

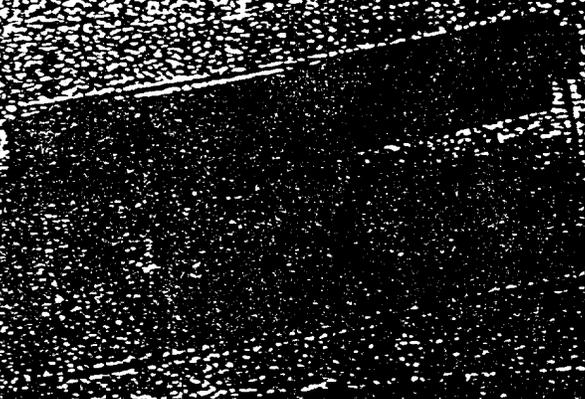


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Nicaraguan Support for Salvadoran Insurgents

Interagency Intelligence Memorandum



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NICARAGUAN SUPPORT FOR SALVADORAN INSURGENTS

KEY JUDGMENTS

We believe that the Sandinista Directorate views support of the Salvadoran insurgency as a key element in the solidification of the Nicaraguan revolution. This priority explains Nicaragua's wide-ranging support activities for the insurgents since the Sandinistas took power in July 1979 and the high level of arms shipments during the period October 1980 - January 1981--despite the prospects that such activities could embroil relations with the United States.

In response to US diplomatic pressure and enhanced interdiction measures, air shipments of arms directly from Nicaragua to El Salvador have apparently stopped since early February. Moreover, land and sea shipments, which are more difficult to monitor, appear to have been cut back sharply.

Nonetheless, a wide range of other support activities--

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very probably continue, including guerrilla training, secure transit of insurgents to and from Cuba, use of "volunteer" Nicaraguan combatants in El Salvador, and assistance in the areas of planning, intelligence, and communications.

Moreover, there are persuasive reports, including some from sources whose information has proved reliable in the past, that the Sandinistas (1) continue to store and probably to receive additional arms for the insurgents and (2) are diligently arranging for alternative routes and methods of arms deliveries from Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

Despite the pressures brought to bear by the United States so far, and the Sandinistas' anticipation of increased pressures, we see no change in their commitment to the

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Salvadoran insurgents. Temporizing tactics may continue for a time; but, if forced to choose, the Sandinistas will very likely give a higher priority to supporting the insurgents than to appeasing the United States.

If, as is likely, the present level of military action continues in El Salvador, we expect to see at least intermittent arms shipments from Nicaragua, directly and indirectly over the next several weeks or months.

In sum, little short of a sharp change in the revolutionary character of the Sandinista regime or termination of serious combat in El Salvador would be likely to force the Nicaraguans to cease or indefinitely curb their support activities.

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DISCUSSION

I. SANDINISTA MOTIVES AND PATTERNS OF SUPPORT

Motives

1. We believe that the Sandinista Directorate, in effect the government of Nicaragua, views support of the Salvadoran insurgency as a key element in the solidification of the Nicaraguan revolution. The Sandinistas share the belief of the Castro regime that, in a region long dominated by the United States, the ability of revolutionary governments to withstand antagonistic foreign pressures is linked to the fortunes of other Latin American revolutionary movements. Additionally, the Sandinistas feel a personal debt to the Salvadoran insurgents, who provided arms, personnel, and financial assistance to the Nicaraguans in their struggle against President Somoza.

2. The calculations of the Sandinista leaders--all former insurgents themselves--reflect practical concerns about the survival of their regime as well as the ideology of revolutionary solidarity. They are acutely sensitive (even paranoid) about their isolated position as the only revolutionary government in Central America, especially vis-a-vis the hostile military-dominated regimes on their northern flank. By assisting the insurgents, the Sandinistas seek, in the near term, to tie down the Salvadoran military and, over time, to contribute to the victory of a like-minded revolutionary government. Meanwhile, cross-border raids from Honduras of anti-Sandinista Nicaraguans remind them of their vulnerabilities.

3. This combination of factors--ties of revolutionary solidarity, moral indebtedness, and concern for self-defense--has led the Sandinistas to provide clandestine assistance to Salvadoran insurgents ever since they seized power in July 1979. The close personal ties and clandestine networks forged by Cubans, Sandinistas, and other Central American revolutionaries during the Nicaraguan insurrection provided a framework for rapidly building a support mechanism for the Salvadoran insurgents. In cooperation with Cuba and with other regional revolutionary groups the Nicaraguans have provided military training; secure transit and safe haven;

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"volunteer" combatants; intelligence, planning, and communications support and arms and military equipment. We believe that only the last-named has varied much in intensity over time.

Training, Transit, and "Volunteers"*

4. Soon after the Sandinistas took power they began to train Salvadoran insurgents--a few hundred of whom remained in Nicaragua after fighting against Somoza's forces. Most, if not all, the training has been provided under the direction of the Nicaraguan military, often in regular Army camps.

5. Apparently, Cuba and Nicaragua have developed a two-stage process for training revolutionaries from El Salvador and other Latin American countries. Basic instruction is frequently given in Nicaragua to prepare for more advanced courses taught in Cuba. Last August, for example, [REDACTED] Salvadorans reportedly began six weeks of basic training in Nicaragua; afterward, the most promising trainees were to proceed to Cuba for a four-month advanced course. Between June and September, 12 Salvadorans started a three-month pilot training program in Nicaragua, to be completed in Cuba. A Salvadoran [REDACTED] stated in early November that he had trained in both countries.

6. In addition to secure transit to and from Cuba for Salvadoran trainees, the Sandinistas have provided various facilities, including safehouses in Nicaragua for insurgent leaders. Nicaraguan officials have apparently staged air rescue missions into El Salvador to transport wounded guerrillas to Nicaragua for treatment.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

7. The Sandinistas have also encouraged experienced Nicaraguan guerrillas to go to El Salvador to serve as combatants and advisers. Several sources have described canvassing by Cuban and Nicaraguan officials for volunteers among security force personnel. A Nicaraguan [REDACTED] said he and 40 other Nicaraguans had been recruited by the Sandinista military in November 1979, given five months' additional training, and sent to El Salvador to fight.

Planning, Intelligence, and Communications*

8. The Sandinistas, along with the Cubans, have provided assistance in the planning of insurgent strategy and tactics and in intelligence and communications. The Nicaraguans provide false documentation to facilitate the movement of guerrillas throughout the region. They apparently also facilitate communication by pouch and radio signal.

9. The Salvadorans operated their own radio station (Liberacion) within Nicaragua from 13 December until 6 February, when US pressures forced it off the air. By locating in Nicaragua the insurgents for the first time gained the security necessary for establishing a semi-permanent facility powerful enough to broadcast throughout the region.

Arms and Military Supplies

10. Until last fall, direct Nicaraguan participation in facilitating the flow of arms to El Salvador was relatively modest. Several reports indicated that in the spring

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of 1980 weapons were being ferried in small boats to El Salvador. Fragmentary information suggests that the Sandinistas also used land and air routes, but our ability to monitor these operations was limited by their intermittent nature, as well as by the likely frequent alteration of routes and carriers and the limited size of individual deliveries.

11. The Sandinistas' desire to mask their role presumably accounts for their decision in early 1980 to establish a support mechanism in Costa Rica for channeling arms to El Salvador. By late summer, however, exposure of that supply network forced Havana and Managua to relocate most of this operation in Nicaragua.

Accelerated Support for the January 1981 Offensive

12. Moreover, the Sandinistas greatly accelerated the transshipping of arms directly from Nicaragua last fall, as the Salvadoran insurgents readied themselves for a major military thrust. Starting in September, Cuba substantially increased the frequency of flights to Nicaragua to accommodate a sharply augmented flow of military equipment that had been collected from a number of Communist and radical countries.

13. [REDACTED] in November--after lengthening and upgrading a remote airfield at Papalona--the Sandinistas initiated a direct airlift to El Salvador supervised by the Nicaraguan Air Force commander, [REDACTED]. The Sandinistas accelerated the airlift in January by supplementing their small fleet of Cessnas and Pipers with larger capacity C-47s.

14. The Sandinistas also stepped up the use of sea infiltration routes last fall. Small launches operating out of several Nicaraguan Pacific ports traversed the Gulf of Fonseca at night, carrying arms, ammunition, and personnel.

[REDACTED] The insurgents who invaded El Salvador's southeastern coast during the January offensive almost certainly came from Nicaragua.

15. In addition, overland arms shipments through Honduras almost certainly increased early this year.

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[REDACTED]

II. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Responding to US Pressures

16. In response to US demarches early in 1981, the Sandinistas have cut back their support to the Salvadoran insurgents. In addition to US diplomatic pressures, the Sandinistas probably are also reacting to fears about greater prospects of detection, and recognition that in the present phase of reduced combat, the insurgents have no pressing need for the large volumes of supplies provided to support the January offensive (some 200 tons).

17. Radio Liberacion ceased broadcasting in early February. Various sources of information give us a high confidence that the Sandinistas have suspended air deliveries since late January. As in the past, we are less able to monitor land and sea shipments. Some supplies originally from Nicaragua continue to move into El Salvador from Honduras. But we have no hard evidence of fresh shipments from Nicaragua, and fragmentary evidence indicates that land and sea deliveries have been sharply curtailed, and perhaps suspended altogether.

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Circumventing US Pressures

18. In our judgment, Nicaraguan assistance in areas difficult to detect and against which the US has not made representations very probably continues roughly at past levels:

-- [REDACTED] the Salvadoran
insurgents have a "command post" in Nicaragua,
[REDACTED] the
guerrillas continue to travel between the two
countries.

[REDACTED]

-- We have no reports on the recent dispatch of "volunteers," but there are strong indications that Nicaraguans continue to fight in El Salvador.

[REDACTED]

there are some indications of plans to expand training in Nicaragua.

19. Moreover, there is abundant and persuasive--if fragmentary and indirect--evidence that the Sandinistas are pursuing with determination the establishment of alternative routes and methods. This evidence indicates that they are working to develop a capability for resuming or expanding military deliveries, with greater potential for escaping detection or for providing plausible denial of Nicaraguan complicity:

-- Nicaraguans have been working with the Cubans, and with Costa Ricans long involved in air flights of arms in Central America, to reopen supply flights from Costa Rica--using Sandinista-supplied aircraft and pilots trained in Nicaragua.

[REDACTED], the Sandinistas are making preparations to resume flights from various airstrips in Nicaragua as well. Nicaraguans are also working on new evasion and denial schemes.

20. Meanwhile, the already large Nicaraguan stockpiles of weapons and supplies for the insurgents probably continue to expand.

[REDACTED] Finally, we believe that Nicaraguans in Honduras are still active in the processing of arms deliveries from there to the insurgents.

Net Judgment

21. In sum, we conclude that the Sandinistas very probably continue various efforts in support of the Salvadoran insurgents. They have either cut out or cut back arms deliveries. But they are taking steps to resume or expand these, if and when they so decide.

III. OUTLOOK

Reexamining Nicaraguan and Cuban Motives

22. The net impact on the Sandinistas and on the Castro regime of the recent, more forceful US policy regarding El Salvador is difficult to anticipate with confidence. Nicaraguan leaders are aware that US power and influence could make an already dismal economic situation more desperate, and could add muscle to security threats from neighboring countries and domestic sources. Cuban leaders also face intractable (if less serious) domestic problems and are more concerned about potential forceful US moves against their interests than at any time since the early 1960s.

23. We believe, nonetheless, that Managua and Havana remain determined to support the Salvadoran insurgency. In effect, they hold a "reverse domino" thesis about revolutionary fortunes in the region. Both countries would see stabilization of a pro-US government in San Salvador (whether conservative or moderate) as a setback to their interests. Especially the Sandinistas would see such a development as leading to US supported efforts by El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala to move against the Nicaraguan revolution.

24. Conversely, a revolutionary regime in El Salvador-- and even the continuation of a vigorous revolutionary challenge--would be seen by Managua and Havana as reducing their vulnerabilities vis-a-vis foreign and domestic adversaries. Furthermore, recent developments have, if anything, probably brought the Sandinistas and Cubans closer together with the former seeing the need to rely even more heavily on Castro's counsel, aid, and protection.

25. While the current tactics of reduced support may continue for some time, only a fundamental change in Nicaraguan leadership or a far-reaching change in the priorities of the present Directorate would alter the government's underlying commitment to revolutionary success in El Salvador. Neither development is more than a remote prospect over the next six months or so. Moreover, while there is some evidence of increased factional strife within the Directorate, it has not yet clearly surfaced on the issue of aid to the insurgents, and we see recent Nicaraguan activities as an indication that Directorate members still are largely agreed on priorities.

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Salvadoran Developments

26. The most likely near-term prospect is for continuing military stalemate in El Salvador: neither side is likely to deal a deathblow to the other. But with programmed US assistance, the momentum could shift to the government and the insurgents could be put increasingly on the defensive.

27. Under these circumstances, the Sandinistas will weigh carefully their intense commitment to the insurgents versus their fear of antagonizing the United States. As indicated, the Sandinistas have already taken preparatory measures for stepping up their arms support and have continued other forms of direct assistance. Their preference, reflected in their mix of current activities, is to attempt to mollify Washington while continuing more circumspect aid. Nonetheless, if forced to choose they would very likely give a higher priority to aiding the insurgents than to appeasing the United States.

28. If the insurgents were to gain the momentum, we believe the Sandinistas would throw caution to the wind and dramatically step up their assistance, with little regard for the consequences. If, in contrast, the insurgents do very poorly in military terms, the Sandinistas would probably increase their pressures on the insurgents to turn to political means (including negotiations) to preserve their influence. In these circumstances, the Nicaraguans would hope quietly and slowly to provide military assistance for some subsequent fighting phase. In short, only in the event of insurgent victory or virtual elimination of their capabilities will the Sandinistas completely disengage from support activities.

Dealing With US Pressures

29. The Sandinistas would probably like to put off any showdown with the United States for as long as possible. Toward that end they might continue the current partial pause for some time or even take overt propitiatory measures, such as issuing ambiguous declarations against outside interference in El Salvador.

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30. We judge, however, that they realize they cannot be certain that the United States too is not stalling for its own purposes, before moving more aggressively against their interests. They may respond to sharper US pressures with a quick expansion of aid to the insurgents, to show that they have not been intimidated.

31. We conclude that no serious decline in the present level of support of the insurgency is likely, and that very probably increased activity in arms support will occur over the next several weeks or months.