

Most of these wars demonstrate the ugly complexity of protracted conflicts, where reprisal heaps on recrimination, where human lives are expended without concern or with cold calculation for tactical or propaganda advantage, and where peacemakers may become targets if they cannot be enlisted by one protagonist or other. These conflicts may now test the ability of even great powers acting together to restrain their erstwhile clients and secure peace. Further, some of them at least will test the ingrained assumptions of the international community to the effect that stopping all "external intervention" and encouraging majority self-determination are always the best routes to peace.

*Central America: Peace Plan in the Balance*

After years of misery and deprivation, and a decade of active warfare in the nineteen eighties, Central America has had high hopes for peace in the 1990s. The laborious processes of the regional peace plans of Contadora and Esquipulas had finally led in 1989 to preparations for Nicaraguan elections under international observation, a ceasefire, and the demobilization of the *contra* rebels. Linked to this process in Nicaragua was the winding down of outside intervention in the region and the reduction of conflicts and human rights violations in El Salvador and Guatemala.

In November 1989, with election preparations proceeding in Nicaragua and a steady flow of complaints about Sandinista intimidation and armed *contra* incursions, President Ortega announced that his forces would no longer observe the ceasefire with the *contras* and launched new offensives against them. He stated that election preparations would proceed unhindered, while the opposition and many international observers expressed grave concern. Almost immediately, in El Salvador, following the worst in a prolonged series of death-squad attacks on opposition and labour groups, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) guerillas broke off their negotiations and launched a new offensive against the government. This major onslaught, carried audaciously into the heart of San Salvador, triggered the death-squad style murder of six Jesuit priests involved in peace efforts, and also provoked government forces to particularly brutal attacks on civilian neighbourhoods and to harassment, arrests and torture of foreign relief and human rights workers, including some Canadians. By the time this offensive was finished, over 2,000 more Salvadorians had died, and the rabid obscenity of the conflict has depressed and disgusted all but the most fanatical adherents or apologists of either side.