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NICARAGUAN EXILE LIMITS ROLE OF U.S.

Anti-Sandinist Leader Asserts Troops Are Not Subject to Washington's Control

By PHILIP TAUBMAN
Special to The New York Times

MIAMI, Dec. 8 — The top commander of exile forces seeking to overthrow the leftist Government in Nicaragua said today that the aims and operations of his troops were not subject to control by the United States.

Enrique Bermúdez, a former colonel in the Nicaraguan National Guard who now commands 3,000 to 6,000 irregular troops in Honduras and Nicaragua, said in a interview: "We would never accept the role of American mercenary. It is not acceptable to us to carry out missions to interdict Cuban and Russian supply lines to El Salvador. We are Nicaraguans and our objective is to overthrow the Communists and install a democratic government in our country."

American intelligence officials have said Mr. Bermúdez's forces, operating under the banner of the Nicaraguan Democratic Front, a coalition of anti-Sandinist exile groups, are the main American-supported paramilitary organization in the region.

A year ago, according to national security officials, President Reagan approved plans for covert operations by the Central Intelligence Agency in Central America that called for the financing of paramilitary groups that would interdict the flow of arms to guerrilla forces in El Salvador. Administration officials said at the time that the Soviet Union and Cuba, with help from Nicaragua, were shipping weapons and ammunition to El Salvador.

C.I.A. Activities Stepped Up

The covert activities have since become the most ambitious paramilitary and political action operation mounted by the C.I.A. in nearly a decade, according to intelligence officials.

Mr. Bermúdez said he could not discuss the sources of assistance to his forces. When asked whether or not the C.I.A. had provided help, he declined to comment.

"We will accept any help to establish democracy in Nicaragua," he said.

"If we can help our friends interfere with supply lines to El Salvador while we are fighting to overthrow the Sandinists, we will do it," he added. "But we will not accept assistance simply to do somebody else's business and will not permit outsiders to set our goals."

In recent days, leaders of the anti-Sandinist coalition have lifted some of the secrecy surrounding their activities in an effort to broaden their base of support. At a press conference on Tuesday, they said they did not support the policies of Gen. Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the Nicaraguan leader who was ousted in 1979.

Some Refuse to Join

Some exile leaders, most prominently Edén Pastora Gómez, a former Sandinist leader who left Nicaragua last year, have refused to join the front because of its identification with the national guard.

Mr. Bermúdez contended today that he was not an ardent Somoza supporter. "I accept responsibility for serving in the national guard," he said. "The only regret I have is that there wasn't enough leadership among the senior officers to prevent the abuses and repression that occurred."

From 1976 to 1979, when the revolution was building in Nicaragua, Mr. Bermúdez served as Nicaragua's defense attaché in Washington. In 1975 he was a student at the Inter-American Defense College in Washington.

After the Sandinists seized power in 1979, Mr. Bermúdez moved to Guatemala where he began organizing paramilitary forces. "There were many young national guard officers who were trapped in the struggle before Somoza fell," he said. "They didn't like Somoza but they hated the Sandinists. I thought they could play a role in the future of Nicaragua if they fought to bring democracy to the country."

Mr. Bermúdez said that if the anti-Sandinist forces were successful, he would not seek a leadership role in a new government. "The military will play a secondary role," he said. Other leaders of the coalition, while saying they take Mr. Bermúdez at his word, acknowledged there was a risk he might one day try to take power.

'Guerrilla Tactics' Used

Mr. Bermúdez, who is 49 years old, joined the national guard in 1952 after graduating from the Nicaraguan Military Academy. He became a colonel in 1977, he said.

He said that the paramilitary troops, which are now based primarily in Honduras and Nicaragua, were using "guerrilla tactics" in their campaign against the Sandinists. "When I studied counterinsurgency strategy in the United States, I also learned about insurgency," he said.

Mr. Bermúdez said that the paramilitary forces were being used in attacks against economic and industrial targets to try to galvanize opposition to the Government.

He described economic and social conditions inside Nicaragua as "ripe" for a popular uprising against the Government. "We cannot win in set battles with Government troops," he said, "so we are counting on a popular uprising."

Mr. Bermúdez, like other coalition leaders, said he was reluctant to talk while in the United States about military operations because American law, specifically the Neutrality Act, prohibits privately organized efforts to overthrow foreign governments.

Coalition leaders, who have used southern Florida as a base of operations, said their lawyers advised them not to discuss military matters.

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