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Pastora Beleaguered as Aid Dries Up

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SAN JOSE, Costa Rica, Aug. 29 — At a time when other rebel groups are receiving renewed financing from the United States, the best-known Nicaraguan exile rebel commander, Edén Pastora Gómez, appears to have stumbled to the lowest point yet in his three-year fight against the Nicaraguan Government he once served.

Mr. Pastora's forces have been battered by a three-month Sandinista offensive that has overrun all of the rebels' bases on the San Juan River, which forms the border between Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

Without money, bullets or supplies, some of the estimated 1,000 rebels nominally under Mr. Pastora's command are reported to be collaborating with the better-financed Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the rebel army that operates out of Honduras.

Rebels Live Off the Land

According to two of Mr. Pastora's closest aides, his remaining men are living off the land and refilling used cartridges to use as bullets.

Mr. Pastora himself harrowly escaped serious injury, according to several rebels, when his only helicopter crashed inside Costa Rica last month, apparently because it had run out of fuel.

"The situation is worse than bad," a senior rebel official said in an interview.

Mr. Pastora's stubborn opposition to alliance with the Nicaraguan Democratic Force is reported to have led the Central Intelligence Agency to cut off all financing to Mr. Pastora 16 months ago. Mr. Pastora has repeatedly criticized the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, charging that it is led mainly by former army and national guard officers who loyally served the deposed Nicaraguan dictator, Anastasio Somoza Debayle.

Rebel Forces Realigned

Mr. Pastora's situation has helped spur a major political and military realignment in rebel forces in Costa Rica. Widely recognized as a hero of the Nicaraguan revolution, Mr. Pastora was able to attract a loyal following of former Sandinistas who appeared to represent the social democratic flank of the Nicaraguan opposition.

His Democratic Revolutionary Alliance declared war on the Sandinista Government not because the group opposed the Nicaraguan revolution, but because it asserted that the revolution had been betrayed and handed over to Cuban and Soviet advisers.

Today, those who formerly joined Mr. Pastora seem to be divided and dispirited. Many have reportedly deserted their former leader to join other rebel groups or have retired from the fray. There is a sense of drift and loss among men who once confidently predicted that Mr. Pastora would attract mass desertions from the Sandinista army and march into Managua, a hero once again.

Declines Role as Adviser

In the vacuum left by Mr. Pastora's diminishing presence, the rebel forces are fitfully reorganizing under the banner of a new group, the United Nicaraguan Opposition, with the backing of the Reagan Administration. The group appears to represent an effort, so far unrealized, to create a broad-based rebel front with greater political and international appeal.

But Mr. Pastora has not found the group to his liking. Two rebel officials said he had declined an offer to join it as a political adviser without military duties because it included the Nicaraguan Democratic Force.

Sour relations between Mr. Pastora and the Reagan Administration are said to have lingered, reportedly leading American officials to insist that he not be given a penny of the $27 million that the United States Congress has approved in "non-lethal" aid to Nicaraguan rebel forces. The money is reportedly to be channeled through the United Nicaraguan Opposition. Alfonso Robelo, a director of the new coalition, confirmed that none of the money would go to Mr. Pastora.

Asked why that was the case, Mr. Robelo replied: "Because he is unable to be part of a team. He is broken and nobody wants to work with him."

Military Ability Questioned

While Mr. Pastora's supporters assert that the Central Intelligence Agency has brought their leader to his knees, several rebels who once served Mr. Pastora said in interviews that he also bore a large share of the blame for his misfortune. They contended that he had proved to be a poor military commander and an even worse politician.

"Edén made a fetish of the C.I.A. to hide his own errors," a former senior adviser to Mr. Pastora said. "His incompetence has been tragic."

The rebels criticized their former commander for mishandling tons of C.I.A.-provided equipment, including rifles, boots and grenades for 7,000 men. Much of that equipment was reportedly sold on the black market by deserting rebels in Costa Rica, they said.

One of Mr. Pastora's aides, noting how hard times had become, recalled the heady days when the C.I.A. gave Mr. Pastora a list of American corporations willing to contribute to his cause. The rebel said Mr. Pastora used to send men to the United States to pick up checks and cash donations from the listed companies. Today, he contended, the C.I.A. has made a point of telling people not to waste their money on contributions to Mr. Pastora.

Cash Sought From Exiles

In the last three months Mr. Pastora and his men have subsisted on $75,000, a fraction of what it costs to run a rebel army, according to an aide who is in charge of logistics. The helicopter that crashed last month was provided by a backer in Panama for $15,000 cash and an I.O.U. for an additional $305,000, according to a close adviser to Mr. Pastora. He said the aircraft had been in operation only a week when it crashed, a seeming symbol of the rebel commander's recent turn of luck.

Mr. Pastora, who describes himself as a democratic revolutionary, is so desperate for funds that he has sought cash in recent months from the Cuban exile community in Miami and from Roberto d'Aubuisson, the extreme right-wing Salvadoran political leader, according to two of his aides.

The Misurasata Indian rebel group, which was once closely allied to Mr. Pastora, is also out of money. Marcos Hoppington, a spokesman for the organization, said in an interview that the rebels were barely surviving and had received no guns or money for months. The group has also refused to join the new United Nicaraguan Opposition.

In Costa Rica, the mood seems to have shifted against Mr. Pastora. Government officials have long turned a blind eye on the rebel leader's activities, but in the last two weeks the police have picked up two of his chief advisers on suspicion of arms trafficking and homicide. Both men were released, but they said they considered their arrests to be a sign that times had changed.

In an effort to recoup some political ground, Mr. Pastora has backed the formation of a new group called the Southern Opposition Bloc. The group has lobbied Latin American governments to support negotiations to end the conflict in Nicaragua. The effort appears designed to keep Mr. Pastora politically alive at a time when his other options have dramatically narrowed.

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