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A D'AUBUISSON LINK TO PLOT UNCERTAIN

U.S. Aides Say Plan to Murder the Envoy Did Not Directly Involve the Salvadoran

By **LESLIE H. GELB**

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 23 — Administration officials with access to intelligence data from El Salvador said today that top right-wing leaders were not directly involved in a plot to kill the United States Ambassador there.

The officials said, however, that the plotters were known to be associates of Roberto d'Aubuisson, leader of the National Republican Alliance, known as Arena.

They said the intelligence reports did not establish direct presence in the plot to kill Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering by Mr. d'Aubuisson.

According to sources who saw the intelligence reports, however, senior Administration officials acted on the assumption that whether or not Mr. D'Aubuisson was directly involved, he would have influence with the plotters and be in a position to stop them.

[According to an official in El Salvador who has proved to have reliable knowledge of the plan to kill the Ambassador, United States intelligence sources received at least two reports last month providing details of the plot by members of Arena.

[Mr. d'Aubuisson was among those with knowledge of the plot, the official said. The reports convinced United States officials here and in Washington that the plan to assassinate Mr. Pickering was well-advanced, the official said.]

C.I.A. Receiving Reports

Officials here said that the Central Intelligence Agency in El Salvador had been receiving a steady flow of information about potential assassinations by both left-wing and right-wing groups. In early May, the reports intensified and included details of an effort to kill Mr. Pickering.

An authoritative source said that it was "all the same crowd" as Mr. d'Aubuisson.

The plot against Mr. Pickering was said to have been foiled when Gen. Vernon A. Walters, the Administration's special envoy, was sent to El Salvador to warn right-wing leaders against any attack.

An Administration official in Washington and two sources in El Salvador have been quoted as saying that Mr. d'Aubuisson was among a small group of Arena members who were said to have planned to kill Mr. Pickering.

General Walters was said to have told them that they would "regret," as one official put it, any mishap to the United States Ambassador or any other American.

The officials denied that General Walters offered Mr. d'Aubuisson a visa to the United States in return for his help. They stated that Mr. d'Aubuisson had been given and denied visas in the past, and that they simply ran out of reasons for further denials after the Salvadoran elections.

Mr. d'Aubuisson has since been in the United States for two or three days and returned to El Salvador, one official said today. There were other reports that Mr. d'Aubuisson had gone today from El Salvador to the United States.

According to a source in El Salvador, a letter from Senator Jesse Helms, Republican of North Carolina, regarding the role of Mr. Pickering in the Salvadoran elections did not help the Ambassador's already difficult position in that country.

Senator Criticized Ambassador

At the time of the Salvadoran presidential elections in early May, Senator Helms wrote a letter to President Reagan, which he then made public in El Salvador, in which he accused Mr. Pickering of siding with the eventual winner, José Napoleón Duarte, and of using his influence "to strangle liberty in the night." He demanded Mr. Pickering's recall.

After the letter and after Senator Helms also publicly accused the Central Intelligence Agency of buying votes for Mr. Duarte, White House officials said that the Senator met with President Reagan and apologized for any problems he may have caused and offered to do what he could to help in Salvador. An aide to Senator Helms today denied any apology was offered.

Senator Helms, in an interview Friday, called statements that he might have fueled feelings against Mr. Pickering in El Salvador "ridiculous."

Senator Helms also rejected reports that Mr. Reagan had reprimanded him about his remarks against Mr. Pickering and White House officials said today that there had been no such rebuke. The officials said that Senator Helms offered to help bring about a reconciliation between Mr. Duarte, the Christian Democrat, and Roberto D'Aubuisson, the conservative candidate favored by Mr. Helms, and that he had been helpful subsequently in trying to do this.

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Asked Friday about a possible connection between his statements and the plot, Senator Helms said: "That's a ridiculous statement. I'd have to be a mind reader. How can I know what d'Aubuisson is thinking? If you have evidence, you ought to present it through people who have the courage and integrity to be quoted by name."