Washington, D.C. -- Election years in the U.S. are dangerous years for governments, leaders and peoples who think they have the U.S. on their side. Nor have our allies helped us much of late.

Israel, it's true, may save the U.S. bacon on Lebanon, unless "civilians" among our career foreign-policy makers stop the Israelis yet one more time. Note that no Japanese "self-defense" naval force rushed to back us up there in the Mediterranean, despite its being the source of much of Japan's oil (as is Communist China). NATO has quibblingly refused to project its forces beyond NATO-country borders. Britain's Mrs. Thatcher, contrary for her own purposes as usual, may have precipitated our problems with her unhelpfulness. When Reagan explored bringing a UN force into Lebanon, Mitterand of France made known a Moscow message that in that case Moscow must have the say-so on where in the Mediterranean U.S. naval forces could and could not be. And that's the way the cookie crumbles -- or the way the so-called Free World crumbles it.

Few Americans know the real genesis of the debacle in which the U.S. Marines became the football in the Mid-East. We know that when the predictable guerrilla attack on the Marines came, guards who challenged the kamikaze truck had no ammunition in their rifles. Shadowy "civilians" in the career governmental establishment in Washington had insisted that Marine weapons be unloaded because "they were so near the airport and there might be a shooting accident in which civilians might get killed." Always, always the shadowy civilians to tie the hands of America's military, who had warned against committing ground troops in Lebanon like tethered goats as tiger-bait.

Media Pincers Close on El Salvador

Having successfully urged the ignominious Lebanon U.S. Marine "redeployment" which snuffs our public's glow over the liberation of Grenada, the American press elite who work so closely (while it suits them) with the shadowy establishment power-brokers have in their hands long, well-whetted knives to cut up the anticommunist side in El Salvador. The New York Times and the Washington Post are showing their determination to knife, firstly, the conservatives in El Salvador and the Salvadoran exiles in the U.S. who were the most productive among the developers who prospered El Salvador with their large commercial farms and export crops. Next, the press elite would carve up those who do not quickly fall in with the ideas of Salvadoran social democrat Napoleon Duarte, who calls himself a Christian Democrat.

Duarte is part of a leftist movement that split back in 1980. Duarte had run for president with his running-mate for vice president Guillermo Ungo, a social democrat advocating ultrasocialism. After the 1979-1980 split, Ungo and part of the ultra-left went over the line to act as frontmen for the Soviet-Havana-backed guerrillas. Ungo is today the Salvadoran guerrilla ambassador-at-large, with headquarters in Mexico.

The American media bellwethers, the New York Times and the Washington Post, both heavily attack every element in El Salvador except Duarte and Ungo, the former on the lawful side of the fighting lines, and the latter acting for and in the interest of the leftist guerrillas. It is hard to believe the two newspapers do not privately coordinate their tactics. For, as is easy to observe, the New York Times seems to be playing up the Ungo "civilians" who work for the guerrillas, while the Washington Post seems to favor Duarte. Between them, they thus back both leftist possible winners.

It all comes to the same thing in the end. If Duarte gets power, he will be destroyed
the way the hardline communists in Grenada liquidated the so-called "moderate" Prime Minister Maurice Bishop. Next, the guerrillas' civilian frontmen will appear to have control for a while. Then a guerrilla leader preferred as tougher in serving Havana and Moscow will emerge to take power. That's it, unless perhaps El Salvador's Pipil Indians decide to push the Americans into the sea and seize power first.

The NYTimes-WashPost pincers can celebrate one success in distorting U.S. policy on El Salvador -- they did indeed influence the December-January final version of the Central America Kissinger Commission report. It includes severe strictures arising from the death-squad hysteria. The press duet is enjoying initial successes also in harassing Reagan's effort to sever the links between Salvadoran "human-rights" performance and the Congress's approval of U.S. military and economic assistance.

Reagan must know something about the Congress that we don't, for neither the State Department nor the White House seemed to be making an effort to answer, counter or combat feverish onslaughts on Congress by the Lurid Left meant to override the committed Reagan military and economic prescription for El Salvador.

One source says the President has initialed a directive putting Central America into the hands of Secretary of State George Shultz during the U.S. election campaign. If so, the State Department contingent determined to give away Latin America to the social democrats will ride hard and high. Reagan could well be gambling that El Salvador can hold out until after the elections, when he would feel freer to act. His buildup of a U.S. military complex in Honduras continues apace. That project would make little sense if he contemplates letting El Salvador go.

Megapress Duet Shouting Down Free World Defenders

The NYTimes-WashPost clamor to balk White House efforts to save El Salvador from the Soviet-Havana bloc is not new. They staged a similar exercise to bring down El Salvador's antileftist Romero regime. And another to deodorize the communist-socialist guerrillas through 1980-1982, even while Carter Washington itself was stuffing a Castro-style economic system down El Salvador's throat "to save it from Castro." The same two papers had clamored to give away Vietnam, to preserve Castro from all harm, and so on. But it jolts even this hardened observer to see how ruthless, persistent, untruthful and unprincipled -- and how successful once again -- the two megapress papers can be.

The huge dailies began their barrage of at least 22 news articles and two virulent editorials on the theme of "right-wing" Salvadoran death squads on Nov. 19, 1983. And for three months, through Feb. 19, 1984, they ran one about every four days harping on the subject.

The first innuendo-loaded item was against Salvadoran anticommunist presidential candidate Roberto D'Aubuisson, the front-running man-of-the-people vilified for years by Robert White, whom Reagan had summarily fired as ambassador to El Salvador. The brief violent opening series hurled blanket accusations at Salvadoran entrepreneurs, driven by leftist terrorism to Miami, lumping the exiles with D'Aubuisson and his ARENA party as having a hand in death-squad killings of an ever-fluctuating number of Salvadorans.

Washington bowed immediately, serving an extraordinary (and quite improper) demand on the Salvadoran government to banish a number of its sovereign citizens, suspects on a list delivered by U.S Amb. Thomas R. Pickering. Vice Pres. Bush then went to El Salvador to reinforce the ukase in a brief public statement which may live on as the most extraordinary utterance in the history of the American presidency and/or vice presidency.

Bush excoriated rightist and leftist terrorists. He said the U.S. is ready to "co-operate" in hunting down and punishing rightist "criminals." But that the Salvadoran
government is "ready to discuss security," etc. to "ensure the fair participation of" the Moscow-Havana-backed terrorists in elections. No amnesty for the rightists who kill leftist. Amnesty, welcome and protection for leftists who have been killing, robbing and destroying for years. That's how many Salvadorans heard it.

On Dec. 19, the NYTimes raged in an editorial that death-squad "murders" have a precise political purpose: to thwart land reform and throw the March 1984 election to D'Aubuisson, "paladin of the violent right." ("Violent right" is the U.S. leftists' buzzterm for anticommunists.) The death squads, it said, get money from "absentee oligarchs" and "gunmen from security forces." The editorial demanded that the U.S. change "institutions and attitudes" in El Salvador, "ridding El Salvador of this cancer."

Damn All Human Rights Except the Left's -- Full Speed Ahead

Under this pressure, administration officials on Dec. 22 announced "from the White House" that it was investigating Salvadoran exiles in Miami and elsewhere in the U.S., using tax-paid manpower of the FBI, IRS, INS and Justice Department.

By Jan. 4, the NYTimes complained that suspects on the Pickering banishee list were refusing to be banished from their native country at Washington's demand. The next day, the giant paper frontpaged a story crowing that El Salvador had posted two suspected officers abroad -- a sort of exile. The second paragraph said death squads killed "6,000" in El Salvador in 1983.

On Jan. 8, dismissed ambassador White played a trump card for the violent left. The NYTimes reported it -- White's release of a lengthy document accusing 20 Salvadorans in the U.S. and at home of heinous death-squad crimes. D'Aubuisson headed White's list. Roberto Hill, against whom White said the U.S. embassy had "information," at once demanded that the embassy make it public. The embassy tried to pass the buck to Salvadoran Pres. Alvaro Magaña, who bounced it back, saying his government had no proof against anybody, and constitutionally no right to banish its native citizens (as Washington of course should have known).

The Jan. 8 NYTimes publicizing White's blast began to weave in more themes: hooray for Amb. Pickering, more pressure on Pres. Reagan, and a call for Congress to renew "human rights" conditions for arms aid to El Salvador. Widening the death-squad smear, White said the Salvadoran "military, security and death squad forces have murdered 20,000 civilians." He of course attacked D'Aubuisson tooth and nail.

As if on cue, the Jan. 12 WashPost fired off an editorial approving of the internationally frowned-upon "intrusive policy" (intervention) that sent Bush to El Salvador on Dec. 11. (When the shoe is on the left foot, the left screams. It screamed when Pres. Johnson's "intrusive policy" landed Marines in the Dominican Republic in the mid-1960s to safeguard U.S. lives, and incidentally to nip in the bud a Castro-style takeover there.) The WashPost said, "Still more intrusive policies may have to be followed to ensure the victory, and then the seating, of Christian Democrat Napoleon Duarte in presidential elections in March." Brushing aside as bagatelles various international and U.S. laws, the editorial demanded "clamping down on Salvadoran nationals in Miami" who "support death squads." It invoked Kissinger Commission suggestions in this vein "regardless of whatever else happens."

Death-Squad Accuser Says Charges "Won't Stand Up in Court"

On Jan. 24, the story began to fall apart. Col. Carlos R. López Nuila, head of El Salvador's national police forces, told a press conference that "some, perhaps the majority" of the Salvadoran citizens blacklisted by the Pickering embassy had obligingly left the country. In reporting this, the WashPost quoted López Nuila as saying
the Pickering embassy had given him "only a list" of names. "But at no times have they provided proofs," stated the Salvadoran officer. The same WashPost dispatch escalated the undocumented toll, saying "death squads are blamed for 30,000 deaths."

The same day, Amb. Pickering told the Salvadoran press that the U.S. embassy could neither confirm nor deny charges against anybody.

On Jan. 27, the NYTimes started to back down and prod, in the same story. The paper printed news saying, "Salvador Deaths: U.S. Inquiry Lags." In it, various investigative agencies had to admit the supposed "evidence" handed them of crimes by Miami Salvadorans was insubstantial.

Robert White was quoted darkly hinting he had supplied the State Department from his embassy in 1981 with "details" of guilt implicating his "Miami Six." Then he added curiously, "If you are trying to get evidence against the Miami exiles that would stand up in court, you'll never get it." But a quote from a Justice Department official was somewhat franker.

"The suspicions are like cotton candy," the NYTimes quoted the official as saying. "When you reach out to grab one, there's nothing to hold on to.

White Convicts Himself with False Charges

But on Capitol Hill, Reagan requests for military aid for El Salvador were, as Chaucer said of summer, "icumin inne," and White was a Democrat trump card in the expert-witness ploy. Lud synng cucu. On Feb. 2, White released to the press a paper headed as testimony for the Congress, in which he fulminated again on "rightist death squads." He would repeat the charges therein in major part on Feb. 6 -- under oath -- to a House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee hearing. White targeted D'Aubuisson, Miami exiles, the military and the entire ARENA party.

The NYTimes on Feb. 3 rushed to print six new names of Salvadorans described by White in his Feb. 2 paper as millionaires, former great landowners, exiles in Miami and D'Aubuisson principals. He accused the six of "ordering" horrendous death-squad crimes, including the "killing of hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans[sic]." White's paper charged Pres. Reagan with a "coverup" of evidence of crimes charged against the conservative presidential candidate Roberto D'Aubuisson. It dramatically pictured D'Aubuisson as "ordering" the assassination of San Salvador Archbishop Oscar Romero. This coldblooded murder horrified the Christian world as did the attack on Pope John Paul II.

On Feb. 4, Central American newspapers frontpaged that a high-ranking Salvadoran guerrilla defector, "Comandante" Pedro Lobo, had revealed in some detail how the archbishop's murder was in fact committed by an ETA Marxist Basque separatist hit team for El Salvador's Marxist guerrilla FMLN. But neither the NYTimes nor the WashPost informed U.S. readers, or the U.S. Congress, of this stop-press news.

The White-NYTimes list of six was filled with major and minor prima facie inaccuracies and outright lies. White named "Viera Altamirano" as one of his "Gang of Six" currently plotting in Miami. Viera Altamirano was the pen name of an above-reproach San Salvador newspaper editor who died in 1977; the alleged death-squad murders did not even begin, nor were there Salvadoran refugees from guerrilla violence in Miami, until 1980.

Two Salvadoran "brothers" named by White and the NYTimes as part of the Miami exile "Six" are neither brothers nor millionaire landowners nor Miami exiles. One is not even living: he was a career diplomat killed in an auto accident in late 1982, before most of the crimes he is accused of ever happened.
Another is an internationally respected banker who spent most of his early exile in and out of Baltimore's Johns Hopkins Hospital in orthopedic surgery to rebuild a leg shattered by Marxist terrorist gunfire when he was kidnapped. He has not lived "in Miami" since May 1, 1983.

A fourth White named was neither a big landowner nor a Miami exile nor a millionaire. A sixth is a Miami resident, but never owned great estates, though he did lose property after a military junta headed by Napoleon Duarte and backed by Jimmy Carter sent squads of soldiers to seize large farms and private banks in March 1980.

Nevertheless, White's Feb. 6 testimony on Capitol Hill was judged credible enough by the Washington Post for it to print the witness's smear of Reagan on the supposed "cover-up." On Feb. 4, both the NYTimes and the WashPost ran small items reporting the State Department's response: that charges sent to Washington by White when he was ambassador had not been "covered up" but were relayed to Congress, where they were reviewed and re-reviewed in 1982 and 1983. What State's feeble response failed to add was that White's charges had been dismissed on Capitol Hill as unsubstantiated rumors. This has been reported in the Hotline several times.

Boston TV Interview

When Robert White repeated most of his charges under oath on Feb. 6 to a Capitol Hill hearing, he appeared with other witnesses. Only one deviated materially from the White smear line. Such stacking of witnesses for the left has been going on a long time. White made headlines, for all the world as if he had not Janet Cooked his credibility to a cinder on Feb. 2. White soon repeated most of his charges on Feb. 9 on a Boston Independent Network telecast. This was the same day that Virginia Prewett in a Washington Times column revealed how White's accusations, against "Viera Altamirano" (dead since mid-1977) and the rest of the "Miami Six" evaporated at even the simplest inspection.

In the Boston TV interview, National Review Editor William Rusher and Wall Street Journal assistant editor Daniel Henniger tried hard to corner White, but information available to them at the time did not include Prewett's revelations of the same date. White repeated charges against the "Miami Six," giving the same names published on Feb. 3 by the New York Times.

As Rusher and Henniger pressed White, the latter said the names were on a list sent to the State Department in 1981 when he was U.S. ambassador in El Salvador. He said he got the names from a "source who was totally reliable." Oh? In 1981, "Viera Altamirano" had been dead four years. As noted above, the well-renowned banker accused by White was undergoing operations and treatment in Baltimore most of the time. And White's "reliable source" was equally wrong for the many reasons noted about the rest of the "Miami Six."

White said he could not disclose the name of his Salvadoran Sore Throat, else the source would "die." Mr. Rusher said, "So you, then, are not making the charge against these six people, as I understand it, yourself. You are quoting a report sent from El Salvador on the basis of a confidential source, is that right?" White answered, "I'm paraphrasing the report. And the basic target here is the Reagan administration and their policies. And what I am doing is citing an example of the type of information they have, and which the administration has not acted on." White thus totally ignored the administration investigations that the NYTimes had reported on Jan. 27.

The questioners tried persistently to get answers on the "Miami Six" more substantive than accusations and references to a "witness" not to be produced. The Wall Street Journal's Henniger at length said, "I'm just wondering whether the information you cited is substantive enough to convict anyone of the charges you've been making."
White did not answer but changed the subject. He said anybody reading the evidence against D'Aubuisson would be convinced -- apparently a reference to his own charges as he released them to the press on Feb. 2. In other non-answers to pointed questions, White said the Reagan administration created D'Aubuisson as a political leader and as a candidate for El Salvador's presidency. That his election would be a "disaster" and that the March 1984 Salvadoran vote would be "another" flawed election. He then attacked the March 1982 turnout as "flawed." (D'Aubuisson's ARENA party, then only five months old, led an informal bloc in winning against Napoleon Duarte's Christian Democrats by a 60-percent majority.)

White said a Salvadoran military officer somewhere knows the details of the plot to kill Archbishop Oscar Romero, murdered in 1980; that the Reagan administration is "completely transfixed" with the idea that El Salvador is an East-West confrontation; that the administration "embraces anyone, no matter how reprehensible" if anticommunist. White insisted the Salvadoran "revolution" is "authentic, completely homegrown."

The questioners in turn made further efforts to pin White down on grounds for his accusations. Mr. Rusher finally asked, "If you yourself, instead of circling around the question and commenting on the evidence, would simply make the charge, if you're so confident about it, that these six men in Miami are running death squads, and then put it to them whether or not they want on that basis to charge you in a libel suit."

White: "Oh, I'm glad to repeat that I believe the evidence that [sic] is accurate that I presented to the committee." Rusher: "Yeah, but that's not quite the same thing."

At this point program executive editor/producer Richard Heffner said, "And this isn't a court of law." White quickly agreed.

White: "This is not the place to conduct a legal argument. I am telling you that the source for this information is a source that has been proven reliable to the United States embassy over years. That his information has been analyzed as credible over the years."

White then changed the subject again. He excoriated the anti-Marxist "contras" fighting to free Nicaragua and called for a negotiated settlement in El Salvador before elections. "You have to have negotiations before you have a truly valid election. The function of elections are not to fix the bases of a society. Once you fix those bases through negotiation, then you can have an election to pick which team is going to administer the country," said White.

White: Power from the End of a Gun

Mr. Rusher and Amb. White next discussed "power sharing," which White seemed to favor. White said power is, de facto, already shared, since guerrillas "control approximately a third" of El Salvador...and the "power belongs to the military." (Power from the end of a gun -- Mao.) Sensing this trap ahead, White hastily said that through Contadora, "some kind of inter-American military-civilian presence" should be brought in to "take over the security of the country" and then to "disarm both the guerrillas and the military." Just as the Mid-East peacekeeping force, complete with U.S. Marines, "disarmed" the Syria-backed Druze in Lebanon, presumably.

In a Washington Times Commentary article of Feb. 27, William Rusher censured White and called D'Aubuisson a "Salvadoran patriot." He said it is "high time" White's smears against D'Aubuisson are "nipped in the bud," calling White "simply an embittered and vindictive man at the end of a botched career." Sorry, but White is much more than that.

Welcome to the fray, Mr. Rusher. But White's "bud" long ago turned into hanging fruit.