

# Soviets target Guatemala, with aid from Her Majesty's Commonwealth

by Jeffrey Steinberg

*The author recently returned from a visit to Guatemala. In October 1985, he toured the Petén region and reported on the Guatemalan Armed Forces' successful anti-drug operation, Guatusa I, in which tens of millions of dollars in marijuana crops were destroyed and evidence was captured proving the total integration of Soviet/Cuban-backed terrorist organizations in drug trafficking.*

On Jan. 14, 1986, Christian Democrat Vinicio Cerezo was inaugurated as the first civilian President of Guatemala in 30 years. The peaceful election and transition process was a tribute to the commitment of the Guatemalan Armed Forces to reopen the political process after decades of combat against Soviet- and Cuban-sponsored insurgency efforts, aided by the U.S. Carter administration's 1977 blacklisting of Guatemala from any military or economic aid on the hypocritical grounds of "human rights violations."

One contributing factor to the success of the electoral process was a surprise military assault against 40 marijuana plantations in the northeast section of Guatemala, plantations for the most part run by the FAR (Armed Revolutionary Forces). At the end of October 1985, on the eve of the first runoff round of presidential elections, a battalion of Guatemalan Army troops conducted a 72-hour assault against the jungle plantations on the border with Belize, destroying crops valued at over \$20 million on the retail markets in the United States, and capturing literature and explosives linked to the FAR. The elections came off smoothly, and FAR representatives, as well as spokesmen for Fidel Castro winced at the fact that they had been caught knee-deep in the dope trade.

At the time of the Cerezo inauguration, this author, again recently returned from a visit to Guatemala City, wrote that within the first hundred days of his administration, Cerezo would have to set the path that his government would pursue—choosing between the course adopted by Peruvian President Alan García—an aggressive war on Soviet-backed narco-terrorism and a commitment to defend the people of his nation against the looting policies of the International Monetary Fund and the major international banks—or that of Argentine President Raúl Alfonsín. Alfonsín, on the other hand, has fully swallowed the IMF's conditionalities, and has tragically directed his government into a crusade to de-

stroy the Argentine military.

Over eight months have passed since the Cerezo inauguration, and the President has yet to clearly define his government's policies on any major issues.

For its part, the United States has failed miserably to live up to its commitments to support the recently democratized Guatemala. Swept up in the budget-cutting frenzy of Gramm-Rudman, and the State Department and Congress's continued adherence to the Carter-era vow to "break" the Guatemalan military, the Reagan administration to date has provided no assistance to the embattled Guatemalans.

Guatemala is quickly becoming a time-bomb ticking away in America's own backyard. A government that as yet has shown little capacity to confront the grave crisis facing the nation, a recently escalated Soviet-backed insurgency poking for any openings provided by the recent democratization process, and a United States blind to the pending crisis: All of the ingredients of a tragedy waiting to happen are playing out—much faster than anyone in Washington cares to notice.

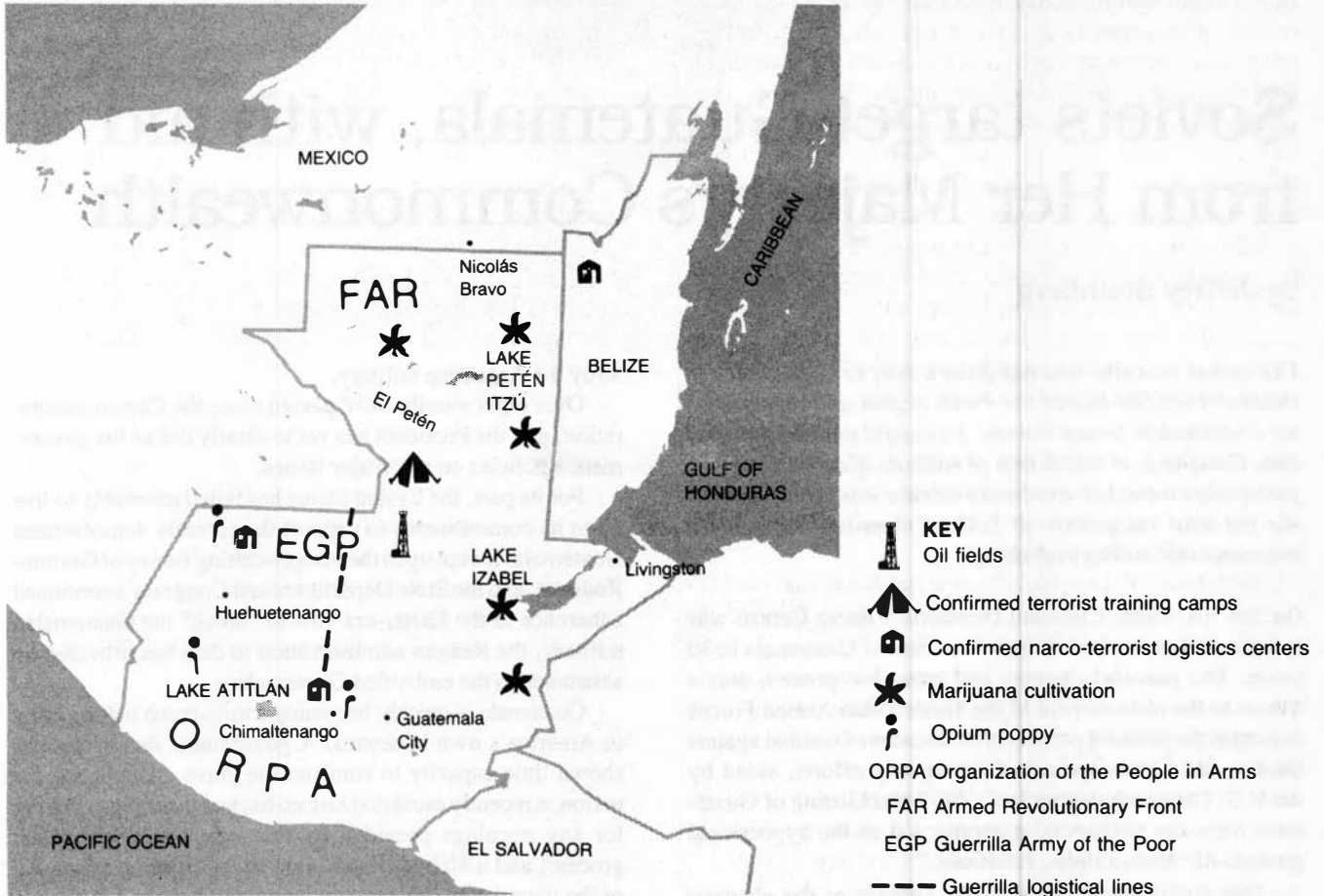
The combination of significant overt and covert U.S. military and paramilitary presence in neighboring El Salvador and Honduras, and the continued failure of the Reagan administration to restore the economic and military aid cut off with the Carter administration so-called human rights crusade, has defined Guatemala as the number-one regional target of opportunity for Soviet destabilization.

As has been the case in the still-unfolding drama in southern Africa, Moscow has found a willing ally against Guatemala in the British Commonwealth: Belize, formerly British Honduras, an independent Commonwealth member-nation since the late 1970s, is presently serving as the most important staging area and logistics base for the recently heavily re-armed insurgency forces active inside Guatemala.

Occupying the bulk of the Atlantic-Caribbean coastal area of the northern tier of Central America, Belize has the port and highway infrastructure to bring weapons into Guatemala to service the narco-insurgents, who, in turn, ship Guatemalan marijuana and opium poppies, as well as cocaine transshipped from Cartagena, Colombia, through covert landing strips on the Pacific coastal plain of Guatemala into Belize.

From Belize, those drugs are reported by regional drug-

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enforcement officials to be 1) shipped to the U.S. markets via the conventional Caribbean routes into the Gulf states of the United States; or 2) picked up directly by Cuban planes flying into a string of guerrilla-controlled airstrips on the northwest corner of Belize. During the previous Price government in Belize, which maintained more-than-cordial ties to Cuba, enormous tracts of land along the border of the El Petén region of Guatemala, were turned over to the Cuban government on 99-year leases. Nominally leased as orange plantations, these sites have been confirmed by Guatemalan Army sources to house a 20-person FAR cell, charged exclusively with maintaining the arms-for-drugs logistics through northwest Belize in direct collaboration with Cuban intelligence.

Guatemalan authorities have identified another terrorist camp in southwest El Petén, adjacent to the Mexican border at Chiapas. Reports of the existence of this camp have been confirmed by U.S. military authorities. The El Petén camp reportedly has students and instructors from the Spanish Basque region, Iran, Lebanon, and Western Europe. The U.S.

sources interviewed in Guatemala stated categorically that this mixture of indigenous guerrilla and international terrorist forces at a single training compound is a significant signal of the planned spread of Middle Eastern and European-type terrorism into North America. The location of the camp in Guatemalan territory also underscores the priority which Moscow has assigned to Guatemala in its continued Caribbean-Central American low-intensity warfare.

Guatemalan military intelligence sources believe that the URNG (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity), the Managua-headquartered unified political-military command binding the three major guerrilla forces—the FAR (Armed Revolutionary Forces), EGP (Guerrilla Army of the Poor), and ORPA (Organization of the People in Arms)—with the urban-based PGT (Guatemalan Workers Party), the official Moscow Communist Party, has used the first eight months of the Cerezo government to prepare the next phase of the Soviet-backed offensive.

While this period has seen relatively little terrorist activity per se, two other dangerous trends have been confirmed.

First, the URNG has used a nominal cease-fire period to, again, begin putting active forces into place in the urban centers, particularly in the capital city. Had a hard core of urban narco-terrorists been in place during the Guatemala City riots and protests accompanying the September 1985 student, municipal, and oil-workers strike, the country could have been hit with the kind of low-intensity war that characterizes the present Soviet-backed "Shining Path" insurgency against the García government in Peru today.

The urban-based side of the insurgency buildup has been facilitated by the non-stop anti-Cerezo agitation of the GAM, the so-called Mutual Support Group, which is the principal Guatemalan front of the international human rights mafia. Using doctored studies prepared by Amnesty International and Oxfam, GAM is claiming 40,000 "disappeared" persons were killed by the Guatemalan Armed Forces and associated "death squads" over the past decade. GAM demands that Cerezo dismantle the armed forces and institute the kind of show-trials of the generals that President Alfonsín has carried out under IMF orders in Argentina.

Both Guatemalan and U.S. sources report that GAM is the umbrella under which the urban terrorist front of the URNG is being rapidly rebuilt.

Second, the three major insurgency forces operating in the countryside have each taken to reorganizing and re-arming in preparation for imminent larger-scale military engagements. The FAR, EGP, and ORPA have been heavily re-armed with predominantly U.S. Vietnam War-vintage equipment seized by the North Vietnamese, including M-16 rifles, rocket launchers, mines, etc. Some of the new equipment, according to Guatemalan sources, is the most advanced matériel ever found in the possession of the guerrillas. Cuba has been identified as the primary source of the arms.

Armed with this new equipment, the three main guerrilla forces have been restructured. Rather than operating in small, at most company-sized elements, the narco-guerrillas have recently, according to Guatemalan Armed Forces accounts, grouped into battalion (400 to 600-man) size elements. This is in preparation for assaults against targeted military installations and units, the first such large-scale action since the insurgency peak of 1980-82.

The efforts of the EGP and ORPA in the Chimaltenango area are a significant indicator of the URNG-led strategy. The city of Chimaltenango, located due west of Guatemala City, has been designated as the communications center for the EGP, whose main forces are based in the Chixoy and Huehuetenango zones, due north of Chimaltenango. An Indian population in Chimaltenango is targeted as a fertile recruiting ground. Given the close proximity to the capital, the majority of Indians there have traveled to and worked in Guatemala City, thus representing a bridge between the rural and urban components of the narco-insurgency force.

The historical military objective of the URNG has been to cut off the western highlands region of the country from central government control, to accomplish the same goal in

the sparsely populated, but strategically located, El Petén, and simultaneously to commence low-intensity warfare inside the capital, thus paralyzing government functions.

Both Guatemala and U.S. military experts interviewed in preparation for this report, have characterized the current Soviet-backed guerrilla activation as a Phase III insurgency. By these standard measures, Phase I is the early recruiting and propaganda phase; Phase II is the period of armed propaganda in which limited terrorist actions, carried out at no more than a company-level of deployment, augment recruitment and logistical buildup. Phase III is the transition into larger-scale military engagements beyond simple skirmishes that signifies a commitment to a qualitative escalation, beyond mere low-intensity unconventional warfare on a theater-level.

The Guatemalan Armed Forces moved in early spring to choke off this guerrilla regroupment before its consolidation, by sending concentrations of troops into the western highlands area around the state of San Marcos and near the western side of Lake Atitlán, to hit the ORPA forces as they were deploying to consolidate their company-level forces at battalion strength. As of this writing, that Guatemalan Armed Forces campaign was to be re-targeted against EGP strongholds (see map).

## Steinberg jailed by money launderers: Guatemala

The leading daily of Guatemala, *El Gráfico*, published a two-page spread on Oct. 12 entitled, "Drug Money Laundering Mafia Orders Arrest of Jeffrey Steinberg, the Anti-Drug Expert and Adviser to Democratic Presidential Candidate Lyndon LaRouche."

The text indicts William Weld, Donald Regan, and George Shultz for having fulfilled the wishes of Gorbachov, in imprisoning Steinberg and his wife Michele for alleged "obstruction of justice" on Oct. 6 (cf. *EIR*, Oct. 17, 1986). It notes: "Jeffrey Steinberg, famous in Guatemala for his contributions to the anti-drug fight, coordinated an *EIR* team which wrote a special report titled, *Soviet Unconventional Warfare in Ibero-America: The Case of Guatemala*, and a film documentary with the same name in August 1985. The report shows the links between the Carter administration and the Soviets' war against Guatemala."

The newspaper observes how "those democrats who have made so many campaigns about supposed violations of 'human rights' in other countries, had no qualms about violating the human rights of the Steinberg couple."