

# In Guatemala

## Leader Opts to Sidestep 'Historic Opening'

By Tod Robberson  
Washington Post Foreign Service

**GUATEMALA CITY, April 1**—After decades of military domination, the once high prospects for broadening Guatemala's nascent democracy under President Ramiro de Leon Carpio appear to be diminishing as he resists U.S. prodding to investigate his army's involvement in death squad activity.

De Leon, a former human rights ombudsman, finds himself isolated politically and under apparent military pressure to keep silent amid revelations that a paid CIA informant in the Guatemalan army was involved in the killings of an American civilian and a guerrilla commander married to a U.S. lawyer.

Diplomats and other analysts here say the Guatemalan president is passing up a rare opportunity to use the CIA scandal to purge the military of corrupt officers and to initiate a wholesale investigation of the army's abuses during its 34-year war against leftist guerrillas. Instead, de Leon has chosen to support

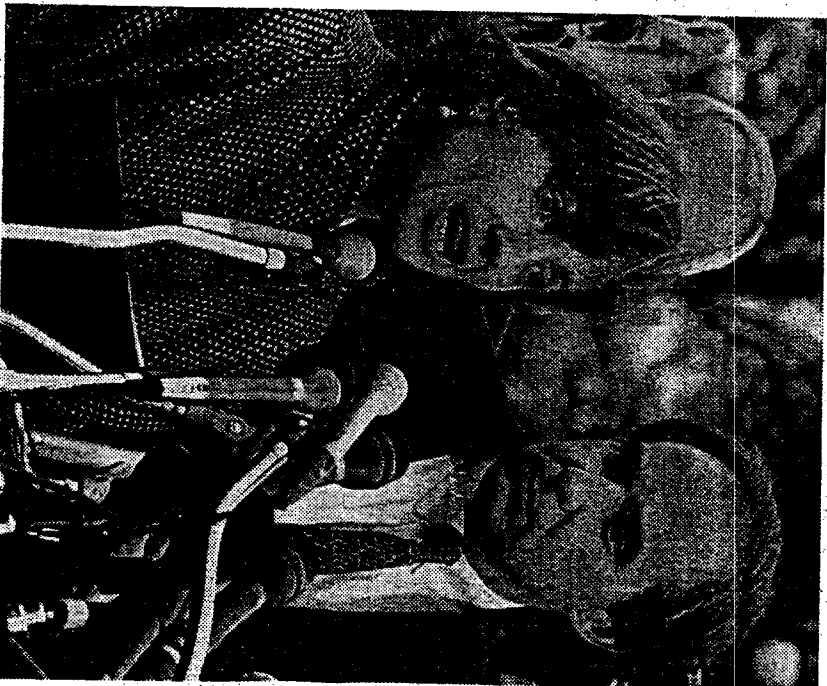
a military institution he once reviled as the country's foremost violator of human rights.

International human rights organizations that had hailed de Leon's ascension to the presidency in 1993 as a dramatic step in the advancement of democracy in Guatemala now are denouncing him as weak and ineffectual, citing not only his handling of the CIA-related cases but hundreds of others involving military abuses.

"He has a historic opening here, and he is not taking it. That's where the bitter disappointment inside the human rights community is being felt," said James O'Dea, director of Amnesty International's human rights office in Washington.

Ambassador Marilyn McAfee has joined the chorus of U.S. officials and human rights groups demanding that the Guatemalan president initiate a full-scale investigation into the killings of U.S. citizen Michael DeVine and Guatemalan guerrilla leader Efraim Bamaca while they were in military custody.

See GUATEMALA, A31, Col 1



Jennifer Harbury, left, with Rep. Robert G. Torricelli (D-N.J.), talks about a "direct link with the CIA in the assassination of my husband" in Guatemala.

BY DAN LITTLE — THE WASHINGTON POST

# Guatemala's President Fending Off Calls to Use Evidence Against Army

GUATEMALA, From A29

In an interview, McAfee expressed dissatisfaction not only with de Leon's response to U.S. demands for an extensive probe but also with the military's attempts to protect officers linked to death squads.

"The burden of the investigation is on the Guatemalans at this point. The events occurred in Guatemala, they were perpetrated by Guatemalans, and they must be investigated by Guatemalans," she said.

McAfee noted that the Clinton administration is probing charges by Rep. Robert G. Torricelli (D-N.J.) that Guatemalan army Col. Julio Roberto Alpirez—identified as a paid CIA informant—was linked to the two killings. The nature of Alpirez's involvement has not been specified, nor whether the CIA had any role in the killings.

"We are dealing with our part. Now the Guatemalan government has to take responsibility for investigating and resolving these . . . cases," McAfee said. "We try to make the point that we do not accept impunity."

DeVine, a hotel and restaurant owner in the remote village of Poptun, about 140 miles northeast of Guatemala City, was killed after being taken into army custody on June 8, 1990. Poptun is in the Peten region, where guerrillas now known as the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) have carried out Central America's longest-enduring armed rebellion.

The U.S. Embassy says DeVine apparently was detained on suspicion of having stolen two Galil automatic rifles that had disappeared from a nearby army base. Col. Alpirez was in charge of that base.

Alpirez also has been named in a separate investigation regarding the army's 1992 capture, and subsequent killing, of URNG commander Bamaca. Bamaca's wife, American

lawyer Jennifer Harbury, recently held a hunger strike here to press U.S. and Guatemalan government investigations of his death.

McAfee became embroiled in the two cases when information surfaced within the embassy last February that Alpirez was linked to DeVine's killing and that the CIA's Guatemala station chief withheld information from her to protect Alpirez's identity as an informant. The station chief, whose identity has not been made public, was ousted from the embassy in March.

De Leon came to Alpirez's defense on Wednesday, advising him to sue Torricelli for "criminal" defamation. De Leon denied that any institutional link existed between U.S. intelligence services and the Guatemalan state.

Although de Leon did not deny that Alpirez may have had links with the CIA, he told reporters that as a result of a government investigation, "We are certain that he did not participate in DeVine's killing."

"One hoped that de Leon's response would have been a more cooperative one. He sounds more like an apologist for linkages to past and present CIA involvement rather than someone interested in finding out who is responsible," O'Dea said. "There are no surprises here" regarding CIA activity in Guatemala, he added. "The agency has had a very unglorious past up and down the entire Central American region."

The U.S. Embassy charged in a statement that de Leon has failed to investigate the DeVine case adequately and that the national police have stood aside while "there was active coverup on the part of at least two ministers of defense and numerous army officers, all of whom remain unpunished."

In 1992, five soldiers received prison sentences in connection with DeVine's killing. The following year, an army captain also was convicted

in the case and sentenced to 20 years in prison—the first time in Guatemalan history that a military officer had been found guilty of a human rights abuse. However, on the day of his sentencing, the captain escaped from military detention and has not been recaptured.

The U.S. government has used a combination of diplomatic pressure and withholding of aid since 1990 to curb the military's historic domination over civilian leaders and to force resolution of the DeVine killing and four other cases involving Americans or relatives of U.S. citizens.

Nevertheless, extrajudicial killings linked to the military or to army-sponsored civilian patrols have increased, according to the Roman Catholic Church's Human Rights Office here. More than 550 have occurred since 1992, a church report said.

De Leon left his job as Guatemala's chief human rights enforcer to become president under legislative appointment in June 1993, following a constitutional crisis in which president Jorge Serrano attempted to seize dictatorial powers. Serrano was ousted under military pressure.

De Leon, whose interim term expires this year, has never run for elective office and is prohibited from running in presidential elections expected within eight months.

Since taking power, de Leon has faced the precarious task of promoting a human rights agenda while avoiding actions that would upset the still powerful military. A month after he took office, his first cousin, Jorge Carpio, was killed on a rural highway in what analysts here say was a warning to the president to limit his probes of the military. A year ago today, the president of the Constitutional Court, Epaminondas Gonzalez Dubon, was slain in a hail of automatic weapons fire at his home. Neither case has been resolved.