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STATEMENT OF
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INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FOREIGN OPERATIONS
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to have the opportunity to appear before this Committee to provide an overview of United States security assistance in El Salvador and Honduras and to discuss our reasons for this reprogramming action. My colleague from the Department of State, Mr. Bushnell, has described in some detail the background and rationale for our current policy in these two countries and Central America in general, and the current situation and threat has been thoroughly reviewed. I propose, therefore, to focus my remarks more on the security interests of the United States in El Salvador and Honduras.

At the outset, I would like to emphasize that the fundamental security problems of El Salvador and Honduras arise from deep economic and social grievances, but the problem of the moment is the increasing momentum of extremist terrorism both from the left and the right and the need for the current government to establish its ability to govern effectively.

Since 15 October 1979, two successive reformist-minded governments have been attempting to find a peaceful middle course between the extremists of the right and violent Marxist revolution in El Salvador. Unfortunately, as Mr. Bushnell pointed out, their programs have been met by violence from

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both the left and the right. On the left, Marxist terrorists, recognizing the threat that even moderate reforms offer to their potential popular base, have been particularly intransigent and have incited labor unrest, violence, mass demonstrations and open insurgency in the countryside in an effort to bring down the current government. The Cubans have been quick to capitalize on these situations and Fidel Castro himself has made personal contact with the leadership of communist parties and guerrilla groups of many Central American nations. Cuban influence on El Salvadoran and Honduran leftist organizations is longstanding, and there are clear indications that the Cubans are assisting these groups in their attempt to overthrow the current government in El Salvador.

On the far right, representatives of the traditional oligarchy in El Salvador have opposed proposed reform through acts of terrorism and violence of their own and almost succeeded in overthrowing the government last month. We made our opposition to such a coup clear in both private and public communications. Our position was underscored by the fact that we were prepared to terminate military assistance should such a coup take place. I point this out to underscore the point that our military relationship to El Salvador has political as well as military significance. This is a point which I shall return to later.

Both the left and the right have mounted intense, sophisticated propaganda campaigns designed to drive a wedge between the Christian Democratic Party members of the government and the military, and between the government itself and the general population. A situation of near anarchy has developed within the country.

While information is sparse on the situation in the countryside, all indications are that guerrilla activity is very high in the northern parts of the country and leftist guerrillas now control some rural areas. Local military commanders are concerned about the pace of revolutionary leftist activity, and government control in many areas of the north and central regions of El Salvador is questionable.

In a concerted effort to stabilize the country and regain control of the deteriorating situation, on 6 and 7 March, the junta announced a significant reform program and the institution of a limited state of siege. If the implementation of this reform package is successful, the government's chances for survival will improve greatly. To insure success of these reforms, the violence from both extremes must be stopped. I would also like to comment on the allegations that the government forces themselves are involved in repression. There are in the government three types of security forces: the military, the National Guard and the police forces. The Army is the most professional of these forces and the one least involved in repression. If its professionalism can be improved, this will strengthen its capacity to respond effectively and with restraint.

To this end, the government of El Salvador has requested modest security assistance from the United States. The reprogramming of \$5.7 million of FMS credits for El Salvador and the current \$300,000 IMET level for that country are intended to meet the needs of the El Salvadoran security forces in establishing a secure environment for the development of a genuine democratic government. El Salvadoran security forces urgently need additional transportation, communications, riot control equipment, and training.

Our reprogramming action contains the resources to meet these needs. We have programmed approximately ~~\$3,700,000~~^{\$4,100,000} towards the provision of vehicles necessary to improve overland mobility, including approximately seventy-two 2½ ton cargo trucks and twenty-one ½ ton ambulances. In order to improve the ability of El Salvadoran Army units to maintain order during public demonstrations without excessive use of force, we have programmed \$316,000 towards the purchase of protective masks and tear gas. Another \$1,200,000 has been programmed for the provision of communications equipment necessary to provide centralized command and control and improved communications to field units. ~~(An additional \$400,000 has been included for other various other equipment to include trailers.)~~

The Salvadoran military have now clearly demonstrated their commitment to modernization and are seeking to limit the violence sweeping their country and to make land reform work. The PDC, which in the past had severe reservations about the military, has now joined in the military's efforts to bring about reforms. The PDC are now also seeking our military assistance as a means of cementing the new reforms.

The army is also critical to implementing the land reform. In order to distribute the land which has been seized from the large landholders, technicians from the Ministry of Agriculture will arrive in the area usually backed by soldiers. A rough ratio is three technicians to 50 soldiers. This reform process has gone forward quickly and, to date, about half of the largest properties have been distributed. There are reports that the peasants have reacted very favorably to the military where this process has occurred and there now appears to be a good relationship developing between the military and the rural population. The point I am trying to make here, Mr. Chairman, is that military activities in El Salvador have as many or more political implications as they do security ramifications and our military assistance will help strengthen the army's key role in reforms.

Lying to the north and east of El Salvador, Honduras plays a key role in the movement of men and materiel to El Salvadoran insurgents. The Hondurans believe, and our intelligence agrees, that their territory is being used as a conduit for men and weapons into El Salvador by insurgents with Cuban support, and they are also concerned that should El Salvador fall to the extremist left forces, Honduras will be among the next primary targets. Unlike El Salvador, Honduras is a sparsely settled country, particularly along the Caribbean coast and along its eastern border, the Coco River. Indications are that men and materiel transit Honduras after landing on the North Coast or coming down the Coco River. There are also reports of aircraft landings at isolated and remote haciendas. The Hondurans desire to cut off this infiltration through their country and to prevent the creation of an insurgency against the government of Honduras itself.

The Hondurans have officially informed us of their urgent need for vehicles, helicopters, and communications equipment to provide the mobility and control necessary to patrol the rugged Honduran countryside. They have also requested military engineering equipment, equipment to outfit a border patrol unit, and have indicated their desire to expand previously planned training for the Honduran armed forces. The items planned for our proposed \$3.53 FMS credits and ~~\$347,000~~^{\$447,000} IMET programs for Honduras are a response to these requests. To this end, we have programmed approximately \$555,000 to equip and support units patrolling Honduran border areas. We have also programmed approximately \$2,000,000 to equip and support one engineer battalion which will be used to expand communications networks within the interior of the country and in various other nation building projects. To improve the capabilities of regular Honduran forces engaged in interdiction operations, we have also programmed approximately ~~\$354,000~~^{238,000} towards the purchase of miscellaneous equipment, such as Marine

communications, small arms, and patrol boats. I might also mention that to provide helicopter lift for the units engaged in interdiction operations and to enhance rapid transport of troops to widely dispersed areas where insurgents may be discovered, and to expedite delivery, we have suggested leasing 10 United States Army helicopters to Honduras under the authority of 10 U.S. Code 2667. Under the terms of the lease, the Hondurans will be required to provide the maintenance for these aircraft and we have programmed approximately \$620,000 for this purpose.

Of the ^{\$447,000}~~(\$347,000)~~ IMET funds, \$213,000 is needed for current and prior training programs, \$31,260 will be used for a mobile training team in interdiction operations, and the balance will be used for pilot transition and maintenance training for Honduran helicopter crews.

In the face of the upsurge in terrorist and Cuban activity in Central America, United States security assistance programs are not only essential for refocusing and refining host country capabilities to meet the challenges of insurgent warfare, but also for sustaining the resolve and confidence of El Salvadoran and Honduran armed forces by the visible U.S. support. Failure to do so may not only allow friends to fall to the advocates of repression, but will damage U.S. international credibility and further limit the degree of influence which we might desire to exert in the region in the future.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that these security assistance programs will have an important result. We must act to assist the governments of El Salvador and Honduras now. Our efforts are intended to aid these countries to provide the secure environment which they themselves require to make the significant social, economic, and political development that they and we in the United States both desire so greatly. We do not seek to support repression, but to assist struggling republics in their efforts to halt radical tyranny of either the left or right.

This concludes my prepared remarks, Mr. Chairman. Let me again thank you for the honor of addressing this Committee. I will be pleased to attempt to respond to any questions the Committee may have.