

29 Nov 1982

EL SALVADOR: Growing Rightist Ascendancy

*The kidnapping and killing of prominent leftists in El Salvador on Thursday is the latest indication of growing rightwing dominance there.*

Five of the seven abducted leftist coalition leaders reportedly have been found dead. Despite government denials, the operation almost surely was carried out by security forces--possibly in retaliation for the brutal slaying last week of a ranking colonel and his family.

The military hierarchy has temporarily put off middle-level demands that the Christian Democratic junta members be dumped, [redacted] has gained civilian acquiescence to demands for a firmer hand in the counter-insurgency effort. Defense Minister Garcia, rather than the more centrist junta member Colonel Gutierrez, now appears to be the dominant military figure.

Progressive junta member Colonel Majano is now powerless, his ouster awaiting only a propitious occasion. Majano, who recently initiated political negotiations with the extreme left, runs a high risk of assassination.

The center is increasingly a no man's land. A major labor leader, one of only a handful of surviving prominent centrists, was recently assassinated. Leftists [redacted] initiating contact [redacted] they killed him. Both the leftists and the government-connected death squads are victimizing the centrists. Government personnel continue the executions of prisoners despite a new code of conduct.

The reform programs are in danger of becoming so incidental to the counterinsurgency as to lose their impact. Last week, a leading agrarian official charged that the frequent violence occurring on agricultural reform properties was part of an official campaign to destroy the political center and sabotage reform efforts.

Despite losses, the left has shifted back to attacks on military targets designed to provoke a rightwing coup, and it is making progress toward its objective.

The left will derive enormous propaganda value from these actions in its campaign to make the Salvadoran Government an international pariah. One of the victims was a former minister in the first reform junta and a highly respected national and international figure.