

[REDACTED]

to targeting for kidnapping of foreign rather than domestic businessmen by the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN). Secondly, the guerrilla groups are increasingly inclined toward physical violence and outright murder. This trend is highlighted by the recent assassinations of locals and by the first-ever use in February of sophisticated explosive devices by the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), not for propaganda value or property damage, but to maim and kill. These shifts, combined with the weapons and vehicles known to be in terrorist hands--or which can be easily acquired--make more credible the recently reported intention of the FPL to assassinate high-ranking US officials. [REDACTED]

For more than a year, the FPL has been planning to kidnap the US Ambassador, originally intending to hold him hostage to secure the release of political prisoners. Those plans have been thwarted by the Embassy's extensive security precautions. In light of the FPL's apparently growing preference for assassination rather than kidnapping, however, together with its probable frustration after more than a year of stymied plans, we would rate the threat against the ambassador's personal safety as substantial. [REDACTED]

At the same time, it is more likely now that a less risky effort will be made against a lower-ranking US civilian or military official. The terrorists' new emphasis on foreign targets, for the most part, has been spectacularly successful. While they have made no effort to date against a diplomat, a strong argument can be made that the changing focus will center more on the official foreign community. [REDACTED]

So far, in addition to propaganda value and monetary gain for the guerrillas, the kidnappings of foreign businessmen have resulted in significant capital flight, the departure of many members of the business community, curtailment of investment plans, and the embarrassment of the Romero government. The terrorists have not succeeded, however, in forcing the President to admit that the government holds political prisoners or to release them. Since the kidnapping of foreign businessmen has not brought sufficient pressure to bear on Romero, it seems likely that the terrorists will eventually up the ante. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Aside from strict security precautions, there are at least two potential restraints on terrorist targeting of US personnel. The local perception of US power in Central America generally is larger than life, and the terrorists might well fear US/CIA retaliation. Secondly, an analysis of the domestic political scene might suggest to the terrorists that US human rights pressures on the government are worth more than the possible gains from an action against a US target. We can have little confidence, however, that these considerations will be overriding. [REDACTED]

We see no likelihood of the local security forces being able to reverse their record of ineffectiveness against the terrorists or to provide adequate security for US personnel. [REDACTED]

Terrorist Capabilities

The three principal guerrilla groups have grown substantially in the past two to three years. A rough estimate suggests their combined membership is in the neighborhood of 2,000 persons. The Farabundo Marti Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) probably numbers around 800, the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN) perhaps as many as 600, and the third-ranking People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) may have several hundred adherents. Although these figures are not firm, the growth trends are clear. [REDACTED]

There are also two much larger front organizations--composed of students, workers, and peasants--that support the terrorists' political objectives by staging demonstrations and work stoppages and by disseminating propaganda. The Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR), political affiliate of the FPL, claims a membership in excess of 60,000; the United Popular Action Front (FAPU), linked to the FARN, is estimated to have 8,000 to 15,000 members. In addition to political activities, these organizations provide a ready source of recruits for the terrorist groups. [REDACTED]

The guerrillas' weapons, although primarily limited to small arms and explosives, are more than sufficient to support planned terrorist actions. Moreover, their arsenal

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is being supplemented by light automatic weapons and grenades stolen from government security forces. The FPL already reportedly has 1,000 weapons on hand and intends to buy or steal more. Demolition-type explosives are apparently in plentiful supply. The ERP especially has developed considerable expertise in the fabrication of explosives; for example, the group recently used booby-trapped bombs to kill at least 20 persons--the majority security personnel. So far, the terrorists have not acquired sophisticated or heavy weapons, but they have had no difficulty stealing vehicles for their operations, including armored cars and trucks belonging to wealthy Salvadorans. What the guerrillas cannot steal, they can purchase, having collected an estimated \$30 million or more in ransoms during the past two years. [REDACTED]

Cooperation among the terrorist groups, although occasionally hampered by ideological and personal rivalries, has frequently been impressive, as in the case of coordinated kidnapping efforts. Recently, the ERP has been supporting FARN operations, and the FPL may once again be willing to coordinate its activities with both groups as it had in the past. The almost unbroken successes enjoyed by the terrorists tend to breed further confidence and cooperation. [REDACTED]

Although foreign assistance has been minimal, the FPL recently reportedly sent [REDACTED] men to Cuba for six months' training--the first substantial Cuban involvement in El Salvador in recent years. Small numbers of Salvadoran guerrillas have also slipped over the border for training with Guatemalan groups. Together with other cadre now being trained in El Salvador, the FPL reportedly plans to form an "army" of 2,000 guerrillas. If such a cohesive force is assembled, it would raise leftist violence in El Salvador to a new order of magnitude. Whether or not this is a realistic near-term goal, it has little impact on the current assessment of the threat to US personnel. At the very least, the new Cuban training program for cadres will enhance the guerrillas' capabilities. Moreover, Havana will also use its influence, as elsewhere in Central America, to encourage greater coordination and unification. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Along with their growing military capability, the terrorists have shown a rising level of political sophistication. The FPL, identifying itself as a Marxist-Leninist organization, has announced its dedication to a struggle against the bourgeoisie and "foreign capitalist imperialism." To spread the message, the politically oriented BPR--whose gradual takeover by the FPL was a significant measure of the terrorists' growing sophistication--is conducting indoctrination sessions throughout El Salvador. It hopes to increase its membership to 75,000 by the end of March--an objective that seems within reach. The BPR has also gotten involved in several labor disputes, and last fall the FPL assassinated two business managers allegedly responsible for union breaking. [REDACTED]

Since November, the ERP and the FPL have seized radio or television stations at least six times in order to transmit taped audio or video propaganda. Last month, FAPU--the FARN front group--temporarily occupied the offices of international organizations and the Mexican Embassy in the capital, embarrassing President Romero on the eve of his trip to Mexico City. [REDACTED]

Prospects

As the terrorist groups have grown in strength and sophistication, they have extended their operations to include foreigners as well as Salvadorans. Since May 1978, the FARN has claimed responsibility for kidnapping seven businessmen, six of whom were foreigners: one of the foreign victims was killed while in custody--apparently by accident; two were released after the payment of large ransoms; and three are still being held. The top command of the FPL reportedly has announced its intention of assassinating a high-ranking US Embassy official. US military personnel were also specifically mentioned as potential targets. [REDACTED]

Bodyguards and armored vehicles can no longer be considered full protection against assassination or kidnapping, as the terrorists are well equipped with explosives as well as small arms, and their bravado is growing. An attack last month on a high Salvadoran defense official who was riding in an armored vehicle came close to success. This was but the latest indication of the guerrillas' increased boldness, commitment, and capability. Such daring daylight operations make clear that local security forces have been reduced to ineffectiveness and serve as little or no deterrent.