


MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

Attached is the memorandum requested by Judge Clark concerning the current military situation in El Salvador. Completing the memo before the elections posed some problems, as we view insurgent capabilities to disrupt the elections as a key test of the existing military balance. In as much as Judge Clark does not want the memorandum until 30 March, we propose to update it just after the elections and thus firm up our conclusions.

The graphics shop will provide us with finished maps for you tomorrow.


Director
African and Latin American Analysis

Attachment:
As stated

Date 24 March 1982

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE
24 March 1982

MEMORANDUMTHE MILITARY SITUATION IN EL SALVADORSummary

A military stalemate has existed in El Salvador for much of the past year, although each side has attempted to seize the tactical initiative at various times. In general the armed forces appear to have made the most progress in improving their capabilities, and as a result, their offensive operations have gradually increased in scale and effectiveness. The insurgents nevertheless remain a potent force and they have improved their combat readiness appreciably in recent months through acquisition of more and heavier weapons and the return of foreign-trained manpower. [redacted]

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The insurgents had planned to make a substantial show of force prior to 28 March in hopes of postponing the elections and forcing negotiations. The armed forces have been able to neutralize most insurgent attacks, however, and they still hold the current military initiative. [redacted]

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This has placed the insurgents in a position where they must now make a concerted effort during the final week before the election to disrupt the balloting and reduce voter turnout. If they fail, it will represent a major strategic setback to the guerrilla cause. [redacted]

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On balance, we believe the armed forces will provide sufficient security in most cases to permit a relatively high voter turnout. The military will

This memorandum was requested by the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. It was prepared by [redacted] of the Central America Working Group, Middle America/Caribbean Division, Office of African and Latin American Analysis and coordinated with the Clandestine Service, the Department of State, and the Defense Intelligence Agency. Information available as of 23 March 1982 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments are welcome and should be directed to Chief, Middle America/Caribbean Division, ALA, [redacted]

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likely be sorely tested in eastern El Salvador, however, where the insurgents now appear to be planning to make a major effort to seize some key cities.

If the elections are successful, the insurgent problem will not disappear by any means. The insurgents will retain considerable disruptive potential, and the military balance will not swing quickly or decisively in the government's favor. But leftist hopes for negotiating with the new government from a position of strength will be greatly reduced, and new strains are likely to appear in the already fragile insurgent alliance.

* * *

More than a year after the failure of the insurgents' "final offensive" in January 1981, the military conflict in El Salvador remains a stalemate. The military initiative has changed hands several times over the past year, but never long or decisively enough to represent a trend. Repeated armed forces' offensives against major insurgent concentrations generally have failed to encircle or inflict heavy losses on the guerrillas. On the other hand, while the insurgents have been able to keep up their hit-and-run raids and economic sabotage, they have not been able to gain enough momentum to turn the military balance in their favor.

Despite the continued stalemate, both sides have improved their capabilities over the past year. On balance, the armed forces appear to have made the most progress, although this cannot yet be projected as a long-term trend. Significant weaknesses remain on each side. The ability of the insurgents to disrupt the scheduled 28 March election will provide the best test to date of the existing military balance and prospects for the future.

Military Improvements

One of the greatest weaknesses of the armed forces has been a lack of sufficient strength to conduct offensive operations while still defending major population centers and economic targets from insurgent attack. Since the January 1981 offensive, the military has made a significant effort to expand, aided by increased US material assistance. As a result, the armed forces have nearly doubled in the past year, and now number about 18,000 (see Table 1).

To improve command and control of this larger force, two additional brigade headquarters have been formed, bringing the

current total to six (see Map 1). The activation of a quick-reaction battalion has provided a central reserve force. While regular units have often been tied down in a static defensive posture, this elite battalion has been free to operate where needed. [redacted]

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The army currently has two additional quick-reaction battalions in training, one in the US at Ft. Bragg and another in-country. The General Staff hopes to activate two other such units by early 1983, bringing the total to five. Regular infantry battalions throughout the country also are being strengthened and reequipped with US M-16 rifles, M-60 machineguns, 81 mm mortars and 90 mm recoilless rifles. [redacted]

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The security forces have also been expanded since January 1981, and currently number about 10,500 men. This has improved urban security and allowed the National Guard to strengthen detachments in smaller towns, particularly in isolated areas. In most of these, the National Guard is the primary defensive force, generally supplemented only by civilian irregulars. [redacted]

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Another significant manpower weakness also shows signs of improvement. This is the critical shortage of junior officers-- platoon leaders number only some 55 percent of the authorized total. About 500 officer candidates are currently undergoing training at Ft. Benning, however, and they should be available to El Salvador by June 1982. Nevertheless, the officers will require combat seasoning before they become fully effective. [redacted]

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A major air force improvement over the last year has been the acquisition of 14 UH-1H helicopters. These have greatly improved army mobility, allowing small units to be airlifted and wounded personnel to be evacuated quickly. Although a number of these aircraft were destroyed in the late January 1982 raid on Ilopango Air Base, they were rapidly replaced by the US. The current inventory is being expanded to 20 UH-1Hs, and Taiwanese mechanics will be available to assist in maintenance requirements. [redacted]

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Despite these improvements, significant weaknesses remain:

- Basic infantry training is poor. There is no national training center, and each major unit is responsible for training its own recruits. Given the distractions of regular combat operations, this has often proved difficult.

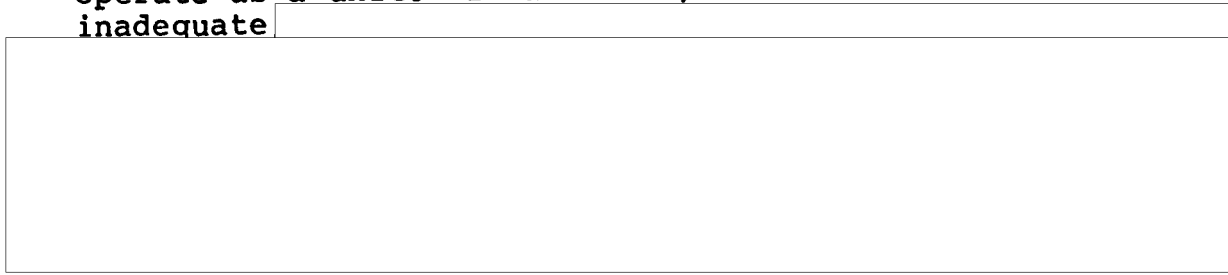
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-- Logistical support capabilities are inadequate. The recent acquisition of some 180 military trucks has eased a critical shortage, but the entire supply system is poorly managed and controlled. Operations are often curtailed, for example, because of inadequate rations of food and ammunition.

-- Command and control is still weak. Major sweeps are conducted by different companies drawn from throughout the country, and these forces have not been trained to operate as a unit. In addition, communications often are inadequate

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-- Interdiction of guerrilla supply deliveries is poor. Although interdiction of overland insurgent supply lines has improved somewhat, defenses are still porous. Naval interdiction also needs to be greatly improved, particularly in deep water. Moreover, there is almost no capability for air interdiction.

-- Finally, despite force expansion efforts, the manpower ratio of the army and security forces to the insurgents is still only about 5 to 1; far less than the 10 to 1 force advantage generally considered necessary to defeat an insurgency.

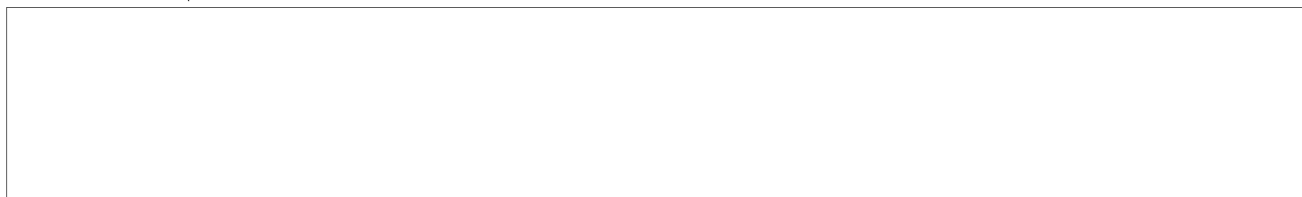
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The Insurgent Situation

The Salvadoran guerrillas also have made considerable improvements over the past year, including increasing their forces by about 25 percent to the 4,500 to 5,000 range. In addition to these regular insurgent forces, there probably are another 5,000 to 10,000 local militia personnel to aid in the defense of base areas.

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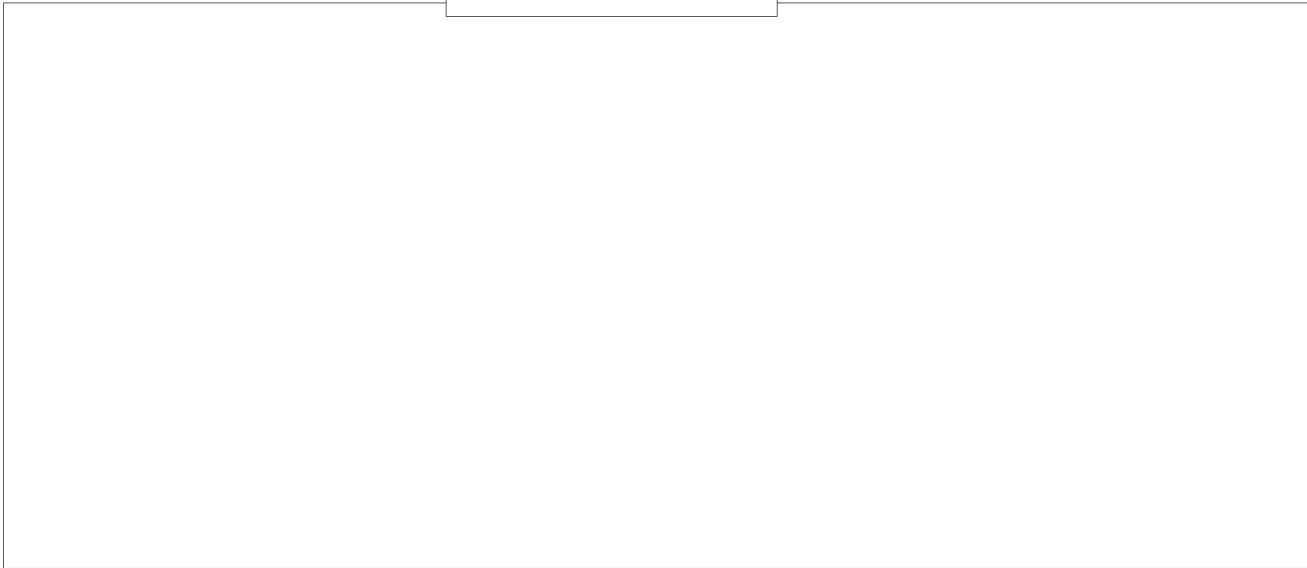
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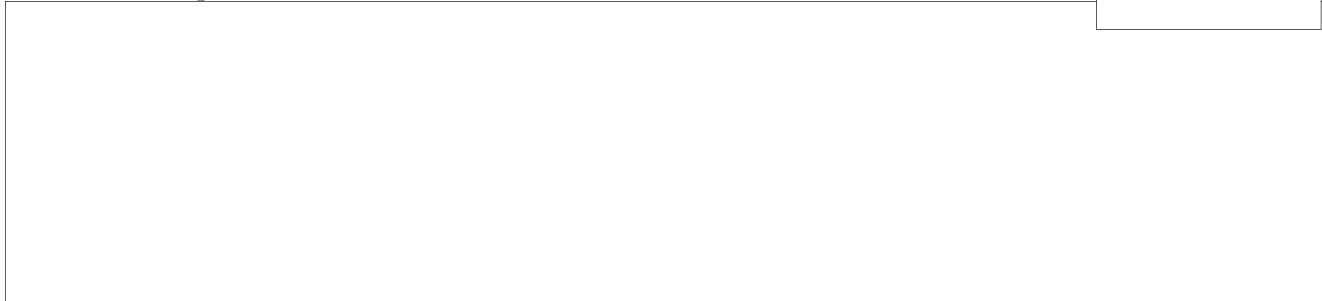
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The insurgent units are generally concentrated in about eight major base areas, primarily in rugged terrain. The most secure are along the Honduran border. Within these concentrations, we have been able to identify about 40 guerrilla camps. There could easily be twice this number which we have not been able to confirm.



Most insurgent training apparently takes place at camps within the base areas. Insurgent leaders, communication personnel, and other technicians and specialists, however, probably get much of their training in Cuba, Nicaragua, the Soviet Bloc, or the Middle East. Several hundred may be abroad at any one time, and the cumulative total could be over a thousand. As a result, the guerrillas have become noticeably more skilled at handling their newer weaponry and adept at launching ambushes and conducting sabotage operations.



The routes used to deliver weapons have been diversified considerably in the past year. Nicaragua reportedly reduced aerial deliveries after the failure of the "final offensive," and most of the supplies began to move overland through Honduras. As a result of increasingly effective Honduran interdiction efforts during 1981, however, delivery by sea gradually gained more prominence. Shipments primarily arrive off the southeastern coast of El Salvador, which is within easy reach of Nicaragua by small fishing craft. Air deliveries also have picked up again, usually by parachute drop. Airfields outside of Nicaragua, including some in Costa Rica and Panama, have increasingly been used as points of departure.

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Despite the insurgent improvements during the past year, significant weaknesses have continued to hinder their efforts:

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- The various factions have been riven by serious differences over political and military strategy. The largest faction--the Farabundo Marti Popular Liberation Force (FPL)--is opposed to negotiation and believes a protracted guerrilla war is necessary to achieve an ultimate victory. Other factions apparently still hope for a victory through a popular insurrection, and barring that, a negotiated settlement giving them access to power.

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- Another basic weakness has been the failure to build a substantial base of popular support. Although the

insurgents have been largely able to gain the favor of rural peasants in the base areas, they have failed to rebuild their urban front organizations. [redacted]

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Insurgent Efforts to Disrupt the Elections

By the end of 1981, insurgent recognition that the scheduled 28 March constituent assembly election could deal them a major strategic setback, particularly if there were a high voter turnout, led them to put aside many of their political and military differences. [redacted]

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This insurgent mobilization effort to disrupt the elections will have residual benefits--better arms, more trained cadre, specialized units--in the months to come. Nevertheless, the primary motive of the anti-election campaign is essentially defensive--to prevent a political defeat. The insurgent leaders are aware that successful elections will boost the new government's image at home and abroad and deal a psychological blow to guerrilla morale. [redacted]

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Initially the insurgents hoped that increased raids on major towns and cities, more attacks and ambushes of small military garrisons, and stepped up sabotage operations would demonstrate the continued military strength of the left and force the government into negotiations. Some of the more optimistic

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factions even hoped that an "insurrectionary" climate would be created, leaving the government no choice but to cancel the elections.

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Current Situation

The failure of their campaign to prevent the elections has forced the insurgents into a position where they must now attempt an all-out effort to disrupt the actual balloting.

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The insurgents hope they can still intimidate voters, disrupt transportation to the polls, reduce voter turnout, and generally undermine the credibility of the elections. They may even attempt to place bombs in polling places to prevent voting. These efforts also are aimed at producing enough destructive violence to attract considerable world attention.

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Prospects

On balance, we believe the armed forces will provide sufficient security in most cases to permit a relatively high voter turnout. Insurgent attempts to paralyze public transportation in rural areas could hold down balloting there somewhat, but most reports indicate considerable voter determination to get to the polls.

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Nevertheless, the army may be sorely tested in eastern El Salvador, where its resources are stretched thin and reinforcement must come across the two remaining--and vulnerable--bridges across the Lempa River. But even in the east, guerrilla victories are likely to be temporary.

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Should the elections come off well and the insurgents achieve only temporary military successes, they will suffer in several ways:

- Considerable manpower and material likely will be expended, drawing down insurgent resources.
- The psychological blow to the morale of insurgent rank-and-file may be considerable.
- Insurgent unity is likely to fall apart after 28 March, particularly as their current alliance is based primarily on the common goal of disrupting the elections, and failure to do so is likely to result in considerable recrimination.

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The military balance will not swing quickly and decisively in the government's favor, however, as the insurgents will retain strong residual capabilities:

- The insurgent offensive effort in eastern El Salvador, although failing to take and hold major cities, may help them expand and consolidate control of rural areas.

[REDACTED]

-- The Cuban and Nicaraguan arms pipeline will likely remain open, and the military's interdiction capabilities will still be minimal. Nevertheless, less priority may be given to sending arms to El Salvador as opposed to other areas, especially Guatemala.

-- Despite the negative impact that attempts to disrupt the actual balloting may have on world opinion, the insurgents will continue to enjoy considerable international public support in both political fora and the media. [REDACTED]

Table 1Salvadoran Military Strength

	<u>February 1981</u>	<u>March 1982</u>
Army	9,170	17,015
Navy	285	440
Air Force	180	510
	<u>9,635</u>	<u>17,965</u>
National Guard	3,460	3,540
National Police	2,835	4,940
Treasury Police	1,320	2,040
	<u>7,615</u>	<u>10,520</u>
GRAND TOTAL	17,250	28,485

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MAP # 1

Salvadoran Military Organization



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