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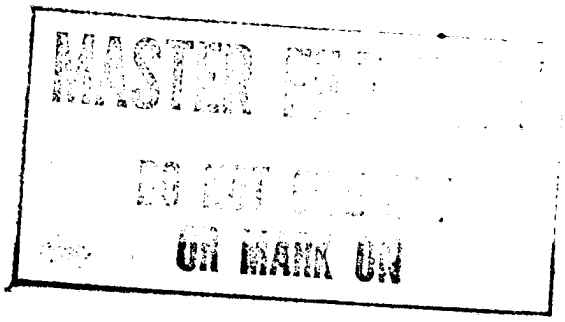

The Guatemalan Insurgency: Near-Term Prospects

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An Intelligence Assessment

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ALA 83-10136
September 1983

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by Office of African and Latin American Analysis. It was coordinated with the Directorate of Operations.

Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Middle America–Caribbean Division, ALA,

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The Guatemalan Insurgency: Near-Term Prospects

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Key Judgments

Information available as of 12 August 1983 was used in this report.

Guatemala's radical left insurgents have been set back both politically and militarily over the past year by the more effective military counterinsurgency tactics of the recently deposed government of President Efrain Rios Montt. The trend of growing insurgent strength and activity that was evident from 1979 to early 1982 has been reversed, and we believe the extreme left will be contained and unable to improve its military position substantially over the near term. The continued factional instability under new head of state Mejia is likely to reduce armed forces effectiveness temporarily but probably will not immediately jeopardize the counterinsurgency gains of the past year. Indeed, we expect Mejia for political and morale reasons to step up operations against the guerrillas soon and to try to score some quick successes.

Since March 1982 the armed forces have cut insurgent strength from over 3,000 to something between 2,000 and 2,500. They have forced the insurgents into a reactive and defensive posture by expanding the deployment of small military units, forming large civilian self-defense forces, and emphasizing psychological operations. The insurgents' urgent need to regroup and the low level of activity they are currently capable of supporting render them unable to take advantage of the recent coup and instability within the armed forces enough to alter the existing balance of power.

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the insurgent threat can be eliminated during the next year. We expect, in fact, a gradual increase in small-scale guerrilla activity. The 2,000 to 2,500 armed combatants, while lacking the resources or unity to launch a broad offensive, are capable of increased hit-and-run ambushes, economic sabotage, and urban terrorism. In our opinion, they will have some isolated successes in demoralizing the military and undermining the legitimacy of the government by emphasizing such operations.

We expect the insurgents to make some headway—against formidable odds—toward their longer term goals of recruiting and training full-time cadre and rebuilding support networks in local communities. They may also make some progress—under pressure from Havana—toward improving unity among their various organizations. The existence of civilian defense forces in over 800 villages, however, will make it more difficult for the insurgents to recruit supporters, and longstanding leadership animosities and ideological differences will continue to hinder efforts to unify.

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Therefore, we do not believe that the guerrillas can resume their dramatic growth of the 1979-82 period or submerge their factional and personal rivalries enough to establish an effective joint politicomilitary command.

The radical left probably will benefit from continued foreign support, particularly from Cuba, and from the unsanctioned use of Mexican and Belizean territory. The guerrillas' access to foreign territory—particularly the Mexican border area—for the transit of arms and cadre, safehaven, and recuperation may increase in importance as the Army exerts pressure on their remaining strongholds in Guatemala.

We continue to believe that there are several contingencies from which the weakened insurgency could benefit. These include potential changes in nonmilitary and external variables such as the continued political instability of the new Mejia government, a renewal of indiscriminate violence by the Army or strong-arm squads, or an even deeper economic decline this year than is expected. In the near term, however, we believe that only the establishment of an extreme left government in El Salvador—which would provide Guatemalan guerrillas with staging bases, arms, and other support—could provide a sufficient catalyst to shift the momentum in Guatemala back to the guerrillas' favor.

For its part, the military may not be able to press fully its current advantage against an already weakened insurgency. While the armed forces under Mejia probably will sustain their counterinsurgency strategy in the near term, in our opinion the military will not be able to augment its programs significantly—particularly civic action—without substantial foreign economic and military assistance. The deteriorating economy will impede expansion of civic action and development projects critical to securing local support, as well as blunt prospects for acquiring necessary military equipment. The nationalistic Mejia government is trying to improve relations with the United States and wants to obtain US military assistance, but it is unlikely to favor any aid offers that entail conditions—such as those pertaining to human rights—that it perceives as infringements of its national sovereignty.

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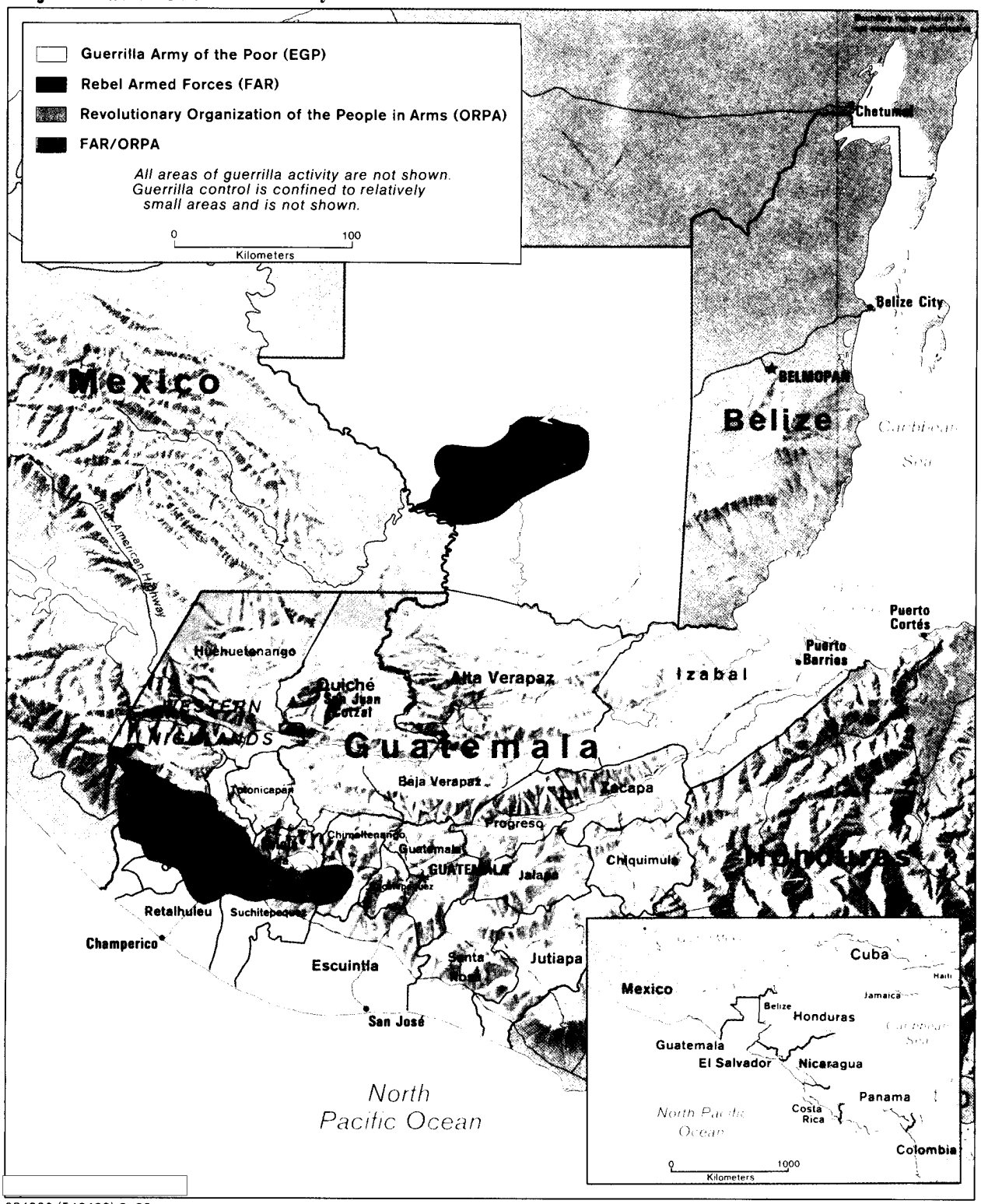

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The Guatemalan Insurgency: Near-Term Prospects

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Introduction

On 23 March 1983, the recently deposed Guatemalan Government of President Rios Montt announced an "amnesty of reconciliation" and lifted a state of siege imposed nine months earlier to underscore its pronouncement that the insurgents had been defeated. That declaration, despite the severe setbacks suffered by the insurgents during 1982, was politically motivated and obviously premature. The guerrillas remain a potent—if presently disorganized—force dedicated to continued combat. With assistance from their foreign allies, the various radical left organizations are regrouping and coordinating their plans for regaining the political and military momentum they sustained until 1982. Nonetheless, despite the continued instability under the new Mejia government, we do not expect the major counterinsurgency gains of the past year to be jeopardized in the near term.

This paper reviews the strengths and weaknesses of the guerrillas after their repeated setbacks of the last year. It analyzes the prospects for renewed growth in the insurgent ranks and for improved unity among the various guerrilla factions. The paper highlights the potential for insurgent gains—both military and political—over the next year in view of the revolutionaries' near-term strategy and present capabilities. Finally, the implications for the United States of the probable course of the insurgency are considered.

The Rise and Fall of Insurgent Strength

The Insurgent Buildup of 1979-82

The 20-year-old Marxist insurgency in Guatemala steadily intensified from 1979 to early 1982 as the guerrillas increased their ranks of full-time combatants from less than 1,000 to a peak of approximately 3,000.[1] Aided by the military's resort to indiscriminate repression during those years, and a rigid socioeconomic structure that essentially ignored the country's large impoverished Indian population, the insurgents were having increasing success recruiting supporters. They also benefited from an increasing commitment of financial and material assistance from Cuba, which had been encouraged by the 1979 Sandinista victory in Nicaragua and the gains of the insurgents in El Salvador.

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The momentum of the guerrilla war was shifting, in our opinion, to the insurgents' favor by early 1982.

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the insurgents had established control over large areas of territory in the Western Highlands along the Mexican border and had developed an extensive network of permanent camps and supply routes. After years of prodding by Havana, the four insurgent organizations announced in Cuba in January 1982 that they had formed a unity front to represent them. A steady growth of guerrilla attacks culminated that same month when a large insurgent force, supported by the local villagers, virtually overran a small Army garrison. Symptomatic of the deteriorating situation at the time, deaths related to political violence—including government-guerrilla clashes as well as unofficial and government death-squad activity—had increased from about 80 in January 1979 to 538 in January 1982, according to US Embassy reports.

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their number is now in the 2,000 to 2,500 range, a figure that matches credibly with the type and territorial extent of their operations. The lowering of our early 1982 insurgent strength estimate of 3,000 mainly reflects guerrilla casualties and defections over the last year.

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Insurgent Reversals of 1982

The growing loss of legitimacy of the government because of the violence and the fear among many officers that the military was losing the war were partly responsible for a coup led by junior officers in March 1982, which installed President Rios Montt in power. The armed forces cut insurgent strength to something between 2,000 and 2,500 and forced the insurgents into a reactive and defensive position by shifting almost immediately to a more multifaceted counterinsurgency program.[2] The antiguerrilla campaign incorporated both military operations and civic action; its three major components were an expanded deployment of small military units, the formation of large civilian paramilitary forces, and heavy emphasis on psychological operations.

In late 1982 the guerrillas moved into tactical retreat after sustaining serious losses to both their full-time cadre and part-time militia. They were forced to flee from territory that had formed their strongholds just one year before. Abandoning many camps in the face of Army operations, the guerrillas lost substantial amounts of supplies and arms. Moreover, many villages that previously were sympathetic to the insurgents and supported them with supplies and safehaven were co-opted by the government through the civilian defense program.

Present Range of Guerrilla Activity

In our judgment, the insurgents are less prepared now for decisive confrontations with the military than they were 18 months ago. The destruction of their support networks and the capture of substantial amounts of their equipment have worsened their supply and organizational problems, thus hindering their capability for major military initiatives. During the first three months of 1983, they were able to maintain only a minimal level of military operations, while concentrating on regrouping and plotting strategy.

Fighting remains sporadic, and engagements generally are of short duration. We know of no sizable attacks involving more than 100 insurgents during 1983, nor any instance of prolonged heavy fighting. Indeed, a coordinated offensive was never carried out.

Although fighting is still light and infrequent compared with late 1981 and early 1982, as of April the number of guerrilla attacks has begun to pick up, generally involving well-planned ambushes of small patrols and military convoys and resulting in substantial Army casualties. Concurrently, economic sabotage and urban terrorism have risen. There are indications that, for the first time, in one area two insurgent groups are effectively combining forces and coordinating attacks. An attack in mid-May on a military zone headquarters also suggests that the guerrillas may be ready to step up the number and boldness of their assaults.

Dimensions of the Remaining Insurgent Threat

Despite their setbacks, the insurgent factions have assets that make it unlikely that they can be eliminated in the short term. These include a significant number of well-trained cadre, committed and experienced leaders, foreign allies, and access to safehaven in bordering nations. Aided by very difficult Guatemalan terrain, the guerrillas continue to wield control over some remote areas, particularly along the Mexican border. They also benefit from a deep distrust and fear of the military still existing in some communities.

Manpower Problems and Combat Posture

insurgent losses over the last year have been heavy.

[2] See appendix A for a detailed account of the government's counterinsurgency strategy.

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The Guatemalan Extreme Left [a]

The Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG)
The URNG, established in Havana in 1982, is the official politicomilitary umbrella organization of the four Guatemalan insurgent groups. Despite Cuban pressure for unity, the URNG has failed to become a joint command of all insurgent forces in Guatemala and remains little more than a propaganda front.

Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP)
Leader: Ricardo Ramirez *de Leon*
Strength: 800 to 1,000
Largest of the insurgent groups, the EGP is a hard-line Marxist-Leninist organization that began armed activities in 1975. Under Ramirez, a veteran Cuban-trained guerrilla leader, the EGP has kept the closest relations with Cuba of all Guatemalan guerrilla groups. Operating mainly in the predominately Indian northwest Highlands Departments of Huehuetenango, El Quiche, and Alta Verapaz, the EGP has recruited more Indians than the other guerrilla groups.

Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms (ORPA)
Leader: Rodrigo Asturias
Strength: 700 to 800
Although led by the Cuban-trained Marxist Asturias, the fast-growing ORPA is less ideologically rigid than either the EGP or FAR. Asturias also has been the most resistant to Cuba's unification efforts and rivals the EGP's Ramirez as Guatemala's supreme insurgent commander. ORPA forces are concentrated in the Departments of San Marcos, Solola, and Chimaltenango on the southern slopes on the Western Highlands.

Rebel Armed Forces (FAR)
Leader: Jorge Ismael Soto *Garcia*
Strength: 400
The oldest of the insurgent organizations, dating from 1962, the FAR is a small but highly effective guerrilla force. Soto is a Cuban-trained leader who enjoys good relations with Havana. The FAR also has resisted unification efforts in the past, but may now be cooperating with the ORPA. The FAR operates principally in the Department of Peten in northern Guatemala, but has recently also moved into the Western Highlands.

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Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT/D) (Dissidents)
Leader: Jose Alberto Cardoza *Aguilar*
Strength: 200
A moribund offshoot of the Orthodox Communist party, the PGT/D broke away in 1978 to join the armed revolution. The PGT/D rarely has been engaged in combat, although its leaders recently appealed to Havana and the other URNG members for arms and financial assistance. If this is not forthcoming, we judge that the PGT/D may be absorbed either by its parent Communist party or by one of the larger insurgent groups.

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Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT/O) (Orthodox Communist party)
Leader: Ricardo Rosales *Roman*
Strength: 300 to 400
A Moscow-line Communist party, the PGT/O has not yet formally adopted the concept of armed revolution, and, although invited to join the URNG, it is not a member of the guerrilla alliance. Party leader Rosales has long resisted engaging the party in military operations.

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[a] *See appendix B for a detailed discussion of the extreme left groups.*

A well-armed Guerrilla Army of the Poor unit in typical jungle terrain of Guatemala's Northwest Highlands.

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The guerrilla organizations are being weakened particularly by the loss—either through combat or defection—of substantial numbers of part-time militia and support personnel. The military uses local civilian defense forces, numbering close to 350,000 members according to official Guatemalan military documents, to patrol the immediate environs of their villages, thus reducing the ability of insurgent sympathizers to assist the guerrillas. Moreover, the increased military presence in remote hamlets, decreased repression, benefits from civic action programs and amnesty periods all provide incentives for guerrilla supporters who are not ideologically committed to change their allegiance.

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The guerrillas initially sought to counter the threat posed by the civilian militias to their support base by attempting to intimidate the peasants with direct attacks. This, however, only served to strengthen the rapport between the poorly armed civilian units and the military. The guerrillas, with the exception of one group, now are trying to avoid clashes with the civilian patrols. Another insurgent reaction to growing loss of local support is the evacuation of sympathizers, at times entire villages, to remote areas. In many of these cases, however, the insurgents have not been able to provide food and health care for their supporters, according to US Embassy sources, and many of these villagers have left the insurgent camps to seek assistance from the military.

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A civilian defense unit drilling with wooden rifles. Most of the civilian patrols are ill equipped, often with only a few shotguns and machetes as weapons.

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A well-armed civilian defense force patrolling an area of heavy guerrilla activity in Western Highlands. Most civilian units are not so well equipped.

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Recruitment of new combatants probably will be more difficult than in the past. The guerrillas still meet indifference and even hostility in many communities even though they have been proselytizing in some areas for 10 years or more. Two radical leaders recently admitted that there is no mass support for the insurgent organizations among workers, students, women, and farmers in Guatemala. The existence of civilian defense forces in over 800 villages makes it even more difficult for the insurgents to approach potential recruits.

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Even so, the 2,000 to 2,500 full-time insurgent combatants remain a formidable force capable of destructive hit-and-run raids, economic sabotage, and urban terrorism designed to demoralize the military and undermine government legitimacy. During such actions they are occasionally augmented by part-time militia members, although support from these irregular forces is more often confined to supplies, safehaven, and information on the military's operations. We believe the current scale of activity and the guerrillas' decision to retrench are consistent with the firmly held view of their Cuban-trained insurgent leaders that they are waging a "protracted popular war." The long-term strategy underlying such a war—and behind the ambush and sabotage guerrilla tactics—is slowly to bleed the strength and will of the government forces.

Equipment Shortages

while some insurgent units are formidable, many are experiencing shortages of ammunition, weapons, food, medicines, and other supplies. Insurgent activity last winter, according to a guerrilla press release, was specifically designed to capture weapons, and action plans over the coming months are predicated on capturing additional weaponry. These shortages suggest that external resupply is sporadic and internal distribution uneven.

In addition, the military is having greater success disrupting guerrilla internal support networks.

dozens of insurgent camps, safehouses, and supply caches have been uncovered. One recently discovered cache, observed by the US defense attache, held 22 US-manufactured M-16 rifles along with enough other weapons to arm 40 to 50 guerrillas.

Still, the regular guerrilla combatants are well trained and well equipped. Several Guatemalan Army officers have noted that some insurgent units they face are the Army's equal in firepower and training. They carry an assortment of modern arms including mortars, grenade launchers, mines, machineguns, and assault rifles, sometimes US-made M-16s. These weapons, along with the additional benefits of terrain and element of surprise, often give these elite guerrilla units the upper hand in engagements of their choosing.

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Foreign Support

The guerrillas' most advanced weaponry is provided by their foreign allies, particularly Cuba, Nicaragua, and Vietnam. Their inventory consists of a variety of US-made equipment, including some captured in Vietnam by Communist forces.[3]

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[3] Several US-made AR-15 and M-16 rifles captured by the Guatemalan military have been traced to US equipment shipped to Vietnam. The guerrillas also obtain some advanced weapons from black market dealers and captured Guatemalan military material, but we do not have information on the percentage obtained from the various sources. The standard issue assault rifle of the Guatemalan military, however, is the Israeli-made Galil; the AR-15s and M-16s in the guerrilla inventory are clearly not captured in battle.

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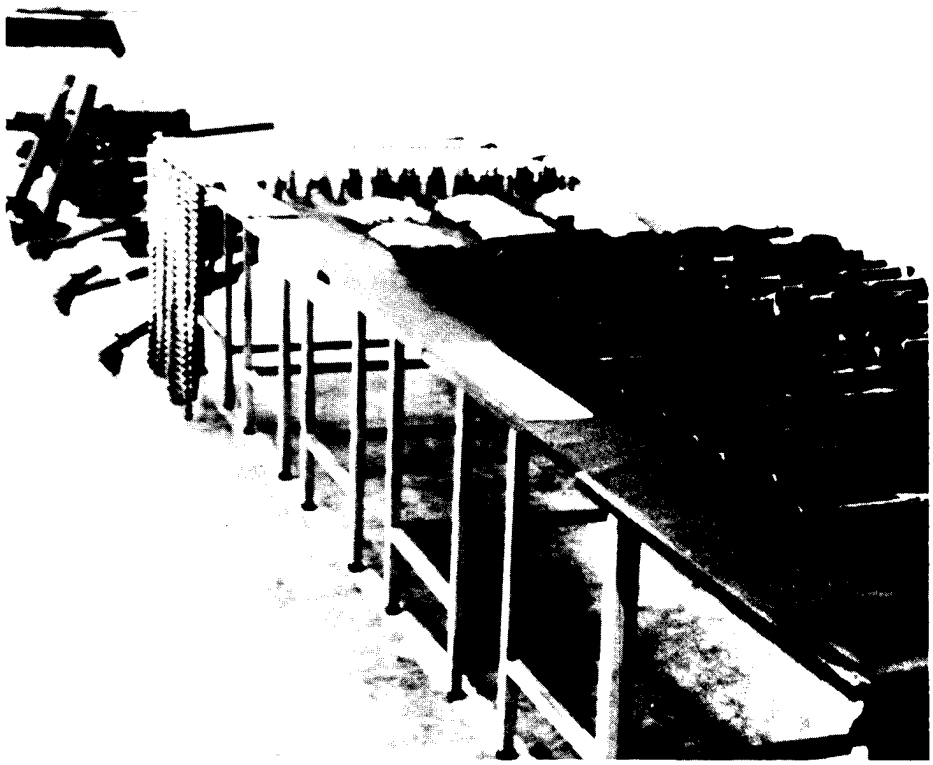

The Cubans are also heavily involved in training Guatemalan insurgents. at least 300 persons, representing all of the extreme left groups, received military training and political indoctrination in Cuba during 1982. Havana is pressuring the guerrillas for even more trainees this year; the orthodox Communist Party—which has not formally adopted the armed struggle—in particular is being prodded to step up its military training, and 18 members of a dissident faction of the Party have already completed training in Cuba this year.

The Soviet Union, its allies, and other radical countries also assist the extreme left with arms, training, and money.

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[redacted]

Inability To Unify

The various guerrilla groups have not been able to effect significant political or military cooperation at either the tactical or national command levels, despite heavy Cuban pressure to unify since at least 1979.[5] Under Havana's tutelage, the four groups active in the armed revolution finally did manage to form a loose umbrella organization, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG), in early 1982. Even so, personal leadership animosities and factional rivalries persisted through 1982, and the unity organization remained little more than a propaganda front. Only in rare cases where groups of isolated insurgents lost contact with their own organizational leadership did the evidence suggest a willingness to take part in joint military undertakings.

[redacted] The Rebel Armed Forces (FAR) and Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA), for example, have combined forces in one area and are carrying out joint attacks. Nevertheless, there is still little indication that the largest insurgent group, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), is cooperating with the others. Nor do the insurgent groups seem to have progressed toward a unified political-military command similar to the Unified Revolutionary Directorate in El Salvador.

[5] See appendix B for details of the political dynamics of the four guerrilla organizations, as well as the orthodox, Moscow-line Communist Party, which has not formally joined the armed struggle.

Increasing Reliance on Foreign Territory

[redacted]

Although the insurgents find ready safehaven in Mexico, we have no reliable evidence that they maintain fixed bases on Mexican territory.[7] Nor is there evidence that the Mexican Government provides material support to the guerrillas or officially condones their logistics-related activities there. Nevertheless, the insurgents long have benefited from the historically low level of patrolling in isolated border areas by the Mexican military and the use of a fairly extensive political support network there, including their political front headquarters in Mexico City.

Insurgent Strategy

We believe that over the next year the significant losses of the Guatemalan left—in both men and material—will force insurgent leaders to focus more

[6] For a more detailed discussion and evidence of the insurgent use of foreign territory, see appendix C.

[7] The insurgents probably recognize that the establishment of permanent bases in Mexico would spur a response from Mexico City, probably in the form of a strengthened military presence in the border area. Various reports already show a heightened Mexican Government concern with border problems stemming from the increased influx of refugees, insurgent activity, and incursions by armed Guatemalan groups. Mexico is improving its monitoring of the border and is preparing to increase patrolling in some areas. Although these measures probably will not impede insurgent activity in Mexican territory in the near term, the guerrillas eventually may find such use more restricted.

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on political work and reorganization of their forces than on military action. We see indications that, caught off guard last year by the military's rapid shift from indiscriminate violence and repression to a more multifaceted counterinsurgency program, the guerrillas are preparing to adjust their strategy accordingly.

the government now is competing for the loyalty of the peasantry, and they can no longer rely upon the assistance nor even neutrality of the population in many areas where they formerly operated freely.

Nevertheless, the Army also expects that guerrilla leaders will, primarily for political reasons, gradually increase military action in the near term as a necessary step to improve their combatants' morale, to enhance their recruitment prospects, and to reassert their status as a serious challenger to governmental authority.

Military Tactics

Insurgent military plans for the next several months, include capturing needed arms and ammunition, increasing hit-and-run ambushes of military patrols, expanding the war territorially, weakening the economy by attacking public facilities and businesses, and stepping up urban terrorism. These actions are designed to stretch the Army's already thin manpower and logistic capacity, to exact large numbers of government casualties while minimizing their own, and to demoralize troops by demonstrating the military's inability to respond quickly with reinforcements. Over time, attacks on small patrols and patrol bases, as well as stepped-up urban terrorism, probably are intended to force the Army to abandon its aggressive small-unit tactics in favor of moving troops back into the larger garrisons and employing large-force sweep operations. The guerrillas, in our opinion, will continue avoiding conventional confrontations with Army units that would further deplete their ranks.

The two guerrilla groups least damaged by last year's counterinsurgency campaign, the Organization of the People in Arms and the Rebel Armed Forces, are reorganizing into larger units, 25X1
Both groups, but 25X1
particularly ORPA, have carried out several successful ambushes in recent months against small Army 25X1
patrols. 25X1
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As a result, 25X1
the military is using, at least temporarily, large-unit 25X1
sweep operations in the southwest where ORPA remains entrenched. These minimize Army casualties and succeed in destroying insurgent camps and disrupting supply lines, but they are easily avoided by 25X1
the insurgents themselves. 25X1

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The radicals have already begun terrorist activity in the city of Guatemala, 25X1
Urban bombings, killings, kidnapings, and other violence maintain the insurgents' high profile at minimal expense, damage the population's faith in the ability of the government to provide security, and dissuade foreign investors and tourists. 25X1

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Political Strategy

We believe the guerrillas' fundamental political strategy is to increase their legitimacy and acceptability among the populace while damaging those of the military. Their ability to accomplish these goals will depend on the degree of success they have in breaking down the growing cooperation between the peasantry and the government. These plans indicate insurgent leaders recognize that, over the longer term, the Army's psychological operations, civic action, and formation of civilian defense forces threaten the guerrillas survival as much as their military losses.

All of the insurgent organizations apparently view the civilian defense forces as the greatest obstacle to their recruitment and freedom to operate, and they are reacting in various ways. For example, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor— has been hurt most by the loss of its extensive civilian support networks—is continuing to attack these ill-equipped civilian defense force patrols and to kill patrol leaders to demonstrate that the military cannot protect their villages. EGP propaganda documents found by the Army threaten villages that form self-defense forces,

The ORPA and the FAR, on the other hand, had traditionally relied upon small, well-trained units and not developed grassroots support and irregular forces in the style of the EGP. Now, with the civilian defense forces in place, both guerrilla groups are trying to form "local resistance groups," they intend to target Army units stationed in villages that also have civilian defense units to illustrate that the Army is their enemy, not the people, and that the villagers cannot rely on military protection.

The guerrillas intend to supplement the psychological impact of their military operations with more intensive propaganda directed primarily at the military rank and file, national police, and civilian defense forces. the insurgents believe that government soldiers have low morale and are susceptible to dissension and defections. The guerrillas also hope to portray themselves more effectively as Guatemala's "true nationalists" by condemning the military and the private sector as US puppets not concerned with the welfare of the people

We believe that the much-heralded "political opening" initiated last March—which General Mejia vows to sustain—also is viewed by insurgent leaders as a long-term threat. The radical left hopes to discredit the political liberalization, while at the same time exploiting it by expanding ties to and control over legitimate groups.

Guerrilla leaders probably also hope that strikes and demonstrations provoke the government to take repressive measures of the type that catalyzed the rapid growth of insurgent ranks from 1979 through early 1982.

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Prospects

We see little chance that the government will be faced with a serious threat of a radical left victory during the next year. The guerrillas are likely to experience greater difficulties in replacing manpower losses and more obstacles to gaining domestic support than they have in the past. Even if they obtain increased support from foreign allies, the insurgents will be hard pressed to retain their established territorial strongholds or to sustain military operations over an extended period. We believe that in the near term only a leftist takeover in El Salvador—which would provide Guatemalan guerrillas with munitions, staging areas, and financial support—could provide a sufficient impetus to shift the momentum in Guatemala back to the guerrillas' favor.

Nevertheless, we believe the military is unlikely to eradicate the insurgents during the next year. Moreover, progress against the insurgency probably will be slow in the next several months as the guerrillas—after several months of regrouping and planning—reemerge from their tactical retreat with better organization and an improved strategy to counter the Army's initiatives. The Army's mobility and logistic weaknesses—stemming from a lack of aircraft, the large amount of territory it must cover, the insurgents' ability to find safehaven in neighboring countries, and continuing support for the guerrillas in some communities—militate against their rapid elimination.

Although we do not believe that in the near term the insurgents can reverse the balance of power and the momentum now favoring the government, we expect them to be able gradually to increase the number and impact of their attacks on Army units. With a minimum of effort, they also can increase urban terrorism, assassinations, and sabotage of economically important targets. The insurgents are unlikely, however, to engage in prolonged confrontations with the military or force the military to abandon its successful small-unit orientation.

The insurgent groups may be able to offset their manpower losses over the next year with new recruits by exploiting the declining economy and rising unemployment, the continuing fear of the military in some communities, and the minimal government presence in others. The widespread establishment of pro-government civilian defense forces, however, coupled with continuing guerrilla losses of men and equipment in combat probably will preclude any dramatic growth in numbers such as the insurgents enjoyed from 1979 through early 1982. 25X1

Finally, under pressure from Havana, guerrilla leaders are likely to attain some measure of unity, but we expect that in the near term increased cooperation will mainly benefit the insurgent propaganda effort. While they may have some success in discrediting the Guatemalan Government internationally, we believe that factional rivalries and persistent personal animosities among leaders probably will forestall successful integration of the insurgent groups or the establishment of an effective joint military command. 25X1 25X1

Implications for the United States

The United States has had little political and economic leverage on Guatemalan governments since 1977, when military assistance was suspended because of human rights considerations. We judge that US influence can be substantially increased only with a resumption of such assistance. Guatemala's counterinsurgency success of the past year was accomplished without significant foreign support, however, and has strengthened the nationalistic attitudes of the government. An already extreme nationalist mentality has been further reinforced by continuing international censure in the face of what we believe has been the government's earnest effort to improve human rights conditions. 25X1 25X1

Guatemala's failure to take advantage of the United States' offer last January of $6.4 million in sales of military equipment—due more to the government's nationalist posture than its foreign exchange shortage—underscores the difficulty of increasing ties to the Guatemalan Government. Many officers view the 25X1

Nonmilitary Factors Affecting the Insurgency

We believe a number of nonmilitary and external factors will have an impact on the ultimate fate of the Guatemalan insurgency. Over the next few months, the political stability of the government, the level of repression, economic conditions, and the situation in El Salvador could affect the capabilities of the contending forces. Collectively, the variables complicate projecting future trends.

Government Stability

Factional rivalries in the military persist, jeopardizing the survival of the new Mejia government. Mejia has promised to satisfy two of the military's goals—holding early elections and obtaining US military assistance—but both may be difficult to attain. Moreover, while the new chief of state is acceptable to most senior commanders as an interim leader, he lacks a strong constituency in the armed forces: Thus, we expect political instability to continue and Mejia to avoid substantial policy changes that could foster opposition to his government.

The ouster of Rios Montt and continued instability under Mejia probably will be disruptive to military discipline and temporarily reduce the armed forces combat effectiveness. The government crisis, however, probably will not immediately jeopardize recent counterinsurgency innovations such as the civil defense forces, psychological operations, and civic action. These programs are increasingly being accepted and employed by field commanders. Although the insurgents are likely to increase armed attacks and propaganda to exploit the unsettled political climate, we do not believe the counterinsurgency effort will be substantially affected in the near term. If anything, we expect Mejia to step up military operations against the insurgents soon to refocus the Army's attention on its military mission and to unify the armed forces by scoring some quick counterinsurgency successes.

Levels of Repression

New organizations representing peasants, Indians, or workers are emerging, spurred by recent laws restoring political activity and encouraging participation by these previously excluded sectors. The new groups will find it difficult, however, to emerge and prosper in a setting where vested interests want to conserve the status quo. Whether or not the newly mobilized groups are actually influenced by the radical left, they will be seen to be so by the ultrarightists in Guatemalan society. The habitual response of this element is assassination of political rivals. Renewed indiscriminate violence would quickly take a toll on government legitimacy and increase the pool of potential insurgent recruits.

Economic Conditions

An important factor in the government's counterinsurgency success has been the gradually increasing support from the civilian population, particularly that of the Indians in the Western Highlands war zone. Maintenance of that support, however, will be contingent on effective military protection and follow-through on promised developmental assistance and social services. This may be difficult to accomplish because worsening economic conditions have forced the government to implement austerity measures. Contraction of the economy this year will raise an already high unemployment rate and jeopardize the government's ability to direct more resources toward the impoverished conflict zones. Cutbacks in these programs and higher unemployment could spur popular disillusionment and add to the ranks of potential insurgents.

Leftist Takeover in El Salvador

The course of the conflict in El Salvador is a critical variable, which will affect the final outcome of the Guatemalan insurgency. We believe a leftist government in El Salvador would provide the Guatemalan guerrillas with unimpeded use of Salvadoran territory for safehaven and for staging attacks. A radical left Salvadoran government probably also would be a new major source of arms and other supplies. Finally, Cuba and Nicaragua—emboldened by a guerrilla victory in El Salvador—probably would not hesitate to expand their assistance to the radical left in Guatemala.

The Army—which has many Indians in its ranks—participates in indigenous festivities and increasingly is trying to identify with Indian cultural traditions.

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United States as an unreliable ally, and a "go it alone" attitude is prevalent among them. Other officers, however, resent former President Rios Montt's anti-US rhetoric and recognize the potential importance of the United States to their counterinsurgency campaign as a supplier of both military equipment and economic assistance. Mejia is trying to improve relations with the United States by supporting US policy in Central America, and he has already requested—through informal channels thus far—a resumption of US military assistance.

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Insurgent gains, if any, over the next year will be determined, however, as much by the government's ability to maintain its multifaceted counterinsurgency approach as by the left's own capabilities and strategy. While we believe the military can sustain its counterinsurgency programs at existing levels, the Army may not be able to exploit fully its current advantage. In our opinion the military will not be able to upgrade its civilian defense force and civic action programs substantially without significant foreign economic and military assistance. The Army has been able to arm only a few of the newly formed civilian defense force units, while the civic action program is constrained by a lack of materiel and the military's limited air supply capability. The Mejia government is searching for economic assistance, as well as pursuing the purchase of helicopters, spare parts for its aircraft, and rifles for the civilian paramilitary units. It is unlikely, however, that the Guatemalan Government will be amenable to aid offers from international donors that entail conditions—such as those on human rights—that it perceives as infringements on its national sovereignty.

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Appendix A

The Government's Counterinsurgency Strategy [8]

Since early 1982 the Guatemalan armed forces have developed a multifaceted counterinsurgency campaign incorporating both military operations and civic action. The three major components of the strategy are an expanded deployment of small military units, the formation of large civilian paramilitary forces, and heavy emphasis on psychological operations. Repression is still used selectively, but is no longer a standard counterinsurgency tactic.

Armed Forces

The military has focused on saturating insurgent-held areas with government forces, both regular Army units and paramilitary groups. An increase in manpower by approximately 5,400 last summer raised the Army's strength to about 24,000 and has enabled it to expand its effective area of control.[9] The military also redeployed large units from major city garrisons and established five task forces in the midst of strongholds held by the approximately 2,000 to 2,500 insurgents. Concurrently, small Army detachments and patrol bases—at company and platoon size—have been placed in as many villages and isolated hamlets as manpower and logistics permit.

The armed forces underwent a fundamental reorganization this spring that further broadened their presence nationwide. The number of military zones has been dramatically increased from 9 to 22, each with a minimum of one battalion, and all security forces, including the civilian defense forces and national police, are being placed under the direct control of the zone commander. The changes are likely to improve tactical command and control and reaction time, as well as enhance the military's ability to direct civic action projects and control political mobilization.

This extensive dispersement of forces is designed to overcome weaknesses in mobility stemming from the lack of aircraft and the difficult and extensive terrain to be covered (five times the area of El Salvador). It permits aggressive patrolling in areas of insurgent activity and reduces some logistic, communications, and planning problems associated with large-force sweep operations. The Army has largely abandoned use of such sweeps, which forced the guerrillas to vacate an area but only until the military operation concluded. The Army now generally restricts sweeps to guerrilla-entrenched areas where it needs to locate and destroy insurgent camps before it can safely establish small-unit patrol bases. 25X1

The military's expanded presence in remote areas also has political and psychological benefits. In many cases it represents for some villages the first show of authority by the central government in months, if not years. It serves to deny insurgent control over an area by default. In many instances the insurgents have assassinated local officials—mayors, military commissioners, and national police—to demonstrate their de facto control of the area. Thus, the presence of troops, particularly as they become involved in programs bringing social services to the area, helps to restore legitimacy to the government. 25X1 25X1

Civilian Defense Forces

The organization of local civilian defense forces has been perhaps the single most important counterinsurgency development. These militias, now numbering 350,000 participants nationwide, patrol the immediate environs of their villages and provide a standoff capability or warning function against insurgent attacks. Although these forces are generally poorly equipped, their presence frees the Army from the need for static defense, permitting it to seek contact 25X1 25X1

[8] This assessment is based on information reported by the US Embassy and the in Guatemala over the last year and a half. Specific sources are cited where appropriate. 25X1 25X1

[9] The 24,000 figure does not include the 9,000- to 10,000-man National Police Force, 3,000-member Mobile Military Police Force, and the 2,000 Treasury Policemen. These units also engage in counterterrorist and counterinsurgency operations, such as border arms interdiction, house-to-house searches, roadblocks, and safehouse raids. 25X1

with insurgents in more rugged terrain. The civil defense forces also provide intelligence on guerrilla movements and on the locations of insurgent arms and supply caches.

The formation of civilian defense forces in over 800 villages is hindering the insurgents' ability to develop local support. Members of these forces are being employed in various projects to improve living standards in their villages. These tangible benefits, however minimal, provide incentive for nonideologically committed insurgent supporters to change their allegiance. Moreover, the insurgent tactic of attacking these forces to discourage their cooperation with the government has, in fact, placed the civilian defense units in an adversary relationship with the guerrillas and has helped to cement their bonds with the Army.

Civic Action and Psychological Operations

The third major component of the military's strategy is an increased emphasis on Army involvement in civic action programs. The high visibility of military personnel in providing food and health care and in restoring roads, homes, and schools is enabling the Army gradually to change its image and garner local support. The Army helps refugees to return to their villages and uses local radio to urge the return of others who fled fearing government repression or who were forcibly evacuated by the guerrillas.

Although a number of villagers have benefited materially from government civic action, the programs thus far probably have had as much of a psychological impact as a tangible one. The growing perception that the Army is willing to protect and assist the populace, even in areas where it cannot yet do so, makes the local inhabitants more amenable to cooperating with the military. Nevertheless, expansion of civic action projects is severely constrained by Guatemala's deteriorating economy and the military's logistic problems. Moreover, the success of the program in increasing local support for the government has depended largely on the widely varying skill and commitment of individual area commanders.

Effective psychological tactics being employed by the Army include two amnesties for the guerrillas, the first in June 1982 and the second from 23 March through the end of May 1983. The second, called the amnesty of reconciliation, was particularly effective, coming after nine months of heavy insurgent losses and the reported demoralization of many guerrilla regulars. Guatemalan Defense Minister Mejia announced that 1,410 people had taken advantage of the amnesty with some 626 of them turning in weapons. Some officers reportedly follow a policy of amnesty for guerrillas at any time and use local inhabitants to ensure that this policy is common knowledge in their region.

The Army also returns former insurgent supporters, and even some captured cadre, to their home villages to show potential guerrilla defectors that they will not be killed if they turn themselves in. Although the government figures cited above probably include civilians who merely sympathized with the guerrillas, the military has successfully used some defectors for propaganda purposes by holding highly publicized "change of loyalty" celebrations welcoming them back to the community. There have been a few instances of returning insurgent defectors being abused by local inhabitants who have suffered from guerrilla attacks, but the wider military presence should help curb such incidents.

The Army is effectively countering the insurgents' domestic propaganda effort and proselytizing among Guatemala's Indians. The military has many Indians in its enlisted ranks and is trying to identify with Indian cultural traditions by taking part in local indigenous festivities and by stressing the Indians' important role in Guatemalan society. The military also is emphasizing nationalism, while portraying guerrillas as dupes of a Communist ideology imported from abroad. Nationalist themes are apparently well received by the peasantry, and they contrast sharply with the insurgents' negative focus on class disparities, ethnic and racial discrimination, and violence. Officers at the local level are being instructed to employ nationalist themes with civilians.

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Repression

The military has not totally forsworn repression as a counterinsurgency tool. Although it is virtually impossible to sort out reports of human rights violations, we believe that the Army in the past used extreme force and brutality in selected areas where insurgent control and support for the guerrillas from the population did not initially permit the military to establish a presence and institute its new programs. This tactic, apparently utilized mostly along the Mexican border, has declined since last summer. Many peasants apparently recognized that the guerrillas could not protect them and that they had the choice of accepting the government's amnesty and benefits from civic action programs or remaining in the armed opposition.

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Appendix B

The Guatemalan Extreme Left

Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG)

The Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG) was established in January 1982 in Havana as the official politicomilitary umbrella organization of the Guatemalan insurgent groups. Designed to emulate the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador, the URNG has failed to establish joint control over all insurgent forces in Guatemala [redacted] It remains little more than a propaganda front, and decisions on military actions remain in the domain of the individual leaders. [redacted]

[redacted]

Active Insurgent Groups

The Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), headed by Ricardo Ramirez de Leon, is the largest insurgent group in the URNG with approximately 800 to 1,000 full-time combatants and a significant number of sympathizers in its territorial strongholds. Ramirez, an ex-member of both the Guatemalan Communist Party (PGT/O) and the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), is a veteran guerrilla leader and a hardline Marxist-Leninist. He was trained in Cuba in the early 1960s and subsequently spent several years there. [redacted]

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The EGP split from the FAR during the early 1970s and began military activity of its own in 1975 after several years of building its support among the peasantry and establishing local irregular forces in sympathetic villages. More than the other guerrilla groups, the EGP actively recruits among Guatemala's large population of impoverished Indians; probably more than half of its regulars are Indians. EGP activity is centered in the largely Indian Northwestern Highlands, particularly in the Departments of Huehuetenango and El Quiche, which border Mexico. [redacted] 25X1

In early 1982, the EGP virtually overran a small military garrison—the first such success of any of the insurgent groups—and [redacted] was in de facto control of much of remote Huehuetenango Department. In response, the Rios Montt government concentrated its heaviest counterinsurgency effort against EGP strongholds during the remainder of 1982. The Army's aggressive tactics and the establishment of the civilian defense forces, [redacted] has severely disrupted the EGP's base of support and ability to rely upon the population for supplies and safehaven. EGP forces are now disorganized, although they have carried out several attacks on the ill-equipped civilian defense forces in recent months. [redacted] 25X1

The Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA), led by Rodrigo Asturias, is the second-largest guerrilla group with an estimated 700 to 800 combatants. Asturias, also an ex-member of the Guatemalan Communist Party (PGT/O), has been involved in insurgent activity in Guatemala since the early 1960s, [redacted] A Cuban-trained Marxist-Leninist himself, he [redacted] 25X1

leads an organization that is less ideologically rigid than either the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) or the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR).

the ORPA leadership split from the FAR in 1971 but did not initiate military attacks until 1979. While its ranks have grown rapidly, ORPA does not emphasize building extensive local support networks or creating a part-time militia like the EGP. Rather, it has concentrated on training and equipping cadre, and, according to a US Embassy source, is anxious to step up the pace of military action against government forces. The ORPA forces are concentrated on the southern slopes of the Western Highlands, with its headquarters and stronghold in San Marcos Department on the Mexican border.

the ORPA has carried out the most damaging attacks against Army units so far this year. The organization has traditionally been the most resistant URNG member to efforts at unification. Asturias, who would like to be the unquestioned leader of the Guatemalan revolution, now may be more willing to cooperate increasingly with the smaller Rebel Armed Forces. By doing so, he may feel that his organization can supplant the EGP, which has been weakened the most by the military, as the preeminent insurgent organization.

The Rebel Armed Forces(FAR), headed by Jorge Ismael Soto Garcia, is a small, but highly trained and effective combat force of approximately 400. Soto, an inflexible Marxist-Leninist, has led the FAR since the late 1960s. He is Cuban trained and enjoys good relations with Havana. A strong advocate of military action, Soto may be the only insurgent leader who permanently remains in Guatemala to lead his combatants.

The FAR is the oldest insurgent group, dating from 1962 when it initiated the armed struggle with an alliance of dissident military officers and Communist Party (PGT/O) members. It was the major guerrilla organization involved in the heavy fighting of the late 1960s but was decimated by the counterinsurgency campaign of that period. The FAR reemerged in 1977 and now operates principally in the remote expansive Peten Department in northern Guatemala. Although it focuses more on military strikes than building popular support,

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The FAR has suffered less than the EGP from the Army's offensive. The government has not yet focused its counterinsurgency campaign against it, because FAR activities take place in a sparsely populated and economically unimportant area. Partly for this reason, the FAR has undertaken some successful ambushes of small military patrols this year. FAR leaders historically have resisted unification efforts but, in one area, are coordinating military actions now with the ORPA. In the past, the FAR feared domination of the guerrilla movement by the EGP and does not have good relations with it.

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The Guatemalan Communist Party/Dissident Faction (PGT/D), led by veteran Communist Jose Alberto Cardoza Aguilar, is the newest insurgent group and smallest member of the URNG. Cardoza broke away from the orthodox party (PGT/O) in 1978 to form the dissident wing when the party refused to adopt armed revolution.

the membership has dwindled to fewer than 200. The PGT/D probably can rely upon far fewer than that for military action, however, and has rarely engaged security forces in fighting.

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The Guatemalan Communist Party (PGT/O)

The party, led by Ricardo Rosales Roman, is an orthodox Moscow-line Communist party that has not yet openly adopted the armed revolution as a means to obtain power and is not a member of the insurgent alliance (URNG). Although the PGT/O may have up to 1,000 supporters, it probably has at most 300 to 400 active members, mostly in the unionized labor sector. 25X1

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The insurgent groups have invited the PGT/O to join the URNG, apparently believing that party leaders have organizational skills and ties to legitimate political and labor organizations in Guatemala that they need. Rosales Roman may accept in the belief that he can gain considerable political influence in an insurgent alliance weakened by the military's continuing counterinsurgency successes. 25X1

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Appendix C

Insurgent Use of Foreign Territory

Access to foreign territory is essential to the guerrillas for safehaven, arms infiltration, resupply, and headquarters for their international propaganda efforts. We believe that the poorly patrolled border areas of Mexico, Belize, and Honduras are increasingly being utilized by the insurgents, particularly for sanctuary.

Mexico

The three largest insurgent groups have their own logistic networks in Mexico, and the Guatemalan Communist Party, has also established a border-crossing apparatus this year.

Although we know of no permanent guerrilla military bases in Mexican territory, guerrillas cross the border for rest and recuperation. They are probably also using some remote areas as temporary staging areas. A source that US Embassy officials in Guatemala consider objective and reliable reported that villagers in one border area said guerrilla units routinely make incursions from Mexico and raid their villages and farms for food and supplies.

Mexico City also serves as headquarters for three insurgent political front groups, which solicit political and financial support from international donors and issue propaganda against the Guatemalan Government. The guerrilla fronts are led by well-known political exiles associated with moderately leftist, but democratic, groups who lend the insurgents legitimacy. Most deny any direct connection to the insurgents, and none of the front groups can speak for or take action on behalf of all the insurgent organizations.

The Guatemalan Commission on Human Rights, for example, which reportly is controlled by the Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms, played an active role in the so-called People's Tribunal held in

[10] This is not to say that all accusations of Army abuses by the refugees are unfounded. We believe that, in the past, extreme repression was the norm in some areas and that isolated cases of human rights abuses still occur (see appendix B). Nor do we wish to imply that the refugee camps are utilized as insurgent bases.

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Spain this year, which condemned the Guatemalan Government's human rights record. A second group, the Guatemalan Patriotic Unity Committee (CGUP), was set up by the Guatemalan insurgent umbrella organization (URNG) to act as its broad political front, although its success in that role thus far has been minimal.

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Belize

Belizean territory also is utilized for insurgent safehaven and the infiltration of supplies. Cuba ships military equipment to southern Belize where Guatemalan insurgents take delivery.

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Honduras

Honduran territory is used by the insurgents, for the transit of arms and supplies from Nicaragua. The border area also may be utilized, for safehaven and as a staging area for attacks against Guatemalan targets.

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