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Salvadoran Attorney General Assassinated: New Rightist Death Squad Claims Responsibility

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On April 19, Salvadoran attorney general Roberto Garcia Alvarado was killed when assailants placed a bomb on the roof of his heavily armored car as it waited at a traffic light in downtown San Salvador. President-elect Alfredo Cristiani and several other officials of the National Republican Alliance (ARENA) publicly asserted that the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) was responsible for the assassination. Garcia was appointed late last year by the ARENA-controlled Legislature. His Christian Democrat predecessor was apparently dismissed as a result of his efforts to investigate senior ARENA officials' links with the 1980 assassination of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the assassination, and the FMLN denied involvement. The FMLN was also accused of the April 14 bombing of Vice president-elect Francisco Merino's home. The rebels have denied any involvement in this incident as well. On April 19 in San Salvador, US Embassy spokesperson Terry Jacob said that Garcia's assassination and the bombing of Merino's home were part of a guerrilla campaign to weaken the new ARENA government by provoking the government and the military to violence. Cristiani said that Garcia was likely killed in response to his statements that he would take measures against urban terrorism. President of the National Assembly, Ricardo Albarenga, also accused the FMLN. He asserted that Garcia's murder "makes clear the necessity of eradicating violence" and pledged that the Assembly would approve "drastic laws to detain the wave of violence." Merino and the army have responded to the recent surge of rebel sabotage and attacks on military facilities by publishing names of civilians who they assert were involved in the violence or in rebel front organizations. In the past, such tactics were tantamount to publishing lists of future homicide victims. ARENA has also announced that it is organizing a community watch program to identify "rebel sympathizers." * On April 20 El Salvador's national news service, Salpress, reported that an ultraright death squad, calling itself the Gerardo Barrios Civil Forces, had claimed responsibility for assassinating Garcia. The previously unheard of group took responsibility in phone calls to Salvadoran radio and television stations. Salpress said the phone calls were credible, and that apparently Garcia was killed because the death squad did not agree with ARENA policy. (Basic data from DPA, 04/19/89, 04/20/89; Notimex, 04/19/89; New York Times, 04/20/89)

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