

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

13 JUN 1984

The Honorable Robert S. Walker
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

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Dear Mr. Walker:

Thank you for your letter of 30 May and the enclosed 8 May newspaper article from The Christian Science Monitor. It is the general policy of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to neither confirm nor deny allegations about its activities appearing in the various media. However, the CIA considered the allegations contained in the above article to be so harmful and untrue that a statement was issued as follows:

"An article in the 8 May Christian Science Monitor makes the outrageous allegation that CIA officials have condoned death squad activities in El Salvador, provided training in torture techniques, and stood by while individuals were tortured. The CIA does not condone, participate in or promote, by instruction or by any other means, murder or the use of torture. Moreover, the U.S. intelligence services are prohibited from engaging in assassination by Presidential Executive Order."

In addition to this denial, you may be interested in advising your constituent of the findings of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) following its investigation of these charges in response to a "Resolution of Inquiry Concerning the Central Intelligence Agency and Death Squads in El Salvador," introduced by The Honorable James M. Shannon, House Resolution 467 (Report No. 98-709). On 25 April, the HPSCI met in closed session to consider the Resolution. HPSCI reached the following conclusions concerning these death squad allegations in the above report:

"Based on its rigorous review of intelligence documents and records which relate to or make mention of either Colonel Caranza or Mr. D'Aubuisson, the committee found no evidence of any Agency complicity in death squad activities in El Salvador. Nothing in the materials reviewed by the committee suggests any Agency violation of the Executive Order or applicable Agency policies."

"The committee's limited, but exhaustive, review within the confines of House Resolution 467 uncovered no facts which suggest improper Agency relationships."

"The committee considers that its review of applicable documents and files has been thorough."

Since the House Report 98-709 was printed on 25 April, it is regrettable that The Christian Science Monitor news reporter did not, it appears, take into consideration its findings, nor did he attempt to contact the Agency, as most news reporters do, for comment on the allegations before the article was published.

I hope these comments will alleviate the concerns expressed by your constituent.

Sincerely,

/s/ Clair E. George

Clair E. George
Director, Office of Legislative Liaison

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Salvador death squads, a CIA connection?

By Dennis Volman

Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

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San Salvador

The United States Central Intelligence Agency and US military advisers have helped organize and have financed, trained, and advised special Salvadorean Army and intelligence units which, although presumably set up for counter-intelligence purposes, subsequently have engaged in "death squad" activities.

These units, in the course of their counter-intelligence activities, frequently torture and sometimes kill Salvadorean citizens — apparently with the knowledge of their US mentors.

These charges are made by two well-informed sources, closely connected with the upper reaches of the Salvadorean political and military power structure. Circumstantial evidence backing up their charges comes from sworn testimony given to the leading human rights group in El Salvador, the legal protection division (Tutela

Legal) of the Roman Catholic Archbishop's office.

In Washington, according to well-placed congressional sources, the US Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence is currently opening an investigation of Salvadorean death squads. Some senators on the committee have raised questions about possible CIA connections with the death squads.

One of the Monitor's two main sources for the charges about a US connection with death squad activities is a politically conservative, very prominent Salvadorean civilian, widely respected for his moral probity. The other is a Salvadorean of high military rank with strong links to Salvadorean intelligence circles.

Both sources discussed the charges at length with this correspondent and made additional allegations about the involvement of senior Salvadorean officials in death squad activities. They refused to allow their names to be published for fear of retribution. The two sources have no direct links with each other but, for different reasons, both say the bulk of their direct knowledge of the situation ended in December 1983. However, they believe the situation has not substantially changed since then.

The civilian source has knowledge of death squad activities in three ways: through a high-ranking civilian professional working in the Salvadorean Army general staff headquarters, where many of the acts reportedly have taken place; through close friendship with some of the victims, some of whom were tortured and released and others tortured to death; through his close contacts with high-level Salvadorean military officials. He is morally outraged that such activities, and what he sees as the US connections with them, are taking place and says he believes it essential that they be made public knowledge.

"How absurd you Americans are," this civilian source remarked bitterly. "With the one hand you send your vice-president here to control the death squads, and with the other you participate in them."

His reference to the US vice-president was to George Bush's visit to El Salvador in December last year in which Mr. Bush pressed the Salvadorean authorities to put an end to death squad activities and remove officers allegedly involved in them.

Last year, there were more than 5,000 unsolved murders, abductions, and disappearances in El Salvador, according to the archbishop office's Tutela Legal. Most of these acts are attributed to rightist death squads and their allies in the Salvadorean military and security forces. After the Bush visit, the figures declined in January and February; but they went back up in March, although they remained significantly lower than before the vice-president's visit.

The Monitor's military source is closely connected with El Salvador's military-security structure. A man of strong conservative views, he says that his overriding motive for speaking out is a deep concern about a possible communist takeover if there are not major changes in the country's political-military structure. He is convinced that these changes cannot occur without an end to the killing and corruption, and to what he too is convinced are US links with death squad-type activities.

This latter opinion is also reflected among some prominent US congressional staffers who say that little progress can be made in bringing about reforms in Central America until CIA policies in the region are curbed and the CIA's political influence within the Reagan administration and Central America is diminished.

According to both of the Salvadorean sources, the Salvadorean group most directly linked with the CIA is the National Intelligence Agency (ANI). This is an operations-oriented counter-intelligence group originally set up under CIA direction about four years ago, and still financed and advised by the CIA.

As part of its function, the two sources say, ANI keeps watch over, detains, interrogates, generally tortures, almost always beats, and sometimes kills suspects that it believes have links with leftist organizations. ANI is under the command of Col. Rinaldo Goelcher and Col. Gabriel Contreras who, according to the military source, are in close and regular contact with the CIA station chief at the American Embassy.

ANI headquarters, says the military source, are located three blocks from the entrance of Colonia San Francisco, an upper-class residential neighborhood in the capital city of San Salvador. A visit to the area shows a high-walled building under military guard. ANI also has military intelligence branches in the provinces of San Vicente and La Unión, adds the military source.

Most of the killings, both Monitor sources say, result from the tortures used in attempts to extract intelligence information. People die during torture, they say, or are killed because the torturer leaves marks on the bodies which he realizes could be used to prove what was done to the victims.

The conservative civilian source adds that ANI has also participated in the more traditional death squad activity of "disappearing" people — that is, kidnapping victims, often from their homes, killing them, and then dumping their bodies into the sea or remote areas.

He says that the victims are not necessarily people with left-wing views. He cites one leading Salvadorean professional of moderate political views who was arrested by the security forces. When the source was able to meet this professional again later, he had been turned mentally into a "child" by torture.

Both of the Monitor's main sources say that closely connected to ANI are the two intelligence departments of

the Salvadorean armed forces general staff, Department 2 and Department 5. While ANI is operations-oriented, they add, these general staff departments are directed toward intelligence-gathering and have US military advisers who are mainly Cuban-Americans.

According to the civilian source, the two departments pick victims up and torture them, sometimes to death. The tortures, he says — usually beatings, burnings, and electric shocks — are often conducted in the building housing the headquarters of the armed forces general staff in San Salvador. He stresses that the existence of the torture activities is common knowledge at Salvadorean general staff headquarters and rules out the possibility that the US advisers are unaware of them.

The civilian source states that both Departments 2 and 5 were originally under the direct personal control of the then-armed forces chief of staff, Gen. Rafael Flores Lima. In the spring of 1983, Col. Mario Reyes Mena took over the position for only a few months. Then, when Col. Adolfo Onecifero Blandon replaced Reyes Mena as armed forces chief of staff in 1983, according to Salvadoran military sources, he also took over the direction of Departments 2 and 5.

Colonel Blandon is described by a number of Salvadorean sources as deeply involved in the activity of death squads when he was provincial commander of Santa Ana Province before becoming armed forces chief. General Flores Lima is now vice-minister of defense.

According to the civilian source, US Army Col. David Rodríguez, a Cuban-American, helped to organize general staff Departments 2 and 5 several years ago.

Both ANI and general staff Departments 2 and 5 grew out of the original Salvadorean National Security Agency (ANSESAL). According to leading military sources in El Salvador, ANSESAL was created in 1962 with heavy CIA and US military participation. At the same time, the agency helped organize parallel organizations in Guatemala and Nicaragua (then ruled by Anastasio Somoza Debayle), called ANSEGAT and ANSENIC, respectively.

Over the years, ANSESAL received consistent CIA advice and training. The Salvadorean agency was dissolved after the first liberal military coup in October 1979. Salvadorean military officials say the agency was responsible for hundreds of cases of torture and death.

After ANSESAL was dissolved, there was a restructuring of the military junta (more conservative members were added) and ANI and general staff Departments 2 and 5 were organized to replace ANSESAL in the early '80s. Thus the connection between ANI and the general staff departments on the one hand and the CIA on the other has a longstanding institutional base.

According to the conservative civilian source, the US military advisers to the general staff Departments 2 and 5 have met regularly at 10 at night in a flower shop in San Salvador with a US Embassy official of Cuban-American background who officially works in the consular section of the embassy. The Monitor has been given his name, but will not publish it. There are legal prohibitions on naming possible US CIA agents.

The name of the flower shop is "Garden." It is owned by a right-wing but anti-Somocista Nicaraguan woman named Leandra Mora. Her role, if any, is unknown to the civilian source.

Evidence that tends to back up some of the two main sources' charges about US links to death squad-type activities has appeared in sworn testimony submitted to Tutela Legal.

In July 1983, four men and women working in the section of refugee assistance of the archbishop's office were arrested by Salvadorean security forces. The following month they gave testimony in confidence to the archbishop's office, in the presence of Western officials, that during the torture and interrogation to which they were subjected, some of their interrogators were American and constantly spoke English to each other. One of the group testified that an English-speaking "American-looking man" was present when he was picked up.

"I became aware that my interrogations took place on the second floor of the National Police headquarters, during which I always heard voices in English from people around me and voices of people translating," said one of the workers from the archbishop's office in his sworn testimony. "When the English-speaking people were sometimes not in the interrogation room, I became aware that sometimes the [Salvadorean] detectives would have them called in order to consult on some detail with them."

Additional testimony came from a young official of one of El Salvador's guerrilla groups, the People's Revolutionary Army, who was arrested on May 30, 1983. In sworn statements given to the archbishop's office in Au-

gust 1983, he describes his tortures and interrogations and states that one of his interrogators looked like an American and spoke Spanish with an American accent.

(Allegations that the CIA helped train Salvadorean security forces in torture techniques appeared in an article in the May 1984 issue of the Progressive magazine. The article by Allan Nairn included an interview with a former member of the Salvadorean Treasury Police using the pseudonym of Rene Hurtado. He said that members of the Treasury Police — one of El Salvador's three main police forces with the National Police and Hacienda Police — were given a course in torture methods by US instructors for one month in 1980. The course, like the tortures said to be practiced by Departments 2 and 5, was held in Salvador's armed forces staff headquarters.)

The Monitor's military source says that the man he describes as the top-ranking officer on the CIA payroll, Treasury Police chief Nicolas Carranza, was also the officer most actively involved with the death squads.

(A New York Times report of March 22 asserted that Carranza received \$90,000 a year from the CIA. This report was confirmed by sources in the CIA, the Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence, and the State Department. Carranza has denied the allegations.)

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Salvadorean armed forces chief of staff Adolfo Bandon has told US legislators and prominent Salvadoreans that Colonel Carranza will be removed from his post. The Monitor has learned that he is likely to be made a general and sent to a post in Rome.

Further charges against Carranza and the Salvadorean military staff are made by the Monitor's military source. According to him, the only death squad that is allowed to carry out politically delicate assassinations like that of Roman Catholic Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero in March 1980 is the squad run by Carranza in the Treasury Police.

According to this military source, although Carranza carried out day-to-day supervision of the squad's activities, ultimate approval of all of its major actions has to be given, directly or indirectly, by the Armed Forces Security Council. This council is made up of the top military leaders including, among others, armed forces chief of staff Colonel Bandon, Defense Minister Gen. Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, Vice-Minister of Defense General Flores Lima, Air Force chief José Rafael Bustillo, Treasury Police chief Colonel Carranza, and National Police director Col. Carlos Reynaldo López Nuila.

According to the Monitor's civilian source, one member of the council especially implicated in the death squads is Air Force General Bustillo. He describes Bustillo as "today, the great untouchable strong man of the death squads." One Western official states that the Salvadorean Air Force's torture methods are the most sophisticated in the country.

Another Salvadorean Security Council member said to be involved in the death squads is Colonel López Nuila, head of the National Police. The Monitor's military source added further charges to an article published in this newspaper Dec. 7 last year which asserted that one of the most notorious death squads in El Salvador had direct ties to the National Police. The military source states that Colonel López Nuila lent his men to Mr. d'Aubuisson to participate in death squad actions. The colonel also, according to this source, organized such death squad actions himself.

American officials and Salvadorean sources say López Nuila, a member of the official Salvadorean Human Rights Commission, is trusted by, and close to, the US Embassy.

Subsequent to the Monitor's article last December, López Nuila conducted an investigation of the charges against his own National Police forces. Although the top levels of the US Embassy are convinced the investigation proved the charges to be groundless, an embassy officer following the investigation describes it as a "farce."

On a more general level, the US State Department and its representatives at the embassy are putting increasing pressure on the Salvadorean armed forces to control the bloodshed. Many US officials are hoping that the election of Christian Democrat José Napoleón Duarte (at time of writing not finally confirmed) will help to bring the killing under control.

There are reports that plans already have been made to try to remove some of the Salvadorean officers, such as Carranza, considered most responsible for death squad activities. According to prominent Salvadoreans, however, the soft treatment of Carranza underlines the basic problem: The bloodshed is not just the work of one or two high officers but rather was approved directly or indirectly by the bulk of the top echelons of the armed forces and is deeply rooted in the military structure.