

Defense Dept. to Investigate U.S. Military Role in Guatemala

CIA Nominee Deutch Orders Probe of Army, NSA

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Deputy Defense Secretary John M. Deutch yesterday announced a broad-scale investigation into the U.S. military's activities in Guatemala from the early 1980s to the present and promised "to hold people accountable for their conduct" if any wrongdoing is unearthed.

Deutch said the department had "secured all areas . . . where there's material available that bears on the subject in the Army and NSA [National Security Agency] and elsewhere." Officials said the investigation should be completed in one week.

The probe is one of several launched by government agencies this week after allegations arose of a possible U.S. role in the slayings of an American innkeeper and a guerrilla leader allegedly ordered by a Guatemalan colonel who was a paid CIA informer.

President Clinton on Thursday ordered the Intelligence Oversight Board to conduct a government-wide review, and the Justice Department has launched a criminal inquiry.

Pentagon officials said yesterday their probe would go well beyond the two incidents. They said they needed to conduct their own inquiry because it had been difficult for them to find out what their special operations and counter-narcotics personnel, who operate clandestinely, may have been doing in Guatemala.

According to allegations in an anonymous letter on NSA stationery to Rep. Robert G. Torricelli (D-N.J.), Army and NSA personnel may have been involved in the killings, and individuals at the agencies were trying to cover up their activities by shredding relevant documents.

"At present, we do not have any concrete information that would resolve any of the many allegations which have been made," said Deutch, who is Clinton's nominee to head the CIA.

The Defense Department's Guatemala Review Panel, which will be co-chaired by Pentagon General Counsel Judith Miller and newly appointed Inspector General Eleanor Hill, "has been charged today to find out every, every bit of information that we have on all Department of Defense activities. . . . We are going to look in every nook and cranny," Deutch said.

Deutch said he had specifically included the department's counter-narcotics activities in Guatemala "because there are activities where the department has been involved, counter-drug activities in Central America. . . . There may have been activities in Guatemala."

Cocaine transshipment through Guatemala is a serious problem, according to the

Drug Enforcement Administration, and various U.S. government agencies work closely with the Guatemalan Treasury Police to suppress it. Joint interdiction and eradication programs include at least 200 treasury police, including air assault units.

Both the House and Senate intelligence committees have announced their intention to investigate the matter.

The CIA has been active in Guatemala for more than 40 years and helped orchestrate the overthrow of its president in 1954.

Guatemalan military officials also were helpful to CIA personnel who were trying to get arms to the Nicaraguan contras during the Iran-contra affair in the 1980s. In return, then-White House aide Oliver L. North sug-

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gested to his superiors in 1985 that the United States compensate Guatemala "for the extraordinary assistance they are providing to the Nicaraguan freedom fighters," according to a North memo that subsequently surfaced.

Guatemala has had one of the most notorious human rights records in the Western Hemisphere and military or paramilitary personnel have for decades been implicated by various human rights organizations in killings, torture and disappearances. A 30-year war against indigenous Indians and leftist guerrillas has left more than 100,000 people dead.

The current allegations involve the killings of innkeeper Michael DeVine, a U.S. citizen whose 1990 murder caused the United States to cut off military aid to Guatemala. The other is guerrilla commander Efraim Barmaca Velasquez, who was killed in 1992 and was the husband of American lawyer Jennifer Harbury. Not certain that he was dead, she staged two hunger strikes to pressure U.S. and Guatemalan officials to either turn over her husband, or his remains.