



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

20 January 1984

EL SALVADOR: DEALING WITH DEATH SQUADS [REDACTED]

Summary

We believe efforts by the civilian government and the military high command to crack down on rightwing violence have made little progress and have been aimed almost exclusively at placating Washington. Salvadoran officials understandably feel uneasy about openly confronting rightwing extremists; death threats and other forms of intimidation against national leaders are commonplace, and often are carried out. Defense Minister Vides--whose room to maneuver is limited--appears both personally disinclined and professionally unable to effect a major cleanup within the armed forces any time soon. [REDACTED]

Palliative Response

Since December, the response of the government and military leaders to the problem of rightwing violence has been mainly verbal. For the past several weeks, government officials have publicly denounced death squads, and military leaders have pledged in the local press to punish human rights offenders

This memorandum was requested by Vice-President Bush. It was prepared by

ALA, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

within the armed forces. Subordinate officers also have received lectures on avoiding involvement with rightwing terrorist organizations. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] policy meetings were held by senior military officers [REDACTED] to discuss "requirements" presented by Vice President Bush during his visit to San Salvador. Consensus was reached that a few unsavory officers identified by US officials would be transferred and that a military committee would be appointed to investigate abuses within the armed forces. [REDACTED]

Concrete Action

Two mid-level police intelligence officers have been transferred to diplomatic posts overseas. This gesture is offset, however, by their replacement with ultrarightist officers, one of whom is a [REDACTED] leader of a police death squad. Moreover, in the course of recent general orders, several other notorious rightwing extremists have been assigned to prestigious commands. These include Lieutenant Colonels Moran, Zepeda, Zacapa, Ponce, and Staben--all close associates of ultrarightist standard-bearer Roberto D'Aubuisson, and his Nationalist Republican Alliance. [REDACTED]

The military has reluctantly followed through on US demands to detain Captain Eduardo Avila, suspected of helping to arrange the murders of two US labor advisers in January 1981. Avila is temporarily being held on charges stemming from his being on self-imposed inactive duty for the past 18 months--a vague form of AWOL. Senior military officers [REDACTED] believe that Avila's uncle--a Supreme Court Judge--has manipulated the legal process to protect his nephew, and Salvadoran authorities claim that more serious charges cannot now be legally brought against Avila. [REDACTED]

Nevertheless, [REDACTED] that the government there has sent documentation to El Salvador charging Avila with terrorist activities in 1982, when he served as an attache in San Jose. US officials hope that these new charges will enable Salvadoran authorities to hold Avila long enough for the murder case against him to be developed or until he agrees to testify against his accomplices. [REDACTED]

Meanwhile, an ad hoc investigative team has been set up by Defense Minister Vides to oversee reports of abuses within the armed forces. Nevertheless, the team leader, Captain Arango of the National Guard, is a cohort of former Major D'Aubuisson. In 1979, Arango [redacted] was a leader of the notorious White Warriors Union--a death squad that specialized in eliminating members of the Catholic clergy. [redacted]

General Vides has requested US aid to help form a bona fide commission to investigate both rightwing and leftwing terrorist groups. [redacted] military officers [redacted] have told some of D'Aubuisson's civilian aides to leave the country or face future investigations into their alleged death squad activities. For the moment, however, D'Aubuisson's civilian henchmen have rejected such threats and have made clear that they intend to remain in El Salvador. [redacted]

EL SALVADOR: DEALING WITH DEATH SQUADS [REDACTED]

Comments

1. Unfortunately, the [REDACTED] memorandum on the Salvadoran death squads and [REDACTED] response appear to be dealing with two separate issues. The [REDACTED] memorandum was answering the question of what has the Salvadoran government accomplished in its effort to crackdown on rightwing death squads from a relatively broad perspective, [REDACTED] is focusing on the Salvadoran response to the specific requests of Vice President Bush. The [REDACTED] agrees that the Salvadorans have done all that we have asked to be done, but we also believe that the government is reluctant, and may in fact be incapable, of undertaking a real crackdown on the death squads. As [REDACTED] points out, however, the US proposals were meant to be a starter, and they have had a positive effect in El Salvador.

2. Concerning the facts, we would point out that deaths attributed to political violence have not declined significantly, only notorious high-level death squads claims of violence. We also would point out that several Army commanders with past death squad associations, especially Zacapa and Zepeda, were appointed to new leadership positions after the Vice President's visit. Finally, while the special investigative unit will be lead by Lieutenant Colonel Rivas, Captain Arango was named to head an ad hoc investigation within the armed forces.

These comments were prepared by [REDACTED] AIA, as a result of perceptions obtained during his recent visit to El Salvador. It contains information available [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]