

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

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MEMORANDUM

El Salvador: Insurgent Arms--Stockpiles and Origin [REDACTED]

The quantity and quality of guerrilla weaponry has grown dramatically in recent months, but the arms are unevenly distributed and the insurgents have not yet had sufficient training or experience in using them. [REDACTED]

During most of 1980, insurgent forces were armed primarily with an odd assortment of handguns, hunting rifles, and submachine-guns. Perhaps only twenty percent of their cadre carried G-3, M-1, and FAL semi-automatic rifles. By August, guerrillas had begun occasionally to employ bazookas, shoulder-fired anti-tank rockets, and recoilless rifle grenades--a Chinese RPG-2 was apparently used in the 16 September attack on the US embassy. Reports in November confirmed that guerrillas had some rifle-propelled grenades and a few M-79 grenade launchers--40 mm rounds for the M-79 were discovered in Honduras and traced to a 1974 US shipment to Vietnam. [REDACTED]

Toward the end of December it was clear that Salvadoran guerrillas were receiving massive shipments of new arms and ammo, and that the incoming material was significantly more sophisticated. Most notable was widespread use of M-16 and Galil 5.56 mm automatic rifles--far superior to the G-3 semi-automatics used by Salvadoran security forces. The insurgents were also employing rifle-propelled grenades, shoulder-fired rockets, sophisticated land mines, and heavy machineguns, some reported to be of anti-aircraft capability. [REDACTED]

This memorandum was prepared by the Latin America Division of the Office of Political Analysis. It was requested by Congressman Paul N. McClosky. It contains information available through 5 March 1981. [REDACTED]

TOP SECRET [REDACTED]

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Location of Arms

The influx of weapons and the guerrillas' offensive in January have prompted security forces to step up raids on safe-houses and arms caches. The raids have revealed that distribution of the new weaponry is a major problem for the guerrillas because of transportation difficulties and increased government security measures. Weapons caches are scattered throughout the country. [REDACTED]

So far the arms shipments have not markedly changed the geographical concentration of insurgent operations. One exception would be the escalation of guerrilla activity since November in the southeastern portion of the country; there operation could be in support of covert flights and sea shipments of men and materiel from Nicaragua. [REDACTED]

Major areas of insurgent operations have generally remained in the northern provinces--permanent guerrilla fortifications have been discovered near the Honduran border in recent weeks--and in the central highlands extending north, west and east from the capital of San Salvador. Activities also remain constant around most of the fourteen provincial capitals; major cross-roads, electric and communication facilities, and military [REDACTED]

Origin of Arms

In late 1979, arms were coming into El Salvador sporadically, from diverse sources. In December, a half million dollars worth of arms--almost certainly of Cuban origin--was transshipped through Honduras. Earlier, Fatah had sent a shipment of rifles and grenades. Smaller shipments of arms, including antitank weapons and sub-machineguns, were received from Sandinista elements and Guatemalan guerrillas. [REDACTED]

In the spring of 1980, the Costa Rican pipeline--overseen by the Cubans--was shipping arms to El Salvador by land, air, and sea; many of these arms had been smuggled into Costa Rica by Cuba, Panama, and Venezuela to support the Sandinista revolution in 1978-1979. This Costa Rican network, which funneled exclusively western-made semi-automatic rifles and munitions, assorted

Guerrilla Activity and Government Troop Disposition



sub-machineguns and other small arms, was exposed in July leading to public disclosures and government investigations that eventually restricted the Cuban and Nicaraguan trafficking in Costa Rica. [REDACTED]

Panamanian officials were also cooperating in 1980 in intermittent shipments to the rebels. [REDACTED]

Other sources of arms were also available. The various guerrilla groups had amassed an estimated \$80 million war chest and were purchasing weapons on the international market and making direct cash payments to several of the individuals and leftist organizations involved in the Central American networks. [REDACTED]

Throughout last summer, however, the Salvadoran insurgents received pledges from Vietnam, Ethiopia, and several Soviet bloc countries to immediately send arms and supplies to the guerrillas via Cuba and Nicaragua. By November, Western-made materiel from these donors was arriving in El Salvador, and was a major factor in the ability of the guerrillas to launch the January offensive. [REDACTED]

Arms Supply--Volume, Staging Areas, and Routes

[REDACTED]

There is no single storage facility in Nicaragua. The weapons flown into Managua from Cuba are housed in a warehouse outside the capital until transferred to distribution points elsewhere. For security reasons, the Sandinista People's Army stores its weapons in various locations rather than in central depots, and we assume the arms supply operation uses similar compartmentation. Other than Managua, the only specific storage point we know of is Leon, where 60 tons of arms were located last year, awaiting transshipment by air from Papalonal. Other sites may include army bases at Villanueva and Puerto Cabezas. Judging

by the location of five airstrips being considered as alternatives to Papalonal, most of the weapons are stored in the central part of Nicaragua. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Although some weapons previously had been infiltrated from Nicaragua to El Salvador by air, the systematic airlift did not begin until last November, after the lengthening and upgrading of Papalonal airstrip. Cessna and Piper planes delivered an estimated 2.5 tons of arms during November, before the crash of one of the Cessnas late that month forced a temporary suspension of the airlift. The small planes were again used in January to carry weapons and guerrilla leaders into El Salvador, and airdrops of arms from C-47 aircraft were begun. Flights apparently have been cut back because some mercenary pilots have balked since Salvadoran security forces captured a pilot late last month. [REDACTED]

Directed by a Nicaraguan official and a Cuban adviser under the supervision of the commander of the Sandinista Air Force, the operation has used sophisticated techniques. The Cessna and Piper flights have been closely coordinated with the insurgents, who secure and light the airstrips. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Cuban military leaders have trained Salvadoran leftists in airdrop techniques and Nicaraguan and mercenary pilots in detection evasion. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The air operation to El Salvador from Nicaragua apparently has been closed down since the US demarch in late January, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Nicaraguans and Cubans are investigating means of evading detection by changing air routes or by having the arms carriers "shadow" regularly scheduled flights of the Nicaraguan national airlines.

Last fall the Sandinistas also stepped up the use of their sea infiltration route. Small launches operating out of several Nicaraguan Pacific ports traverse the Gulf of Fonseca at night, carrying arms, ammunition, and personnel.

[REDACTED] The boatloads of insurgents who landed on El Salvador's southeastern coast in January certainly came from Nicaragua.

In addition, overland arms shipments through Honduras probably have increased in recent months. In late January, Honduran security forces intercepted a shipment of weapons and ammunition concealed in a tractor-trailer and subsequently located two related arms caches.

[REDACTED] five additional truckloads of weapons had reached El Salvador safely.

[REDACTED]