

~~Top Secret~~

~~No Foreign Dissem~~

56
12



DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

KIDNAPING AS A TERRORIST TACTIC IN LATIN AMERICA

RELEASE IN PART
EXEMPTIONS: (b)(1)
(b)(3)
DATE: AUG 2001



RETURN TO ARCHIVES & RECORDS CENTER
IMMEDIATELY AFTER USE
RAB 797830 BOX 3

~~Top Secret~~

7 April 1970
SC No. 01235/70

3-218408

WARNING

This document contains classified information affecting the national security of the United States within the meaning of the espionage laws, US Code Title 18, Sections 793, 794, and 798.

THIS DOCUMENT MUST BE KEPT IN COMMUNICATIONS
INTELLIGENCE CHANNELS AT ALL TIMES

It is to be seen only by personnel especially indoctrinated and authorized to receive COMMUNICATIONS INTELLIGENCE information within the Government to which transmitted; its security must be maintained in accordance with COMMUNICATIONS INTELLIGENCE REGULATIONS.

No action is to be taken on any COMMUNICATIONS INTELLIGENCE which may be contained herein, regardless of the advantages to be gained, unless such action is first approved by the Director of Central Intelligence.

GROUP 1
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC
DOWNGRADING AND
DECLASSIFICATION

~~TOP SECRET~~ [REDACTED]
NO FOREIGN DISSEM

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
7 April 1970

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Kidnaping As A Terrorist Tactic in Latin America

Summary

Since the late 1950s, Latin American terrorists have conducted kidnapings as a means of embarrassing governments or obtaining money. It is only within the past year and a half, however, that foreign diplomats have been seized and held in exchange for prisoners. Subsequent to the kidnaping of US Ambassador Elbrick in Brazil last September, five other diplomats--two of them US--have been abducted. In addition, the foreign minister of Guatemala was kidnaped shortly before the Guatemalan elections in March, and an attempt was made in Argentina to abduct two Soviet diplomats. So far, the governments involved have complied with terrorist demands in all but two instances. In one case, Argentina, the hostage was released unharmed; in the other, Guatemala, he was killed. The Latin American governments may be increasingly confronted by a conflict between internal security and diplomatic amenities. An additional factor is that rightist terrorists and the military may be more likely to kill leftists before they can be captured.

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates and the Clandestine Service.

NO FOREIGN DISSEM
~~TOP SECRET~~ [REDACTED]

Background

1. Since 1965, the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) in Guatemala, an extremist pro-Castro group, has often kidnaped wealthy people as a means of raising money. It is estimated that during the last six months of 1965 alone the group received at least \$1 million in ransoms, and from 1966 through 1969 at least \$1 million more. It was only after the kidnaping of US Ambassador Elbrick in Brazil that the FAR demanded the release of prisoners in exchange for a hostage.

2. Terrorists in other Latin American countries have frequently kidnaped individuals in order to show the ineffectiveness of the government security forces. One of the first of these cases occurred in Cuba in 1958 when members of Fidel Castro's 26th of July Movement abducted Juan Fangio, a well-known Argentine racing driver, and held him for several days. He was released unharmed, and the group received a great deal of favorable publicity.

3. The pro-Cuban Armed Forces of National Liberation in Venezuela (FALN) adopted the same tactics for the same purposes in 1963 and 1964. During the presidential campaign in 1963, the FALN mounted an all-out attempt to sabotage the elections and the democratic system. That summer an outstanding Spanish soccer star, whose team was playing in Caracas, was abducted. He was well-treated and, when released, spoke highly of his kidnapers. The FALN twice kidnaped members of US military missions, releasing them unharmed after a few days.

4. In August 1968 the Guatemalan FAR killed US Ambassador Mein when he apparently tried to escape from a kidnap attempt. It is not known, however, whether the kidnapers planned to hold him for ransom or merely to use him to obtain world-wide publicity.

5. One of the first instances of holding hostages to force the release of government prisoners occurred in December 1963 in Bolivia. Leftist tin miners seized four US citizens and held them for about a week in an attempt to compel the government to release

three Communist labor leaders. The government moved troops into the area, and a compromise was finally reached. The troops were withdrawn, the Communists were assured of a fair trial, and the hostages were released.

6. Kidnapings occasionally have backfired on their perpetrators. In March 1968, Guatemalan rightists, apparently inspired by FAR successes, kidnaped the Roman Catholic cardinal. They apparently hoped that the ineffectiveness of the government would so outrage the military that the government would be overthrown. The cardinal was very unpopular, however, and there was little protest. He eventually was released unharmed.

Recent Incidents

7. The first incident of the new wave of terrorist kidnapings occurred in Brazil in September 1969. A group of university students working with the National Liberating Action, some of whose members had been trained in Cuba, kidnaped US Ambassador Elbrick. He was only released after 15 prisoners were flown to Mexico. This episode put a new twist on terrorist kidnapings and prompted the term "diplomatic kidnapping." At the time there were fears that the Brazilians would be emulated elsewhere in Latin America, but no other kidnapings occurred until the end of February 1970. Two days before the Guatemalan general elections, Foreign Minister Fuentes Mohr was abducted by the FAR. He was exchanged for a student leader who had been arrested shortly before, but the terrorists' primary aim appears to have been to upset the electoral process. In any event, the incident may have influenced voters to cast their ballots for the rightist Colonel Carlos Arana, who was the eventual victor.

8. Apparently stimulated by this success, on 6 March the FAR abducted the US labor attaché and demanded and obtained the release of four prisoners, one of whom had been detained in connection with the foreign minister's kidnaping. On 11 March the pro-Castro Popular Revolutionary Vanguard (VPR) in Brazil

seized the Japanese consul general in Sao Paulo. The VPR, which is led by a renegade Army colonel, demanded the release of five prisoners. It also demonstrated that a crack-down by security forces following the Elbrick kidnaping had not destroyed the terrorist groups.

9. The VPR's action added another dimension to the entire problem of the kidnapings. Many observers had believed that underlying anti-US feeling had been a key factor in the incidents, with prisoner exchange and governmental embarrassment being valuable side benefits. With the kidnaping of the Japanese, no foreign official in any Latin American country could feel completely secure, particularly where the new demands threatened to stretch security forces beyond their capabilities.

10. After a brief respite, Latin American terrorists struck again in widely separated incidents during the last week in March. On 24 March the US Air Attaché in the Dominican Republic was kidnaped. His abductors demanded that more than 20 prisoners be released. Moreover, they were to be set free within the country, not, as in previous cases, flown to Mexico. The Dominican Government, however, refused to comply completely with the demands and insisted on flying the prisoners out of the country.

11. On 31 March the FAR again entered the kidnaping business, seizing the West German Ambassador Karl von Spreti, in Guatemala City. They ultimately demanded the release of 22 prisoners and a ransom of \$700,000. The government, under strong pressure from the armed forces, refused to deal with the terrorists. On 5 April the ambassador was murdered. This was the first instance of murder of a hostage, and Germany has threatened to break diplomatic relations with Guatemala. This action by the FAR could have serious effects for the government--even to the point of Mendez' ouster unless he takes stern repressive measures against the extreme leftists. In desperation, the terrorists may well soon attempt other abductions, particularly against US officials. The Swiss ambassador has already been threatened.

12. On 4 April terrorists in Porto Alegre, Brazil, tried to kidnap the principal officer of the US Consulate. The official was shot, but he managed to escape his assailants. The attempt was probably made by the extreme leftist Revolutionary Armed Vanguard-Palmares.

Governmental Reaction

13. Recent events in Argentina and Guatemala have provided a break in the pattern of previous abductions of diplomats. Late in March members of the Argentine Liberation Front, a left-wing organization, seized a Paraguayan consul in Argentina and demanded the release of two imprisoned leftists. Their demand placed the Argentine security services in a difficult position, because one of the prisoners had died under police interrogation. The government decided not to bow to the terrorists' demands. Paraguayan President Stroessner, who was vacationing in Argentina, agreed to this course of action. The terrorists finally released their captive; this marked the first time that a government had successfully defied the kidnapers of a diplomat.

14. The Argentine picture was confused, however, when members of a rightist organization closely linked with the security and intelligence services attempted to abduct the Soviet commercial attaché in Buenos Aires at the end of March. A police official was involved in the plot, and some high-ranking police and intelligence officials were aware of it. When their plans were frustrated, the rightists gave the Soviet a deadline to leave the country, threatening to blow up the embassy and several public buildings if he did not go. The publicity given these developments may lead other right-wing groups to take similar action. Such moves would probably be prompted primarily by a desire for publicity. Some extreme rightists in the government may also be using these groups to get the message across to leftists that the government will no longer tolerate terrorist tactics.

15. The firm position of Argentina was welcomed by other Latin American governments, especially those where kidnappings had occurred. Several had been reluctant to deal with the abductors, and security forces were unhappy at the prospect of risking their lives to capture extremists only to have them released.

16. At the time of the Elbrick kidnapping, a number of Brazilian military officials were displeased at the idea of releasing the prisoners; a group of paratroopers even tried to prevent the plane from leaving for Mexico. When the Japanese consul general was abducted, a widespread search for him was instituted. One of the kidnapers' demands was that this operation be suspended. The government's compliance caused much unhappiness within the army and among the police. In an intercepted message the 2nd Army commander told the foreign minister, "We have complied with our part, bitter though it was, because it was with great sacrifice, even the risk of losing their lives, that they [his men] were able to arrest those people just to release them afterwards." The foreign minister replied that he realized what a sacrifice it was and added, "Every time this is repeated, it becomes more serious." One military officer, reflecting a widespread opinion within the security services, said, "If [the Japanese] died, it would be our good fortune because other cases would not occur."

17. When the Dominican Communists abducted the US Air Attaché, a number of police and military officers were extremely reluctant to accede to the kidnapers' demands. President Balaguer himself took a firm position against freeing the prisoners in the country, believing that to do so would allow them to resume terrorist activity at once. The government was willing to negotiate with the kidnapers, however, through the good offices of the archbishop of Santo Domingo. A compromise eventually was reached, and the prisoners were packed off to Mexico. Another abduction in the Dominican Republic would severely test the willingness and ability of the government to comply with the kidnapers' demands.

18. The murder of the West German ambassador will weaken the Guatemalan Government's position during its last three months, because the military are disgusted that the terrorists can wield such power. The FAR is likely to undertake additional action, believing that the government will not dare refuse its demands again. US personnel may be particularly vulnerable, as the FAR probably believes that it was US pressure that caused the government to stand firm.

19. Several governments that have not had to deal with abductions of diplomats have indicated their unwillingness to make bargains. Uruguayan President Pacheco has said both publicly and privately that if a Uruguayan official or a representative of a foreign government is kidnaped, he will not accede to terrorist demands. There have been two politically-motivated kidnappings in Uruguay, the most recent in late 1969. The National Liberation Movement, known as the Tupamaros, kidnaped a prominent Uruguayan banker in September and held him until November. Although the government steadfastly refused to deal with the kidnapers, two of the bankers' associates finally paid a private ransom. President Pacheco strongly disapproved of this action and removed the two men from the government posts they held.

20. The Chilean Government has stated that in the event of the kidnaping of a foreign diplomat it would be unable to agree to the release of any prisoners. Claiming that there are no political prisoners in Chile, the government stated that it would merely be able to "inform the judiciary of the kidnapers' demands, as prisoners are under judicial authority." The US Embassy in Chile has received threats, but so far there has been no overt action.

21. One of the most interesting reactions has come from the Cuban Government. When 13 of the 15 prisoners exchanged for Ambassador Elbrick flew to Cuba from Mexico, they were met at the airport by Fidel Castro. Since then, although the Cuban Government has continued to give wide publicity to kidnappings, it has also become concerned with

the vulnerability of its own diplomats to attacks by Cuban exiles interested in freeing anti-Castro prisoners in Cuba. In an intercepted circular message, the Cuban Foreign Ministry advised its embassies that the government "cannot nor should not accept an exchange of any kind" in case a Cuban official were kidnaped.

Conclusions

22. Further kidnapings will probably take place, but it seems unlikely that they will continue at the same high rate--four attempts in the past few weeks. The refusal of the Argentine and Guatemalan governments to accede to the demands of the kidnapers may cause some terrorist groups to pause before making similar attempts. It will now be more difficult for any Latin American government to agree to release prisoners in exchange for diplomats with these precedents of refusal. On the other hand, leftist terrorist groups may be willing to test the local government's determination to resist a demand for exchange of a US diplomat, even though a refusal would risk his death and provoke serious repercussions.

23. In several countries there are either a large number of terrorists or key individual extremist leaders in prison who could provide the motive for further kidnapings. In Bolivia, Regis Debray and Ciro Roberto Bustos, both of whom were associated with Che Guevara in 1967, are still in jail. In Uruguay about 130 members of the Tupamaros are imprisoned, and Chile holds a leader of the extremist Movement of the Revolutionary Left. Hugo Blanco, leader of a peasant guerrilla movement, is in jail in Peru, and an important Nicaraguan extreme leftist is being held in Costa Rica. Any large-scale roundup of extremists in a country like Brazil could provide the excuse for a new kidnaping. A factor militating against kidnapings in countries like Chile, however, is public respect for law.

24. A prerequisite for successful kidnaping appears to be an effective urban terrorist organization that has some support from the general public.

In Bolivia, for example, extremists are so poorly organized and have so little urban apparatus that the likelihood of a successful attempt is less than in such countries as Guatemala, Brazil or the Dominican Republic, where terrorists have urban organizations. It is worth noting, however, that in countries like Bolivia, where terrorists are poorly organized, security services are ineffective and diplomats are thus particularly vulnerable.

25. Security services in Latin America are likely to become increasingly reluctant to release their prisoners. Brazilian officers have commented that perhaps the solution is to kill extremists rather than capture them, as the government would then have no one to exchange. If such a solution is widely adopted, hostility between extremists and security services will become even greater.

26. In many countries in Latin America civilian governments operate at the sufferance of the military establishments. In these cases, governmental compliance with kidnapers' demands could trigger a coup.

27. Rightist terrorists in countries like Argentina and Guatemala are also likely to renew their counter-terrorist activity. They probably believe, like the military, that the way to prevent kidnappings is to murder leftists before they can be captured.

~~Top Secret~~



~~Top Secret~~