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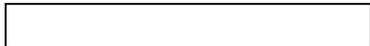
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3 June 1987

Talking Points on Nicaraguan Insurgency for DD/ALA's Briefing of SSCI

During the past two years, analysts in the Intelligence Community has offered judgments on the likely course of events in Nicaragua that we in the DI feel have held up well and I would ask your indulgence as I read a brief excerpt (March 1986).... 

We still believe that the insurgents are unlikely to achieve an outright military victory over the near term. At the same time, however, we acknowledge that they have come a lot farther than we anticipated they would when funding for the "program" resumed last October. Let me tick off the major areas of improvement:

- Resupply, which had been the rebels' most critical vulnerability, is vastly improved. Aerial resupply now is provided on the field commanders' request, and efforts to develop maritime and ground resupply routes have begun. The rainy season--May through November--is unlikely to do more than occasionally delay scheduled missions.
- The pace and scope of rebel military actions has also impressed us. Because resupply has become regular and dependable, the insurgents are able to remain active simultaneously on at least three fronts--northwest, central, and south. In the past, they were unable to sustain activities in more than one front for over a month.
- The rebels are beginning to attack more visible and difficult military targets--such as the logistics base at Las Banderitas--and to move toward the fringes of the western plains, where the bulk of the Nicaraguan population lives. The demolitions training the rebels received has improved their capability to sabotage the economic infrastructure--electrical and telephone towers.
- In the area of psychological operations, the insurgents also have made significant progress. The airdropping of anti-regime leaflets near three towns in the northwest last month was also an important first. In addition,

APPROVED FOR RELEASE  
DATE: JUN 2004

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[redacted] Radio Liberacion is well received by a wide audience, although regime jamming blocks out most of Managua, and additional jammers capable of covering all of Nicaragua reportedly are under construction near Esteli. [redacted]

Despite these improvements, the resistance continues to be plagued by shortcomings or weaknesses in several areas.

- Rebel field units continue to experience uneven leadership. The training program has taught some commanders new skills and enhanced their awareness of the political nature of the insurgency, but new skills do not appear to have been passed on to the rank and file very well.
- While the rebels are beginning to attack more heavily defended military targets, they continue to focus on economic targets that make them vulnerable to regime changes of banditry and abuse of civilians. Militia units frequently are garrisoned at agricultural cooperatives, for example, and attacks on such locations provide the regime propaganda windfalls when civilian casualties result.
- Likewise, although the rebels' resupply network is functioning remarkably well, [redacted] the aircraft flown by foreign contract personnel, leaving the rebels very vulnerable should this assistance stop.
- Politically, several hard issues have yet to be resolved. The recent reforms restructured the insurgency on paper, but we believe that the question of civilian control of the military will remain contentious. [redacted]
- One of the biggest chronic problems facing the rebels is their absence from the populated west coast and the lack of internal support networks.

In the next six months, assuming that the program receives new funding, the insurgents are likely to continue making incremental progress.

- In the field, coordinated attacks on better defended military targets probably will increase, reflecting the spreading effects of the training program. Attacks on controversial targets, such as cooperatives, will certainly continue as will instances of human rights abuses.
- Ground and maritime resupply networks should become established, providing alternative means of refitting troops in the field.

- [REDACTED]
- We look for the rebels to establish a base of operations on the fringes of the western plains, especially in the highlands in the west of Chinandega and Leon Departments.
  - The insurgents should make some progress in establishing internal support networks to broaden the base of popular support for the insurgency and improving the security of their operations. [REDACTED]