

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE DC-11WASHINGTON POST
26 January 1984**JACK ANDERSON****'Death Squads'
Continue Despite
U.S. Pressures**

President Reagan would like to stamp out the infamous right-wing "death squads" that have cast a long shadow over the anti-communist cause in Latin America.

It won't be easy. The reasons:

- Our CIA may have helped set up the first death squads in Guatemala. They evolved out of the National Liberation Movement, a paramilitary-political organization that overthrew leftist president Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 with the not-so-covert aid of CIA agents.

- The CIA has continued to maintain contacts inside the death squads. The Reagan administration, therefore, knows more than it cares to admit about the composition and operations of the death squads. In fact, the administration has given a list of death squad leaders to the interim civilian president of El Salvador, Alvaro Magana.

- Some death squads operate through the World Anti-Communist League. This was once a respectable association of ultraconservative groups, but it has come increasingly under the influence of extremist,

even neo-Nazi organizations. Nevertheless, some of Reagan's staunch supporters continue to sympathize with the league.

- The president has solid intelligence that hard-core revolutionaries, trained and indoctrinated by the Soviets and Cubans, have moved into key positions in the rebel movements of Central America. The only way to stop the spread of communist influence in our back yard, White House aides say, is to bolster anti-communist governments in the region. But the death squads are so deeply entrenched in these governments that it is almost impossible to extricate them.

I have been investigating the death squads, which operate throughout Latin America under the name of La Mano Blanca (White Hand). In the cause of executing communists they have slaughtered tens of thousands of suspected leftists (including four U.S. churchwomen) without a trial. A loose rumor or accusation may bring a death sentence upon an entire family.

La Mano Blanca's political assassins are protected by a Mafia-like code of loyalty and silence. One of the rare sources who dared to talk about the death squads explained to my associate Jon Lee Anderson: "La Mano Blanca means that whoever is involved in the killing is protected by powerful, invisible hands. These

hands whitewash all evidence leading to a member."

An admitted assassin, whom I call El Lobo (The Wolf), boasted: "We go by different names in each country and make up new ones to confuse our enemies. But we are all La Mano Blanca."

The front organization for the death squads, he confirmed, is the Latin American Anti-Communist Confederation, an affiliate of the World Anti-Communist League. The affiliate, known by the initials CAL, pretends to keep its skirts clean of the clandestine murders. But sometimes the truth slips out.

At a World Anti-Communist League meeting in 1981, CAL Secretary Rafael Rodriguez came close to letting the black cat out of the bag. He boasted that many members of the Latin American affiliate were involved in "active resistance" to the communist threat, "whether with weapons, with the pen or with the spoken word. . . . Their mission is to back with action any authority-taking effective measures to oppose communism."

Despite pressure from the White House, no criminal charges have been brought in El Salvador or Guatemala for right-wing assassinations. La Mano Blanca is simply too powerful.

Meanwhile, the butchery goes on.