

Report on Arms Caches Seized in Chile 10/86
in August 1986

- The arms caches, consisting of an estimated 70 tons of materiel worth three-five million dollars, are the largest ever discovered in Latin America.
- They are largely older US weapons originally sent to Vietnam and Soviet Bloc antitank weapons and explosive ordnance of comparatively recent manufacture.
- Unprecedented sanitization of the weapons' markings indicates elaborate efforts to disguise origins and rules out a non-state source.
- Overwhelming circumstantial evidence points to Cuba as the most likely supplier. Castro had access to the weapons, contacts with Chilean communists, and ships at the right place to have made the deliveries.
- The size, location and sophisticated construction of the arms caches suggest that the captured weapons were intended for a protracted conflict rather than for imminent use.

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Analysis of Terrorist Arms Discovered in Chile

Discovery of the Arms Caches

On August 6, 1986 Chilean security forces discovered near Carrizal Bajo on the coastline of northern Chile the first of eight terrorist arms caches--which together contained the most ordnance ever found at one time in the possession of Latin American terrorist forces. The initial cache--consisting of 342 assault rifles--was found in a large depression located 600 meters from a small cove. Terrorists captured with the weapons identified themselves as members of the Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front (FPMR). They stated that this cove had served as the landing area for several illicit seaborne arms deliveries that had taken place since early 1986. These individuals led Chilean security officers to an abandoned mine--located about 12 kilometers from the cove. There over 200,000 rounds of 5.56mm rifle ammunition and 315 Bloc rocket-propelled antitank grenades were discovered. The munitions had been stacked with almost geometric precision in a large chamber several hundred meters from the mine entrance, and the terrorists had constructed an elaborate winch and pulley system to raise and lower the ammunition crates.

Over the next two weeks other arms caches were discovered--most also located near Carrizal Bajo. These cache sites were extremely well constructed and clearly intended for the long-term storage of large quantities of ordnance.

- o In a suburb of Vallenar, 1320 assault rifles, nearly one million rounds of rifle ammunition, and 894 antitank rockets were found in a concrete-reinforced underground vault located near an abandoned hotel purchased by FPMR members earlier in the year. The vault measured approximately eight meters long by four meters wide by three meters high. It was paneled, reinforced with bolted wooden beams, and tarred in an effort to protect the weapons against moisture and dirt.
- o A similarly well-constructed site was discovered under a house in Huasco, a small town a few kilometers south of Carrizal Bajo. This site housed what was apparently an underground training school with an indoor firing range and a classroom with wooden benches which folded down from the walls. An identical underground school was found further south near Santiago.

Photographs of these schools and other cache sites show that many had identical vaulted wooden ceilings. The uniform construction suggests that these structures may have been prefabricated, providing another indication of the considerable effort and planning that preceded the placement of arms at each cache.

The Recovered Ordnance

The Chilean caches consist of heretofore unheard of quantities of a few types of extremely lethal weapons ideal for terrorist or insurgent use. Most of the captured ordnance consists of either US weapons manufactured during the Vietnam war or comparatively newer ordnance of Soviet Bloc origin. Almost all of the over 3,000 US M16A1 assault rifles were manufactured in the late 1960s and early 1970s and were probably originally sent to US forces in Vietnam. Traces run on some of the M16s reveal that at least ten had been sent to Vietnam between 1967 and 1969. Similarly, many of the M16s had early, pre-1968 open flash-suppressors, and most had unchromed bolts--another indication of pre-1970's manufacture. All had US Government property stamps--indicating that they had not been sold to a foreign country--and many bore a model designation used only on the early-model M16s sent to US troops in Vietnam. The weapons were found with a full complement of ancillary equipment including cleaning kits, extra magazines, and rifle slings--many of which were in their original wrappings with Vietnamese labels.

Other captured items of US origin include 167 M72 Light Antitank Weapons (LAW) and nearly two million rounds of 5.56mm ammunition for the M16s. Most of the LAWs were manufactured between 1970 and 1974 and were sent to Vietnam. Similarly, much of the M16 ammunition was produced for the US military during the early 1970s.

In contrast to the older US arms, all of the Bloc ordnance appeared to be in mint condition, and of relatively recent manufacture. This was most noticeable in the case of the 114 RPG-7 rocket launchers and the nearly 2,000 rounds of RPG-7 rocket propelled grenades. These grenades are of Bulgarian origin, and were produced in 1984. All of the RPG-7 booster, propulsion, and warhead components were found in their original factory wrappings. Similarly, the RPG-7 launchers found in Chile were in very good condition and came complete with unused web gear, spare parts, and even optical sights.

Much of the Bloc-origin rifle ammunition and other expendables is also of relatively recent manufacture and was

found packed in original factory containers. This materiel included nearly 5,000 Soviet non-electric blasting caps made in 1979 and nearly 1,000 rounds of Soviet 7.62x39mm Kalashnikov ammunition of 1977 and 1982 vintage. In addition, nearly 2,000 Soviet-style F-1 hand grenades and Soviet UZRGM ignitor assemblies were recovered, all packed in their original factory containers and in excellent condition. The only older Bloc ordnance found was several thousand rounds of 1960s-vintage Bulgarian rifle ammunition.

Cuba: The Regional Source

Both the quantities involved and the composition of the arms caches rule out the possibility of the arms having been obtained from private sources abroad or from existing stockpiles within Chile. The cost of the weapons found and the logistical problems associated with moving them probably put an effort of this scale beyond the resources of any Chilean terrorist group acting independently. Outside help, therefore, is certain. Hanoi has not sold its captured US ordnance to private dealers, and information regarding the other Latin American countries where these arms have turned up points to Cuba as the regional supplier, with Nicaragua having served as an intermediary for arms destined for El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

In this case, the evidence points to Cuba. Of those states who could have assisted the FPMR terrorists, Cuba stands out as having had access to both new Bloc ordnance and US Vietnam vintage weapons through its Bloc allies and the capability to deliver the ordnance through its fishing vessel operating regularly in international waters off the Chilean coastline.

Moreover, similar materiel in smaller quantities--some from the same lot number and date indicators--has been captured from Cuba-backed terrorists in other Latin American countries during the past few years:

- o Other US MLBs traceable to Vietnam have been captured since the early 1980s from leftist insurgents and terrorists in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, and Colombia.
- o One of the US LAW antitank weapons found in Chile bears lot and date indicators identical to those on another LAW captured in June 1986 from leftist-backed rebels in El Salvador. All of the LAWS in this lot were sent to Vietnam in October 1973. The discovery of two of these weapons--thirteen years later--in the possession of leftist terrorists in so distant countries as El Salvador and Chile suggests that these LAWS were captured together by Hanoi and subsequently shipped to Cuba for disbursement to communist terrorists in Latin America.

- o Several thousand rounds of the 7.62x51mm (NATO caliber) ammunition found in Chile were manufactured in 1962 in Bulgaria and are identical to Bulgarian ammunition captured in 1984 from leftist rebels in El Salvador. Similar 1960s-vintage Bulgarian ammunition was used by Colombian M-19 terrorists during their 1985 takeover of the Palace of Justice in Bogota. Weapons traceable to Cuba and to Nicaragua were used by the M-19 during this same attack.

The sheer volume of ordnance--weighing an estimated 70 tons--indicates delivery by sea and tends to substantiate statements by captured terrorists that the weapons were offloaded from larger Cuban boats into smaller vessels owned by the terrorists prior to delivery to the cove at Carrizal Bajo. The physical condition of some of the ordnance also indicates delivery by sea. Most of the captured web gear and ammunition pouches were damp, and some of the rifle ammunition was wet and heavily corroded--suggesting exposure to salt water.

A Chilean press report claims the Cuban fisheries ship "Rio Najasa" is one possible candidate in delivery of the arms. International shipping records show this ship could have made a delivery off the northern coast of Chile in May 1986. Six other Cuban ships of the same class also traveled to the west coast of South America between May and July and could have unloaded weapons into smaller boats at sea. The Chilean authorities have seized one such small vessel, the "Astrid Sue," a Chilean boat purchased in Caldera by captured FPMR terrorists earlier in 1986.

Implications

The size, location, and sophisticated construction of the arms caches suggest that the captured weapons were intended for a protracted conflict rather than for a series of quick, hit-and-run operations designed to harass Pinochet government forces. Most of the ordnance uncovered to date was found in large caches in northern Chile near the reported delivery point, indicating that no imminent use was planned. Caches found in the Santiago area were far smaller, suggesting that most of the delivered ordnance has not yet been split up and disbursed to smaller operational cells throughout the country.

The presence of training schools suggested a long-term effort to build up the capability to seriously confront Chilean security forces. With the quantity of captured ordnance the FPMR could have equipped as many as several thousand insurgents. While the FPMR presently does not have the

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capacity to equip a large number of insurgents or terrorists, the assassination attempt on President Pinochet in early September--for which the FPMR took responsibility--indicates both that the FPMR still possesses weapons similar to those captured in the caches and that the group is willing to use these arms in attacks on high profile targets. An RPG-7, a LAW, and M1b rifles were used in the attack.

That so much ordnance could be secretly delivered to terrorists in Chile suggests that other Latin American nations with long stretches of deserted coastline may also be vulnerable to similar Cuban efforts. Few, if any, such nations have the capability to patrol their coasts adequately, making detection of suspicious shipping activity still more difficult.

The discovery of large quantities of Vietnam-vintage US weapons in Chile suggests that large quantities of these arms have been introduced into Soviet client states in Latin America. It can be anticipated that more US weapons captured in 1975 by Hanoi will be channeled through Cuba and Nicaragua to leftist insurgents and terrorist organizations in the region.

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**Arms Seized in Chilean Caches
6 August-9 September 1986**

Manufacturer	Item	Quantity Found
US	M-16 assault rifles	3,351
Bloc	RPG-7 rocket launchers	114
Belgian	FAL rifles	148
US	M-60 machineguns	6
US	LAW light antitank weapons	167
US	M-16 ammunition	1,967,512
Bloc & Western	FAL ammunition	4,205
Soviet	AK-47 ammunition	965
US	M-60 rounds	2,700
Bloc	F-1 Handgrenades	1,979
Bulgarian	PG-7 rounds	1,859
Soviet	Detonating caps	4,700
Unidentified	Brick explosives	2,204 kg
Unidentified	T-4 explosives	796 kg