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Page 000

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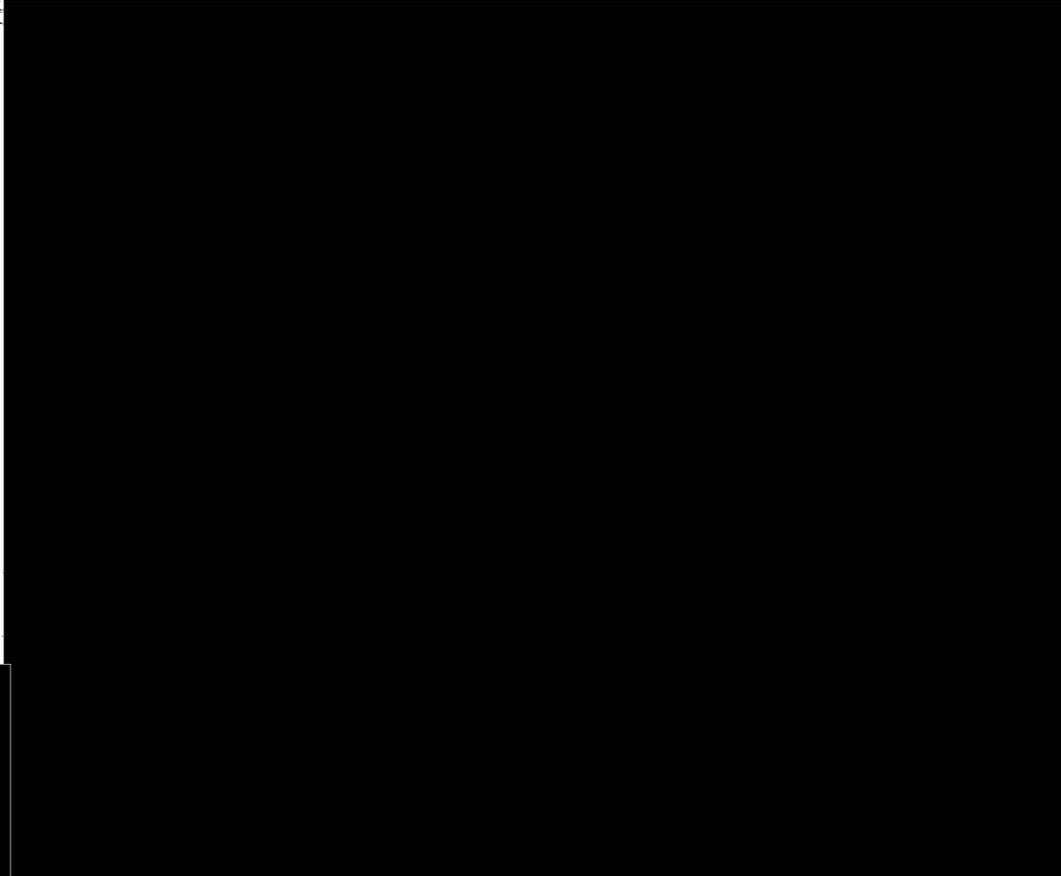
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Contents



Nicaragua-Honduras: *Insurgent Threat to the Sandinistas* . 11

~~Top Secret~~
SC 00268/82

Special Analysis

NICARAGUA-HONDURAS: Insurgent Threat to the Sandinistas

The Sandinistas' recent declaration of a military emergency along Nicaragua's northern border reflects their growing concern about the increasing capabilities of insurgents based in Honduras. Sandinista military and security forces are the largest in Central America, however, and can counter any near-term challenge. Meanwhile, renewed efforts toward greater cooperation among the various insurgent factions have failed to make significant progress.

After a lull in September, insurgent attacks from Honduras occurred almost daily during October. Most strikes were small harassment operations against Sandinista border posts and isolated patrols. Some recent attacks may have been diversions to infiltrate insurgent units from Honduras and establish base camps in Nicaragua.

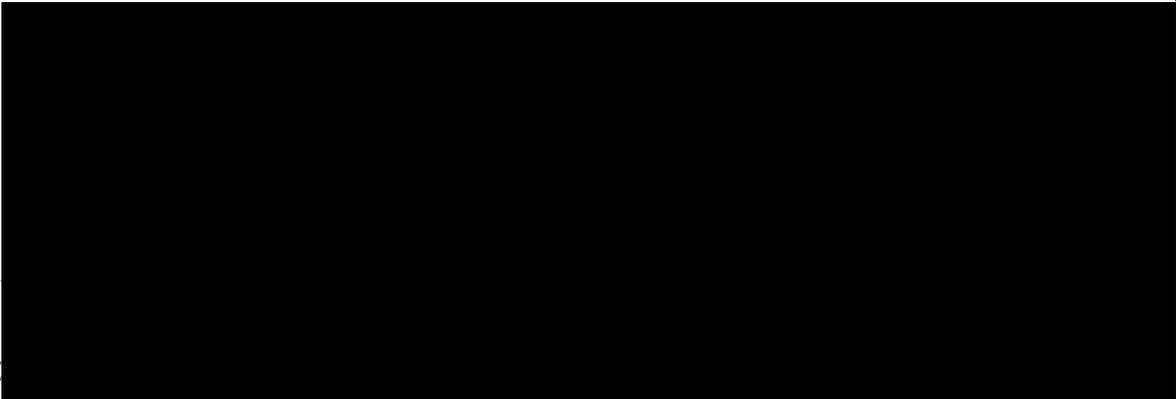
The insurgents also have conducted sabotage operations, and the destruction of several key bridges earlier this year indicates that they can disrupt the country's road network. In addition, an attack in August on a road construction camp caused an estimated \$1.2 million in damage.

The personnel costs to the Nicaraguans have been high. The government has admitted losing 109 killed in the last three months, and the total thus far this year may be over 600. Several Cubans also have been killed.

The Insurgent Groups

The attacks from Honduras are being carried out primarily by the Nicaraguan Democratic Front, the only insurgent group that has demonstrated a sustained military capability. It is led largely by former members of the Nicaraguan National Guard and includes disaffected Sandinistas, Miskito Indians, and other Nicaraguan dissidents. The Front now has an estimated 2,000 to 2,500 full-time, armed personnel, and it continues to grow rapidly.

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The Democratic Revolutionary Alliance, which is based in Costa Rica, is the other major anti-Sandinista organization. It is a loose federation led by revolutionary hero Eden Pastora and former Nicaraguan junta member Alfonso Robelo. The Alliance is trying to build a military capability while continuing propaganda aimed at undermining Western economic support for Managua.



//The Sandinistas have reacted to the insurgent threat from Honduras by continuing to strengthen their forces in the northern border area.



//In addition, Managua recently extended a nationwide state of emergency. It suspended most civil liberties for another six months.//

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The Sandinistas' mounting fears are reflected in their increasing allegations of an imminent invasion from Honduras. They apparently are using the allegations to rally popular support, to deflect international criticism of their repressive policies, and to justify their continuing military buildup. Managua also recently issued a white paper alleging more than 400 incidents on the Honduran border during the past three years. [REDACTED]

Outlook

//The insurgents probably realize that their hopes of overthrowing the Sandinistas hinge on massive popular support for an uprising and on defections from the Army. There is widespread dissatisfaction with the regime, mostly among the middle class. There is little evidence at this time, however, that popular support and Army defections will materialize.// [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The Sandinistas, not wanting to appear the aggressors, have refrained thus far from major attacks on insurgent bases in Honduras. Nicaragua's recent election to the UN Security Council, however, may have reduced constraints on such actions. Moreover, if the insurgents become more unified and their threat continues to grow, Nicaragua is likely to ask Cuba for greatly expanded military support. [REDACTED]