

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

31 Mar 82

2557-87

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable William P. Clark
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
The White House

SUBJECT : The Military Situation in El Salvador

Attached is the assessment you requested on the
Military situation in El Salvador.

W. J. Casey

William J. Casey
Director of Central Intelligence

Attachment:

[Redacted]

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

29 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 were able to neutralize most insurgent attacks, however, and retain the military initiative. [redacted]

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This placed the insurgents in a position where they had to make a concerted effort during the final days before the election to disrupt the balloting and reduce voter turnout. Even this failed, however, resulting in a major strategic setback to the guerrilla cause. [redacted]

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The armed forces were able to provide sufficient security in most cases to permit an unexpectedly high voter turnout. The insurgents were able to

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 29 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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reduce balloting significantly only in Usulután and a few other areas of eastern and northern El Salvador. [redacted]

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

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* * *

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. [redacted]

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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 significant weaknesses remain on each side. Nevertheless, the failure of the insurgents to disrupt the 28 March elections will provide a major psychological boost to the military's counterinsurgency efforts. [redacted]

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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). [redacted]

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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

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[redacted]

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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[redacted]

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 [redacted] 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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- [redacted]
- 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.
- [redacted]

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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.
- [redacted]

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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.

[redacted]

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[Redacted]

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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. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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The routes used to deliver weapons have been diversified considerably in the past year. [redacted]

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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. [redacted]

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[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.

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[Redacted]

[Redacted] a continuous series of government military offensives since early February into guerrilla staging areas--aided by improved intelligence--disrupted insurgent supply lines and upset operational schedules. Finally, the population generally preferred to remain neutral and avoid involvement despite insurgent calls for popular support.

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

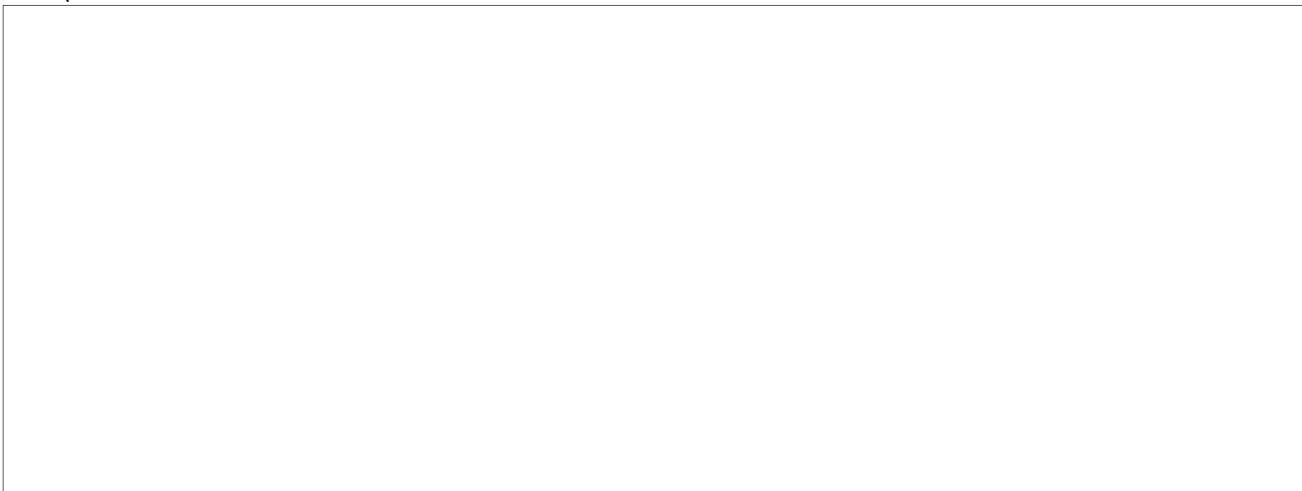
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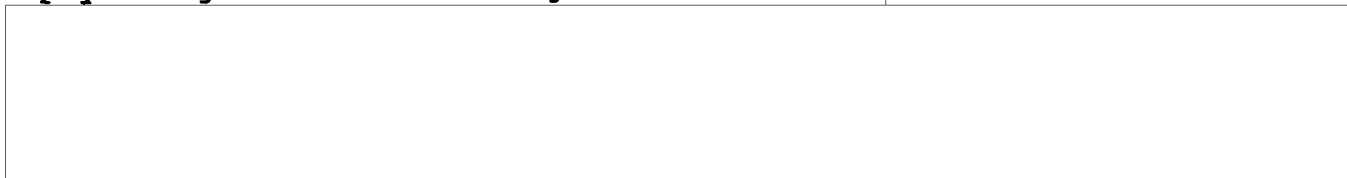
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Prospects

The insurgent failure to disrupt the elections and the unexpectedly large turnout have dealt a major political and psychological blow to the guerrilla cause.



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

- The insurgent mobilization effort to disrupt the elections has provided them with better arms, more trained cadre, and new supply routes.
- The Cuban and Nicaraguan arms pipeline will likely remain open, although perhaps with lesser priority, and the armed forces' interdiction capabilities are still minimal.
- The insurgent offensive effort in eastern El Salvador, although failing to take major cities, has left them in a stronger position in Usulután and Morazan Departments, and it will take a major sustained effort to dislodge them.
- Despite the negative impact of the successful elections, the insurgents still enjoy considerable international support in both political fora and the media.

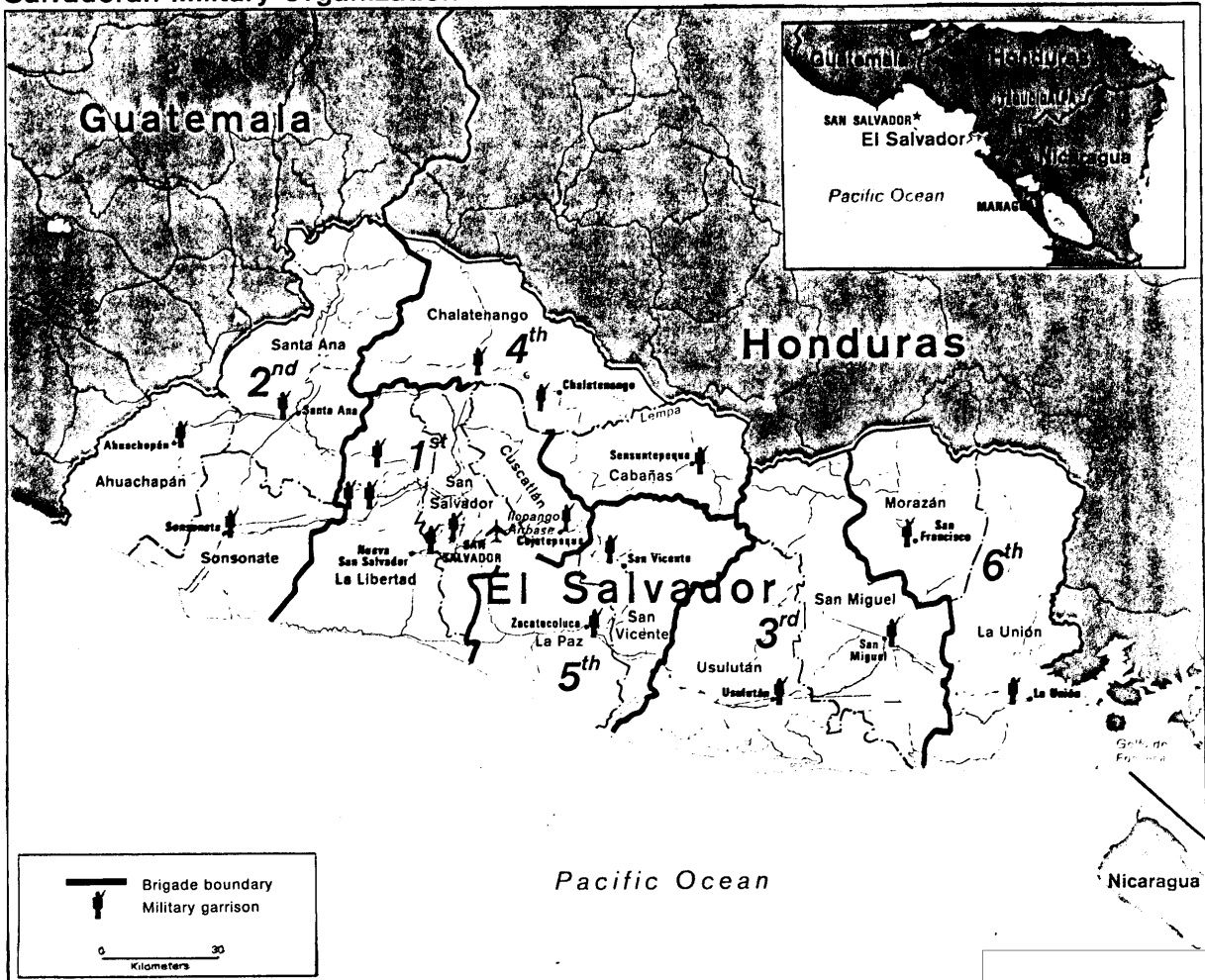


Table 1Salvadoran Military Strength

	<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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Salvadoran Military Organization



MAP 1

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