed the staying power of the Vietcong. Those new factors are Mexico and the Catholics.

Many Americans, while knowing better, still tend to see Mexico as a sombrero republic. But it now has a

population half that of the United States. It is undergoing a pell-mell industrialization all the while it suffers from grinding poverty. For the first time in its history, it has wealth and influence that go beyond its borders.

In the conflict against Somoza, Mexico strongly supported the leftist Sandinistas. And now it shows its support for the leftist insurgents in Guatemala and El Salvador. Only a day after Reagan's election, President Jose Lopez Portillo warned the U.S. not to intervene in the Central American conflicts. And the Nicaraguan ambassador in Mexico City said that if the United States intervened in El Salvador to support the right, Nicaragua would go in to support the left.

The Mexicans are convinced, based on the experiences of their own revolution, that revolutionary ferment will continue in countries such as El Salvador and Guatemala until a leftist regime comes to power and is able to satisfy the key grievance of the peasantry -- land re-

distribution. Such a regime could then re-establish law and order, just as happened in Mexico after the 1910-1920 revolution, which promulgated a dramatic land reform. And just as the Mexican revolutionary party, the PRI, turned into an entrenched mandarin in Mexico, so the Mexicans believe leftist regimes will do elsewhere in Central America.

Thus President Lopez Portillo, though coming from the right wing of the PRI, got a hero's welcome in Havana last summer when he vowed Mexico's support of Cuba if threatened by the U.S.

United States involvement in El Salvador on the right could easily mean Mexican involvement on the left, putting these two countries on a dangerous collision course.

The second and potentially more serious swelling on the landscape is the position of Catholics. The call of the last three Popes for a more equitable division of the world's wealth has found powerful resonance in the stance of many Latin American bishops, who constitute

one of the chief countervailing forces to the military dictatorships. They are strongly supported by the thousands of "basic Christian communities," cell-like groups of poor people who are often served by radicalized priests and nuns.

This dramatic new role for the Church became evident in the Sandinista revolution where it was one of a trinity of forces who made the revolution: Marxists, anti-Somoza businessmen, and the Church. And today, as the Marxists are squeezing out the pro-business forces, the Church provides a powerful grassroots base.

While some Reagan advisers apparently believe the gap between Church and Marxists can be widened through U.S. pressure, the evidence for a powerful leftward tilt on the part of the Church suggests just the opposite. Indeed, the general secretary of the U.S. Catholic Conference, Bishop Thomas B. Kelly, made a public plea for an end to U.S. military aid to El Salvador less than one week after Reagan's election.

With so many other factors indicating a powerful wave of opposition to any U.S. involvement, even under the pretext of preventing Soviet expansionism, the chances are good that many clerics will shift even farther leftward.

Also, the Mexican and Catholic factors may not be limited to Central America. Both could send ripples and tremors of anti-U.S. interventionism surging through the large Chicano and Catholic populations at home.

For years, Reagan's advisers have argued that the U.S. must get over its Vietnam phobia, the fear of ever again using military force because it could produce another Vietnam. Ironically, no U.S. military intervention abroad seems to offer such a sure-fire recipe for generating another Vietnam as getting involved with the Central American right.

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Black family income down

Median family income for Black families in 1979 was \$11,650, according to a report from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Census Bureau.

The 1979 median for Blacks was 6.7 percent higher than the 1978 median of \$10,880, but when adjusted for inflation the 1979 figure showed some evidence of a 4-percent decline in real dollars even though the year-to-year change was not statistically significant.

In 1979, Black median family income was 57 percent of that for white families. This was not significantly different from 1978 ratio of 59 percent. According to the report, the 1979 income figures do not reflect the influence of the recession which began in the spring of 1980.

The report also shows that an estimated 25.2 million persons of all races were below the poverty level in 1979, of whom 7.8 million were Black. The number of Black married-couple families below the poverty level increased from 370,000 in 1978 to 440,000 in 1979, reversing a decrease for this group between 1977 and 1978. However, the apparent increase of 200,000 between 1978 and 1979 in the total number of Blacks below the poverty level was not statistically significant.

At the beginning of the decade, 56 percent of all poor Black families were maintained by women; by 1979 the proportion had grown to 72 per-

cent. Although the report notes no significant change in the overall number or proportion of persons below the poverty level since the 1975-76 period, certain population subgroups showed changes between 1978 and 1979. For example, the number of poor persons 65 and older increased from 3.2 million in 1978 to 3.6 million last year.

As part of an effort to improve the quality of its income and poverty statistics, the Bureau introduced several important modifications in the collection and presentation of the data. These changes included a larger sample, a more detailed income questionnaire, use of a new household classification concept, more detailed income intervals for high income groups, and a new farm definition.

As in all sample surveys, the data in the report are subject to sampling variability and errors of response, including underreporting and nonreporting.

Single copies of the report, *Money Income and Poverty Status of Families and Persons in the United States; 1979, P-60, No. 125*, may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402 or from Commerce Department District Offices in major cities throughout the United States. The price is \$2.25 per copy prepaid.

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- CUT THE INSULATION. Mark where the insulation overlaps. Then allow 6" for taping. (For example, if it takes 25" of insulation to encircle the duct, cut 31". Remove insulation on the last 6" so it will wrap around easily.)
- WRAP DUCTS WITH INSULATION. Tape along each overlap & tape the joints between insulation segments. Completely circle the duct with tape, overlapping about 6" so tape sticks to itself.
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