

DATE: 27 July 1988

25X1 TO: [redacted]
25X1 FROM: Dr. Kenneth Nolde, DB-3E2, [redacted]
SUBJECT: Background Paper, El Salvador

25X1 1. (C/[redacted]) Within the Salvadoran military there are two identifiable chains of command: the nominal and real or actual. In the nominal system the Chief of State is the overall head, with the Minister of Defense and Public Security (MOD) under him. Directly subordinate to the MOD are the Armed Forces Chief of Staff and the Director General of Public Security Corps: Treasury Police, National Police, National Guard and the paramilitary Territorial Service. All elements of the regular military are subordinated to the Armed Forces Chief of Staff. In practice the nominal chain of command exists only on paper and represents what the Constitution has prescribed.

25X1 2. (C/[redacted]) The real or actual system reflects the chain of command as it actually functions. In practice the Chief of State has little or no influence and the Minister of Defense makes all military decisions. The Chief of Staff and the General Staff are bypassed by departmental commanders who report directly to the MOD. Officers designated as one of the 14 departmental commanders are the most important field commanders and their additional titles as brigade, military detachment or battalion commanders are meaningless except as an administrative accounting devise. With the departmental commanders reporting directly to the MOD and receiving orders from him, the Chief of Staff, and the General Staff agencies under him, function only in administrative and planning roles to support MOD decisions.

25X1 3. (C/[redacted]) The military leadership and the MOD, in particular, have been working very hard to bring all elements of the regular forces under centralized control. This has meant that the traditional autonomy of departmental commanders had to be severely restricted. In past, the departmental commanders had the direct responsibility for all security matters in their department and could exercise a great deal of individual judgment because their orders or directives were very general. In order to limit the individualism of these commanders, the MOD now requires strict adherence to his orders or directives and officers have been removed for refusing to obey. Publically and privately, the MOD has told all commanders that arbitrary violence and human rights abuses are to cease. The effect has been a marked decline in acts of violence by the regular armed forces. The improved functioning of the chain of command has made it almost impossible for acts of wanton violence to go undetected. Further, the military has been removing undesirables and members of the military are being held responsible for their actions. Personal accountability for actions in the field or elsewhere is an innovation that has no historical precedent. While the number of personnel being punished is not great, its effects are becoming widespread and is believed to have contributed to the reduction in abuses.

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4. (C [redacted] Within the public security forces, the situation is not as clear as that of the regular armed forces. The major difference is that they are not part of the formal structure of the Armed Forces and outside of the Armed Forces chain of command. The security forces operate in the same areas as do the regular Armed Forces and are theoretically subordinate to the departmental commander. Nevertheless, very often these units ignore the departmental commander in favor of reporting to their respective Director General. In this traditional role as a police force they are used to settling disputes on the spot and are normally stationed in isolated outposts with poor communications, imprecise orders and often not well trained. At any time, there are more than one hundred outposts manned by security forces and in most cases they represent the only law or protection in their immediate area because the Armed Forces are unable to provide a presence. The physical and communicative isolation of the security forces has reinforced their tradition of independent action and makes direct command and control extremely difficult. Nevertheless, security force members have been removed, prosecutions are pending for some, improved training with emphasis on protecting the rights of non-combatants and increased coordination with the regular Armed Forces are all measures that have been introduced in the past year to improve control over security forces.

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5. (C [redacted] The Minister of Defense, General Jose Guillermo Garcia, is on record as opposing any action by the military which would add to the suffering of the people or abuse their human rights. His message to the Armed Forces, in March 1982 and subsequently repeated, strongly reiterated his position that abuses of human rights would not be tolerated and those found guilty of such abuses would be severely punished.

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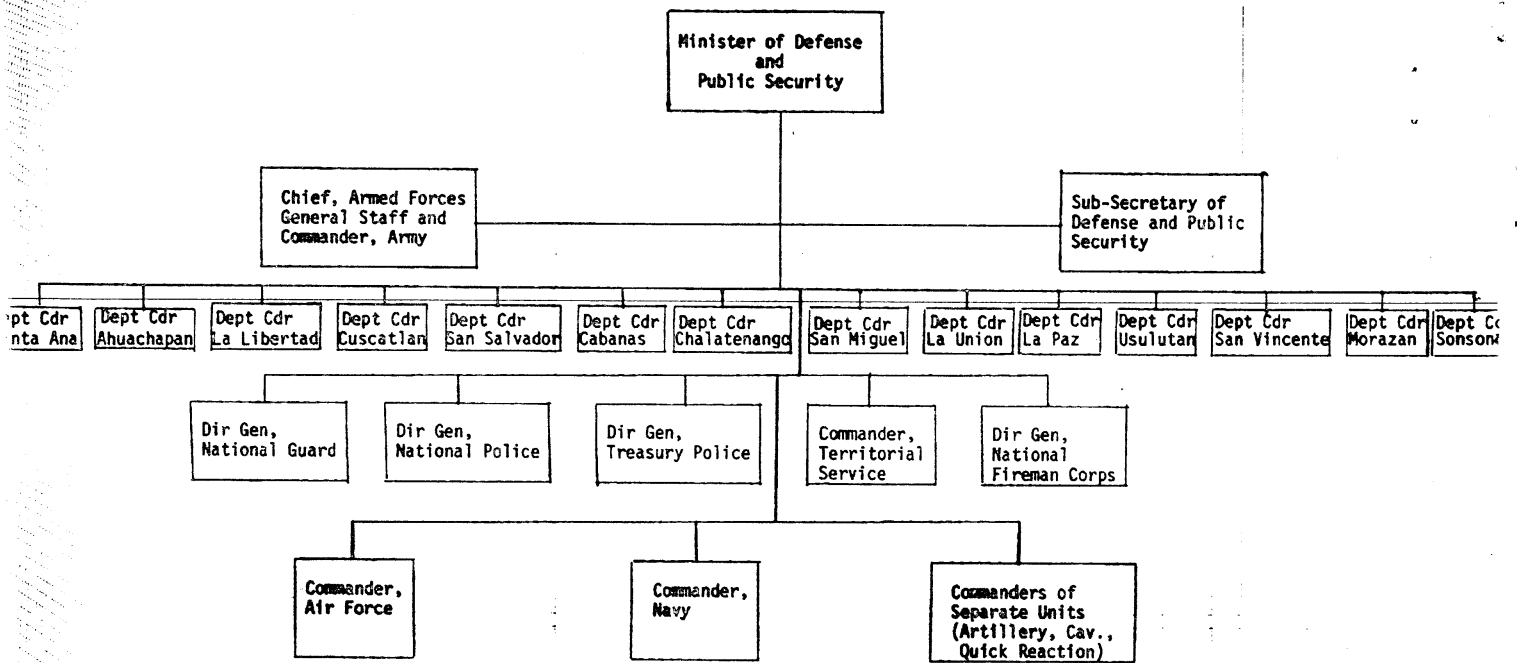
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