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Toward Smarter Use of Intelligence

Your Feb. 1 editorial on El Salvador, "Trial by Ballot," erroneously states that: "The House Intelligence Committee studied the matter (D'Aubuisson's documents) and found no evidence to sustain a conclusion that Mr. D'Aubuisson had Archbishop Romero killed." The House Committee's staff report made no judgments on the innocence or guilt of Mr. D'Aubuisson or anyone else. The report examined the intelligence process and how certain issues such as the D'Aubuisson documents, Archbishop Romero's assassination and rightist violence were treated by the intelligence community.

What the report did say was: "During the two years since their capture, these documents had been virtually ignored, not only by policymakers who felt they had no immediate use for them, but more importantly, by the Intelligence Community. They did not receive the kind of routine intelligence evaluation given to a large number of the Salvadoran guerrilla documents captured later that year . . ."

The staff report examined the Archbishop Romero assassination from the standpoint of how it was treated in finished intelligence analysis. The report noted the dearth of hard data and systematic analysis and that the references in intelligence to the Romero killing had been quite incon-

sistent: "Intelligence analysts apparently had not systematically retained and correlated the data about killings and bombings that were publicly available and pertinent intelligence collection had not been made."

That the September 1982 staff report remains topical is reflected in the following judgment: ". . . collection weaknesses in the cases cited suggest that determining the perpetrators and any others responsible for authorizing specific instances of rightist terror has not been considered a suitable task for intelligence. Without deliberate collection by all appropriate means and without systematic correlation of available data about specific terrorist incidents, firm judgments about their significance politically or in terms of the accountability of particular security forces or individuals have been difficult."

Recent initiatives by the Administration to curb rightist violence in El Salvador were made possible by improvements in intelligence analysis and collection, improvements which the report urged in September, 1982.

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