



U.S. court once again rules to deport former Salvadoran defense minister'

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Former defense minister of El Salvador, Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, leaves federal court in Palm Beach, Fla.

An immigration appeals court earlier this week ruled that a former defense minister of El Salvador can be deported back to the Central American country due to his participation in or concealment of torture and murder by his troops during the bloody civil war in the 1980s.

In what has been hailed as significant human rights precedent, the decision – published Wednesday by the Board of Immigration Appeals – found that former official, Gen. Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, had a direct role in the abuse and killing of civilians because of his "command responsibility" as the top military officer.

"Congress clearly intended that commanders should be held accountable if their subordinates commit torture and extrajudicial killings," the panel of three judges wrote, according to the New York Times.

The ruling now makes it easier to deport foreigners who were top commanders in other country's militaries based on violations by soldiers serving under them.

Vides Casanova, who was El Salvador's defense minister from 1983 to 1989, was a U.S. ally during the Salvadoran government's armed struggle with Marxist guerrillas during much of that decade. He later moved to South Florida and became a permanent legal resident

There are other former Salvadoran officials from that era living in the U.S. who could be targeted for deportation for similar abuses, said Center for Justice & Accountability attorney Carolyn Patty Blum.

This week's decision upholds an opinion in February 2012 by an immigration judge that ruled that General Vides could be deported. He, however, is not likely to be expelled immediately because he can appeal to a federal appeals court.

"This is not a case in which isolated or random human rights abuses took place at the hands of rogue subordinates," the judges wrote. General Vides "affirmatively and knowingly shielded subordinates from the consequences of their acts and promoted a culture of tolerance for human rights abuses." An immigration appeals court earlier this week ruled that a former defense minister of El Salvador can be deported back to the Central American country due to his participation in or concealment of torture and murder by his troops during the bloody civil war in the 1980s.

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