

[REDACTED]

25 March 1981

MEMORANDUM

EL SALVADOR: The Right Wing

The right wing in El Salvador is broad by almost any definition. Conservative tendencies run wide and deep in the military institution, 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 a smaller group. [REDACTED]

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 view that the lasting solution to the extreme leftist problem should be military rather than political. Armed forces officers who now favor a right-wing coup are relatively few--a small clique of junior and middle-grade officers allied with some far-right civilians and retired military officers. [REDACTED]

The extreme rightist officers are currently held in check by the more pragmatic high command, which represents the mainstream of military thinking. The extreme-right clique does not presently 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. [REDACTED]

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

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1979. A protege of "Chele" Medrano, the ultra-rightist former chief of the National Guard, D'Aubuisson has served as principal henchman for 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.

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While relatively intelligent, D'Aubuisson is egocentric and reckless. He favors the physical elimination of El Salvador's leftist opposition, which he defines as anyone not supportive of the traditional status quo. His hatred of those he suspects of harboring leftist sympathies motivated his visits to the US last spring, during which he condemned the Carter administration's policy toward El Salvador. After his US visa was cancelled, D'Aubuisson traveled throughout Latin America seeking military and political support for his Broad National Front--an ultra-conservative group of wealthy Salvadorans.

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

[REDACTED]

D'Aubuisson's personal following is limited to a handful of wealthy civilians and some extreme rightist 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 have looked to more senior officers for leadership.

[REDACTED]

Nevertheless, D'Aubuisson could play a spoiler role by continuing to encourage right-wing terrorists--many of whom are enlisted personnel in the security forces--and by issuing inflammatory public declarations against the junta and those sympathetic to the reform process. 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 on reforms and initiate an all-out civil war against the left could

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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. [REDACTED]

Right-Wing Terrorism

The ultra-right 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 failed peasant rebellion in 1932. In the 1960s, a surge of political activity among peasants and urban workers led to the creation of many new right-wing organizations, both official and clandestine. [REDACTED]

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 and suspected enemies of the regime but only occasionally taking direct action against them. [REDACTED]

Augmenting the semiofficial organizations were a variety of secret vigilante groups that have faded in and out of existence. Traditionally, right-wing death squads have included civilian mercenaries, idealists tied to particular wealthy elites, and active and retired security force personnel. During the Romero regime (1977-79), members of the security forces and the economic elite participated in the principal rightist terror organizations. 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. [REDACTED]

Leadership and Organization

Information on the leadership and organization of right-wing terrorist groups is sketchy. A small group of wealthy expatriates living in Guatemala and the US apparently are the chief backers for the several clandestine right-wing groups now operating in El Salvador. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

A small group of wealthy Salvadorans living in Miami are believed to be behind the kidnapping and intimidating of other businessmen who have shown sympathy for the civil-military government or US policy in El Salvador. These individuals reportedly fund the right-wing death squads in El Salvador, and may have ordered the deaths of the two US AFL-CIO representatives assassinated in January. Tied to this group of wealthy expatriates are businessmen in El Salvador who belong to the Broad National Front. This organization is headed by a young ultra-conservative, [REDACTED] and Major Roberto D'Aubuisson.

[REDACTED]

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 US. The involvement of security force personnel in rightist terrorism insures a further supply of arms and license to use them. For example, this week's attack on the Nicaraguan Embassy in San Salvador by assailants using RPG-2 rockets follows the capture over the past month or so of a substantial supply of these weapons by government troops.

[REDACTED]

Membership in right wing 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 civilian elements. Mercenaries outside armed forces ranks are also utilized.

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We are unable to determine the extent to which former Nicaraguan National Guard personnel may be involved in this activity. Following Somoza's overthrow, some 1,300 Nicaraguan troops arrived in El Salvador, the vast majority enlisted personnel. [REDACTED] suggested a large number of these personnel were to be integrated into the Salvadoran armed forces, but we never received confirmation and suspect 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 right wing terror, but it is impossible to estimate numbers.

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The rumor that Guatemalan troops or paramilitary forces are active in El Salvador is heard frequently. [REDACTED]. Our information confirms contacts and consultations between right wing Salvadoran and Guatemalan elements--and some civilian terrorist personnel may have trained in Guatemala with like minded organizations--but we have no persuasive evidence that significant assistance has taken place. It seems extremely unlikely that the Guatemalan Government would have authorized the dispatch of government personnel, in mufti or otherwise, to El Salvador. [REDACTED]

Nonetheless, even prior to the self-exile of El Salvador's conservative economic elite, there were frequent contacts between hard lining 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, [REDACTED] have discussed the possibility of providing funds or men to the Salvadoran right wing. Although the current level of right wing 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. [REDACTED]

The question regarding weapons traced back to US military posts is based on a misunderstanding. Weapons--specifically those captured at Comayagua, Honduras, in late January--have been traced back to US forces formerly in Vietnam, not to stores recently held at US bases.

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