
CENTRAL AMERICA

State Department pours oil on the fire

by Gretchen Small

There was nothing inevitable about the new round of fighting now escalating in several parts of Central America. It was Secretary of State Alexander Haig's deliberate sabotage of international efforts to contain the Salvadoran crisis through a political solution which provoked the new offensive—not the much-vaunted beginning of the rainy season.

Although fighting has persisted across the countryside in El Salvador, the last two months had seen relative quiet, largely as a result of behind-the-scenes pressure from the combined Vatican, West German, and Mexican efforts to create an international climate in which the Salvadoran parties could be brought to the negotiating table. Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski's mission to Central America, Mexico, and Cuba in mid-April as a special envoy from Chancellor Schmidt had come the closest to setting the stage for initial talks. Wischnewski's argument, reportedly, was simply for the adversaries to sit down—with no strings attached.

As soon as Wischnewski returned to Germany, the State Department pulled the plug on the possibility for talks. The State Department issued a categorical rejection of the Wischnewski initiative: "The United States position is that an election process is the best route to a peaceful resolution of the situation in El Salvador. If what is meant by 'negotiation' . . . is the establishment of a government by negotiation, we oppose it," a May 2 State Department statement read. A statement following on the 4th specified that the United States would only support negotiations dealing with the subject of the technicalities involved in upcoming elections in El Salvador. Salvadoran military spokesmen and the head of the governing junta, José Napoleón Duarte, echoed the State Department line immediately. Negotiations were pronounced dead.

Haig's approach

Elections under civil war conditions are not a realistic idea, nor were they meant to be. Haig, and the coterie of Kissinger trainees around him, have sold the administration the scenario that a few more months of

more sophisticated military operations can mop up the guerrilla forces. The so-called Zimbabwe solution would then follow, the line goes, with a ceasefire followed by elections—overseen by an international observer force modeled on the British operation that was carried out in Rhodesia.

Haig's shoot-first-talk-later approach has already fed the leftist insurgency, and a new offensive by the left has been declared in answer to the government's refusal to talk. The rector of San Salvador's National University, Rodríguez Ruiz, issued a statement May 9 in the name of the opposition Democratic Revolutionary Front and the so-called Faribundo Marti Liberation Front, which declared that the Duarte government was planning a new offensive over the next eight to ten months to "prepare the basis for elections in 1982 over the cadavers of the opposition." In response, Rodríguez said, the guerrillas will launch their own counteroffensive.

Haig has strengthened the hand of the Socialist International, which is now portraying itself as the liberation struggle's best ally. Nicaraguan and Salvadoran radicals hailed the Mitterrand electoral victory in France as their "triumph" as well. Salvadoran guerrillas were quick to point out that Mitterrand's wife Danielle heads the French solidarity committee with the Salvador rebels, while the Nicaraguans cited Mitterrand's position on the executive of the international solidarity committee with Nicaragua, established by the Socialist International. Meanwhile, border clashes between Honduras and Nicaragua this month have brought the two close to war.

Guatemala has now been placed in the sights as the next regional flashpoint. The international press has begun to churn out stories on the "gathering storm" there, pointing out, as the *Christian Science Monitor* did last week, that Guatemala is "five times the size of El Salvador," "potentially more explosive," and borders on oil-rich Mexico.

The guerrillas are estimated to lack the capability to mount a Salvador-style final offensive as yet, but last week's bombing of the country's main oil pipeline signals a serious step-up in activity. Well-informed intelligence sources have told *EIR* that the preconditions for a major outbreak of left terrorism have been put in place over the past month in Guatemala, particularly through Libyan channels.

Played off against the activation of the "left" side of the Guatemalan scenario, Haig has deployed a team to Guatemala to make sure the Guatemalan military does its share from the "right." Former Deputy Director of the CIA Vernon Walters has been joined on this mission by former Ambassador to Guatemala Frank Ortiz, a member of the Knights of St. John with close ties to British Special Operations Executive.