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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D. C. 20505

24 January 1980

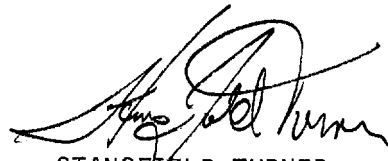
ALERT MEMORANDUM

MEMORANDUM FOR: The National Security Council

SUBJECT : Threat of a Leftist Extremist Takeover  
in El Salvador

1. Leftist extremists in El Salvador continue to make important gains in military and political strength. Meanwhile, the governing junta is riven by divisions and its support among the politically active population is dwindling. Under these circumstances, a leftist extremist thrust for power--through widespread military action or nationwide strikes and disorders--could come at any time, and with little warning. If there is an outbreak of civil war, or simply a collapse of the government with attendant anarchy, the odds would favor an extreme left victory, especially in the short term. [redacted]

2. I believe the situation in El Salvador demands close attention at this time, and I am making you aware of my concern. [redacted]

  
STANSFIELD TURNER

Attachment  
[redacted]

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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

24 January 1980

ALERT MEMORANDUM\*

El Salvador

*The extreme left appears determined to seize power in El Salvador during 1980. Bolstered by its own growing military strength and popular support, and by the declining support and weakness of the governing junta, the extreme left could make a thrust for power at almost any time. Moreover, during the next couple of months, debilitating general strikes, an attempted coup by conservative military officers or some other serious incident could touch off a revolutionary showdown. The odds increasingly favor the extreme left in a conflict, because of political divisions in the junta and the poor state of readiness of the military and security forces.*

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The extreme left is in an increasingly advantageous position for an armed struggle. Its timetable and tactics may not yet be fixed, and may be affected more by events--such as a rightwing coup--than by planning.

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Leftist extremists have been expanding the numbers of their armed guerrillas as well as their political activists and organizers. They have also made significant strides in unifying and coordinating both their military and political activities.

*\*The Alert Memorandum is an interagency publication issued by the Director of Central Intelligence on behalf of the Intelligence Community. Its purpose is to ensure that senior policymakers are aware of impending potential developments that may have serious implications for US interests. It is not a prediction that these developments will occur. This memorandum has been coordinated at the working level with CIA, DIA, NSA, and State/INR.*

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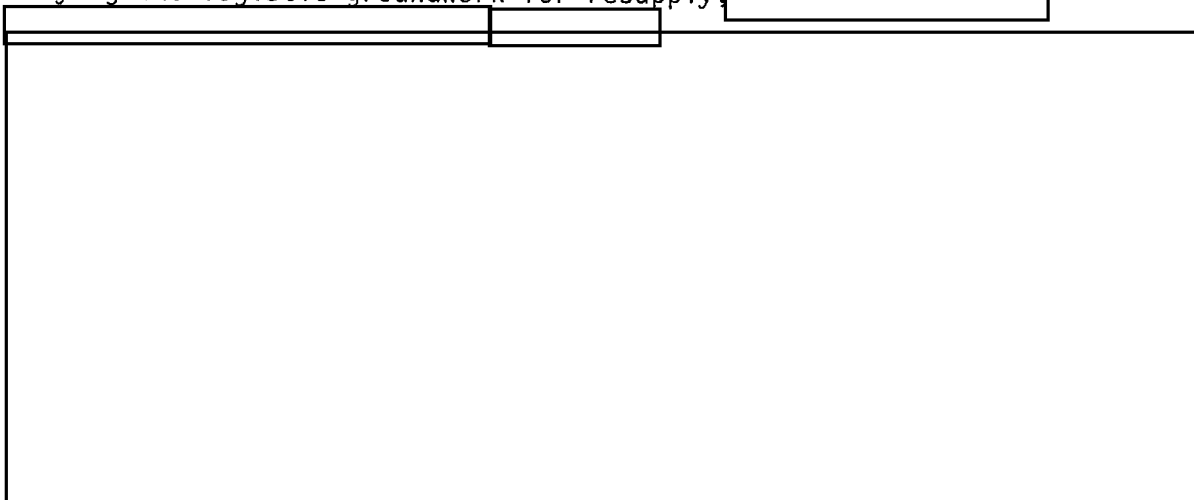
A mass rally in San Salvador on 22 January, to celebrate their newly proclaimed unity, brought upwards of 80,000 demonstrators into the streets. This may have exceeded their own expectations, though various popular front groups throughout the country have been growing rapidly. [redacted]

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The extreme left is very well funded, mainly from kidnap ransoms. It has improved its military capabilities through training in El Salvador and in Nicaragua and Cuba, and through increasingly sophisticated hit-and-run raids on both government security posts and civilian targets. It is also increasing the size and sophistication of its armaments and, with Cuban assistance, is laying the logistic groundwork for resupply. [redacted]

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The governing junta--a combination of moderate military officers and Christian Democratic politicians--has had considerable difficulty putting together a cabinet since it was formed in early January. The junta's agreement on goals is paper thin, because of differences between and within both its civilian and military camps. The indecision has delayed sorely needed US economic and security assistance. [redacted]

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The weaknesses of the government probably cannot be papered over. Pressures from rightist civilians and senior military leaders have prevented the moderate military members in the junta from moving too rapidly to enact reforms. The moderates fear a coup from the right, which would split the military institution. Meanwhile, the Christian Democrats, especially their younger, more leftist members, are trying to pull the junta in the opposite direction to mend the government's fences with the center left. [redacted]

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[REDACTED]

If there is an outbreak of civil war, or simply a collapse of the government with attendant anarchy, the odds would favor an extreme left victory, especially in the short term. Even if a rightist coup installed a government determined to crack down against the extreme left, the long-term advantage would probably lie with the latter. A rightwing military government would still be weakened by political divisiveness, which would undercut its limited capability for protracted warfare. The extreme left, under these circumstances, would gain recruits from the center, as was the case in Nicaragua under Somoza. [REDACTED]

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Civil war in El Salvador would endanger the safety of US officials and citizens as well as threaten US interests throughout Central America. [REDACTED]

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