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Central Intelligence Agency

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Washington, D.C. 20505

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

9 May 1986

**Cuba: Focal Point for Political
Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean**

Summary

Cuban President Fidel Castro has not stopped selectively supporting revolutionary activity in Latin America despite his attempts to portray himself publicly as a responsible third world leader. Cuba has developed a two-pronged revolutionary strategy:

- Establishing diplomatic relations where possible while simultaneously encouraging a broad front coalition of leftists and moderates to strive for political power.**
- Maintaining contact with radical groups, providing training and other support to ready them for violent activities should conditions become propitious for a revolutionary push.**

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This memorandum was prepared by [Redacted] the Counterterrorism Center, [Redacted] of the Office of Africa and Latin America Analysis, with a contribution by [Redacted] the Office of Central Reference. Comments may be directed to the Chief, Policy Support Branch of the Counterterrorism Center, [Redacted]

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4. Cuba also curries the favor of regional subversive groups by providing safehaven to individuals. For example, following the M-19 seizure of the Dominican Republic's Embassy in Bogota, the M-19 guerrillas, together with some of the hostages and the Cuban Ambassador were flown to Cuba and given asylum. Cuba also has provided refuge for numerous airline hijackers affiliated with Cuban-supported terrorist groups and abrogated its anti-hijacking agreement with Washington in 1977. In fact, Castro's 26th of July Movement conducted one of the first airline hijackings in the 1950s, although Havana to this day charges that the US "invented" such operations to subvert Castro's regime. [redacted]

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5. On the question of terrorism, we believe Castro views it as a legitimate weapon in his efforts to promote the revolutionary conditions needed to destabilize a regime. During the 1950s, Castro's July 26 Movement bombed civilian targets and employed assassinations to provoke the Batista government to become repressive, to polarize Cuban society, and to attract recruits to armed struggle. Drawing on this strategy, Castro encourages rebel groups to use terrorism when he perceives that revolutionary conditions are ripe. [redacted]

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A. Evolution of Revolutionary Strategy

6. An analysis of Cuban policy indicates that Cuba's revolutionary strategy appears to have evolved through three phases, from 1959 to the late 1960s, from the mid-1970s to the US action in Grenada (1983), and post-Grenada. [redacted]

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7. Initially Castro attempted to replicate his own success elsewhere but failed. In 1959, Castro aided armed expeditions against the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Haiti. During the early and mid 1960s, Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Peru all faced Cuban-backed attempts to instigate guerrilla movements. In seeking indigenous groups with which to cooperate, the Cubans rejected the orthodox Latin American Communist Parties, instead they lent their support to more militant groups dedicated to armed violence even when their ideology was not fully developed. [redacted]

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8. Following these failures, Castro began to pursue normal government to government relations in the hemisphere. By the mid-1970s, Cuba's isolation in the Americas had eased, OAS sanctions were dropped, and full diplomatic or consular relations were established with a number of countries. The successes of Cuban conventional military forces in Angola and Ethiopia in the mid 1970s strengthened the hand of the hardline element in Cuban policymaking circles and led to enhanced support of the Sandinistas in their struggle against Somoza in 1979 and 1980. The victory in turn opened up a new era in which support for armed struggle again became a major trend of Cuban foreign policy. [redacted]

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9. In the wake of the Grenada setback in 1983, Havana reassessed its regional strategy. [redacted] Apparently Castro believes conditions in most target countries are generally unfavorable at this time for the promotion of widespread terrorist and insurgent activity. Many leftist groups such as those in Uruguay and Brazil are splintered and weak after years of repression under military regimes. Cuba also fears jeopardizing recently established diplomatic relations with new civilian regimes, leading Havana to counsel moderation to many groups it

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supports. Moreover, the Grenada affair almost certainly has made Havana more cautious in pursuing its revolutionary strategy. [Redacted]

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10. A study of Cuban revolutionary policy indicates the extent of support Cuba provides to any revolutionary group is governed by a number of factors, including the conditions in the particular country and the likely impact of Cuban backing on the movement's chances for success. Havana also must take into consideration whether a seizure of power by the group it is supporting will advance Cuban goals without hindering Soviet policy aims. [Redacted]

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11. In our view, Cuba is now focused on a strategy that emphasizes long term goals, including rebuilding and unifying regional leftist groups, and encouraging some to participate in the political process while at the same time maintaining their military and terrorist capabilities. In the near term, however, Havana apparently believes that radical elements within the region should remain calm and not react to provocation. [Redacted]

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II. High-Level Cuban Support

A. Chile

13. Cuba's special interest in Chile dates back to the Allende years and has persisted during the Pinochet era. Following the overthrow of the Allende government in September 1973, Castro promised those Chileans who opposed the

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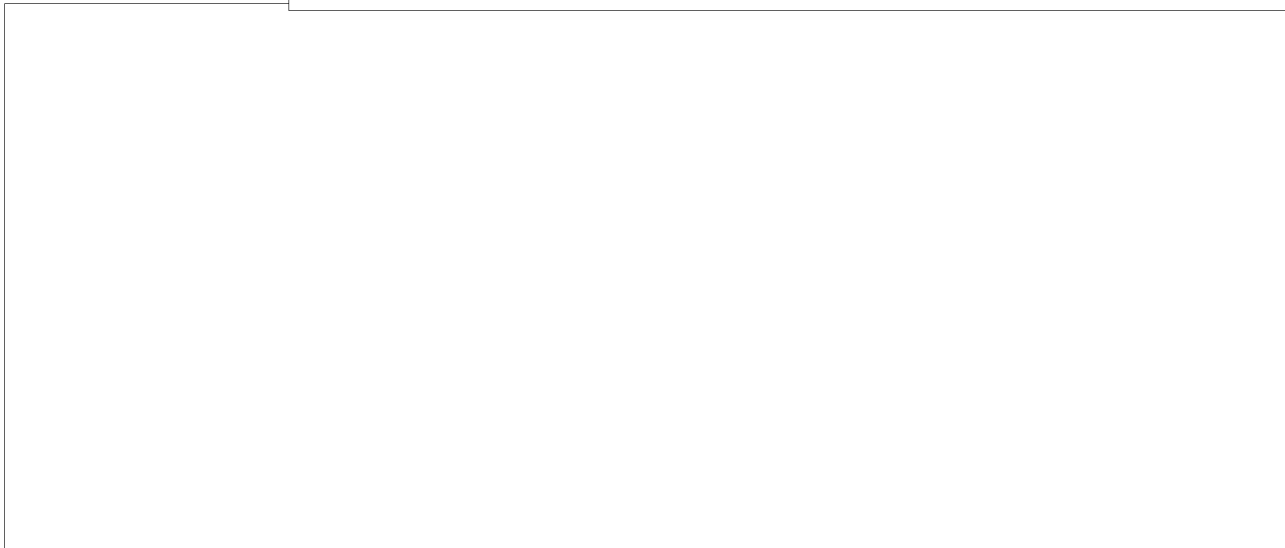
military takeover all the aid in Cuba's power to provide, and offered maintenance assistance for about 10 years without expecting in the near term that the radical left would engage in violence. Only recently has Castro acted to increase his support to Chilean terrorist groups, apparently viewing the time as propitious for an escalation of violence.

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14. Of special interest to Cuba has been the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR). Havana reportedly has supported the MIR by providing substantial training since the 1970s

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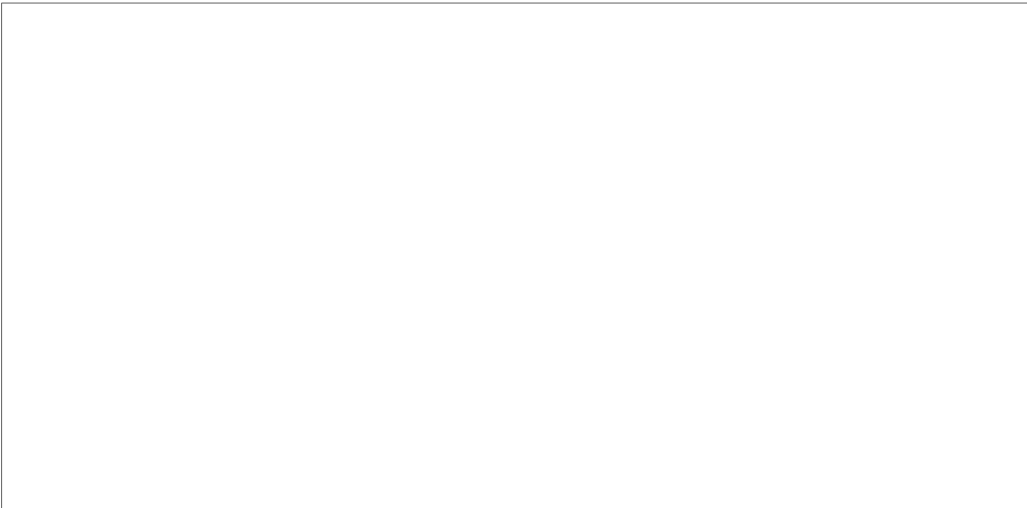
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15. Cuba also supports the Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front (FPMR), a radical leftist terrorist group affiliated with the Chilean Communist Party (PCCh) and responsible for the bulk of terrorist incidents to date. The precise relationship between Cuba and the FPMR remains unclear, but Cuba has provided training and material assistance since the group first announced its existence in December 1983.

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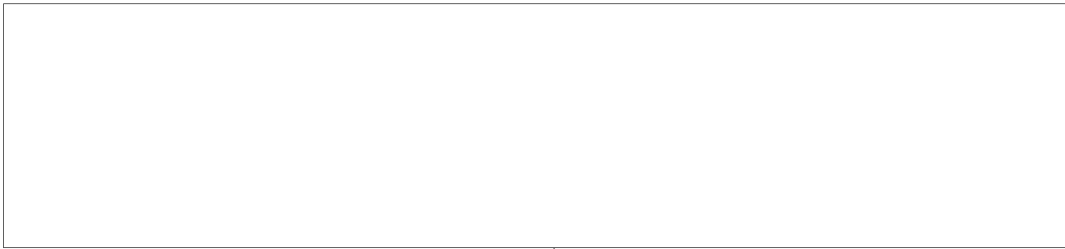


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B. Colombia

16. Cuba has a longstanding relationship with several Colombian guerrilla groups, particularly the 19th of April Movement (M-19). Relations between Colombia and Cuba have not improved significantly since March 1981 following a Cuban-supported guerrilla boat landing in Colombia, despite signs of warming after President Belisario Betancur's inauguration in 1982. We believe President Betancur would encounter substantial political and military opposition if he tried to reestablish full diplomatic relations, chiefly because Havana has continued to provide extensive support to Colombian guerrillas. The leading contender for the presidency in the elections this spring--a Liberal Party member--is unlikely to be receptive to Cuban diplomatic overtures

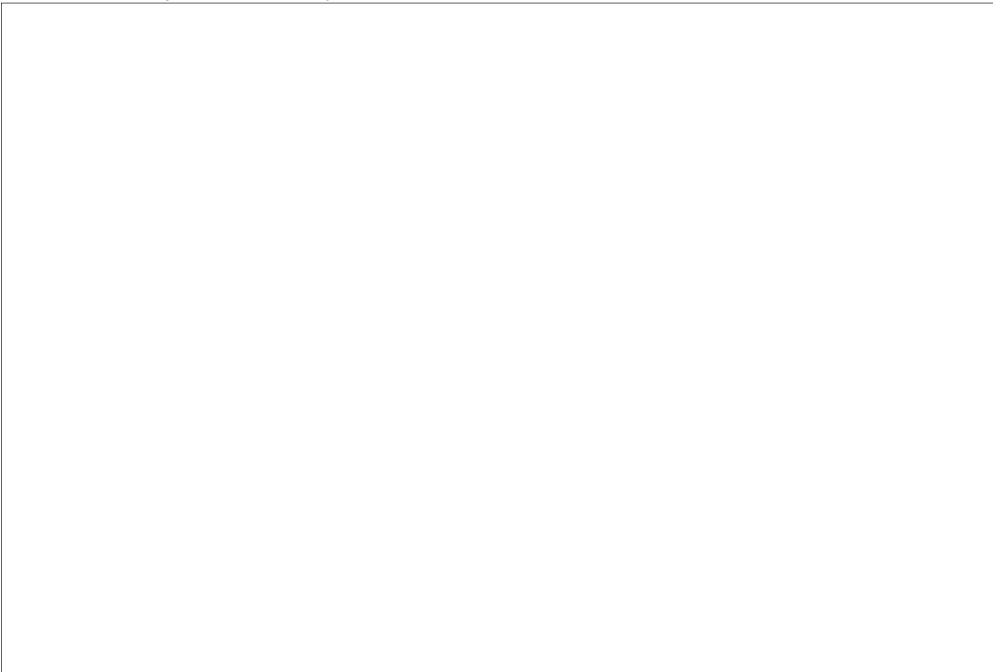
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17. Although a change in diplomatic relations is unlikely, we believe that Castro will increase the level of Cuban assistance to Colombian terrorist groups. Havana may have attempted to revive the sagging fortunes of the M-19 and may have encouraged it to take the lead in uniting the various smaller terrorist groups into a larger guerrilla coalition. Cuba could attempt to establish contact with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the only group that has nominally honored the 1984 peace accords, and could encourage the group to return to violence.

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III. Low-Level Cuban Support

18. In addition to offering support to terrorists in Chile and Colombia, we believe Castro will continue to provide low-level assistance to radical leftists in several other Latin American countries. In some of these countries, Argentina, Bolivia and Uruguay, Cuba may seek to establish toeholds or bases of regional support to facilitate the funneling of assistance to subversive groups in the region. Elsewhere, such as the Caribbean, Cuba appears to be tempering its policy of revolutionary violence while encouraging political organizing, recruitment of new members, and exploitation of labor unrest. Cuba probably will maintain its ties to radical leftists and former terrorists throughout Latin America, preserving for some future date the possible return to violence. [Redacted]

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A. Ecuador

19. Cuba's relationship with Alfaro Vive, Carajo (AVC), the most prominent and active terrorist group in Ecuador, is difficult to assess. A number of AVC members have received guerrilla training in Cuba. We believe that this training, coupled with operational support from the Colombian M-19, has enabled the group to grow from a weak, ineffective organization, to one that has been able to spring prisoners from jail and conduct raids on Ecuadorean police weapons arsenals. AVC's operations, although not entirely bloodless, have focused for the most part on efforts to gain maximum media publicity for its views while minimizing damage and casualties. The group has thrived in large measure because of the ineptitude of Ecuador's security services. Although in our judgment the AVC poses no serious threat to the stability of the Ecuadorean Government, it could become a more dangerous and lethal force if it continues to recruit new members and if the Ecuadorean security services fail to develop the capability to counter it. [Redacted]

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20. The Revolutionary Socialist Party of Ecuador (PSRE)--one of the most radical political parties in Ecuador--has advocated the use of terrorist tactics [Redacted]

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After rejoining the legally certified Socialist Party of Ecuador (PSE) in 1985, the PSRE appears to be moving the mainline Socialist Party toward a more radical stance. Several former PSE leaders have been replaced with more hardline PSRE members, thereby opening the way for implementation of the PSRE's far more radical policies. [Redacted]

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B. Honduras

21. Honduras has in the past been the target of Cuban destabilization efforts. In July 1983, about 100 Cuban-trained Honduran nationals reportedly were infiltrated from Nicaragua into eastern Honduras. About a year later, another group of Cuban-trained guerrillas entered Honduras. Both groups were annihilated by the Honduran Army. Since then Havana has appeared to be cautious in its use of violence in Honduras. [Redacted]

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22. The destabilization of Honduras clearly would enhance the position of the Salvadoran and Guatemalan insurgencies. Havana also probably sees in Honduras a chance to intimidate or destabilize the major base for anti-Sandinista insurgents fighting in Nicaragua. Although Havana is not providing as much support to Honduran terrorist groups as it has been to the established Central American insurgencies, we believe Castro may attempt to bolster the divided Honduran left with financial and training assistance. Given the failure of insurgency attempts, Havana probably sees terrorists as its only mechanism in Honduras for pursuing its regional goals. [Redacted]

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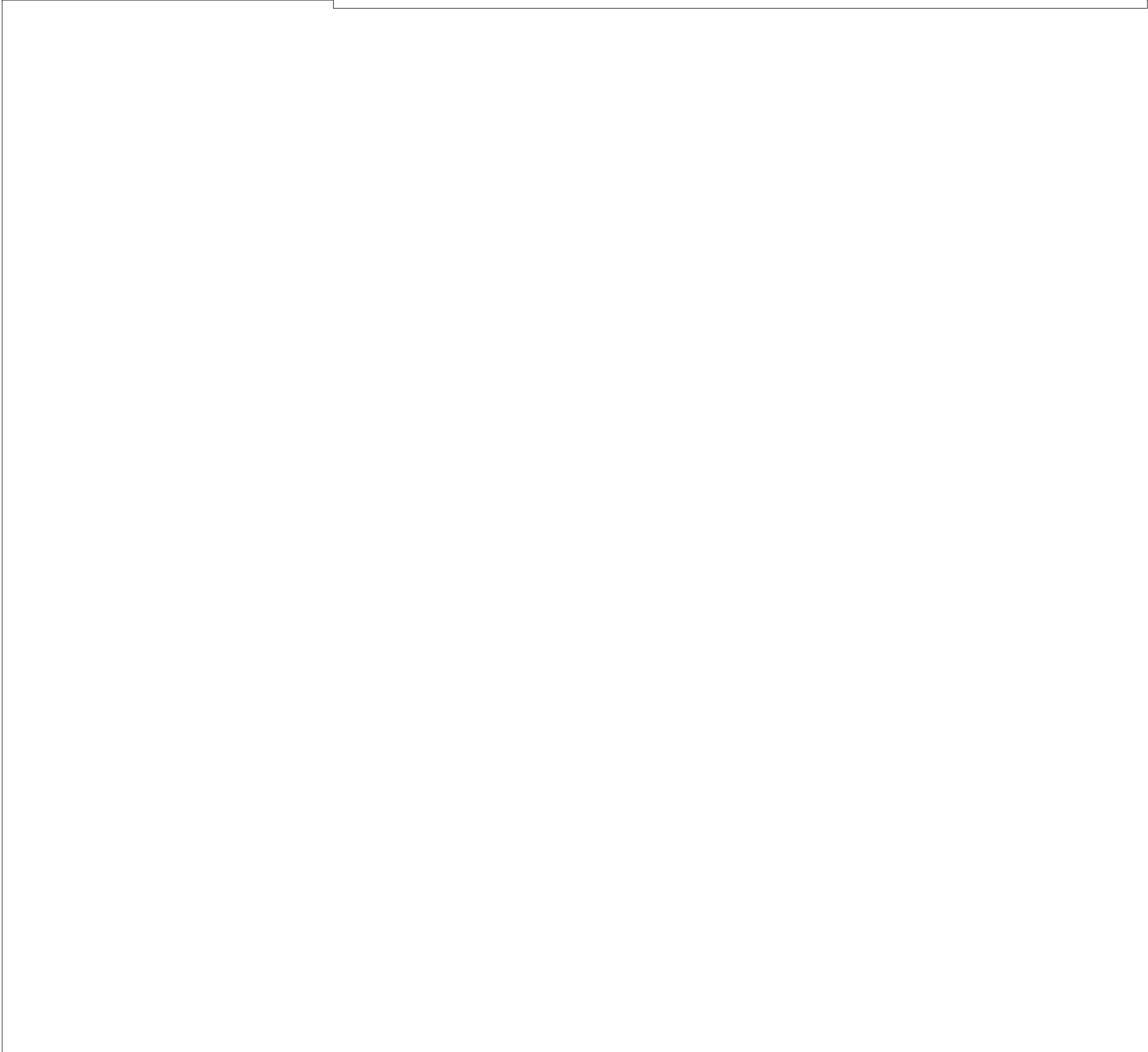


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C. Bolivia

23. During the tenure of former President Siles, there was a great deal of Cuban activity in Bolivia. Since the election in August 1985 of Paz Estenssoro, however, both the Cubans and the Soviets have been kept at arm's length. Paz Estenssoro probably hopes to gain greater access to US aid by adhering to US-encouraged reforms.

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E. Argentina

26. The Cubans have a long history of association with terrorists in Argentina. The Cubans gave financial and logistical support to Montoneros and the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP)--the two groups responsible for unleashing the wave of leftist terrorism which swept Argentina in the 1970s. Cuba provided them with training in Cuba in urban and rural guerrilla warfare. These terrorist groups were virtually eliminated as a result of the Argentine military's brutal counterinsurgency campaign, and Castro allowed the remnants of their leadership to relocate in Havana. Since then, the radical left has remained extremely weak and factionalized and Argentina has been free from leftist terrorism. [Redacted]

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27. We do not foresee Cuba encouraging any indigenous radical groups to pursue a path of terrorist violence because it would be reluctant to jeopardize its newly-established relationship with the government of Raul Alfonsin. In fact, Cuba probably is encouraging the Montoneros to attempt to acquire a measure of political legitimacy. Cuba, may, however, at some future point begin to view the generally relaxed environment for leftists as conducive to a renewal of subversive support. In that event, Cuba might seek to take advantage of its links to the Montoneros to renew subversive operations. [Redacted]

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F. Caribbean

29. More than two years after its setback in Grenada, Cuba is struggling to recover its political influence in the Caribbean. Our analysis indicates Castro continues to support leftist political groups and promote political coalitions among them. [Redacted]

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Cuban policy is to offer Caribbean leftists political advice, organizational assistance and limited financial aid as the basis for a foothold in the region. [Redacted]

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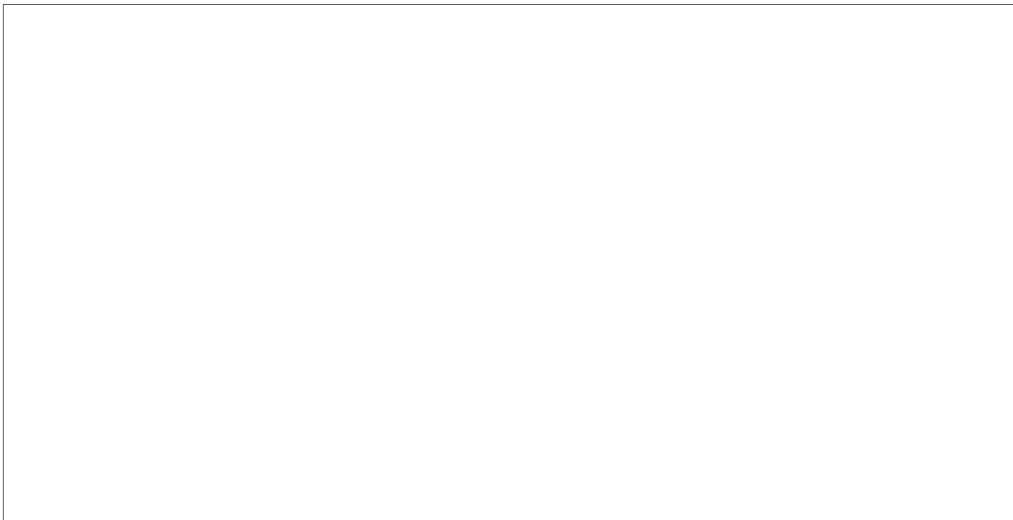


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2. French Departments

32. Cuba has long viewed the French Caribbean as falling within its legitimate sphere of influence, and we believe it would be reluctant to lose any leverage to the Libyans who have become increasingly active in the region. Cuba reportedly has responded to Libyan inroads with warnings to local leftists about the risks of involvement with Qadhafi and Havana probably will step up its offers of training scholarships, organizational assistance, and financial aid. 

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3. Dominican Republic

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33. In the early 1980s, Cuba encouraged leftist radicals in the Dominican Republic to unite and prepare for armed actions. 

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Cuba and other Communist countries mounted extensive training programs for Dominican students. Cuba also provided military instruction to members of small extremist splinter groups such as the Social Worker's Movement and the Socialist Party as well as to the pro-Moscow Dominican Communist Party and the Dominican Liberation Party. 

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34.  Cuba has encouraged some of these radical leftist groups, in particular the Dominican Liberation Party, to engage in civil disturbances and strikes. Havana is maintaining or, in some cases, restoring contacts with opposition elements, ranging from moderate left to radical. Cuba believes that the economic and political situation will continue to deteriorate, placing the radical elements--and by association, Cuba--in a favorable position. Although the elections scheduled for May 1986 could provide a focus for Cuban encouragement for the leftist violence, we believe that Havana will be deterred from doing so because the left remains fractured. 

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4. Puerto Rico

35. The Cubans have had a relationship with Los Macheteros, the Puerto Rican separatist group, for the past several years. Recent activity includes:


-- On 30 August in San Juan, Puerto Rico, US FBI agents seized approximately \$60,000, a small plane used to take aerial photographs of US military installations on the island, and a number of weapons in raids of several Machetero safehouses. Investigations into the weapons supply routes indicate that the confiscated weapons may have been supplied by Cuba. 

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-- In addition, these raids netted 11 suspects in the \$7 million 1983 Wells Fargo robbery in West Hartford, Connecticut. The key figure in that robbery received sanctuary in Cuba and may have provided the Cuban Government with up to \$2 million. 

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IV. Cuban Support for Insurgents

36. Throughout Latin America, many radical leftist groups seek at some point to become insurgent or guerrilla organizations and maintain both rural and urban fronts. Cuba has supported many of these groups in the past, and in some cases has maintained the relationship over the years. Cuba generally provides these groups with guerrilla and military training, rather than specific tactical or operational support. 

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37. Over the past two years, many of the insurgent groups in El Salvador and Guatemala have been on the defensive and have adopted the tactics of urban terrorism. Although Cuba has provided many of these insurgents with training in urban tactics--and likely will continue to do so--we see little evidence of Cuban operational direction or sponsorship of specific urban terrorist acts. 

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A. El Salvador



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38. Prior to 1979, Cuban support to Salvadoran radicals involved training small numbers of guerrillas, providing modest financial aid, and serving as a political conduit between Salvadoran extremists and leftists outside the hemisphere. During the Nicaraguan civil war, Cuba concentrated on support for the Sandinistas. After the fall of Somoza, Cuba began intense efforts to help pro-Cuban guerrillas come to power in El Salvador. In fact, Cuba played a critical role in bringing together the various fragmented elements of the Salvadoran left leading ultimately to the forging of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN). [Redacted]

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39. As Cuba saw the level of violence escalate, it increased the flow of weapons and financial support to the Salvadoran guerrillas. Larger numbers of Salvadoran guerrillas went to Cuba to receive political and military training and returned to El Salvador to augment the guerrilla ranks. Cuban training increased sharply in 1980 as Cuba concentrated on building a trained army capable of mounting major offensives. A typical three month training program included courses in guerrilla tactics, marksmanship, and use of artillery. [Redacted]

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40. Over the past few years, however, Cuba has been more cautious in its support for the Salvadoran insurgency and has attempted to temper Salvadoran zeal for dramatic terrorist attacks. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] We suspect that Cuba will continue to exert a moderating influence on the plans of the Salvadoran insurgents, especially if the groups continue to suffer both military and political losses, and will attempt to dissuade them from mounting indiscriminate terrorist attacks. [Redacted]

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B. Guatemala

41. Guatemala serves as an example of Cuban attempts to form a union of disparate guerrilla groups. In November 1980, the four major insurgent organizations signed an agreement to establish the National Revolutionary Union (URNG). Following the signing ceremony, held in Managua, representatives traveled to Cuba and presented the document to Castro. Despite the show of unity, however, the Guatemalan groups have not become a cohesive organization and only occasionally engage in joint terrorist operations. [Redacted]

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42. At present, we believe the revolutionary groups seeking power in Guatemala are far from achieving their objectives. The successful counterinsurgency and civic action programs and the progress of the democratization process have undercut their domestic support and give them little hope of success in the near future. The URNG seems to have little real power, serving only as a propaganda mechanism and political front. [Redacted]

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43. We believe Havana will maintain its political and military training programs but is not likely to encourage an increase in violent activity. Most probably, Cuba will stress the importance of negotiating and seeking to achieve a measure of political legitimacy. [Redacted]

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VI. The Soviet Factor

47. The USSR and Cuba share a broad range of goals in Latin America and are in general agreement as to policies concerning the use of subversion and terrorism. At present we believe the shared strategy focuses primarily on unifying leftist groups and strengthening regional cooperation among radicals in preparation for opportune revolutionary conditions. [Redacted]

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48. Throughout the 1960s, the Soviet Union was suspicious of Cuba's policy of inciting armed violence, preferring to work through established Moscow-line Communist Parties. Disagreement over this issue was a serious point of friction for several years. Cuba denounced the Soviet policy of "peaceful coexistence" as a fraud arguing that it implicitly undercut the legitimacy of aiding "national liberation" struggles. At the 1966 Tricontinental Conference, Cuba sought to enlist North Vietnam and North Korea and create a more aggressive revolutionary internationalism. None of these Latin American insurgencies fomented by Havana, however, aroused much popular support and they all failed. [Redacted]

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49. At present, Moscow and Havana appear to favor a more active policy of subversion in Chile, while guarding against damaging their political objectives elsewhere. Unless Castro decides to promote armed revolution in countries such as Argentina or Peru, where Moscow has important economic and political stakes--a development we view as unlikely in the next few years--Moscow and Havana probably will continue to work along parallel tracks in the region. [Redacted]

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50. Despite this general confluence of goals, however, [Redacted] the two countries occasionally work at cross purposes. For example, Havana has maintained only formal ties with the Soviet-sponsored moderate elements of the Bolivian Communist Party (PCB), the result of the PCB's refusal to support the efforts of the Guevara in the late 1960s. [Redacted]

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VII. Outlook

51. In our judgment, Castro will continue to selectively sponsor Latin American terrorist activity as part of his commitment to the revolutionary struggle, while being careful not to endanger his own regional interests or to come into conflict with Moscow. Cuba will remain intent on maintaining deniability in order not to reverse the diplomatic and political inroads it has made in several countries in Latin America nor to forestall future breakthroughs on the diplomatic front. [Redacted]

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53. Cuba probably will continue to place high priority on assistance to terrorists in Chile during the coming year. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] As the moderate and center left political parties view accommodation with President Augusto Pinochet as increasingly unlikely, they may become more tolerant of leftist violence and perhaps even offer support to radical leftists. [Redacted]

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54. In our view, Castro will continue encouraging the Chilean radical left to reach a rapprochement with the moderate opposition in order to lessen its political isolation and to strengthen prospects for the radical left to play a role in efforts to oust Pinochet, as well as in a future, post-Pinochet period. However, Castro also will continue to stress to the Chilean terrorist groups, especially the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) that they must remain committed to armed struggle and political violence as part of their overall strategy to maintain pressure on the Pinochet government. [Redacted]

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55. Havana probably will increase its support to Caribbean leftist groups, possibly in an attempt to mitigate any decline in Cuban influence resulting from the growing Libyan presence.* Havana is increasingly concerned that Libya's courtship of

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Caribbean leftists could prompt a US response. [redacted]

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56. Libya's growing involvement with leftists, both in the Caribbean and elsewhere in Latin America, may spur Castro to step up his support to various guerrilla groups, especially if these groups effectively use their ties to Tripoli as leverage in an attempt to gain greater financial support from Havana. Cuba could also make more effective use of what it has to offer--a logistical support base to Caribbean leftists that is far more useful than what Libya can offer in the region--as well as increased provision of scholarships and training. [redacted]

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57. Although Havana's ideological animosity toward the United States may make targeting US installations and personnel tempting, we believe Castro fears retaliation and would be responsive to likely Soviet urgings that he avoid a confrontation with Washington. It is nevertheless important when making calculations on Castro's likely mode of behavior, to remember the "wild card"--Castro's own ego needs and his propensity for emotional responses when suddenly confronted by actions he perceives as embarrassing to himself or hostile to his regime. [redacted]

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VIII. AD Officers

58. The AD, which was established in 1974, is largely made up of officers who came over with Manuel Pineiro from the General Directorate of Intelligence (DGI), where they had been Latin American specialists. AD officers are Cuban Communist Party functionaries who implement government policy regarding Latin America and have a broad spectrum of responsibilities: to extend and strengthen bilateral relations with foreign governments; to maintain liaison with Communist Parties and other sympathetic organizations; to establish contacts in cultural, intellectual, political, and press circles as channels for promoting pro-Cuban views; and, to provide logistic support and training to foreign revolutionary groups operating in country and to third country exiles residing in Havana and overseas, who are willing to mount "liberation movements" in nations unfriendly to Cuba. [redacted]

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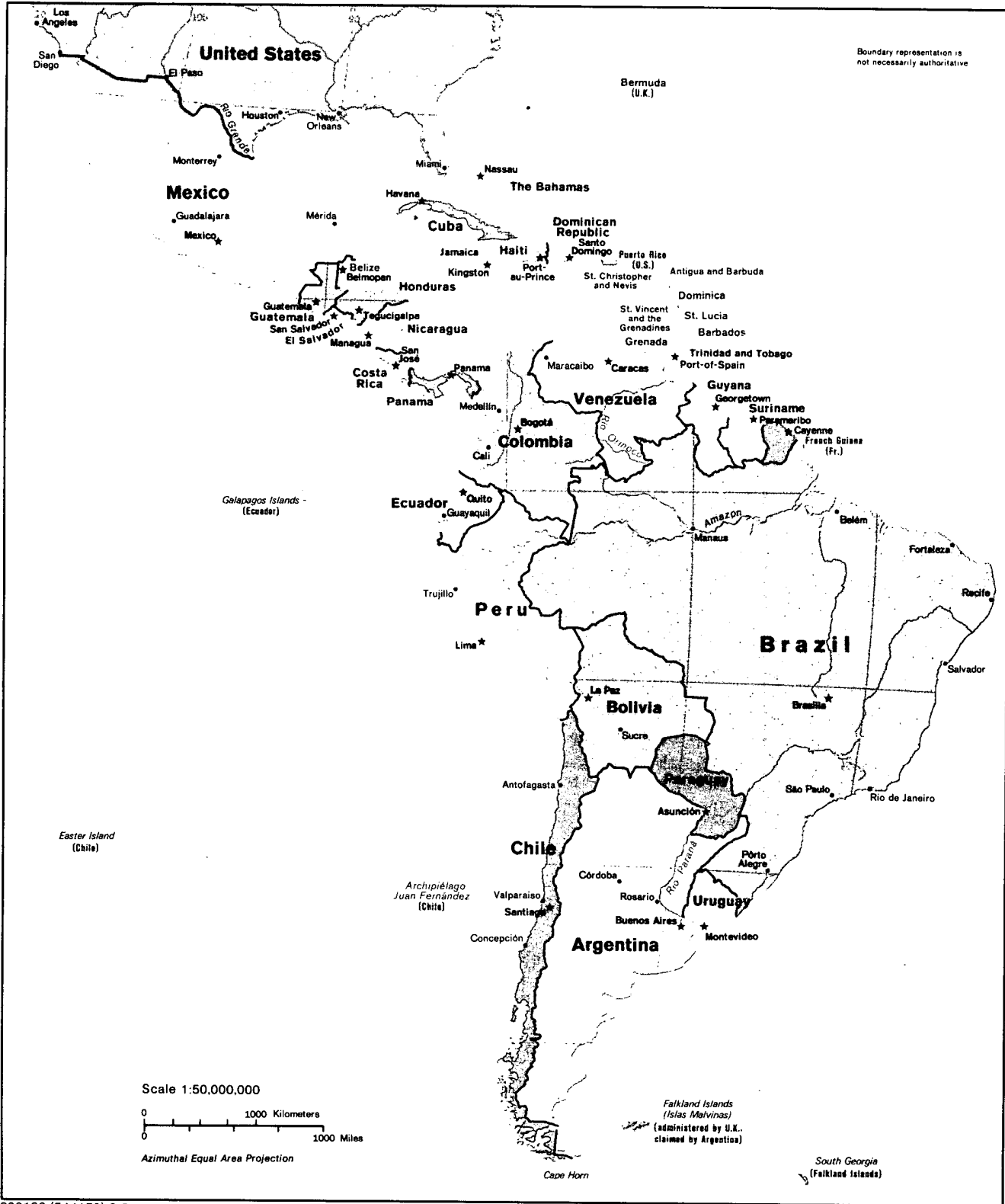
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