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BILL CHRISTIAN: A US researcher says it's easy to spot CIA controlled newspapers in Latin America. It's all in knowing how.

Mike Kriegul has the story.

MIKE KRIEGUL: Fred Landis is a Chilean-born American-based researcher who has spent five years doing content analysis of the press in Chile, Cuba, Jamaica and Nicaragua, and he says he's found patterns that run among each of the country's leading conservative newspapers. In each case, he says, as the countries move toward socialism, the papers announce the appearance of the Virgin Mary.

FRED LANDIS: And day by day the appearance of the Virgin takes over more and more space in the newspaper.

KRIEGUL: Until it comes out that the Virgin isn't happy with the current socialist government. At the source of these sightings, says Landis, is the CIA.

LANDIS: The point is that if you look at the front page of a conservative newspaper, at such time that the CIA has taken it over, the newspaper looks like a psychological warfare leaflet. It looks like a cartoon. It does not look like a conservative newspaper.

KRIEGUL: The idea is to convince devoutly religious Catholics to circumvent their church for guidance, as the church often sides with the left.

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LANDIS: Remember, the ultimate purpose of the CIA is simply to discredit, neutralize or eliminate a government they consider to be unfriendly.

KRIEGUL: Among the papers that have followed this pattern, says Landis, is Chile's El Mercurio, which never announced the victory of Salvador Allende as president until after he was overthrown. And he says a similar chain of events is now going on in Nicaragua's La Prinsa.

I'm Mike Kriegul reporting for the Pacific News Service.