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Interview With CIA Director William J. Casey

The Real Soviet Threat in El Salvador—And Beyond

In a rare and unusually candid discussion, the nation's intelligence chief spells out a Kremlin strategy for conquest by subversion and for building Russian military power by using secrets stolen from the U.S.

Q Mr. Casey, there's a great deal of concern that this country might be dragged into a Vietnam-like quagmire in El Salvador. In your view, is that fear warranted?

A No. I don't think El Salvador or what we're likely to do there bears any comparison to Vietnam. In the first place, El Salvador is on our doorstep. And we're not just talking about El Salvador; we're talking about Central America—Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala. The insurgency is beamed at all those countries. Furthermore, this is part of a worldwide problem.

Q Worldwide in what sense?

A Around the middle of the '70s, the Soviets assessed the impact of Vietnam on American public opinion and decided we probably would be restricted in our ability to respond to low-level insurgency operations. In the last seven years, starting with the dispatch of sophisticated weapons to join up with Cuban troops in Angola, they have developed a very innovative and brilliant mix of tactics: Political, diplomatic, destabilization, subversion, terrorists and support of insurgencies. And they have applied this around the world.

Over this past year alone, you've had insurgencies in North Yemen, Chad, Morocco, Kampuchea, El Salvador, Guatemala. You have incipient insurgencies in many African countries. The Soviets work in some concert with Cuba, Libya and North Korea. They work with Angola against Namibia and Zaire; with Ethiopia against Somalia, and with Libya and Ethiopia against the Sudan.

Q How are the Soviets involved?

A What happens in these insurgencies is that the Soviets go in and exploit the underlying social and economic discontents, which are plentiful. That gives them a base. They feed it with trained men and with arms. That drives away investment. The insurgents sabotage economic targets, and so economic discontent grows. And as the discontent grows, more people go over to the insurgents' side.

It's almost a no-lose proposition for the Soviets. They can stay in the background. They sell their arms and get up to 20 percent of their hard currency from Libya and other countries that can pay for the arms. It's something we have very great difficulty coping with.

Q What is Cuba's role in all this?

A Here's a country of 10 million, with 50,000 people around the world—military and civilian. Besides the Cuban troops in Angola and Ethiopia, there are 12,000 technical

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trainees in East Germany and Czechoslovakia and 5,000 to 6,000 students in the Soviet Union. They have 50 people here, 60 people there—in Africa, in the Middle East and in Latin America.

They can do this because of the demographics that led them to get rid of 120,000 people in the Mariel sealift. There has been a 50 percent jump in the 15-to-19 age group in the Cuban population. That's quite a latent force that Castro has no work for at home and can use for mischief abroad. He said in a speech just a few months ago that he would like to send 10,000 young Cubans to Siberia to chop down trees for construction projects in Cuba.

Q Do you have evidence that matériel is being supplied by Cuba to the guerrillas in El Salvador on a significant scale?

A Oh, yes. Without it the guerrillas wouldn't be able to sustain an insurgency.

Q And Nicaragua? What part does it play?

A This whole El Salvador insurgency is run out of Managua by professionals experienced in directing guerrilla wars. You've got to appreciate that Managua has become an international center. There are Cubans, Soviets, Bulgarians, East Germans, North Koreans, North Vietnamese, representatives of the PLO. North Koreans are giving some weapons they manufacture. The PLO provides weapons they've picked up around their part of the world. There are American weapons that the Vietnamese brought in in substantial quantities—mostly small arms that were left behind in Vietnam.

Q How large are these foreign groups operating in Managua?

A In the case of the Cubans, 6,000 are in the country, of whom 4,000 are in civil work and maybe 1,800 or 2,000 are in military and security work. The East Germans and Soviets each have somewhere between 50 and 100. The Bulgarians, the North Koreans and the Vietnamese are fewer. They all have their little function: The East Germans work on the security system; Cubans work on the general strategy, and the Soviets work, for the most part, on the large weapons that have come in. The North Koreans and Vietnamese are good at caching arms and digging tunnels and things like that.

Q Why is the administration apparently so concerned about the arrival in Cuba of crates presumably containing a squadron of MiG-23s—a plane that already is operating there?

A Well, Cuba has the biggest air force in the hemisphere next to ours. The new planes are just part of a buildup. But I don't know that we are that concerned. Jimmy Carter made it an issue when MiG-23s arrived in Havana, and he didn't do anything about it. I think this President has been rather careful not to make it an issue—although I wouldn't say we're unconcerned.

Q Does what is happening now in Cuba violate the 1962 Kennedy-Khrushchev agreement ending the missile crisis?

A Oh, sure it does because the '62 agreement said the

Soviets would send no offensive weapons, and it also said there would be no export of revolution from Cuba. The agreement has been violated for 20 years.

Q So the aircraft coming to Cuba now are attack planes—

A They're attack airplanes, yes.

Q Are they nuclear capable?

A They can be made nuclear capable. There's an export version which is not nuclear capable. We haven't seen these planes yet. They're not out of the crate. The probability is they're the export version, but it just takes a little bit of wiring and a little bit of work and some pilot training to make them nuclear capable.

On the other hand, the Soviets have better ways to hit us with nuclear bombs. It's more likely these planes are for the purpose of building Cuba up militarily, modernizing their Army, probably paying them for their work in Africa—to keep their forces in Angola and Ethiopia. Their Army probably feels happy if it gets modern equipment, and they probably wangled these planes out of the Soviets.

Q Could these MiGs be destined ultimately for Nicaragua?

A We think that Nicaragua is lengthening its runways at three airports for the purpose of being able to take this kind of fighter. It probably hasn't been determined whether the

HARRY MATTISON—GAMMA/LIAISON



Salvadoran soldiers. "The notion that all massacres of civilians are perpetrated by the government, not by guerrillas, is false."

planes will go from Cuba to Nicaragua or whether additional planes will go directly from the Soviet Union.

Q Is there a point at which the United States says to the Soviet Union and Cuba, "This far and no further"?

A That's the \$64 question. I don't think the American public generally perceives the threat in as serious a light as we may perceive it at this stage. I think we'll come to our senses and face up to it. But you've got a problem not only of American public opinion but of Latin American public opinion. It's the gringo problem: They don't want us down there.

When we go down there, we play into the hands of the Marxists to a degree; we give them a rallying point. The President has made it clear that there is no intention of sending troops there. Exactly what to do to help these countries defend themselves is a very difficult, complex political, diplomatic, military decision. You can't make it without public understanding and public support.

Q Is there any sign that Latin American opinion is changing and becoming more supportive of the United States?

A A year ago no Latin American country was greatly concerned about what was happening in El Salvador. Yet when

Mexico and France spoke out in support of the El Salvador insurgents several months ago, 12 Latin American countries dissented. That shows growing concern. At the OAS meeting in St. Lucia a couple of months ago, there was a 22-to-3 vote in support of orderly elections in El Salvador. The three dissenters were Nicaragua, Mexico and Grenada. Just two or three weeks ago, Costa Rica, El Salvador and Honduras got together and called upon Venezuela, Colombia and the United States to help protect them against Nicaragua.

Increasingly, the Colombians and the Venezuelans are getting concerned. The Mexicans should be concerned because they could be the next target. I read now that they've got at least the beginnings of a quick-reaction force. So maybe they're coming around. Also, there is dissidence in Nicaragua. A lot of Nicaraguans think that the Sandinistas are betraying the revolution. They resent having the country taken over and run by Cubans.

So we can hope that developments in Central America will breed a reaction. You say "Halt" to all this when you're not saying it alone, when you're not perceived to be behaving in Central America the way the Soviets behave in Poland and when you have enough Latin American participation so that you're helping them instead of doing the whole thing for them.

Q Concretely, what threat do these developments in Central America pose for the U.S.?

A Well, just look at what is happening down there. Nicaragua, a country of 2½ million people, has an Army twice the size of El Salvador's, which has twice the population and is fighting for its life. Nicaragua is sitting there with a big Army that's getting bigger, with Soviet tanks and airfields being extended and pilots being prepared for Soviet supersonic planes. When and if that happens—I think it will happen in six months—Nicaragua will have military dominance over the rest of Central America, with a population 7 times theirs.

If Cuba, with 10 million people, and Nicaragua, with 2½ million people, take over the rest of Central America and build up the armies on the scale of their own, you would have a very large army down there on our doorstep. Mexico is sitting there with a military force of about 150,000 today and never thought of having anything more.

Q Are the persistent reports true that government troops are responsible for most of the massacres of civilians in El Salvador?

A Nobody knows where all these casualties come from. This is civil war. Sometimes they come from the government, and sometimes they come from the guerrillas. We are satisfied that the government is sensitive to the importance of disciplining its forces and is making a genuine effort to do so. But that's going to be very slow and not entirely satisfactory to our public opinion. El Salvador has a violent society, and the law is kind of slow. A man can't be convicted of murder without a witness under their law. And those who sit in judgment risk their lives because the society is violent. So judges have a tendency to duck the responsibility.

But the widely propagated notion that all the massacres of civilians are perpetrated by the government and not by the guerrillas is clearly false. In the final analysis, you have to make up your mind whether you would prefer a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship to a society that is capable of reform.

Q Turning to Russia: The CIA and the Defense Department recently stressed the need to limit Soviet access to American scientific and technological research. Why the sudden concern?

A You need to be concerned about it. We have established a technology-transfer center at the CIA that has taken a very comprehensive look at the whole question of the degree to which American research and development—and Western technology generally—has contributed to the increased accuracy, sophistication, precision, power and countermeasure capability of the Soviet arsenal.

Key Points Made by Casey

- **El Salvador as another Vietnam.** El Salvador bears no comparison to Vietnam. It "is on our doorstep [and] is part of a worldwide problem."
- **1962 Kennedy-Khrushchev agreement.** The accord barring Soviet offensive weapons from Cuba and prohibiting Castro from exporting revolution "has been violated for 20 years."
- **Havana's role in El Salvador.** Without arms from Cuba "the guerrillas wouldn't be able to sustain an insurgency."
- **Threat from Nicaragua.** "Managua has become an international center" for subversion—harboring 6,000 Cubans, plus Russians, East Germans, Bulgarians, Vietnamese, North Koreans, PLO. Three airports are being developed to take advanced Soviet warplanes.
- **Qadhafi—a madman?** "You could say that." He was driven to retaliate with assassination squads for the U.S. downing of two Libyan planes.
- **Continued threat to Reagan.** Qadhafi's hit teams still pose a danger to the President. "You don't call those things off."
- **Russia's reliance on U.S. technology.** "Soviet strategic advances depend on Western technology to a far greater degree than anybody ever dreamed of," and the KGB has a large organization working exclusively to get these secrets.
- **CIA mandate.** To overcome the effects of years of rundown, the agency has a "general go-ahead to carry out a buildup . . . in line with the defense buildup."

We have determined that the Soviet strategic advances depend on Western technology to a far greater degree than anybody ever dreamed of. It just doesn't make any sense for us to spend additional billions of dollars to protect ourselves against the capabilities that the Soviets have developed largely by virtue of having pretty much of a free ride on our R&D. They use every method you can imagine—purchase, legal and illegal; theft; bribery; espionage; scientific exchange; study of trade press, and invoking the Freedom of Information Act—to get to this information.

We found that scientific exchange is a big hole. We send scholars or young people to the Soviet Union to study Pushkin poetry; they send a 45-year-old man out of their KGB or defense establishment to exactly the schools and the professors who are working on sensitive technologies.

The KGB has developed a large, independent, specialized organization which does nothing but work on getting access to Western science and technology. They've been recruiting about 100 young scientists and engineers a year for the last 15 years. They roam the world looking for technology to pick up. Back in Moscow there are 400 or 500 assessing what they need and where they might get it—doing their targeting and then assessing what they get. It's a very sophisticated and far-flung operation.

Q Can you give examples of how U.S. research has directly contributed to the development of Soviet military capabilities?

A Yes. The Soviet ability to MIRV their weapons—to develop multiple, independently targetable warheads for their missiles and to achieve the accuracy of their missiles that threaten the survivability of our fixed-site land-based systems came largely from their hooking on to the technology behind our guidance systems and from the use of high-precision grinding equipment they were able to get from us. I'm not saying they might not have made these advances sometime anyway. But they got them on the cheap and quick.

Q How can the U.S. counter this Soviet drive to gain access to American technology?

A This is something which needs to be looked at across the board in terms of our export controls, in terms of the openness of information and in terms of scientific exchanges. I think there probably will be a panel of the National Academy of Sciences that will look carefully at the question of scientific exchanges and determine how far one might go to control damaging leakage. But you're not going to shut these down. We want to preserve an open society. We're not going to alter that. But, at the same time, we are entitled to protect our scientific and technological secrets.

Q Early in the Reagan administration there was much talk of Soviet involvement in international terrorism. Is there evidence that Russia orchestrates the activities of these terrorist groups?

A We believe they export them more than orchestrate them. Terrorism has become a great industry. It was always a false issue whether the Soviets directed and controlled world terrorism. World terrorism is made up of a bunch of freebooters, and they're all, more or less, in business for themselves. The Soviets have supplied weapons and trained the Palestinians and other terrorist groups. They have training camps in South Yemen. That was part of their getting influence and edging their way into the Middle East.

But if anybody orchestrates them, it's Libya's Qadhafi. He has made many of them dependent on him. After the '73 war, when the Arab world was in disarray, Qadhafi was looking for leadership. The only thing he had was money—and nothing to spend it on. So he found all these Palestinian organizations wanting to stir things up, and he started to put money in them. And then he started to train them and so on. There are over 25 terrorist and guerrilla training camps in Libya. Training guerrillas and terrorists is the second largest industry there—second only to oil.

When Qadhafi wants to send hit teams out to get his own dissidents or to retaliate for the downing of two of his planes in the Gulf of Sidra by the United States, he uses mostly Libyans, but he'll also go to Palestinian and other terrorist organizations and sign them up to help.

The capitals of terrorism are Tripoli and Beirut. The money comes out of Tripoli, and the infrastructure and the false documents—the headquarters—are in Beirut. It's a big business today. They need money, and Qadhafi provides it.

Q What is Qadhafi's aim?

A He's striving for ego satisfaction. He wants to be a big figure in the world. He wants leadership.

Q Is he a madman?

A You could say that. When he's confronted, he has to retaliate. He has that kind of ego drive. He has to show that he's as big as anybody else, and if the United States knocks two of his planes out of the air, he's got to do something about it. He talks about it, and then he's under greater pressure to do something about it. He wants to spread his influence across Africa, and his money reaches Muslim groups as far away as the Philippines.

Q It's your view that the hit squads we heard so much about were sent by Qadhafi to assassinate U.S. leaders in retaliation for the downing of the two Libyan planes—

A I think that's when it started. Of course, we had previously broken diplomatic relations and taken other steps against Libya. Qadhafi is a little guy feeling he's being kicked around by the big guy, and he thinks he's really bigger—and he's going to show it.

Q Do those hit teams still pose a danger to the President?

A I think they do. You don't call those things off. Qadhafi sent somebody to say, "We're going to call them off." And then he said he was firing people out of his intelligence organization, but we find they're still there. We keep getting reports that people are being recruited, moving around. It's

interesting that the American colonel—the deputy military attaché in Paris—who was killed at his home was at the highest level below those provided with security. I think that so much security was laid on to protect the President and other top Americans that the Libyans may have pulled back for a while. But you don't know when they're going to resume.

Our Paris embassy believes that a large number of their personnel are under surveillance. We see people casing the homes of ambassadors in other countries. There's clearly still a threat, and you've got to be concerned with it.

Q Does the rescue of Brig. Gen. James L. Dozier from Italy's Red Brigades imply that the terrorist threat is receding?

A Oh, no. It's growing. I think we're just seeing the beginning of it.

Take the Red Brigades. People who take up that activity are not normal, and their egos are easily bruised. When they suffer a setback, they want to come back to regain their reputation and status. They bungled the Dozier affair from their point of view, so their reputation recedes. Like any other business, when their reputation recedes, their ability to recruit and to get money diminishes. If they want to stay in business, they've got to do something again. They've got to score a hit. They do this to make an impression or to get attention.

The reason I say it's going to increase is that the opportunity to inflict real damage and to really influence public opinion hasn't been scratched yet. The opportunities to score propagandistic hits are so much greater than has been exploited. That's why I think we're going to have more terrorism before we get less of it.

Q If you were to name the half-dozen most dangerous spots in the world for the U.S. in the coming period, what would they be?

A Iran, Central America, the Middle East, the other side of the Persian Gulf, Germany and East Europe, Morocco and the Strait of Gibraltar.

Q Do you mean East Germany—or West Germany and Eastern Europe?

A I think that whole mix—that's where something could break out.

Then, too, I think, you've got to look at southern Africa. There's the danger of that area being cut off and ultimately falling into the Soviet sphere of influence. That could put a squeeze on the minerals and other resources that are so important to the West. That may not be an imminent threat, but it's something you have to worry about.

But let me emphasize this: We're not the only people at risk. The Soviets have their problems, too.

Q What sorts of problems are most serious for the Soviets?

A I would make three points:

First, the Soviets have been able to carry on the biggest military buildup in the history of the world and somehow manage to make us the warmongers. We're portrayed as the threat to peace because we're responding. If we tell our story right, we can turn that tide. We're not very good at it, but we can make the world more concerned about the Soviets as a threat to the peace.

Second, the Poland development should be proof of the failure of the command economy and the Communist system. They can't work in the long run without brutal repression. I don't know how Poland and Romania, which is also in a mess, are going to pull out.

Finally, the Soviet economy is in very bad shape. The leadership was a year late with its five-year plan. And in order to increase military spending, they had to make an enormous reduction in their investment program. The poor economy has led to a social malaise, alcoholism, labor unrest and strikes in the Baltic states. I'm told that Solidarity buttons were bringing \$20 apiece in the Ukraine before December 13.

At some point, the bottom of the barrel is going to emerge in the Soviet Union. There are real constraints on the Soviets—real constraints. They're only able to carry on their activities around the world because they've learned to use other people so well. □



Under Way: A Big Buildup for the CIA

Q What have you done to strengthen the agency after its years of buffeting?

A The basic intelligence-gathering capability can't be changed overnight. It had run down over a seven or eight-year period largely because of a 40 percent draw-down in funds and a 50 percent drawdown in people. Over the past two years, starting with the last year of the Carter administration, there has been an increase in resources.

We have completed a broad examination of the challenges that the intelligence community will face during the rest of this decade—and the available technologies. We have defined the capabilities needed to meet those challenges, and we now have a general go-ahead to carry out that buildup.

Q Does that mean a big increase in funding and staff?

A Yes, but I can't be specific about either as they're classified, but the buildup is roughly in line with the defense buildup. We also have introduced a number of other improvements to integrate more effectively the intelligence process with the administration's policy-making machinery and to improve coordination within the intelligence community. We now have a fast-track procedure that can produce an estimate in a week or two when policymakers need something quickly.

Q How important are covert operations, which were virtually suspended during the Carter administration?

A The Carter administration did virtually discontinue these for about two years, but in the final two years they undertook increasing numbers of special activities. These can be important. We don't talk about these activities, and they're undertaken only if they're authorized by the executive branch and reported to Congress.

Q Are you seriously hampered by legislative constraints?

A No. We tell the congressional intelligence committees our plans. They raise questions, and this can help us to improve and fine-tune what we are doing.

Q Do you tell Congress of these operations beforehand?

A I can't think of any time that we haven't.

Q Does the President's recent executive order defining the role of the CIA permit it to engage in operations in this country or spy on Americans abroad, as critics have alleged?

A Despite the fuss made over the executive order, it doesn't alter the situation. We don't spy on Americans in this country. All counterintelligence, law-enforcement and antiterrorist activity in this country is the province of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

But since these problems don't stop at the water's edge—they flow in—the new executive order permits the CIA to operate to the extent of supporting and coordinating with the FBI under rules laid down by the Attorney General. In pursuit of foreign-policy objectives abroad, we can work with Americans who want to help or with foreigners here in this country.