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Approved For Release 2005/07/01 : CIA-RDP91-00901R000700060043-1
23 June 1984

Salvador Right Reportedly Plotted To Assassinate U.S. Ambassador

By JAMES LEMOYNE

Special to The New York Times

SAN SALVADOR, June 22 — United States intelligence sources uncovered a plot by right-wing Salvadoran extremists to kill the United States Ambassador here last month, according to an Administration official in Washington and two sources in El Salvador.

They said Roberto d'Aubuisson, leader of the National Republican Alliance, known as Arena, was among a small group of Arena members who were said to have planned to kill the Ambassador, Thomas R. Pickering.

[In Washington, senior officials confirmed that the Administration had learned of a right-wing Salvadoran plot to assassinate the Ambassador and that a high-level official had been sent to El Salvador to issue warnings to the plot leaders. Page 5.]

The United States Embassy here officially refused to comment on the report. Mr. Pickering is in the United States on vacation and could not be reached for comment. Mr. d'Aubuisson also could not be reached.

On learning of the plan, the Reagan Administration sent its special envoy, Gen. Vernon A. Walters, to El Salvador to tell Mr. d'Aubuisson of "serious consequences" if it was carried out, according to the Administration official and the sources in El Salvador.

General Walters, according to one of the sources in El Salvador, met Mr. d'Aubuisson in the late afternoon of May 18 at the United States Ambassador's residence here. Mr. Pickering was also reported to be at the meeting.

"General Walters read the riot act," the official said. "The message was that we knew what was going on and it had better not happen."

Mr. Walters, who could not be reached for comment today, also was said to have told Mr. d'Aubuisson that he had a place in Salvadoran politics as an opposition leader if he chose to take it. In a final move, he reportedly offered Mr. d'Aubuisson a visa to visit the United States. Mr. d'Aubuisson received a single-entry visitor's visa on May 31. The United States had previously refused to grant a visa to Mr. d'Aubuisson.

It is not clear why the United States gave Mr. d'Aubuisson a visa after the reports of the plot against the Ameri-

can Ambassador. But the granting of a visa appears to be part of the effort to woo the Arena leader into a more moderate stance.

Today Mr. d'Aubuisson was reported by a member of his party to be in El Salvador. The party member said Mr. d'Aubuisson has a visa for the United States but has not used it.

Mr. d'Aubuisson is reported to want to visit the United States to meet with supporters of the Salvadoran exile community to reassess Arena strategy.

While General Walters, a former deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, warned Mr. d'Aubuisson, United States Embassy staff members here were told of an increased risk of attack and were asked to take special measures to safeguard their security, according to one of the sources in El Salvador.

The Arena members were said to have planned to kill Mr. Pickering because they were outraged by reported C.I.A. support for Mr. d'Aubuisson's opponents in two rounds of presidential elections in March and early May. Mr. d'Aubuisson lost the election to José Napoleón Duarte, head of the Christian Democratic Party, who took office earlier this month.

Role of Senator Helms

According to one of the sources in El Salvador, a letter from Senator Jesse Helms, Republican of North Carolina, complaining of reported American aid to Mr. d'Aubuisson's opponents and calling for Mr. Pickering's recall contributed to the Arena members' anger.

On learning of the plot, President Reagan reportedly called Mr. Helms into the White House and told him that he had acted irresponsibly, according to one of the sources in El Salvador.

Mr. Helms then attended Mr. Duarte's inauguration at the end of May and met with Mr. d'Aubuisson.

Senator Helms, who was in Raleigh, N.C. for a North Carolina Republican conference, could not be reached for comment.

However, Senator Helms's chief legislative assistant, James P. Lucier, denied in a telephone interview that Mr. Helms had been reprimanded by Mr. Reagan or any other White House official for publicizing the C.I.A. role in the Salvadoran election and for demanding Mr. Pickering's recall.

"It is a complete falsehood that he was called to the White House," Mr. Lucier said. "There was no suggestion that he had been irresponsible."

Mr. d'Aubuisson, a former army major, has been linked to right-wing death squads in the past. Arena has been backed by conservative landowners and businessmen, but it also appealed to a wider spectrum of conservative Salvadorans.

There have always been contradictions in United States policy toward Mr. d'Aubuisson and his party. United States officials have tried for two years to persuade Mr. d'Aubuisson to accept the democratic process and stop his contacts with right-wing extremists.

In the last year American officials have also publicized those same extremist contacts to embarrass Mr. d'Aubuisson.

After the Salvadoran Army high command decided to impose Alvaro Magaña, a well-known banker, as President after elections for a provisional government in 1982, General Walters reportedly met with Mr. d'Aubuisson to persuade him to accept the army's decision.

Mr. d'Aubuisson acquiesced and became head of the Constituent Assembly, a post he held until this year's presidential contest.

After a campaign in which Mr. d'Aubuisson called Mr. Duarte a "communist" and Mr. Duarte called Mr. d'Aubuisson a "fascist," Mr. Duarte won the presidency in early May with 54 percent of the vote. Mr. d'Aubuisson received almost 46 percent of the total.

Mr. d'Aubuisson and other senior Arena officials at first refused to accept the election results, saying that fraud had been committed. Later they asserted that reported C.I.A. interference invalidated the vote. As a sign of their anger, they refused to attend Mr. Duarte's inauguration.

The C.I.A. was reported in May to have given \$960,000 to Mr. Duarte's Christian Democratic Party and \$437,000 to the National Conciliation Party to support its presidential candidate, Francisco José Guerrero. The C.I.A. funds were reportedly given to block the possible election of Mr. d'Aubuisson.

Administration officials were known to have feared that Congressional support for El Salvador would have dried up if Mr. d'Aubuisson had won the presidency.

Since losing the election, Mr. d'Aubuisson's party appears to be suffering internal divisions. Some senior party officials have reportedly resigned and Mr. d'Aubuisson's leadership remains uncertain.

Mr. Duarte will hold the presidency for the next five years. Arena's only chance of political resurgence would appear to lie in municipal and legislative assembly elections next year.

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NEW YORK TIMES
23 June 1984

U.S. CONFIRMS PLOT TO MURDER ENVOY

Reagan Sent a High Official to Warn Salvador Rightists It Knew of Conspiracy

By HEDRICK SMITH

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 22 — Senior officials confirmed today that the Administration had learned of a Salvadoran right-wing plot to assassinate the American Ambassador. They said a high official had been sent to El Salvador to warn the leaders against carrying out the plot.

White House and State Department spokesmen refused to comment on a report from El Salvador that the Central Intelligence Agency had uncovered a plot against Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering.

The plot was laid to right-wing extremists, including Roberto d'Aubuisson, a candidate for President of the National Republican Alliance.

"There was concern about plots by the violent left and the violent right against various people, including our own people," a senior official said.

"We had pretty good intelligence about a plot against Pickering by the far right. It was not clear whether d'Aubuisson was actually involved in the plot or just in a position to stop it."

Reagan Said to Send General

Intelligence and other civilian officials said that President Reagan had sent Gen. Vernon A. Walters, an ambassador at large specializing in contacts with Latin American officers, to El Salvador to meet with Mr. d'Aubuisson.

The general, it was said, was to warn him that the United States knew of the plot and wanted him to call it off.

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York, vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, applauded President Reagan's action in sending General Walters. "The President had every right to do that and I'm glad he did," the Senator said. But he indicated that the intelligence committees had not been briefed on the episode before today.

"Walters was there but he didn't issue any threats," said one official. "He may have said some harsh words but he didn't go in and bargain with a visa to the United States. He didn't have a visa in hand."

Reports from El Salvador said General Walters had offered Mr. d'Aubuisson a visa to the United States and that one was issued on May 31.

Tip Linked to Senator Helms

One official said, however, that he was not certain that General Walters had met with Mr. d'Aubuisson, a former major, because Mr. d'Aubuisson was evidently tipped off about the mission — possibly by Senator Jesse Helms, the North Carolina Republican.

"Someone in Washington, either on Helms's staff or on one of the committees on the Hill, learned of Walters's trip," one official said. "The scenario was for Walters to see d'Aubuisson but it appears that d'Aubuisson got wind of Walters's trip. Our reports show d'Aubuisson in public making statements dissociating himself from any violence. So I don't believe Walters ever saw d'Aubuisson."