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CHILE: TERRORISM STILL COUNTERPRODUCTIVE

The Movement of the Revolutionary Left's recently expanded operations so far have had only a minimal psychological and political impact. The MIR's efforts to assassinate government officials have not yet undermined the public's sense of security nor have they shaken domestic or foreign business confidence in the regime's ability to maintain order. Moreover, the MIR also has failed to provoke the security services into overreacting and thereby alienating the public. In fact, the security forces have used good intelligence and improved operational skill to score several successes. They seem confident that they can continue to restrict the MIR to isolated, although sometimes dramatic, acts of terrorism. The Pinochet regime probably actually benefits from such incidents because the violence reinforces the President's claim that continuing restrictions on political life are necessary.

Increased Scope of Operations

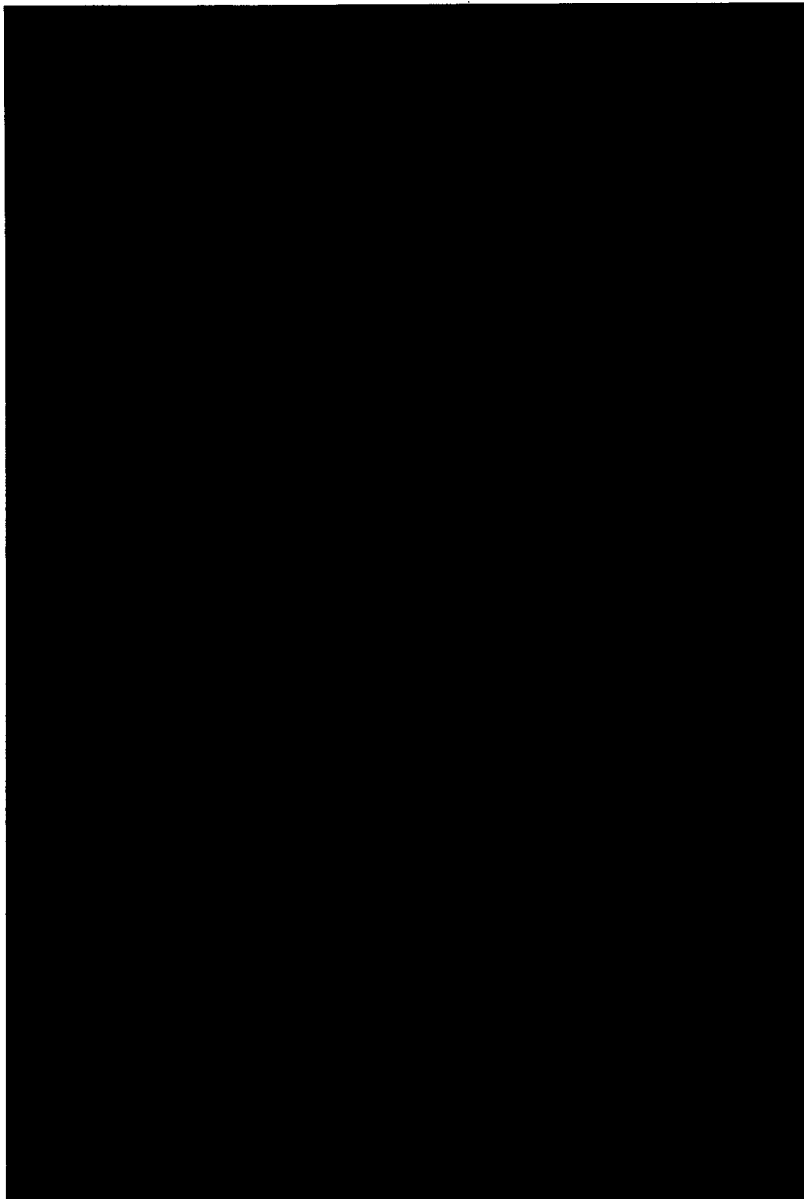
The MIR has been trying to broaden the scope of its campaign against the regime by:

- Establishing base camps in the countryside, reportedly hoping to promote rural insurgency.
- Forming a Democratic Youth Front at the University of Santiago with the Communists to try to provide support for propaganda and political agitation.
- Switching from minor assaults and bank robberies executed by auxiliary members to more significant operations, such as the attempted assassination of the Supreme Court President, which was carried out by high-level guerrillas.

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The MIR's official newsletter highlights a rural base camp, Neltume, as the "spark of rebellion." ■

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The decision to step up activities has been costly for the terrorists. On 9 November, three days after the assault on the Supreme Court President, the police killed four MIR leaders near the Foreign Minister's residence, thus apparently forestalling another assassination attempt. In sweeps carried out from June to November, security forces destroyed two rural base camps in the mountains of southern Chile, seizing large caches of munitions and killing or capturing a score of MIR operatives. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Cuban Support

Cuban President Castro apparently remains undaunted by the prospect of a long and often unrewarding struggle against the Pinochet regime. Havana's ideologues are genuinely convinced that armed struggle is the only way to achieve true social change in Chile. In their view, the existence of active MIR units serves as a rallying point for the disaffected and a reminder that the Pinochet government has not smothered all resistance. Moreover, the MIRistas who survive this difficult period will have earned, at least in Cuban eyes, the right to claim for themselves the leadership of the entire revolutionary movement once it gains momentum--Cuba supported the FSLN in Nicaragua for years under similar circumstances. In addition, supporting an insurgency in Chile, even an unsuccessful one, satisfies to a degree the Castro regime's thirst for revenge against the forces that overthrew President Allende. [REDACTED]

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Leftist Disunity

For the most part, the MIR has been unable to convince the other leftist parties to join it in revolutionary violence. Although exiled Communist Party leaders, many of whom are in Moscow, have pledged support for violent confrontation, domestic party members have demonstrated a notable reluctance to go beyond propaganda and political agitation.

[REDACTED]

The other leftist parties have formed a front organization, the Socialist Convergence, which has rejected violence and instead is trying to rebuild a political base.

[REDACTED]

In the present milieu, they think that violence only provides the regime with a justification for continued repression, thus postponing a return to civilian government. Consequently, the moderate left hopes to reconstruct a clandestine political infrastructure among student, intellectual, and labor groups.

[REDACTED]

In the short term, the MIR probably will be able to do little more than maintain informal contacts with elements of the nonviolent left. The MIR may derive some benefit from the left's parallel activities among student and labor organizations, but it cannot expect the Convergence to risk association with guerrilla operations.

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Prospects

While the MIR is still a threat, its prospects for destabilizing or even severely disrupting Pinochet's rule remain slim. The present quiet in the countryside as well as traditional peasant conservatism bodes ill for the terrorists' hopes of promoting rural insurgency. In addition, the MIR probably will continue to suffer defections by exiles who return from overseas to find that the revolutionary potential is far less than they had expected. Finally, efforts to unify the left to take violent action are not likely to be productive under present conditions despite Cuban promises of substantial aid. [REDACTED]

General Pinochet continues to be a formidable foe for any revolutionary movement. He retains both military backing and considerable popularity among civilians. The regime's greatest potential vulnerability is the economy, which, although still strong, has begun to slow down. Foreign investors have not lost confidence in the government, however, and Chile's improved international image, particularly its better relations with the United States, have raised Pinochet's domestic standing. Finally, the security services' recent successes have demonstrated the government's ability to respond effectively to the terrorists without overreacting. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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