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TERMINATION PHASE-OUT STUDY  
PUBLIC SAFETY PROJECT  
COSTA RICA

The following comments are furnished as a supplement to the Termination Evaluation Report of the Public Safety program in Costa Rica. They were not included in the main unclassified report because of possible GOCR sensitivity.

INTERNAL SECURITY PROBLEMS

A. Historical

Costa Rica, being somewhat unique among the five Central American republics, is a culturally-united society which has an active interest in the democratic process for the conduct of its national and international affairs. Every four years, popular participation in the presidential election process brings out a national fervor to select and promote political leaders which most generally reflect the conservative traditions of the comparatively large middle-class sector.

The society is characterized by a high level of respect for, but occasional lax compliance to law and order. There is a notable absence of serious subversive activity, political turbulence and crises with high violence levels as compared to most other Latin American countries. This situation has probably resulted more from the inherent good nature and the relatively high level of literacy of the people than diligent law enforcement itself could bring about. Much common criminality is accepted as a matter of course, and judicial and punitive measures are lightly administered in most cases. The GOCR security forces in fact, have in the past shown a tendency to be organizationally weak, politically influenced and subject to frequent personnel changes. They have been fragmented into separate agencies within the GOCR itself to ensure their absolute control and to discourage their ability to fully unify and diminish any threat to constitutional government. The general anti-military feeling which pervades throughout the populace is derived in great part from the fear of having the same political convulsions as experienced by other Latin American military regimes.

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DECONTROL FOLLOWING April 30, 1976

An occasional, sensational incident will occur which goes beyond usual security responses. A case in point was the attempted highjacking of a Costa Rican jet airliner several years ago. The President of the country personally took command of civil guard forces at the airport to prevent the take-off of the jet and directed the action in which the perpetrators were captured. In another instance, Costa Rica was used as a safe-haven in 1968 along the Panama-Costa Rica border during some guerrilla activities within Panama.

There is no formal military force in Costa Rica, this being expressly prohibited by the country's constitution. Some para-military practices and equipment are utilized by the Civil Guard when necessary to meet such contingencies. In the main, the people feel proud of the fact that they are without a formal standing military force.

B. Current

The current threat to citizen security exists principally within three areas: 1) common criminality against persons and property, 2) occasional civil and labor disturbances, and 3) infrequent "front-page" crimes of personal violence.

Juvenile delinquency and drug use, principally marihuana, are of some recent concern but much less so than in the United States. Local usage of drugs/narcotics is negligible, but the occasional presence of international traffickers in Costa Rica has been noted.

Not infrequently, U.S. and other foreign citizens, evading sundry criminal or civil code violations of the U.S. and elsewhere, have found a convenient temporary haven within the country through a "laissez-faire" attitude of the GOCR. Where such individuals remain unobtrusive, minimal effort is expended to locate them. There is a general indifference to their presence as long as no undesirable consequences subsequently result which can undermine the internal security or national interest of the country.

Urban terrorism, politically-inspired kidnappings, and sensational major robberies have, for all practical purposes, been non-existent and consequently insufficient forethought has been given

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by public security officials to reaction plans for such cases. Like many other countries before, it is conceivable that Costa Rica can innocently become the current opportune scene for international terrorism or criminal attacks against diplomatic, business, or other influential elements within the country. However, political parties and groups are not currently oriented toward violent subversive activity. There is little in their inventory of experience that the GOCR public security forces can draw on to effectively thwart or resolve such actions.

The radical socialist and communist parties are legally recognized and operate openly by submitting presidential and legislative candidates and working on issues which attempt to exploit economic, social and labor discontent where possible. Diplomatic relations and embassies are exchanged with the U.S.S.R. and other socialist-aligned countries. It is reasoned that some encouragement and assistance are occasionally given to such established local parties where Soviet block views can be promoted.

C. Future

Officials of the GOCR as well as the U.S. Mission can foresee no serious threats to Costa Rica's internal security in the immediate future.

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