

EL SALVADOR:

New Rightist Plots

Extreme rightists are plotting to form a new death squad and oust President Cristiani; the President plans to preempt a move against him by purging rightwing extremists from his government.

rightwing elements plan to kill leftist labor leaders, students, and politicians. Roberto D'Aubuisson, a leader of the ruling ARENA party, Vice President Francisco Merino, and other wealthy Salvadorans will pay squad members and cover expenses. The hit list would come from a former attorney general who traded information on alleged leftists for D'Aubuisson's aid in dismissing charges of corruption against him in the Legislative Assembly.

D'Aubuisson told ARENA associates he has plans to oust the government, which he claimed is being manipulated by the US.

Cristiani anticipates D'Aubuisson will try to remove him by force and plans to purge the government of D'Aubuisson loyalists. Cristiani hopes to initiate changes as soon as next week. Among those he will fire are Supreme Court President Mauricio Gutierrez Castro and Col. (Ret.) Sigifredo Ochoa, head of the government-owned electric company. The President also fears ARENA may lose support in the legislative election next March unless he improves its image by removing incompetent, corrupt officials.

Comment: Plans to form new death squads have surfaced several times over the past two years, but there is no proof any have been created. A number of disappearances and unexplained killings evidently by the right occur each year but at a greatly reduced rate from the early 1980s.

Cristiani's plan to challenge D'Aubuisson's influence may open the way for real reforms. The President's continued reluctance to name his own choice as Defense Minister, however, suggests he is not eager to confront ARENA's right wing. D'Aubuisson behaves erratically and drinks heavily, and his plots may be his usual bluster. He nonetheless remains a powerful figure whom no one seems willing to challenge directly.

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