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Contraband Chilean Weapons Shipment Destined For Croatian Combatants In Yugoslavia: Summary Of Developments

by Erika Harding

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Dec. 9: Hungarian newspaper Nepszava reported that on Dec. 1, 11 metric tons of weapons from Chile were discovered in the Budapest airport. The arms, packed in boxes supposedly containing medicine to be shipped to Yugoslavia, were transported from Santiago on a Florida West Airlines Boeing 707. Dec. 10: Chilean weapons manufacturer Carlos Cardoen denied that his company had shipped arms to Yugoslavia. Chilean Defense Minister Patricio Rojas issued a communique officially acknowledging that some of the weapons which included shoulder-held SAMs, bazookas and revolvers were made by the Chilean Army Materiel Plant (FAMAE), and shipped on Nov. 30. The brief statement indicated that the Defense and Foreign Ministries had authorized only one weapons shipment to an Asian country. Officials later discovered that the shipment had left Chile under an export authorization to Sri Lanka, and documentation was subsequently changed to "humanitarian aid" destined to Hungary. Weapons shipments to Yugoslavia are in violation of a UN Security Council weapons embargo. A civil war between the Serb and Croatian ethnic groups is currently underway in Yugoslavia. Zarko Domljan, president of the Croatian parliament whose visit to Chile coincided with the exposure of the arms shipment in Budapest said he had no details. According to Domljan, "If the embargo imposed by the Security Council has actually been violated, it is only a violation of human law. According to the law of God, Croatia has the right to defend itself."

Dec. 12: Jose Viera-Gallo, president of the Chilean Chamber of Deputies, said he had requested that the government conduct a special investigation into the illegal weapons shipment. Dec. 15: The Chilean government issued a communique stating that all persons responsible for the illegal arms shipment would be prosecuted, regardless of position in government or private industry. Dec. 16: Interior Minister Enrique Correa told reporters that the government is "completely innocent" of any wrongdoing in the contraband weapons affair. According to a report published by the weekly Hoy de Santiago, the weapons discovered Dec. 1 in Budapest and intended for Croatian combatants were part of a 370 MT arms deal valued at US$6 million. The report, which did not specify sources, said the deal included 5 million bullets, 6,000 rifles, 40 Blow Pipe missiles and 10 missile launchers, 500 Mamba missiles and 10 launchers, 4,855 LOW rockets, 3,000 AMBRUST rockets, and thousands of grenades and mortars. Dec. 17: Deputy Jorge Schaulsohn demanded a full-scale congressional investigation into arms trafficking. He asserted that army commander-in-chief Gen. Augusto Pinochet "lacked the impartiality" to lead an investigation within the military. Schaulsohn said he had evidence indicating that the shipment was the third of five destined to Croatian combatants. The deputy mentioned details of the arms deal similar to those published by Hoy de Santiago on Dec. 16. Pinochet denied any connection with the arms shipment. Dec. 25: In an official communique, the Chilean army acknowledged the involvement of "military personnel" in weapons trafficking to Croatian combatants. The statement did not identify personnel responsible, only that such persons would be sanctioned. Dec. 31: The Supreme Court rejected a petition by the executive for one of the high court justices to conduct a separate investigation into the weapons shipment incident. The ruling was justified on the ground that the illegal shipment in
question did not endanger Chilean relations with a foreign government(s), a prerequisite for such an appointment. [The Court approved a petition for separate investigation headed by a justice in the Orlando Letelier murder case. Letelier was assassinated in Washington, DC, in 1976.] Jan. 2: A Defense Ministry press statement said President Patricio Aylwin ordered the removal of Gen. Hector Letelier from the post of FAMAE director. Letelier was replaced by Brig.Gen. Carlos Carvalo. Defense Minister Rojas said that a civilian has been detained on charges of involvement in the arms deal. According to Rojas, investigations by civilian and military authorities are underway. Jan. 3: The Supreme Court reversed a previous decision and appointed magistrate Hernan Correa de la Cerda as special investigator in the weapons trafficking case. [Sources: Inter Press Service, 12/10/91; La Epoca, El Mercurio (Chile), 12/09/91, 12/12-14/91; Spanish news service EFE, 12/10/91, 12/12/91, 12/16/91, 12/17/91, 12/23/91, 01/02/92, 01/03/92; Agence France-Presse, 12/09-11/91, 12/13/91, 12/15-18/91, 12/27/91, 12/31/91, 01/02-04/92]

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