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United States General Accounting Office

Fact Sheet for the Honorable
Edward M. Kennedy, U.S. Senate

July 1990

EL SALVADOR

Extent of U.S. Military Personnel in Country



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**National Security and
International Affairs Division**

B-240039

July 9, 1990

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
United States Senate

Dear Senator Kennedy:

In response to your request, this fact sheet provides information on the practice of limiting U.S. military trainers in El Salvador to 55, the number and roles of U.S. military personnel in the country, and the requirements for reporting human rights abuses. In February 1990, we provided you with a report on unexpended aid to El Salvador.¹ As agreed with your office, information on the effectiveness of the military aid program will be provided in a subsequent report.

Results in Brief

In summary, we found the following:

- The U.S. Military Group (MILGROUP) ensures that the number of military trainers, excluding medical and short-term trainers, does not exceed 55.
- An average of 48 military trainers were in El Salvador between January and March 1990.
- An average of 86 other U.S. military personnel in El Salvador, who are not counted against the limit of 55, work as medical and temporary trainers or as members of the MILGROUP and sections supporting the security assistance program, the Defense Attache Office and other Embassy offices, and the U.S. Embassy Marine guard detachment.
- U.S. military personnel are not legally required to report human rights abuses, according to MILGROUP and State Department officials; however, MILGROUP operating procedures instruct security assistance personnel to inform their commanding officers of such violations.

**Limit on U.S. Military
Presence**

Although not legislatively mandated, the Department of Defense limits the number of its personnel working with Salvadoran forces. The Salvadoran Armed Forces have increased from about 12,000 in 1980 to approximately 57,000 in 1989. Between 1981 and 1983, several congressional committees proposed legislation to limit the number of military trainers in El Salvador to 55, the approximate number of U.S. military personnel working with Salvadoran forces at that time. However, none of the proposals were enacted.

¹El Salvador: Pipeline of U.S. Military and Economic Aid (GAO/NSIAD-90-121FS, Feb. 23, 1990).

On the basis of a September 1983 State Department message that said the U.S. military personnel carrying out training responsibilities were limited to 55, the MILGROUP continues to ensure that the number of trainers does not exceed this limit. Excluded from the limit were medical trainers; military personnel in El Salvador temporarily for non-training functions; and members of the MILGROUP, the Defense Attache Office, and the Embassy's Marine guard detachment. According to the message, administration officials discussed who would be excluded from the limit with the staffs of key congressional leaders, who raised no significant objections.

U.S. Military Personnel in El Salvador Average 134

In the first 3 months of 1990, an average of 134 U.S. military personnel were in El Salvador. Of these, 48 were security assistance personnel who were serving in a training capacity and were counted against the limit of 55. These trainers worked at the Salvadoran military headquarters and at Salvadoran Army, Navy, and Air Force locations throughout the country. The other 86 military personnel were not counted against the limit. These included 49 associated with the security assistance program: an average of 12 MILGROUP members, 4 related administrative staff, 14 in a helicopter support detachment, 5 in a communication support unit, 10 humanitarian medical trainers, and an average of 4 temporary duty personnel. In addition, an average of 22 Marine guards assigned to protect the U.S. Embassy, 9 military personnel permanently assigned to the Defense Attache Office, and 6 temporary duty personnel cleared by the Defense Attache to enter the country were in El Salvador.

According to U.S. military officials, the current military presence is consistent with the levels present over the past few years. Available records indicate that the number of U.S. security assistance personnel in El Salvador remained relatively stable between January 1988 and March 1990. The number fluctuated depending on how many personnel were visiting the country for temporary duty or were out of country for official or personal reasons. For example, on November 17, 1989, 16 military personnel were on temporary duty in El Salvador, raising the total number of military personnel associated with the security assistance program to 127. However, during the December holidays in 1988 and 1989, respectively, about 62 and 65 military personnel were in El Salvador.

Procedures for Limiting the Number of Trainers to 55

The MILGROUP is responsible for administering the U.S. security assistance program and managing the activities of all trainers and support personnel associated with the program. As part of this responsibility, the MILGROUP closely monitors the number and role of U.S. military in the country to ensure that the limit of 55 trainers is not exceeded. The operations officer prepares a daily report showing the number and names of military in El Salvador on a permanent or temporary basis and whether they are counted against the limit. Using expected arrival, departure, and leave dates, he also projects the number of personnel subject to the limit up to 1 year in advance. For example, in August 1989, from the trainers' leave plans and the scheduled arrival of trainers, the operations officer projected that 58 trainers would be present in mid-November 1989. To stay within the limit, the MILGROUP was prepared to delay the arrival of two trainers and direct other trainers to take leave. However, these actions were not necessary because several personnel did not come to El Salvador as originally scheduled.

The MILGROUP considers the role of military personnel and their length of stay in El Salvador to determine if they count against the limit of 55 trainers. If a person is in El Salvador more than 14 days to train Salvadoran forces, then the person is counted. However, the MILGROUP has not customarily counted personnel in El Salvador 14 days or less, regardless of their roles. As a result, some personnel providing training on a short-term basis are not counted against the limit. MILGROUP officials also acknowledged that in some instances trainers who are counted against the limit and training support personnel who are not counted against the limit have similar roles.

Our analysis of MILGROUP listings of short-term temporary duty personnel showed that on 15 of 36 judgmentally selected days between October 1988 and March 1990,² short-term personnel were engaged in training activities but were not counted because they were in country less than 14 days or were serving in training support roles. For example, in mid-February 1990, one U.S. military person was assigned to design military instruction courses at a Salvadoran training camp. According to the MILGROUP operations officer, this person was not counted because he served in a training support position, even though a permanent trainer assigned to the same location and performing similar tasks was counted against the limit. In another instance, two instructors in El Salvador from mid-June to mid-July 1989 to conduct a psychological operations

²Two days in each month, at mid-month and at the end of the month, were used to sample this 18-month period.

course were counted against the limit, but eight additional military personnel serving as facilitators during an 11-day segment of the course were not counted. According to the MILGROUP operations officer, the eight personnel were not counted because they were only indirectly involved in the training process and were in country less than 14 days.

Even if the definition of those counted against the limit were broadened to include temporary duty personnel engaged in training-related activities, there would have been more than 55 trainers in El Salvador on only 4 of the 15 days. These four instances are described below.

On November 30, 1988, a military instructor and his assistant were in El Salvador for 29 days to conduct research in preparation for a psychological operations course planned for early 1989. According to the MILGROUP operations officer, they were not counted against the limit because they were not conducting training during this time period. Another four U.S. military personnel conducting a course in free-fall parachuting were not counted because they were in country for only 14 days. Using the broader definition, if these 6 personnel had been counted, the number of training personnel in country would have been 56.

On January 31, 1989, nine U.S. military were in El Salvador to train Salvadoran military instructors. These personnel were in country less than 14 days and were therefore not counted against the limit. Using the broader definition, if these nine personnel had been counted, the total number of training personnel would have been 57 during the period they were in country.

Between October 30 and November 22, 1989, U.S. Army Special Forces personnel were deployed for training in El Salvador to be evaluated on their ability to train foreign defense forces. The exercises, planned in June 1989, originally scheduled three U.S. Army Special Forces "A" teams of 12 soldiers and an exercise evaluator each to be in El Salvador for a 12-day period. Between October 30 and November 10, 1989, the first team trained a Salvadoran company of 160 soldiers in patrolling techniques, weapons use, and other exercises to meet their annual Special Forces training requirement. The second team began its exercise on November 10 but was interrupted when the Salvadoran unit participating in the training exercise was deployed to engage in a conflict with antigovernment forces. According to the MILGROUP's training officer, the Special Forces team was unable to return to San Salvador until November 20 due to the conflict and, by coincidence, was in the

Sheraton Hotel during a guerrilla attack. The third team's visit was canceled.

According to the MILGROUP Commander, these teams were not counted against the limit of 55 trainers for two reasons: (1) the primary purpose of the mission was to exercise and evaluate the Special Forces teams, not to train Salvadoran soldiers, and (2) each team was in country less than 14 days. Using the broader definition, if these personnel had been counted as trainers during their mission in El Salvador, the total number of training personnel would have been 63 during the first exercise and 66 during the second.

Reporting Human Rights Violations

According to MILGROUP and State Department officials, U.S. military personnel are not legally required to report human rights abuses in El Salvador, but operating procedures require MILGROUP personnel to notify their commanding officers of violations by Salvadoran forces. The MILGROUP Commander said that he had received a few oral reports of alleged abuses, which were investigated to determine their validity. However, he added that U.S. military may be unaware of violations because their movements are restricted and it is unlikely that violations would be committed in their presence. The U.S. Ambassador and the MILGROUP Commander have recently issued directives emphasizing the responsibility of U.S. personnel to report human rights violations.

Scope and Methodology

We performed our field work and interviewed officials at the Departments of Defense and State in Washington, D.C., and at the U.S. Embassy in San Salvador, El Salvador. We researched the legislative history and records at the Departments of Defense and State to establish the origin of the limit on the number of military trainers. (See app. I.) We did not evaluate the appropriateness of the criteria used to determine which military personnel are excluded from the limit. To determine the number and roles of military personnel in El Salvador, we analyzed documents and records prepared by the MILGROUP and the Defense Attache Office, including daily listings of personnel in country. (See app. II and III.) We also reviewed legislation and U.S. Embassy directives concerning requirements for reporting human rights abuses. (See app. IV.)

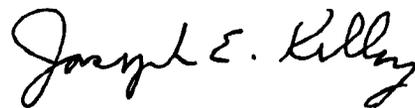
We conducted our review between February and May 1990 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. We did not obtain written agency comments. However, we discussed a draft of

this report with Defense Department officials and incorporated their comments as appropriate.

Unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, no further distribution of this fact sheet will be made until 10 days after its issue date. At that time we will provide copies to interested congressional committees and the Secretaries of Defense and State. Copies will be made available to other interested parties upon request.

Major contributors to this fact sheet are listed in appendix V. If you have questions on this report, please call me on (202) 275-4128.

Sincerely,



Joseph E. Kelley
Director, Security and International
Relations Issues

Contents

Letter		1
Appendix I Origin of the Limit on U.S. Military Trainers		10
Appendix II U.S. Military Presence in El Salvador		12
Appendix III Roles of U.S. Military Personnel in El Salvador	Trainers Counted Against Limit Personnel Not Counted Against Limit	14 14 14
Appendix IV Requirements for Reporting Human Rights Abuses	U.S. Personnel May Not Be Aware of Violations Recent Emphasis on Reporting Abuses	17 17 17
Appendix V Major Contributors to This Report		19
Figures	Figure II.1: Distribution of 134 U.S. Military Personnel in El Salvador (Jan.-Mar. 1990) Figure II.2: U.S. Military Security Assistance Personnel in El Salvador	12 13

Abbreviations

MILGROUP U.S. Military Group

Origin of the Limit on U.S. Military Trainers

Various congressional committee reports as well as Defense and State Department documents contain information on the limit on U.S. military trainers in El Salvador. The following chronology describes events related to the origin of the limit.

March-April 1981

During hearings before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on March 18, the Under Secretary of State said that 31 additional military personnel had been sent to El Salvador since January 1981, bringing the total number of U.S. military working with Salvadoran forces to 54. According to the Under Secretary, that number met El Salvador's requirements at the time. However, he said that 54 was not a limit, as reductions or increases could occur as warranted by the situation in El Salvador. In a letter to the Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, dated April 6, 1981, the Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations listed a total of 56 U.S. military security assistance personnel in El Salvador.

March 1983

On March 23, the Senate Appropriations' Subcommittee on Foreign Operations approved the administration's request to reprogram \$60 million in military aid to El Salvador on the condition, among other things, that the number of advisers¹ be limited to 55.

On March 24, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved the reprogramming of only \$30 million and advised the State Department of the Committee's desire to limit advisers in El Salvador to 55.

April 1983

On April 26, the House Appropriations' Subcommittee on Foreign Operations also approved the \$30 million reprogramming; however, a limit on the number of U.S. advisers was not a condition of its approval.

May 1983

On May 17, the House Foreign Affairs Committee limited the number of U.S. advisers in El Salvador to 55 in its version of the 1984 foreign aid authorization bill (H.R. 2992).

¹State Department testimony in 1981 said that the term "trainer" more accurately described the role of U.S. personnel working with the Salvadoran forces.

On May 23, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee adopted language similar to the House language and limited the number of advisers to 55 in its version of the authorization bill (S-1347).

These proposals to limit the number of advisers were not enacted.

August 1983

President Reagan announced that he would not increase the number of U.S. military trainers in El Salvador beyond 55, according to a 1984 House Committee on Foreign Affairs report.

September 1983

A September 22, 1983, State Department message said that the limit applied only to U.S. military personnel with training responsibilities. This definition was prompted by an anticipated increase from 6 to 11 MILGROUP personnel to administer the security assistance program. The MILGROUP personnel had previously been counted against the limit. To remain below the limit with this increase would have required reducing the number of trainers to 44, which would have impaired the training mission, according to the State Department. The definition excluded the MILGROUP, medical trainers, and military personnel temporarily in El Salvador for non-training functions. The Marine security guards and military staff with the Defense Attache Office continued to be treated as separate and distinct from the limit. The message states that administration officials discussed the definition with the staffs of key congressional leaders, who raised no significant objections.

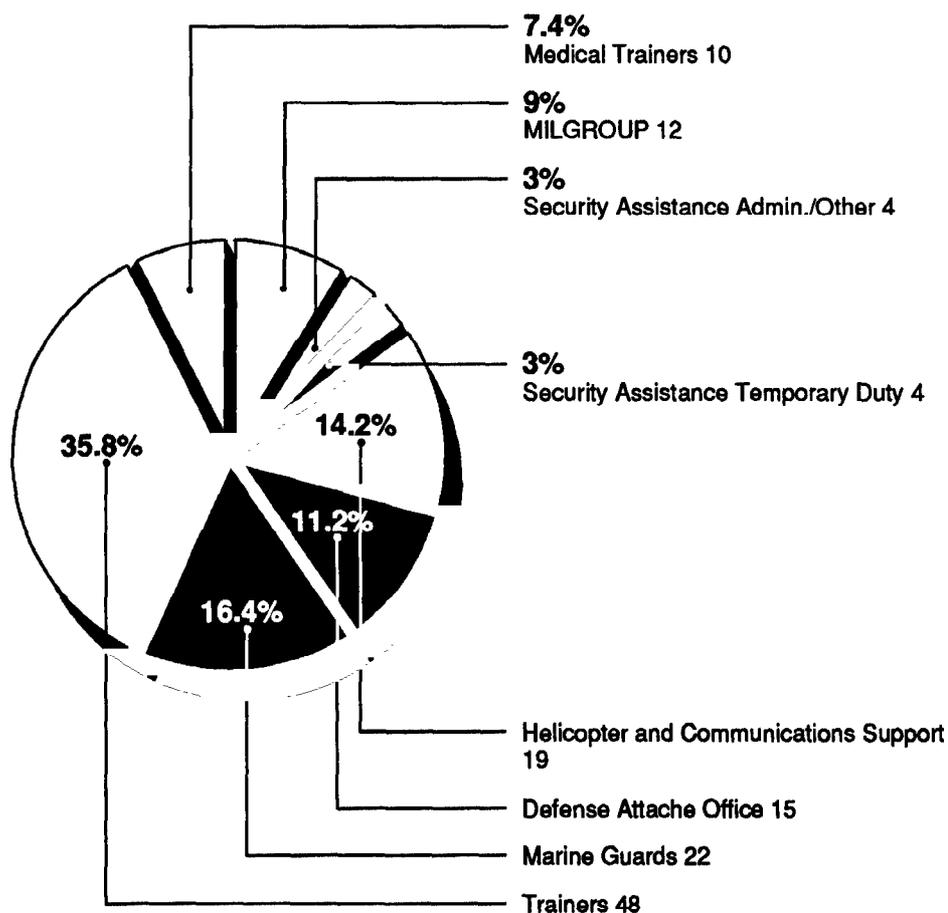
February 1985

Three congressional members of the Arms Control and Foreign Policy Caucus reported that the administration had agreed to a cap of 55 military security assistance personnel in country but that more than 100 were actually in El Salvador. The report recommended that only the Marine guard detachment and the Defense Attache Office be exempt from the limit. No action was taken on this recommendation.

U.S. Military Presence in El Salvador

The figures below provide data on the U.S. military presence in El Salvador. Figure II.1 shows the distribution of 134 U.S. military personnel and their function. Figure II.2 shows the levels of U.S. military security assistance personnel and the portion that is counted against the limit of 55 trainers.

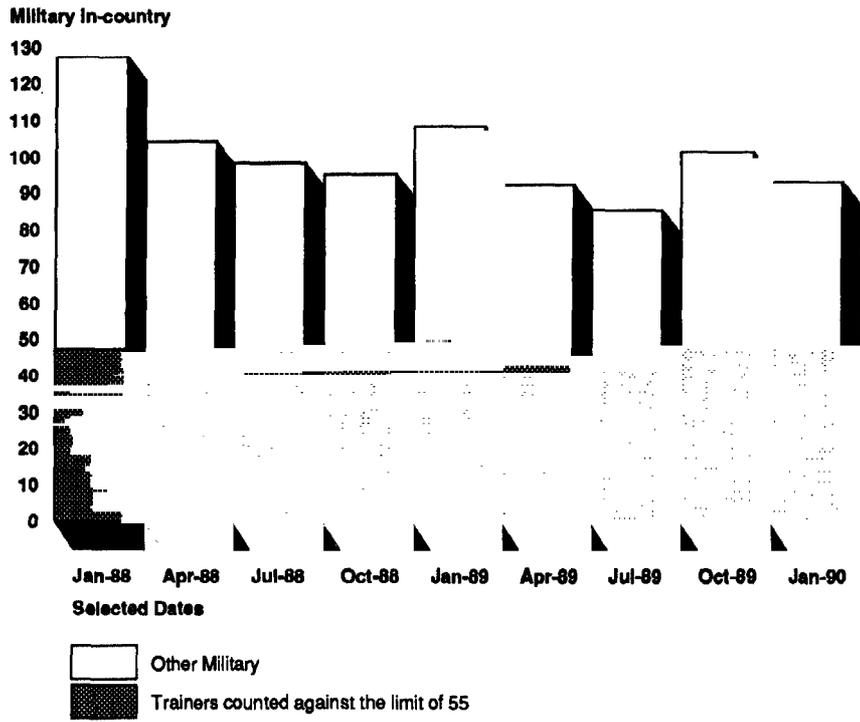
Figure II.1: Distribution of 134 U.S. Military Personnel in El Salvador (Jan.-Mar. 1990)



Notes:

1. The figure shows the average number of military personnel for each function, calculated from data contained in one daily personnel report for each of the 13 weeks from Jan. 1 to Mar. 30, 1990.
2. Average number of personnel with the Defense Attache Office includes nine personnel permanently assigned to the Office and six temporary duty personnel cleared by the Defense Attache to enter El Salvador for official business with that Office or other Embassy sections or for unofficial business.

Figure II.2: U.S. Military Security Assistance Personnel in El Salvador



Note: Figures represent the number of personnel in country at mid-month.

Roles of U.S. Military Personnel in El Salvador

Trainers Counted Against Limit

U.S. military personnel counted against the limit of 55 are in El Salvador to train the Salvadoran Armed Forces. Trainers work with the Salvadoran Joint Staff (the equivalent of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff) and at Salvadoran Army, Navy, and Air Force locations throughout the country. The U.S. trainers at the Joint Staff assist the Salvadoran military in implementing personnel, intelligence, and logistics systems and in developing military academy curricula and psychological operations campaigns. The U.S. trainers assigned to the field locations assist the Salvadoran military in improving small unit combat abilities and brigade effectiveness and in developing local civil defense units. These trainers serve 1- or 2-year tours of duty.

Other trainers are in El Salvador as members of mobile training teams. These teams provide specialized training lasting from 1 week to 6 months in areas such as logistics, civil defense, interrogation, and counterintelligence. These teams are counted against the limit only if they are in country more than 14 days. Since November 1988, the long-term trainers have begun to conduct more of the specialized training, and fewer mobile training teams have been used.

Personnel Not Counted Against Limit

U.S. military personnel who do not count against the limit on trainers include personnel who administer and support the security assistance program, medical trainers, short-term temporary duty persons, and military working with the Marine guard detachment or the Defense Attache Office.

The MILGROUP and Related Administrative Staff. The MILGROUP administers the U.S. security assistance program and supports U.S. military personnel assigned to El Salvador. About 12 MILGROUP members¹ are in El Salvador on any day, including the Commander, Deputy Commander, and administrative and operations personnel. Four additional military staff assist the MILGROUP with logistics and budget work, manage U.S. Corps of Engineers projects, and provide coordination with Agency for International Development projects. MILGROUP members and related administrative staff are not counted against the limit.

Helicopter and Communications Support Personnel. About 14 flight crew and maintenance personnel support three helicopters, and about

¹The MILGROUP in El Salvador is authorized 13 military positions, which are justified each year in budget requests submitted by the Defense Security Assistance Agency, making it the largest U.S. security assistance organization in Latin America.

5 personnel operate a radio communication network for the use of security assistance personnel. According to the MILGROUP Operations Officer, the transportation and communication support personnel do not provide services or training to Salvadoran forces and are not counted against the limit.

Medical Trainers. An average of 10 trainers assist the Salvadoran Armed Forces in improving their health care system and equipping Salvadoran medical soldiers and units. During 1990, the trainers are scheduled to assist the Salvadoran military medical staff in developing and implementing a medical supply system and establishing infection control and intensive care nursing programs. Although the U.S. medical personnel are trainers, their role is viewed as humanitarian, not military, and as such, they are not counted against the limit.

Temporary Duty Security Assistance Personnel. The number of temporary duty security assistance personnel in country varies, but on average, about four are in El Salvador daily. None of these personnel are counted against the limit on trainers. Temporary duty personnel include trainers in country less than 14 days, official visitors such as the Inspector General from the U.S. Southern Command, and technicians. For example, U.S. military personnel have come to El Salvador for 3-4 weeks to repair medical equipment, assist Salvadoran forces to conduct warehouse inventories, and inspect Salvadoran aircraft for corrosion. In addition, two medics from a U.S. Special Forces Group are deployed periodically to El Salvador on 45-day rotations. The medics work in a Salvadoran field hospital to gain experience in treating war-related injuries, which helps them meet their qualification as Special Forces medics. Permanent trainers are also included as temporary personnel during pre-deployment visits and during their first 2 weeks in country, when they overlap their incumbents' term for orientation.

U.S. Embassy Marine Guards. About 22 Marine guards are assigned to El Salvador to provide security protection for U.S. Embassy personnel and buildings. The guards do not perform training functions and are not counted against the limit on trainers.

Defense Attache Office. This Office, located at the U.S. Embassy, is staffed by nine U.S. military representatives from all of the services. Their missions include reporting military and political/military intelligence information, advising the U.S. Ambassador on military matters, and representing the Defense Department and the military services to

**Appendix III
Roles of U.S. Military Personnel in
El Salvador**

the Salvadoran military. The Defense Attache Office also provides clearances to Defense Department personnel, aircraft and vessels for entry into the country on a temporary basis for business with the Defense Attache Office or other Embassy offices, and for unofficial business, such as personal leave. There is an average of 6 of these temporary duty personnel in El Salvador. Members of the Defense Attache Office and temporary personnel cleared by that office are not trainers and are therefore not counted against the limit.

Requirements for Reporting Human Rights Abuses

According to the legal and human rights officers at the U.S. Embassy in El Salvador and the MILGROUP Commander, military personnel are not legally required to report any human rights abuses by Salvadoran forces. However, the MILGROUP Standard Operating Procedure dated June 30, 1989, instructs U.S. military personnel "to try to stop" any violation of human rights they observe and, if unsuccessful, to report the violation to the MILGROUP Commander or Deputy Commander. Newly assigned MILGROUP members, trainers, and other security assistance personnel receive briefings on these procedures. This requirement has been part of the military's operating procedures for several years; similar guidance is contained in 1984 MILGROUP instructions.

U.S. Personnel May Not Be Aware of Violations

The MILGROUP Commander said that since November 1988, when he assumed his position, he has received a few oral reports of alleged human rights abuses from MILGROUP personnel. He stated that, although the reports were not formally submitted in writing, each allegation was investigated to determine its validity. He stressed that U.S. trainers may not be aware of violations because the Rules of Engagement governing the military restrict U.S. military trainers to conducting routine activities within 5 kilometers of their assigned locations unless accompanied by a Salvadoran Armed Forces commander. The U.S. military trainers are also prohibited from accompanying Salvadoran forces into battle. According to the MILGROUP Commander and the military trainers we interviewed, the Salvadoran forces receive extensive training pertaining to human rights, and they understand that the United States does not condone human rights abuses. Because of this, the trainers said that it was unlikely that any human rights violations would be committed in their presence by Salvadoran forces.

Recent Emphasis on Reporting Abuses

In a February 1990 memorandum to U.S. personnel in El Salvador, the U.S. Ambassador reiterated the long-standing policy that all Embassy employees were obligated to report any alleged human rights abuses through appropriate channels to his office.

On May 2, 1990, the MILGROUP Commander issued a memorandum to all security assistance personnel that emphasized their responsibilities in reporting human rights violations. The memorandum instructs all personnel "to be alert for and demonstrate professional concern for human rights issues in your routine dealings with all Salvadorans." In this memorandum, the Commander instructs MILGROUP personnel to report all suspected human rights violations immediately and to follow up verbal

**Appendix IV
Requirements for Reporting Human
Rights Abuses**

reports with written reports. Personnel are also instructed to exercise appropriate professional judgment in separating rumor from information worthy of further inquiry. The Commander said that he urges his staff to substantiate, to the extent possible, allegations of human rights abuses to ensure that accurate information is reported and the credibility of the United States will not be damaged. According to the Commander, this is important because he and the Ambassador will report allegations involving the Salvadoran Armed Forces to the Salvadoran military commanders and the President of El Salvador.

Major Contributors to This Report

**National Security and
International Affairs
Division, Washington,
D.C.**

John Brummet, Assistant Director

**Atlanta Regional
Office**

Roderic Worth, Regional Manager Representative
Nancy T. Toolan, Evaluator-in-Charge
Raymond H. Murphy, II, Evaluator

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