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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

DDI-2645-82
31 March 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

THROUGH : National Intelligence Officer for Warning

FROM : National Intelligence Officer for Latin America

SUBJECT : Monthly Warning Assessment: Latin America

1. Central America - After the El Salvador Elections*

The enormous popular participation in the El Salvador elections was an affirmation of democratic hopes and a repudiation of the extreme left. Despite four months of political and military plans to disrupt and, if possible, prevent the elections, the guerrillas were able to do much less damage in the closing days than had been feared--this should prompt a close look at our estimates of their numbers and their tactical skills. It also points to the likely effects of the combination of good intelligence and preemptive government military operations throwing the guerrillas off balance. [] 25X1

The prospect of a coalition in El Salvador which includes ARENA and excludes the Christian Democrats raises potentially serious issues of continued international support from Venezuela and the international Christian Democratic parties. However, it is possible that the military will work with other forces to require that any new Salvadoran government promises not to reverse the reforms, not to persecute or prosecute Christian Democrats, and not to interfere with the military chain of command. A real commitment on the first two issues might sustain moderate international support. [] 25X1

From a warning perspective, another critical issue is the probable post-election strategy of the extreme left. Most likely the Salvadoran extreme left and its Soviet bloc supporters will continue the main elements of the consistent strategy they have pursued in El Salvador by efforts to: (1)

*The discussion of the situation in Guatemala and El Salvador at the 22 March warning meeting mostly has been overtaken by events. This section of the warning report provides an updated assessment reflecting the objective but individual comments of the NIO/LA. [] 25X1

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fragment the civil-military coalition and accelerate polarization by provoking counter-terrorism; (2) isolate and delegitimize the El Salvadoran government internationally; (3) use propaganda to bring about a cutoff of US assistance. [REDACTED]

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In the next weeks the extreme left may use its deployed forces and ammunition stockpiles to launch various military, sabotage and terrorist actions; but its essential tactics over the next months (perhaps till July 1982) will probably repeat those used after the failure of the January 1981 military offensive: increased emphasis on national and international political operations (such as negotiations) to undermine the Salvadoran government while guerrilla military strength, operational unity and morale is built to higher levels for additional assaults. [REDACTED]

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2. Guatemala

The coup of 23 March 1982 seemed to derive from a combination of junior officers, the far right MNL (National Liberation Movement) Party and other disappointed politicians. It is still unclear how the balance of forces will evolve; and, there is a need for additional information and close monitoring. Surprisingly, the extreme left has not taken advantage of what must be a distracted army to launch major attacks. That could change in the next weeks. [REDACTED]

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3. Nicaragua

Violence along the Honduran border has increased considerably during the past month, both in terms of increased anti-Sandinista activity and clashes between the Nicaraguan and Honduran military. Recent flight activity from Cuba to eastern Nicaragua and increased military in the region could reflect not only Nicaraguan concern over the border situation but, some believe, efforts to provide more support to insurgent forces in the region or even preparations for the introduction of MIG aircraft. [REDACTED]

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4. Cuba

The extensive military activity in Cuba during past months reflects Castro's continuing effort to deter any US military action and his desire to promote a siege mentality on the island. Recent military construction activity appears designed mostly to increase Cuba's ability to survive an air attack. We expect such activity to continue with possible big increases in paranoia when two carrier battle groups begin exercises from 8 April to 17 May 1982. [REDACTED]

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We see no major shifts in Cuban policy toward Central America. Some analysts think that the Cubans felt the guerrilla election offensive in El Salvador was ill advised. However, Castro remains optimistic that even a stalemate in El Salvador will produce a guerrilla victory because he believes that prolonged conflict eventually will force the US to pull out. Recent Cuban efforts to increase help to the guerrillas in Guatemala is equally a function of the need to see more progress made in El Salvador. Castro does not see quick victory (6-12 months) in Guatemala, and he believes insurgents in Honduras still lack the necessary infrastructure to wage a meaningful struggle. Strategy for now will be to convince the Honduran military to

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remain neutral thus buying more time before the struggle can be escalated there. [REDACTED] 25X1

5. Brazil

The November 1982 elections amount to a plebescite on the government. An unprecedented number of posts could change hands, and the election will determine the composition of the electoral college that picks a presidential successor. The government has not been successful in manipulating the electoral rules, and many analysts believe that the best it now can hope for is not to lose badly. It probably will not try to void the electoral results because this could provoke a major political crisis and risk, splitting the military. Moreover, an effort by hard-core conservatives to overthrow the election probably would not succeed because there is not sufficient military backing for such a step. [REDACTED] 25X1

6. Force Totals

Please note that the size of El Salvador's active security forces has been increased on the attached chart to 28,900. This includes the 1,500 officer candidates and soldiers receiving training in the US. The NIO/LA group on military/guerrilla force estimates will be convened by [REDACTED] (A/NIO/LA) in order to reassess our estimates of guerrilla strength in El Salvador. [REDACTED] 25X1

Constantine C. Menges
Constantine C. Menges

Atts: (2)

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ATTACHMENT A

CENTRAL AMERICA: GUERRILLA FORCES, March 1982

| Country | Category | Strength | Confidence Level* | Classification | Unclassified |
|-------------|------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Nicaragua** | Full-time guerrillas | less than 1,000 | D | [REDACTED] | less than 1,000 |
| | Militia/part-time guerrillas | | | | |
| El Salvador | Full-time guerrillas | 4,500-5,000 | D | | |
| | Militia/part-time guerrillas | 5,000-10,000 | D | | 5,000-10,000 |
| Guatemala | Full-time guerrillas | 4,000-5,000 | D | | 4,500 |
| | Militia/part-time guerrillas | | | | |
| Honduras | Full-time guerrillas | 100 | C | [REDACTED] | some |
| | Militia/part-time guerrillas | | | | |

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* Reflects the level of confidence in the relevant reporting, ranging from A (highest level) to D (lowest level), follows:

- A = uncertainty is less than 20 percent.
- B = uncertainty is less than 35 percent.
- C = uncertainty is less than 50 percent.
- D = uncertainty is greater than 50 percent.

** Anti-Sandinista forces operating mostly from Honduras.

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- 1 - C/CA/IAD
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