

Since 1980, the Soviet line on El Salvador has been one of sympathy for and solidarity with the guerrilla movement. Moreover, it is reasonably clear that in the initial days of optimism, prior to the ill-fated "final offensive" of January 1981, the Soviets assisted the Salvadoran guerrillas to obtain stocks of American light weaponry held by the Vietnamese and Ethiopians.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, Fidel Castro, presumably with Soviet approval, brought the leaders of the various guerrilla factions together in an attempt to get them to bury their differences during what the Cubans and Soviets apparently believed was the final stage of the war. The result of his mediation was the formation of a rather shaky united front.

Since the failure of the offensive, and in the context of an increasingly clear US commitment to prevent a guerrilla seizure of power and the Americans' partial success in producing a more or less legitimate and stable Salvadoran government under Napoleon Duarte, Soviet optimism concerning El Salvador has waned. Since 1981 there has been very little solid evidence of a significant Soviet role in the provision of finance and arms to the FMLN or its various component parts. This accounts for the brevity of this discussion.

Instead, it appears that the principal sources of external assistance to the FMLN have been the Nicaraguans and the Cubans.⁷⁰ Soviet policy vis-à-vis the Salvadoran Revolution in this sense conforms to the preference mentioned above, to rely on local actors whose interests coincide with those of the Soviet Union and who are committed to fuelling instability in the region. Once again it reflects an unwillingness to assume the risks and costs associated with more direct involvement. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the Salvadoran problem is one of indigenous unrest fuelled to a degree by other local actors who support regional revolutionary transformation and are deeply alienated from the United States, rather than — in any immediate sense — one of "Soviet expansionism". As such, its solution, from the US point of view, lies more in the recasting of regional policy than in tilting at Soviet windmills.

⁶⁹ See J. Valenta and V. Valenta "Soviet Strategy and Policy in the Caribbean Basin", in Wiarda (op. cit. note 2), p. 230.

⁷⁰ Unless one counts the substantial and inadvertent US supply of weapons to the guerrillas via the Salvadoran Army.