

Embassy Seeks to Monitor CIA

Guatemalans Say Agency Activities Undercut U.S. Diplomatic Efforts

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GUATEMALA CITY, April 5—The imbroglio over CIA activities in Guatemala has left the U.S. Embassy struggling to establish a clear chain of command to guarantee that the ambassador knows what the agency is doing, according to U.S. and Guatemalan sources familiar with CIA activities here.

The embassy has begun an internal procedural review, prompted by the CIA's failure to keep two successive U.S. ambassadors to Guatemala informed about an investigation that linked a Guatemalan army officer who was a paid agency informant to the abduction and subsequent killing of a U.S. citizen in the remote Guatemalan back country, according to the sources interviewed here and in other capitals.

While the reported CIA concealment is regarded as an isolated case, analysts here said it puts a focus on a more global interdepartmental conflict: that heads of embassies often are kept out of the loop on the activities of CIA agents who, in theory but not necessarily in practice, are required to report to their ambassadors.

The sources here said existing U.S. procedures require the CIA to provide ambassadors with intelligence on a "need-to-know" basis. But the CIA station in Guatemala appears to have made a decision to keep senior embassy officials in the dark about the involvement of Guatemalan army Col. Julio Alberto Alpirez—a CIA informant—in the 1990 slaying of the American citizen, an innkeeper named Michael DeVine.

The case has exposed an embarrassing lack of coordination that sent a confusing, mixed foreign-policy signal to Guatemala's military leaders, according to current and former officials here.

As a result of this lapse, U.S. Ambassador Marilyn McAfee and her predecessor, Thomas Strook, were placed in the position of publicly condemning the Guatemalan govern-

ment and blocking any effort to prosecute DeVine's killers, while the CIA was hiding key details of the case. When an angry McAfee learned in February that the CIA had withheld information from her about Alpirez's involvement, she arranged the withdrawal of the CIA's station chief from her embassy.

The Capitol Hill inquiry into this and other unresolved killings linked to Alpirez may raise more questions than it answers, analysts here

note—such as why the CIA has spent millions of dollars in a country posing relatively minimal national security concerns for the United States. U.S. diplomats say fewer than 1,000 leftist guerrillas are still battling government forces in Guatemala's 34-year-old civil war. And although the United States regards Guatemala as a key transshipment point for U.S.-bound narcotics, the drug war is being fought by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, not the CIA.

"Nobody knows why the CIA is feels a need to be here. I guess this is a country where the Cold War is still going full steam ahead," said Rachel Garst, a Guatemala intelligence specialist at the Washington Office on Latin America, a human rights monitoring group.

As the U.S. Embassy procedural review gets underway, McAfee and other embassy officials are refusing to discuss any matters involving CIA activities or even to acknowledge publicly that the agency maintains offices within the U.S. diplomatic mission here.

But retired general Hector Gramajo, Guatemala's defense minister from 1986 to 1990, said, "What we are seeing is the redesign of the CIA" and its Guatemala mission. Gramajo acknowledged that during his military and government service,

he frequently came in contact with CIA agents. He added that the CIA helped fund a training school for Guatemalan military intelligence agents and described the agency's activities here as extensive.

"This was no secret," Gramajo said. "If they had done something awful, like teach people how to assassinate or torture, that would have been something else. But they taught us how to carry out intelligence activities within a framework of laws and restrictions. . . . We tried very hard to maintain discipline within the institution, and then, in 1990, it all fell apart."

According to the U.S. Embassy, on June 8, 1990, Guatemalan troops abducted DeVine from his farm and guest house in the remote eastern town of Poptun to question him regarding the disappearance of two Galil automatic rifles from a nearby army base. They took him for questioning to a base at Poptun that was commanded by Alpirez. CIA informants reportedly identified Alpirez as being present during DeVine's interrogation.

The next day, DeVine's body was found in a wooded area near his

farm, with his hands bound and his neck sliced through by a machete.

Alpirez also has been identified as being present during the 1992 interrogation and subsequent killing of captured guerrilla commander Efraim Bamaca Velasquez, who was married to American lawyer Jennifer Harbury.

The exposure of Alpirez's links to the CIA has placed the agency as well as the Guatemalan military in the difficult position of either sacrificing him for prosecution or honoring a long-standing, unwritten code of mutual protection. This code, experts say, lies at the heart of the conflict between the CIA and U.S.

diplomats.

"We're talking about a partnership, a covenant between some very cold professionals," Gramajo explained. "The CIA does not just give up its informants. In this case, obviously the station chief chose not to cooperate" with ambassadors McAfee and Strook.

According to an embassy statement, the 1990 cutoff in U.S. aid to Guatemala was specifically designed to pressure the Guatemalan government into investigating the DeVine case and "bringing the perpetrators to justice." But the CIA, in a program at odds with the State Department's public enunciation of U.S. policy, continued covert funding for the Guatemalan military until President Clinton ordered it halted this week.

The different signals sent by the State Department and CIA to Guatemala's military were further confused by an official "hands-off" U.S. policy that emphasized not taking sides and pushing for peaceful resolution of the Guatemalan civil war, according to a diplomat involved in the peace process.

The United States, which has maintained contact with both sides in the war, is one of six nations calling themselves "friends" of the peace process. The diplomat said that in addition to pressing human rights concerns, the withholding of aid to the Guatemalan military was designed to nudge the leadership toward the negotiating table.

But retired general Efraim Rios Montt, now president of the Guatemalan legislature, described the CIA's covert funding as "sending a confused signal" on what Washington's real policy was. While the State Department was urging peace negotiations and an end to human rights abuses, he said, the CIA was quietly telling military leaders "not to worry."