

## Politics and the FMLN in El Salvador

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In a solemn ceremony in Mexico City's Chapultepec Castle, representatives of El Salvador's government and the FMLN signed a peace settlement in January 1992. The agreement ended 12 years of civil conflict that left approximately 75,000 people dead and spelled the end of the FMLN as a terrorist organization.<sup>1</sup> The FMLN employed a variety of tactics, such as kidnappings, arson, and bombings, to coerce the Salvadoran government into making significant political, social, and economic changes. They targeted government officials and members of El Salvador's oligarchy. During an offensive operation in November 1989, for example, FMLN fighters occupied several upper-class neighborhoods in the capital city of San Salvador. As one FMLN member remarked, "By taking this part, we bring the war to the rich." The FMLN's clandestine radio station repeated this message in its broadcast to the city's residents: "We're already sitting in the oligarchy's best mansions."<sup>2</sup>

How did the FMLN end as a terrorist organization? This chapter argues that the possibility of a political settlement with terrorist groups is linked to a key variable: the breadth of terrorist goals. Most

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<sup>1</sup> On the number of people killed during El Salvador's civil war, see David H. McCormick, "From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding: Restructuring Military and Police Institutions in El Salvador," in Michael W. Doyle, Ian Johnstone, and Robert C. Orr, eds., *Keeping the Peace: Multidimensional UN Operations in Cambodia and El Salvador*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 282–311, p. 282.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Grant Mine, "Guerrillas Attack Affluent Neighborhoods," Associated Press, November 29, 1989.