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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

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16 September 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: John R. Horton
National Intelligence Officer for Latin America

SUBJECT: Latin America Warning Report for September 1983

1. The Warning Meeting held on 14 September 1983 was addressed by Mr. Jon Glassman, a Foreign Service Officer, assigned to Ambassador Richard Stone, and the discussion reported here is a digest of Mr. Glassman's remarks, questions asked of him, and comments made by others. Mr. Glassman began by pointing out that Ambassador Stone's mission, our support to the Contadora talks, and the substantive talks with the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN), are in response to a Congressional initiative -- that is, that the US carry on such talks, that the government of El Salvador do the same, and that there be a credible offer made to the FMLN to participate in elections in El Salvador. In meeting with Stone, the FMLN representatives made a point of their confidence of winning the war on the ground and of their willingness to talk to the Peace Commission of El Salvador in order to reach the "real factors of power," which Glassman said they define as the government bureaucracy of El Salvador, the armed forces of El Salvador, and the United States. The members of the FMLN delegation consisted of Guillermo Ungo, President of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR), who was introduced as moderator, Ruben Zamora, also of the FDR, Mario Aguinaga Carranza of the Communist Party of El Salvador (PCES), and Mario Lopez, of the Central American Workers Revolutionary Party (PRTC). Importantly, they said that they were not interested in participating in elections. They talked instead of a coalition government and of dealing -- again -- with the "real factors of power." They spoke of precedents for a coalition government, such as the first junta and also of coalitions of groups in the National University of El Salvador.

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2. After that meeting -- which occasioned a press release by the FMLN, repeating most of what it had said in the meeting -- both General Vides Casanova and Roberto d'Aubuisson were surprised that the FMLN had rejected the offer to participate in elections. The government was also disturbed that the FMLN had made a public statement, an agreement of confidentiality having been agreed to by El Salvador. The people of El Salvador, and especially the armed forces, Vides feared, would suspect that political power was being bargained away in secret, so the government also made its stand public.

3. Concerning the Contadora process, there are tensions here too, particularly within the Core Four. Honduras suspects Costa Rica of wanting bilaterally to alleviate its uncomfortable relations with Nicaragua. There is nervousness about the new Foreign Minister of Guatemala, Andrade, who wants to talk bilaterally instead of being confined to the Contadora/Core Four framework. The others in the Core Four suspect him of throwing Guatemala's weight around, as though it were the colonial days when Guatemala had the Captain Generalcy of the region. (The US is opposing this bilateral tendency in Andrade.) Now the Contadora has brought forth a statement of objectives, the twenty-one points, which might later be phrased as a treaty. Honduras is satisfied with this scheme, just so long as there is no step-by-step approach, and the US too wants to be sure that results would be reached simultaneously, especially the specification for democratization. Mr. Glassman commented that no one expects that we will ever get to an actual treaty with these negotiations.

4. The motive of the Salvadoran guerrillas is to appeal directly to the U.S. Congress in a context of reasonableness. In their dealings with the Peace Commission, which the government of El Salvador insists is not a governmental body, the guerrillas try to make it appear that they are dealing with the government of El Salvador. On the El Salvador side, d'Aubuisson pretends publicly to support these negotiations but makes it clear privately that he does not. And Vides, to retain the support of the officer corps and for the morale of the troops, iterates the point that the purpose of negotiations is to arrange participation by the far left in the elections, not for arranging the sharing of power.

5. Differences are apparent among guerrilla factions. Neither the Peoples Revolutionary Army (ERP) nor the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN) is represented on the FMLN negotiating delegation. And Joaquin Villalobos, heading the ERP, in speaking of a makeup of a coalition government in El Salvador, uses the term "democratic forces," rather than the cliché, "real factors of power." These are a couple of examples of differences, and it is tempting to speculate how, by making offers, differences might be exploited to increase factionalism, to break up the FMLN. There is another sort of difference which shows itself when we consider symmetry. The Sandinista Directorate is not talking with the Nicaraguan guerrillas. In the words of Daniel Ortega, they will "talk with the masters not with the dogs."

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6. So far as negotiations are concerned, there is a good argument for the proposition that the application of force has produced results, although the Salvadoran guerrilla delegation refuses to admit this. What we look for from the guerrillas is acceptance of El Salvador's offer to participate in the elections: if the guerrillas don't accept it, then they face defeat by the government. Concerning the ability of the government to guarantee the safety of those participating in elections, it is a real weakness and in addition to the threat from the right, there is that of the vengeful left. Anyway, it is doubtful that anyone, even Ungo, will agree to take part in the 1984 elections. The guerrillas have thought too of the prospects for d'Aubuisson's becoming President, for his abolishing reforms and for his driving the Christian Democrats (PDC) into the arms of the guerrillas. The members of the delegation claim that they keep in touch with the PDC, with Napoleon Duarte, and with Morales Ehrlich, an item of information which the Stone party did not pass on to the government of El Salvador. Concerning the possibility of a Central American settlement which would allow separate states to choose their own form of government in return for pledging to leave each other alone, it would be unacceptable because we could not be sure that clandestine support would not continue flowing from Nicaragua to neighboring states and the large military establishment of Nicaragua itself would continue to be a threat to neighbors. Human rights in El Salvador continues to be a problem affecting Congressional attitudes in this country. Vides is sensitive enough to this to have circulated a standard of procedures to the army but the vexing Lopez Sibrian case seems unlikely to be resolved.

7. In Nicaragua, symmetry would call for the anti-Sandinista guerrillas to initiate preliminary discussions with the Sandinista Directorate through intermediaries. The aim would be to produce a peaceful resolution of the differences between the Contras and the Sandinistas at which point the US would stop supporting the anti-Sandinista forces. The ultimate and beneficial result of the Contadora negotiations themselves would be a new government in Nicaragua which would allow opposition to flourish, unlikely as that may be. A question was asked then: what if the means we are using to put pressure on the other side are not sufficient to produce our maximalist objectives? One reply to this is that we keep the pressure on to attain the resources we need, namely, resources from Congress for our help to the government of El Salvador and our support to the anti-Sandinista forces. If we were really negotiating, we would make attractive offers to such persons as Ungo, for example, to split various factions off from the FMLN, or to isolate the hardline Villalobos. And in addition to playing them off against each other in negotiations, we would plan the anti-guerrilla campaign in El Salvador with the same end in mind: that is, attack or go easy on the forces of this faction or that for the purpose of increasing doubts and jealousies among them.

8. Going back to the question of the ability of the government to defeat the guerrillas in El Salvador, considerable skepticism was expressed by military men about the possibility ever of defeating the guerrillas as long as they are supplied and supported from Nicaragua. A distinction was made here between the difficulty of wearing guerrillas down in a war of attrition, which

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may grind down the government as much as it does the guerrillas, and dealing deliberate heavy blows to a particular unit in a short time. (There is a far greater effect on morale if a unit takes a large number of casualties in a short time rather than taking the same number of losses over an extended period.) It was brought out by one participant that we must assume that the FMLN can last until the next Presidential election in this country -- if that is considered to be an aim -- but we must question whether the anti-Sandinista forces in Nicaragua can last as long. Their performance so far has not been significant: if anything they are unifying the Sandinistas rather than causing factionalism in the Directorate and the Directorate has been flexible in dealing with them.

9. Concerning the strength of the guerrillas in El Salvador, compare the activity of the guerrillas a year ago, when they seemed formidable, with the past summer, and we see that they have accomplished much less. We have been waiting all summer for a major attack on government forces, but it has not taken place and we hear reports now of an October offensive. What is the reason for the delay? Several reasons were cited: factionalism in the FMLN was one. The result of the government's summer-long offensive, much more effective than we had thought in May that it could be, was another. Perhaps the guerrillas had been pacing themselves for the then-expected elections in El Salvador at the end of this year. The guerrillas may need new weapons as a result of the disruption of supply. (There was speculation about their having SA-7's, the Soviet version, or US Redeyes, for use against helicopters. This would be a blow to the anti-guerrilla forces in El Salvador: the Afghan rebels have hand-held SA missiles, after all, so that the lack of such weapons in El Salvador is probably not a result of any Soviet reluctance to escalate in weaponry.) Another reason for the lack of a guerrilla offensive was offered: What can the guerrillas gain from a large-scale offensive while talks are going on? Past offensives were followed by propaganda pushing for the negotiations now going on. Also, the guerrillas do continue to undermine the economy of El Salvador through sabotage. Now we wait to see what October will bring.

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