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El Salvador: A Rebel Defector Talks

A high-ranking defector from one of El Salvador's two largest rebel groups has provided U.S. and Salvadoran officials with a detailed inside view of the operations of the government's left-wing opposition. Napoleón Romero García, a commander of the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) in San Salvador from March 1984 until he turned himself in to government authorities last April, has handed over lists of guerrilla leaders and sympathizers—and identified the two men who murdered U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Albert Schaufelberger in San Salvador in 1983. According to still-secret reports of his interrogation by Salvadoran officials, Romero, who has passed several lie-detector tests, claims the five main rebel groups now have between 6,000 and 7,000 troops—down from a high of 9,000 to 10,000 estimated by U.S. intelligence officials in late 1983. Financial aid and ammunition for the rebels are collected in Nicaragua before being smuggled into El Salvador, he says. The movement's top priorities, according to Romero: destabilizing El Salvador's economy and sabotaging its infrastructure. Secondary goals include assassinating Salvadoran Air Force officers (especially pilots) and U.S. military advisers. Romero also provided details of rebel training in Soviet-bloc countries—including lessons in detonating plastic explosives in Cuba and a course in terrorist tactics in Vietnam.