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## **Interview: Col. Orlando Zepeda, Chief Of 1st Infantry Brigade, San Salvador**

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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[Appearing below are excerpts from a recent interview with Col. Orlando Zepeda, chief of the First Infantry Brigade in San Salvador, published in a November special report by the Regional Coordinator of Economic and Social Research (Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Economicas y Sociales-CRIES, Managua). Zepeda is a member of the so-called "Tandona," or the 1966 graduating class of military officers.] Q: In what way does the upsurge in urban guerrilla actions affect the operational capacity of Salvadoran troops? A: It affects us a great deal. We are put in a defensive position...65% of our forces are guarding the economic infrastructure...I have at least 70% [of my troops] on the defensive. Today I have to protect the coffee harvest in the zone around the San Salvador volcano, and I have to guard the cutting and processing of sugarcane. Together these activities tie up 85% of our forces. Q: How do you plan to stop this urban war with such limited capabilities? A:...We have to be more demanding in carrying out the laws. We have a restructuring plan to make the units more efficient,...to move into areas, identify vehicles and persons, in order to restrict the free movement of the terrorists in the capital. Q: You have said that the FMLN is morally and militarily defeated. Do you mean to say that there is a military solution to the conflict, that there is no reason to look for a political solution? A: To talk of a political arrangement is to give up a portion of power, to interfere with the destiny of the country. It implies that [FMLN commander Joaquin] Villalobos should come around and express his wishes to hold a ministerial position, that the assassins of the FMLN be incorporated into the armed forces. That is not possible. They do not recognize the constitution. To put together a government with broad participation is not possible from a moral, patriotic and constitutional point of view. Q: What about the Democratic Convergence's proposal: a process in stages wherein the two sides come together? A: They carry on with their political campaign like other correct citizens that have never taken up arms and today demand that their military troops, their assassins, receive benevolent treatment. They have been given too much. How do they justify their alliance with the FMLN? Requesting talks is not compatible with intensifying the struggle. Q: There have been many cases of human rights violations, even massacres attributed to the army. Is this a natural part of counterinsurgency warfare or are these excesses of particular military units? A: ...We are at war, and death is the dialectic of war. This has to happen if the enemy is armed. Q: Is it possible to win a war and strengthen a democracy at the same time? A: The greater objectives must be prioritized. I criticized the US for their interest in a democracy at all costs. They believe I think that...democratic philosophy produces the marxist anti-bodies. In a war environment democracy is weakened in order to confront aggression. To win a war in a democratic environment is very difficult. For that reason it has taken so long.

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