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EL SALVADOR: Progress on High-Profile Cases

A Salvadoran military court will announce today the conviction and sentencing of three suspects—allegedly FMLN insurgents—for their role in the murders in 1985 of 13 civilians, including six US citizens, in the capital [Redacted]. The presiding judge reportedly already has received death threats. Meanwhile, in the case involving the murders of six Jesuit priests and two household staff members in 1989, the reviewing judge ruled against the habeas corpus petition of Colonel Benavides, the highest-ranking defendant. The Supreme Court, anticipating consecutive petitions by each defendant, has initiated similar reviews of the remaining suspects to cut down on delays. [Redacted]

Comment: The military court's convictions represent a breakthrough in one of several cases of high interest to Washington, although an appeal may be possible. The insurgents, who had praised the murders as patriotic acts, may react angrily and probably will note that several cases involving political crimes by the military remain unresolved. While the Supreme Court's action in the Jesuit case represents a rare instance of activism, the matter still faces many obstacles, such as finding jurors who are willing to serve. [Redacted]

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