

## letters to the editor 9751

### Critics miss real issue in El Salvador

Is El Salvador another Vietnam? It is, but in ways that critics seldom mention.

First, El Salvador is another Vietnam in that its guerrillas are reputed to be peasant reformers, as were the Viet-cong; but, also like the Viet-cong, they seek to take their country down the Marxist road into the arms of the Soviet bloc. In the field, they are led by the Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN) whose banners carry the hammer and sickle, whose manifestos bristle with Marxist slogans, and whose hero is Agustin Farabundo Marti, Salvadoran Communist revolutionary leader of half a century ago.

Second, El Salvador is another Vietnam in that unrelenting movements of protest are already paralyzing effective action. In Vietnam, the courage of the armed forces could not overcome the political effects of hundreds of thousands of marchers on Washington, the restrictions placed by frightened politicians on our war effort, and their willingness to lose the struggle rather than face up to orchestrated protest.

In the case of El Salvador, the waves of protest against even very limited U.S. involvement are already reaching crescendo levels. Leading politicians are resisting any action in El Salvador that might offend agitators who clamor for guerrilla victory. More fearful of losing votes than of losing their country, congressional spokesmen again set the stage for a struggle they will not permit us to win.

Third, El Salvador is another Vietnam because U.S. security interests are thought to be involved. Vietnam was of concern to the United States because of the fear that the U.S.S.R. or China or both might take over that country and then extend their power to other parts of southeast Asia. As it turned out, because of the U.S. defeat, the Soviet Union now exercises proxy control over Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and this may threaten other states in the region. Only time will tell whether the U.S. government was right to suppose this situation would endanger our security.

In the matter of security, an obvious dissimilarity is that El Salvador is in Central

America, right under our noses, not in southeast Asia, almost halfway around the world. The distance from El Salvador to U.S. gulf ports is about the same as that from Colorado Springs to Chicago. There is concern that victory by the FMLN in El Salvador will create a new Soviet satellite in this hemisphere, as has occurred in Cuba and is happening in Nicaragua; and that this outcome would ultimately place the Soviet-Cuban axis in control of Central America and later Mexico.

Fourth, El Salvador is another Vietnam in that in both cases the central issue of security was and is buried under mountains of verbosity about democracy and freedom. South Vietnam didn't know what the word "democracy" meant, so it seemed like chicanery and betrayal when our government explained that we were there to preserve Vietnamese liberty.

In El Salvador, there is more historical reason to hope for the emergence of genuine democracy and social reform than there ever was in Vietnam, and this should be an important objective of U.S. policy; but we should not be forever tongue-tied, as we were in Vietnam, when it comes to mentioning the question of U.S. security. Otherwise, the need to preserve Central America and Mexico from domination by implacable enemies of the United States is forever buried in inconsistencies and obfuscation.

In the case of Vietnam, had we honestly debated the question of U.S. national interest, pro and con, we could have entered or stayed out and known why we did one or the other. In El Salvador, the question of U.S. security has but one answer. But until the matter is put forward in those terms, El Salvador is likely to fall within the satellite system of the U.S.S.R. because the United States is too confused to know why it should stop this from happening.

With more Marxist victories in Central America and then in Mexico, the next events will be the outbreak of World War III on our very borders or the dissolution of the United States as we have known it, or both.

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