

Fujimori: Rejected word of death squad

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LIMA, Peru --

Former President Alberto Fujimori testified Monday that he did not believe a dissident army general in 1993 when he revealed the existence of a military death squad, saying his top advisers told him the report was false.

Fujimori is on trial for murder and kidnapping allegedly carried out at his orders by the squadron. He said he believed his spy chief and his defense minister when they told him the report by Gen. Rodolfo Robles was untrue.

"They explicitly denied it in no uncertain terms," Fujimori said in response to questioning from prosecutors.

Fujimori, 69, is on trial for his alleged use of the Colina death squad, which was composed of army intelligence agents, to fight a bloody Maoist insurgency during the early years of his 1990-2000 presidency.

If convicted, he faces up to 30 years in prison and a fine of some \$33 million.

Fujimori has denied having any knowledge of the squad's activities, and has said he never authorized Vladimiro Montesinos, his feared intelligence chief and a powerbroker in his autocratic regime, to lead a dirty war against the Shining Path rebels.

Fujimori said his defense minister, Gen. Victor Malca, publicly denied Robles' report.

"I remember that Gen. Malca even made a public statement immediately afterward denying Gen. Robles' affirmation," Fujimori said.

Robles, then the army's third-ranking officer, publicly disclosed the existence of the death squad in May 1993, accusing Montesinos of organizing it. He then took refuge in the U.S. Embassy and fled to Argentina.

The existence of an army death squad would have violated his strategy for fighting the insurgency, Fujimori argued on Monday.

"This formation of the Colina group did not fit within my directives," he said.

The Colina group killed 15 people in a tenement in Lima's Barrios Altos neighborhood in November 1991, including an 8-year-old boy. In July 1992, in a second strike against suspected rebel collaborators, the squadron kidnapped nine students and a professor at La Cantuta University and killed them. Prosecutors say it was disbanded in December 1992.

In 2000, Fujimori fled to Japan, where his parents were born, as his government collapsed amid a corruption scandal involving Montesinos. He flew to Chile in 2005 in an apparent attempt to stage a return to Peruvian politics.

Chile instead extradited him to Peru in September to stand trial on corruption and human rights abuse charges.