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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Legislative Liaison Branch
Washington, D. C. 20505
Telephone: [redacted]
11 March 1982

OEZA 82-0466 (2) 25X1

Handwritten signature

TO: Ms. Diane LaVoy
Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
House of Representatives
H-405, The Capitol.

Dear Diane:

I hope the enclosed published items are useful. To my knowledge, there are no additional documents pertinent to your request.



Legislative Liaison

Enclosures

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FORM 1533 OBSOLETE PREVIOUS EDITIONS.

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USSR - EL SALVADOR: SUPPORT FOR INSURGENCY

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Encouraged by the success of the revolution in Nicaragua, the USSR in 1979 began to advocate and indirectly support armed revolution in El Salvador. The Soviets have apparently encouraged their allies and clients to provide weapons and other military support to the insurgents and have mounted an international propaganda campaign on their behalf. The USSR, however, has refrained from any direct military involvement as it apparently wants to avoid exacerbating US-Soviet tensions and to reduce the risk of provoking direct US military action against the revolution. Although Moscow will continue to indirectly back the revolution in El Salvador, it probably is less optimistic now than it was a year or so ago that such upheavals represent the wave of the future in Central America.

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Background

The success of the 1979 Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua--in which Moscow played virtually no role--has led the USSR to encourage and support armed revolution in Central America. Although the Soviets have always recognized armed struggle as a legitimate option, during the 1960s and 1970s they urged leftist forces in Latin America to use the political process to achieve power. Since 1979, however, Moscow has encouraged most of the Central American Communist parties to align themselves with other forces of the left, create broad military-political fronts that include the middle class, and engage in or prepare for armed struggle.

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In the case of El Salvador, Soviet officials, in apparent coordination with the Cubans, in 1979 began to actively encourage the pro-Soviet Communist Party of El Salvador (PCES), headed by Jorge Shafick Handal, to join forces with other leftist groups already resisting the government and form the Unified Revolutionary Directorate (DRU), the umbrella organization directing the insurgency.

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The Soviets urged formation of a broadly based insurgent movement similar to that established by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Soviet officials subsequently encouraged this winter's united offensive by the insurgents against the junta. [redacted]

Obscuring Moscow's Role

Although the evidence of Soviet encouragement and endorsement of armed revolution in El Salvador is clear-cut, information on the nature of their role in providing such support as arms is less precise. In the spring of 1980, clandestine reporting indicated that Moscow had promised the insurgents that it would provide arms aid through third countries. [redacted]

Confiscated PCES documents indicate that last June and July, Handal visited the USSR, Eastern Europe, Vietnam and Ethiopia seeking weapons and other military support. He was unable to extract a Soviet commitment to provide arms, but Moscow directed him to Vietnam, indicating that he was likely to get a positive response there. The Vietnamese did, in fact, promise Handal a large amount of captured US weapons. The Salvadorans subsequently asked the USSR to transport these weapons; the Soviet contact agreed to do so in principle but equivocated, saying final determination would be made at higher levels. Although the weapons eventually did arrive in El Salvador, we have no good evidence that the Soviets had a role in transporting them. During Handal's visit to Moscow he was offered paramilitary training for 30 Salvadorans, but we do not know if their training is in process. [redacted]

Handal also received promises of arms from Ethiopia, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia, and of military support equipment from Hungary and East Germany. It is likely Moscow encouraged these commitments. We have numerous well-documented reports of efforts by the Soviets to encourage clients and allies, including the PLO and East Germany, to support other Soviet initiatives in Latin America. The PLO was reportedly specifically asked to assist the revolutionary movements in El Salvador in exchange for Soviet military and political assistance to the Palestinian cause. We also know Moscow threatened to curtail its financial subsidies to the Costa Rican Communist Party if it did not support the Salvadoran insurgents. [redacted]

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The Soviets also have apparently indirectly supplied weapons to the Salvadoran guerrillas via Cuba and Nicaragua. A Soviet-piloted TS-154 transport has been loaned to Cubana Airlines for transporting such arms, supplies, and Cuban personnel from Cuba to Nicaragua. Some of these weapons have probably found their way into El Salvador, or served to release US-made weapons in Nicaragua for onward shipment to El Salvador. [redacted]

The overall pattern of Soviet activity indicates that Moscow and its East European allies have actively supported the revolution in El Salvador but have sought to conceal their activity and to avoid direct linkage to the insurgency. The aforementioned confiscated PCES documents indicate, for example, that the Czechs were deliberately seeking to conceal their arms aid. Furthermore, the most significant commitments of arms of which we are aware--from Ethiopia and Vietnam--were of American-made arms, again reflecting an apparent effort to conceal their source of origin. The Soviets obviously hope that this factor will make it difficult for the United States to refute Soviet public denials that they have supplied weapons to the insurgents. [redacted]

Moscow's policy of providing only indirect support, however, did lead to criticism by Central American Communists that Moscow had failed to give sufficient support to the Salvadoran guerrillas. The confiscated documents also indicate that Soviet reluctance to provide direct support had in fact frustrated the Salvadoran Communists. [redacted]

Media Support for the Insurgents

The most obvious form of Soviet support for the Salvadoran guerrillas is the propaganda campaign which began in late 1980. Moscow's media campaign--abetted by the press in Eastern Europe--has been aimed at winning international support for the insurgents and at instigating criticism of the US role in El Salvador. The Soviet media has blasted the "US-backed repressive junta," which "terrorizes the population." Imminent intervention by the United States and its "puppets"--Honduras and Guatemala--is a key theme. [redacted]

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The Soviet press initially overplayed the recent "final offensive" and its potential for success--perhaps because it was relying on optimistic assessments provided by the insurgents. Moscow has attributed the junta's success in countering the offensive to growing intervention of the United States in the form of military aid, advisers, and funds. Soviet officials have privately been saying that Moscow does not think the insurgents' prospects are bright. [redacted]

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Moscow's Assessment of Impact on US

Recent private Soviet comments indicate growing sensitivity to the impact the Soviet position on El Salvador is having on US policy and on Soviet relations with Latin American countries. Moscow's concern that its policy toward Central America may be damaging to its own interests is also reflected in the reported comments of Soviet officials in the region, who claim that they have been tasked to prepare a complete assessment of Central American attitudes toward the USSR. They said that Moscow's foreign policy--and international image--is being crippled by association with "so-called revolutions" and "irresponsible hotheads" linked with terrorism. [redacted]

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Such comments suggest Moscow will be increasingly cautious on its involvement in El Salvador but they probably do not presage any significant change in Soviet support, which has been limited and indirect all along. Nevertheless, Moscow is probably far less optimistic now that revolutionary upheavals represent the wave of the future in Central America. Brezhnev's failure to mention El Salvador or Central America in his Congress address on 23 February seems to represent not only a deliberate effort to avoid introducing a subject unpalatable to the United States but a disassociation of Soviet prestige from a potentially losing cause. [redacted]

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Moscow's reluctance to provide direct support to the Salvadoran guerrillas probably stems from Soviet concern over the consequences that such activity could have on US-Soviet relations. In addition, it may reflect Soviet fears of provoking a US military intervention that would

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CENTRAL AMERICAN ARMS TRAFFICKING: THE COMAYAGUA CACHE

The Honduran far left--working closely with the Cuban-Nicaraguan support apparatus--is an integral part of the infiltration of arms and personnel to the Salvadoran guerrillas. Honduran authorities have recently stepped up interdiction efforts but their country will probably continue to offer regional leftists the potential for clandestine operations.

Regional Arms Trafficking

Of the three northern-tier countries of Central America, Honduras faces the least serious threat to stability from leftist insurgents. Over the past several years, however, the Honduran far left has been integrated into a regional support network. Before 1978, the Honduran Communist Party (PCH) followed a cautious line, but in that year--in large part at Cuban urging--it began to support the Sandinista guerrillas against Somoza. The PCH helped infiltrate Nicaraguan revolutionaries through Honduras, as well as providing training camps and supply depots. Other Honduran leftist groups also aided the Sandinistas with funding and weapons.

The Sandinista support effort provided previously lacking practical experience for the PCH and other leftists. The Cubans moreover, not only brokered contacts between the PCH and other leftist groups, but accelerated their training efforts to prepare the Honduran left for eventual insurgency. Castro, however, sees Honduras' logistical role as being the major benefit to Cuba's regional policy. Thus, when Havana began establishing support networks for the Salvadoran insurgency shortly after the triumph of the Sandinistas in mid-1979, it was logical to include Honduras.

Meanwhile, however, Cuban support efforts were reactivated in Costa Rica and brought along at a measured pace--at least initially--in Nicaragua. This availability

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of alternative routes points up one of the reasons that it has been difficult to interdict the arms flow to El Salvador: Honduras was important in late 1978; through mid-1979, Costa Rica was a principal conduit; Nicaragua is now the main pipeline.

The Comayagua Operation

Guerrilla documents captured by Salvadoran security forces last November indicated that one of the Salvadoran insurgent groups expected delivery of about 20 tons of materiel through Honduras in December. We believe the arms seized at Comayagua in mid-January were the final shipment of this expected materiel.

By mid-December, significant amounts of sophisticated new weaponry were being employed by Salvadoran guerrillas. Especially noteworthy was a sudden influx of M-16 automatic rifles, which provide firepower superior to the semiautomatic G-3 rifle used by the Salvadoran armed forces and had been mentioned in the captured documents.

Last month, Honduran authorities learned of an impending shipment of weapons overland from Nicaragua to the Salvadoran insurgents, and on the 17th, a suspect tractor-trailer was noted at the Guasaule border crossing. The truck was followed to a warehouse outside Comayagua, where Honduran security officials arrested six Salvadoran guerrillas unloading 100 M-16s, 100,000 rounds of M-16 ammunition, and numerous mortar rounds from a secret compartment built into the roof of the trailer.

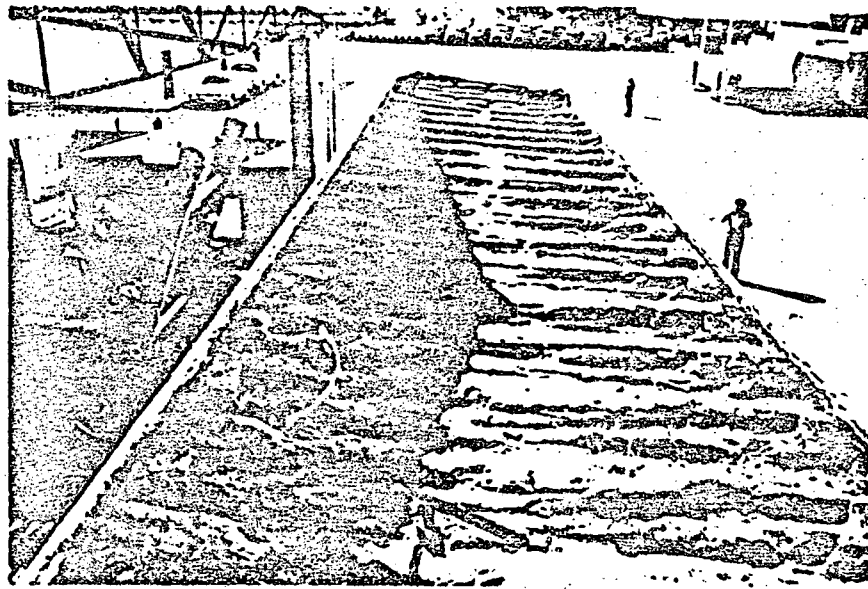
A search of the warehouse uncovered 200 more M-16s and the same ordnance--M-16 ammunition and mortar rounds--found in the truck. Additional weapons were discovered in wall cavities of the warehouse, along with false passports containing numerous entry and exit stamps from Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Subsequent investigation led to the arrest of several accomplices, including a Costa Rican who reportedly arranged the truck loading in San Jose. In addition, security officials confiscated several light trucks--carrying M-16 ammunition and rocket launchers--that were probably used to transport the weapons in smaller parcels to guerrillas in the border areas of northern El Salvador.

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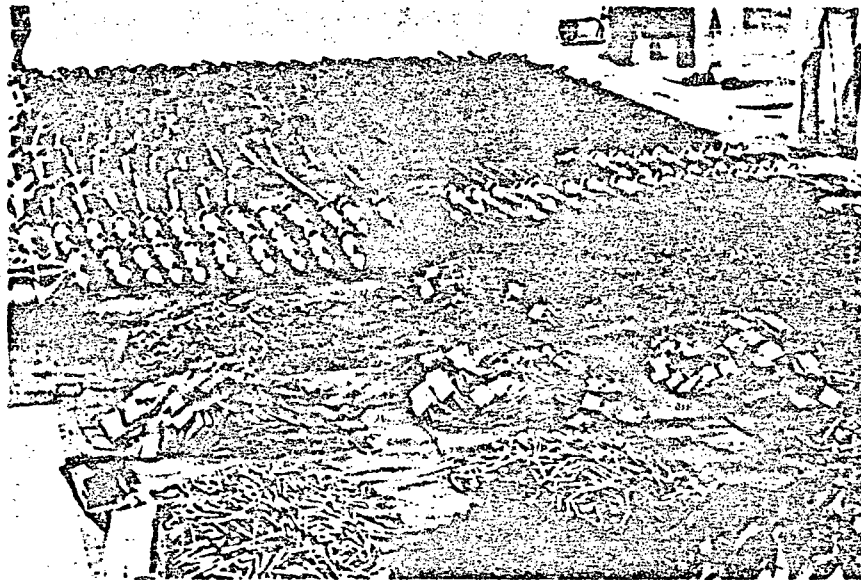
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Unclassified

False top of trailer truck exposed after unloading of weapons at warehouse near Comayagua.

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Unclassified

A portion of the Salvadoran guerrilla arsenal recovered from the trailer truck, including M-16 automatic rifles and ammunition, 81-mm mortar rounds, and Chinese-made rocket launchers and rocket grenades

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Many of the M-16s found during the raid have been traced to former US Army stockpiles in Vietnam during the early 1970s, corroborating the guerrilla documents that cite Vietnamese arms contributions to the Salvadoran insurgents. The total weight of the Comayagua arms capture was approximately 3-1/2 tons; the rest of the 20-ton shipment presumably already had reached El Salvador.

Outlook

Honduran authorities clearly have discovered a major arms-support apparatus through their Comayagua investigation. Early this month, for instance, security forces were able to raid four Salvadoran guerrilla safehouses in Comayagua, La Paz, Siguatepeque, and Tegucigalpa.

The disruption of this operation is a significant setback both to the Honduran Communists and to the Salvadoran guerrillas, but it may not prove lasting. After similar reverses in the past, apparatus have been fairly quickly reestablished. Moreover, the Comayagua operation may be only one of several clandestine support networks. Honduran authorities are investigating another operation, for example, in which Honduran leftists are recruited and paid \$400 monthly to fight with Salvadoran insurgents; guerrilla training camps for these recruits have reportedly been operating near La Masica and La Cruz.



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