

PRESS BRIEFING

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EVIDENCE OF NICARAGUAN SUBVERSION IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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SUMMARY

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An auto accident in Honduras on December 7 led to the discovery by Honduran authorities of ammunition, grenades, communications and encryption material, and other items being sent from Managua to guerrillas fighting in El Salvador. The evidence, which came to light only by chance, provides further proof of the continuing role of Nicaragua in support of regional armed subversion and terrorism and factually demonstrates that Sandinista Foreign Minister Miguel D'Escoto and his government lied to the World Court when they said they are not engaged in provision of supplies to the guerrillas in El Salvador.

INTRODUCTION

Honduran authorities have already issued a statement concerning the incident we address today. On December 7, in Honduras, a serious accident occurred involving a Soviet-built Lada automobile. As Honduran investigators at the scene of the accident discovered, the vehicle had six concealed compartments containing grenades, ammunition, communications and encryption materials, instructions, money, medical supplies, and personal letters to guerrillas fighting in El Salvador from relatives in the Soviet Union, Cuba, and other countries. The documents, including instructions addressed specifically to nine guerrilla commanders, revealed that the shipment came from the Managua headquarters of the Armed Liberation Forces or FAL, the military wing of the Communist Party of El Salvador and one of the five main guerrilla groups that make up the FMLN. The other four groups are the National Armed Resistance Forces (FARN), the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL), the Central American Revolutionary Workers Party (PRTC), and the Popular Revolutionary Army (ERP).

The shipment we are discussing today was sent by the FAL Communications Section in Managua and was destined to nine field communications chiefs in El Salvador. The text of the FAL letter of instructions is being made available.

BACKGROUND: ARMS TRANSFERS

Since the Sandinistas took power in Managua, arms and other supplies, including dollars, have been shipped from communist bloc countries and elsewhere through Nicaragua to the guerrilla groups of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation

Front (FMLN) in El Salvador. Nicaragua and Cuba are the central participants in this support network. The Sandinistas provide warehouses for storing arms, ammunition and other supplies awaiting onward transportation to El Salvador. Nicaraguan territory is used for training camps for guerrillas from El Salvador and other Latin American countries. The FMLN central command's radio and logistics system is in Managua.

It was no accident that the negotiations with the Salvadoran guerrillas for the release of President Duarte's daughter and twenty-two mayors and municipal officials had to be conducted via the FMLN's central radio in Managua.

The pattern of arms shipments through Nicaragua to El Salvador has gone through several stages since 1979. From small-scale deliveries early in 1980, the shipments became massive in the period November 1980 to January 1981, when large arms shipments from the communist bloc, particularly Vietnam, were sent to Nicaragua for transshipment to El Salvador. It was at this time and for this reason that President Carter suspended U.S. economic aid to Nicaragua and commenced military aid to El Salvador. At that time three rather open methods were used for shipping arms: aircraft -- for both airdrops and landings in El Salvador; large semi-trailers -- for the overland route from Nicaragua through Honduras; and small vehicles for transport into El Salvador. (Photographs of one of these trailer trucks are printed in the State Department publication, "The Sandinista Military Build-up.")

After the arms shipments of late 1980 and early 1981 were exposed, the Nicaraguans and Salvadoran guerrillas turned to other means. The emphasis switched to transportation over the Gulf of Fonseca, and automobiles and small vans on the overland route. As with the earlier trailer trucks, license plates and vehicles registered in other countries, such as Costa Rica, Guatemala and Honduras were frequently used to allay suspicions of border guards.

As Salvadoran surveillance on the Gulf of Fonseca improved and arms were seized after landings, the Sandinistas and the FMLN have again changed the sea routes, using larger boats on blue water outside the Gulf of Fonseca, then transferring shipments under cover of darkness to small boats which are unloaded at safe locations on the Salvadoran coast. The arms smugglers are informed by guerrilla radio of the locations of Salvadoran army patrols as the boats approach the coast.

Today, the transport of arms by vehicle has become quite sophisticated. In Managua, there is a shop for modifying vehicles to add small secret compartments like those found in the Lada. Frequently, vehicles begin their trip in Costa Rica, pick up their cargo in Nicaragua, pass through Honduras into El Salvador or go to Guatemala before going to El Salvador, and finally, after unloading, on to Mexico. Then after a week or two the vehicle returns to Costa Rica. For example, according to its driver, the Lada vehicle captured on December 7 would have gone into El Salvador after passing through Honduras.

Another variant on the routes used is to off-load the arms and supplies in Honduras for storage and subsequent shipment to El Salvador via small vehicles, pack animals, and in backpacks.

THE ACCIDENT

On December 6, a Lada automobile bearing Costa Rican plates crossed the border of Costa Rica into Nicaragua. On December 7, the same vehicle entered Honduras from Nicaragua on the Panamerican Highway between Nicaragua and El Salvador. Shortly thereafter, it suffered a blowout and crashed in the small town of La Leona, Honduras. Both the driver, Elias Solis Gonzalez, and his passenger, Martha Espinoza Espinoza, were injured, and the woman is hospitalized in serious condition in Honduras.

Local police, noting the Costa Rican plates, notified the Costa Rican consular representative. During the police inspection of the vehicle several wires were discovered protruding from the air conditioning duct. The wires turned out to be parts of blasting caps. Later, in the course of a more detailed examination in Tegucigalpa, the authorities found several concealed compartments in the Lada, which contained ammunition, grenades, communications and encryption material, money -- \$27,400 in U.S. currency -- medical supplies, personal letters to individual guerrillas fighting in El Salvador from relatives in the USSR, Cuba and other countries, and instructions to the front communications officials from the head of the FAL Communications Section.

The driver of the Lada was a Costa Rican and a member of Costa Rica's communist Popular Vanguard Party. He was acting as a courier for the Salvadoran Armed Forces of Liberation, the FAL. The driver, now under detention, has admitted to having been trained in Cuba in "political subjects" from September 1981 to June 1982, and to having made an earlier courier run in the same vehicle in July 1985. His route on the previous run went from Costa Rica to Nicaragua, to Honduras to El Salvador.

These photographs show the concealed compartments and the following materials contained in them:

- Ammunition: 7,000 rounds, sufficient to equip a platoon sized unit (30-50 men) for a major assault or several smaller operations
- 86 electric blasting caps, which can be used to make 86 home-made bombs or improvised explosive devices. There have been over 400 bombings in El Salvador in 1985 along, with an increasing shift to urban actions.
- 20 fragmentation grenades used to kill or incapacitate personnel, or as mines and boobytraps. Also a thermite grenade used to destroy machinery or as an incendiary device.
- 17 grenade fuses.
- Communication gear: Two base station radios used for communication over long distances with units in the field and ten walkie-talkies for use between platoon leaders. Computer-generated Encryption pads: used to encrypt and decode communications.

- US\$27,400 in hundred dollar bills. Worth over a quarter million Salvadoran colones on the black market, enough to support 250-500 combatants for a month.
- Medical materials, typically associated with combat field hospitals.
- Over 20 assorted documents, mostly personal letters from Argentina, Spain, Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Soviet Union

The use of autos and other vehicles for the transport of explosives and communications equipment, as well as ammunition and other small-scale items, has been known for some time. The sophisticated construction of the concealed compartments, as seen in the photos, has eluded normal detection measures. Short of the actual dismantling of every vehicle crossing a border, it is hard to identify which vehicles are smuggling materials for the guerrillas. It is, in fact, completely fortuitous that this physical evidence of something we have known through intelligence for a long time has come to light.

In a similar incident last month, Guatemalan authorities picked up an individual, arriving by air from El Salvador, who had in his possession \$30,000 in U.S. \$100 bills. He was turned over to Salvadoran authorities, who have determined that he is an intelligence officer for the Communist Party of El Salvador (PCFS) and was trained in the USSR and Cuba. He had been a resident of Managua for five years at the time of his

arrest, and since September 1984 had been travelling to Guatemala City approximately every three months to deliver between \$20,000 to \$30,000 to the PCES. He is continuing to cooperate with Salvadoran authorities, and we cannot share with you all the information he has provided thus far. However, what is clear is that he was a highly trusted member of the guerrilla movement, and no mere courier for the Salvadoran Communist Party.

The Sandinista regime will undoubtedly deny its involvement in this incident, as it has always denied any involvement in logistical support for subversion, from arms transfers to provision of command and control facilities for various terrorist groups.

In his April 21, 1985, affidavit to the International Court of Justice in the Hague, Foreign Minister Miguel D'Escoto claimed that his government "is not engaged, and has not been engaged, in the provision of arms or other supplies to either of the factions engaged in the civil war in El Salvador." He insisted that the policy and practice of the Sandinista regime is to prevent the use of Nicaraguan territory as a conduit for arms or other military supplies to guerrillas, and assured that the policy would continue in force. Nevertheless, the evidence that puts the lie to those denials and assertions continues to mount. The vehicle that I have shown you is only the latest evidence which demonstrates that D'Escoto and the Sandinista

regime simply lied to the World Court. The Sandinista regime

~~is~~ is the vital link in the transfer of weapons, supplies, and money to the Salvadoran guerrillas.

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