

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

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Honorable Michael D. Barnes, Chairman
Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs
Committee on Foreign Affairs
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I appreciate this opportunity to clarify for you the quote from me in The Wall Street Journal on 16 July 1982 about U.S. assistance to El Salvador during that country's recent election process.

As Chairman of the Subcommittee on Inter-American Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, I am sure you were aware of and understood the U.S. Government's concern that El Salvadoran citizens be allowed to vote without fear of intimidation from the guerrilla forces, who had made no secret of their intention to do everything in their power to disrupt the elections. Indeed, you will recall on the evening of the national election, the entire U.S. television audience saw how the guerrillas succeeded in aborting the election in the provincial capital of Usulután by terrorizing its citizens.

I have in some talks, and in this instance in response to a question from a Wall Street Journal writer, explained the nature of the kinds of special activities undertaken in support of the President and U.S. policy in today's world. The way I was quoted in the Journal was taken out of context and interpreted falsely by Mr. Robert E. White in his article "Certifying El Salvador," which appeared in The New York Times on 27 July 1982. As I indicated to The New York Times in my letter to The Editor, which was printed on 30 July, the assistance to which I alluded was to help the Salvadoran Government protect El Salvadoran citizens from being intimidated from voting. My second objective was to describe the purposes of the kinds of assistance now undertaken as special activities as a contrast to the popular perceptions of special activities of the past. In the case of El Salvador, assistance included (1) providing the Salvadoran Government with information and capabilities which helped it reduce the supply of weapons from Cuba and Nicaragua and resist guerrilla attacks intended to destroy the election process, and (2) providing Salvadoran election authorities with invisible ink which helped to keep the identity of the voters from the guerrillas and thereby avoided their retaliation against the citizens who had exercised their right to vote.

P310

I have publicly expressed my concern on more than one occasion during the past year about the methods guerrillas use to take advantage of underlying social and economic discontent to disrupt democratic processes in small beleaguered nations. Most recently, in a speech to the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, California, on 21 May 1982, I used El Salvador to illustrate my concern in a way that I believe gets to the heart of your question:

El Salvador provided an example of how we can help these beleaguered nations defend themselves. The training of El Salvadoran troops and officers in the United States imparted new capabilities to the government Army. The success of the recent elections in El Salvador came largely from developing new intelligence sources and showing the El Salvadoran Army how to use intelligence to break up guerrilla formations before they could attack provincial capitals in order to stop the voting. This resulted in the American television audience seeing in living color Usulután, the provincial capital nearest Nicaragua, with its streets empty and its inhabitants huddled behind closed doors as guerrillas fired their rifles at doorways. Then, a minute later, this television audience saw in the rest of the country long lines of people patiently waiting in the hot sun to cast their vote. That contrast in a few minutes wiped out weeks of distortion and propaganda about what has been happening in Central America.

Today, El Salvador has a new government and a vote of the people has overwhelmingly rejected the insurgents, organized, supplied and directed from Nicaragua and Cuba, in their attempt to stop the election. Next door in Honduras, a democratically elected civilian government, to which the military are fully subordinated, presides over a free and open society. Nicaragua can't stand this contrast to its own militarized and totalitarian society in which opposition forces, free expression, and civil liberties and human rights are being stamped out. So instructions have gone out and Communist and extreme leftist elements in Honduras have begun to hijack airplanes, plant dynamite in buildings and otherwise lay the groundwork for revolutionary violence in their determination to see that free democratic government does not succeed in Central America.

If I can be of further assistance to you on this matter, please let me know.

Sincerely,

William J. Casey

William J. Casey
Director of Central Intelligence

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