

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE D11

THE WASHINGTON POST
13 February 1981

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Look to Left Wrong in El Salvador

Jimmy Carter's lame-duck decision to resume military aid to the junta in El Salvador was apparently based on a mass of intelligence reports that pointed to the Kremlin as the power behind leftist forces in the ravaged little country.

That's why the Reagan administration, which needs no encouragement from Democrats to take a hard anti-Soviet line, will undoubtedly continue aid to the junta.

What worries professional diplomats and intelligence analysts is that the administration's fear of a communist victory in El Salvador may blind it to what they see as an even likelier possibility: that the centrist junta may be overthrown by rightist elements who want a return to the old military-landowner oligarchy.

Allies like Mexico and West Germany, meanwhile, tend to be less fearful of the Salvadoran leftists than of what they regard as a return to the days of U.S. imperialism in Central America.

In the hope of persuading European leaders that U.S. fears of a leftist victory in El Salvador are not just anti-communist hysteria, the State Department is considering the idea of sending a team of intelligence experts to brief western leaders. As the team's mission is described in a secret document, it would be to "show them evidence in our possession . . . [to] clarify and support our statements and actions vis-a-vis El Salvador."

In West Germany, the intelligence team "would, of course, hope to make presentation to leadership of the Socialist Party, given their apparent support of the Salvadoran revolutionaries," the document states.

Following the team's visit to Bonn, the intelligence would be made "available" to NATO members and "other select European countries."

Participating in the intelligence roadshow would be representatives of the State Department, the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency. What would they have to tell the skeptical foreign leaders? Here is some top-secret information that our intelligence experts have been gathering since last summer. Much of it, sources told my associate Lucette Lagnado, comes from a cache of documents captured from Salvadoran communists:

- With the Kremlin's approval, the Cubans are in charge of smuggling arms to the guerrillas from Eastern Europe and Vietnam.

- The leftist rebels have received several tons of arms from the Soviet bloc, including 57 mm rifles and other antitank weapons.

- Many of the communist weapons smuggled to the Salvadoran guerrillas come from the stocks Americans left behind in Vietnam.

- Despite Soviet attempts to avoid

direct complicity, some Russian-made arms are also getting into El Salvador. For example, a shipment of Soviet hand grenades, still in original crates, was recently captured from the rebels.

- As many as 300 guerrillas at a time are being given military training in Cuba.

- The Palestine Liberation Organization is also providing training to Salvadoran rebels at PLO bases in Syria and Iraq.

Our experts believe the Soviets' aim in El Salvador is more devious than a straight-out victory for leftist rebels. What they hope to do is create enough turmoil in Central America to divert U.S. attention from the Russians' activities in Afghanistan and elsewhere — and maybe sucker us in to another Vietnam.

The Kremlin "would like nothing better" than to see the United States get deeply involved in the Salvadoran conflict, a diplomatic source said.