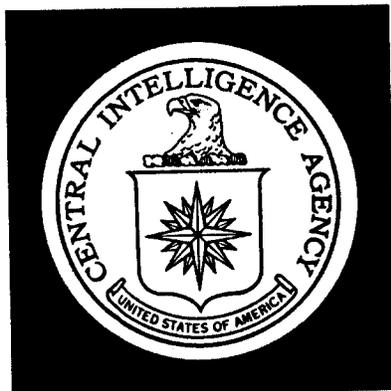


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DIRECTORATE OF  
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# Intelligence Memorandum

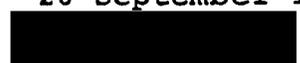
*The Communist Insurgency Movement in Guatemala*

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20 September 1968



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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
20 September 1968

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Communist Insurgency Movement in Guatemala

Summary

Guatemala's Communist insurgency movement, which distinguished itself on 28 August by perpetrating the only assassination in history of a US ambassador, survives after nearly seven years of fluctuating fortunes ranging from near impunity to near annihilation. The direct threat of the insurgents is to public security. But the insurgents also lessen government stability, by undermining public confidence in the ability of the authorities to maintain order. Communist insurgent strength, already weakened by internal factionalism, was decimated by a no-holds-barred government thrust during 1967 and early 1968. The movement is still in a period of retrenchment and reorganization, under severe government repression, and subjected to a continual loss of experienced leadership through the security forces' actions. Nevertheless, it continues to carry out well-planned and professionally executed hit-and-run operations. Tentative indications of growing Cuban support for the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR) and the FAR's proved durability suggest the prospect of continuing insecurity in Guatemala.

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, the Central Reference Service, and the Clandestine Services.

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Background

1. On 13 November 1960, a group of young army officers tried unsuccessfully to overthrow the Ydigoras government. The group gradually developed a guerrilla movement based in a mountainous jungle area in the northeastern Department of Izabal and called the 13 November Revolutionary Movement. With some assistance from Cuba, the small band, under the leadership of Marco Antonio Yon Sosa, engaged in sporadic terrorist acts, including harassment of communications lines, buses, and railroad tracks, pillaging of military supply points and plantations for money and arms, assassination of army collaborators, and attacks on commercial and official installations.

2. The outlawed Guatemalan Communist Party (PGT) made contact with the guerrillas, supplied them with food and medicine, and propagandized for them. Some PGT members worked with the guerrillas, and a few became highly critical of the party for not giving the guerrillas more support. These dissidents within the party were strengthened by the military coup that ousted Ydigoras in March 1963. With its relative freedom of political action curtailed under the military government, the PGT gave more emphasis to armed struggle and established a military commission to undertake guerrilla warfare and urban terrorism. The issue in the party now became whether or not violence should be the major form of struggle, with the activists in the hills chafing under what they saw as unrealistic subservience to the Soviet line.

3. By late 1963, the party had managed to establish a united guerrilla front called the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR). Included were Yon Sosa's 13 November group (MR 13), a Communist "12 April" youth group, and a Communist-dominated "20 October" group. The PGT's attempt to control the movement was resented by Yon and other revolutionaries, and its domination was also undercut by the ability of the guerrillas to secure funds, equipment, and training on their own.

4. At this time, counterinsurgency under the military government was relatively ineffective in

the northeastern area. The security forces, however, achieved some important success in Guatemala City, and left the PGT there demoralized and weakened. The party continued to be divided. The dissidents rejected the thesis of some high-level members who insisted that wholesale commitment to violence was an error. Further confusion came in 1964 with the emergence of a Trotskyist or pro-Chinese element among the guerrillas.

5. Following the international meeting of Communists in Havana in November 1964 that called for unity among the "liberal" forces and a more activist stance on the part of the orthodox parties in several countries including Guatemala, the 13 November group and the PGT appeared to reconcile, but only temporarily. After analyzing the fall of Khrushchev in October, the MR 13 unabashedly praised the Chinese. It criticized the PGT's support for a bourgeois nationalist revolution, and Yon Sosa withdrew his group from the FAR. In January 1965, the MR 13 suffered a split of its own when Luis Turcios, the chief of the "Edgar Ibarra" guerrilla band, attacked "Trotskyist" control of the guerrillas. In June 1965, he placed his group under the direct command of the PGT's central committee. Members of the various revolutionary factions, particularly those in the hills, were confused and demoralized. The PGT's adoption of a harder line and its espousal of armed struggle were too little and too late for some high-level members. Some of them, disgusted with the indecision and weakness of PGT policy, pulled out. A group headed by central committee member and guerrilla Ricardo Ramirez de Leon reportedly intended to form a new party.

6. Despite this dissension and division, the PGT-aligned FAR under Turcios brought insecurity in Guatemala to its highest level in 1966. The insurgents' kidnaping campaign terrorized the public and netted an estimated \$2 million in ransom.

#### Intensified Disunity

7. A turning point was reached in 1966 as a result of two unrelated developments--the death of Turcios in October, which created a serious leadership crisis

for the FAR, and the government's adoption of clandestine counterterrorism. FAR members, especially recent returnees from Cuba, stridently opposed the PGT old guard leadership, and disunity intensified within the Communist guerrilla movement.

8. The organizational flux and changing alliances became even more intense from the end of 1966 to early 1968. To a certain degree, the incoherence stemmed from terminology. The formal "FAR," for example, included the Edgar Ibarra guerrilla group, PGT elements, and the Communist youth. Leaders from each of these combined to form the Revolutionary Leadership Center (CDR), which was designed to provide the movement with a single, unified command. Because the Edgar Ibarra group was, in fact, almost the entire active military and guerrilla forces of the FAR, however, the term "FAR" more often referred to just that group.

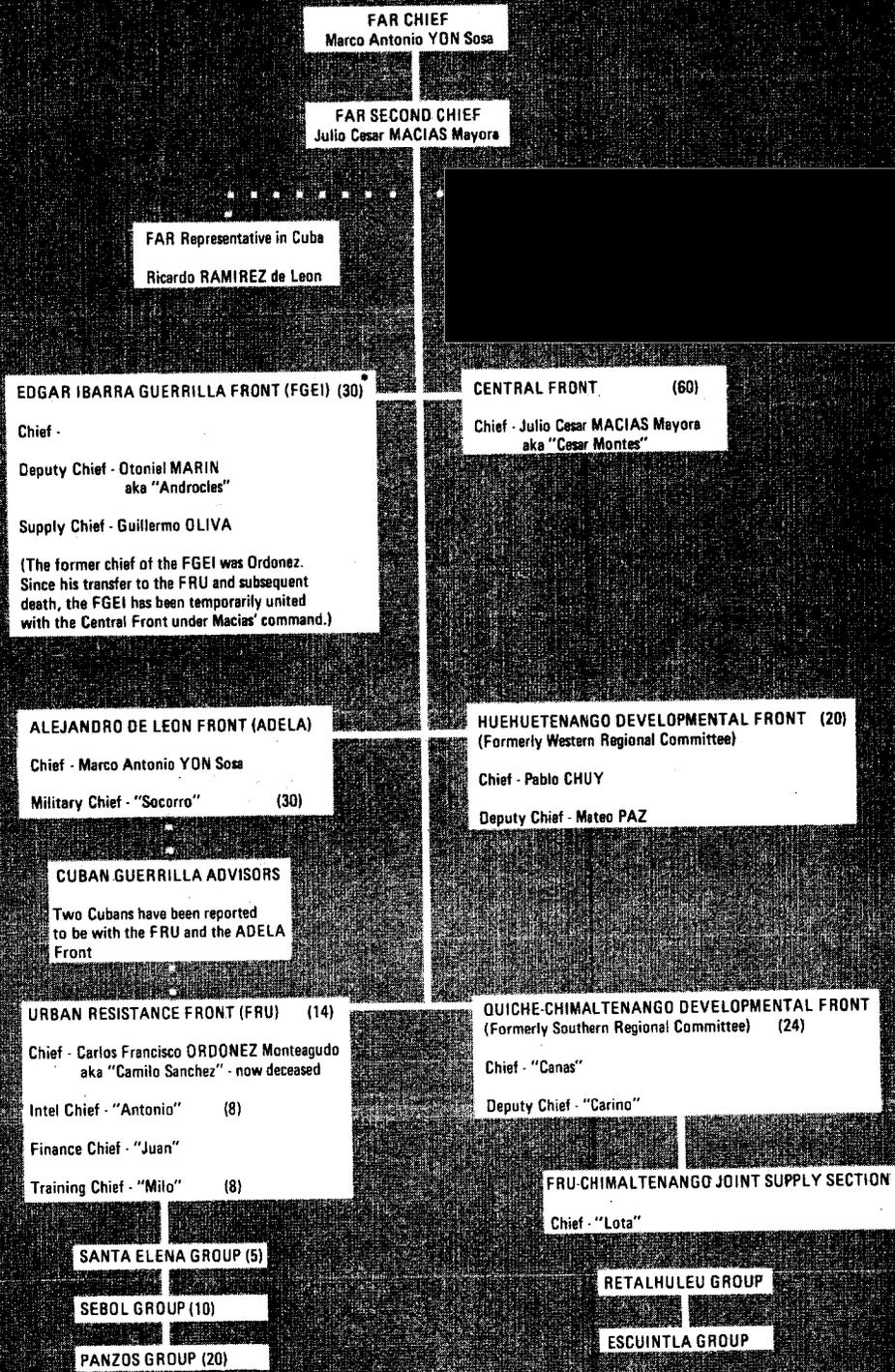
9. Criticism of the PGT by the active guerrillas seemed by late 1966 to point to an inevitable separation. Documents from that period admit that guerrilla reversals were related to the government's new offensive, but that the major cause for failure was miscalculation by the PGT leadership, particularly after Mendez Montenegro's civilian government took office in July 1966. The guerrillas claimed that the PGT's desire for legal political status led the party into the error of demilitarizing the movement. A paper signed by three leaders of the hard line or "red guard" of the FAR--Jose Maria Ortiz Vides, Gabriel Salazar, and Ricardo Ramirez de Leon--stated flatly that the old-line Communist leaders were incapable of understanding the concept of political-military leadership and that they were unable to direct the revolutionary process. Expressions of FAR disagreement with the PGT were published regularly by the Cuban press and radio.

10. A "FAR Declaration" dated January 1968 announced that the FAR guerrilla leaders had taken over the leadership of the revolution and were sharing it with Yon Sosa's MR 13 band, which had been inactive for nearly two years. In February, Yon Sosa and Cesar Montes stated that the 13 November Movement would return to the FAR. The PGT announced formation of a new military organization of its own under a slightly adjusted name--the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR/PGT). The FAR and the FAR/PGT were seriously damaged by the effective military campaigns against them throughout 1967 and 1968, and neither has fully recuperated from its internal splits. The FAR is a Cuban-oriented movement whose structure reflects pure commitment to guerrilla warfare. The FAR/PGT is an adjunct of the Soviet-oriented Communist Party, which recognizes violence as only part of the long-term revolutionary struggle. Because of the underground nature of both, their continual experimentation in reorganizing, the usual lack of timely access to documents, and the frequent changes caused by internal disruption or police action, there is relatively little information available which can be relied on as presenting a completely valid picture of the insurgency today.

11. What is clear, however, is that the FAR's determination to carry forward its campaign of subversion and violence is undiminished. Reports consistently point to strong resistance within the FAR, even to temporary lulls designed to permit regrouping, resupplying, and revising strategy. Although the FAR has suffered heavy losses recently and may be experiencing dissension within its ranks, it may still have both the intention and capability, including external support, to mobilize for a future coordinated campaign of rural insurgency on two or more fronts, with simultaneous urban terrorist acts. Operations in more than one rural front where road net and logistics will not support overland reaction of the government forces would significantly enhance the FAR's ability to damage security and, at least indirectly, political stability.

**Rebel Armed Forces (FAR) Command Structure**

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The FAR Under Yon Sosa

12. The FAR includes an estimated 200 men organized into guerrilla fronts, an urban resistance front, and support sections, all under the unified command (commandancia). Yon Sosa is the number-one man, and Cesar Montes is number two (see chart). The personnel changes in the Guatemalan Army during March which signaled a government pullback from its extralegal counterterror campaign, reinforced the FAR's decision to prepare carefully and to organize well before launching the guerrilla war. Throughout mid-1968, there were indications [redacted] that the offensive would be delayed at least until the end of the rainy season in November. They now plan to rob for funds and medicines, to engage in action to test training and weaponry, and to exploit targets of opportunity.

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13. Throughout the spring, information on the FAR's activity [redacted]

[redacted] showed that preparations were continuing. The assignment of command personnel was often temporary, and experimental combinations of guerrilla bands were tried. By May, two "regional committees"--the western and southern--had been dissolved, with the personnel transferred to the northern departments of Huehuetenango and El Quiche (see map). The problem in the western zone was reported to be army pressure, and in the south there were difficulties between the FAR and the PGT.

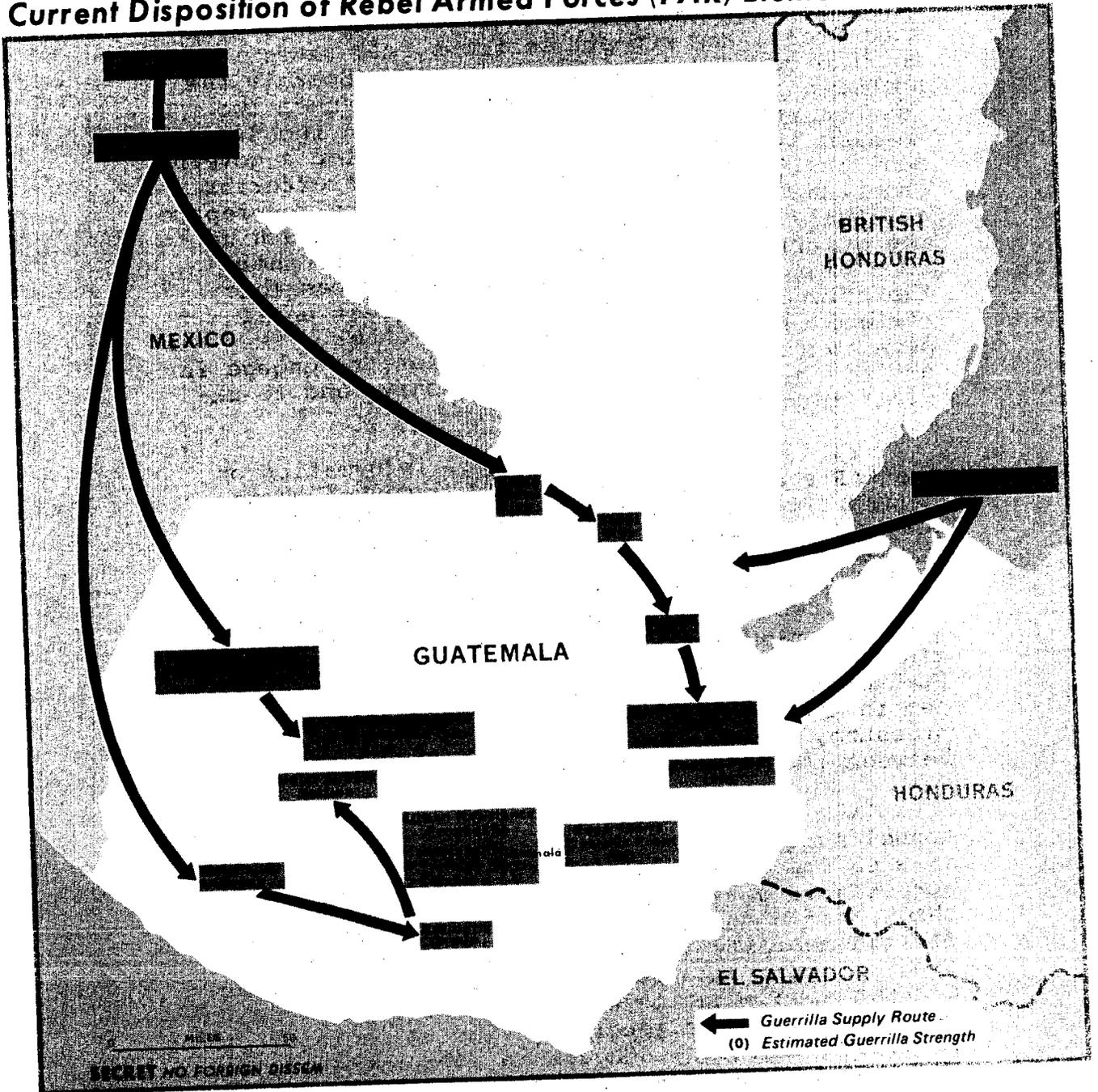
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14. The continual movement of units and personnel suggests that the guerrillas were engaged in area familiarization and were caching food and supplies in anticipated areas of operation. It also shows that plans to operate with tactical flexibility and mobility are being implemented. Descriptions of guerrilla camps observed [redacted]

[redacted] also point to emphasis on mobility. A camp in San Marcos reportedly had no tents or permanent shelters. Sheepskin sleeping bags, small propane stoves, and lanterns shielded to avoid their being sighted from the air, and short-range transceivers, probably for camp contact with guardposts,

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# Current Disposition of Rebel Armed Forces (FAR) Elements



were being used. The logistical aim is to achieve maximum self-sufficiency while on the move. By storing food in strategic places, the guerrillas hope to avoid the problem that arose in 1965 and 1966 when they fell prey to army attacks after they were forced from their strongholds in the mountains and their rural supply nets were destroyed.

15. The FAR often repeats its commitment to the "single command" for purposes of discipline and coherence, but an effective single command seems more fiction than fact. There are continual indications of considerable autonomy on the part of some of the guerrilla leaders, and frequent reports of dissent and calls for immediate action. [REDACTED] in late 1967 [REDACTED] the FAR lacked funds because the location of the reserve funds was known only to Cesar Montes, who was outside Guatemala, and to the acting chief, who had been killed. It is not clear whether such secrecy signifies security-consciousness, or distrust and rivalry.

16. The FAR's aims, as stated in captured documents, are to build up a guerrilla army while terrorizing commercial interests and sabotaging public installations in order to upset the economy, to push the military into a coup, or to cause US intervention. It is unclear whether the psychological vulnerability of a military regime is considered more important domestically, or internationally.

17. From all indications, the FAR move against Ambassador Mein on 28 August was intended to secure him as a hostage to obtain the release of Camilo Sanchez, the high-level FAR leader whom the government had captured four days earlier. There is no information to suggest that the action, which occurred following a fairly long period of relative quiet, has a deeper significance in terms of FAR strategy. Last March, Yon Sosa was [REDACTED] ready to kidnap US citizens when he heard that one of his own men had been captured. He reportedly said that if the government refused to release the guerrilla, he would "send the gringos back in pieces." The reported capture, however, proved to be a false alarm.

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The FAR/PGT in 1968

18. The Communist Party remains an internationally recognized orthodox party oriented toward the Soviet Union. The PGT itself is organized along traditional Communist party lines and is completely underground. The PGT's commitment to violence remains within the context of Marxist-Leninist principles and definitions of the national "condition" or ripeness for revolution. Political theses, Communist dogma, party integrity and survival--the over-all Communist cause--are more important to the PGT than immediate guerrilla action. The PGT is respected in international Communist circles for its virtual take-over of the government in the early 1950s and for its subsequent survival under very difficult conditions. The party has an "annex" [redacted] where many Communist exiles act as liaison for it. The party also has important members in European Communist countries for training, meetings, or instructions. Like the FAR, the PGT has suffered severe damage from the government campaigns, has lost many members, and is trying to retrench.

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19. Following the FAR's breakaway in January 1968, the PGT contended that guerrilla warfare should be one of several revolutionary developments. During a conference of its regional committees--called the Fourth National Conference of the FAR--last April, the decision was made to retain the initials "FAR" to identify the action arm of the PGT. A propaganda bulletin entitled "FAR" affirmed armed struggle as the only valid and correct means to achieve the revolution.

20. The National Command, selected by the National Conference, is the unit responsible for day-to-day direction of the FAR/PGT. The FAR/PGT will have regional committees to effect the armed struggle in their own areas. [redacted]

[redacted] these will be the old PGT regional committees. The party is said to be forming resistance units in Guatemala City and to be providing some military training, but the organization of a guerrilla front is being delayed indefinitely. [redacted]

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External Assistance

21. Cuba began providing material assistance to the Guatemalan guerrilla movement in early 1962. Yon Sosa received guerrilla training in Cuba, and it is estimated that at least 260 other Guatemalans have received similar training during the period 1961-1968. Emissaries from Cuba and [redacted] have delivered supplies and funds to the guerrilla bands. In addition, Communist propaganda media in Europe and Latin America have given considerable attention to the revolutionary movement in Guatemala, and the guerrillas have been in contact periodically with outside journalists who have publicized their cause widely.

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22. Cuba has been a principal source of assistance and guidance to the guerrillas. As noted above, the temporary reconciliation between the FAR and the Communist Party may have stemmed from nudging at the Havana meeting in November 1964. Following the reconciliation, the PGT reportedly received word from Fidel Castro that if the FAR's revolutionary activity was intensified and sustained through 1965, Havana would give the party complete financial support. Other information also suggested that Cuban funds were largely contingent on an increase of violence and terrorism.

23. At the conference of the Latin American Solidarity Organization (LASO) in Cuba, in August 1967, one of those FAR members attending was elected vice president of the permanent organization. Since then, there have been several reports that funds have been passed to Guatemalan guerrilla representatives by members of the Cuban diplomatic staff in [redacted]

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[redacted] last January, the FAR was receiving \$15,000 each month from Cuba via this [redacted] channel. Other reports early this year indicated that several Cuban guerrilla instructors were operating with the FAR and that at least one FAR member had recently returned from training in either North Korea or North Vietnam. Again, confirmation is lacking.

24. The extensive unguarded frontiers of Guatemala permit the guerrillas to move back and forth with

relative ease, and the transshipment of arms and supplies from outside the country takes place with only minimal threat of interdiction by Guatemalan security forces. Early last May, however, a Guatemalan Army unit clashed with FAR elements near the Honduran border where they were alleged to be picking up a large arms shipment. Yon Sosa was then in Honduras to arrange the weapons delivery. There have also been reports that the guerrillas have bought arms from [redacted] [redacted] smugglers to be infiltrated across the border into the sparsely inhabited northern jungles. Some supplies destined for the guerrillas have been captured from time to time, but the flow probably has not been substantially interrupted.

The Context For Revolution--An Overview

25. At least part of the population that fared well in the revolutionary period of 1944-54, can be presumed in sympathy with the idea of revolution or a return to the "good times." Some of those disappointed in Mendez' "third government of the revolution" probably see the only hope for "progress" in the armed struggle being waged by the Communists. How many is a matter of speculation. The portion of the population is very small. The presumably moderate majority among this segment are probably not favorably impressed with the merits of the elected government. Under the constitutional Mendez administration, insecurity has been high, and tangible public benefit and national progress have hardly been spectacular. Even so, the number of revolutionary sympathizers is probably relatively low as a result of public disgust and fear of the war in miniature represented by the confrontation between the insurgents and the security forces.

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26. [redacted]  
[redacted] some students are attracted to the revolutionary movement and make up a substantial portion of the guerrilla bands.

27. The Communists can also secure some collaboration, though not sympathy, by extortion and threats.

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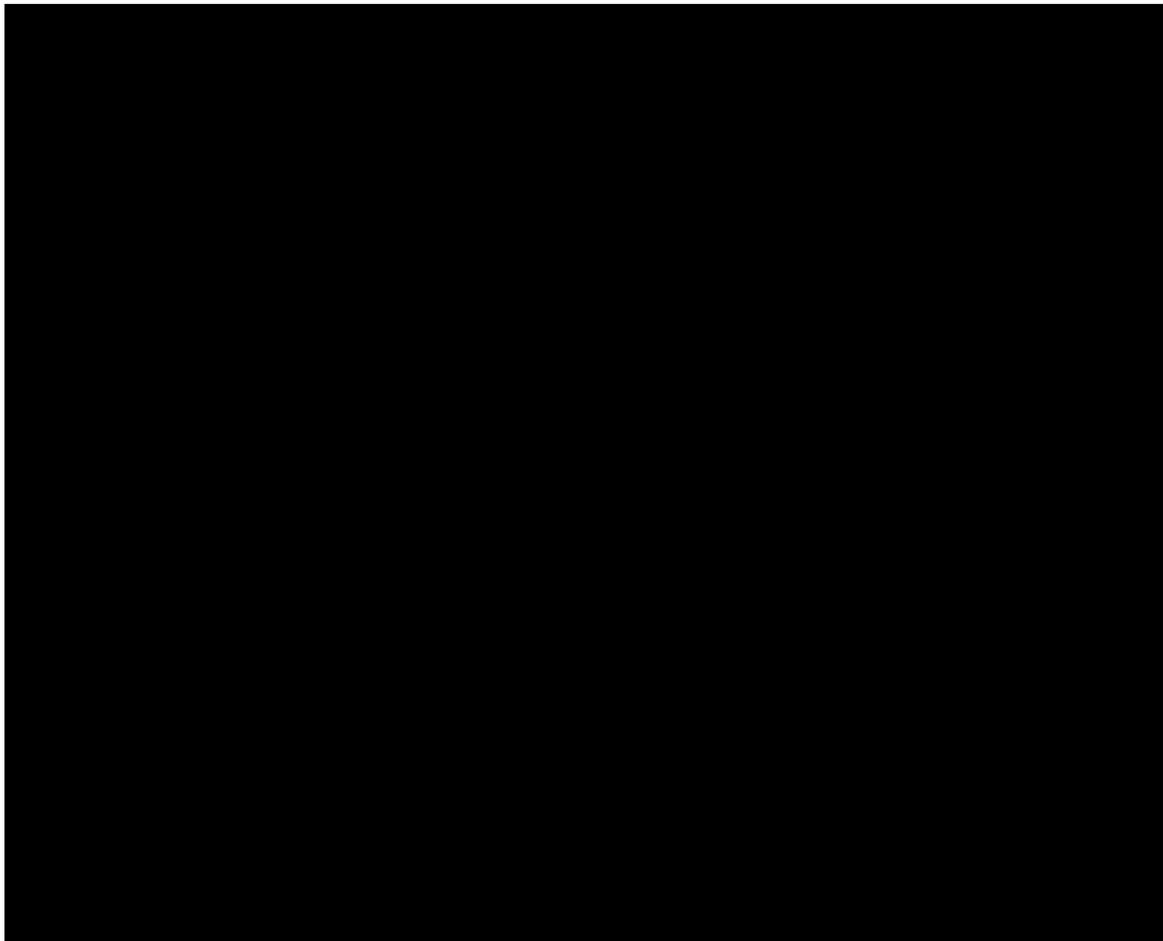
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28. An assessment of the raw appeal of the revolutionaries must also take into account the pervasive primitivism of the Guatemalan political system, in which the precedence of party, position, or nation over personal interest is at best rare. The comparatively "enlightened" liberal element in the society suffers no dearth of examples of corruption, maldistribution of wealth, exploitation, and lack of freedom or opportunity. The serious underdevelopment at all levels and in all fields and the absence of promise for a substantially different future provide would-be revolutionaries with considerable exploitable material. The relatively insignificant progress that the insurgents have made in seven years speaks for the basic conservatism, apathy, and unawareness of most of the Guatemalan society, as well as for the occasional effectiveness of the government's campaigns against them.

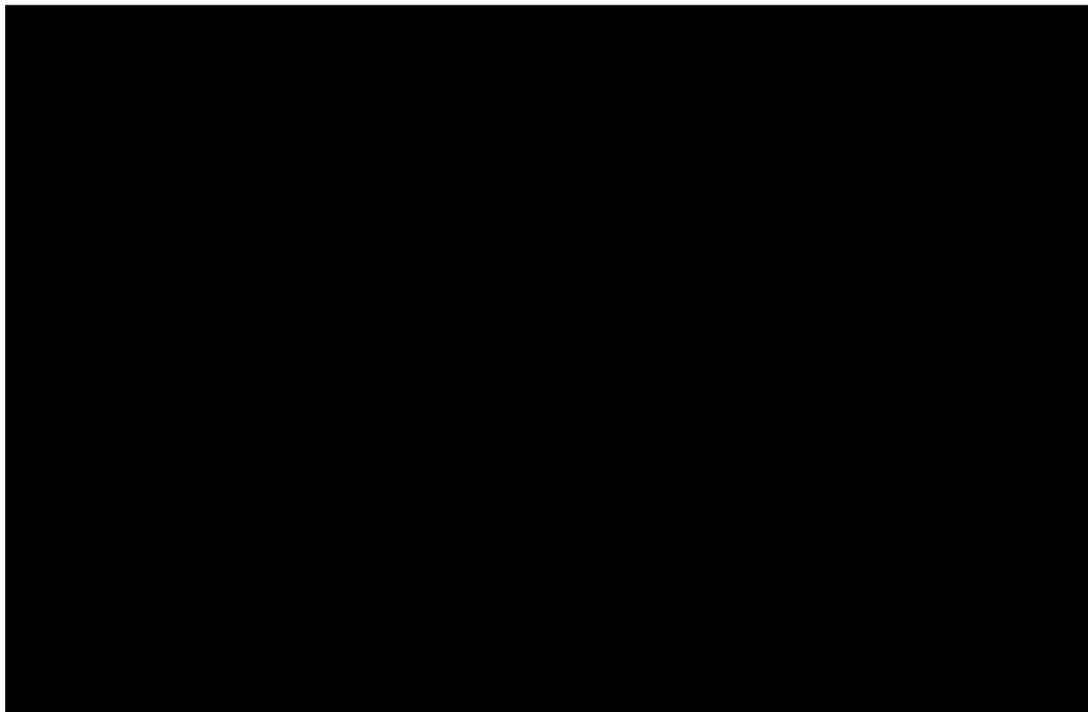
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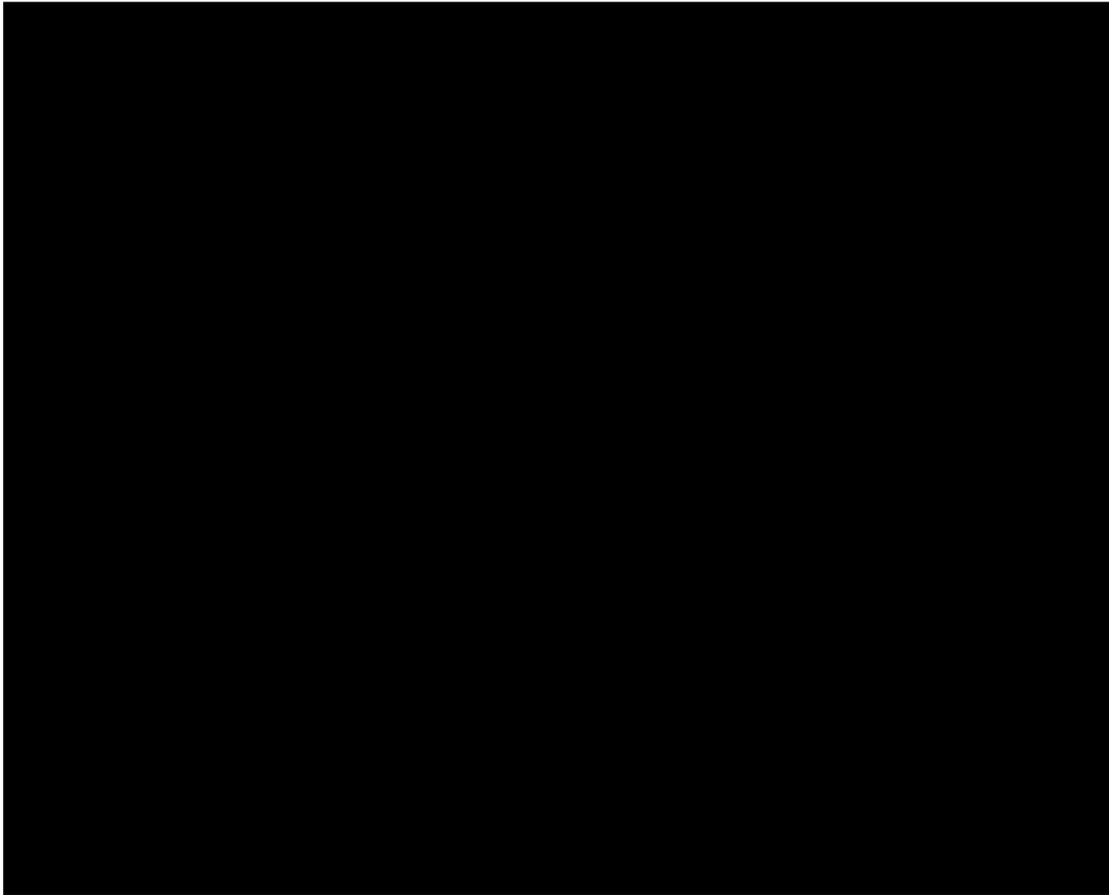


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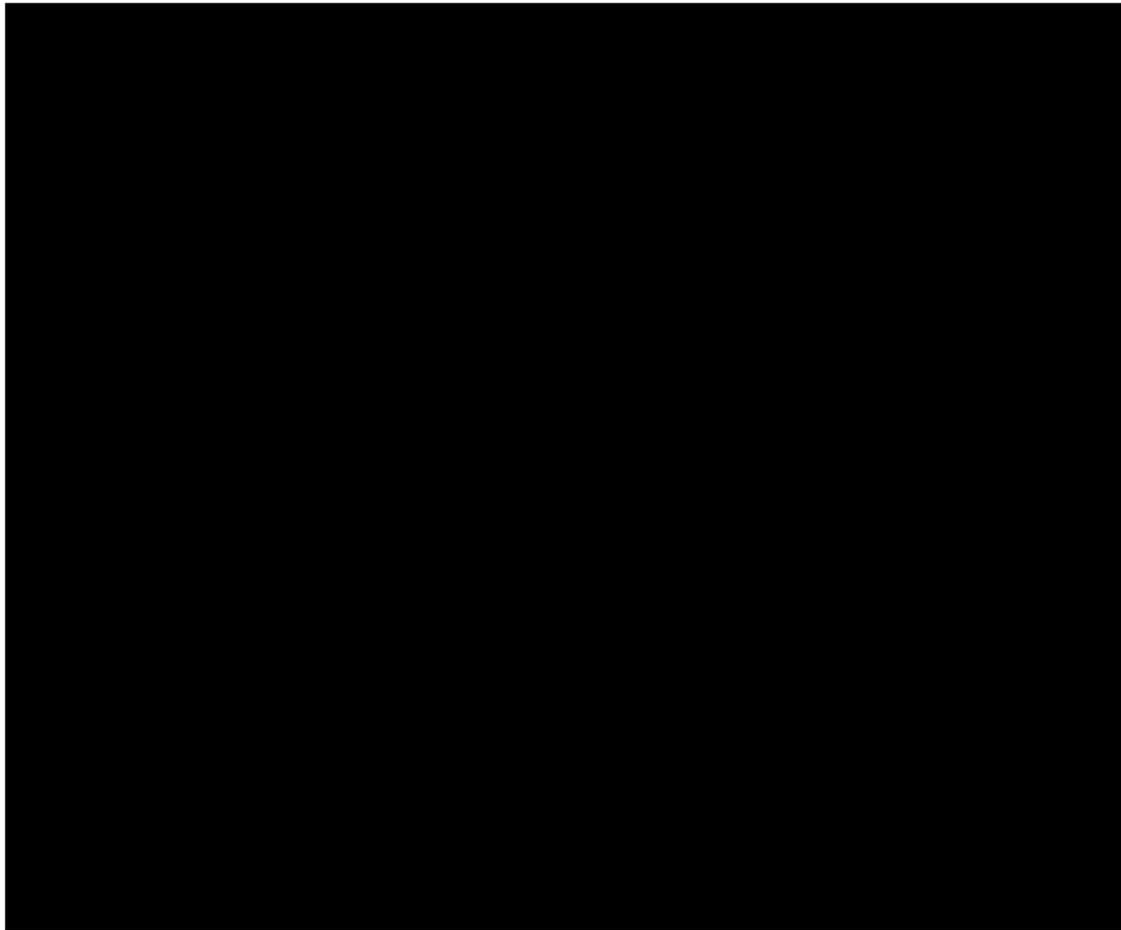
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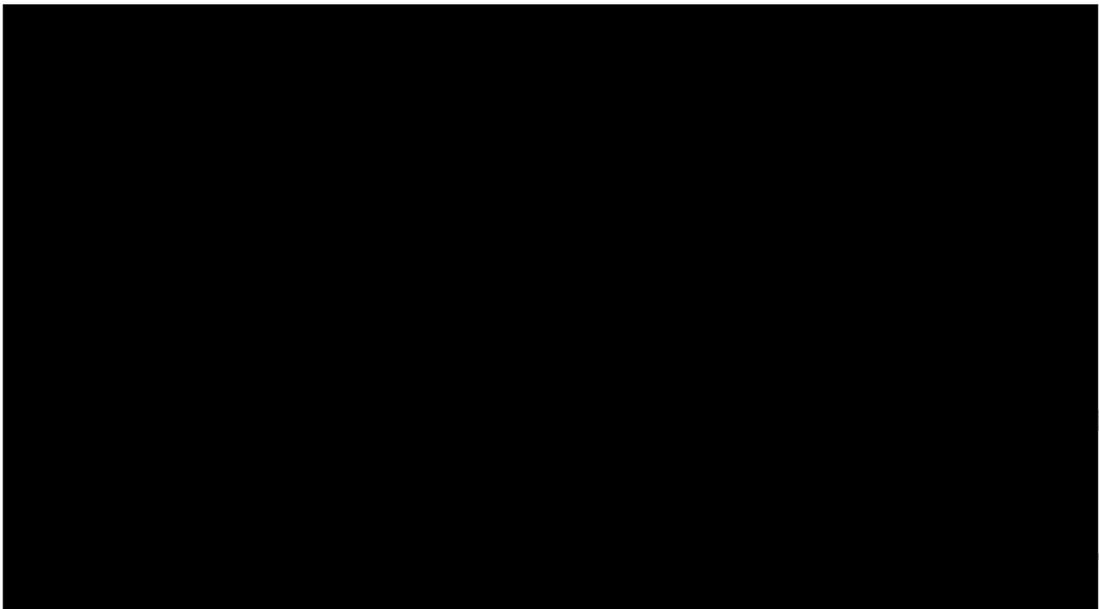
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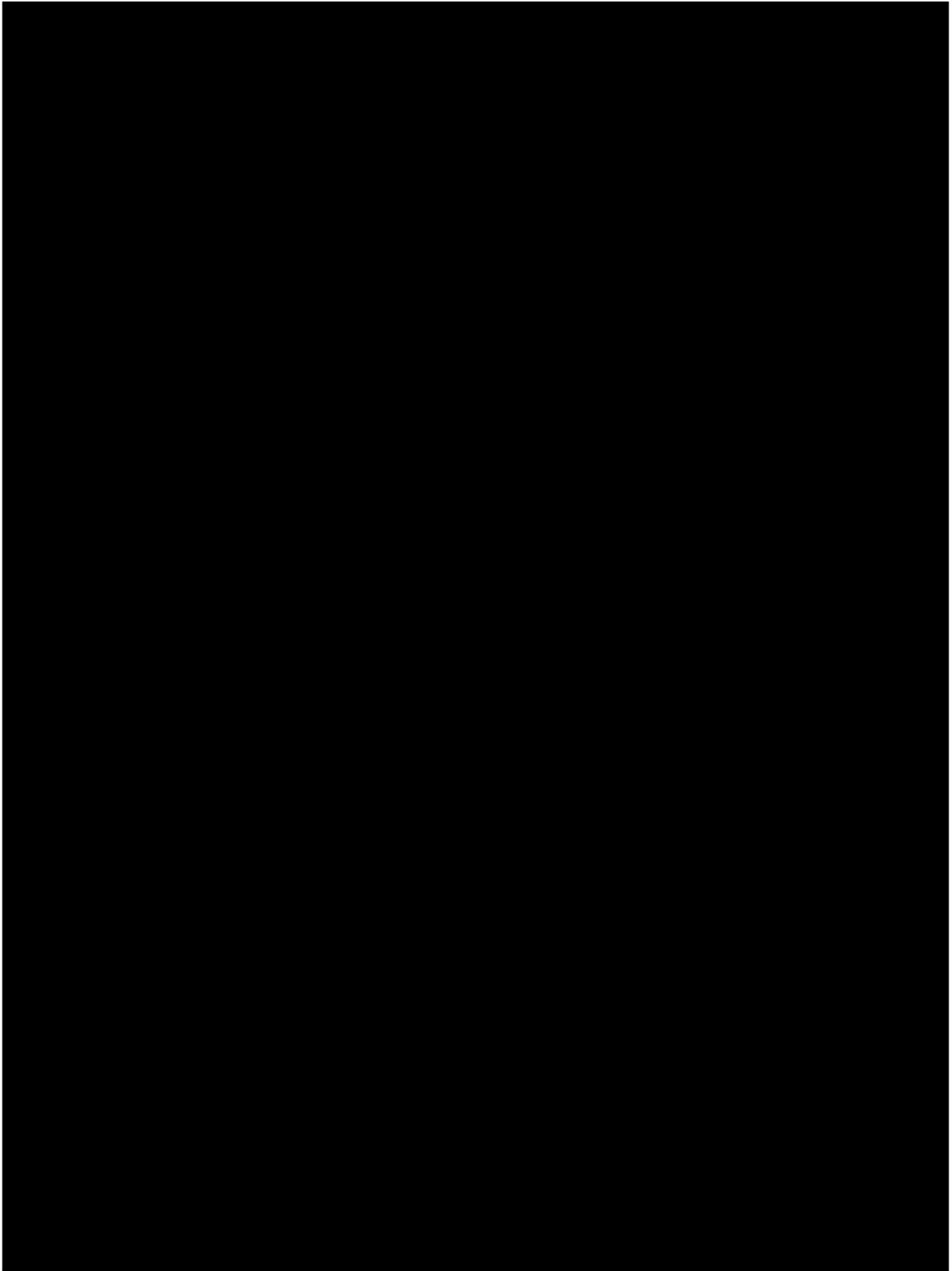


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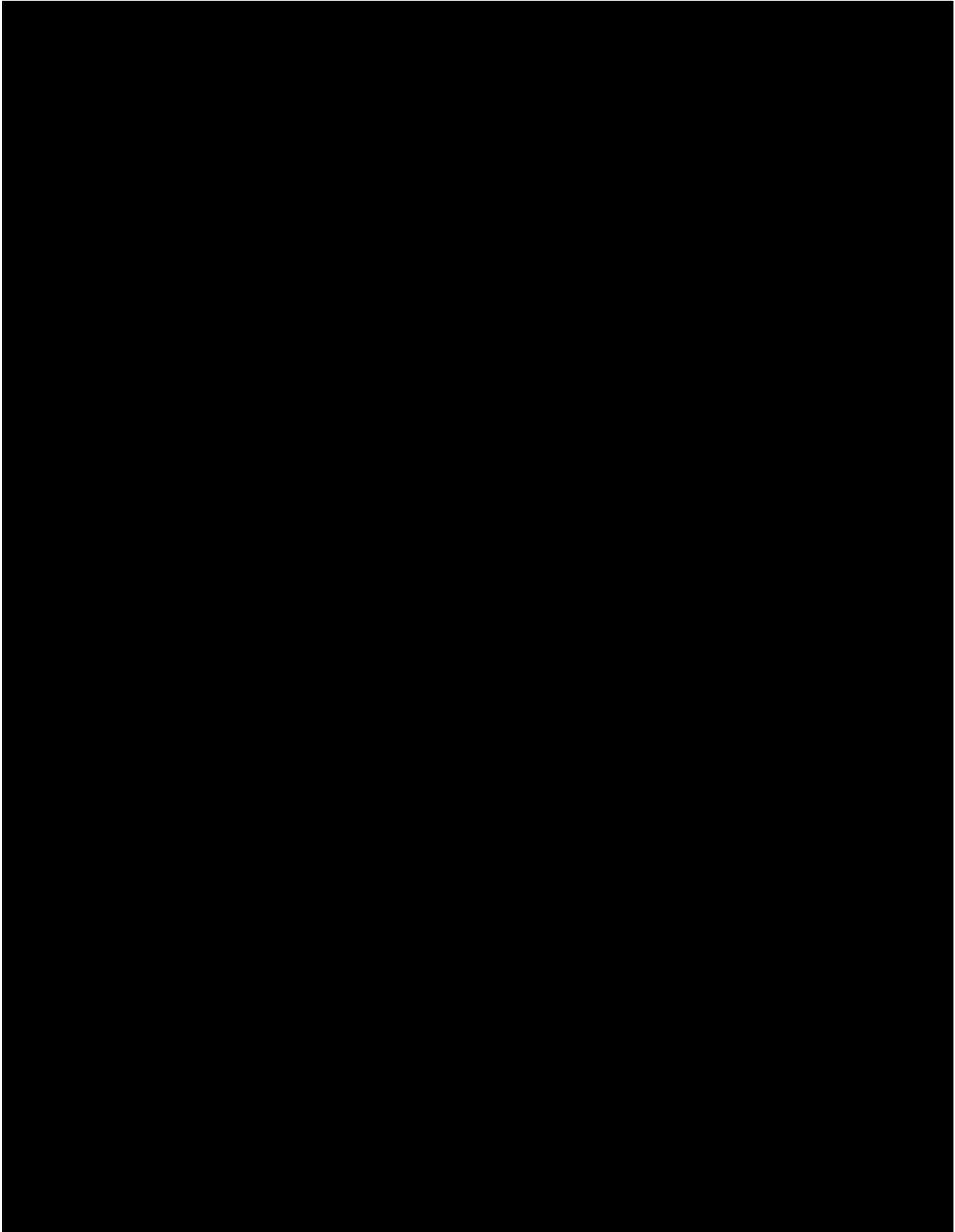


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