



Directorate of Intelligence

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**Latin America**  
**Review**

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**Supplement**  
**31 January 1986**

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*ALALAR 86-004J*

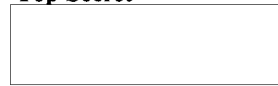
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**Latin America  
Review**

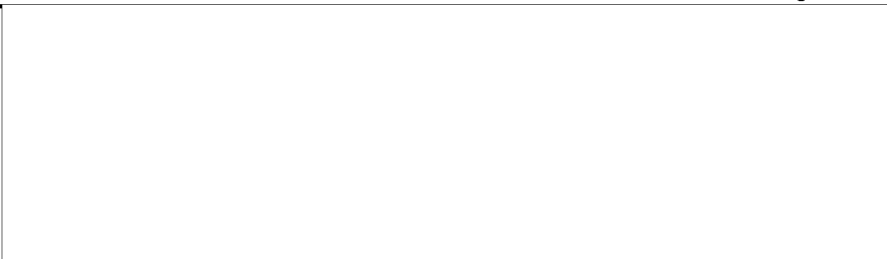
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**Articles**



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**El Salvador: The FMLN Guerrillas Dig In**

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The guerrillas are constructing at least 11 elaborate defensive strongpoints to counter the military's recent, more aggressive operations.

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**Cuba: Recent Military Acquisitions**

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Soviet deliveries to Cuba of advanced communications equipment and other military hardware, together with improvements in Cuba's coastal defense missile system, are part of an effort to upgrade Havana's military capabilities.

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*Articles have been coordinated as appropriate with other offices within CIA. Comments and queries regarding this publication may be directed to the Chief, Production Staff, Office of African and Latin American Analysis,*

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**El Salvador: The FMLN Guerrillas Dig In**

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We have identified 11 elaborate defensive strongpoints in areas occupied by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). This supports reporting that the guerrillas are feeling pressure from government forces and are preparing these strongpoints to better withstand the military's recent, more aggressive operations. The guerrillas are reportedly making extensive use of landmines to strengthen their defenses and ambush government forces. The rapid construction of these 11 strongpoints suggests that the General Command of the FMLN probably is planning and directing the work. This strengthening of guerrilla defenses will most likely result in higher government casualties.

[redacted] El Salvador [redacted]

[redacted] reveals that guerrilla forces of the FMLN have established at least 13 base areas or zones of control in remote areas of central and eastern El Salvador. The guerrillas use these zones as safe areas to plan operations, recruit, train, and resupply their forces. Operating from makeshift camps in the zones, the guerrillas easily overcome local opposition. During this time frame, if attacked by larger government forces, the guerrillas avoid direct confrontation, often abandoning an area until the government forces withdraw. Choosing not to defend terrain, the guerrillas prepare a limited number of trenches and foxholes to temporarily secure their supply routes, the approaches to camps, and the corridors into the zones of control. Since late 1984, successes by government assault forces appear to be compelling the guerrillas to adopt new defensive measures.

**Description**

In June 1985, [redacted] guerrilla forces were constructing more elaborate defensive positions or strongpoints in the FMLN zone in northern San Vicente Department. [redacted]

central El Salvador confirms the presence of similar strongpoints in five other FMLN zones. All six of the zones that have the new-style strongpoints have been

**New Guerrilla Strongpoints in Central El Salvador**

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Name <sup>a</sup>	Location	Status
Cton y Crio San Jeronimo	13-45-45 N 88-40-48 W	Inactive
Sitio El Ingles	13-45-55 N 88-44-35 W	Active
Omoa	13-46-52 N 88-45-51 W	Active
Cerro Verde	13-31-04 N 88-38-27 W	Inactive
Aqua Fria	13-51-48 N 88-57-50 W	Inactive
Las Charcas	14-12-07 N 89-06-15 W	Inactive
Las Canitas	14-14-10 N 89-04-30 W	Active
El Quebradero	14-13-40 N 89-05-30 W	Active
Tremedal	14-11-58 N 89-03-30 W	Inactive
Laguna	14-03-48 N 88-52-45 W	Active
El Amate	14-03-05 N 89-24-34 W	Active

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<sup>a</sup> Names have arbitrarily been assigned to these strongpoints that reflect the identity of the nearest feature on the 1:50,000 series maps, second edition, of El Salvador published by the Instituto Geografico Nacional.

[redacted]

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under heavy pressure by government forces during the past eight months. Although defensive positions are a common feature in FMLN zones of control, these strongpoints stand out because of their unusual size, distinctive features, and rapid pace of construction. While there are differences in the size and shape of the strongpoints, they share the following characteristics:

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- Are larger and more elaborate than previous FMLN defensive positions.
- Include a series of interconnecting trenches and foxholes in rough, easily defended terrain, usually on high ground.
- Occupy new sites away from previous guerrilla positions.

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted] the guerrillas are reinforcing their defensive positions and have used landmines extensively to ambush government forces. [Redacted]

occupying the zones. This improved government capability probably motivated the FMLN to construct the new strongpoints. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

The new strongpoints provide the guerrillas with better prepared positions from which to engage government forces. In contrast, government forces are faced with more difficult objectives and must anticipate higher casualties if they assault the strongpoints, especially if the approaches are seeded with landmines. By positioning the strongpoints in new locations, the guerrillas may also be attempting to avoid detection as well as relieve pressure on areas already hard hit by government operations. [Redacted]

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**Location**

[Redacted] The strongpoints are located in six of the 13 guerrilla base areas. The first strongpoint was identified in northern San Vicente Department in June 1985. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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Six of the 11 known strongpoints were active in mid-October 1985, and the other five appear to be unoccupied and overgrown with vegetation. Because of the dense vegetation that covers much of rural El Salvador, it is possible that other strongpoints exist but remain undetected. [Redacted]

[Redacted] Whether the guerrillas choose to defend a strongpoint or abandon it just before it comes under attack, they can slow the pace of government counterinsurgency operations, thus buying time for withdrawal. [Redacted]

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**Purpose**

The strength of the insurgent movement in El Salvador is in its control of the countryside. The FMLN's base areas or zones of control are sanctuaries in which the guerrillas can rest, recruit, plan operations, conduct training, and organize logistics. To maintain its credibility as a potent political-military force, the FMLN must remain in control of these zones. Since late 1984, and continuing through 1985, the Salvadoran armed forces have launched a series of counterinsurgency operations deep into the FMLN zones of control. For the first time, ground force units of the Army and Treasury Police, joined by Air Force ground attack aircraft, helicopter gunships, and airmobile assault teams were able to achieve a measure of surprise against specific guerrilla concentrations. This change in government tactics has reduced the guerrillas' warning and reaction time and increased the level of risk for guerrilla units, support columns, and civilians

**Significance**

We believe that the guerrillas are constructing strongpoints in the zones of control because the FMLN feels the pressure of recent government counterinsurgency operations and has ordered additional defensive preparations to help them counter the faster paced government assaults. The FMLN also probably realizes that to remain credible in the eyes of the local population they must better defend their zones of control. FMLN control of sizable areas of El Salvador provides the guerrillas with their most powerful bargaining chip in any future peace negotiations with the government.

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[Redacted] the FMLN's commitment to improve its organization of the rural population as well as the FMLN's concern over the success of government air assault forces operating against these zones. The number, location in six base areas, and rapid construction of new strongpoints suggest that the program is being

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directed and expedited by a central authority, such as the General Command of the FMLN. The presence of the strongpoints and landmines increases the likelihood that government forces will suffer greater casualties in future counterinsurgency operations and that the armed forces' morale will suffer, thereby achieving one of the guerrillas' goals in their war of attrition

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**Cuba: Recent  
Military Acquisitions** [Redacted]

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The recent delivery of advanced communications equipment and resupply of other military hardware from the Soviet Union, in addition to the identification of an improved coastal defense missile system in Cuba, reflect a continuing effort by Havana to upgrade its military capabilities with Moscow's help. [Redacted] the Soviet arms delivered to the Cuban port of Mariel in early January included three MIG-23 Flogger fuselage crates, nine T-54/55 tanks, one set of R-410M/Twin Plate communications equipment, and at least three sets of Spoon Rest D air defense radar equipment. The equipment apparently was delivered by the Soviet merchant vessel Bratslav, which departed the Black Sea on 19 December after loading at Nikolayev South—Moscow's major arms transshipment port for the Third World. Although most of this equipment probably is intended for military units in Cuba, some—particularly the T-54/55 tanks—may ultimately be destined for Cuban forces in Angola.

[Redacted]

The January delivery marks the first identification of the R-410M/Twin Plate tropospheric scatter communication system in Cuba. This system is used in the USSR by the Soviet High Command's signal units for secure communications. Acquisition of the equipment by Havana will significantly enhance Cuban communications by providing an increased range, greater resistance to jamming, and an improved reliability in a nuclear environment over current microwave systems. In addition, the Twin Plate equipment will complement the ongoing installation of an islandwide coaxial cable system.

[Redacted]

The first indication that Havana possesses an improved coastal defense missile system came in July 1985 when a fragment of an antiship missile—later identified as associated with the Soviet-built SSC-3 coastal defense missile system—was found off the Florida coast. US technicians established that the missile probably was fired from a ground-based launcher rather than from a Cuban missile patrol boat.

[Redacted]

The transporter-erector-launcher for the SSC-3 system—now used in the Warsaw Pact countries and exported by the USSR to Syria, Libya, Algeria, and South Yemen—was subsequently observed [Redacted]

[Redacted] in an area southwest of Cienfuegos in mid-January. The deployment of the SSC-3 system in Cuba will modestly improve Havana's coastal defense capability. In wartime, Cuba's use of the radar-guided missile—with a maximum range of 50 nautical miles—would pose a threat to shipping in the Yucatan Channel, the Florida Straits, and other sea lanes in the Caribbean.

[Redacted]

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