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Salvadoran Rebel Offensive & Related Developments: Summary Of Events & Statements, Saturday, Nov. 18

by Deborah Tyroler

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[See CAU 11/15/89 and 11/17/89 for details on earlier events mentioned below.] According to the AP, fighting in San Salvador dropped off on Saturday, and thousands of residents took advantage of the situation to evacuate. AP reported that fighting continued on a sporadic basis in Mejicanos, and along the northern and eastern edges of the city. AFP reported that unconfirmed rumors suggested that the army was preparing a "final counter-offensive" as rebel and government troops were locked in intense fighting in San Salvador and San Miguel. Soldiers blocked all access to the northern and eastern sectors of the capital where rebel forces had established positions. AFP cited press reports saying that the rebels who had evacuated the Zacamil suburb Thursday had regrouped in Ayutuxtepeque, north of the capital. Rebels were also seen at Apopa, 12 km. north of the capital on the major northern route. Notimex reported that Atlacatl Battalion troops continued to advance on rebel positions in Mejicanos. Commanders said civilians had been evacuated, and that the troops been ordered to use what was necessary to dislodge the rebels. Notimex reporters said that many civilians remained in combat zones, including women and children. AP reported that witnesses and airport officials said the rebels shot down an A-37 jet fighter-bomber in San Miguel department. Peter Collins of ABC News was in San Miguel and said he and his crew saw the plane struck by two projectiles, apparently from a 50-caliber machine gun fired by guerrillas. In a report broadcast by Radio Venceremos, FMLN Commander Jorge Melendez said that in San Miguel the Salvadoran military had strafed the residential district of Los Altos de la Cuevas from helicopters and planes. He said rebel units shot down an A-37 plane previously engaged in dropping 500-pound bombs over the city. In a separate broadcast by Radio Venceremos, the FMLN asserted that the government had been defeated politically, and given a death blow militarily. The rebels, said the broadcast, had stripped bare the nature of the "military fascist dictatorship" to the eyes of the world. In reference to bombings of civilians in the cities and the murder of the Jesuit priests, the FMLN said these crimes have isolated the government and the military in the international community, "reminiscent of the last days of [Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio] Somoza." The Salvadoran military reported that since the offensive began on Nov. 11, 784 guerrillas have been killed, 527 wounded and 129 captured; 208 soldiers were killed, and 627 wounded. No report on civilian casualties was given. AFP reported that more than 2,000 had been killed or injured since the offensive began. In a Radio Venceremos broadcast, the FMLN said government troops had suffered at least 827 casualties since Nov. 11. Next, the FMLN reported the capture of 127 heavy weapons, 21 machine guns, and a large quantity of ammunition. In a letter to Pope John Paul II, Salvadoran Attorney General Mauricio Eduardo Colorado accused unnamed Roman Catholic bishops of fomenting violence and urged the Vatican to withdraw them from the country. The government prohibited publication or news of the letter to be disseminated within the country. A copy of the letter was provided to journalists of the AP and AFP, among others. It was believed that among those Colorado referred to were Archbishop Rivera y Damas, and auxiliary archbishop, Gregorio Rosa Chavez. Both are identified with human rights causes and have urged the government to negotiate with the FMLN to end the war. Colorado said "large portions of public opinion" blamed the bishops for the violence in El Salvador. He told the

Pope: "We are of the opinion that instead of investigating crimes, it is a thousand times better to avoid them." Hundreds of mourners filed past the caskets of the six Jesuit priests and two women who were tortured and murdered on Thursday. Students, fellow religious workers, doctors and other professionals, and members of the faculty staff participated. According to AP, Guillermo Ungo left the country for Panama Saturday after spending a week holed up in the Venezuelan Embassy. Notimex reported that Ungo left the country for Venezuela. Other leftist politicians, union activists and intellectuals were in hiding, fearing that the killings of the Jesuits were the beginning of another wave of death squad killings. The Italian Foreign Ministry expressed "its indignation and condemnation" of the murders of the Jesuits, and requested that the Salvadoran government "clarify" as soon as possible the "barbarous episode." Government officials said they had informed the Salvadoran embassy in Rome that negotiations are "the only solution" to the civil war. Roman Catholic Church officials in the US urged the White House to press for an investigation of the murders of the six Jesuit priests, and an end to military aid to both sides. The Netherlands announced approval \$675,000 to aid war victims, to be channeled through the private organization Diaconia and the Red Cross. More than 15 tons of medicines sent by the International Red Cross arrived in El Salvador. At a press conference, head of the Salvadoran Red Cross, Francois Musy, said that the organization's main priority continues to be the evacuation of wounded and civilians from combat zones. Musy reiterated a call by the Red Cross for a "humanitarian truce" to permit the evacuation of all wounded "with a minimum of safety guarantees." The West German Red Cross announced that it was shipping medical supplies, blood plasma and clothing to El Salvador, and reiterated a call for an immediate cease-fire and an end to indiscriminate bombings of residential areas. The Spanish Red Cross opened two special accounts for funds to assist Salvadoran war victims. The International Committee of the Red Cross called on the world community to apply pressure on the Salvadoran government to permit its delegates access to all areas of El Salvador, and to establish a truce to permit evacuation of all wounded. The French government announced that Minister for Humanitarian Action, Bernard Kouchner, would fly to El Salvador Sunday to oversee French assistance to victims chiefly medical equipment and supplies for the main hospital in San Salvador. AFP reported that Paris has called on El Salvador to free immediately French aid worker, Thierry Nappé, who had been detained by the Salvadoran police since Nov. 12. Some of 12 Lutheran missionaries who were arrested Thursday and released Friday said that Nappé had been "badly tortured" and was in "critical" condition. A Foreign Ministry official in Paris said there was no confirmation of these allegations. The official said the Salvadoran ambassador in Paris was summoned Saturday and asked to secure the teacher's immediate release. In its Saturday edition, Canada's *The Globe and Mail* pointed out that to date not one member of a death squad in El Salvador has been convicted of a violent crime. Notimex cited excerpts from the newspaper article stating that the US government has the means to disarm the death squads and force the government to return to the negotiations table with the FMLN. Next, the daily stated that despite enormous US military and economic aid (over \$1 million per day), not one of the basic causes of the Salvadoran conflict has changed for the better, such as the enormous gap between the impoverished mass of campesinos and the tiny minority of big landowners. The *Globe and Mail* asserted that the Salvadoran government cannot or does not wish to contain the violence of the death squads against civilians. The newspaper referred to recent statements by associates of ARENA founder and known death squad organizer, Roberto d'Aubuisson, and top military officers declaring that the only way to end the rebellion is to assassinate all progressives. An unidentified Canadian "political source" cited by Notimex said that a cease-fire and resumption of negotiations are essential because certain sectors of the military and the government have asserted that the only way of resolving

the current situation is to launch a large-scale massacre. Nicaragua's diplomatic personnel were evacuated from San Salvador on Saturday. Upon arriving in Managua, the embassy's business affairs charge, Norman Lacayo, said his government had decided to bring the diplomats home due to the climate of insecurity in San Salvador. Lacayo said the Salvadoran government has blamed Nicaragua for its current problems, which encouraged terrorist groups to threaten the lives and safety of diplomats. Since the time the offensive began, Lacayo said the embassy had requested security corps from the Salvadoran Foreign Ministry, but the embassy was left without protection. The Nicaraguans, said Lacayo, requested diplomatic protection from the Mexican government. Mexico responded immediately, and arranged the diplomats' trip to Managua. In an interview aired over the Salvadoran national radio network, currently controlled by the military, Col. Sigifredo Ochoa, president of the state-run hydroelectric enterprise, issued a statement calling on Salvadorans to refuse pressure from international organizations for negotiations or a truce. These organizations and "elements of some churches," said Ochoa, "serve as an echo of the FMLN." Ochoa said that instead of political negotiations as suggested by the Organization of American States, the Red Cross, the Catholic Church and other organizations the "terrorists" must be "exterminated" as the only means of resolving the conflict. Notimex reported that in recent broadcasts, the military-controlled media in El Salvador has stepped up calls for the extermination of "the FMLN communists, genocides, and anti-patriots." Salvadoran newspaper El Diario de Hoy asserted that a truce or mediation efforts were unacceptable. El Diario criticized offers to mediate by "false religious" using the "pretext" of aiding war victims. The newspaper article continued by stating that "no one asked for mediation" from the Catholic clergy, and that their inclinations are well-known. Because of the supposed tendency to support the rebels, said El Diario, the clergy is "largely responsible for the unjust bloodbath suffered by our people." UNESCO director general Federico Mayor Zaragoza expressed condemnation of the assassination of the six Jesuit priests, and the death of a "British journalist engaged in a mission of service." He denounced the conflict that has resulted in an ever increasing civilian death toll, and the recent extension of extreme violence to educational and religious institutions. In Quito, the World Council of Churches condemned the assassination of the six Jesuit priests. In a message to Cristiani, the Council said that "thousands of civilians are being killed and mutilated by the indiscriminate use of weapons by the armed forces in air and land attacks." In Caracas, the Christian Democrat Organization of America (ODCA) said in a communique that the Salvadoran government is engaged in actions signifying regression in the area of democratization and above all, agrarian reform. In San Salvador, Spanish Deputy Foreign Minister Inocencio Arias said that the governments of the US, El Salvador, Spain and Britain had commenced an investigation into the Nov. 16 murders of the Jesuit priests. He added that President Cristiani had invited the three foreign governments to participate in the investigation. Arias said that Cristiani told him the crime could have been committed by an "uncontrolled military element." Witnesses who claim to have seen 30 uniformed soldiers enter the priests' home have not yet come forward. According to Jesuit Provincial for Central America, Jose Maria Tojeira, the witnesses will speak at an opportune moment. In Los Angeles, 3,000 people participated in a demonstration demanding that the Salvadoran government seek a political solution to the war. Participants included Salvadorans and other Central Americans residing in the Los Angeles area, and representatives of church and human rights groups. In Mexico City at a press conference, president of the Msgr. Romero International Christian Solidarity Committee, Msgr. Sergio Mendez Arceo, criticized the US government for providing military aid to El Salvador. Rafael Alvarez, member of the Mexican Solidarity Assembly for El Salvador, denounced US military aid to El Salvador, and called for the withdrawal of US and Guatemalan troops from that country. The

Assembly comprised of 64 organizations said it had planned a march for Nov. 21. (Basic data from several reports by Notimex, AFP, AP, Radio Venceremos, 11/18/89)

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