Inter-Religious Task Force on Central America

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Update Central America **January, 1986**

EL SALVADOR
Archbishop Condemns Air Force Bombings

In one of his strongest statements to date Salvadoran Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas this month condemned the indiscriminate bombing of civilians by the Government Air Force and the destruction of homes and crops in army sweeps in rebel-held areas of the country.

The Archbishop, after a two-week-long trip to rebel-held territory in northern Chaletenango province charged that bombs had been dropped within 4 miles of him. In direct contradiction to the Archbishop, Minister of Defense Eugenio Vides Casanova denied that bombs had been dropped in the area.

In a sermon broadcast live from rebel territory, Rivera y Damas said "the greatest plea is that I advise that there is a large civilian population here." "It is not the case," continued the Archbishop, "that there is not a civilian population." "The petition is clear. That I make myself the voice of all and express to those who should hear that the bombings cease in areas inhabited by the civilian population."

The Archbishop's charges corroborate evidence gathered in recent months by several journalists that the Air Force has attacked a number of villages occupied by civilians despite a much-publicized prohibition of such attacks by President Jose Napolean Duarte. The Salvadoran Government, the U.S. Embassy, and the Salvadoran Air Force have all denied that villages are being bombed—denials more difficult to sustain in the face of the Archbishop's allegations.

Christmas Truce Broken By Air Force

The Archbishop's condemnation of the Air Force came on the heels of the Army's refusal to respect a Christmas truce carefully crafted by the Roman Catholic Church, President Duarte, the rebels, and ostensibly, the Army high command.

> **'I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing-oriented" society to a "person-oriented" society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.'**
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> **—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**
> **April 4, 1967**

NICARAGUA
Administration Begins Press for More Contra Aid: Seeks $100 Million

The Reagan Administration, confident that it has crushed organized congressional resistance to its campaign to overthrow the Nicaraguan government, has stepped up its propaganda war in an effort to lay the foundation for requesting military aid to the contras.

The $27 million in so-called "humanitarian" aid provided for the contras last June runs out in March. Under current law, the administration could submit a new aid request before that time and have it dealt with on a "fast track" basis.

Last month, Elliott Abrams, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, charged that a Cuban pilot and co-pilot were among fourteen fatalities when contra forces used a recently acquired SA-7 antiaircraft missile to shoot down a Nicaraguan helicopter. The acquisition of "about twenty" of the portable antiaircraft missiles last month represents a significant military development.

The "proof" of a growing combat role of Cuban military advisors in Nicaragua has been "intelligence" reports according to both Secretary of State George Shultz and Abrams. Yet, according to the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA), the sources of these reports are not revealed. Convincing corroboration is lacking, says COHA. The story that Cubans were shot down in the helicopter was based entirely on an assertion of FDN Washington representative Bosco Matamoros that contra forces heard Cuban accents on intercepted radio communications.

In charging that Cubans are engaged in combat, Abrams vaguely cited "reports," in his testimony before the House Western Hemisphere Subcommittee on December 5. According to COHA, Abrams' figure of 2,500 Cuban military advisors is no more credible than the administration's inflated figures for Cubans in Grenada in 1983 which were found to be half of the number originally charged by the White House.

Meanwhile, as he departed for the Cartegena, Colombia meeting of the Organization of American States last month, Secretary of State Shultz asserted that the U.S. had information that the Sandinistas aided the M-19 guerrillas' seizure of Colombia's Supreme Court palace last month. Colombian officials immediately denied any knowledge of the basis for the charge.

While no information was provided that would establish

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