

8 December 1981

BRIEFING FOR SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

VIOLENCE IN EL SALVADOR

THE SUBJECT OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN EL SALVADOR IMPACTS DIRECTLY ON THE CREDIBILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. APART FROM DEATHS DUE TO ACTUAL COMBAT, THE LEVEL OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE HAS DIMINISHED SOMEWHAT SINCE SEPTEMBER AND IS CONSIDERABLY LOWER THAN THE LEVEL OF LAST YEAR AT THIS TIME. THE GOVERNMENT IS MORE CONSCIOUS OF THE DAMAGE DONE TO ITS IMAGE BY CONTINUED VIOLENCE AND MEDIA REPORTS OF ATROCITIES, AND HAS TRIED--ALTHOUGH NOT VERY EFFECTIVELY--TO CONTROL IT.

- There are several categories of violence which should be recognized.
- There is, for example, the sectarian violence by the extreme right and left; there is official government violence; anarchic violence and banditry by opportunists; and the normal domestic violence that has always plagued El Salvador.
- Groups sympathetic to or allied with the insurgent left--like the Catholic Legal Aid Society, the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission, and the Mothers of Political Prisoners and Victims Organization--continue to inflate the death toll figures to where the world media routinely repeats numbers ranging from 35,000 to 40,000 deaths since January 1980. It is often alleged that the junta is responsible for over 80% of this total.
- Our best estimate of the total number of deaths due to violence in El Salvador for the past two years would be around 22,000.
- This figure includes all battlefield deaths and non-political deaths of which there may be perhaps 6,000.
- Of the 16,000 or so deaths we feel are politically inspired, about 30% are attributable to right-wing terrorist and vigilante groups, about 40% are due to left-wing violence, and a remaining 30% to official government police and military operations.
- These estimates--while necessarily rough--do reflect our concerted effort to analyze quantitative and qualitative data over the past two years.

Approved for Release

NOV 1993

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] indicates that both civilian and military elements of the government have been increasing their efforts to curb official violence and right-wing vigilante violence.
  - The military high command has stepped up disciplinary measures against officers and enlisted personnel known to be involved in criminal abuses of authority: although most military personnel--and there are hundreds--have merely been transferred or discharged during the past two years for these actions, more recently we see some instances where the most serious offenders are tried before military criminal courts.
  - There are also a few instances where civilian right-wing terrorists have been identified and arrested by the police for their activities.
  - [REDACTED] indicate that the level of both official abuses and right-wing terrorist operations has declined, but we are unable to monitor this more precisely.
  - Much of the continued violence by military personnel and right-wing terrorists, however, remains beyond the knowledge and control of senior military officials.