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## CENTRAL AMERICAN ARMS TRAFFICKING: THE COMAYAGUA CACHE

The Honduran far left--working closely with the Cuban-Nicaraguan support apparatus--is an integral part of the infiltration of arms and personnel to the Salvadoran guerrillas. Honduran authorities have recently stepped up interdiction efforts but their country will probably continue to offer regional leftists the potential for clandestine operations.

Regional Arms Trafficking

Of the three northern-tier countries of Central America, Honduras faces the least serious threat to stability from leftist insurgents. Over the past several years, however, the Honduran far left has been integrated into a regional support network. Before 1978, the Honduran Communist Party (PCH) followed a cautious line, but in that year--in large part at Cuban urging--it began to support the Sandinista guerrillas against Somoza. The PCH helped infiltrate Nicaraguan revolutionaries through Honduras, as well as providing training camps and supply depots. Other Honduran leftist groups also aided the Sandinistas with funding and weapons.

The Sandinista support effort provided previously lacking practical experience for the PCH and other leftists. The Cubans, moreover, not only brokered contacts between the PCH and other leftist groups, but accelerated their training efforts to prepare the Honduran left for eventual insurgency. Castro, however, sees Honduras' logistical role as being the major benefit to Cuba's regional policy. Thus, when Havana began establishing support networks for the Salvadoran insurgency shortly after the triumph of the Sandinistas in mid-1979, it was logical to include Honduras.

Meanwhile, however, Cuban support efforts were reactivated in Costa Rica and brought along at a measured pace--at least initially--in Nicaragua. This availability

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of alternative routes points up one of the reasons that it has been difficult to interdict the arms flow to El Salvador: Honduras was important in late 1978; through mid-1979, Costa Rica was a principal conduit; Nicaragua is now the main pipeline.

#### The Comayagua Operation

Guerrilla documents captured by Salvadoran security forces last November indicated that one of the Salvadoran insurgent groups expected delivery of about 20 tons of materiel through Honduras in December. We believe the arms seized at Comayagua in mid-January were the final shipment of this expected materiel.

By mid-December, significant amounts of sophisticated new weaponry were being employed by Salvadoran guerrillas. Especially noteworthy was a sudden influx of M-16 automatic rifles, which provide firepower superior to the semiautomatic G-3 rifle used by the Salvadoran armed forces and had been mentioned in the captured documents.

Last month, Honduran authorities learned of an impending shipment of weapons overland from Nicaragua to the Salvadoran insurgents, and on the 17th, a suspect tractor-trailer was noted at the Guasaule border crossing. The truck was followed to a warehouse outside Comayagua, where Honduran security officials arrested six Salvadoran guerrillas unloading 100 M-16s, 100,000 rounds of M-16 ammunition, and numerous mortar rounds from a secret compartment built into the roof of the trailer.

A search of the warehouse uncovered 200 more M-16s and the same ordnance--M-16 ammunition and mortar rounds--found in the truck. Additional weapons were discovered in wall cavities of the warehouse, along with false passports containing numerous entry and exit stamps from Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Subsequent investigation led to the arrest of several accomplices, including a Costa Rican who reportedly arranged the truck loading in San Jose. In addition, security officials confiscated several light trucks--carrying M-16 ammunition and rocket launchers--that were probably used to transport the weapons in smaller parcels to guerrillas in the border areas of northern El Salvador.

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Many of the M-16s found during the raid have been traced to former US Army stockpiles in Vietnam during the early 1970s, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The total weight of the Comayagua arms capture was approximately 3-1/2 tons; the rest of the 20-ton shipment presumably already had reached El Salvador.

#### Outlook

Honduran authorities clearly have discovered a major arms-support apparatus through their Comayagua investigation. Early this month, for instance, security forces were able to raid four Salvadoran guerrilla safehouses in Comayagua, La Paz, Siguatepeque, and Tegucigalpa.

The disruption of this operation is a significant setback both to the Honduran Communists and to the Salvadoran guerrillas, but it may not prove lasting. After similar reverses in the past, apparatus have been fairly quickly reestablished. Moreover, the Comayagua operation may be only one of several clandestine support networks. Honduran authorities are investigating another operation, for example, in which Honduran leftists are recruited and paid \$400 monthly to fight with Salvadoran insurgents; guerrilla training camps for these recruits have reportedly been operating near La Masica and La Cruz.

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