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Chile: Revival of MIR Terrorism [REDACTED]

The Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR), Chile's largest subversive organization, appears to have launched its most important activity in five years. Cuba is supporting the initiative, suggesting that the Castro regime, encouraged by the Sandinista successes in Nicaragua, has become more willing to aid selected revolutionary groups elsewhere in the hemisphere. The MIR does not pose an immediate threat to President Pinochet's government, but resurgent violence could heighten social tension and give weight to the arguments of regime hardliners who oppose liberalization. [REDACTED]

MIR Offensive

Over the past several months a series of terrorist acts has ended the period of relative calm that followed the government's repression of the MIR in 1974 and 1975. In the most serious incident, the director of the Army intelligence school was gunned down last month in public--the first assassination of a senior Chilean official since the military toppled President Allende seven years ago. [REDACTED]

Some incidents are probably the work of government agents or extreme rightists who hope to blacken the MIR's reputation and to justify renewed government repression. The MIR and its associated fronts, however, have claimed credit for several recent bombings, robberies, and attacks; other operations also hint of MIR involvement. [REDACTED]

The renewed activity reverses the MIR's near-collapse five years ago. One of several organizations inspired by Che Guevara during the 1960s, the MIR generally supported the Allende administration. After his overthrow, it reverted to secret, violent operations. Government security forces killed many of the organization's members, its leaders were forced to flee, and only about 100 hardcore adherents remained in the country. Chilean

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Socialists and Communists, and perhaps even the Cubans, reportedly urged the organization to abandon violence-- which they feared would bring further repression against all leftists--and convert itself into a legitimate political party. [REDACTED]

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Cuban Involvement

Cuba's support for the MIR's offensive underscores its increasingly optimistic assessment of the prospects for hemispheric revolutionaries. Leftist coups in Grenada and Suriname, and particularly the triumph of the Cuban-backed Sandinista movement in Nicaragua, have prompted Havana to reevaluate its policies. The Cuban leadership apparently has decided that conditions for revolution are again propitious. In the early-to-mid-1970s Cuba concentrated on establishing diplomatic relations with its neighbors. [REDACTED]

Efforts to improve bilateral ties, however, suffered a number of setbacks. Peru's nationalistic military regime cooled toward Havana when a moderate came to power five years ago. Venezuela's new president reversed his predecessor's moves toward closer relations with Cuba. Guyana and Ecuador have turned down fishing agreements with Cuba, and Argentina's military regime, while maintaining trade ties, has severed many of the political links established by the Peron government. [REDACTED]

These events have strengthened the positions of those in the Cuban leadership who believe that armed struggle often is more effective than diplomacy in

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furthering Cuban objectives in Latin America.* Castro emphasized this view in his annual speech on 26 July. He pointed to Allende's overthrow and the recent coup in Bolivia as demonstrations that the only formula for true liberation was that used by Cuba, Grenada, and Nicaragua.

Castro probably realizes that the MIR's chances of seriously damaging the Chilean regime in the short run are slim. His investment in the operation, however, is probably so cheap as to justify involvement despite the poor odds--the cost of training and infiltrating the Chilean militants cannot be high. Moreover, Castro's hatred of the Pinochet regime, which stems from his deep personal involvement with Allende's government, may have caused him to overestimate its vulnerability.

Prospects

The MIR hopes to create disruptions that will keep the government off balance and cause it to take highly repressive measures that will alienate the populace and harm Chile's image abroad. So far, the government has tightened security measures, conducted massive manhunts, and made numerous arrests, but has not yet rounded up any key leaders. In addition, the director of national security, a moderate who has tried to end abuses, has resigned under pressure and been replaced by an officer who may be more likely to use repressive tactics.

The government will probably find it harder to crush the MIR today. Cuban aid, while limited, is more substantial than in the past and appears to be focused more on training MIR members for operations in Chile. Such aid should permit the MIR to continue provocative acts, increasing the likelihood that regime hardliners will convince their colleagues that firmer security measures are needed. A return to strong-arm tactics could, over time, drive some regime supporters into the opposition and cause those leftists who have been reluctant to resort to violence to align with the extremists. Such a polarization of society is precisely what the MIR wants.

* [REDACTED]

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