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THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

(Entire Text)

January 26, 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT
From: Alexander M. Haig, Jr. 
Subject: El Salvador

We have been very lucky in El Salvador. The Durarte military/civilian government fortunately defeated the major January offensive despite the fact that almost no U.S. military assistance had reached them at the time the offensive opened. Six helicopters and substantial other arms and ammunition have now been supplied. Given the regular and recently increasing flow of arms from Castro and his friends to the insurgents, the outcome might have been quite different. Perhaps the key factor was that the general population gave little support to the communists. There is still a flow of equipment and perhaps people to the insurgents from outside El Salvador. We shall have to deal with that problem in a more general context.

We need to address the El Salvador problem in a comprehensive way while quickly rectifying the policy and implementation errors of the previous Administration.

Surprisingly, I have not found a comprehensive analysis of the background and current status available in State or any other agency. Our first step must be to understand fully the nature of the problem before you commit the administration to a policy. Several key factors in this background emerge from the initial interagency work I have started:

-- El Salvador is a small overpopulated coffee republic with a tradition of oligarchical rule and military repression of popular discontent. Over the last few years, it has become a classic case of internal unrest capitalized upon by foreign communists to increase violence and attack our interests.

-- The Salvadoran security forces total about 16,000. The 8,300-man Army is the most disciplined core of the security forces but is composed of conscripts on 18-month duty. The ranks of the National Guard

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(3,000), National Police (3,500), and Treasury Police (1,200) have traditionally been filled with former soldiers. The police and National Guard man outposts throughout the country and have often been used by leaders of the local power structure as their private enforcers, leading to abuses against the population.

-- The Salvadoran general staff estimates that total guerrilla strength exceeds 9200, including 3700 full-time guerrillas and 5500 militia. (We believe these figures are inflated -- 3,000-4,000 guerrillas is probably more accurate.)

-- The guerrillas have commitments of support from the Cubans, the Soviets and the PLO. The guerrillas have acquired quantities of arms (many Western-made) from Soviet and Eastern European sources. Cuba has helped in smuggling arms and has provided training for perhaps as many as a thousand guerrillas.

The extent of the future problem will obviously depend on how much outside support the guerrillas continue to receive. If such support is not contained, it would be necessary to expand the size of the Salvadoran military and provide it with major amounts of modern arms. The 700 officers of the Salvadoran military are generally well trained - a majority have some US training. But they do not have experience with larger than guerrilla operations and are woefully weak on logistics. A major training effort would be required by U.S. forces. The presence of substantial numbers of U.S. military in the country would run major risks of polarizing the situation in El Salvador, uniting the people against the foreigners, and of polarizing the U.S. along Vietnam lines.

If substantial support from outside can be cut off, it appears the current or modestly expanded Salvadoran forces can control the situation so long as we provide the fairly modest amounts of materiel needed.

In the major interagency study now underway we shall analyze the above preliminary findings. On a separate sensitive track we shall be working on ways to curtail outside support for the insurgents. We shall provide you a comprehensive action plan in about 10 days.

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On Saturday State chaired an interagency meeting to develop options on El Salvador. There was substantial interagency agreement, including DOD, CIA, AID, ICA, OMB, NSC.

I believe we need to await the more comprehensive study before acting on the principal interagency action item, a strong statement of consistent reliable support for the Government of El Salvador. However, I shall proceed with the following agreed recommendations:

-- Provide immediately the \$5 million from the unexpended portions of FY '81 FMS credit and the 506 determination grant funds to supply El Salvador ammunition, grenade launchers, machine guns and other military equipment.

-- Commit quickly the \$17.9 million in unexpended AID and PL-480 assistance for El Salvador.

-- Begin staff work immediately to develop in consultation with Duarte an integrated policy plan for El Salvador; staffing will demonstrate domestic and foreign policy trade-offs and include public initiatives essential to gain the necessary Congressional and public support.

In addition I have recalled Ambassador White from El Salvador for consultations and then reassignment. I believe we need a strong man to take over that mission quickly - one who can work quietly and effectively with the government and stay out of the limelight.

The biggest problem with the previous Administration's policy on El Salvador was that it was not steady and consistent. Assistance was promised one day, turned off the next. Neither the Salvadorans nor our friends around the world knew where we stood. We need to establish a firm policy and stick with it.

Defense strongly recommends that we send additional military training teams to El Salvador. There is major interagency disagreement on the introduction of significantly greater number of Americans, both on the need and the political implications in El Salvador and here. I note that both President Duarte and his Foreign Minister have urged that we not send additional US military personnel to El Salvador. At the same time we may have to send some additional people in order to attain our objectives. This issue will receive careful study.

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