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DEATH IN GUATEMALA CITY

A RECENT SPATE OF ASSASSINATIONS IN GUATEMALA CITY, AT LEAST SOME OF THEM POLITICALLY RELATED, REVEALS THE FRAGILITY OF THE PROCESS THROUGH WHICH THE COUNTRY IS GRADUALLY RETURNING TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT.

SOME OF THESE KILLINGS MAY HAVE BEEN TERRORIST ACTS, DEPENDING ON THE IDENTITIES AND MOTIVATIONS OF THE MURDERERS, WHICH IN MOST CASES HAVE YET TO BE DETERMINED. THIS POSSIBILITY IS OF SOME IMPORTANCE TO THOSE OF USE WHO CHRONICLE TERRORIST EVENTS; INDEED, IT IS THE REASON THE MURDERS ARE DESCRIBED IN THIS PUBLICATION. IN THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THE KILLINGS OCCURRED, HOWEVER, THE QUESTION OF WHETHER OR NOT THEY WERE TERRORIST ACTS CAN BE SEEN TO BE OF LITTLE RELEVANCE.

BUSINESSMAN MURDERED

ON 25 OCTOBER PROMINENT GUATEMALAN BUSINESSMAN FREDDY SEDRA CALDERON WAS FOUND MURDERED, TOGETHER WITH HIS BODYGUARD. THEY HAD BEEN KIDNAPED AROUND 3 OCTOBER BY SIX ARMED MEN ORIGINALLY IDENTIFIED IN THE PRESS AS POLICE INVESTIGATORS. IT NOW APPEARS LIKELY THAT THE TWO WERE KILLED AFTER RANSOM NEGOTIATIONS BROKE DOWN BETWEEN THE SEDRA FAMILY AND THE KIDNAPERS. TWO PERSONS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED IN CONNECTION WITH THE CASE.

PARTY LEADER ATTACKED

THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE NATIONAL UNITY FRONT (FUN), GABRIEL GIRON ORTIZ, REPORTED THAT, DURING THE EARLY MORNING HOURS OF 26 OCTOBER, UNKNOWN PERSONS FIRED SEVERAL SHOTS AT HIS HOUSE. ALTHOUGH NO ONE WAS HURT, GIRON REQUESTED PROTECTION FROM GOVERNMENT SECURITY FORCES.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLYMAN ASSASSINATED

ON 26 OCTOBER SANTOS HERNANDEZ, AN INDIAN DEPUTY IN THE NATIONAL CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY REPRESENTING QUICHE DEPARTMENT, WAS SHOT TO DEATH AS HE WAS WALKING ALONG A GUATEMALA CITY STREET. THE ASSAILANTS, SEVERAL MEN WHO ARRIVED IN TWO VEHICLES, ALSO KILLED HIS TWO BODYGUARDS. HERNANDEZ HAD BEEN ELECTED TO THE ASSEMBLY IN JULY AS A MEMBER OF THE FUN BUT ANGERED HIS PARTY BY SUBSEQUENTLY ANNOUNCING THAT HE WAS PLANNING TO SWITCH TO THE EXTREME RIGHTWING NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT (MLN). SPECULATION OVER THE IDENTITY OF HIS KILLERS HAS BEEN WIDE RANGING:

--THE FUN MAY HAVE KILLED HIM BECAUSE OF HIS INTENDED

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DEFECTION.

--THE MUX, WHICH WAS PLANNING A FORMAL CEREMONY TO ACCEPT HERNANDEZ INTO THE PARTY, MAY HAVE KILLED HIM TO PREVENT HIM FROM RECONSIDERING HIS DEFECTION, AS HE WAS RUMORED TO BE DOING.

--BUSINESS RIVALS MAY HAVE KILLED HIM TO BREAK HIS REPORTED MONOPOLY ON TRANSPORT IN HIS HOME REGION.

--EXTREME LEFTWING ELEMENTS MAY HAVE KILLED HIM TO EMBARRASS THE GOVERNMENT. [REDACTED]

TWO COMMUNIST PROFESSORS MURDERED

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ON 26 OCTOBER NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SAN CARLOS ECONOMICS PROFESSOR CARLOS DE LEON GUIDEL WAS SHOT TO DEATH BY UNKNOWN ASSAILANTS AS HE DROVE HOME FROM THE UNIVERSITY. THE FOLLOWING DAY, THE DEAN OF THE ECONOMICS FACULTY, VITALINO GIRON CORADO, WAS SHOT TO DEATH AS HE STOPPED AT A GAS STATION WHILE DRIVING TO THE FUNERAL OF DE LEON. THE ASSASSINS ARRIVED IN TWO CARS; THOSE FROM ONE CAR PULLED MRS. GIRON AWAY FROM HER HUSBAND, WHILE THOSE FROM THE SECOND CAR SHOT HIM. [REDACTED]

A GOVERNMENT STATEMENT ABOUT THE MURDERS IMPLIED THE TWO PROFESSORS HAD BEEN MURDERED BY COMMON CRIMINALS, BUT IT SEEMS MORE LIKELY THEY WERE EITHER KILLED BY GOVERNMENT SECURITY FORCES--DE LEON HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN KIDNAPED AND THEN RELEASED BY SECURITY PERSONNEL--OR THAT THEY DIED AS A (MEX LEADER GIRON THEN REVEALED THAT HERNANDEZ WAS ILLITERATE AND TRIED TO TAKE HIS PLACE IN THE ASSEMBLY, BUT THE ASSEMBLY VOTED INSTEAD TO LET HERNANDEZ KEEP HIS SEAT, SAYING HE COULD SERVE AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE COUNTRY'S 4 MILLION ILLITERATES. (U)) CONSEQUENCE OF AN INTERNECINE STRUGGLE IN THE GUATEMALAN LABOR (COMMUNIST) PARTY (PCT). BOTH WERE RUMORED TO BE MEMBERS OF THE PCT ORTHODOX FACTION, AND THE UNIVERSITY IS CURRENTLY IN THE THROES OF A PCT-FOMENTED LABOR DISPUTE. [REDACTED]

THE US EMBASSY FEARS THAT THE DEATHS OF THE TWO COMMUNIST PROFESSORS INDICATE THAT THE RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY, DR. EDUARDO MEYER, IS IN EXTREME JEOPARDY. MEYER, WHO REFUSES TO USE BODYGUARDS, IS SOMETIMES MENTIONED AS A LIKELY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. AN ATTACK AGAINST HIM WOULD, IN THE EMBASSY'S VIEW, BE A MAJOR SETBACK TO THE PROCESS OF RETURNING GUATEMALA TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT. MOREOVER, ACCORDING TO THE EMBASSY, IN THE PAST WHEN ITS MEMBERS HAVE BEEN MURDERED, THE PCT HAS RETALIATED IN KIND. THUS THE GROUND HAS BEEN PREPARED FOR A CYCLE OF RETALIATORY ASSASSINATIONS. [REDACTED]

US PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER SLAIN

ON 23 OCTOBER IN GUATEMALA CITY, A US PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER WAS FOUND SHOT TO DEATH. WITH HELP FROM THE US EMBASSY, WHICH HAD RECEIVED A TIP, A FEW DAYS LATER POLICE IDENTIFIED AND ARRESTED THE APPARENT KILLER, A YOUNG GUATEMALAN. ACCORDING TO HIM, THE KILLING WAS BASICALLY AN ACCIDENT. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE SOME HOLES IN HIS STORY, THERE WERE APPARENTLY NO POLITICAL OVERTONES TO THE INCIDENT. [REDACTED]

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