

*Strategy and Tactics of the Salvadoran FMLN Guerrillas: Last Battle of the Cold War, Blueprint for Future Conflicts.* By JOSÉ ANGEL MORONI BRACAMONTE and DAVID E. SPENCER. Westport: Praeger, 1995. Photographs. Maps. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xv, 197 pp. Cloth. \$59.95.

In his 1978 study, *Injustice*, Barrington Moore, Jr., argued, "It is the state of the army, of competing armies, not of the working class, that has determined the fate of twentieth-century revolutions" (p. 375). Despite the mountain of literature devoted to the Salvadoran civil war of the 1980s, few authors have pursued its purely military history. Those who did virtually always have focused on two factors: U.S. military assistance, and Salvadoran military terror carried out against civilians.

The lacuna is now substantially filled by this flawed but important analysis of FMLN military strategy. The authors are an intriguing pair. David Spencer is an American who served as "political consultant" to the government from 1987 to 1992; José Angel Moroni "is the pen name of a combatant in the war" for 12 years, a Delphic wording that avoids telling whether he fought for the government, the FMLN, or (my bet) the two sides seriatim.

Their main focus is a tactical analysis. It bears the hallmarks of a military subculture, especially in their professional appreciation of a capable enemy. They readily recognize the FMLN's efforts when such efforts are militarily clever, innovative, resourceful, and brave. Thus their cool analysis is mixed with professional admiration, one group of warriors for another. Undergirding these elements is the greatest wealth of hard-to-find documentary sources this reviewer has ever encountered (largely from the FMLN itself), along with many interviews with former combatants (typically anonymous, like the senior author).

The authors' historical and social analysis of El Salvador fares less well. Their warrior professionalism carries with it the usual baggage of Cold War conservatism (even reaction), packed with the usual rhetoric of "Communist subversion" and "Marxist-Leninist aggression." I found their treatment of the changing sociopolitical situation both unpersuasive and glib. Many readers, given the political tenor of Latin American studies as an academic subculture, might dismiss this book far more forcefully (especially when nary a word is whispered about the armed forces' terror tactics against civilians at El Mozote and elsewhere).

Such a dismissal, however, would be a mistake. First, the sheer range of empirical materials gathered here on the military aspects of the war is in itself a great service to all scholars of Salvadoran politics, not just military analysts. Second, if one wishes to contend with serious scholarly correctives about 1980s El Salvador, consider the authors' "revisionist" assertions:

The fighting morale of the Salvadoran government forces was usually high (not ever-collapsing, as we often read in previous studies).

The FMLN employed high levels of mining, sabotage, and civilian coercion (usually glossed or dismissed as minor elsewhere).

The Salvadoran guerrillas' training in Cuba was the heaviest of all the regional insurgencies since 1960 (pp. 4, 17).

The FMLN received massive outside military assistance for more than ten years.

The skeptical scholar in me noted that this claim peppers much of the text, with no scholarly support; much harder to ignore were the arguments and documentation in chapter 9. This is no set of easily rejected "white paper" statements, even though the authors never really justify their extreme assertion that approximately \$1 billion in outside military support reached the FMLN, roughly paralleling U.S. military aid to the government (pp. 6–7).

The authors' research may or may not have been careful; this reviewer, at least, lacks access to most of the documents they cite. They also have the annoying habit of citing sources without page references (to me a sign of sloppy scholarship). And I am disturbed by one such citation to Gabriel Zaid's well-known 1982 piece for *Dissent*, supposedly showing that Cubans backed the ERP and dropped the FPL (p. 16, n. 2). I could find no such passage in Zaid's text.

These reservations aside, this book is a must read for anyone wanting in-depth information on, and military analysis of, the Salvadoran insurgency. No matter how one responds to the authors' own political agenda and social analysis—especially their armed forces' boosterism and Cold War conservatism—no student of the Salvadoran civil war can justify ignoring this most important treatment of the very events that enthralled our field for more than a decade.

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*Democracy and Socialism in Sandinista Nicaragua*. Edited by HARRY E. VANDEN and GARY PREVOST. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1993. Photographs. Illustrations. Tables. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xii, 172 pp. Cloth. \$32.00.

Genuine democracy is possible under socialism, and the FSLN sought earnestly, though with limited success, to construct it in Nicaragua during the early 1980s. While some readers may find these propositions debatable, Harry Vanden and Gary Prevost argue for them convincingly in this book. Even those who remain unconvinced should find the book a useful overview of Sandinista politics.

The authors define genuine democracy as necessarily participatory; they contrast it to U.S.-style representative government and to the authoritarian "verticalism" common both to Nicaragua before 1979 and political models generated by Eastern European and Cuban socialism. Effective participation requires that the people understand and act on their own interests. On taking power in 1979, however, the FSLN, like many other leftist "vanguard parties" in similar situations, feared that the general population, sodden with capitalist vices, was ripe for manipulation by elite-backed demagogues. The party's stated strategy was to lead the people gradually toward consciousness and power; the party apparently did not imagine that at some point this might require the *comandantes* themselves to relinquish power.