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Deborah Tyrolier

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On Salvadoran Military Recruitment

by Deborah Tyroler
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The 57,000-man Salvadoran military forcibly enlists 12,000 young people per year. Poor families, and rural households are especially susceptible to forced recruitment of teenagers as young as 14. Most Salvadoran soldiers complete their enlistment every two years. Consequently, many army units consist largely of inexperienced fighters. Despite the war, however, many soldiers try to re-enlist. Since more than half of all working-age Salvadorans are un- or unemployed, even low-pay, high-risk soldiering remains desirable. Most wealthy young Salvadorans avoid military service, either by buying their way out, or by going to school in the US. Three years ago, President Jose Napoleon Duarte introduced legislation for universal military service, but it was never approved. The Salvadoran rebels do not use forced recruitment. A rebel spokesperson in Perquin, Morazan department, cited by the New York Times said: "No one is a combatant against his will. All are voluntary. They all have to understand why they are fighting." (Basic data from New York Times, 04/21/89)

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