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Doubts linger on El Salvador

Washington's perennial foreign-policy manipulators are trussing up another nation's people, this time the Salvadorans, for step-by-step delivery to the kind of national prison farm wherein dwell the hapless Nicaraguans. And the Cubans, the Vietnamese, and scores of others, right back to the Poles, who were trussed up and handed over at Yalta in 1944.

Each time the Washington giveaway formula is different. But it all leads to the same animal farm. American journalists, many of them, cheer the parade.

On El Salvador, our major media have almost feverishly embraced the black legend that Salvadoran free-enterprisers are vicious killers, cruel oppressors, and all that anti-capitalist class warfare says is evil.

In sharp contrast, such things as the Salvadoran guerrilla high command's May 1 communique claiming to have killed and wounded 18,000 Salvadorans in four years rarely get reported at all.

And nowadays, with the story of how the CIA used \$2 million to rig the Salvadoran elections against conservatives copiously on the record, journalists friendly to President Reagan are not supposed to mention this, "lest it hurt chances to get congressional military aid for

El Salvador." Thus communist armed aggression in that country is used to force us into making a mockery of democracy. As *The Wall Street Journal* editorialized on May 11, the president himself has fallen into a trap. Tiptoeing now can only set Mr. Reagan up for a "Duar-tegate" later.

Consider the time-sequence of leaks on CIA Salvadoran election-rigging. *The Washington Post* on May 3 prepared a story to front-page on May 4 saying the CIA as well as the Agency for International Development had helped fund the electoral defeat of the conservative candidate, Roberto D'Aubuisson. The CIA rushed that same day to the Senate Intelligence Committee to confess behind closed doors that it had indeed done so. Senators present did not confirm this to the Western Hemisphere Subcommit-

tee chairman, Sen. Jesse Helms, until days later.

But someone in the CIA got ready to flood leaks to *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* confirming the first *Washington Post* story of covert funding of Candidate Jose Napoleon Duarte. As I read the signs, the CIA is divided on El Salvador, for meanwhile it appears that a CIA source itself made sure that Sen. Helms would "stumble" onto the May 3 Senate Intelligence Committee show-and-tell session.

One yet-unpublicized part of the May 3 CIA confession to senators is that President Reagan himself did not know CIA funds were being used selectively against the Salvadoran anti-communist ARENA party, and that this twist was added by the bureaucratic policy-making in-group on its own. This is a fact of key importance to Mr. Reagan's political health.

Some of the intense behind-scenes top-level anti-Helms flap may have been designed to keep that key fact from emerging. The manipulators who torpedoed ARENA are safest if they can make it seem the president knew all of the scheme all along. To intimidate the whistle-blowers, rumors of "murder plots" and "death threats" against Americans in the scenario even have been peddled around Washington, giving the episode a John Le Carré flip-flop intrigue flavor.

Sen. Helms in fact stumbled — or was steered — onto the CIA election-rigging just in time to warn Mr. Reagan against the gross embarrassment of praising the Salvadorans' election of Mr. Duarte as "fair and democratic" in his nationally televised speech on May 8, just before copious CIA confessions to major American newspapers. The obvious White House ban on any journalist's question about the CIA caper at Mr. Reagan's press conference last week after the CIA confessions is embarrassing enough.

That the Senate should be less irate at the election-rigging than at Mr. Helms for his timely warning boggles the mind. Great senators

from Henry Clay to Arthur Vandenberg must be spinning in their graves. For what the CIA did to subvert El Salvador's elections violates sacrosanct Senate-ratified U.S. international pledges: the Charter of the Organization of American States, of the United Nations and many inter-American treaties. It violates, above all, the human and civic rights of the Salvadoran people.

If a White House with newly burned fingers believes Washington manipulators can — or indeed will wish to — moderate Mr. Duarte, surprises are in store. Mr. Duarte's ideology could scarcely be further from Mr. Reagan's.

Mr. Duarte says he plans to "investigate" alleged crimes by conservatives, even as he "prepares political space" for the communist guerrillas, who will no doubt arrive with tumbrels rattling. The Duarte dream, oft spoken during the campaign, is "absolute power" consolidated through electing a national assembly of "peasants and workers" in March 1985. That has a familiar sound.

With CIA funds and a few dollars more, his star-chamber inquisitors can buy witnesses for show trials convicting any political enemy of anything his "revolution" requires.

It will require finishing off the political and economic assets of the Salvadoran free-enterprise sector. As did the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, Mr. Duarte's "revolution" can of course buy itself a thin facade of business community support.

Washington's manipulators are playing a dangerous game with El Salvador. Its people overwhelmingly rejected the communist guerrillas in one election in 1982 and in two in 1984. It took the CIA, AID, and blatant vote-miscounting to give Mr. Duarte even a small majority, 100,884 votes, on May 6. Few in El Salvador want the communists in on running things.

Nor do they want Napoleon Duarte as a Maurice Bishop draped in an American flag. But that's what they're going to get from Washington. It seems.