

*Guatemala  
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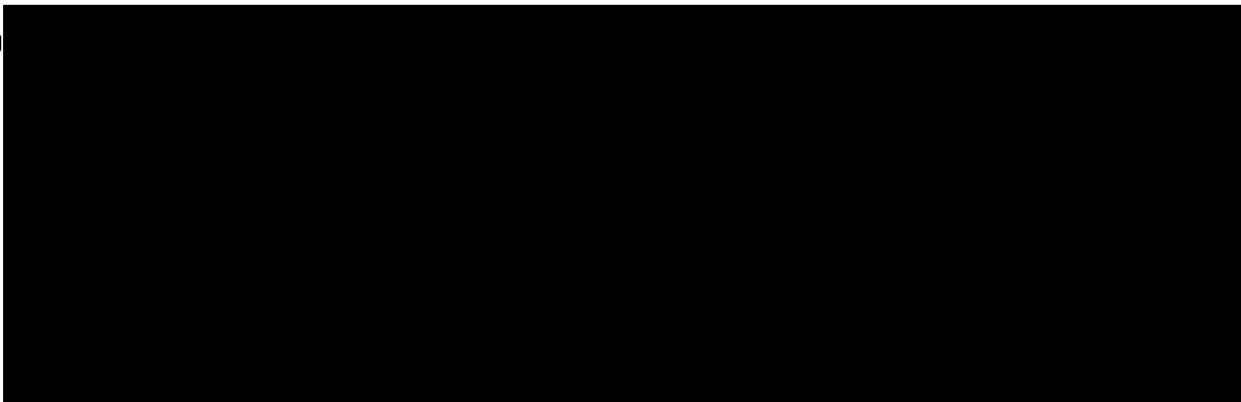
3. GUATEMALA: INSURGENTS SEEK LEGITIMACY THROUGH DIALOGUE

The insurgents continue to aim for an eventual revolutionary government in Guatemala, but having lost "legitimacy" with the return to democratic rule in Guatemala they are now interested in a dialogue with the Cerezo government. President Cerezo would doubtless like to be remembered as the president who ended the 25-year-old civil war. He is not naive about guerrilla intentions, however--and remains in any case under serious constraints. The armed forces want to continue combating the insurgency through a combination of rural development--which the civilians have not been adept at managing--and military operations.

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The war. The insurgency (comprised of four guerrilla groups, numbering 1,500-1,800 in all) continued at a low level last year. Combat casualties on both sides were 159, down from 297 in 1985 and 467 in 1984. The army has reestablished control over considerable territory just south of Lake Atitlan, but the insurgents continue to control remote areas adjacent to Mexico. The guerrillas remain under pressure and have reverted to theft and assassinations. Insurgent activity has picked up this year, and plans are reportedly under way to establish an "urban front" in Guatemala city.

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Government conditions. The government, prodded by the military, continues to maintain that there can be no dialogue until the guerrillas lay down their weapons. Cerezo--interested in being seen as a peace-maker--nonetheless appears interested in meeting with the insurgent leadership. He is not under any illusions, however, that they are seriously interested in giving up the armed struggle and realizes that he must tread carefully in order not to incur the wrath of the military.

Likely scenario. Since the insurgents will almost certainly not lay down their arms, a serious dialogue between the Guatemalan government and the URNG is unlikely in the near future. And although the URNG may get propaganda mileage from its strategy, it is doubtful that it will be able to drive a wedge between Cerezo and the military on the dialogue issue. Cerezo probably concedes the military's point that the government needs to place greater attention on rural socio-economic development if the progress in the war against the insurgents is to be maintained.