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EL SALVADOR: New Killings Plague Government

Three well-publicized killings in El Salvador in recent weeks are probably unrelated, but they may presage a resurgence of politically motivated murders as elections slated for next spring draw near. The two most recent victims appear to be farmworkers, whose murders, [REDACTED] may have been a common crime disguised to appear politically motivated. The government has made little progress in investigating the killing of a prominent leftist human rights activist late last month. His death derailed government negotiations with the rebels. Meanwhile, a recent UN study accuses the insurgents of widespread summary executions of civilians and indicates that political killings of civilians by the military continue to decline. [REDACTED]

Comment: Both the extreme left and radical right benefit from such killings, which both discourage leftists now in exile from returning to participate in next year's legislative elections and serve as a pretext for the insurgents to avoid meaningful peace negotiations. On balance, however, the left gains more in propaganda terms when a prominent leftist activist is killed, because the government is almost always blamed for such murders, even though government links to rightwing extremist groups have been dramatically reduced since 1984. [REDACTED]

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Approved for Release

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