Directorate of
Intelligence

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Guatemala: Significant Political Actors and Their Interaction

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Despite these gains and the resiliency of the insurgency, the inability of the major guerrilla groups—described below—to overcome widespread ideological and personality differences has limited their effectiveness [redacted] As a consequence, decisions on military actions generally are uncoordinated—an insurgent failing that we believe has helped the Guatemalan military by mid-1985 to carve back the insurgency to what we estimate are about 1,500 full-time combatants, roughly half its 1982 force level. Even though the rebels are unlikely to reverse the momentum now favoring the government, we nevertheless expect that they will retain their ability to conduct urban terrorism, carry out assassinations, and sabotage economically important targets. [redacted]

Major Insurgent Groups. The Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), Guatemala's oldest insurgent group, was founded in 1962 as a breakaway faction of the pro-Moscow Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT). Although decimated during the counterinsurgency campaign of the late 1960s, the FAR reemerged in 1977 and now operates principally in the remote northern department of El Peten. Headed by the Cuban-trained Jorge Ismael Soto Garcia, the FAR is a small but highly effective combat force of some 400 to 500 members, and it may be the only insurgent group to have grown since Rios Montt initiated the country's innovative counterinsurgency program in 1982. The resurgence in early 1985 of insurgent activity in the Las Minas Mountains area of eastern Zacapa Department is probably the work of FAR guerrillas trying to exploit the Army's thinly stretched logistic and transportation lines. The government's limited presence in the Zacapa area may be an added enticement for the FAR. In similar circumstances the FAR has built what we judge—on the basis of its apparent foreknowledge of troop movements and success in evading government sweep operations—is an excellent intelligence and supply network in the Peten. [redacted]

Perhaps the major reason behind the FAR's relative success, however, is its location within a sparsely populated and economically unimportant area and the concentration of government counterinsurgency assets elsewhere. However, the Army's growing concern over its continuing problems with the FAR is likely to make this guerrilla group a major counterinsurgency target. [redacted] (b)(1)

that four infantry battalions—one composed of units on rotation from other commands—are dedicated to the Peten this year, and that tighter security measures around Santa Elena Airbase and other military installations also have been noted in recent months. [redacted] (b)(3)

The Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), headed by Ricardo Ramirez de Leon, is Guatemala's largest insurgent group with an estimated 600 to 850 full-time members. Originally formed by FAR dissidents in the early 1970s, the EGP began military operations of its own in 1975 and has been one of the most effective of the insurgent factions because of its emphasis on working among Guatemala's large Indian population. [redacted] (b)(3) (b)(1)

the group's tactics are similar to those of other insurgent groups. It ambushes small Army units when it can, collects "war taxes" at makeshift roadblocks, temporarily occupies small towns and farms for propaganda purposes, and periodically destroys selected economic targets, such as specialized farm machinery. [redacted] (b)(3)

The EGP emphasizes the establishment of extensive local supply networks and the creation of a part-time militia. Its operations focus largely on the northwestern highlands area of Huehuetenango and Quiche Departments, where it recruits among the Indian and peasant populations. In early 1982, the EGP was in de facto control of much of Huehuetenango Department, where it overran a small military garrison—the first and last such success by any insurgent group. In response, US defense attache [redacted] (b)(1)
shows that the Rios Montt government concentrated its heaviest counterinsurgency effort against EGP

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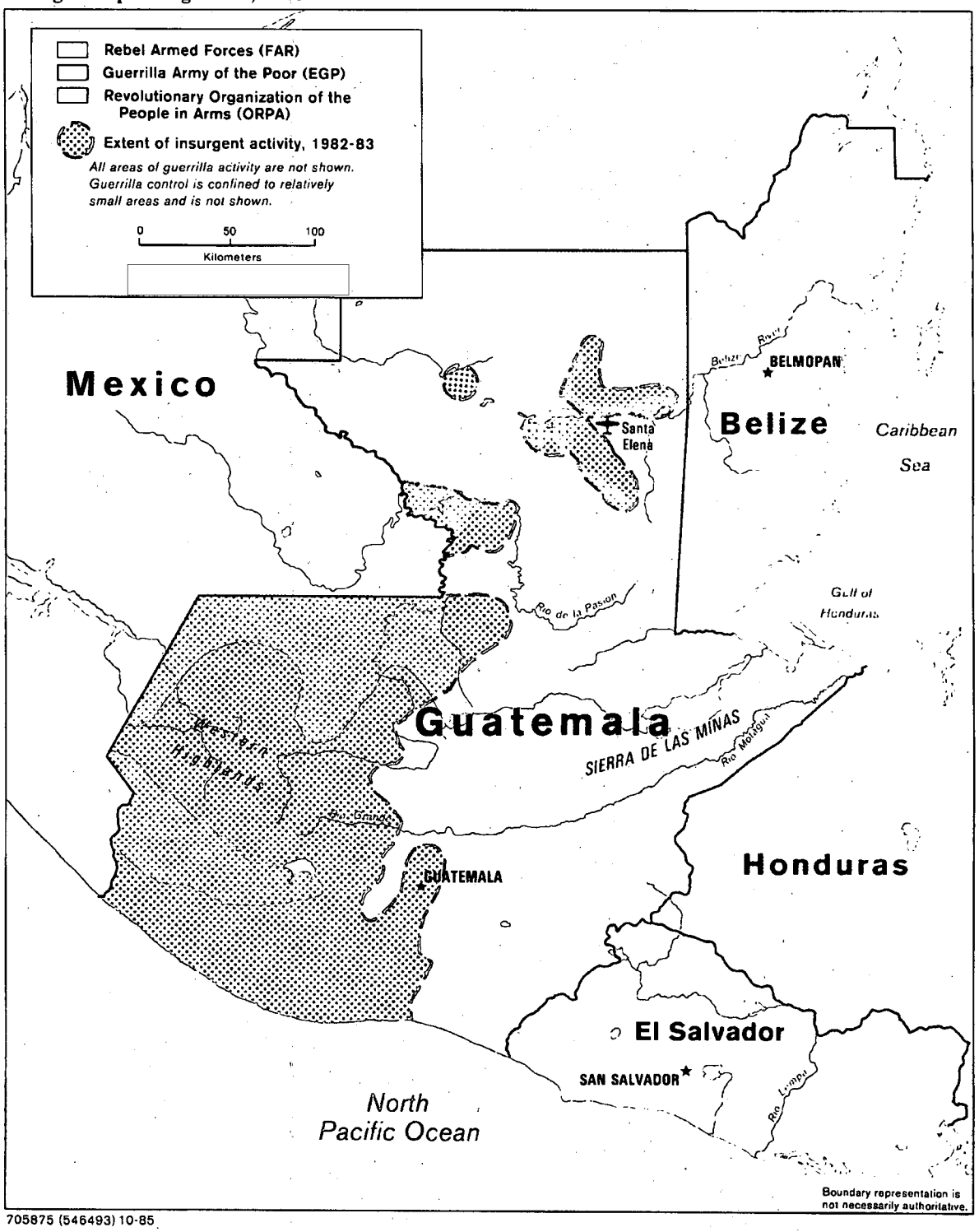
Figure 3
Insurgent Operating Areas, 1985



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strongholds during the remainder of 1982. The government's subsequent introduction of patrol bases in remote areas, civilian defense units, and model villages into the highly contested area, in our judgment, has since severely disrupted the EGP's base of support by undercutting its ability to rely on the population for supplies and safehaven. The EGP has retaliated by attacking the ill-equipped and poorly trained civilian defense patrols to demonstrate that the military cannot protect their villages.

The Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA), led by Rodrigo Asturias Amado, is Guatemala's second-largest insurgent organization. On the basis of US Embassy reporting, we estimate that ORPA has 450 to 600 full-time combatants. Originally formed in 1971 as a splinter group of the FAR, ORPA did not begin military operations until 1979, presumably using the intervening period to establish its infrastructure and support base among the Indian population. According to this group's periodic publications and public pronouncements, ORPA appears to be less ideologically rigid than the other major insurgent groups. Unlike the larger EGP, ORPA also does not advocate a broad-based rural structure, preferring instead to concentrate on training and equipping its cadre. ORPA conducts its operations along the southern edge of the Western Highlands from the Mexican border in San Marcos Department eastward toward the slopes of the Atitlan Volcano in Solola Department—a traditional insurgent stronghold

ORPA's reliance on small, well-trained units—a factor that reduces its vulnerability to penetration—thus far has allowed it to escape entrapment by the military. In contrast to 1983, however, when insurgent and military communiques alike show ORPA guerrillas were responsible for some of the most damaging attacks against the government, large-scale sweeps by the Army in San Marcos Department in mid-1984 seriously hurt this guerrilla group. ORPA's ability to conduct urban terrorist operations was severely damaged in early 1984 after counterterrorist raids by government security forces decimated the leadership of three other small terrorist groups and forced ORPA to withdraw its urban units to the countryside. Even so, ORPA appeared to be recovering from its rural setbacks by early 1985, when local press accounts show that it briefly occupied the important resort town of Santiago Atitlan in Solola Department and soon afterward seized another small town in San Marcos Department. (b)(3)

The dissident faction of the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT/D) was formed in 1978 by veteran Communist Jose Alberto Cardoza Aguilar, when the party's longtime leadership—fearing government retaliation—refused to join the armed revolution. Despite being the newest and smallest member of the insurgency, the PGT/D, which maintains close ties to the EGP, periodically has carried out bombings, assassinations, and kidnappings, according to communiques issued by the party. Cardoza, however, has failed to recruit noticeable numbers of new adherents to the party, probably because he has attempted to guide the PGT/D from his sanctuary in Mexico. As a result, we believe the group has now probably dwindled to only several dozen diehard followers. (b)(3) (b)(1)

The orthodox Moscow-line faction of the Communist Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT/O), which has operated underground since the mid-1950s, is led by Ricardo Rosales Roman. Active membership is probably less than 200, although the party probably has some sympathy among unionized labor. Unlike the PGT/D, it has not yet openly adopted armed revolution and is not a member of the insurgent alliance. the PGT/O is attempting to outfit a small armed contingent suggests, however, that party leaders may have finally succumbed to the longtime pressures from members of the rebel alliance and their supporters in Havana, Managua, and Moscow to have them join the struggle. (b)(1) (b)(3)

a small dissident group of young militants, in an action similar to the PGT/D breakaway in 1978, split with Rosales and other party leaders in January 1984—again over the issue of armed insurrection. Although the small militant faction is disorganized, it could later rejoin the party if efforts to form a military arm prove successful. (b)(1) (b)(3)

Searching for Unity: The URNG. The Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) was formally established in Havana in February 1982 and publicly proclaimed to exercise joint command and control over all Guatemalan guerrilla forces, much as the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) attempts in El Salvador. Despite pressure over the years from its Cuban and Nicaraguan patrons to unify—including periodic threats of an arms cutoff—the URNG remains little more than a propaganda shell. Its members—the FAR, EGP, ORPA, and PGT/D—probably resent Havana's attempts to force them to stifle their strong ideological and personality differences to ensure continued Cuban aid.

cooperation among the various insurgent groups may be increasing. The apparent simultaneity of insurgent attacks across several departments in early 1985, for example, suggests that some of the actions were coordinated in advance. the guerrillas also are now carrying out limited joint operations in some areas. We believe such cooperation stems largely from the rebels' dwindling ranks, increasing loss of popular support, and the need to demonstrate that they remain a viable military threat.

Outlook and Implications for the United States

We anticipate no major shifts in the positions of the key political actors and groups discussed in this paper over the near term. Moreover, we expect Guatemala's policymaking process on major issues will continue to be based on broad, enduring national values that historically have colored the country's outlook toward the United States.

Guatemalans believe, for example, that size, population, and relative economic and military strength entitle Guatemala to a preeminent role in Central America. Contributing to this sense of national pride is the awareness that Guatemala's military successes against leftist guerrillas have taken place without US military aid. Guatemalans also do not view themselves as having any worse a record than the Hondurans or the Salvadorans in the area of human rights. Thus, they contend that they are being victimized by a double standard, and argue that US human rights policy has discriminated against Guatemala and created an imbalance between the treatment received by their country and the The resulting "go it alone" attitude and resentment of the United States color Guatemala's policy perspective, and in our opinion, is reflected in an ambivalent willingness to cooperate with Washington, particularly among military leaders. (b)(1) (b)(3)

Regardless of who wins the election, we believe that Guatemalans regard the US role in influencing their country's political fate as crucial and that they want to deal directly with Washington on a multitude of bilateral and regional issues. In this regard, we expect that centrist-oriented groups will seek moral and material support from Washington as a means of obtaining and sustaining leverage with the Guatemalan armed forces. Although we believe that obtaining US economic and developmental assistance will be given the highest priority by the new government, virtually all of Guatemala's announced presidential candidates have at one time or another proclaimed their support for more than a These same leaders are quick to add, however, that the renewal of such aid must be contingent on a continuation of the democratization process. (b)(3) (b)(1) (b)(1) (b)(3)

The military establishment is likely to be anxious about its future no matter what the outcome of the presidential election. We believe that many officers are deeply concerned that a DCG victory might bring reprisals against them for past abuses, or that the (b)(1) (b)(3) (b)(3)

Army's ability to conduct its counterinsurgency programs will be seriously curtailed by a civilian-led government. Still others fear any outcome—for example, a Sandoval victory—that might jeopardize US aid. The military, in our view, is overwhelmingly compelled by the need to shed its role of international pariah in order to pave the way for increased military and economic assistance. As a result, it will continue to try to adhere to its pledged neutrality in the contest, and—unless its institutional prerogatives are severely threatened—will honor the vote's outcome.

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While the military and the key parties are working toward a smooth transition to civilian rule, the potential for violence during the presidential campaign appears greatest from groups that occupy both extremes of the political spectrum. The guerrillas probably are fearful that a successful election in November will bring increased levels of

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further jeopardizing their prospects. As a result, we expect that Guatemala's various guerrilla organizations may attempt to carry out more widespread ambush and harassment operations designed to lower voter turnout and discredit the election.

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we believe further that the 1984 Constituent Assembly election caused an active debate within some armed factions about whether or not to continue the armed struggle. If, as is likely, the insurgents are unable to disrupt the vote, these ideological fissures almost certainly would widen, thus further weakening the insurgency.

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The left's perspective is closely mirrored by many elements of the Guatemalan right, which see a victory by the left—either by force of arms or at the ballot box—as totally unacceptable. As the political opening grows and activism from all sectors increases, the potential for violent action by the right against political figures, labor leaders, university professors, and others could escalate as rightwing extremists try to limit the gains and slow the momentum of their reform-minded competitors. Such an occurrence, in our judgment, would seriously jeopardize the democratization process and set back progress made by the current military regime in improving Guatemala's image at home and abroad.

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