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Nicaragua's New Military



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An Intelligence Assessment

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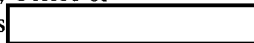
Nicaragua's New Military



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An Intelligence Assessment

*Information available as of 15 October 1981
has been used in the preparation of this report.*

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Nicaragua's New Military

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Key Judgments

Nicaragua already outstrips its Central American neighbors in military manpower, armor, and certain artillery. It is in the process of building an armed force, closely patterned on the Cuban model, that will surpass the combined strength of its neighbors. By 1983 Nicaragua's Sandinistas probably will be in a position to dominate Central America militarily.

Since Nicaragua expects Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, with US backing, to initiate a regional war, its conventional military growth has so far been defensive. This buildup intimidates governments in the region, however, and encourages the Sandinistas to export their revolution. Through aid to regional insurgents, Managua seeks to tie down neighboring forces while developing a potential fifth column.

The Sandinistas' active-duty force of some 19,000 to 24,000 regulars probably will reach 35,000 to 40,000 men in the next year or two. By then they will also have a ready reserve of approximately 40,000 men. The remainder of the 200,000 people the Sandinistas want for militia training will be incorporated into irregular territorial forces.

Nicaragua probably will overcome Honduras' present air advantage, in the next year or so, and also deploy radar-assisted antiaircraft artillery and surface-to-air missiles. In addition, the Sandinistas have received some 25 Soviet-made T-54/55 tanks and in the next year will probably receive a total of 40 to 50 tanks, enabling them to deploy two armor battalions. Even now, the Sandinistas could probably beat back an attack by any one potential adversary in the region.

Havana apparently has been Managua's chief small-arms supplier and transshipper of larger weapons. The defense pact signed between the countries in late 1979 makes Cuba the guarantor of Sandinista rule. With about 2,200 military and security advisers in the country, Cuba's training programs are extremely broad; at least several hundred Nicaraguans are also training or studying in Cuba at any one time and the total could be substantially higher.

Moscow's role in planning and facilitating the military buildup is important, although its direct involvement is limited. Part of the increased Soviet arms shipments to Cuba this year are intended for transshipment to

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Nicaragua and to replace Cuban arms previously delivered to the Sandinistas. The Cubans and East Europeans work in concert with the Soviets, and both the PLO and possibly the Algerians are being encouraged by Moscow to play larger roles in boosting Nicaragua's military. Most of the Soviet effort will continue to be directed through intermediaries; direct involvement will grow in measured increments in the hope of muting United States and regional reactions.

Significant Sandinista vulnerabilities—such as a deficient air arm and lack of weapons proficiency—will reinforce the preference for a broad defensive strategy for at least the next year or so. The Sandinistas will face a lack of skilled support personnel and the drawdown of a relatively slim officer corps for foreign training. In addition, the construction of repair and maintenance facilities will probably lag as new equipment is received, and the logistics system is not fully developed.

Managua's increasing military capability will nevertheless translate into growing tactical aggressiveness. As the Sandinistas have less to fear from a Honduran attack, they will increasingly risk strikes across the border to eliminate the camps of counterrevolutionaries, whose raids they see as a forerunner to eventual foreign invasion. This will widen the possibility of border incidents that could spark open warfare.

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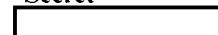
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Nicaragua's New Military

Strategic Thinking

The Sandinistas are preparing for regional warfare—which they expect their neighbors to initiate—and military preparedness is therefore an overriding objective. The Sandinistas have designated this year as one of "Defense and Production," but defense is clearly the first priority.

The Sandinistas' attitude is central to this military buildup and explains why their armed forces' capability will continue to grow. Even relatively moderate Sandinistas see regional conflict as a significant possibility, and for many in the leadership it is probably close to an inevitability. The United States, in the Nicaraguan view, is actively encouraging and covertly supporting collaboration by the regimes in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador against Managua's leftist administration.

This thinking permeates the command structure. Field-grade officers view the border clashes with Honduras as a prelude to a broader conflict, and thus contingency planning for open war is under way. With the government stressing what it regards as Tegucigalpa's aggressive actions, the public increasingly regards Honduras as a serious threat. Armed forces commander Humberto Ortega has publicly voiced what is a strongly held private view: that the US decision in May to halt wheat shipments to Nicaragua was not an economic move but "an aggressive political measure to set a better, more suitable stage for . . . military intervention."

These perceptions are reinforced by Cuba, whose estimated 2,200 military and security advisers help shape Sandinista strategic thinking. Havana's experience with the Bay of Pigs invasion attempt and its view of Reagan administration policies prompt it to encourage Managua to build a professional military with sufficient prowess to offset the combined strengths of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala—all of which are viewed as US pawns.



Figure 1. Commander Humberto Ortega [The halt in US aid is] "an aggressive political measure to set a better, more suitable stage for . . . military intervention."

The Sandinistas are therefore determined to build such a force. The recent receipt of Soviet field artillery pieces and some two dozen tanks are only the first steps in building a powerful military machine. At the same time, this buildup is fostering an alliance among the northern tier military regimes and making open warfare more likely. The Sandinistas probably recognize this, but with their own view of the inevitability of conflict, it only accelerates their efforts.

Much of the Sandinistas' strategic thinking is necessarily defensive at this relatively early stage of the buildup, paralleling the thinking that initially shaped the Cuban military. Fear of attack by the United States reinforces their present strategy, which is to fall back, resist, and survive invasion by a superior military force. Primary effort has been expended on recruiting and training large numbers of personnel to deter an invading force and on setting up an air

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defense system. Defensive trenching extends along some of the border with Honduras. Like the Cubans in the early years of the Castro regime, the Sandinistas reportedly are attempting to make regional commands self-sufficient by dispersing weapons stocks and maintenance facilities. In addition, in the event Managua should fall, substantial stores of weapons have been cached for use in irregular warfare. Given their guerrilla origins, the Sandinistas believe such irregular warfare could be conducted by them and their supporters throughout Central America. [REDACTED]

These views on the likelihood of conflict and fallback strategy underscore why Managua's cooperation with Cuba and the Soviets in supplying aid to Central America's leftists will not only persist but probably increase. Such support both furthers the Sandinistas' political objectives and is an integral part of their military strategy. [REDACTED]

The effort extends far beyond the Sandinistas' well-known involvement in El Salvador. For example, Managua has become a major training center for Central American radicals. A ranking Sandinista officer has noted that Nicaragua hopes to benefit from the acceleration of insurgent activities in Guatemala. [REDACTED]

From the Sandinistas' perspective, it is Nicaraguan self-interest—quite apart from Cuban urging—that dictates continued aid to regional insurgents. If Nicaragua is to avoid encirclement, revolutionary movements in the region must prosper. Thus, the Sandinistas cooperate not only with Havana, but with others such as the PLO—and through them, the Soviets—in promoting revolution. [REDACTED]

In the near term the Sandinistas hope the training and arming of revolutionary groups will add to domestic turmoil and tie down the potentially hostile forces of

their northern neighbors. In the event of open warfare, the Sandinistas will have a fifth column apparatus in neighboring territories that would be a critical support element for their fallback guerrilla strategy. [REDACTED]

As the Sandinistas' military capabilities widen and their fear of possible attack by Honduras or others diminishes, it is inevitable that Nicaragua will be in a better position to advise, train, and arm revolutionaries. [REDACTED]

The internal Nicaraguan political situation is unlikely to slow either conventional military expansion or the growth of the Managua-based insurgent support network. Instead, pressures from the Nicaraguan democratic opposition and from armed revolutionary bands are accelerating the Sandinistas' military schedule and stiffening their commitment to Central American leftists. The Sandinistas' control is already extensive enough to make its sub rosa operations immune to local investigation or pressure. Further, believing their domestic opponents are linked to the United States and neighboring conservative regimes, the Sandinistas are strengthening their commitment to the left in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala as a means of ensuring the security of their own regime. Moreover, Nicaragua's rapid expansion of troop strength and acquisition of relatively modern weapons are intended to quell dissent at home as well as meet the expected US-backed invasion from northern tier forces. [REDACTED]

Armed Forces: Size and Structure

In less than two years the Sandinistas have transformed an undisciplined guerrilla force (the core of which was 4,000 to 5,000 men) into a standing army of some 19,000 to 24,000 men, of which about 20 percent are apparently reserves or militia on active duty. Perhaps another 20,000 or more militia serve as an additional reserve with sufficient training to be incorporated easily into the military. These totals do not include the 8,000-man police force. [REDACTED]

Of the four Central American states that maintain standing armies, Nicaragua has a population only about half the average of its neighbors and is working from a more limited resource base as well. Only El

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Salvador's military approaches Nicaragua's in total personnel, but the Salvadorans have boosted their armed forces and national guard strength to 18,000 men because of their major counterinsurgency effort against some 4,000 to 4,500 guerrillas. In contrast to Nicaragua's plans to boost recruitment and widen the present personnel gap further, none of its neighbors has embarked on a major force expansion (see table 1). [Redacted]

At most, 110 to 125 Nicaraguan units may have been formed (the majority of which are reserves or militia) with an apparent authorized strength of about 700 personnel each—approximately 77,000 to 88,000 men in all. Many of the militia have been given only limited training, however, and a number of regular and reserve units are under strength. Many units are in the initial stages of formation, with the Sandinistas apparently assigning unit numbers sequentially as soon as a group begins organizing. This is partly because of the Sandinistas' vested interest in exaggerating both the size of their militia and the extent of reserve recruitment. Some units are organized only on paper, and there are some inconsistencies in the numbering system. [Redacted]

The overall growth of the Sandinista People's Army (EPS), however, is evident. Beginning late last year, and especially this year, reserve groups have been integrated into active-duty forces. Moreover, large groups have been sent abroad for training, and a major effort has been made to form new militia units. The original Sandinista target of 16,000 active-duty troops probably was exceeded late last year. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Our 19,000 to 24,000 estimate of active-duty personnel reflects several considerations. An estimated breakdown of the force structure provides the higher figure. [Redacted] many units are still under strength, even taking into consideration that the EPS is being forced to use temporary facilities, that there is probably overcrowding in pres-

Table 1
Comparison of Central American Military Forces

	Population (million)	GNP 1980 (billion \$)	Area (km ²)	Armed Forces
Nicaragua	2.5	1.8	147,900	19,000-24,000 ^a
Guatemala	7.2	7.6	108,880	15,000
Honduras	3.8	2.2	112,150	13,500
El Salvador	4.9	3.2	21,400	18,000

^a In contrast, Nicaraguan forces in 1979 under President Somoza totaled 10,500, including police.

[Redacted]

ent structures, and that some personnel are training abroad. More precise totals are hampered not only by limited Western access, but by the EPS integration of regular, reserve, and militia forces. (See appendix D.)

[Redacted]

Roughly, the major line elements of the ground forces include:

- Ten regular motorized infantry battalions with an authorized strength of 857 men each.
- Six Frontier Guard battalions (commanded by and integrated into the regular EPS, but which may include militia forces as a major component) probably with an authorized strength of 600 to 700 men each.
- One tank battalion (possibly expanding to two) estimated at 250 men total.
- One artillery battalion totaling 350 men.
- Two anti-aircraft battalions with 350 men each.
- One engineering battalion with 350 men.
- One special forces battalion with 350 to 500 men.
- Five battalions of reserves or militia on active duty totaling 3,500 men. [Redacted]

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This line strength adds up to approximately 18,000 men. Air force and naval elements add another 1,000 men. Other support troops may total 5,000 men, based on known Nicaraguan inventories and their practice of relying heavily on large numbers of personnel in the absence of skilled technicians. [Redacted]

This provides an active duty complement of 24,000 men at full strength. Subtracting the reserve battalion strength and assuming that half of the Frontier Guard forces are militia on active duty, about 19,000 of this total would be regular EPS. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Even assuming the lower estimate, however, it is clear the Sandinistas are embarked on a major expansion.

[Redacted]

In terms of structure and personnel, the Sandinistas in many respects are patterned after the Cuban model, which may provide some insight into future developments. During the last several years, for instance, the composition of the Cuban armed forces has been altered to reduce the number of regular troops and to increase reliance on reserves and a territorial militia.² The economic drain of a large standing army was one of the motivations for the reduction. [Redacted]

If the Cuban peacetime army formula of 1 to 2 percent of the population is applied to Nicaragua with a population of 2.5 million, it would mean a standing force of some 25,000 to 50,000 men. Coincidentally, the combined standing force of Managua's three northern neighbors is 48,000 men, which may be one element in Sandinista planning. Moreover, the EPS has a reported target of 30 reserve motorized infantry battalions—a total of 24,000 men—which accords with the Cuban model. It also would bring Nicaragua's total ready force close to 2 percent of the population. [Redacted]

This suggests a possible topping out of regular forces in the not too distant future and fairly heavy reliance on reserves to boost active-duty forces to the 35,000- to 40,000-man level or slightly beyond. This is partly borne out by the accelerated patterns of militia recruitment this year and plans for reserve to regular ratios of 3 to 1 and 4 to 1 in some areas. As in Cuba, economic considerations also will play a role, since reserves are a cheaper way to maintain a large standing army and are not as disruptive to civilian production. [Redacted]

Militia and Reserve Programs

As noted, reserve or militia forces (about 5,000 of the 19,000 to 24,000 active-duty strength) already boost the EPS, although the militia's capability falls short

² The Cuban Deputy Chief of Staff forecast the shift in emphasis in 1970 when he suggested that a Cuban peacetime army should be 1 to 2 percent of the population, with a heavy dependence on ready reserves. At that time Cuba had some 130,000 regular personnel in its standing army. At present, with a population of almost 10 million, the Cubans have approximately 120,000 men (1.2 percent of the population) on active duty; a major percentage of the 26,000 to 32,000 Cubans serving overseas are activated reservists. Some 100,000 to 130,000 ready reserves (available on 4-hour callup) back this force, with the total of active-duty forces and ready reserves approximating 2 percent of total population. [Redacted]

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of the extravagant claims of Sandinista spokesmen. EPS leaders have boasted of a 120,000-man militia already in being, but much of this force is unorganized. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Nevertheless, this year witnessed a major surge in militia recruitment and mobilization. Perhaps 25,000 to 30,000 personnel have passed through some stage of training. Additional personnel probably participate in weekly drills, but are not yet organized into reserve battalions. In some instances the EPS apparently provides the better militia recruits with additional training to reach reserve battalion status, after which they may serve on active duty. In turn the reserve forces are the primary source of recruits for the regular Army. [Redacted]

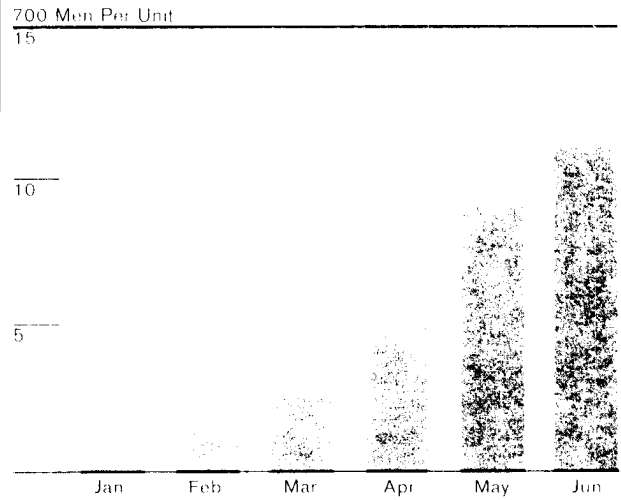
Much of the militia is still being defined. Those units that will constitute the formal reserve were initially not markedly differentiated from others, but they now appear to have separate status and longer tours of duty in tandem with regular units. Border Guard Forces originally were under the Ministry of Interior, but now are integrated into the EPS and work with regular units at activities ranging from land and naval patrols to customs duties. [Redacted]

The Sandinista goal of a 200,000-man militia (some spokesmen have even suggested 300,000) is probably unrealistic in a strict military sense. Already Sandinista leaders are privately talking about winnowing the militia to make it a more respectable force. Some youth and women's battalions have more propaganda than military value. [Redacted]

Nevertheless, the Sandinistas have a good chance to achieve their goals. Based on recruitment to date, they seem likely to provide at least rudimentary training to some 150,000 people by mid-1982. Even if only one-fourth of them have adequate skills to reinforce active-duty troops, this would probably be sufficient for Sandinista needs. In a crisis in late 1982, therefore, the Sandinistas would be able to add quickly 40,000 or so personnel to a projected active-duty force

Figure 4

Militia Units Mobilized or Trained in 1981



[Redacted]

of 35,000 to 40,000 troops. The EPS would thus easily outnumber the combined strength of its potential enemies. [Redacted]

Politicization

Sandinista objectives are political as well as military. Focusing on numbers alone neglects the other primary aim - for regular and reserve alike - which is indoctrination and politicization. [Redacted]

Among regular forces this is reflected at several levels. The Office of Political and Cultural Affairs, part of the General Staff, also has components at the regional command levels. National Directorate member Luis Carrion recently contended that regional political chiefs cannot give orders to the local military commander, but admitted that there is at least equality between the two. Perhaps more pertinent, a former EPS officer indicated that the political chief was the

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Figure 5. Vice Minister of Defense Luis Carrion
 "... the people must be trained around the army
 so they can be mobilized to defend the national
 sovereignty."

equal or superior of the regional military commander, since the former reported through the political network to the controlling National Directorate, rather than through the EPS command structure.

The EPS devotes perhaps a fourth or more of basic training time to political instruction. Officers are being screened to determine those most willing to defend the FSLN from foreign invasion, whatever the source. The investigations are also designed to root out by 1985 those who might prefer social democracy to rule by the proletariat. Probably not coincidentally, 1985 is the year the FSLN has promised elections.

Militia training reflects the same political emphasis. The EPS combat chief recently stated that the most important instruction for backup troops is political—ranking above tactical and physical training. Having reserve and militia forces manning the front lines in the battle against counterrevolutionary elements draws the civilian population further into the political struggle. Similarly, the Sandinistas have blurred the distinction between regulars and reserves in a number

of areas, upgrading salaries and instituting death benefits to families of militia. This tends to unify the EPS and local populations, as does the practice of blending the anti-insurgent units with regular, reserve, militia, and police personnel.

Over time these varied efforts, in conjunction with a large corps of foreign-trained personnel, should provide the FSLN with a politically reliable fighting force.

The Materiel Buildup

In addition to its manpower buildup and its expansion of physical plant and training facilities, the EPS is also acquiring additional materiel. The most glaring weakness—lack of a significant air capability—will probably persist into next year, but this will be offset by improved air defenses, longer range artillery, and more armor and firepower.

It is this expansion as much as the current arsenal that has so unsettled other Central American governments. The EPS achieved a firepower advantage in field artillery in May when it received at least 12 Soviet 152-mm howitzers. This field piece, with a range of 16 kilometers, easily outdistances the 105-mm howitzers in most Central American inventories. With 12 to 16 guns sufficient for one battalion, it is likely that another unit eventually will be formed in order to match or outclass Honduras, which has three artillery battalions on paper though only one is combat ready.

Nicaragua's antiaircraft defenses are already extensive by Central American standards, and given the emphasis on air defense, it is likely the inventory will

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[redacted]

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be expanded. Some 88 ZPU-4 or ZU-23-2 guns have been observed at sites around the country. [redacted]

by late this year or early next. It is also likely that MIG aircraft or similar planes from Vietnam will be in Nicaragua in 1982. [redacted]

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[redacted] They also have an undetermined number of SA-7 surface-to-air missiles. [redacted]

Deliveries of Soviet-built T-54/55 tanks were originally expected last spring, but the Nicaraguans may have delayed receipt because of heavy attention in the US press to their prospective arrival and possible concern over upsetting some of their international supporters. Both Mexico and members of the Socialist International, who have strongly supported the Sandinistas, have expressed disquiet over any major buildup of armor. [redacted]

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[redacted] some were observed for the first time in a military parade last July. [redacted]

Nevertheless, vulnerability to air attack remains Nicaragua's principal weakness, and even speeded-up equipment deliveries or training programs are unlikely to solve it in the near term. The main air defense weapons are vintage ZPU-4s or ZU-23-2s, which are relatively small caliber (14.5 mm and 23 mm, respectively). Although they may give a psychological boost to the Nicaraguans, they would not be a match for the Hondurans, whose claim to military superiority rests principally on a squadron of 15 Super Mysteres. [redacted]

Nevertheless, the EPS has received 23 to 28 T-54/55s, enough for one battalion. [redacted]

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The gap is most likely to be filled by a relatively sophisticated, radar-assisted anti-aircraft missile system like the SA-2 or SA-6. [redacted]

[redacted]

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[redacted] its appearance next year would not be surprising. Actual delivery depends on political considerations as well as the year-long training schedule. Factors that could speed up delivery include a delay in Nicaraguan receipt of fighter aircraft, or a Honduran move to improve its capabilities or readiness posture. SA-2 or SA-6 training would take about a year; if training was initiated in late 1980, the Nicaraguans would be capable of operating such systems by early next year at the latest. This assumes, however, that Nicaragua has enough qualified personnel to complete the courses successfully. Even after such training, Nicaraguan personnel would probably continue to have problems maintaining and operating such sophisticated equipment without foreign assistance, and their level of proficiency is likely to be low until considerable experience is gained. [redacted]

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[redacted] additional T-54/55s are due later this year, but at this point we expect international pressure and the Nicaraguan Army's own limitations to restrict the tank inventory to no more than two battalions overall. The Cubans rely heavily on armor and may have argued that adequate defense demands—even initially—40 to 50 tanks. Much more than this, however, would probably overwhelm the army's repair and maintenance facilities. Even so, the T-55, a medium tank with three to four inches of armor and a 100-mm gun, easily outstrips any tank now in Central America. The principal competition comes from Honduras' 16 Scorpion light tanks, but this vehicle is thin skinned with a 76-mm gun, not even a close match. [redacted]

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Armor and aircraft are two other areas of major regional concern. Despite some deference to international and domestic political sensitivities regarding both types of hardware, Nicaragua is in the process of fielding one tank battalion and will probably have two

Nicaraguan strategy for defending against invasion from Honduras probably calls for some armor deployment to the northern border region, where tanks would serve as both a real and psychological deterrent. Much of this area, however, is unsuited for

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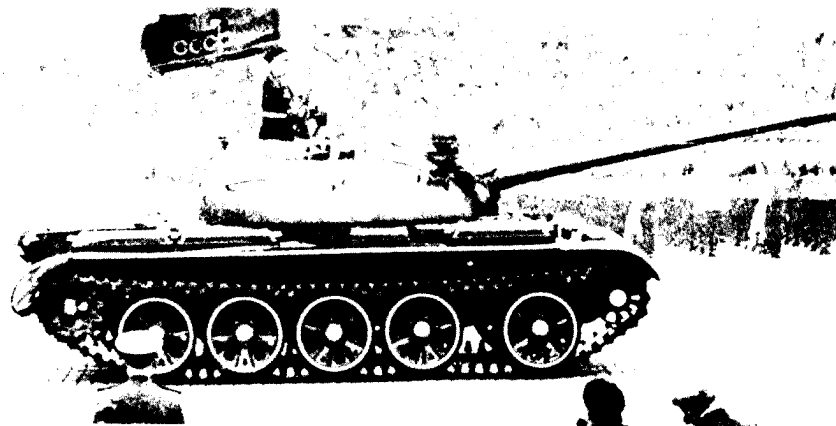
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Figure 6. Soviet-made T-55
Medium Tank [Redacted]

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tanks, being heavily forested and ravined, with poor roadways. Given Sandinista and Cuban concern about potential counterrevolution, it must be assumed that a substantial number of the tanks are intended to quell possible domestic unrest. [Redacted]

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[Large redacted area]

[Redacted area]

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One Sandinista leader has suggested that Nicaragua would purchase either F-4 Phantoms from Iran or T-37s from Vietnam, but such purchases would probably be a stopgap. The Nicaraguans have discussed acquiring high-performance aircraft from Vietnam—probably captured US F-5s or perhaps T-37s—and are in the process of acquiring helicopters from Hanoi. Spare parts and maintenance problems associated with the F-5s could argue against their acquisition as a long-term solution to the Nicaraguan aircraft problem, although they could serve as a temporary political expedient. Vietnam has been unable to sell the F-5s, and they could be available under extremely attractive terms. The Sandinistas might reason that F-5s would not be so politically unsettling as MIGs [Redacted]

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This kind of depth in the resupply effort, the caching of weapons as a contingency for use in possible fallback guerrilla warfare, [Redacted]

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[Redacted] suggest the Nicaraguans probably have abundant stocks of small arms and ammunition, at least for active-duty forces.

[Redacted]

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In the interim the Air Force has made do with about 40 outdated and battle worn aircraft, the most effective of which are four T-33 jet trainers and four T-28 prop trainers, both modified for a combat role. [Redacted]

The Sandinistas also appear to have made up what had been an early shortage of transport vehicles. Last year the government contracted for the purchase of 800 W-50 trucks from East Germany, and almost all of them were probably delivered by this spring—most of them to the EPS. Recent sea shipments have included Soviet cross-country and other types of trucks with as many as 60 in a single delivery and an estimated 150 overall. The Sandinista practice of attempting to disperse maintenance facilities—as opposed to a central facility as is the case in Honduras—coupled with the fact that most EPS vehicles are new provides Nicaragua with a comparative advantage.

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The Sandinistas' principal near-term improvement effort appears devoted to increased troop mobility and quick reaction capabilities by the acquisition of helicopters and short-range transport aircraft. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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In more mundane areas of materiel acquisition, the Sandinistas are also forging ahead. Our knowledge of the total holdings of ground force light weapons is imprecise, but sufficient to record major increases in almost all categories over the last year. [Redacted]

Supply Lines

The Cubans and Soviets play principal roles in the resupply and upgrading of materiel. Havana appears to be a major supplier, relying on the Cuban airbridge and Nicaraguan ships regularly traveling between Cuba and Nicaraguan Caribbean ports. Inventorying, and in some cases confirming, all of these shipments has been impossible due to EPS concealment practices and limited Western access. The overall frequency of the deliveries and our knowledge of some of the contents, however, provides a gross index of the military buildup. [Redacted]

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In contrast to midyear 1980, units throughout Nicaragua last fall reflected very rapid increases in their holdings of machineguns, mortars, and light cannons. Undetermined quantities of rocket-propelled grenade launchers, Czech M-23 and M-25 submachineguns, and machine pistols have been delivered. [Redacted]

[Redacted] Where AK-47s were observed in the military parade last year but were not in general use, they are now much more common. Soviet Bloc weapons clearly predominate, with older Western rifles having pretty much disappeared from the EPS inventory. [Redacted]

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This outfitting of troops extends to the militia [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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[Redacted] By August reserve units were observed receiving increased distribution of these rifles.

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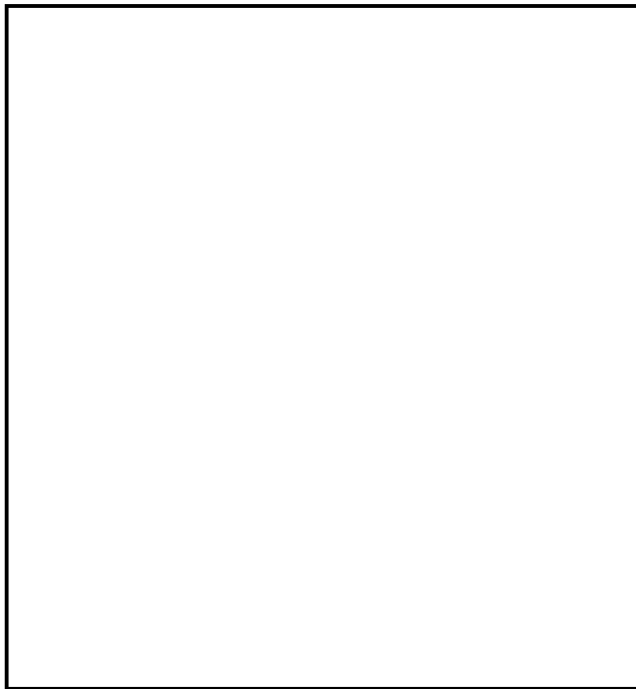
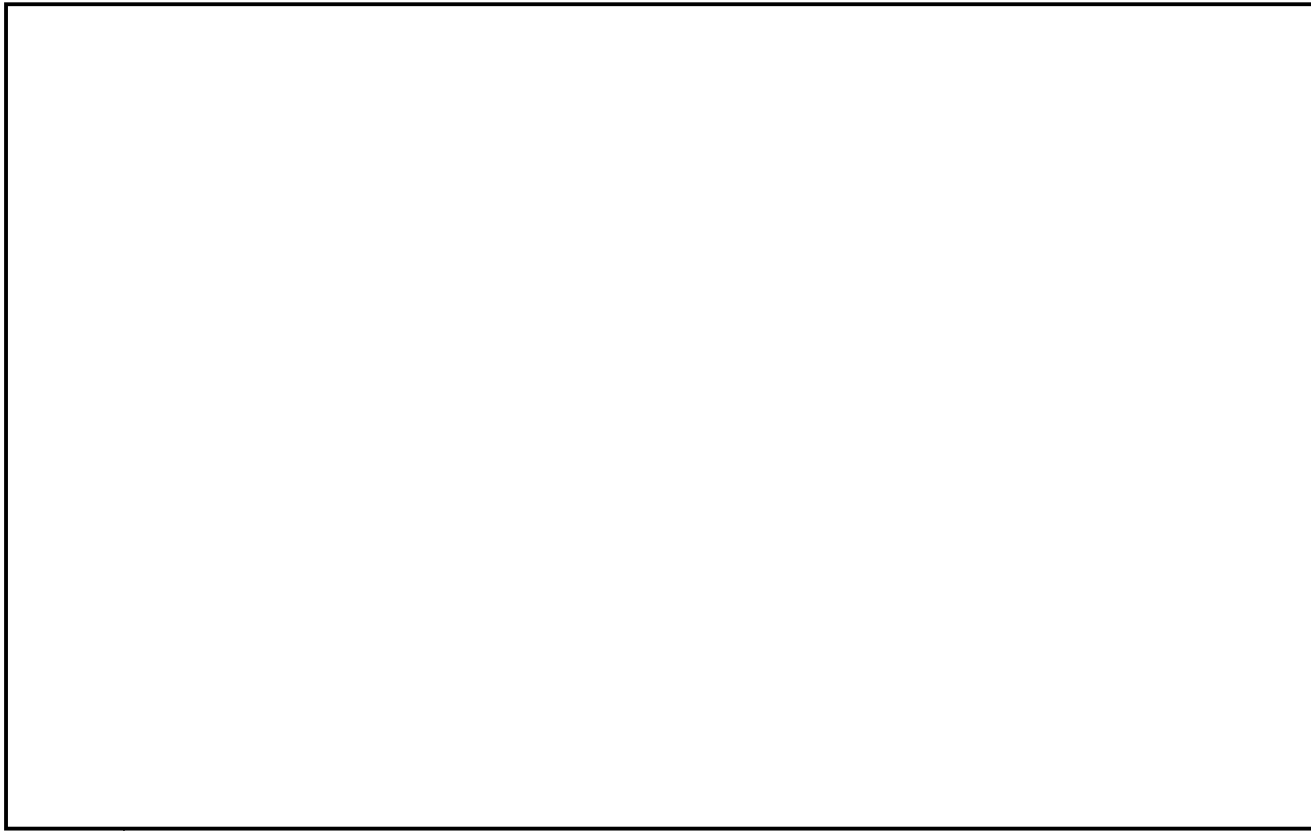
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Most of the large equipment is coming in by ship, and some of the smaller weaponry now arrives at east coast ports and is trucked from there. The Nicaraguans, however, follow the Cuban practice of offloading and moving their equipment at night and closing the ports and roads to civilian traffic. In addition, deliveries are made principally on the remote Caribbean coast, an area whose sparse population, poor access, and easily secured approaches make it ideal for clandestine deliveries [Redacted]

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The apparently increased frequency of sea shipments and particular information regarding individual cargoes reflects the broadening effort by Nicaraguan allies to pump up EPS military capabilities. [Redacted]

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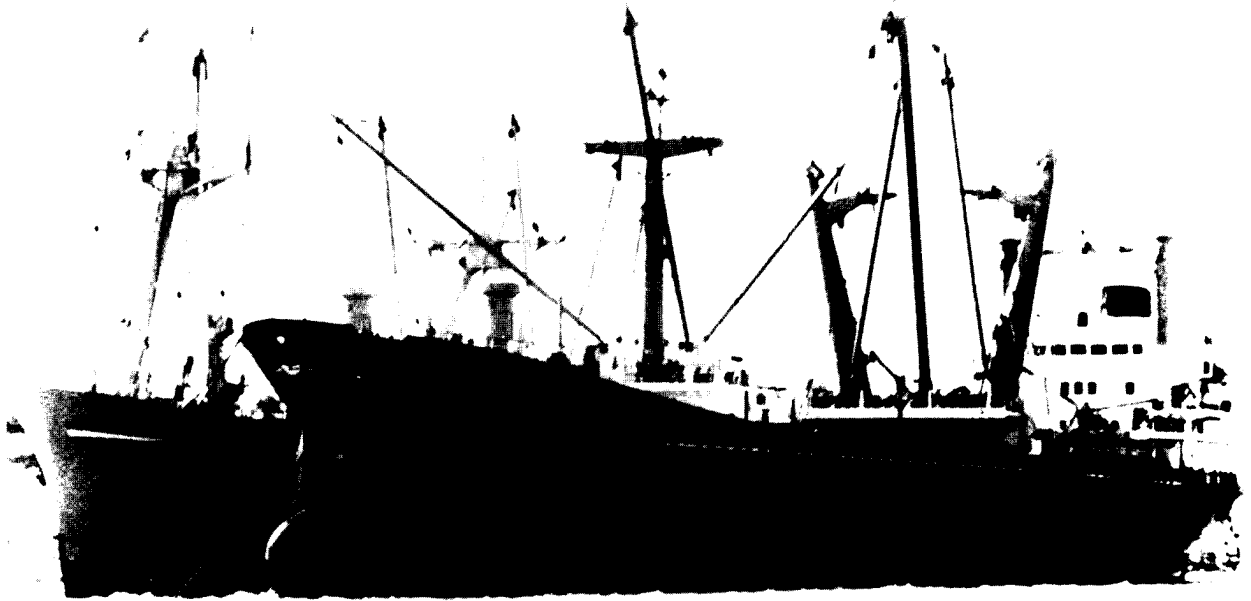


Figure 8. Algerian freighter delivering military equipment to Nicaragua. February 1981.

[Redacted]

several respects modeled on the Cuban armed forces. The roles of the Soviets, other Bloc countries, and the important PLO contingent are also expanding, but even collectively these countries do not come close to the influence wielded by Havana.

Foreign Influence

Nicaragua has been almost wholly dependent on Cuba, Soviet Bloc countries, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) for military training and supply; these foreign ties are likely to grow stronger. The interchange between Nicaragua and these countries in terms of materiel deliveries, planned purchases, and training commitments all show an upward climb over the past several months. As the Sandinista army begins to receive more sophisticated equipment, its training and spare parts needs will deepen the relationships. The Sandinistas' political perspective and their expectation of conflict with their US-backed northern neighbors are further prods in the direction of wider military relations with current suppliers.

In contrast to the Bloc presence, Western nations have been almost completely cut off from the military.

[Redacted]

Most of the Latin American military has cold shouldered the Nicaraguans, viewing them as a potential enemy

[Redacted]

The United States is occasionally treated to surface cordiality, but Nicaraguan officers rarely attend even US social functions, and the military relationship has generally come to a dead end.

[Redacted]

Havana's pervasive influence is growing—some 2,200 Cuban military and security advisers are in the country—and the Nicaraguan military system is in

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Cuba

Havana has supplied the bulk of training and probably much of the materiel to the Sandinista army and has become the guarantor of continued Sandinista rule by virtue of the defense pact signed between the two countries in late 1979. One measure of Havana's preeminent position is the Sandinistas' steadfast refusal to countenance internal criticism of the extensive Cuban military role, despite some backlash. This is in contrast to the FSLN's tactical flexibility in many other areas. [redacted]

The Cuban role is the logical result of the historical relationship between the FSLN and Fidel Castro, who supported the Nicaraguan guerrillas from their beginnings in the early 1960s. The Cubans fashioned and cemented the Sandinista guerrilla coalition in 1978 and 1979, helped formulate and coordinate political and military strategy, and trained "internationalist brigade" personnel who fought with the Sandinistas. Castro played a pivotal role in the closing months of the campaign against Somoza by supplying some 500 tons of arms. Havana also sent about 50 Cuban advisers to assist Sandinista units during the final offensive against the Nicaraguan National Guard. [redacted]

Havana moved swiftly to extend its influence as the Somoza regime fell on 19 July 1979:

- Julian Lopez Diaz, who had been the key Cuban adviser to the Sandinistas in Costa Rica, flew into Managua on 18 July in time for the takeover and became the new Cuban Ambassador.
- Cuban military personnel accompanied Sandinista leaders into the bunker headquarters formerly occupied by Somoza and set up an immediate advisory presence.
- Before the first week of Sandinista rule was over, Havana had in place its first 65-man medical team, about 100 military and security advisers, a functioning *Prensa Latina* office. [redacted]

- By the end of October the Cuban presence numbered 650 personnel, increasing to about 2,200 the following February and continuing a steep upward climb to an estimated 5,850 to 6,300 by October of this year; about 2,200 of these are military or security advisers. The large complements of teachers, medical personnel, and construction workers and Cuban attention to humanitarian and technical aid put the best face possible on the large Cuban contingent [redacted]

The Cubans shouldered an enormous training and support burden for the Nicaraguan military from the outset. By September 1979 some 60 Cuban instructors were detailed to the Basic Infantry Training School to help train the first class of platoon leaders. Cuban advisers were reportedly present down to the company and sometimes the platoon level. All high-level Sandinista leaders also have Cuban advisers personally assigned to them. [redacted]

The present scope of Cuban training and schooling is a clear indicator of the extremely close military ties and of the likelihood of a continuing close relationship. The most intensive training takes place in Cuba. [redacted]

[redacted] some 700 ranking Army and party members had been sent to Cuba by early 1980. One initial group of 60 officers took an accelerated six-month course, returning to replace Army staff officers who were then to proceed to Cuba for a two-year course [redacted]

At least several hundred Nicaraguan personnel are probably receiving military or security training in Cuba at any one time. Commissioned and noncommissioned officer training is provided at Cuban military academies, and the Cubans also receive fairly significant numbers of troops for specialized training. About 300 of the quick reaction battalion troops traveled to Cuba last year for special instruction. Several groups totaling perhaps 100 to 200 men have also received tank training, including repair and maintenance. [redacted]

[redacted] Groups of [redacted]

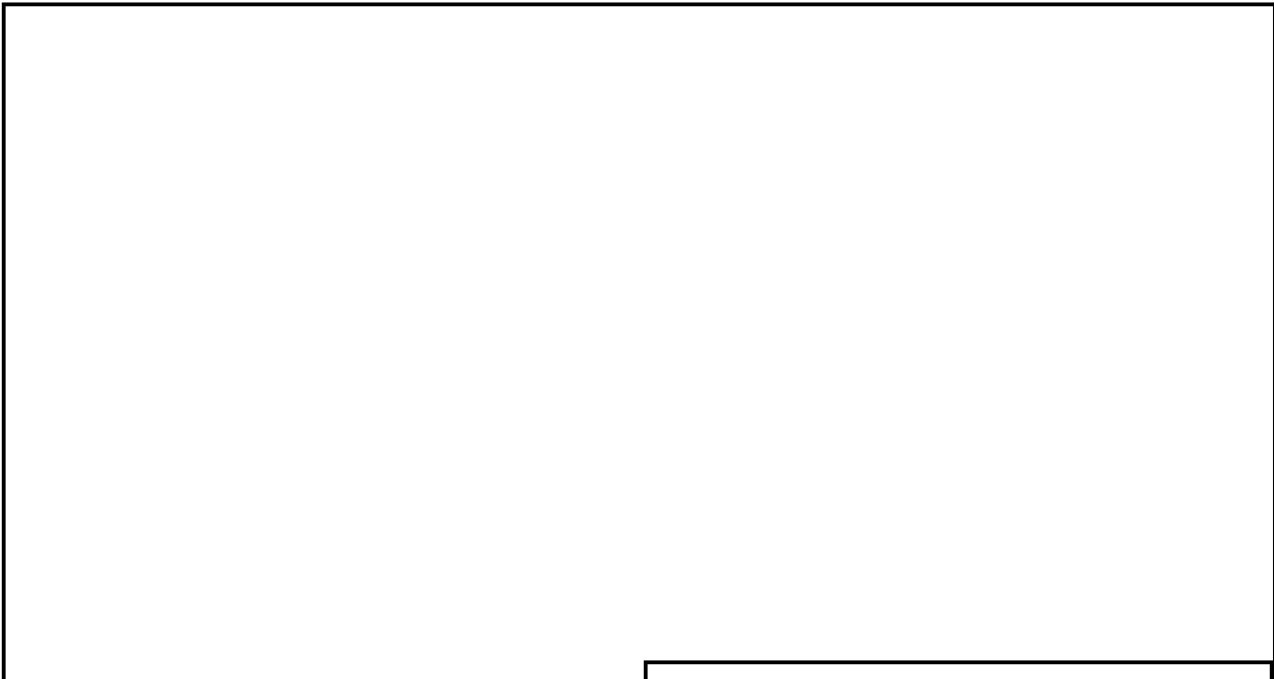
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10 to 50 personnel travel periodically for instruction in subjects ranging from antiaircraft defense to infantry training. Small groups of pilots have also been sent to Cuba, and unknown numbers receive six months' basic training. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Although militia and border guard troops have received far less attention than regular troops, a hundred or so militia have attended courses in Cuba. Smaller numbers of border guard unit personnel have also received instruction. [Redacted]

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The impact of the Cuban presence and training is reflected across the board in the military sphere. The EPS structure, philosophy, [Redacted] reflect the Cuban model. The EPS, like the Cuban military, is a multiservice force, with air and naval elements integrated into the army command. The early emphasis on air defense and the inclusion of air defense and the antiaircraft brigade under the air force command follow the Cuban example. So does the integration of a political office and political functions into the armed

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forces. EPS reliance on a backup militia and the integration of reserve and regular forces on active duty similarly reflect Cuban tutelage [redacted]

[redacted]

Underscoring Cuban involvement and commitment is the defense pact concluded between Havana and Managua, apparently in late 1979. A logical outgrowth of the FSLN-Cuban relationship, the signing coincided with high Sandinista concern over border incidents with Honduras and the possibility of major counterrevolutionary efforts against the FSLN leadership. Details of the agreement are unclear, [redacted]

[redacted]

What is clear is that Cuba is the ultimate guarantor of continued Sandinista rule. [redacted]

The extensive Cuban role has sparked a backlash. East coast rioting and demonstrations last fall were directed at the Cubans. There is also evidence of periodic military disgruntlement at the sometimes overbearing presence of the Cubans. [redacted]

The response of the Sandinista hierarchy, which has demonstrated significant tactical flexibility in several areas, underscores the symbolic and material importance FSLN leaders attach to the Cuban role. The east coast protests were put down, and there was no

compromise on the Cuban question. Sandinista leaders have also reportedly refused to countenance internal discussion concerning the numbers and roles of Cuban personnel. In June the government announced an apparent decision to reduce substantially the contingent of 2,000 Cuban teachers in the country, but quickly reversed itself following a statement from Washington calling attention to the planned departures. Now the 1,200 teachers that returned to Cuba last summer are being replaced. [redacted]

In addition to the FSLN's needs over the next several years for continued arms supplies and training from Cuba, the emergence of Minister of Defense Humberto Ortega—now the single most powerful individual in the government—and his brother Daniel, head of the government junta as the dominant Sandinista clique, is another indicator of the likelihood of closer ties between Cuba and Nicaragua. Even before the takeover in 1979 the Ortegas privately made clear their intention to establish a Cuban-style government. During the insurgency against Somoza the Ortegas operated out of San Jose, Costa Rica [redacted]

[redacted] Of the nine top Sandinista leaders, the Cubans are closest to the Ortega brothers. [redacted]

These ties do not rule out public relations moves reducing the number of Cuban personnel working in such secondary areas as construction or the possibility of shifting more training activities to Havana and even lowering the Cuban profile in some more sensitive security areas. But the broad dimensions of the Havana-Managua relationship are set. That relationship has a firm historical base and will probably be deepened by support programs and strong personal ties. [redacted]

Soviet Union

The Soviets are playing an important role in planning and facilitating the military buildup, although their direct involvement is relatively limited. Soviet arms shipments to Cuba make possible Havana's deliveries to Managua. [redacted]

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Figure 10. This photo appeared in a Nicaraguan newspaper with the following caption: "The Soviet MI-8 helicopter, loaned by Aeroflot to the Nicaraguan Government, with its Soviet pilots, when it landed in Rancho Grande yesterday. The comrade in front is a Nicaraguan pilot who also speaks Russian."

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[redacted] Havana is also a convenient trans-shipment point. Apparently growing East German, Bulgarian, and Polish military cooperation with Nicaragua is done at Soviet behest. The PLO views its role in Nicaragua at least partly as a tradeoff for increased Soviet aid. The Soviets also appear to be encouraging countries such as Algeria to contribute to the military buildup. Although the Soviets contribute primarily through middlemen, they are slowly increasing their local role—and probably the numbers of Nicaraguans going to the Soviet Union—as they gauge both local and US reaction [redacted]

In contrast to the Cubans, the Soviets moved at a relatively measured pace, and the Soviet presence still is of moderate size—some 50 to 70 personnel. An initial Soviet diplomatic mission visited Nicaragua in August 1979, relations were formalized in October, and about 30 embassy personnel arrived the following January. Despite initial press reports that the diplomatic mission would quickly expand to 100 or more,

the embassy presence appears not to have been boosted significantly. Although a small number of military advisers was probably included in the original total, the first indication of Soviet military personnel surveying Nicaragua's needs was in the summer of 1980.

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The pace of Soviet-Nicaraguan military relations has picked up this year.

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[redacted] Soviet technicians and pilots arrived in late May of this year to train Nicaraguan crews on two Soviet-delivered MI-8 helicopters.

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[redacted] Subsequently in July, the Nicaraguans also received six Soviet AN-2 transports [redacted]

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Defense Minister Ortega visited Moscow in March 1980 and again this March [Redacted]

Like the Cubans, the Soviets hope to build Sandinista military capabilities quickly enough to deter either foreign invasion or counterrevolution and to help blunt US pressures on the FSLN [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Soviet weapons deliveries to Cuba in the past year have also included outdated antitank and antiaircraft artillery. The appearance of such weaponry in Nicaragua over the past year confirms that the Soviets are employing Havana as a convenient holding area to avoid many direct shipments [Redacted]

East Germany

East Germany has worked actively to boost ties with the Nicaraguan regime, both as part of its effort to gain greater political influence in Latin America and to advance Soviet foreign policy objectives. Although the military relationship is generally not treated publicly, East German advisers are believed active in security and other specialized fields [Redacted]

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[Large Redacted Block]

The East Germans, having provided immediate medical aid and supplies after the Sandinista takeover, sent one of their most talented and aggressive diplomats to head their mission in the fall of 1979. East Germany quickly provided an \$11 million line of credit, and its Ambassador worked energetically to facilitate the Soviet ties and programs that followed. [Redacted]

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Both the Nicaraguan Minister of Defense and the Minister of Interior visited East Germany in early 1980—with security matters certainly dominating discussions [Redacted]

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When Nicaraguan Foreign Minister D'Escoto met with East German Council of State Chairman Honecker in June of this year, they both noted the "dynamic development and high level of cooperation between the two countries." [Redacted]

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In other areas the Soviet role is similarly important, if further removed. For example, the timing of the provision to Nicaragua of MIG aircraft—perhaps from Cuban or East European stocks—will almost certainly be determined in consultation with the Soviets. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

The direct military relationship has nonetheless been kept quiet. Press coverage of visits in East Germany has sometimes been uninformative, even by East German standards. In Nicaragua, this is mirrored in the publicity accorded East German trade, cultural, and humanitarian activities, while military activities have been shrouded [Redacted]

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The Soviets also reportedly provide military and police training programs in the Soviet Union, although we lack detailed information. We estimate that a few hundred personnel may be involved in such instruction, with courses probably running for six months or longer. [Redacted]

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may still be in that range. Although the PLO has diverse objectives in seeking to lend support and expand ties in Nicaragua, it reportedly is acting at Soviet urging in the broad outlines of its policy ... including using Nicaragua as a base to aid other revolutionary organizations in Central America [Redacted]

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Other East German activities cover a fairly broad spectrum. East German technicians help maintain the 800 trucks purchased by Nicaragua and work in several military fields. East German advisers assisted in preparing the anniversary celebrations of the revolution last year [Redacted]

PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat attended the first anniversary celebration of the Nicaraguan revolution in mid-1980, and a military cooperation agreement was concluded the following month. The PLO agreed to provide flight and paramilitary training and to supply coastal radar units. In September some 30 personnel in these specialties arrived in Managua. In the last year PLO personnel have provided instruction in flying and airplane maintenance, flown operational missions, and aided Nicaragua in its effort to improve its radar defense capabilities. [Redacted]

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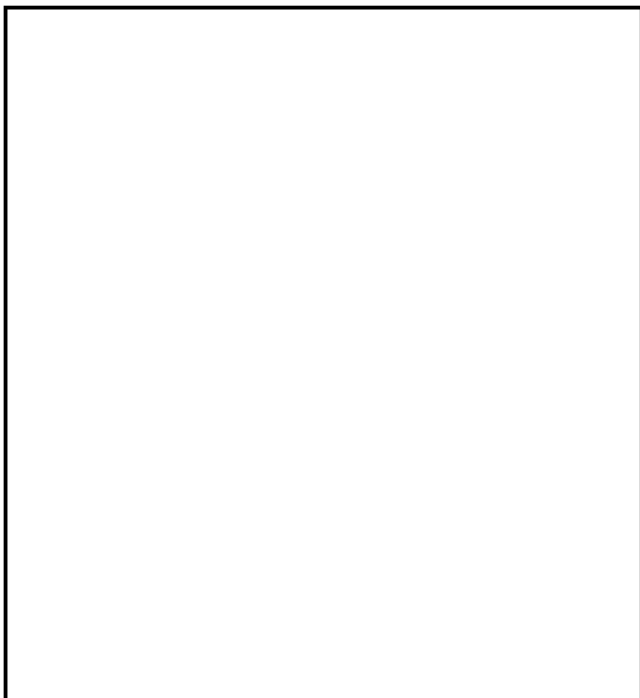
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PLO
The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) originally stationed about 30 to 35 personnel in Nicaragua following the Sandinista takeover. Subsequently, the number appears to have fluctuated significantly but

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**Outlook**

An active duty force of 35,000 to 40,000 men in late 1982 is attainable, particularly if tensions with Honduras continue. An active duty force approaching 50,000 would place considerable strain on the logistics and command systems and would probably be the maximum FSLN capability in this time frame. The buildup is already running ahead of the EPS's ability to provide skilled commissioned and noncommissioned officer cadre. While foreign training programs are expanding, it will be some time before this need is met [redacted]

As the EPS sorts itself out, it is likely to make a more meaningful distinction among regular, reserve, and militia forces. The militia will become more purely a territorial backup, while the caliber and training of reserve forces are boosted, more in line with the Cuban system [redacted]

Because of certain significant deficiencies, Nicaragua is likely to follow, at least for the next year, a broadly defensive strategy. Even if Soviet-built jet combat aircraft are provided promptly, Nicaragua's air arm in 1982 would still be untested. Proficiency on artillery and armor also will take time to acquire. Logistics are still rudimentary, and the all-volunteer approach can provide more chaff than wheat. [redacted]

Nicaragua still appears to have a very low officer-to-enlisted ratio. Even assuming that ranking personnel soon begin to return from medium-term Cuban and other foreign training programs, the continuing armed forces expansion ensures a bottom-heavy force that will complicate command and control for some time. [redacted]

Even beyond this, focusing on numbers and inventories obscures the difficulties the Sandinistas face in transforming themselves from a guerrilla band to a modern military force. In a crisis, lack of skilled personnel in support categories could make logistics a nightmare. The Nicaraguans have not had adequate time to acquire professional expertise, and the continued introduction of new weaponry will extend reliance on foreign technicians and advisers. [redacted]

Other Foreign Influence

There are in Nicaragua perhaps an additional 50 or so Communist Bloc representatives from six countries—Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Vietnam, and North Korea. Some, like the North Koreans, teach specialties such as personal defense to security personnel, and the Koreans may also have supplied some limited weaponry, like 57-mm antitank guns. The Bulgarians run a flight training program and provide other forms of specialized training in their home country, and assign military doctors to Nicaragua. Many of the others are active in the supply of small weapons [redacted]

In addition to this Communist presence, there are scattered Latin American radicals in the military and security services. These personnel are remnants of the international brigades that fought with the FSLN in the struggle against Somoza. [redacted]

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Havana heavily influences the Sandinista military and will probably caution against an aggressor role, since the Cuban-Nicaraguan defense pact and the large number of Cuban military and security advisers would probably draw Havana into any regional conflict. Managua would not be inclined to a preemptive strike, unless it was convinced that an attack by its northern neighbors was certain in the near term. [redacted]

Nicaragua is already a potent military force by regional standards, and its expanding military and training programs and planned weapons acquisitions will widen the gap between it and its neighbors. The Sandinistas are shaping their military institutions and designing strategies for regional war. In contrast, neighboring militaries have devoted their energies in large measure to the internal threat and domestic politicking. By early 1983 such disparities and the Sandinistas' improved arsenal will probably enable the Nicaraguans to dominate Central America militarily [redacted]

As Managua's military capability grows, however, the EPS will be further inclined toward cross-border pursuit and retaliation against counterrevolutionary activity based in Honduras. As Managua's growing military strength blunts the potential damage of a direct Honduran attack, Nicaragua will increasingly risk employing airstrikes and assaults across the Honduran border to eliminate the counterrevolutionaries. Training and arming regional radicals to help cope with this counterrevolutionary threat and tie up the resources of the Sandinistas' potential adversaries will remain an integral part of military strategy. [redacted]

The Sandinistas' greater tactical aggressiveness will increase the risk of wider hostilities. Even now, despite Tegucigalpa's air superiority, we doubt that Honduras could win a war against Nicaragua in the sense of occupying and holding a major portion of Nicaraguan territory. Any direct comparison between Nicaragua and Honduras—or any of the Central American nations—ignores the likelihood that Cuba, under the terms of its defense pact, would probably come to Nicaragua's aid. [redacted]

In addition, even though there is significant internal political dissent in Nicaragua, any armed confrontation with Honduras would be a compelling unifying event. Even a superior conventional force fighting the Sandinistas would probably face major civil resistance in addition to its purely military adversary. [redacted]

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Appendix D**Organization of the
Sandinista National Liberation Front**

Comandante de la Revolucion Humberto Ortega—concurrently Commander in Chief, Minister of Defense, and member of the Sandinista National Directorate—dominates the Army structure. He is the most powerful single individual in Nicaragua, and his power is further enhanced by his brother Daniel's position as head of the governing junta.

The EPS is headquartered in the capital, Managua, with the General Staff immediately subordinate to Commander in Chief Ortega. In addition to standard military functions and departments, the staff includes a political and cultural office and a political representative to the government sector. Both the armor and special forces battalions are headquartered outside Managua with the anti-aircraft brigade divided among the various regions.

The EPS is multiservice, including not only ground forces but the Air Force and small naval elements as well.

Regional commands are broken down into seven broadly similar military districts covering the entire country; regional brigade headquarters mirror general staff functions. Troops are broken down into permanent or Regular Army battalions, reserve or mobilized militia forces, and border guard troops. The number of battalions in each category is somewhat flexible; outlying areas have a higher proportion of reserve troops, while Managua and northern border regions may have two regular battalions.

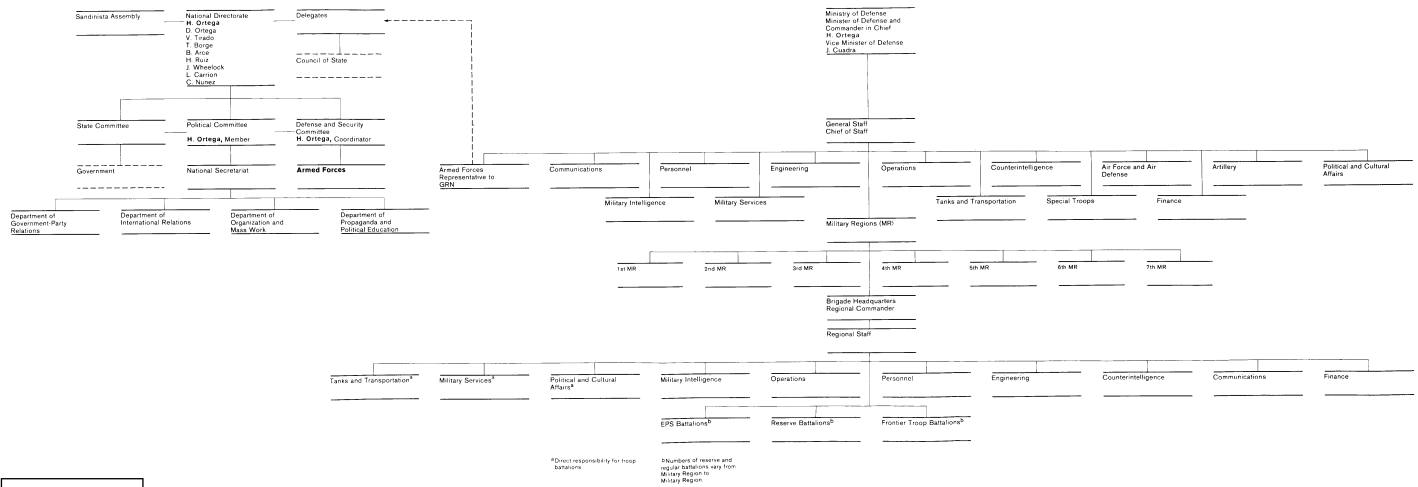
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Figure 12

FSLN Organization



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