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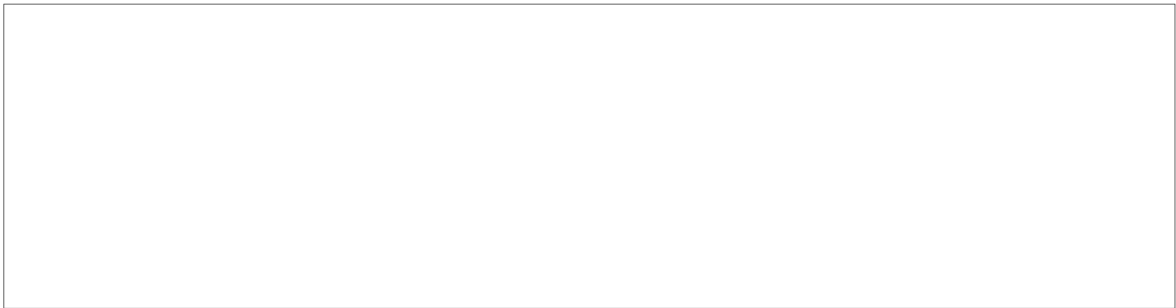
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LATIN AMERICA VIEW (U)

17 April 1981

CONTENTS

NR Record



El Salvador: The Right Wing (U) 6



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(b)(6)

Conservative tendencies are wide and deep-- especially in the military and business community--but the extreme right wing that favors and supports the activities of vigilante death squads is a relatively small group. (b)(3) NatSecAct



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The right in El Salvador is broad by almost any definition. Conservative tendencies run wide and deep in the military, the business community, and beyond. The extreme right wing, however, which currently favors a coup d'etat and unrestricted use of vigilante groups against suspected leftists, is smaller.

The rightist tendency in the armed forces is predominant. Nearly three-fourths of the officers are decidedly conservative, and Defense Minister Garcia--the strongman in the government--represents a consensus that the lasting solution to the extreme leftist problem should be military rather than political. The officers in the armed forces who now favor a rightwing coup are relatively few consisting of a small clique of junior- and middle-grade officers who are allied with some far-right civilians and retired military officers.

The officers on the extreme right are being held in check by the more pragmatic high command, which represents the mainstream of military thinking. The extreme-right clique does not have a single senior active-duty officer as its leader. It had previously regarded Defense Minister Garcia as its unofficial chief, but the extremists have recently grumbled about his political compromises with the Christian Democrats. National Guard Chief Vides Casanova is also sought after as a potential coup leader, but he too has rejected the extremists' overtures, at least for the time being.

The Role of Roberto D'Aubuisson

Former Army Major Roberto D'Aubuisson has been an articulate and charismatic spokesman for the far right in El Salvador since leaving active service after the reformist coup on 15 October 1979. A protege of "Chele" Medrano, the ultrarightist former chief of the National Guard, D'Aubuisson has served as principal henchman for

17 April 1981

6

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~~SECRET~~

wealthy landowners and as a coordinator of the right-wing death squads that have murdered several thousand suspected leftists and leftist sympathizers during the past year.

Although relatively intelligent, D'Aubuisson is also egocentric and reckless. He favors physically eliminating the leftist opposition, which he defines as anyone not supportive of the traditional status quo. His hatred of those he suspects of leftist sympathies led him to visit the United States last spring to condemn the Carter administration's policy toward El Salvador. After his US visa was canceled, D'Aubuisson traveled throughout Latin America seeking military and political support for his Broad National Front--an ultra-conservative group of wealthy Salvadorans.

D'Aubuisson is funded by members of the extreme rightwing Salvadoran elite, most of whom now live in Guatemala and the United States. Though few in number, these wealthy expatriates have reportedly spent millions of dollars to support D'Aubuisson and his followers in their efforts to overthrow the present junta and return the country to rightwing military rule.

D'Aubuisson's personal following is limited to a handful of wealthy civilians and some military officers, many of whom are not on active duty. His influence in the military has waned over the past year, as many of his former colleagues in the junior officer corps look to more senior officers for leadership.

Nevertheless, D'Aubuisson could play a spoiler role by continuing to encourage rightwing terrorists--many of whom are enlisted personnel in the security forces--and by issuing inflammatory declarations against the junta and those sympathetic to reform. D'Aubuisson's penchant for action is underscored by his sponsorship of several unsuccessful coups during the past year. His efforts to turn back the clock and initiate an all-out civil war against the left could succeed if he manages to convince a majority of the officer corps that the new US administration would accept an ouster of the Christian Democrats from the government.

17 April 1981

7

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Rightwing Terrorism

The ultraright in El Salvador has a long history of using violence as a political tool, perhaps marked most vividly by the widespread repression and murder of campesinos following the unsuccessful peasant rebellion in 1932. In the 1960s, a surge of political activity among peasants and urban workers inspired the creation of many new rightwing organizations, both official and clandestine.

One such government-sponsored group--the National Democratic Organization (ORDEN)--was comprised of tens of thousands of conservative rural peasants and served as a tool of the landed elites. It included many former armed forces personnel who were part of the nation's reserve force, the Territorial Service. ORDEN served principally as an intelligence-gathering organization--identifying real or suspected enemies of the regime--but it also occasionally took direct action against them.

Augmenting the semiofficial organizations were a variety of secret vigilante groups that have faded in and out of existence. Traditionally, rightwing death squads have included civilian mercenaries, idealists tied to particular wealthy elites, and active and retired security force personnel. Given the impunity with which death squads continue to operate today, it is clear that security force personnel continue to cooperate with and participate in vigilante terror.

Leadership and Organization

Information on the leadership and organization of rightwing terrorist groups is sketchy. A small group of wealthy Salvadorans living in Miami, however, is believed to be behind the kidnaping and intimidation of businessmen who have shown sympathy for the civil-military government or for US policy in El Salvador. These individuals also may have ordered the assassinations of the two US AFL-CIO representatives in January. Tied to this group of wealthy expatriates are businessmen in El Salvador who belong to the Broad National Front, headed by Major D'Aubuisson and a young ultraconservative, Alfredo Mesa Lagos.

17 April 1981

8

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The extreme right wing therefore has limited need for external support, given its financing by millionaire exiles. The terror squads use a broad range of side arms, machine pistols, and rifles that are readily available on the regional black market and in the United States. The involvement of security force personnel in the rightist terrorism ensures a further supply of arms and license to use them. For example, the March attack on the Nicaraguan Embassy in San Salvador by assailants using RPG-2 rockets followed the capture of a substantial supply of these weapons by government troops.

Membership in rightwing terrorist groups probably approaches several hundred, but our information in this area is limited. Security force personnel operate on their own or are employed in an off-duty capacity by civilians. Mercenaries outside armed forces ranks are also utilized.

The rumor that foreign personnel--usually Nicaraguans or Guatemalans--are active in rightwing activities is heard frequently, but there is little hard evidence. Following Somoza's overthrow, some 1,300 Nicaraguan National Guard troops arrived in El Salvador, the vast majority of whom were enlisted personnel. A few reports suggested a large number of them were to be integrated into the Salvadoran armed forces, but this was never confirmed and the numbers actually integrated were probably quite modest. Many others may have been recruited into the private guard forces of the elite. Members of either group could easily be involved in rightwing violence, but it is impossible to estimate numbers accurately.

Leftist spokesmen and media outlets also constantly charge that Guatemalan paramilitary forces are active in El Salvador. Contacts and consultations between rightwing Salvadoran and Guatemalan officials do occur--and some civilian terrorist personnel may have trained in Guatemala with like-minded organizations--but there is no persuasive evidence that significant assistance has been given. It seems extremely unlikely that the Guatemalan Government would have authorized the dispatch to El Salvador of government personnel, in mufti or otherwise, under prevailing conditions.

17 April 1981

9

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Nevertheless, even prior to the self-exile of El Salvador's conservative economic elite, there were frequent contacts between hardlining businessmen in Guatemala and El Salvador and some soliciting of funds from the Guatemalan brethren. The travels of Major D'Aubuisson attest to continuing contacts, and Guatemalan rightists have discussed the possibility of providing funds or men to the Salvadoran right wing. Although the current level of rightwing activities in El Salvador could easily be maintained without resort to outside aid, in the event of a major Salvadoran crisis a segment of the Guatemalan right would probably provide concrete assistance if asked.

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17 April 1981

10

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