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## El Salvador: Untying The "gordian Knot"

by Deborah Tyroler

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The accord signed at United Nations headquarters on Sept. 25 between the government of President Alfredo Cristiani and the rebels of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) has, in the words of observers, "untied the Gordian knot" in the Salvadoran peace process. At the close of 10 days of intense discussion, signatories declared that the 11- page document, known as the New York Agreement, gives a "decisive impetus to the negotiations" that began two years ago. The peace talks, after making substantial progress last spring (see "Transition in El Salvador - Light at the End of the Tunnel?," CAU 08/21/91), had ground to a halt by late July, as the two sides could find no points of coincidence or compromise over the most controversial issues the armed forces and a cease-fire. The impasse was overcome when UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar took the unprecedented step of bringing the two sides into direct negotiations at UN headquarters. During the closed door sessions, Perez de Cuellar presented, in separate meetings with each delegation, the proposed accord drafted by his personal representative, Alvaro de Soto, who has been acting as mediator in the talks. The New York document includes eight basic points, including the creation of a National Commission for the Consolidation of Peace (COPAZ); agreement to purge, reduce and re-educate the government army; the creation of a new National Police force; and several agreements on social welfare and economic policies. These agreements are to be implemented in accordance with a calendar which sets Dec. 15 as the deadline for signing a cease-fire. However, the New York Agreement left unresolved several critical issues which still stand in the way of a definitive resolution of the conflict, in particular, concrete terms for military reforms and a cease-fire. Resolution of the two issues, which observers say are inseparable and must be defined in tandem, is now the key to a definitive settlement. Despite the unparalleled optimism generated by the accord, Salvadoran delegates said it should not be seen as a final settlement but as "the basis for reaching, in the short term, a set of political agreements required for bringing to an end to the armed conflict in our country." The difficulty of reaching agreement on the unresolved issues became clear on Oct. 15 when the two sides met again in Mexico to resume negotiations, and particularly to hammer out cease-fire terms. After one week of intensive, closed-door bargaining, and a concrete proposal presented by UN mediator De Soto, the rebel and government delegations were able to make some headway in discussing cease-fire terms, but left Mexico with much to be resolved, and a long way from a final accord. Demilitarization and cease-fire: still the core issues In signing the UN accord, the FMLN made an important concession by dropping the demand for integration of rebel forces into the government army. The government agreed to a "purge, reduction and re-education" of the 60,000-strong army. The government delegation was able to defer discussion on concrete terms and procedural arrangements for achieving these military reforms. In the end, it was agreed that an "ad hoc" commission will be created to examine the issue, and details would be negotiated in subsequent talks. The accord specifies that FMLN combatants are to be included in a new civilian-controlled National Police force. The National Police will replace three military-run bodies: Treasury Police, National Guard (a militarized police force) and Public Security Force (CUSEP). The three forces are notorious for human rights abuses and corruption, particularly the Treasury Police, which is considered a principal actor in much of the death squad activity over the past 15 years. Reorganization of the Salvadoran police forces, which number nearly

20,000, is an important step. However, more critical, and still pending, is restructuring of the army, led by an officer corps whose influence extends throughout all areas of Salvadoran society. The army's high command is also believed to play a major role in widespread human rights abuses. The FMLN is unlikely to demobilize until rebels are satisfied that military reforms and international safeguards are sufficient to ensure the security of combatants, supporters and allies; an end to military impunity; and, a strictly neutral and apolitical role for the military in society. FMLN general command member Joaquin Villalobos said, "Politically, it is practically impossible to trust the army and to believe that purges and reduced troop strength will be sufficient transformation of the armed forces." He added that a change in the nature of the armed forces is mandatory. In this regard, an effective reeducation of the army is considered crucial. The Salvadoran armed forces currently operate on the basis of the "National Security Doctrine," which defines the army's role as maintaining "internal security" by combatting "subversion" within society (i.e., domestic challenges to the status quo). During the 1960s and 1970s, US foreign policy and military advisers imposed this doctrine on Latin American military organizations. The FMLN, along with much of the Latin American left, has insisted that the army's sole legitimate function should be defense of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The New York Agreement refers to this doctrinal reorientation, within the framework of respect for "principles based on the rule of law, the primacy of the dignity of the human being and respect for his/her rights." The lessons of Haiti The FMLN is perhaps the most formidable insurgency in Latin American history. At present, rebel full- and part-time combatants number 17,000, and active collaborators are estimated at about 100,000. The FMLN exercises control or determining influence over a third to half of Salvadoran territory. Several years ago the FMLN abandoned its strategic objective of seizing power through military means. (On the FMLN's ideological evolution, see "The Transformation of the FMLN," CAU, 08/23/91.) The organization now perceives itself as protagonist in a process of thorough demilitarization and political, social and economic democratization of Salvadoran society. The FMLN's objective is to become a legal, political organization advocating change through civic struggle and electoral participation. However, FMLN leaders insist that before it can demobilize, guarantees must be in place for its own security and for the freedom to operate as a political movement in civil society. In New York, FMLN negotiating team member Roberto Canas said, "The factors which would allow for political participation and pluralism have been obstructed by the war, and could be developed once a cease-fire is achieved. Therefore, we are negotiating not only guarantees for the FMLN, but guarantees that fundamental change will take place in the country." Some observers have pointed to the recent coup in Haiti by a military organization that did not undergo restructuring and reform, despite a political democratization process leading to free elections. In Colombia, over 2,000 members of the Patriotic Union (UP) party have been assassinated by rightist paramilitary groups after former guerrillas disarmed and became active in civilian politics. Observers say the Haitian and Colombian experiences vindicate FMLN insistence on prior military reform and guarantees from the international community on the integrity of peace agreements and the security of former rebel combatants. In Villalobos' words, the FMLN "cannot jump into the swimming pool without assurances that there will be sufficient water and an adequate temperature for us to swim." "Sufficient water and adequate temperature" refers to two considerations on the minds of FMLN leaders. One is the immediate issue of the physical safety of FMLN members and supporters. The other is achieving sufficient demilitarization and civilian control over society before the end of the war to allow political protagonists to struggle for real change in Salvadoran society. These are the considerations behind the FMLN's proposal presented in New York and Mexico for a one-year transition period truce. During the "informal cease-fire," negotiators would work toward

definition and implementation of a comprehensive settlement. (See CAU 10/18/91.) A possible scenario then, is a cease-fire agreement in which rebel combatants do not immediately demobilize (the FMLN's so-called "transitional period of armed peace"). UN forces would play a pivotal role for an extended period in this scenario. In August, the first civilian, police, and military teams from the United Nations El Salvador Group (ONUSAL), created last May by Security Council mandate, arrived in El Salvador. In this first stage, the 115-member ONUSAL mission was split up into several small units to monitor respect for human rights and investigate complaints in several locations. Subsequent stages, contingent on conclusion of a cease-fire accord, will see an increase in ONUSAL mission numbers and activities, including peacekeeping, verification of a comprehensive settlement, and assistance in rebel demobilization and reintegration into civilian society. The COPAZ is also expected to expedite the transition to peace. On Oct. 10 in Mexico City, rebel and government delegations reached agreement on COPAZ membership. Two Commission members represent the government, and another two, the FMLN. Next, all political parties or coalitions holding seats in the national legislature are to have one representative apiece. COPAZ is charged with supervision and verification of a comprehensive settlement. The Commission will have direct access to the president and powers to submit draft legislation related to the peace process. The UN Security Council is expected to approve a resolution in the near future endorsing the Commission and authorizing it to appeal directly to the United Nations. Socio-economic policy measures and extreme-right opposition In the New York accord, the government committed itself to provide agricultural workers and small farmers with access to land it currently owns, as well as to "excess" land currently controlled by private landowners. The Salvadoran constitution specifies a ceiling of 245 ha. on individual landholdings. The government also agreed to "respect the current state of land tenure within conflict zones" while claims on these holdings are being decided. The conflict in El Salvador is historically rooted in one of the most extreme and unequal land tenure systems in Latin America. The government's commitments in the New York accord constitute the first steps in an authentic agrarian reform. If implemented, such reforms would mean that a third to a half of national territory will be controlled by Salvadorans characterized as the rebels' active social base. Consequently, socio-economic agreements are bound to exacerbate divisions within the Salvadoran elite. A few hours after the New York accord was reached, the far right represented by factions within the armed forces and the governing National Republican Alliance (ARENA) party publicized its opposition. In San Salvador, Vice President Francisco Merino Lopez, for instance, asserted that despite the accords, the government would "never" accept FMLN participation in the National Police. In addition, an escalation of rightist threats and violence was reported in El Salvador during and after the New York talks (see CAU, 09/27/91). ARENA is currently divided between the extreme right and moderate, pragmatic factions. The former is led by ret. colonel Sigfredo Ochoa and Vice President Merino Lopez, and supported by hard-line military officers and representatives of the old oligarchy. The latter is headed by President Cristiani, San Salvador Mayor Armando Calderon Sol, and Legislative Assembly president Roberto Angulo, and supported by more forward-looking "new right" businesspersons organized in the National Association of Private Enterprise (ANEP) and the Salvadoran Development Foundation (FUSADES). Roberto d'Abuissou, ARENA party founder and leader, was recently diagnosed with terminal cancer. Report of the diagnosis has triggered a fierce internal struggle for succession in the ruling party. The outcome of this struggle will be critical for the prospects of the peace process. Decisive international role Although checkered by a innumerable setbacks and advances, and carried out against the backdrop of ongoing military conflict inside the country, the Salvadoran peace process has, in retrospect, made dramatic advances over the past two years. Since the initial September 1989 encounter,

the two sides have met 18 times in Geneva, Mexico, Costa Rica, Venezuela, and New York. The process reached a high point last spring with the signing of the first accords of substance pertaining to human rights and constitutional reforms. The high priority placed by Perez de Cuellar on the New York talks underscored the remarkable role played by the international community. In fact, cumulative pressures applied by the international community were decisive in bringing the two sides together in New York at a time when the negotiations were perceived as stalemated, and a major escalation in the war was predicted. At the last US-Soviet summit, the UN Secretary General was requested to take an active role in overcoming the impasse. Similar calls were put forward by the "Friends of the Salvadoran Peace Process" group comprised of the Spanish, Mexican, Colombian and Venezuelan governments, and Ibero- American heads of state who met in Guadalajara, Mexico in late July. In addition, the UN Secretariat General, as the organization's administrative executive, has additional reasons for seeing a successful conclusion to the peace process by year-end. Perez de Cuellar's term as Secretary General ends in January 1992, as does that of his personal staff, including Alvaro de Soto. According to UN procedures, any unfinished business of the Secretariat General will be transferred to the Security Council in January "in order to guarantee fulfillment of its resolutions." One of the Security Council's options would be to send an emergency peacekeeping force to El Salvador. Another would be to pass the Salvadoran mediation mandate on to the new Secretary General. Salvadoran observers predict that either scenario could complicate the peace process, in the event that agreements on a cease-fire and comprehensive settlement have not yet been concluded.

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