

# Report: The CIA in Guatemala

## *Its Paid Informants Included Assassins, Kidnappers and Torturers*

On March 30, 1995, President Clinton directed the Intelligence Oversight Board, a four-person panel established to review intelligence activities, to investigate the circumstances of violent attacks against 13 U.S. citizens in Guatemala since 1984. Clinton acted after disclosures that the CIA had paid \$44,000 to

**VERBATIM** Col. Julio Alpírez, a Guatemalan colonel implicated in the murder and torture of Michael DeVine, an American innkeeper, and Efraín Bamaca, a Guatemalan guerrilla leader who was married to Jennifer Harbury, an American lawyer.

Over the last 40 years, the U.S. government, via the CIA, has supported the Guatemalan security services in their efforts to defeat a leftist guerrilla insurgency. An estimated 100,000 civilians have been killed during the conflict. One key question the board sought to answer was whether agency officials in Guatemala and Washington knew that their "assets"—Guatemalan military officers paid to supply information to the CIA—had engaged in violent activities.

On June 28, the board published its findings in its first-ever public report. Here is an excerpt:

### **Policy Objectives**

U.S. policy objectives in Guatemala from 1984 to the present—the period we reviewed—included supporting the transition to and strengthening civilian democratic government, furthering human rights and

the rule of law, supporting economic growth, combatting illegal narcotics trafficking, combatting the communist insurgency, and advancing the current peace process between the government and the guerrillas. . . .

### **Intelligence Activities**

Although the CIA's goals in Guatemala were legitimate, achieving them and maintaining influence in Guatemala required that the CIA deal with some unsavory groups and individuals. The human rights records of the Guatemalan security services were widely known to be reprehensible, and although the CIA made efforts to improve the conduct of the services, probably with some limited success, egregious human rights abuses did not stop. . . .

### **Human Rights Abuses By Assets or Liaison Contacts**

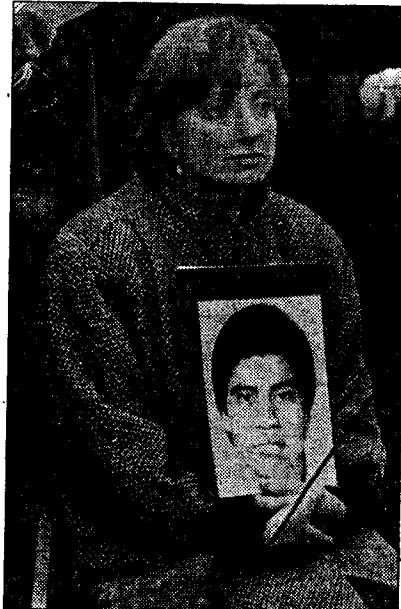
In the course of our review, we found that several CIA assets were credibly alleged to have ordered, planned or participated in serious human rights violations such as assassination, extrajudicial execution, torture or kidnapping while they were assets—and that the CIA's Directorate of Operations (DO) headquarters was aware at the time of the allegations.

A number of assets were alleged—with varying levels of credibility—to have been involved in similar abuses before their CIA

asset relationships began; in several other cases, the alleged abuses occurred or came to light only after the CIA was no longer in contact with the assets. A few assets were reportedly present as others engaged in acts of intimidation, and another engaged in such an act before becoming an asset. . . .

In addition, a number of the station's liaison contacts—Guatemalan officials with whom the station worked in an official capacity—were also alleged to have been involved in human rights abuses or in covering them up. In many of the cases noted above, however, we learned of the allegations only by virtue of relationships with other assets or liaison contacts alleged to have engaged in similar abuses.

None of the assets alleged to have committed serious human rights abuses now have asset relationships with the CIA. Relationships with all but a few such assets had been terminated prior to September 1994 for a variety of reasons. Only one of the terminations of relationship was principally the result of a human rights allegation. On September 1994, because of a human rights issue unrelated to Guatemala, the DO's Latin America Division conducted a review of its then-current assets throughout Latin America to determine if any may have violated human rights. As a result of this review, the CIA in early 1995 terminated relationships with the few remaining Guatemalan assets alleged to have been in-



JOE MARQUETTE—ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Jennifer Harbury with a photo of her murdered husband, Guatemalan guerrilla leader Efraim Bamaca.**

involved in serious abuses such as assassination and kidnapping.

As noted earlier, the IOB believes that U.S. national interests, with respect to Guatemala and elsewhere, can in some cases justify relationships with assets and institutions with sordid or even criminal backgrounds . . . We note that in carrying out law enforcement activities in the United States, the FBI, police and other authorities regularly weigh such considerations in

establishing informant relationships with persons having criminal backgrounds.

Among the potential costs to be considered, however, in continuing or establishing such relationships with foreign intelligence assets are: the moral implications, the damage to U.S. objectives in promoting greater respect for human rights, the loss of confidence in the intelligence community by the Congress and the American people and the effect of such relationships upon the ethical climate within U.S. intelligence agencies. In February 1996, largely as a result of the inquiries related to Guatemala, the CIA issued guidance for dealing with serious human rights violations or crimes of violence by assets and liaison services.

We believe that this guidance strikes an appropriate balance: it generally bars such relationships, but it permits senior CIA officials to authorize them in special cases when national security interests so warrant. We are disturbed, however, that until the recent Guatemala inquiries, the CIA had failed to establish agency-wide written guidance on such an important issue.

We found no evidence that Guatemala station was a "rogue" station operating independently of control by its headquarters; it generally kept the DO headquarters well-informed of developments, negative or otherwise, including allegations implicating CIA assets as each allegation surfaced. DO headquarters officials, generally on an ad hoc basis, provided guidance to Guatemala station in the late 1980s and early 1990s advising it to avoid assets against whom human rights violations had been alleged, but the number of such assets retained or recruited without any evident deliberation suggests that this guidance was neither strictly enforced by headquarters nor observed by the station.