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Cuba: Promoting Armed Struggle in South America



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An Intelligence Assessment

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PA 81-10372
September 1981

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Cuba: Promoting Armed Struggle in South America

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An Intelligence Assessment

*Information available as of 1 September 1981
has been used in the preparation of this report.*

This assessment was prepared by

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Office of Political Analysis. Comments and queries
are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Latin
America Division, OPA,

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The assessment was coordinated with the Office of
Strategic Research, the Office of Economic
Research, the Directorate of Operations, and the
National Intelligence Officer for Latin America.

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**Cuba:
Promoting Armed Struggle
in South America**

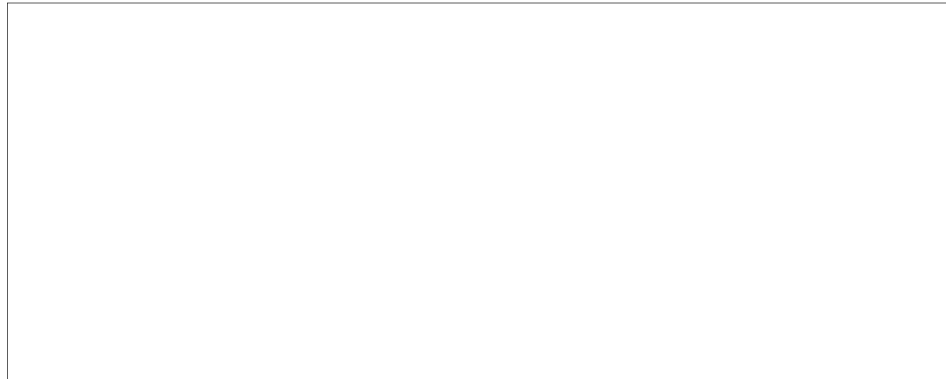
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Key Judgments

Since the overthrow of President Somoza in Nicaragua in 1979, armed struggle has played an increasing role in Cuba's policy toward Latin America. A trend—which shows no sign of abating—has been established toward greater risk-taking and growing dependence on violent revolution as a mainstay of foreign policy.

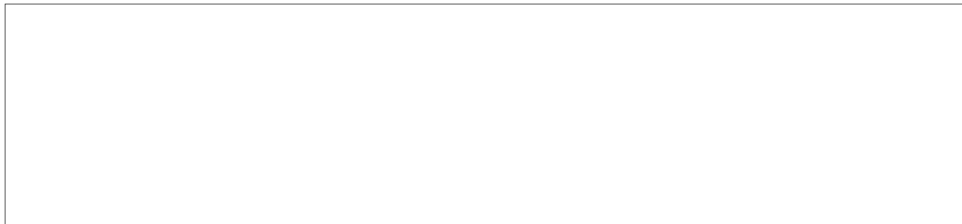
Cuba's hard line has Soviet blessing. The Soviets have come to acknowledge that under certain circumstances rebel groups can serve as the revolutionary vanguard more effectively than can the local Communist party.

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In countries where prospects for revolutionary change are dim, Castro probably believes that a rise in terrorism will provoke enough government repression to lead to mass alienation, one of the factors necessary for revolutionary success. Havana is willing to train guerrillas even from Argentina and Uruguay, where there is little chance of overthrowing the government, in part because the trained insurgents constitute reserves that can fight elsewhere in fulfillment of their "international duty"—as they did in Nicaragua in 1979.

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The Castro regime may revise its tactics as a result of setbacks, but its commitment to violent revolution will not change. Any falloff in its support for Latin American revolutionaries would require events similar to those of the late 1960s—a series of major guerrilla defeats, Cuba's virtual isolation in the hemisphere, and strong pressure from the USSR.



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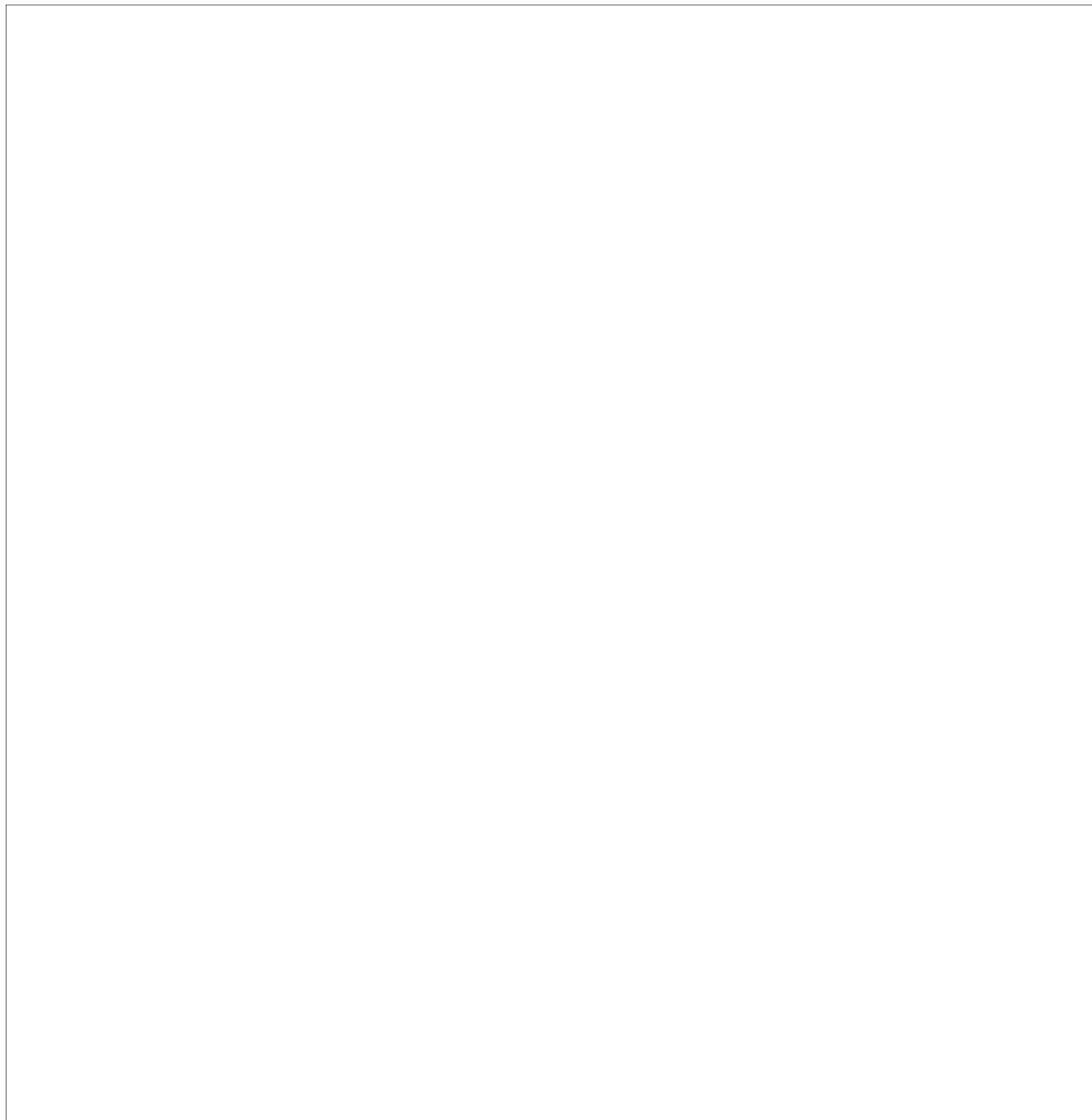
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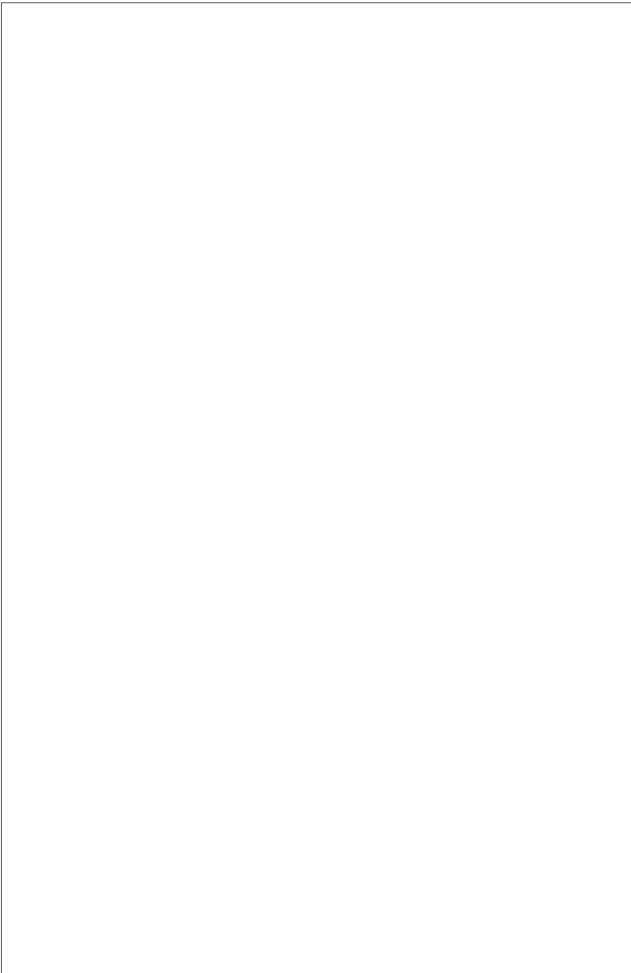
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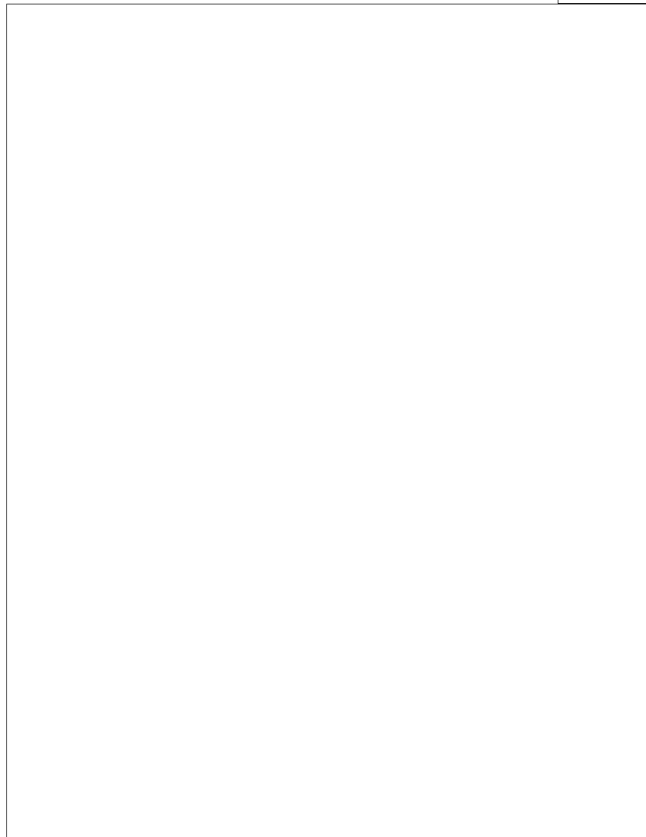
for not developing a paramilitary force strong enough to prevent the coup that unseated him in 1973, and they are determined to make sure that other revolutionaries who achieve power through elections do not make the same mistake. (c)

On the other hand, if the left does not succeed by legitimate means, it can claim that the only way to right social ills is violent revolution, thus providing theoretical justification for armed struggle. A strong paramilitary capability is therefore required regardless of the success or failure of the electoral effort, and the earlier it is created, the sooner the left will be prepared to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. (c)

Supporting South American Revolutionaries

Havana's enthusiasm about developments in Central America quickly grew to include South America. South American revolutionaries and other leftists visiting Havana in early 1979 received much the same advice as their Central American counterparts. 

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The Cubans and the Soviets constantly tout the Sandinista example as evidence of the critical role played by leftist unity and international support in achieving and retaining power. They view these as requisites for legitimizing the revolution and safeguarding it against counterrevolution and outside interference. Although leftist forces also must strengthen their paramilitary capabilities and try to exploit legitimate paths to power until those paths prove fruitless, unity is seen as the linchpin. (c)

If the unified left succeeds through elections, as Salvador Allende did in Chile in 1970, the possession of a strong paramilitary capability protects the leftist leadership and provides insurance against the armed forces which, in Cuba's view, are irreversibly opposed to revolutionary change. The Cubans faulted Allende

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Fidel Castro surrounded by leaders of the Nicaraguan Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) at 26 July 1979 celebrations in Cuba. [redacted] 3.5(c)

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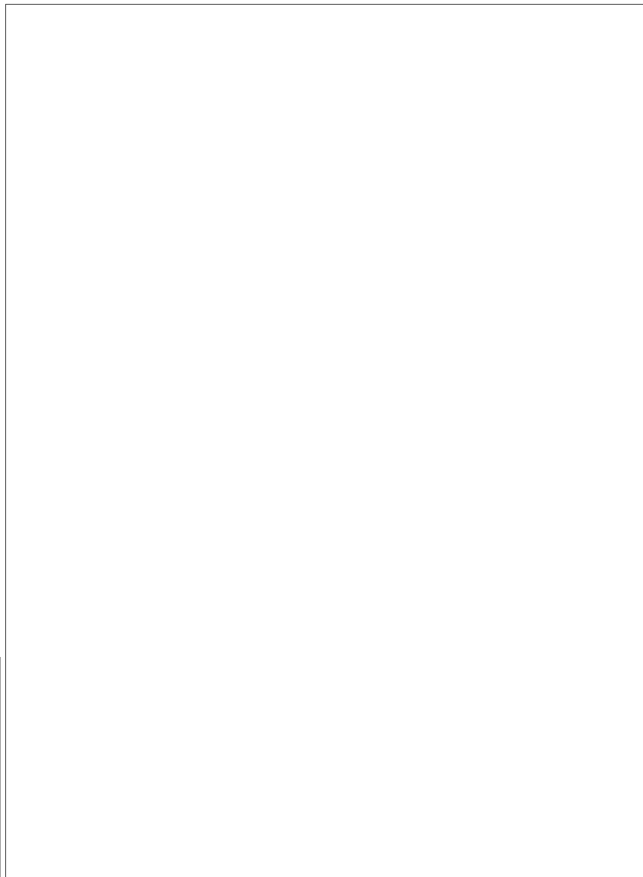
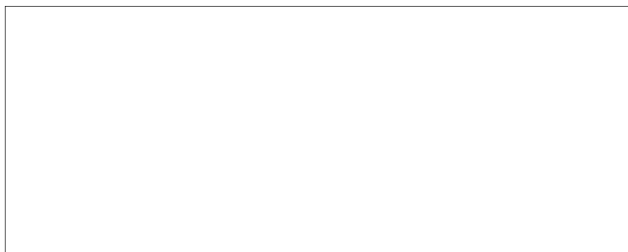
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Reflecting the level of Havana's interest, Fidel Castro became personally involved in some of these efforts. In December 1980 the Cuban leader reportedly met with the secretary general of the Chilean Communist Party and pledged to support the party's efforts to unite the left against Pinochet. Castro also urged the Communist Party to adopt armed struggle and to coordinate its activities more closely with the Movement of the Revolutionary Left. [redacted] 3.5(c)

Havana's tactical advice was accompanied by a sharp increase in direct support to South American insurgents, particularly those from Chile, Colombia, and to a lesser extent Argentina. In the last case, Havana focused its efforts primarily on activities outside Argentina. For example, Cuba employed a number of Montoneros in the so-called "Internationalist Brigade" that fought alongside the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1979. The Cuban media, meantime, provided favorable coverage of all such exploits. [redacted]

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In sum, Castro will continue to promote, and perhaps escalate, revolutionary activity throughout Latin America—albeit less recklessly than in the 1960s. Havana sees prospects for a successful revolution as brightest in Central America and therefore will concentrate its efforts in that region. Nevertheless, the Cubans also will continue to support insurgent groups in South America. The Cuban leader sees promising opportunities through promotion of insurgency to advance Cuban objectives in the region and to restore a sense of revolutionary momentum at home in a period when little else seems to be working to his regime's advantage.

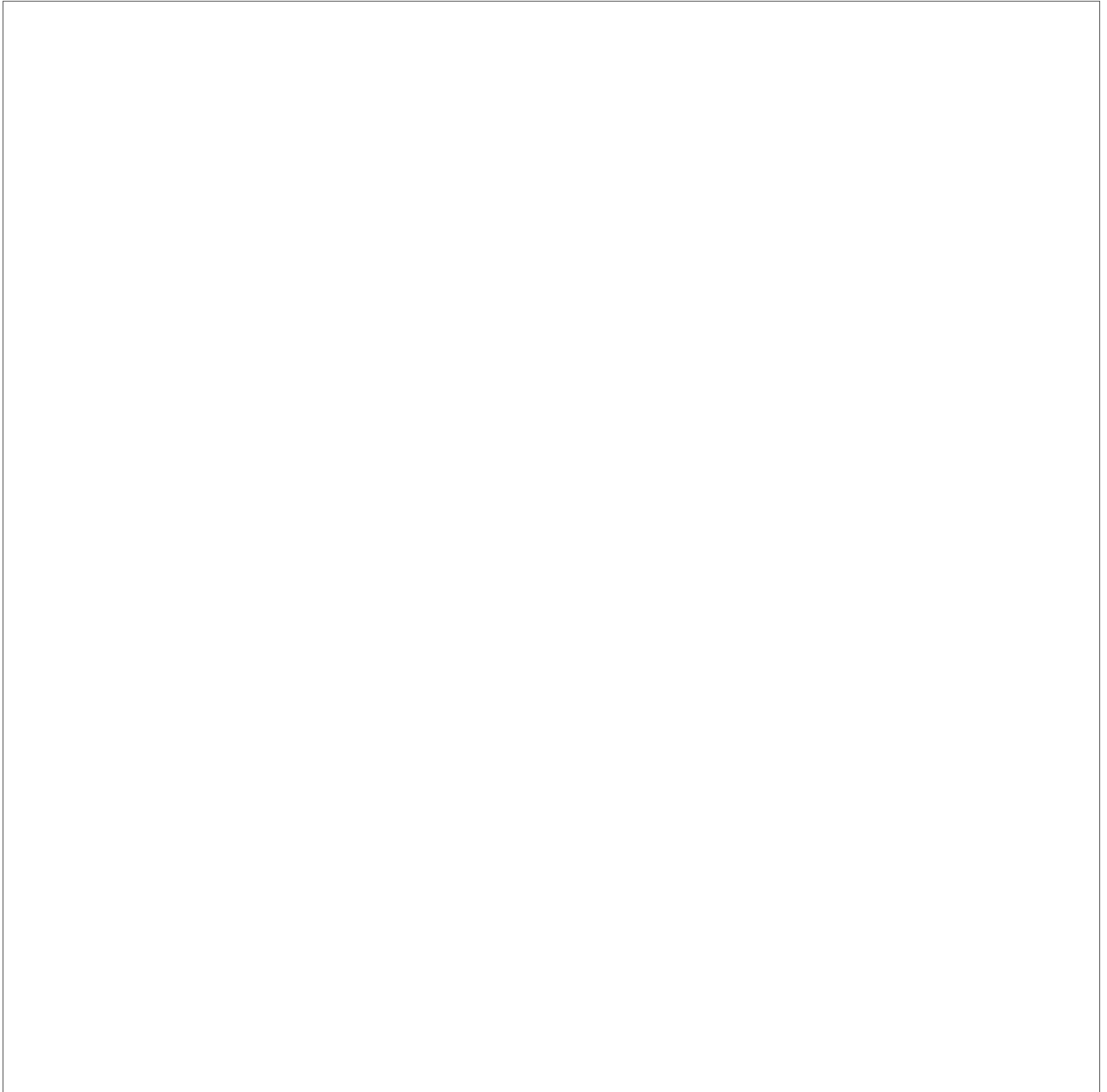
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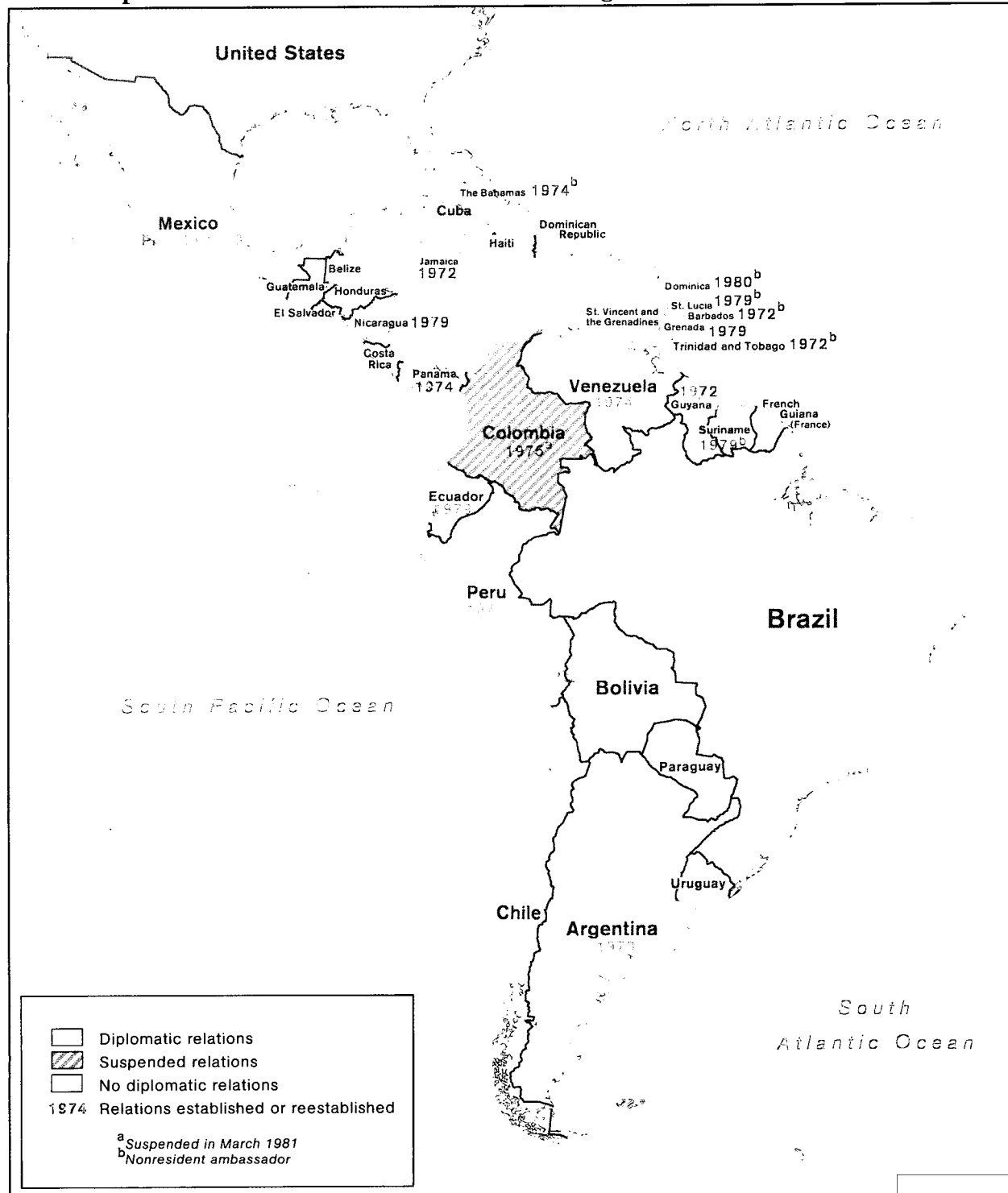
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**Cuban Support of Revolutionaries
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Cuban Diplomatic Relations in Latin America August 1981

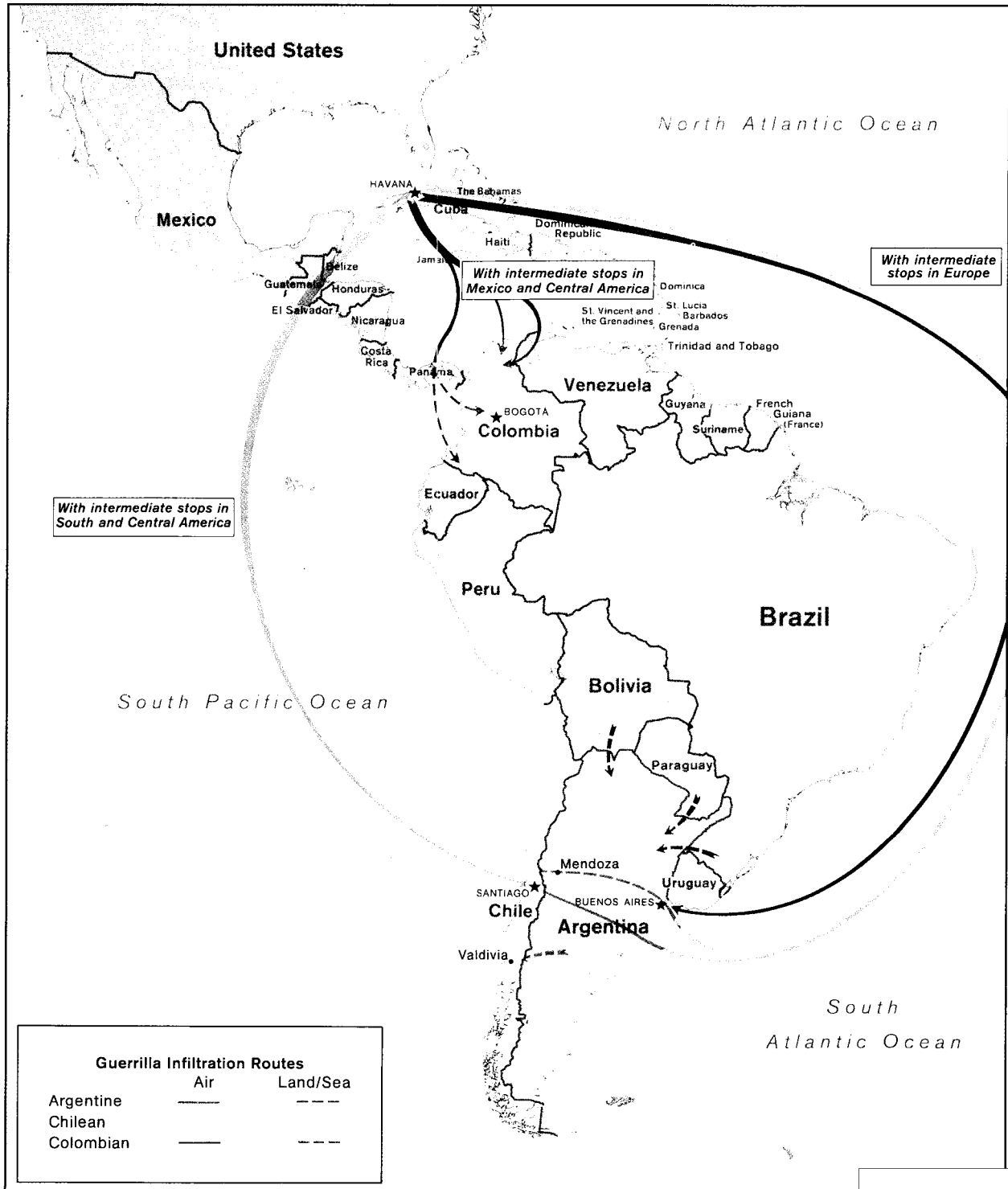


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Known and Suspect Guerrilla Infiltration Routes into Argentina, Chile and Colombia

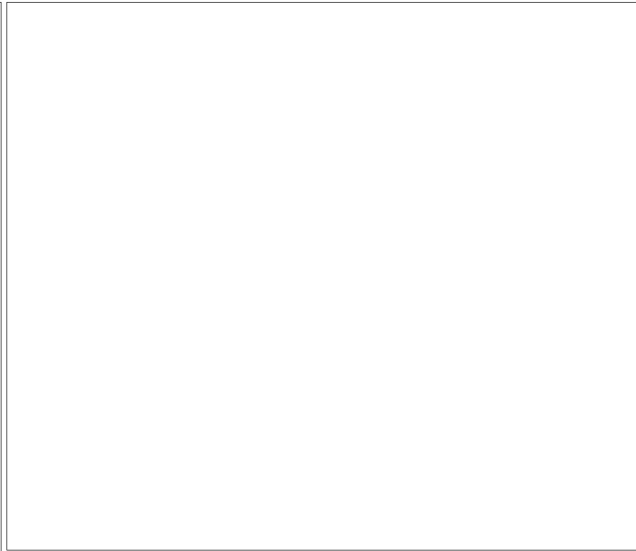
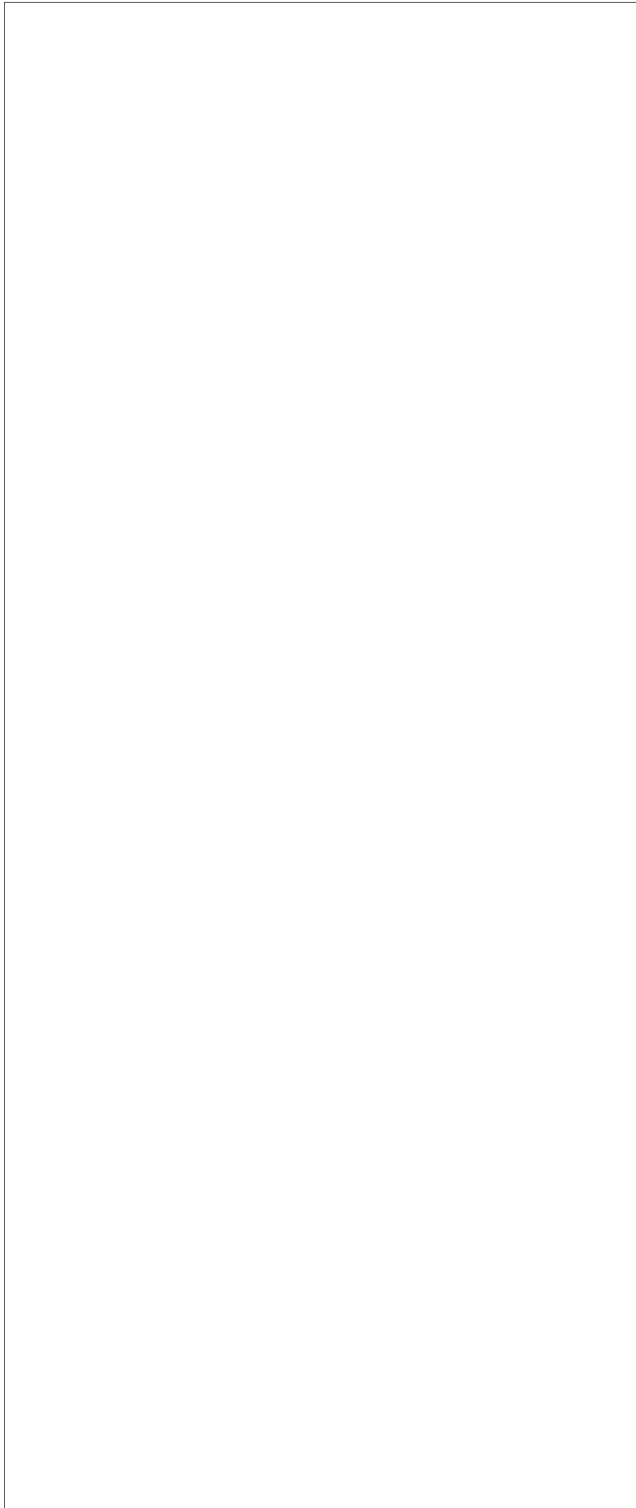


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Argentina

Until the military coup in March 1976, Havana used its diplomats in Buenos Aires to maintain contact with Argentine revolutionaries and the Chilean MIR. [redacted]

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[redacted] in the mid-1970s the

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Cubans met regularly with the Montoneros and the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), providing them with funding and instructions on psychological operations, propaganda, and recruitment, as well as advice on military, labor, and student operations. [redacted]

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Following the coup in 1976, the Argentine Government launched a highly successful campaign to root out subversives. [redacted]

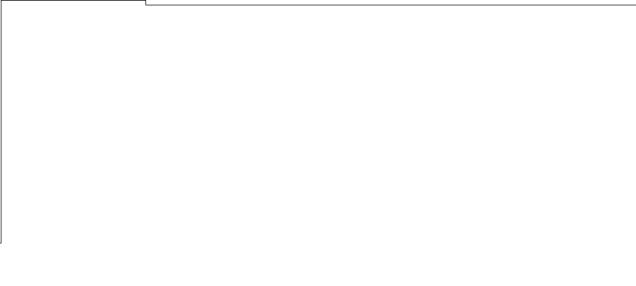
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In August 1976 two Cuban Embassy employees were kidnaped and never found; Havana strongly suspected they had been killed by rightist elements in the Argentine Government. As a result, the Castro regime sharply curtailed its subversive activities in Argentina. [redacted]

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By 1978 the ERP's once-formidable treasury was seriously depleted, its arsenal had shrunk to a few small arms and explosives, most of its leaders were dead or in exile, and fewer than 150 inactive members remained in the country. The Montonero organization, similarly devastated, was reduced to probably no more than 250 members in Argentina, and only a few hundred were in exile—including most of the leaders.

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Havana's economic ties with Buenos Aires also have been a constraint against blatant support of subversive groups. The Argentines, who saw the Cuban market as a means of expanding their exports, extended a \$1.2 billion line of credit in 1973, much of which was used through the mid-1970s to finance purchases of industrial and transportation equipment. In recent years, however, the level of trade has begun to decline (see table). Continuation of this trend will lessen Havana's incentive to avoid antagonizing the Argentine Government. [] 3.5(c)

The first sign of a shift in policy toward Argentina came in 1978 when Cuba invited the Montoneros to the World Youth Festival in Havana in direct contravention of the wishes of the Argentine Communist Party. In early 1979 Cuba organized, armed, and transported an "internationalist brigade" of Latin American revolutionaries—including Cuban-trained Montoneros—to participate in the struggle against the Somoza regime. [] Havana reportedly offered the Montoneros financial assistance, noting that the Argentine Communist Party did not merit such support because it was too conservative and was not working actively enough against the military regime. At the time the Cubans indicated that if the Montoneros were successful, Havana could provide financial assistance to other revolutionary vanguard movements, such as those in Colombia and Uruguay. [] 3.5(c)

By late 1979 Cuban efforts to promote a more aggressive guerrilla strategy in Argentina briefly bore fruit. [] the Montoneros were actively infiltrating more members into Argentina and that terrorist activity inside the country had been revived. The Argentine security service launched a major crackdown, however, and most infiltration

**Cuban-Argentine Trade,
1975-79**

Million US Dollars

	Imports	Cuban Exports
1975	156.5	.06
1976	168.6	.01
1977	167.6	.02
1978	118.3	.07
1979	49.6	.24

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attempts were foiled. Several more attempts to infiltrate guerrillas in late 1980 also proved unsuccessful; large sums of cash were found on the captured guerrillas as was a microfilm of a document outlining a comprehensive plan to increase terrorist activity in Argentina. [] 3.5(c)

These setbacks caused a decline in antigovernment activity by the Montoneros in Argentina, but external training in preparation for eventual infiltration continued. [] the training is part of a recently launched major training program for Latin American revolutionaries organized as a cooperative effort between Palestinian groups and the Cuban and Nicaraguan Governments. [] a group of Latin American revolutionaries—including [] Argentines, [] Brazilians, [] Bolivians, and [] Salvadorans—completed guerrilla warfare training conducted by Palestinians in Lebanon and left for their home countries, where they were to train other guerrilla cadre. Additional groups of Latin American insurgents were to begin training [] and similar courses reportedly have been provided in Syria and South Yemen. Early this year Palestinians involved in these training programs were told by their Cuban and Nicaraguan contacts that, following a leftist victory in El Salvador, the next targets for Communist subversion would be Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, and Guatemala. [] 3.3(b)(1)

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In light of the effectiveness of Argentine security forces and the lack of popular support for leftist violence, a substantial renewal of Montonero activity appears extremely unlikely over the short term. In the meantime, the Montoneros, probably with encouragement from Cuba, will concentrate on operations elsewhere in Latin America.

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[Redacted]

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Small numbers of Montoneros are known to be in contact with other insurgent groups in Central America, particularly in Costa Rica. They probably assisted in the formation of several terrorist cells and—presumably with heavy Cuban assistance—largely staffed and administered Radio Noticias del Continente, which was beaming leftist propaganda throughout Latin America until shut down by Costa Rican authorities in early 1981.

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted] Montonero leader Mario Firmenich issued instructions in March 1981 that members in Europe should travel to Cuba, Mexico, and Nicaragua to “contribute to revolutionary activities” in Central America. The Montoneros probably expect that such activities will improve their capabilities and give them a claim on foreign support for a campaign in Argentina once victory has been achieved in Central America. [Redacted] about 10 Montoneros successfully returned covertly to Argentina between mid-February and mid-March. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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[Redacted] Despite this minor surge in local activity, the Argentine security forces probably will be able to capture most Montoneros who attempt to remain in the country for extended periods. (S NF NC OC)

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