

[REDACTED]

13 April 1989

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: President-Elect Alfredo Cristiani

1. Given the wide press coverage of the official visit of El Salvador's President-elect Cristiani last week, I thought it would be useful to highlight key points covered during his presentation at the National Press Club on 7 April. [REDACTED]

2. The greatest number of questions focused on the extent of Cristiani's knowledge of death squads and his plans to control them. Cristiani seemed prepared to deal with this topic and gave a historical perspective, explaining that death squads were institutionalized in the late 1970's to deal with a growing insurgent threat which the military was ill-prepared to counter. He stressed, however, that death squads have been dismantled--and discredited--since 1981 and his government will vigorously prosecute individuals who are suspected of carrying out acts of vigilante violence. [REDACTED]

3. To reduce the incidents of rightwing violence, Cristiani emphasized several times that US aid should be focused on supporting efforts to improve the security services' ability to cope with terrorist activity and on improving the justice system. Specifically, he said he wants to create a civil service for judges, promoting them on merit rather than political patronage. (At present, judges at all levels are appointed by the Legislature and prior experience is not a prerequisite.) [REDACTED]

4. In response to repeated queries about Roberto D'Aubuisson, Cristiani denied having any proof that he was ever directly involved in death squad activity and defended his right to continue to have a role in ARENA. While reiterating his promise to crack down on suspected death squad members--including, by implication, D'Aubuisson--Cristiani did little to distance himself from D'Aubuisson. His emphasis on the party's new, broader base as evidence of ARENA's moderation probably did not go far enough to allay concerns about how much influence party hardliners will have over the direction of the party. [REDACTED]

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5. Cristiani seemed less sure of himself when responding to questions about his regional policy--which, [REDACTED] he is just now beginning to formulate. The president- [REDACTED] praised the US bipartisan accord. He also said he did not want to see the Contras dismantled because they are the most effective way to keep pressure on the Sandinistas to uphold their promise to democratize. He said his government will support continued humanitarian aid. Cristiani faulted Nicaragua for renegeing on past commitments and said he wanted to see free and fair elections there. Cristiani skirted the issue of whether the Contras should be repatriated, but did stress that the US should continue to support them until there is evidence of opposition participation in Nicaragua. [REDACTED]

6. Cristiani did not elaborate on his economic agenda, but repeated earlier promises to SLOWLY loosen state control over banking and exports. He said he wanted to focus US economic aid to El Salvador on the promotion of economic development, but he was not specific. The implication was that aid should be used to encourage industrialization and non-traditional exports, rather than on agrarian projects. [REDACTED]

7. Finally, Cristiani said he wants to seek a political solution to the war rather than a military victory. A political agreement with the rebels, he said, is the best way to ensure long term peace. He does not believe the guerrillas truly want peace, and cited the recent acquisition of large numbers of East Bloc AK-47s and other weapons as proof that the rebels will continue their military offensives. He emphasized his willingness to negotiate with them at any time once he takes office, but did not mention any possible new concessions. [REDACTED]

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Middle America-Cuba Division  
Central America Branch

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