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Salvadoran Rebels Stop Attacks On Most Non-military Targets

by Deborah Tyroler

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On March 13, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) announced that it would halt attacks on public transport, telephone lines, commercial establishments and civilian officials beginning at midnight Friday. In an interview with a Salvadoran radio station, FMLN commander Shafik Jorge Handal said, "We wanted with this gesture to unblock the path toward the initiation of negotiations." Attacks on electrical transmission lines will not be suspended. On March 14, Salvadoran presidential spokesperson Mauricio Sandoval said the FMLN's announcement had violated an agreement by both sides to maintain discretion about steps necessary toward resuming peace talks with UN mediation. He added that the government had not yet formulated a response to the rebel offer. [Both the Salvadoran military and the FMLN have warned of a new rebel offensive. The most intense fighting since the November offensive has occurred in the past three weeks. A sampling of reports of recent fighting and rebel sabotage follows: Feb. 21: Rebels machinegunned a helicopter in the village of Guancorita, Chalatenango department, resulting in injuries to the pilot. On the same day, rebels attacked the El Maguey farm in Morazan department. Four rebels were killed, and six wounded. Rebel sources reported two government troop casualties. According to the state-run electricity company, service has been interrupted in the areas of Nejapa, Aguilares, Mexicanos and Apopa in the northern periphery of San Salvador; in Chalatenango department; and, along the border with Guatemala. Feb. 21 marked the third consecutive day of electricity rationing throughout 40% of the capital city. The armed forces press office reported eight rebel and two soldiers wounded during fighting in Morazan, Chalatenango, Cuscatlan and La Libertad departments. Feb. 22: The military press office reported the deaths of six members of the air force in a rebel attack against an observation post located in the Soyapango neighborhood of San Salvador. An explosive device was tossed from a moving car at the soldiers. On Thursday morning, FMLN commandos launched mortars and rifle fire against the Public Security Academy located in old Cuscatlan, located on the northern periphery of the capital. The military press office reported that the attack caused no material damage, but three soldiers were wounded. Feb. 26: Military sources reported that on the weekend of Feb. 24-25, five soldiers were killed and three wounded in a rebel ambush of a troop transport in San Vicente department. The sources also reported attacks early Feb. 26 against National Guard posts in Jucuapa, Usulután department, and in Chinameca, San Miguel department. There were no casualties. On Feb. 25, rebels set fire to a cane field in La Libertad department. The state-run electricity company reported that over \$700,000 had been spent in the last two months to repair 125 primary transmission lines, and 76 electricity pylons. In the last 10 years, said company spokespersons, the FMLN has caused a total of \$48.5 million in damages to the country's electricity grid. March 8-9: According to Radio Venceremos, on Thursday evening the FMLN launched a major operation against military targets in San Salvador and La Unión, Morazan, San Miguel and Usulután departments "to prove we are not weak...and to press our demand for a political solution to the war." A total of 4,000 government troops were immediately sent into the northern suburbs with helicopter support. A rebel attack against the coffee processing plant "Oromontique" (owned by President Alfredo Cristiani's in-laws, the Llach family) spread

into nearby Santiago de Maria, Usulután and continued into the early afternoon hours of March 9. Heavy fighting was also reported in Ciudad Barrios, San Miguel. The FMLN claimed 91 casualties throughout the country. March 10: Radio Venceremos reported fighting in San Salvador and in several departments throughout the country.] [Basic data from Notimex, 02/21/90, 02/22/90, 02/26/90; Xinhua, 03/10/90, 03/14/90; Prensa Latina, 03/10/90; New York Times, 03/14/90; 03/05-12/90 El Rescate Human Rights Department Report (Los Angeles, CA)]

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