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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

National Intelligence Officers

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2 November 1981

Copy No. 7

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. Overall Trends in Central America

In the view of some--but not all analysts--there is a wide array of information suggesting that Cuba, Nicaragua, and the Central American guerrilla groups will move quickly and preemptively in the next months to:

(1) reinforce the Nicaraguan Government with Cuban or other troops introduced in a deceptive way--such as the approximately 225 Cuban "special troops" who arrived in recent weeks on airplanes along with teachers;

(2) provide jet aircraft and additional amounts of other heavy weapons to Nicaragua which could permit it to intimidate or threaten Honduras and Costa Rica if they permit any "anti-Nicaraguan activities" on their soil;

(3) strengthen guerrilla/terrorist groups in El Salvador (the Sandinistas have called for volunteers to fight there), Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica--for expanded military/terrorist assaults in January-March 1982; this might well occur simultaneously at different levels of violence in the various countries for both military and political purposes--such as convincing Mexico and the Socialist International (meeting in Caracas in February 1982) and the US Congress that the guerrillas will win and further help to the threatened government is hopeless or too costly. [Redacted]

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2. Nicaragua

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The various sources of intelligence information on possible Cuban troop movement to Nicaragua--recent and future--were reviewed to the extent possible in that context and specific questions from the Cuban deployments to Angola (1975) and Ethiopia (1977) were raised for possible lessons. DIA will make a presentation on this issue at the next meeting.

There was consensus that Nicaragua continues its movement toward a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship and provides material help to the guerrillas in Central America. 25X1

3. El Salvador

Compared with August/September 1981 there has been a 25% reduction in the number of small unit attacks by the extreme left. Overall, the total estimated politically-related deaths (from all sources) have declined from about 120 per week during the first eight months of 1981 to about 70 per week recently.

There is evidence that the various armed groups among the extreme left have had serious disputes about tactics that this has included several firefights. However, the destruction of the bridge over the Rio Lempa and the subsequent large unit attack on the second and last bridge linking the isolated eastern part of El Salvador to the rest of the country and the past ability of the guerrilla organizations to overcome tactical disputes all suggest the threat remains severe. Many analysts believe this is a period of build-up before the expansion of violence in January-March 1982.

The government forces have good morale and have mounted several large sweep operations but the guerrillas have escaped, though much of their logistical support was captured or destroyed. 25X1

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The cohesion and stability of the Christian Democratic-military coalition has been shaken by reports of Christian Democratic willingness to negotiate with elements of the FDR, by the vehement opposition of Colonel Garcia (scheduled to visit Washington on 5 November) and by reports of moderate officers' discussions of the need to remove Colonel Garcia--the Minister of Defense.

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Though the Christian Democrats have disavowed any negotiations with the FDR, there are Salvadoran elements which want to remove them and which tend to become more active if they perceive the guerrillas weaker or US indifference on this issue. The differences within the government coalition are potentially far more serious than those within the guerrilla forces. 25X1

4. Guatemala

Trends described last month continue. However, the growing strength of the guerrillas was made visible when 300 captured a provincial capital and killed the governor, the police chief and about 10 others. This town, Solola, is located about 70 miles from the Mexican border. 25X1

5. Honduras

Various extreme left groups including the Communist Party of Honduras (PCH) went to Havana in mid-September for the now familiar Cuban insistence on "revolutionary unity" as a prelude to its expanded support for violent destabilization. This was followed by several dramatic terrorist incidents including the attack on the US military aid group and a mid-October unity meeting among the extreme left to make plans for further violence and help to the guerrillas in El Salvador and Guatemala--mainly as a conduit and storage mechanism for arms.

A recent CIA report estimated that about 400 Honduran guerrillas are now being trained in Nicaragua for action in Honduras as early as January 1982. Total estimated strength of the armed extreme left is now about 850 (including the 400 in Nicaragua), a dramatic increase from two years ago when reports of Cuban training for Honduran guerrillas first were seen.

Initially, Castro intended to leave Honduras in relative peace so that it could be the "funnel" to El Salvador and Guatemala. However, there may be three reasons for the clear step-up in the timetable for Honduras:

- (1) to prevent military cooperation among the threatened governments in the area by tying down/distracting Honduras forces,
- (2) to prevent or intimidate Honduras from permitting its territory to be used in operations against Nicaragua;
- (3) to prevent elections in late November which would give Honduras strong international legitimacy.

While analysts agree that the Honduran extreme left is still too weak and divided to threaten takeover, it may well be strong enough to create a large upsurge in violence within the next months. Though the election remains likely, the heightened insecurity within the Honduran military already evident as result of the increased violence and Nicaraguan covert activities with one political party, have raised ever more serious concerns about the possibility of a military coup or other maneuver to prevent or nullify the elections. 25X1

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6. Belize

This is a situation that should be watched very closely and that requires far more intelligence information about possible Cuban/Nicaraguan or Grenadian efforts at subversion--especially in the case of one political faction.

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7. Brazil

The mix of positive and troublesome trends described last month continues with most analysts still judging that there will be elections in 1982. However, reports of activities by elements of the Brazilian intelligence services to provoke violence and justify a crackdown on some leftist elements continue and might portend serious problems for the political transition.

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