

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

José Guillermo GARCIA Merino  
(Phonetic: garSEEah)

EL SALVADOR

*Minister of Defense  
(since October 1979)*

*Addressed as:  
Mr. Minister*



One of the most intelligent officers in the Salvadoran Army, Gen. José Guillermo García has been the strongman in the government since the October 1979 coup. Since the March 1982 elections, García has supported President Alvaro Magaña and other moderates in the government in their struggle for political dominance over the extreme rightists, who are led by Constituent Assembly President Roberto D'Aubuisson. Politically conservative, García was considered by the military as a possible choice for president in the mid-1970s.

[redacted] he would like to run for president in the elections scheduled for March 1984. (C)

Over the past year García has lost support among the military. The January 1983 rebellion of Lt. Col. Sigifredo Ochoa in Cabañas Department dramatically symbolizes that loss. Many Salvadoran military and political officials believe that García's position has become so eroded as a result of the Ochoa incident that he will be forced to resign within the next several months. (C)

[redacted] García is anti-Communist and friendly toward the United States. [redacted]

[redacted] His record on human rights abuses in his country is mixed, however; like most Salvadoran military officers, he has been primarily concerned with the destruction of the insurgent movement. (C)

After graduating from the Military Academy in 1956, García rose rapidly through the Army ranks. He attended the War College in Mexico during 1966-70 and took an orientation tour of the Panama Canal Zone in 1963. Before the 1979 coup, he had served since July 1978 as commander of San Vicente Department. (U)

García, 49, is married and has four daughters. (U)

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1 February 1983

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