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García may have had paramilitary links

A declassified document asserted that the political party of former President Alan García, in second place following Sunday's presidential election, ran a paramilitary organization.

BY HUGO KOMINSKI
Special to The Miami Herald

A declassified U.S. government document asserts that former Peruvian President Alan García's political party ran at least one secret paramilitary organization that "developed" Shining Path guerrillas during his 1985-90 term and sent 300 agents to train in North Korea.

García is in second place in Sunday's presidential elections, which could send him into a runoff against the leading candidate, ultra-nationalist Ollanta Humala. Photo calls and a media-seeking maneuver from his campaign spokesman and personal secretary were unanswered.

The one-page document, which is undated and marked as page 3, was archived in the Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, Calif., as part of the National Security Council files from the Reagan administration. The document does not say what event it preceded.

RUNNING AGAIN: Peruvian presidential candidate Alan García — who was president from 1985-90 — holds a news event Thursday in Lima to give a speech.

A 1987 report described García's military as 'willing to commit more brazen killings'

RUMORS WIDESPREAD

Allegations of human rights violations in the fight against Shining Path were widespread at the time, although most human rights groups blamed Peru's security forces. A 1987 Human Rights Watch report said García's government enacted "provisions of an...internal war in zones usually known" and described "a military zone from which civilian control, willing to commit more brazen killings."

U.S. human rights advocates at the time protested against the Reagan administration's failure to condemn Peruvian human rights abuses.

According to the report, García's party — the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance — or APRA — ran "covert paramilitary organization, perhaps several" while his Reagan interlocutor, Ambassador Alexis Alexander Marcelle, "supervised a blood police force."

"Marcelle reportedly believes that APRA needs the capability to eliminate terrorists because of the inability of the nation's judiciary to release them and police reluctance to kill captured ... militants," said the report, first published earlier this month by Lima's La República newspaper and declassified in 2005.

The four-to-five-page report does not say whether the paramilitary was actually carried out. It notes that one APRA paramilitary squad known as COMITAP lurched an attempted assassination of an alleged pro-Shining Path newspaper.

The guerrilla war caused the deaths of more than 69,000 people, according to a 2003 report by Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and Shining Path was conducted under García's successor, Alberto Fujimori.

The document also notes COMITAP "reportedly has agreed to send 1,000 of its members to North Korea for training by 1987, which will have been there already."

Four individuals either held high-level positions at the time in the Lima embassy section of the National Security Council and the U.S. Southern Command said that the form and style of the document indicate it was prepared either by the CIA or by the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research. All asked for anonymity, weighing out of tradition of diplomatic circumspection.

The U.S. embassy in Lima at the time was also sending cables to Washington about the existence of paramilitary groups. Many were supplied to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and appear on the website of the National Security Archive, an independent group dedicated to declassifying U.S. foreign policy documents.

But those cables lacked the specificity of the document in the NSC files of the Reagan library, using words such as "rumor" and "suspicions" to describe the García links to the paramilitary squads.

'THERE IS NO DOUBT'

Alexander F. Watson, then U.S. ambassador to Peru and now a top international consulting firm in Washington, declined to comment on some of the assertions in the report, said, "There is no doubt that the APRA party had paramilitary organizations."

But Watson said he could not recall any U.S. diplomatic complaints to the García administration at the time.

Gary Hoover is a freelance journalist who has conducted research at the Reagan Library and cited the report in documents he declassified.