

jh chrono

TRANSMITTAL SLIP		DATE 12/16/82
TO: C/LA/DDO Mr. Clarridge		
ROOM NO.	BUILDING	
REMARKS:		
Attached FYI.		
FROM: H. F. Hutchinson, Jr. VC/NIC		
ROOM NO.	BUILDING	EXTENSION

FORM NO. 241
1 FEB 55

REPLACES FORM 36-8
WHICH MAY BE USED.

(47)

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Attachment: Copy of

[Redacted Box]

Salvadoran Insurgent Capabilities

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9 December 1982

TO : Harry Rowen, C/NIC
 From : [redacted] NIC/AG
 SUBJECT: Situation in El Salvador

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1. During your meeting with the AG on Thursday you raised a question about the situation in El Salvador, expressing some concern that the situation might be deteriorating, if I heard you correctly. [redacted] in response, opined that solid progress is being made. I was less optimistic and would like to expand my comments here.

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2. I attach the DIA publication, Salvadoran Insurgent Capabilities [redacted] which I think is very good, much better than the April 1981 SNIE on the same subject. Although released last month it is based only on intelligence available as of March 1, 1982. Thus, it does not take into account the effect of the March 28 elections which were, [redacted] a severe setback to the DRU, particularly in the area of international public opinion. I also attach a report from Major McKay, USMC, who I think is the best official observer in El Salvador.

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3. My sense of the situation from daily reading of El Salvador traffic is that the Government of El Salvador (GOES) has been unable to exploit the successful elections and by now their beneficial effect on world public opinion has all but disappeared. In the military area there is little evidence to show any significant progress by the GOES either in terms of victories in the field or demonstration of increased capabilities relative to the insurgents. Guerrilla offensives this summer and during October and November show, if anything, improvement on the insurgent side. Government counter-offensives are always "successful" but involve not much more than marching thousands of troops into the contested areas of Morazan, Chalatenango, La Union (most recently), and Usulután and claiming great numbers of dead guerrillas. These are suspicious because relatively few weapons are reported as recovered and there are almost never any prisoners. The operations typically last 10 days to two weeks (the logistical limits of the Salvadoran Armed Forces (ESAF)) and restore captured towns to GOES control. Garrisons are re-established and within a couple months are again overrun by the insurgents. A partial exception to this was the attack on the insurgent complex at the La Guazapa volcano in June which did seriously reduce the guerrilla presence there.

4. A disturbing development in this pattern over the past few months is that GOES garrisons tend to surrender quickly, with the insurgents taking significant quantities of weapons and numerous prisoners. Some of the prisoners are recruited into guerrilla ranks. The rest are propagandized, treated well, and released--whenever possible to the Red Cross. Some observers believe that the returnees are creating morale problems for the ESAF as they spread the word that it is better to surrender than to risk death by

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fighting. Moreover, by taking and releasing prisoners the insurgents insure listenership for their Radio Venceremos over which they broadcast the names and state of health of the prisoners. They also often broadcast the names of government KIAs and either deliver the corpses to civil authorities for transmission to the families or announce where the bodies, often coffined, have been buried so that relatives can reclaim them. As for weapons, the most recent series of guerrilla attacks in Morazan and La Union netted the insurgents over 500 modern rifles, 4 81 mortars, 2. 50 cal. MGS, 3 90 mm RRs, some M-79s, M-60 MGs, 60 mm mortars, and a dozen TRC-77 radios besides almost 160,000 rounds of rifle ammunition.

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5. I think it fair to say that the scale of insurgent operations and their relative success in the face of what we know (or think we know) about health conditions, availability of food and clothing, the interdiction of arms crossing the Honduran border, and the problems of coordinating operations among the ideologically divided insurgent groups, bespeaks a rather higher level of insurgent capabilities vis-a-vis the ESAF than we had expected at this time. Conversely, I think it fair to say that there has been some disappointment at the performance of the ESAF after the amount of US training and supply they have had. Also, in view of the effort that has been put into interdiction of arms supplies that current working assumptions about routes and sources have been brought into question. Likewise, the ability of the insurgent forces to recruit and maintain their force levels raises questions about the extent of their support within the population. There is recent speculation, based on interrogation of FMLN leaders captured in Honduras that the unchanging total of 4500-5000 fulltime armed insurgents may be too low and should be adjusted to 7,000 or even higher.

6. On the other hand, the US-supported buildup in ESAF strength has not yet been translated into a positive change in the military situation. The US-trained mobile battalions have had a mixed record. (It should be noted that training is a wasting asset in the ESAF since draftees serve only one year and there is no professional corps of NCOs). The National Guard is composed chiefly of army veterans and arguably should be a more experienced and effective force. However, there is little evidence to show that this is so. Employed alone or in combination with local civil defense forces the Guard often provides static garrison forces in El Salvador's small towns and cities. Recently, as noted, these garrisons appear more and more to prefer surrender to last ditch defense. Moreover, the Guard is most often charged with responsibility for abuses of the civil population.

7. The appearance, if not necessarily the fact, that the guerrillas hold the initiative is adding to a widespread belief in El Salvador that it is the insurgents who have stalemated the government. The lack of military progress combined with continuing sabotage of the infrastructure has caused disillusionment among many influential civilians, particularly businessmen who, especially after the elections had removed Druate and the Christian Democratic reformers, had believed that the "unleashed" Army would rapidly reduce the insurgency. Recent traffic reports highly placed conservatives telling [REDACTED] of their belief that the military is content to let the war drag on since many officers are personally profiting from US materiel assistance. Others complain that General Garcia in particular is less interested in prosecuting the war than in positioning himself to win the

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presidential election. He is careful, they say, not to allow possible political opponents in the military to hold key commands, regardless of their competence. There are continuing rumors of discontent in the officer ranks over what some military men see as Garcia's concentration on politics, or his lack of competence, or his alleged subservience to the Americans, or, especially among majors and lieutenant colonels, his violation of Salvadoran military tradition by clinging to power instead of retiring to let the next tanda (in this sense, military academy generation) take over. All of this discontent is exacerbated by lack of significant military success and is having a negative effect on armed forces morale. Although they have to be discounted, the comments of the Honduran military on their Salvadoran colleagues' competence are far from laudatory.

8. The purely political situation, involving the power struggle among the Christian Democrats, the National Conservatives (now split into two parties), and D'Auboisson's ARENA, the dicey question of US relations, including the murder trials and certification, and, above all, the economy, are none of them causes for optimism. The election of March 28 continues to fade into history and the war drags on. When the Pope visits Central America in early 1983 he probably will call for negotiations. This will put further strain on a divided government that clings to the dictum that the insurgents should not be allowed to gain at the conference table that power they were unable to win in the field. However, in view of the insurgents' success in the field (or, at least, the government's inability to drive them from the field) this argument wears thin. Indeed, it can be reversed with some plausibility.

9. The election, it is also argued, was a vote against the insurgents. But it was not merely that. It also was a vote against the Duarte government that had been carrying on the fight against the insurgents. And, it was a vote for peace, in the sense that whatever government succeeded Duarte was supposed to bring peace by one means or another. In several senses, then, the elections have been a failure. They have not produced a clearly popular government, and they have not produced any progress toward peace through continuation of the military and economic policies of the Duarte regime. The option of seeking peace through negotiations has not been tried, but it can hardly be argued that the elections were a referendum against negotiations. This is not to say that negotiations are a wise course. It is only to point out that pressures are building in their favor--if only on the grounds that nothing else has worked--and that in all likelihood the papal visit will increase those pressures. The fact that the Pope will be on his Central American tour at about the same time that congressional recertification of human rights progress in El Salvador is required only makes the situation more interesting from the point of view of US policy.

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