



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Office of Legislative Counsel
Washington, D. C. 20505

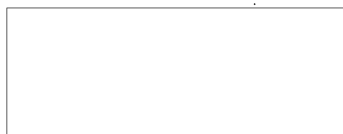
Telephone:

25 MAR 1982

TO: Ms. Diane La Voy
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Diane:

Heard your request re Archbishop Romero's assassination: We have conducted a thorough review of all NID articles from 24 March to December of 1980 and have surfaced little in the way of speculation. The enclosed items, however, may be of some interest to you.



Legislative Liaison

Enclosures

FORM 1533 OBSOLETE
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25 MAR 1982

EL SALVADOR: Reaction to Romero's Assassination

Public reaction to Archbishop Romero's assassination is now beginning to develop, but there have been no widespread demonstrations so far. Unless the junta's investigation produces quick results, Salvadorans will be increasingly likely to blame the government. In the meantime, yesterday's sporadic guerrilla bombings in the capital probably will continue throughout the three-day mourning period.

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26 March 80

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BRIEFS AND COMMENTS

EL SALVADOR: Assassination of Archbishop Romero

The assassination yesterday of Archbishop Romero--the most influential public figure in El Salvador--could provoke widespread violence and further dim the government's chances of survival.

The killing, unquestionably the work of rightwing terrorists, is likely to provoke violent reprisals by the extreme left and could touch off a popular insurrection. Reaction to the assassination also may split the coalition government, already weakened by dissension over the military's failure to curb rightist violence. Regardless of guilt, the military will at least stand accused of having inspired the shooting, and the US--because of a perceived association with the military--may also share the blame. The ultraconservative opposition views the possible collapse of the ruling junta as a way to drive the civilians from the government and engineer a restoration of repressive military rule.

Known as the champion of the poor, the Archbishop had been the nation's most articulate critic of repression and social injustice, and had recently stepped up his denunciations of violence by the security forces and the right. He also came close to endorsing the alliance of extreme-left organizations as a political alternative.

Much will depend on the government's handling of the funeral procession, the first opportunity for a massive demonstration of popular sentiment after the killing. Any overreaction by the security forces in such a tense situation could trigger an uprising in the streets of the capital, followed by other revolts in rural areas.

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EL SALVADOR: Violent Burial

Turnout for the funeral of Archbishop Romero was far less than predicted--estimates range from 20,000 to 50,000--but the ceremony was interrupted by gunfire and bombings that reportedly panicked the crowd and left numerous dead and injured. The government, which had ordered security forces off the streets, blamed the extreme leftist alliance for provoking the disorders. As in past incidents of this type, however, there were charges of both leftist and rightist responsibility for the killings. [redacted]

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The left will probably continue efforts to capitalize on the assassination. After an uncertain start last week, the general strike called by radical organizations could gather momentum in the aftermath of yesterday's violence. One terrorist group reportedly plans to murder an ultraconservative leader allegedly involved in Romero's murder. After the cabinet resignations Thursday, which have further weakened the Christian Democrats' confidence in the junta, more violence or economic disruption will severely test the government's ability to survive. [redacted]

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EL SALVADOR: Status Report

The repercussions of the assassination of Archbishop Romero-- including cabinet resignations and strong international criticism-- is eroding the junta's legitimacy. [redacted]

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Three cabinet officials--two of whom are prominent Christian Democrats--resigned Thursday and left the country because of the government's failure to curb rightwing violence. Their departure could prompt more defections from the government. [redacted]

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Extremist violence continues, but increasingly aggressive search operations by security forces are taking a toll on the left. One leftist guerrilla group may have decided to suspend activities, and the propaganda campaign of the largest radical front organization has been seriously hampered. [redacted]

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The left also may be influenced by advice from Cuba, which sees Romero's killing as a rightwing ploy to draw the left into an armed showdown with the military. Havana reportedly has counseled against street demonstrations for the time being. [redacted]

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Nonetheless, some radical elements--which have already accused the US of complicity in Romero's murder-- probably intend to turn the massive funeral procession planned for tomorrow into an antigovernment demonstration. [redacted]

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The assassination of Romero has hardened international opinion against the junta. At its meeting in Santo Domingo this week, the Socialist International formally condemned both the Salvadoran Government and US support for the junta. Nicaragua's withdrawal of its Ambassador may presage a formal diplomatic break--if major violence persists; Mexico apparently is contemplating a similar move. The possibility of significant aid to the junta from Latin American and European countries appears increasingly remote. [redacted]

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29 March 80

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