October 1980

"U.S. Response to Crisis in El Salvador": A Dialogue (Dialogue #1)

Robert White
U. S. Ambassador to El Salvador

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Robert White is a career foreign service officer. He has served in numerous posts throughout Latin America, including Ecuador, Colombia, and Nicaragua. He was named U.S. Ambassador to Paraguay in 1977 and assumed his present role as U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador in early 1980.

Robert White, U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador:

It's a great pleasure to be with all of you this evening. I want to express my appreciation and thanks to Florida International University. I think this is a great service to the community and the country to have this issue of our relations with El Salvador brought out in this type of forum.

I don't think that Dr. Montgomery and I will have very much -- very few differences in analyzing what was wrong in El Salvador. In a recent article in The Economist, there was this quote: "working people eventually will revolt against any system of social organization based on exploitation by a single class. Feudalism by aristocrats, capitalism by monopolists and now socialism by apparatchiks." Now obviously the last reference was to Poland and the magnificent struggle of the workers in that country against the communist bureaucrats. But the first part of that quote applies very well to the situation in El Salvador. As a recent article in Foreign Affairs pointed out, El Salvador had the worst income inequality in Latin America. Sixty percent of the people earn less than $250.00 a year.

According to a recent FAO study, the malnutrition was the worst in Latin America and according to a Cornell study the highest percentage of landless "and near-landless people in the world was in El Salvador. Bangladesh was second. So what you have had in El Salvador has been a political history
where the rich have ruled through the military since 1931. There has never been a civilian government. Napoleon Duarte for example of the Christian Democrats won the elections in 1972 and it was stolen from them. As a result of this, the political institutions of the country disappeared; because after all the only reason for forming a political party is to gain in power. And if you can't gain power your political institutions disintegrate. This is one of the reasons for the emergence of the mass organizations, the Bloques, and so forth. Now, the history of the United States' role in El Salvador up until October 15 of last year was typical of U.S. policy in the region. We neglected it; it was almost impossible to get any high level attention for Latin America except a speech, the standard speech by a president or a secretary of state, but no real policy interests. We uncritically supported dictatorships, we winked at repression, we tolerated corruption, and we permitted the perversion of the democratic process.

On October 15, 1979, in El Salvador there was what is called a revolution. Whether it was a revolution or not depends on your definition. But in any case, a new civilian military mixed junta took over. The people who made up that junta were probably the finest people in El Salvador, or representatives of the finest people in El Salvador. By bringing that out I mean to complement the civilians who made up that junta and the entire government -- the ministries and so forth.

Unfortunately, these people had little experience in politics and that was natural. How could you have experience in politics given the situation in El Salvador. Only very few people had had that experience. And so after two and a half months, the junta fell apart. The civilians left in
a dispute with the military. This is important because it signals in my view the innocence, even the naivete of these fine people who thought that they could change 40 or 50 years in two and a half months. The work of changing the political ambiente of a country as fragmented as El Salvador is a work of years, and not of days.

Now the second junta then came in. Made up of the same two military men, two Christian Democrats and one Independent. The two Christian Democrats were very prominent men, Napoleon Durate, who had been mayor and presidential candidate and José Morales Erlich, who had been mayor of San Salvador. Both men had been persecuted by the military for their democratic beliefs, tortured, and exiled. My point in emphasizing this is that the moral credentials of the first junta I know are not superior to the moral credentials of the second junta. The United States in El Salvador is not supporting an odious dictator; we're supporting people who have moral integrity.

Let us move to what this government has done. This government has done more for the people of El Salvador than any government in the history of El Salvador. The agrarian reform is the most profound reform since the land reform of Mexico. They have expropriated all the farms over 500 hectares and have put people to work on those farms producing in producers' cooperatives. This week is beginning another stage of the land reform where somewhere between 125-150,000 peasants will receive the land which they work. Land to the tiller. Shear cropped, indirect exloitation of land will end and those people will become landowners. The banks have been nationalized to the extent that the state now owns 51 percent. The reason for this is in order to make the land reform possible, in order to finance plantings because the banks formerly were in the hands of a very small group
of people who used them only to finance their own little "in-group." They nationalized the export of coffee in order to avoid capital flight and make sure that the proceeds from the coffee exports are distributed equitably among the people.

What was the response of the two extremes? The response of the right, the violent right, was to inspire coups in the military to kill, to assassinate people both in and out of the government who were bringing these reforms forward and to try to create chaos in the country. We need not detain ourselves too long with the extreme right because they represent practically no one. Their only God is their panza and the only thing that they want to do is take the country back to those early days where the country existed for the few.

Let's look at the response of the extreme left, because the response of the extreme left is very interesting. Before the reforms were put in place the Bloques could put 150-200,000 people into the streets. This is what gave them the power. In my view the profundity of the appeal of the extreme left, of the Marxist left, was always overestimated. I think that what was going on was that there was a general disgust with the Romero government and people knew that it was going to fall and they wanted to hasten that fall and they were willing to go into the streets and demonstrate against that government. But once the second junta started to put those reforms into place, the attitudes of the people began slowly to change. And the left began making some very great mistakes. The first mistake was at the funeral of the beloved Archbishop Romero (killed 99/44/100 percent certain by the right) in order to try to create chaos. At the funeral of the archbishop, the left sent 250 young men and women, some
only 16 years old, with bombs handing from their belts and Uzi machine guns into the peaceful crowd. There were no security forces there. There are at least 10,000 photographs of the Cathedral square that day. ABC has a film that shows the whole panorama the whole of that day from beginning to end, and there is not one photograph of one member of the security force. There's no photographic evidence of any kind to show of any shooting from any windows or any type of government activity whatsoever.

My own belief and we had observers there, was that one of the young people became nervous, and I understand why they were nervous, and one of the propaganda bombs exploded prematurely. There was a panic and a great number of people died or were trampled and severely injured. But there is photographic evidence of members of the Coordinadora pumping bullets into the crowd, Uzi machine gun bullets going into the people who were gathered there to honor this great man. Now the people of El Salvador are just as intelligent as anyone else and they know that if they are going to be killed by the forces of the left they're not going to go to any more meetings. So, from that point on, the left was incapable of putting more than 1,500 people into the streets. They announced the huge manifestation for the 1st of May and it was a total flop -- fifteen hundred people, no more.

The next thing that happened was that they called general strikes and the first general strike had some partial success because again Salvadoreans like everyone else don't mind taking a holiday. But again the security forces stayed in the barracks and abandoned the field, so it was about 50 or 60 percent effective, it would be my judgment. But the second general strike, where the left said we will enforce the general strike and the government said no you won't, was a total flop. The people went to
work and they rejected the general strike; they rejected this form of violence. The people of El Salvador want to work and they are tired of violence. And so the left is on the decline, the extreme Marxist left is on the decline because they have no issue, so they're reduced to terrorism; they're reduced to hauling bus drivers off their vehicles and executing them in front of the passengers. They're reduced to kidnapping innocent people and executing them in order to give drama to their cause. They are now throwing missiles into the American Embassy, which I am also against.

And what has been the result of all this? It's that the left has lost moral authority and without moral authority the left is nothing. What this discussion is going to come down to, is that the United States is supporting violence and that is the exact opposite of the truth. The United States is supporting the reforms and applying as much legitimate pressure as we can to put an end to the violence. It is no news to me and I stated it publicly that a certain percentage of the security forces of El Salvador are participating in wanton violence directed against the youth of the country, directed against the people they suspect of being involved with the left and half the time they get people who are and half the time they get totally innocent people. This is a shocking, unacceptable thing. And the United States makes that clear on a daily basis to the Salvadorean junta and the Salvadorean military. But I submit to you there is a big difference between a fledging government that's been in power less than a year, that has stated publicly its commitment to human rights and who has yet been able to bring its own military totally under control. And this is their stated objective and this is what they are trying to do and this is what the United States is supporting.
So I want to contrast for you now, 1) the position of the revolutionary government of El Salvador, which is in favor of profound reform, which they are taking forward, which is against violence and which is doing its best to control the violence of the extreme right and the violence that is admittedly participated in by some of the security forces. And over the last six months 10% of the military of El Salvador have been dismissed for abuses and they don't make that public because it causes them problems. But I'm telling you that is accurate.

Now I want to get to the point of the left. The left is guilty of violence. It's not White who's telling you this. They announced it. Juan Chacón a leader of the FPL, publically took credit for 2,000 deaths. They execute bus drivers. They execute innocent civilians and I have never yet heard a member, a leader of the Frente Democratico, reject the violence of the left. This is against innocent civilians. I'm not talking about armed confrontations with the military. If you want to go into revolution and you want to fight, revolution is a game for adults and that's what we call a fair fight; but they execute innocent civilians. What I want to hear is the great democrats of this world, Dr. Ungo and Oqueli and Dada Heresi and all of the others -- I want to hear them reject the wanton violence of the ERP, of the various armed branches of this Coordinadora, of which they have voluntarily assumed the leadership. If they do not reject that kind of wanton violence, what moral right do they have to judge a government that's doing its best to get control over recalcitrant elements of the military and bring the country to profound change.

The people of El Salvador like the people of the world, want an end to violence. The terrorists of the left exhalt violence and all of its forms over political activities and this is a crucial point that you must absorb.
To them, violence is a necessary form of social regeneration for the oppressed. And political process is against their creed. They reject politics as the normal means of solving the differences within a community. And politics my friends is an essential part of the machinery of civilization.

Now what is the United States position -- what are we doing? We are supporting the reform process. We have signed approximately seventy or seventy-five million dollars worth of economic assistance in the last 6 months. The left consistently lies about military assistance. I can quote you and I have got them in my brief case if you'd like to read them, statements by Dr. Ungo, statements by all of the Frente about all Green Berets in El Salvador, about Marine bases in El Salvador, about the provision of arms to El Salvador. We have not given one lethal weapon to El Salvador, not one. Less than 2 million dollars of military assistance has arrived in El Salvador in the last year and all of that are trucks -- no the trucks haven't arrived yet -- communication equipment. There was some tear gas to be used for riot control and that is it. There are some ambulances on the dock right now so that will take it up another million, I suppose to 3 million. So I reject categorically the lies which are told consistently by the left about what the nature of the United States support is in El Salvador. The signature of the United States in El Salvador is economic and social assistance. It is not military assistance. It is the left who is importing military equipment and Chinese missiles, etc., to throw at the U.S. Embassy and not the Salvadorean military. The second is that we are trying to assist the Salvadorean people in reestablishing that vital center which will recreate a political process. It is the stated goal of the second junta to bring the country of El Salvador to elections. It is envisioned that there will be amnesty for all political prisoners, for all political
elements. (There are few political prisoners in El Salvador.) We support the private sector in El Salvador, we support free enterprise, because let me tell you socialism would be an absolute disaster for El Salvador. There is no way that you can feed 4½ million Salvadoreans in a country that you can fit in the entire province of Olancho in Honduras unless you utilize the tremendous competence of the Salvadorean private sector. I have had arguments with the Salvadorean private sector in that they were guilty of running that country for the benefit of a few. But one has to recognize that there is honest-to-God entrepreneurial talent there and the ability to get that country moving again. And I want to point out that the private sector supports this political process of the junta and is backing the political process.

Now what is the importance of El Salvador? The importance is this: up until now there has only been one role model for revolution in Latin America, and that has been the Castro model. Marxists take power by force and violence, eliminate all U.S. influence from the area. And let me tell you that is not a program that has very much appeal to any administration of the United States. And be under no doubt that the Salvadorean revolutionaries as they are constituted are Marxists, are Marxist-Leninists, are violent, and want the United States influence completely eliminated from the area. That is their stated program, I have it in my briefcase things that you can read. Those are their statements, they are not my statements.

Now if the revolutionary government succeeds in El Salvador, the present government succeeds in making those reforms stick, in bringing the violence of both the extreme left and the extreme right under control and bringing that country into a political process that culminates in elections, Latin America will have another model for revolution, -- a
revolution that is non-Marxist, a revolution that is pro-democratic, a revolution that rejects statism and has a definite and important place for private enterprise and will accept the cooperation and assistance of the United States government.

In conclusion, I would just like to say that I find it passing strange and even paradoxical that for one of the first times in the United States when we're not supporting total reaction in Latin America, we're not supporting dictators, we find the people in the United States are more against the present policy which I regard, honestly, as enlightened, sophisticated, subtle, and reasonably well executed -- in comparison with what we have done in the past -- I think it's positively brilliant, and I find it paradoxical that we have so little understanding from supposedly democratic forces in the United States for what we are trying to do. Thank you very much.
Dr. Tommie Sue Montgomery received her Ph.D. in Politics from New York University in 1977. Author of numerous articles on Central America, Dr. Montgomery is completing her most recent study, El Salvador: Profile of a Nation in Revolution, to be published by Westview Press.

I would also like to express my appreciation to Florida International University for the invitation to be here tonight and to share in this forum with you and with Ambassador White.

Ambassador White was quite correct in his opening comment in saying that he suspected he and I would have very little disagreement about the analysis of the situation and the history of El Salvador. I would concur entirely with his analysis of that situation and that history. I would like to take however, a departure from that and suggest that in the beginning there is very little else on which we will agree this evening.

The United States policy toward Latin America for the last 20 years that is to say, since the revolution in Cuba, has been generally designed to stop revolution anywhere else in the Hemisphere and one aspect of that policy in a number of nations around the Hemisphere including Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Honduras and El Salvador has been a very strong support for the Christian Democratic Parties of those countries. This was certainly an element in the growth of the Christian Democratic Party in El Salvador during the 1960s, although frankly that support was not consistent -- for when the Christian Democratic candidate, José Napoleon Duarte won the election for president in El Salvador in 1972 and was cheated out of that election in a case of absolutely blatant and massive fraud on the part of the military government, the U.S. Ambassador in El Salvador sat on his hands and his tongue and did absolutely nothing to protest or to denounce the fraud. So the U.S. policy
has not been consistent in this regard. Nonetheless toward the end of the 70s, for a variety of reasons, including in El Salvador, the growth of the popular organization of the left, the human rights policy of the Carter administration, the increasing repression at the hands of the Romero government, which because of the human rights policy here was a growing concern and finally of course the revolution in Nicaragua, the United States began once again to pay more attention to the Christian Democratic Party of El Salvador. This again was very subtle but what the U.S. was attempting to do was to look forward to return to a democratic process, which they hoped would come in the projected elections of 1982.

There is another element in the development of U.S. policy in El Salvador which I think one can generalize about to many other countries, not only Latin America, but around the world, which is that our policy has been consistently conditioned by what I call ideological blindness. That is we are as a nation and certainly as a government, almost incapable of understanding or accepting until its absolutely crammed down our throats, any process of social change that occurs outside the defined limits of liberal democracy, which is to say elections, political parties, and interest groups. Our whole history is in this liberal context, this is our heritage, this is the way we are socialized and it is quite normal that we have difficulty understanding other kinds of processes of social change. But indeed I think that this has been a profound factor in the way U.S. policy has evolved toward El Salvador in the view we have of the popular organizations of what Ambassador White calls the extreme left, but I will refer to as the Frente Democratico Revolucionario, which includes not only those organizations, campesino organizations and so on. And since April a growing group of professional and technical people who are in absolute numbers small, probably at this time
around 500, but which represent really the cream of the intelligentsia of the technical expertise, the economists, medical doctors, nurses, and so forth of the country. Many of these people having served in fact most of them having served in the government of the first junta and having resigned on January 3rd along with everyone less save the minister of defense and his sub-secretary.

A major problem with U.S. policy in El Salvador was that following the coup which permitted us to breathe a huge sign of relief, it got rid of Romero, it got rid of the incredible human rights violations, it seemed to provide an alternative for peaceful social change, and indeed I think Ambassador White is quite correct in describing the people who compose that government as the cream of the crop. I think its really fair to say that about 90% -- not only of the ministers but the bureaucrats -- the tecnicos who compose the government were really the best minds that El Salvador has.

The problem with U.S. policy at that point was shortly after the coup was that it began operating on two levels. There was the public level of support for the junta and the reforms it proposed. But then there was a private level, and the private level essentially had two aspects. On the one hand the United States particularly military attachments, began pushing a law and order line with the Salvadorean military. The problem with this law and order line was that these people in the U.S. Embassy never understood that law and order in El Salvador instantly got translated into repression.

The other problem or the other aspect of the private level of U.S. policy was that the U.S., particularly through its then Ambassador, was giving very strong support to the private enterprise sector and indeed to the
most reactionary element in that sector, never understanding or not wishing to understand, I'm not sure which, that supporting this sector was in fact supporting the most extreme right wing sectors of Salvadorean society. So, between October 15 and January, 1980 when the United States began to reevaluate its policy following the fall of the first junta or the resignation of the first junta, you have this public posture of support for the junta and its reforms and the private reality or the hidden reality of pursuing lines that intentionally are not — and I don't think it was intentional but this was the effect, of supporting the most reactionary elements in the government.

What had happened at the time of the coup was that while the men — the leaders of the coup -- those who had initially conceived it some nine months before, were indeed the most progressive military officers in the country -- absolutely committed to human rights, absolutely committed to the reforms that were listed in the proclama of the armed forces immediately following the coup -- there was a situation where, to put it very briefly, the two military men who were elected to the junta, Majano and Gutierrez, shared very different commitments, Majano sharing this commitment to reform and Gutierrez not being quite sure that he wanted to go that far. The result was that Gutierrez unilaterally appointed Garcia minister of defense without consulting Majano, without consulting anyone. One of the problems was that partly out of the political inexperience to which Ambassador White had referred, partly out of simply the process of getting a new government going, Garcia was permitted to remain. I emphasize this because, I believe that the presence of Garcia and Carranza in the ministry of defense has completely shaped the history of El Salvador in the last year. And if those men had not been there and if they had been gotten rid of
months ago, that the history of El Salvador today would be quite different.

Following the resignation of the first junta, there was in late January or early February a reevaluation of the U.S. policy and there was as one official told me, a recognition that perhaps we should have been more assertive, perhaps we should have made our policy clearer. At the point the U.S. government decided to make its policy clearer and indeed what happened was exactly what we have seen since late February and early March, the arrival of Ambassador White in El Salvador, namely a very strong support for the revolutionary junta of government. The public and private split or contradiction which I have described completely vanished. The U.S. began to assert itself rather vigorously. It stopped a right wing coup attempt the end of February, although the argument can be made that indeed the coup succeeded -- certainly not in an institutional sense, but in terms of what happened with the policy of the Salvadorean government. The Christian Democratic member Hector Dada-Heresi resigned from the junta several days later, charging that the junta was not living up to the commitments that it had made when it was instituted in January -- namely to stop the repression and to dialogue with the popular organizations.

Following the halt of the coup in the end of February the sixth of March and seventh, as Ambassador White has pointed out, the agrarian reform and the nationalization of the banks was implemented. Now, it is here, at least at the first point that Ambassador White and I really part company, because I would argue that these reforms are virtually meaningless in the context of the current Salvadorean reality. In the first place, these were reforms with repression or as many campesinos have said to me, reforma con garrote. On the same day that the agrarian reform was announced, security forces began moving
into villages around the country in fairly indiscriminate fashion and simply shooting up villages. Four days later, refugees began pouring into the arzobispado, the seat of the Archdiocese in San Salvador, seeking refuge. Within two weeks there was something like 1,500 refugees from around the Archdiocese in the capital and the Church was providing refuge for these people. The stories that they came in and told was just one horror story after another of security forces, sometimes men with or without men in civilian clothes coming in, shooting up their villages, and indiscriminately going house to house sacking the houses, burning the houses, killing women and children in their beds, raping their daughters, taking their young people, the teenagers off and the teenagers simply disappearing, killing the animals and so on, it just went on and on and on. I spent three hours one day listening to these stories from different campesinos from around the country. This has not stopped! It started and I asked these people what day did this begin? And they gave me different dates but several of them said it began on the sixth of March, the same day that the agrarian reform was implemented. This pattern of repression has not stopped, indeed it has grown. Ambassador White has referred to statements of Juan Chacón which he made in Nicaragua. I have not seen the statement so I cannot respond to that because I have not seen the transcript of Chacon's statement, but I will say that of the 6,000 deaths, apart from those who have died from confrontations between guerrillas and security forces, which I also leave aside as does Ambassador White, of the 6,000 people who have died so far this year, both Church and human rights organizations have said that 80% of those deaths were at the hands of security forces or right wing vigilantes. Now these are documented cases. These are not estimates, because the Church sources and the human rights groups make lists by names whenever possible, by age, where the people were born, where
they live and so on. So this is hard data. And in round figures, this is their estimate: 80% of the people who have died in El Salvador this year have been victims of right wing repression or the security forces. At this point, I would like to add a footnote which is often in El Salvador and this is not only in the last year, this is historically true, the right wing vigilantes are very often off-duty national guardsmen or national police, because for years they have moonlighted as security forces or vigilantes for the large property owners in El Salvador and this a continuation of that pattern only now with a real vengeance.

Ambassador White makes a case that the government is trying to get the repression under control and this is a major objective. But in May there was a major massacre at the Rio Sumpul on the border between El Salvador and Honduras. A case which I understand the Ambassador has said that there is not evidence for. Well I have six pages of evidence here if you would like to see that. Several days ago, or about two weeks ago or so there were attacks in the department of Chalatenango which is a department north of San Salvador that borders on the north with Honduras, attacks in two villages by the army and the national guard. In these attacks I do not have a lot of details, the Churches were fired on. And the result of this is that the entire quarteles of the army and the national guard have been ex-communicated by Bishop Arturo Rivera Damas and this was an announcement he made about six days ago in Nicaragua where he was attending a conference.

The United States as you have heard tonight continues to maintain that the junta is moderate and reformist, and that there is a reduction in the level of official violence, that the security forces are being disciplined. If indeed this is the case, if indeed 10% of the security forces have been dismissed over recent months, I would argue that it is very much in the
interest of the Salvadorean government to publicize that fact far and wide and indeed in so doing would probably gain even greater support from the people.

I would further argue that rather than being moderate and reformist the junta indeed has become increasingly conservative and that the recent military crisis which some of you may be aware which occurred the first 10 days of September, was a power struggle within the military and essentially Majano lost. The order of the month which is the day a monthly list of transfers and so on was issued with only the signature of Gutierrez and the minister of defense, Garcia. This order removed from the command post virtually all of Majano's supporters within the military. When Majano saw the order of the month, he sent a telegram telling the barracks around the country to ignore the order and this precipitated a crisis which I will not go into, except to say that the resolution was that the supporters of Majano were indeed removed and while the junta had succeeded in securing from the officer corps an agreement that the junta would sign off on all future orders of the month, indeed this was in fact a consolidation of power in the hands of the conservatives. By removing the supporters of Majano he has become extraordinarily isolated on the junta. This has indeed been a victory for Garcia and Gutierrez and indeed for José Napoleon Duarte, whom I would characterize as the last colonel.

Another response regarding the question of repression is that just this past Sunday, the secretary general of the Christian Democratic Party of El Salvador resigned and is now in Costa Rica. The U.S. maintains that the left has no support, that it is loosing support. Ambassador White has offered a number of examples. I will take the time to respond specifically to the
example he gave of the funeral, because indeed I have a very different version with documentation of what happened at that funeral. Indeed there is film available which shows that contrary to the government assertions, that all troops were confined to barracks that day, that there were security forces inside the National Palace which fronts on one side of the square while the cathedral is here and there are pictures of the security forces firing at the crowds. There pictures appeared in newspapers outside the country and were taken by a Dutch photographer. I have also been told but have not been able to confirm, that indeed there was NBC footage which did confirm that the bomb came from a window of the National Palace and was not thrown by the left and that the film was confiscated. Now, as I said, I've not been able to confirm this, but in this particular case, the source is sufficiently reliable to give me confidence to at least say this here tonight.

The other substantial evidence that the left did not precipitate this violence comes from a statement from 22 priests, bishops, nuns, and laity from around the world which were standing on the steps of the cathedral and who saw the violence begin and who got together as soon as they could after the situation was over in the arzobispado and shared their experiences, shared their knowledge of what had happened and wrote this statement which all of them signed. In addition, Archbishop John Quinn, who is president of the National Catholic Conference, issued his own statement when he returned to the United States that night which concluded: "Am I to believe that the left threw the bomb at themselves?", and he too had been standing on the steps of the cathedral. I have run out of time. There other points to which I would like to respond but I'll wait for questions. Thank you.
Ambassador White's response to Dr. Montgomery's Comments.

Well, I would like to start by pointing out that Dr. Montgomery did not respond to the most important point I made, which was that she did not disown in any way the violence of the left. She did not say that the left is wrong when they execute bus drivers, is wrong when they kidnap innocent citizens and execute them. That is the crucial issue!

You know I don't make any claims that the United States is 100% right in all of these issues; we go through very difficult times within the government trying to figure out what's best to do. A lot of these things are close calls, which way you go. And people who are certain as our friends here, I just wish I was as certain about anything as they seem to be of everything, because I think this is a very complex situation and I agree with a great deal of the criticism that Dr. Montgomery has just made about the government. What we have in large part is a parallel government; you have the revolutionary civilian military junta and then you have the reality of military power and a great many of the Salvadorean military look upon all government as irrelevant -- as they looked upon governments as being irrelevant for 50 years. The real power to them is the military. But this is what the revolutionary junta is trying to do, it is trying to accrete power and get the military under control. And there is no way of doing this unless you posit the desirability of a blood bath to the political process.

Now, regarding the massacre: this is typical of the kind of propaganda that is put out of which there is no independent verification. The same is true of what happened at the Archbishop's funeral. There have been American journalists who have gone up to the area where this alleged massacre took place and none of them could find any evidence at all. There's
never been any evidence for it, it's never been verified and I invite you to talk to any American journalist who has been in El Salvador or five foreign journalists for that matter--there has never been any identification.

Secondly, I'm a poor man but I'll pay $1,000.00 to Dr. Montgomery or anybody else that can show me a picture of any member of the security forces at the Archbishop's funeral. It just is not true. And I think that the statement by the bishops, was in my opinion, an abdication of responsibility on their part. They're entitled to their opinion and I'm delighted that they give their opinion. But what they're not entitled to do is make a charge against the government that holds the government responsible for what happened on the plaza on that Sunday and omit entirely the mention that 250 armed members of the Coordinadora marched into a peaceful crowd. That kind of omission is something that I think the bishops have to answer for.

Now regarding the ideological blindness of the State Department and military attaches pushing law and order: you know military attaches in every country are big on law and order, but I just want to point out to you that we have had an entire turnover in the United States Embassy in the last 7 months and we speak with one voice; there is not one military attache pushing law and order; there is not one CIA person pushing any special type of initiative down there; there is one Embassy and there is one voice and everybody knows what the United States position is. And attacking the past is one thing, but I think what we should do is address ourselves to the present situation.

Regarding this idea that we cannot understand the reality of Latin America. That Latin America is in effect not apt for democratic institutions, that they have their own special brand, -- I regard this as racist
nonsense; I think Latin Americans are just as capable as anyone else of democracy and their constitution show it. There is not a constitution in Latin America that doesn't provide for free elections. And so the Latin Americans are perfectly capable of democracy. What they are not capable of is democracy when the United States policy is opposed to democracy and as it has been in years gone by. Now, when the United States policy is in favor of democracy we have the kind of people who are arguing for mob rule from the left which I find totally unacceptable and a violation of civilized standards.

It is naive to say that Colonel Garcia has shaped El Salvador; 95% of the violations that have taken place by the security forces have taken place by enlisted men who are out for hire to the financiers of the extreme right and they're killing for pay, for nothing else. I will certainly admit that there are a number of people in the military that are not sold on reform, that do not believe in democracy, but I think it's gratuitous and even naive to say that one man or two men are responsible for the situation of El Salvador. You're also naive if you think that there isn't substantial support for repression; this is one of the problems that we have got down there, there's a hell of a lot of people down there who think that repression is the way to handle it.

And last, I really think that it was gratuitous and wrong to talk about "Colonel" Duarte. "Colonel" Duarte, you know, Duarte suffered over 30 years because of his witness for democracy in El Salvador. And the brave Dada-Heresi who Dr. Montgomery quoted, is a man who left El Salvador on an official mission and once he got safely out, then denounced the government. I don't regard that as totally admirable.
I want to just close by saying that I reiterate: there is no reason whatsoever to say that the second junta is morally inferior in any way to the first one. It's just that these men are more experienced politicians and are hanging in under terribly trying, difficult and dangerous circumstances in order to try and bring that country into a political process and there I rest my case. Thank you.
Questions and Answers: (edited)

Q: A key factor in your analysis is popular support. How do you think that two Christian Democrats without popular support and two military factions that are unable to agree with each other, are going to be able to make the junta survive?

(White) A: That's a good question -- because it addresses a very important point. In El Salvador, we are dealing with a very fragmented society. As I explained earlier, practically all political institutions have disappeared. The Christian Democratic Party is without question the strongest political party in the country; that doesn't mean it's powerful, that just means that it is bigger than the rest of them. The ideological differences between Colonels Gutierrez and Majano is way over done, let me tell you. I know them both very well, Majano -- the real Majano and the Majano that the left has idealized are two very different people. But the point is that there is no government that can in effect say that it represents the people because there doesn't exist the institutions through which you can channel popular support into a political process. But this is indeed the effort that is underway and there is going to be the appointment of electoral commissions, the suspension of state of seige and the freedom to organize political parties; and if the left has the popular support, let them organize the political party and gain the support of the people and go to elections. That's fine by everyone. If the left can triumph in free elections, more power to them. The second point that I want to make is that this government should not be popular. That's not its function. This is a transitory government that should get the hell out as soon as its job is over, and that is to get the reforms in place, quell the violence from both the left and the right and begin the political process culminating elections and
and that's the way it should go.

Q: Embajador White usted dijo que es cierto que el gobierno de los Estados Unidos apoya a la junta civico-militar de El Salvador. Es un modelo de revolución anti Marxista y pro-democrático. No es, menos cierto que el gobierno de los Estados Unidos está apoyando indirectamente la junta Marxista de Nicaragua? Que el gobierno de los Estados Unidos dice que no es Marxista pero todo el mundo sabe lo es. Como explicaría usted esa contradicción?

(White) A: No, me pagan para hacer comentarios sobre la situación en Nicaragua, pero. Estoy acreditada a el Salvador. I will answer you in this way. What we are supporting in Nicaragua is a way to extricate the people of Nicaragua from a tight ideological mold and support the private sector which is functioning and competent. I think it would be wrong, foolish, self-defeating to write-off Nicaragua. Nicaragua -- the revolution -- God knows if any country ever needed a revolution, it was Nicaragua. And we are paying now for supporting a corrupt and brutal dictatorship over 40 or 50 years. So that government in there is not to our liking, but that doesn't mean that just because a government is not to our liking and our actions have not been to their liking either that we should thereby abandon the turf of Nicaragua to Castro; no, it seems to me that what we do is support the forces of pluralism in Nicaragua with the faith that, one, the institutions in Nicaragua such as the Church, the press, and the private sector, are strong, and that at least thus far, I see no evidence that Nicaragua -- I don't quarrel with your definition at all -- but there's not the repressive apparat in place that was in place for example in Cuba. There are still many pluralistic elements working in Nicaragua and I think that
one of the reasons that I hope El Salvador works well is because I think that it will have a powerful drawing influence on Nicaragua and also an important influence on the situation in Guatemala.
It's a great pleasure to be with all of you this evening. I want to express my appreciation and thanks to Florida International University. I think this is a great service to the community and the country to have this issue of our relations with El Salvador brought out in this type of form. I don't think that Dr. Montgomery and I will have very much -- very few differences in analyzing what was wrong in El Salvador. In a recent article in the Economist there was this quote "working people eventually will revolt against any system of social organization based on exploitation by a single class. Feudalism by aristocrats, capitalism by monopolists and now socialism by apparatchiks" now obviously the last reference was to Poland and the magnificent struggle of the workers in that country against the bureaucrats, communist bureaucrats, but the first part of that quote applies very well to the situation in El Salvador. As a recent article in Foreign Affairs pointed out, that El Salvador had the worst income inequality in Latin America. Sixty per cent of the people earn less than $250 a year. According to a recent field study the malnutrition is the worst in Latin America and according to a Cornell study the highest percentage of Lambilist and neolambilist people in the world was in El Salvador. Bangladesh was second. So what you have had in El Salvador has been a political history where the rich have ruled through the military since 1931. There has never been a civilian government. Napoleon for example won the elections (the Christian Democrats) won the elections in 1972 and it was stolen from them. As a result of this the political institutions of the country disappeared because after all the only reason for forming a political party is to get in power. And if you can't gain power your political institutions disintegrate. This is one of the reasons for the emergence of the mass organizations the Blockists, and so forth. Now the history
of the United State's role in El Salvador up until October 15 of last year was typical of U.S. policy in the region. We neglected it, it was almost impossible to get any high level attention for Latin America except a speech, the standard speech by a president or a secretary of state but no real policy interests we uncritically supported dictatorships, we winked at repression, we tolerated corruption, and we permitted the perversion of the democratic process.

Now on October 15 in El Salvador there was what is called a revolution. Whether it was a revolution or not depends on your definition, but in any case, a new civilian military mixed junta took over. The people who made up that junta were probably the finest in El Salvador. A representative of the finest people in El Salvador. By bringing that out I mean to complement the civilians who made up that junta and the entire government the ministries and so forth.

Unfortunately, these people have little experience in politics and that was natural how could you have experience in politics in the given situation in El Salvador. Only few people had had that experience. And so after two and a half months, the junta fell apart the civilians left in a dispute with the military.

Now this is important because it signals in my views the innocence in naivete of these fine people who thought that they could change 40 or 50 years in two and a half months. The work of changing the political ambiente of a country, as fragmented as El Salvador is a work of years. And not of days.

Now the second junta then came in. Made up of the same two military men, two Christian Democrats and one Independent. The two Christian Democrats were very prominent men, Napoleon Black
The mayor, presidential candidate and Jose Morales-Sevich, who had been mayor of San Salvador. Both men had been persecuted by the military for their democratic beliefs tortured and exiled. My point for emphasizing this is that the moral credentials of the first junta I know are not superior to the moral credentials of the second junta. The U.S. in El Salvador is not supporting an odious dictator, we're supporting people who have moral integrity.

Now let us move to what this government done. This government has done more for the people of El Salvador than any government in the history of El Salvador. The reform is the most profound reform since the land reform of Mexico. They have expropriated all the farms over 5 hundred and have put people to work on those farms producing, this week is beginning another stage of the land reform where somewhere between 125 and 150 peasants will receive the land which they work. Land to shear crop indirect exploitation of land will end and those people will become landowners. The banks have been nationalized to the extent that the state now owns 51 percent. The reason for this is in order to make the land reform possible in order to finance plantings because the banks formerly were in the hands of a very small group of people who used them only for their to finance their own little in group and the export that they put -- they nationalized the export of coffee in order to avoid capital flight and make sure that the proceeds from the coffee exports are distributed equitably among the people.

Now what was the response of the two extremes? The response of the right, the violent right, the extreme right was to inspire coups in the military to kill, to assassinate people both in and out
of the government who were bringing these reforms forward and to try to create chaos in the country. We need not detain ourselves too long with the extreme right because they represent practically no one. Their only god is their panta and the only thing that they want to do is take the country back to those early days where the country existed for the few.

Let's look at the response of the extreme left, because the extreme left -- the response of the extreme left is very interesting. Before the reforms were put in place the blokes could put 150 to 200,000 people into the streets. This is what gave them the power in my view the profoundaty of the appeal of the extreme left of the Marxist left was always overestimated. I think that what was going on was that there was a general discuss with the Romero government and people knew that it was going to fall and they wanted to hasten that fall and they were willing to go into the streets and demostrate against that government. But once the second junta started to put those reforms into place the attitudes of the people began slowly to change. And the left began making some very great mistakes. The first mistake was at the funeral of the beloved archbishop Romero. Killed 99/44/100 percent certain by the right. In order to try to create chaos. But they agreed to the revolutionary democratic front. What happened at the funeral of the archbishop the left, sent 250 young men and women, some only 16 years old, with bombs hanging from their belts and oozing machine guns, into this peaceful crowd. There were no security forces there there are at least 10,000 photographs of the Cathedral Square that day. ABC has a film that shows the whole panorama the whole of that day from beginning to end. And there is not one photograph
of one member of the security force. There's no photographic evidence of any kind to show of any shooting from any windows or any type of government activity whatsoever, what happened was that the -- my own belief and we had observers there, was that one of the young people became nervous and I understand why they were nervous and one of the propaganda bombs exploded prematurely there was a panic and a great number of people died or were trampled and severely injured. But there is photographic evidence of members of the cordinadora pumping bullets into the crowd oozing machine gun bullets going into the people who were gathered there to honor this great man. Now the people of El Salvador are just as intelligent as anyone else and they know that if they are going to be killed by the forces of the left they're not going to go to any more meetings. So, from that point on the left was incapable of putting more than 1,500 people into the streets they announced the huge manifestation for the 1st of May and it was a total flop. Fifteen hundred people no more.

The next thing that happened was that they called general strikes and the first general strike had some partial success because I guess Salvadoreans like anyone else don't mind taking a holiday but again the security forces stayed in the barricks and abandoned the field, so it was about 50 or 60 percent affective, it would be my judgment. But the second general strike where there was--where the left said we will enforce the general strike and the government said no you won't was a total flop. The people went to work and they rejected the general strike, they rejected this form of violence. The people of El Salvador want to work and they are tired of violence. And so the left is on the decline extreme
the extreme Marxist left is on the decline because they have no issue, so they reduce to terrorism, they're to hauling bus drivers off of their vehicles and executing them in front of the passangers. They're reduced to kidnapping innocent people and executing them in order to give drama to their cause and they are now throwing missiles into the American embassy which I am also against.

And what has been the result of all this? It's that the left has lost moral authority and without moral authority the left is nothing, what this discussion is going to come down to is that the United States is supporting violence and that is the exact opposite of the truth. The United States is supporting the reforms and applying as much legitimate pressure as we can to put an end to this violence. It is no news to me and I stated publicaly that a certain percentage of the security forces of El Salvador are participating in wanton violence directed against the youth of the country. Directed against the people they suspect of being involved with the left and half the time they get people who are and half the time they get totally innocent people. This is a shocking an unacceptable thing. And the United States makes that clear on a daily basis to the Salvadorian/ and the Salvadorian military. But I submit to you there is a big difference between a fledging government that's been in power less than a year, that has stated publicaly it's commitment to human rights and who has yet been able to bring its own military totally under control and this is their state objective and this is what they are trying to do and this is what the United States is supporting. So I want to contrast for you now, 1) the position of the revolutionary government of El Salvador which is in favor of profound reform which
they are taking fully, which is against violence and which is doing its best to control the violence of the extreme right and the violence that is admittedly participated in by some of the security forces and they have been dismissed over the last six months, 10% of the military of El Salvador has been dismissed for abuses and they don't make that public because it causes them problems but I'm telling you that is accurate.

Now we will have to get to the point of the left, the left is guilty of violence its not White who's telling you this, they announced it, Juan Chacon a leader of the FPL publically took credit for 2,000 deaths. They execute bus drivers, they execute innocent civilians and I have never yet heard a member, a leader of the frente democrático reject the violence of the left. This is against innocent civilians, I'm not talking about armed confrontation with the military, if you want to go into revolution and you want to fight, that's--revolution is a game for adults and that's what we call a fair fight, but they execute innocent civilians, what I want to hear is the great democrats of this world, Dr. Ungo and

and all of the others, I want to hear them reject the wanton violence of the IRP of the various armed branches of this cordinadora of which they have voluntary assumed the leadership. If they do not reject that kind of wanton violence, what moral right do they have to judge a government that's doing its best to get control over recausitan elements of the military and bring the country to profound change.

The people of El Salvador like the people of the world want and end to violence. The terrorists of the left exault violence in all of its forms over political activities and this is a crucial point if you must absorve. To them violence is a necessary form
of social regeneration for the oppressed and it's a political process is against their creed, they reject politics as the normal means of solving the differences within a community, and politics my friends is an essential part of the machinery of civilization.

Now what is the United State's position what are we doing. We are supporting the reform process, we have assigned approximately seventy or seventy-five million dollars worth of economic assistance in the last 6 months. The left consistently lies about military assistance. I can quote you and I got them in my brief case if you'd like to read them. Statements by Dr. Ungo, statements by all of the frente about all green berets in El Salvador about Marine bases in El Salvador. About the provision of arms to El Salvador. We have not given one lethal weapon to El Salvador, not one. Less than 2 million dollars of military assistance has arrived in El Salvador in the last year and all of that are trucks --no the trucks haven't arrived yet, communication equipment, there was some tear gas to be used for riot control and that is it. There are some ambulances on the dock right now so that will pick it up another million. I suppose to 3 million. So I reject categorically the lies which are told consistently by the left about what the nature of the United States support is in El Salvador. Signature of the United States in El Salvador is economic and social assisted it is not militarily assisted. It is the left who was importing military equipment and Chinese missiles etc., to throw at the U.S. embassy and not the Salvador military, the second is that we are trying to assist the Salvadorian people in reestablishing that vital center which will recreate a political process it is the stated goal of the second junta to bring the country of El Salvador to elections
It is envisioned that there will be amnesty to all political prisoners, for all political elements, we support the private sector in El Salvador free enterprise, because let me tell you socialism would be an absolute disaster for El Salvador.

There is no way that you can feed 4 1/2 million El Salvadorians in a country that you can fit in the entire province of El Vancho in Honduras unless you utilize the tremendous competence of the Salvadorian private sector, I have had arguments with the Salvadorian private sector in that they were guilty of running that country for the benefit of a few. But one has to recognize that there is honest to God entreprenerial talent there and the ability to get that country moving again. And I want to point out that the private sector supports this political process of the junta and is backing the political process.

Now what is the importance of El Salvador? The importance is this: up until now there has only been one role model for revolution in Latin America, and that has been the Castro mold. Marxists take power by force and violence eliminate all U.S. influence in the area. And let me tell you that is not a program that has very much appeal to any administration of the United States. And be under no doubt that the Salvadorian revolutionaries as they are constituted are Marixst-Leninists, are violent, and want the United State's influence completely eliminated from the area that is their stated program, I have it in my briefcase things that you can read, those are their statements, they are not my statements.

Now if the revolutionary government succeeds in El Salvador the present government succeeds in making those reforms stick in bringing the violence of both extreme left and the extreme right
under control and bringing that country into a political process that culminates an election Latin America will have another model for revolution. A revolution that is non-Marxist, a revolution that is pro-democratic, a revolution that rejects statism and has a definite important for private entreprise and will accept the cooperation and assistance of the United States government.

In conclusion, I would just like to say that I find it strange and even paradoxical that for the first time in the United States (not the first time but not one of the first times) when we're not supporting total reaction in Latin America, we're not supporting dictators, we find the people are in the United States morally against the present policy which I regard, honestly, as enlightened, sophisticated, subtle, and resonably well executed in comparison with what we have done in the past, I think it's positively brilliant and I find it paradoxical that we have to have so little understanding from supposedly democratic sources in the United States for what we are trying to do. Thank you very much.
I would also like to express my appreciation to Dr. Rosenberg and Florida International University for the invitation to be hear tonight and to share in this forum with you and with Ambassador White. Ambassador White was quite correct in his opening comment in saying that he suspected he and I would have very little disagreement about the analysis of the situation and the history of El Salvador. I would concur entirely with his analysis of that situation and that history. I would like to take however, a departure from that and suggest that in the beginning there is very little else on which we will agree this evening.

The United States policy for Latin America for the last 20 years that is to say, since the revolution in Cuba. Has been generally designed to stop revolution anywhere else in the Hemisphere and one aspect of that policy in a number of nations around the Hemisphere including Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Honduras and El Salvador has been a very strong support for the Christian democratic party of those countries. This was certainly an element in the growth of the Christian democratic party in El Salvador during the 1960s although frankly that support was not consistent for when the Christian democratic candidate, Jose Napoleon Unduarte, won the election for president in El Salvador in 1972 and was cheated out of that election in a case of absolutely blatant and massive fraud from the part of the military government, the U.S. ambassador in El Salvador sat on his hands and just and did absolutely nothing to protest or to denounce the fraud so the U.S. policy has not been consistent in this regard none the less toward the end of the 70s, for a variety of reasons including in El Salvador growth of the popular organizations of the left of the human right policy of the Carter administration, the increasing
repression at the hands of the Romero government, which because of the human rights policy here was a growing concern and finally of course the revolution in Nicaragua, the United States began once again to pay more attention to the Christian democratic party of El Salvador, the United States began once again to pay more attention to the Christian democratic party of El Salvador this again was very subtle but the what the U.S. was attempting to do to look for a return to a democratic process, which they hoped would come in the projected elections of 1982. There is another element in the development of U.S. policy in El Salvador which I think one can generalize about to many other countries not only Latin America but around the world, which is that our policy has been consistently conditioned by what I call ideological blindness that is we are as a nation and certainly as a government almost incapable of understanding or accepting until its absolutely crammed down our throats, any process of social change that occurs outside the defined limits of liberal democracy which is to say elections, political parties, and interest groups, our whole history is in this liberal context, this our heritage, this is the way we are socialized and it is quite normal that we have difficulty understanding other kinds of processes of social change. But indeed I think that this has been a profound factor in the way U.S. policy has evolved toward El Salvador in the view we have of the popular organizations of what ambassador White calls the extreme left but I will refer to as the frente democratico revolucionario, which includes not only those organizations but a whole range of center to central left of political parties, labor unions, teacher's organizations, campesino
organizations and so on. And since April a growing group of professional and technical people who are in absolute numbers small, probably at this time around 500 but which represent really the cream of the inteligencia of the technical expertise, the economist, aguanamist, medial doctors, nurses and so forth, of the country. Many of these people having served in fact most of them having served in the government of the first junta and having resigned on January 3rd along with everyone else save the minister of defense and his sub-secretary.

A major problem with U.S. policy in El Salvador was that following the coup which permitted us to breathe a huge sigh of relief, we got rid of Romero, we got rid of the incredible human rights violations, it seemed to provide an alternative for peaceful social change, and indeed I think Ambassador White is quite correct in describing the people who compose that government as the cream of the crop. I think its really fair to say that about 90% of the --not only of the ministers but the bureaucrats--the tecnicos that compose the government were really the best minds that El Salvador has.

The problem with U.S. policy at that point was that it began operating on two levels. There was the public level of support for the junta and the reforms it proposed, but then there was a private level, and the private level essentially had two aspects on the one hand the United States particularly military attachees, began pushing a law and order line with the Salvadorian military. The problem with this law and order line was that these people in the embassy never understood that law and order in El Salvador instantly got translated into repression.

The other problem or the other aspect of the private level
of U.S. policy was that the U.S. particularly through its then Ambassador was giving very strong support to the private enterprise sector and indeed to the most reactionary element in that sector never understanding or not wishing to understand, I'm not sure which, that supporting this sector was in fact supporting the most extreme right wing sectors of Salvadorian society. So, between October 15 and January when the United States began to reevaluate its policy followign the fall of the first junta or the resignation of the first junta you have this public posture of support for the junta and its reforms and the private reality or the hidden reality of pursuing lines that intentionally are not -- and I don't think it was intentional but this was the effect of supporting the most reactionary elements in the government. Since this is a whole of the story that I'll be glad to speak to if anyone has any questions But what had happened at the time of the coup was that while the men--the leaders of the coup -- those who had initially conceived it some 9 months before were indeed the most progressive military officers in the country. Absolutely committed to human rights absolutely committed to the reforms that were listed in the proclama of the armed forces immediately following the coup there was a situation where there--to put it very briefly-- the two military men who were elected to the junta Mohano and Gutierrez shared very different commitments, Mohano sharing this commitment to reform and Gutierrez not being quite sure that he wanted to go that far. The result was that Gutierrez unilaterally appointed Garcia minister of defence without consulting anyone and one of the problems was that I think partly out of the political inexperience to which Ambassador White had referred, partly out of simply the process of getting a new
government going, Garcia was permitted to remain and I emphasize this because, I believe that the presence of Garcia and Caranza in the ministry of defense has completely shaped the history of El Salvador in the last year. And if those men had not been there and if they had been gotten rid of months ago that the history of El Salvador today would be quite different.

Following the resignation of the first junta there was in late January or early February a reevaluation of the U.S. policy and there was as one official told me a recognition that perhaps we should have been more assertive, perhaps we should have made our policy clearer. Well, at that point the U.S. government decided to make its policy clearer and indeed what happened was exactly what we have seen since late February and early March the arrival of Ambassador White in El Salvador namely a very strong support for the revolutionary junta of government. The public and private split or contradiction which I have described completely vanished. The U.S. began to assert itself rather rigously it stopped a right wing coup attempt the end of February although the argument can be made that indeed the coup succeeded. Certainly not in a institutional sense but in terms of what happened with the policy of the Salvadorian government. The one member of the Christian democratic member, Hector Darairesi, resigned from the junta several days later, charging that the junta had not--was not living up to the commitments that it had made when it was instituted in January namely to stop the repression and to dialogue with the popular organizations.

Following the halt of the coup in the end of February the sixth of March and seventh, as Ambassador White has pointed out,
the Agrarian reform and the nationalization of the banks was implemented. Now, it is here, at least at the first point that Ambassador White and I really part company, because I would argue that these reforms are virtually meaningless in the context of the current Salvadorian reality, in the first place these were reforms with repression or as many campesinos have said to me, reforma con garaute. On the same day as reform with a garate. On the same day that the Agrarian reform was announced, security forces began moving into villages around the country in fairly indiscriminate fashion and simply shooting up villages. Four days later, refugees began pouring into the arsobispado, the seat of the Archdiocese in San Salvador, seeking refuge in their homes and in two weeks there was something like 1,500 refugees from around the archdiocese in the capital and the church was providing refuge for these people and the stories that they came in and told was just one horror story after another of security forces sometimes men with or without men in civilian clothes coming in shooting up their villages and indiscriminately going house to house sacking the houses, burning the houses, killing women and children in their beds, raping their daughters, taking their young people, the teenagers off and the teenagers simply disappearing. Killing the animals and so on, it just went on and on and on. I spent three hours one day listening to these stories from different campesinos from around the country. This has not stopped! It started and I asked these people what day did this begin? And they gave me different dates but several of them said it began on the sixth of March, the same day that the Agrarian reform was implemented and this pattern of repression has not stopped indeed it has grown. Ambassador White has referred to statement of Juan Chicon which he made in Nicaragua, I have not seen
the statement so I am not going to-- I cannot respond to that because I have not seen the transcript of Chicon's statement but I will say that the--its really beside the point because the--it is beside the point I want to make because of the 6,000 deaths apart from those who have died from confrontations between gorillas and security forces which I also leave aside as does Ambassador White of the 6,000 people who have died so far this year, both church and human rights organizations have said that 80% of those deaths were at the hand of security forces of right wing vigilantes, now these are documented cases these are not estimated because the church sources and the human rights groups make lists by names whenever possible, by age, where the people were born, where they live and so on. So this is hard data. And this is there--in round figures--this is their estimate: 80% of the people who have died in El Salvador this year have been victims of right wing repression or security forces. At this point I would like to add a footnote which is that very often in El Salvador and this is not only in the last year, this is historically true, that the right wing vigilantes are very often off duty national guardsmen or national police, because for years they have moonlighted as security forces or vigilantes for the large property owners in El Salvador and this a continuation of that pattern only now with real vengence.

Ambassador White makes a case that the government is trying to get the repression under control and this is a major objective but in May there was a major massacre at the Rio Sunbul on the border between El Salvador and Honduras. A case which I understand perhaps the Ambassador would like to respond to this, I understand
the Ambassador has said well there is no evidence for it, well I have six pages of evidence over here if you would like to see that. Several days ago, or about two weeks ago or so there were attacks in the department Teletenango which is a department north of San Salvador that borders on the north of Honduras. Attacks in two villages by the army and the national guard in these attacks the church--I do not have a lot of details but the churches were fired on. And the result of this is that the entire cuarteles of the army and the national guard had been ex-communicated by Bishop Arturo Rivera Damas and this was an announcement he made about six days ago in Nicaragua where he was attending a conference.

The United States as you have heard tonight continues to maintain the junta is moderate and reformist and there is a reduction in the level of official violence, that the security forces are being disciplined. If indeed this is the case, if indeed 10% of the security forces have been dismissed over recent months, I would argue that it is very much in the interest of the Salvadorian government to publicize that fact far and wide and indeed in so doing would probably gain even greater support from the people.

I would further argue that rather than being moderate and reformist the junta indeed has become increasingly conservative that--and that the recent military crisis which some of you may be aware of that occurred the first 10 days of September there was a power struggle within the military and essentially Mohano lost. The order of the month which is the day a monthly list of transfers and so on was issued with only the signature of Gutierrez and the minister of defense Garcia and when Mohano had this order removed from the command post virtually all of Mohano's supporters within the military
when Mohano saw the order of the monthly issue he sent a telegram telling the barracks around the country to ignore order and this percipitated a crisis which I will not go into, expect to say that the resolution was that the supporters of Mohano were indeed removed and while the junta had succeed in securing from the officer corp that the Junta would sign off on all future orders of the month indeed this was in fact a consolidation of power in the hands of the conservatives because by removing the supporters of Mohano he has become extrodinarily isolated on the Junta and this has indeed been a victory for Garcia and Gutierrez and indeed for Jose Napoleon Duarte, whom I would characterize as the last colonel.

Another response I would make regarding the question of repression is that just this past sunday the secretary general of the Christian democratic party of El Salvador resigned and is now ft in Costa Rica. The U.S. maintains that the le/. has no support that it is loosing support. Ambassador White has offered a number of examples, I would like--I had no planned to do this--but I will take the time to respond especificially to the example he gave of the funeral, because indeed I have a very different version of what happened at that funeral, indeed there are films that are available that show contrary to the government assertions that all troup were confined to barracks that day but there were security forces inside the national palace which fronts on one side of the square while the cathedral is here and there are pictures of the security forces firing at the crowds, these pictures appeared in newspapers outside the country and were taken by a Dutch photographer. I have also been told but have not been able to confirm that indeed there was NBC footage which did confirm that the bomb came from a window of the national palace and was not thrown by the left and that that film was confiscated.
Now, as I said I've not been able to confirm this, but in this particular case, the source is sufficiently reliable to give me confidence to at least say this here tonight.

It is difficult, the other substantial evidence that the left did not perpetuate this violence comes from a statement from 22 priests, bishops, nuns, and laity from around the world which were standing on the steps of the cathedral and saw the violence begin and who got together as soon as they could after the situation was over in the archobispado and shared their experiences, shared their knowledge of what had happened and wrote this statement which all of them signed. In addition Archbishop John Quinn, who is president of the National Catholic Conference issued his own statement when he returned to the United States that night which concluded am I to believe that the left were the bombers themselves and he too had been standing on the steps of the cathedral, I run out of time and I will not, there are other points to which I would like to respond but I'll wait for questions. Thank you.
Ambassador White will now take five minutes to respond to Dr. Montgomery's comments.

Well I would like to start out by pointing out that Dr. Montgomery did not respond to the most important point I made, which was that she did not disown in any way the violence of the left. She did not say that the left is wrong when they execute bus drivers, is wrong when they kidnap innocent citizens and execute them. That is the crucial issue!

Now look what we've got here, I wish -- you know I don't make any claims that the United States is 100% right in all of these issues, we go through very difficult times in the government trying to figure out what's best to do. A lot of these things are close calls, which way you go. And people who are certain as our friends here, I just wish I was as certain about anything as they seem to be of everything because I think this is a very complex situation and I agree with a great deal of the criticism that Dr. Montgomery has just made about the government. What we have in large part is a parallel government, you got the revolutionary civilian military junta and then you got the reality of military power and a great many of the Salvadorian military look upon all government as irrelevant. As they looked upon governments as being irrelevant for 50 years. The real power to them is the military but this is what the revolutionary junta is trying to do, it's trying to do it is trying to acrrete power and get the military under control. And there is no way of doing this unless you deposit the desirably of a blood bath to the political process. Now regarding the massacre this is typical of the kind of propaganda that is put out and which is no independent verification. The same is true of what happened at the Archbishops funeral. There have been American journalists that have gone up to the area that
this alleged massacre took place and none of them could find any evidence at all, there's never been any evidence for it, it's never been verified and I invite you to talk to any American journalist who has been in El Salvador or five journalists for that matter, there has never been any identification.

Secondly, a poor man but I'm paying $1,000 to Dr. Montgomery or any one else that can show me a picture of any member of the security forces at the archbishop's funeral, it's just is not true. And I think that the statement by the bishop was in my opinion an advication of responsibility on their part, they're entitled to their opinion and I'm delighted that they give their opinion but what they're not entitled to do is make a charge against the government that holds the government responsible for what happened on the plaza on that Sunday and omit entirely the mention that the 250 armed members of the cordinadora marched in a peaceful crowd. That kind of omission is something that I think the bishops have to answer for.

Now regarding the ideological blindness of the state departemnt and military attaches pushing law and order. You know military attaches in every country are big on law and order, but I just want to point out to you that we have had an entire turnover in the United States embassy in the last 7 months and we speak with one voice and there is not one military attache now pushing law and order there is not one CIA person pushing any special type of initiative down there, there is one embassy and there is one voice like everyone knows that the United States position is and I attacking the past is one thing but I think what we should do is address ourselves to the present situation, and regarding this idea that we cannot understand the reality of Latin America. That Latin America is in effect not apt for democratic institutions
that they have their own special brand. Now, I regard this as racist nonsense, I think Latin Americans are just as capable as anyone else of democracy and their constitution shows it. There is not a constitution in Latin America that doesn't provide for free elections.

And so the Latin Americans are perfectly capable of democracy, what they are not capable of is democracy when the United States policy is opposed to democracy and has been in years gone by. Now, when the United States policy is in favor of democracy we have the kind of people who are arguing for mob rule from the left which I find totally unacceptable and a violation of civilized standards.

Now it is naive to say that Colonel Garcia has shaped El Salvador 95% of the violations that have taken place by the security forces have taken place by enlisted men who are out for hire to the financiers of the extreme right and their killing for pay and nothing else and the high command is, I will certainly admit that there are a number of people in the military that are not sold on reform, that do not believe in democracy, but I think it's gratuitous and even naive to say one man or two men are responsible for the situation of El Salvador. You're also naive if you think that there isn't substantial support for repression this is how the problems that we got down there, there's a hell of a lot of people down there who think that repression is the handle.

And last, I really think that it is was gratuitous and wrong to talk about Colonel Duarte. Colonel Duarte, you know, Duarte has suffered over 30 years as a--because of his witness for democracy in El Salvador. And the brave Darairese, who Dr. Montgomery quoted
is a man who left El Salvador on an official mission and once he got safely out, then denounced the government. I don't regard that as totally admirable. I want to just close by saying that I reiterate there is no reason whatsoever to say that the second junta is morally inferior in any way to the first one, it's just that these men are more experienced politicians and are trying--are hanging in under terribly trying, difficult and dangerous circumstances in order to try and bring that country into a political process and there I rest my case. Thank you.
Questions and answers:

Q: A key factor in your analysis is popular ____. I think facists how do you think that two Christian Democrats and military/ that are unable to agree with each other are going to be able to name are going to make the junta survive.

A: That's a good question--that's a good question because it addresses a very important point and that's what were--in El Salvador we are dealing with a fragment of society. As I explained earlier, practically all political institutions have disappeared. The Christian democratic party is without question the strongest party, political party in the country, that doesn't mean it's powerful, that just means that it is bigger than the rest of them. The ideological differences between Colonels Gutierrez and Mohano is way over done, let me tell you, I know them both very well, Mohano--the real Mohano and the Mohano that the left has idealized are two very different people. But the point is that there is no government that can in effect say that it represents the people because there don't exist the institutions through which they can channel popular support into a political process but this isn't the effort that is underway and there is going to be the appointment of electoral commissions, the suspension of state seige and the freedom to organize political parties, and if the left has the popular support, let them organize the political party and gain the support of the people and go to elections. That's fine with everyone if the left can triumph in free elections, more power to them. The second point that I want to make is that this government should not be popular that's not its function this is a transitory government that should get the hell out as soon as its job is over and that is to get the reform in place, squell the violence from both
the left and the right and begin the political process culminating elections and that's the way it should go.

Q: Embasador White usted dijo que es cierto que el gobierno de los estados unidos a la junta del Salvador es un modelo de revolucion antipacifico y democratico. No es cierto que el gobierno de los estados unidos esta apoyando la junta Marxista de Nicaragua? Que el gobierno de los estados unidos dice que no es Marxista pero todo el mundo lo sabe. Como explicaria usted esa contradicion?

The question deals basically with an apparent contradiction between U.S. support for what the gentleman alleges is a Marxist government in Nicaragua and what the gentleman alleges, according to Ambassador White is a non-Marxist government in El Salvador.

Q. No pagan para hacer comentarios de la situacion en Nicaragua, pero. I will answer you in this way, what we are supporting in Nicaragua is a way to extricate the people of Nicaragua from a tight ideological mold and support the private sector which is functioning and competent, I think it would be wrong and foolish and self defeating to write off Nicaragua. Nicaragua--the revolution--God knows if any country ever needed a revolution it was Nicaragua and we are paying now for supporting a corrupt and brutal over 40 or 50 years so that government in there is not to our liking but that doesn't mean that just because a government is not to our liking and our actions have not been to our liking either that we should thereby abandon the turf of Nicaragua to Castro, no it seems to me that what we do is support the forces of pluralism in Nicaragua
Questions & Answers

with the faith that one institution in Nicaragua which is the church the press, the private sector are strong and that at least thus far, I see no evidence that Nicaragua--I don't quarrel with your definition at all but it's not the repressive apparatus in place for example in Cuba, there are still many pluralistic elements working in Nicaragua and I think that one of the reasons that I hope El Salvador works well is because I think that it will have a powerful drawing influence on Nicaragua and also an important influence on the situation in Guatemala.

Q: I would like to ask the Ambassador how does different position on the situation of El Salvador or Nicaragua for before of thousands of people that have disappeared and the thousands of people that have died since in Nicaragua since we have the human rights of Carter over 25,000 deaths and over 6,000 political prisoners and in El Salvador at this moment you talk about 50 people a day are dying precisely because of our human rights position. And besides this how do you reconcile the situation of human rights with the confiscation of property, when will these people get property, I myself was in business in El Salvador I lost all my property there, not farm property, industrial property because of the situation and how I tell my employees about their human rights when will they get a job, there are so many people without work, you're getting your salary, you're getting paid when will these people get a job.

A. I don't understand the question, honestly I wish you would repeat it.

Q. How do you reconcile the thousands of deaths since the human rights position of Mr. Carter.
White: In El Salvador?

Q. In Central America how about Iran

A. First, I deny the premise, I think you're totally wrong, that there are gorrillas being funneled into El Salvador at any appreciable rate from Cuba or from Nicaragua or from anywhere else, I don't deny in any way that Castro is taking advantage of the situation, that he has trained gurrillas, our figures, our intelligence figures are more less 500 gurrillas have trained by Castro, he certainly gives important moral support, Prenta Latina and Radio Havana, send vibes every day about what is happening in El Salvador, and supports the left far / and that certianly is an important propaganda weapon on the hands of the far left. I am not so naive as to deny that there are probably some Cuban revolutionaries there and I'm almost sure I'm certain that there are some Nicaraguans there. I think that they are there more as volunteers, I'm certain relatively certain no I'm certain that the Sandinista government, the revolutionary government of Nicaragua is not providing any official support. You have a lot of things but one of the things you have is a thesis one of the great advantages of working for the state department is that you get used to poverty, you don't have any particular cuase to push in other words I'm not working in the Pentagon and trying to get green berets into El Salvador and I'm not working for AID