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31 March 1989

THE SITUATION IN  
CENTRAL AMERICA

Over the past month, the Central American governments have moved forward on the peace process and El Salvador has elected a new president. Both issues remain high policy concerns for the United States. [REDACTED]

The Central American Peace Process

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Approved for Release

NOV 1993

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### Situation in El Salvador

Finally, the election of a new President in El Salvador has altered the political equation there and raised concerns about the ARENA government's policies. Even before he assumes office on 1 June, President elect-Alfredo Cristiani--aware of US uncertainties about ARENA's policies on human rights<sup>8</sup>--will try to reassure Washington about his commitment to prevent the resurgence of rightwing death squad activity. Cristiani is in Washington this week for meetings with US officials.

- Despite Cristiani's desire to maintain ARENA's new moderate image, we expect to see an increase in rightwing vigilante activity by extremists who believe ARENA--tied in the past to tactics of violence and intimidation--will tolerate such activity. In addition, Cristiani will be under pressure from his party and many in the military to take a tougher stand against the left, and we expect his government to support legislation rescinding some civil liberties for suspected insurgents.<sup>9</sup>
- Senior military officers, however, are sensitive to US admonishments about human rights and would object to death squad activity that could be blamed on the Army and jeopardize US aid. [REDACTED]

Another major challenge facing Cristiani will be determining the role that the party's extremist founder, Roberto D'Aubuisson, will play in his administration.<sup>10</sup>

-- At least for the near term, we expect D'Aubuisson--who was associated with ARENA's death squad activities in the early 1980s--will keep a low public profile to defuse international criticism of the continued presence of hardliners in the party. We do not foresee major clashes between Cristiani and D'Aubuisson over policy in the near term. Both leaders will want to avoid the appearance of an open schism that the rebels and opposition parties could use to challenge ARENA's mandate.

-- Nevertheless, D'Aubuisson, who holds a seat in the National Assembly, will continue to be a dominant force in the party. Although he probably will focus on security issues, his legislative role will allow him to influence other policies as well. [REDACTED]

Although unable to seize power militarily and under growing pressure from the Army's improved counterinsurgency efforts, El Salvador's 7,000 Marxist insurgents are likely to continue to launch violent, headline-grabbing, terrorist attacks.<sup>11</sup> The guerrillas will try to portray the government as unable to control urban violence and attempt to tarnish the military's human rights record by provoking harsh over-reactions. The rebels also are likely to follow up their January peace proposal with new initiatives intended to keep the government on the defensive and break bipartisan support for aid to El Salvador.

-- [REDACTED] indicate that the insurgents, who previously relied primarily on US-made M-16s, are reequipping their frontline units with AK-47 and AKM assault rifles, possibly in preparation for a major offensive.<sup>12</sup>

-- Although the guerrillas claim the new munitions are being purchased from the anti-Sandinista rebels, [REDACTED] thus far indicates most are being shipped from Cuba through Nicaragua. None of the 19 East Bloc assault rifles captured thus far has been traced back to known Contra stocks, but some Contra stocks may trickle into El Salvador given the number of weapons involved in the Contra effort and Managua's capture of several caches of AK-47s [REDACTED]

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