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Salvadoran Rebels Bomb Defense Ministry

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Dec. 23, Salvadoran rebel commandos attacked the Defense Ministry in San Salvador with car bombs and catapult explosives, killing at least three people and wounding at least 35, according to officials. The assault was focused on the military headquarters compound and on a nearby government health clinic. Witnesses said that four car bombs exploded in late morning just outside the building, and at the health clinic, located 50 yards down the road. A 20-foot wall surrounds the compound, which also houses the armed forces joint chiefs of staff headquarters. At a news conference, Defense Minister Gen. Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, said that homemade bombs were also launched from catapults. One officer told AP, who requested anonymity, that three projectiles fell inside the compound. Vides said casualties included 25 passengers in a passing bus who were wounded. Dr. Alfredo Galan Avalos, director of the clinic, said flying glass from car-bomb explosions wounded 10 health workers. About 60 people work in the clinic, which had about 20 patients at the time of the attack, he said. The Defense Minister said that three people were killed in the attack, and homemade bombs destroyed four vehicles and three buildings. It was the first attack on the Defense Ministry since the guerrillas began fighting in October 1979. On Dec. 25, San Salvador auxiliary archbishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez condemned the bombings because the blasts killed civilians. He said, "We characterize the attack on the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a terrorist act because all the victims were civilians. Since the first use of car bombs (in April), the church raised its voice to denounce it as a negative development because it raised the level of danger for the civilian population." Rosa Chavez spoke with reporters at the capital's Catholic cathedral after a morning Christmas Mass. (Basic data from AP, 12/23/88, 12/25/88)

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