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MEMO: FRENCH POLICY TOWARD CENTRAL AMERICA

1. What is the relationship between the Elysee and the Quai d'Orsay on Central American decision-making?

The relationship between the Elysee and the Quai d'Orsay on Central American policy seems to have varied in relation to the amount of personal interest Mitterrand has taken towards developments in the region. My impression is that, for the most part, it has been the Quai d'Orsay (and in particular the Foreign Minister) which has played the primary role in French Central American policy, primarily because Mitterrand has been more concerned with what he sees as more important issues. Mitterrand's interest in Central America was highest during 1981. Elysee adviser Regis Debray played a key role during this period, especially in the arms sale to Nicaragua. However, Cheysson was also active during this period and there are no indications of any diversity in their views or approaches. The impression one gets from this period is that French policy toward Central America was guided by a coherent strategy and well co-ordinated from the top. Evidence of this coordination can be seen in the similar justifications for the Nicaraguan arms sale given by Foreign Minister Cheysson, Defense Minister Hernu and Elysee adviser Regis Debray.

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Mitterrand's interest in Central American affairs cooled considerably after the negative US and Latin American responses to the joint declaration with Mexico and the arms sale to Nicaragua. Mitterrand turned to other issues, particularly the crisis over INF deployment in West Germany during 1982-83. It seems most likely that during this period Mitterrand let the Quai handle Central American issues within certain well-defined parameters. Mitterrand probably made it clear to Cheysson during this period that solidarity within NATO was crucial during this period and therefore France should not seek a confrontation with the US on Central America. [REDACTED]

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After the successful INF deployment in West Germany and the US invasion of Grenada in late 1983, it seems that Mitterrand loosened the reins and allowed Cheysson to pursue a more confrontational policy toward the US in Central America. France began an active policy of vocally opposing US attempts to apply economic and military pressure against the Sandinistas in various international fora. A few factors seem to support the thesis that Cheysson rather than Mitterrand was the main mover in French Central American policy. First Mitterrand made very few public statements referring to Central America during this period and those he did make either said nothing new or were calculated so as not to be too offensive to the US. On the other hand it seems that Cheysson was directly responsible for leaking Shultz's letter at the San Jose conference in 1984, for

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and France's internal security service (under the Interior Ministry) have played a more important role over the objections of the Foreign Ministry. The French Defense Ministry sees Cuban and Libyan activities in the region as a threat to French strategic interests (particularly the space facilities at Kourou in French Guiana). The Foreign Ministry on the other hand is more concerned with developing a rapprochement with Cuba, which the Quai sees as a regional power with whom France might cooperate to help stabilize the Caribbean Basin. The beefed up French security presence in the Eastern Caribbean, increased aid and diplomatic contacts with the East Caribbean islands and French help in training the security forces of some of these islands indicates that the Defense Ministry has prevailed in this area. [redacted]

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3. What has been (and is) the role of Regis Debray and Alain Rouquie on Central American policy-making?

Regis Debray probably has not played a significant role in France's Central America policy since the end of 1981. Debray had much to do with the conceptualization of France's early approach to Central America, particularly the arms sale to Nicaragua in 1981. The joint declaration with Mexico on the FDR and the arms sale to Nicaragua were soon seen as a disaster by the higher echelons of the

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French government and Debray's association with this policy damaged his reputation within French government and PSF circles. Furthermore, Debray has enemies on the left and the right in Latin America which made him unsuitable as an emissary. [REDACTED]

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On the other hand, Alain Roquie has had an effect on the formulation of French policy. Roquie is one of the few real Latin American experts in France and his opinion is highly regarded by the Quai. Recently Roquie has been skeptical of Duarte's ability to control the army and his seriousness about discussions with the rebels. These attitudes have been adopted by the Quai and his advice has probably been responsible, at least in part, for French reluctance to abandon the FDR/FMLN and reluctance to be more supportive of the Duarte regime. [REDACTED]

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4. Which parties and countries in Latin America and Central America are France's preferred interlocuteurs?

Since the Franco-Mexican declaration on the FDR/FMLN in August 1981, France has found it very difficult to find diplomatic partners toward the region. The Franco-Mexican declaration was condemned by nine Latin American countries and the Nicaraguan arms sale was condemned by these nine countries and Mexico and Brazil. Mexico had been France's preferred partner, due to its size and economic power in

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the region. The joint declaration on the FDR/FMLN was as much a symbol of a Franco-Mexican partnership as it was a statement on El Salvador. However, after the negative reaction to the joint declaration and the Nicaraguan arms sale, Mexico began to distance itself from France and seek out its traditional diplomatic partners as evidenced by the establishment of the Contadora group in 1983.

During 1982 and 1983, France also sought to improve its ties with Cuba as a means of increasing its influence in the Caribbean Basin. However, there were too many obstacles to a French-Cuban rapprochement. The INF deployment crisis of 1982-83 set a premium on Alliance solidarity and made a dramatic French gesture toward Castro difficult. Furthermore, Castro proved unwilling to make any concessions on human rights, Africa or Central America which would make a French-Cuban rapprochement worthwhile. However, many people in the Quai still see advantages in cutting a deal with Castro and trying to allow him to extricate himself from the Soviet orbit so that a possible move toward Cuba in the future remains a distinct possibility. [REDACTED]

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France has found it difficult to find diplomatic partners in Latin America for several reasons. First, the Nicaraguan arms sale and the joint declaration on the FDR/FMLN alienated many Latin American countries. French support for Britain during the Falklands/Malvinas war also gravely damaged French stock in Latin America. French

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efforts to mediate between Nicaragua and Costa Rica were also seen as an intrusion into the region's affairs and detrimental to the efforts of the Contadora group.

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France has had more luck working with European countries, but here too its success has been limited. In 1983, France made an offer to start a joint initiative with the newly elected Socialist government in Spain, however, the Spanish were more interested in acting on their own. France has worked through the EC and played an important role in organizing the 1984 San Jose conference. However, other European countries have been wary to become involved with diplomatic initiatives toward Central America with the French.

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5. What role does the PS as an institution as well as Lionel Jospin, Jacques Huntzinger and Nicole Bourdillat play in Central American policy-making?

As an institution, the PS has played a minor role in France's Central American policy. Party organs have served more as policy instruments rather than policy-makers. At times, the PS has served as an effective and informal instrument for President Mitterrand. The party's first secretary, Lionel Jospin, is a close associate and loyal lieutenant of President Mitterrand's. Jacques Huntzinger, the party's international secretary is an intellectual with no base within the

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Socialist Party. A long-time adviser to Mitterrand, Huntzinger probably owes his position within the PS leadership directly to Mitterrand. As Mitterrand became less interested in Central American affairs after 1981-82, he used Socialist party organs less frequently. After 1981, the party paid lip service to solidarity with Nicaragua but actually did very little. [redacted]

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Frustration with the growing pragmatism of the party leadership on a wide range of issues caused Third Worldists within the party to seek other means of making their voices heard. Opposition to government policy began to coalesce around the party's parliamentary group in the National Assembly, lead by Pierre Joxe. Joxe was one of Mitterrand's oldest political supporters and a heavyweight within the Socialist party. Joxe's long-standing personal relationship with Mitterrand strengthened his hand in dealing with Elysee and Matignon staffers.

Under the leadership of Joxe, the PS parliamentary group conceived of itself as the "conscience" of the Socialist party. Left wing "study commissions" were established which acted as shadow cabinets within the ruling party examining the party's compliance to the Socialist program. [redacted]

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On Central American issues, a Franco-Nicaraguan friendship group was formed in the National Assembly under the leadership of CERES hard-liner Jean Natiez. At times these parliamentary groups seemed to be conducting their own foreign policy, issuing declarations of

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solidarity with the Sandinistas, sending official delegations to Central America and receiving Nicaraguan officials in Paris. Several Socialist deputies were also active in extra-parliamentary organizations opposed to US policy, organizing demonstrations, letter writing and fundraising campaigns, and volunteer solidarity brigades to help build roads and schools in Nicaragua. Among the Committee's more notable members were Elysee counsellor Regis Debray and Danielle Mitterrand, wife of the French president. [redacted]

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The activities of Third Worldists within the Socialist party affected the rhetoric of France's policy more than its substance. At a time when France's economic policy was moving to the right, its African policy becoming increasingly reminiscent of Giscard's and the government taking a strongly Atlanticist, pro-American stand in Europe, there were few other than Central America where the left could vent its frustrations. The leadership had determined by this time that Central America was an area of marginal concern for France but an emotional issue with the party's rank and file. By echoing empty platitudes about French solidarity with revolutionary movements in Central America, the government could placate the party's left at little cost, while in fact pursuing a more moderate policy aimed at disturbing as few people as possible while still seeking opportunities for France to expand its interests. [redacted]

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Several Third Worldists in the party were particularly displeased with Nicole Bourdillat, the party's secretary for Central American affairs. Bourdillat became increasingly more critical of the Sandinistas during her tenure and more vocal in her criticism. Her replacement, Marie Duflo has been much more sympathetic to the Sandinistas. It is probable that Bourdillat was sacrificed to appease rank and file Third Worldists within the PS. However, the replacement of Bourdillat by Duflo has not made the organs of the Socialist party any more important in the formation of French Central American policy.



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6. Are there any present or planned institutions (similar to the Ebert Stiftung or the Spanish Institute for Iberoamerican Cooperation) that France might use to extend its influence and presence in the region?

As already mentioned, some Socialists have set up and participated in solidarity and friendship groups outside the party. However, as far as I can see there have been no plans by the Socialists to set up an institution devoted to Central or Latin America.



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**PLUS CA CHANGE?: FRENCH POLICY TOWARD CENTRAL AMERICA**

**One Analyst's View**

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In private conversations with high-ranking US officials during the last six months, French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac expressed full support for US policy in Central America, and promised to change France's policy toward the region from that followed by the previous Socialist government. Since the election in March, France has indeed been less confrontational toward the US on Central American issues, but this has been due more to the political situation created by cohabitation, than any directive for change. Neither Chirac nor President Mitterrand -- whose office traditionally directs foreign policy -- is willing to take a position on Central America that might come back to haunt him later. This lack of any strong direction from the top mitigates against any major shifts in French Central American policy in the near future. France will probably continue to gradually reduce support for the Sandinistas in favor of the Central American democracies. Lack of support for the Sandinistas, however, will not necessarily translate into support for US policy and France is not likely

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to support active US measures to apply economic and military pressure against the Sandinistas. 

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#### FRENCH POLICY UNDER THE SOCIALISTS

French policy toward Central America during the early days of Socialist rule was blatantly antagonistic to the United States. Originally, French Socialists followed a policy of actively supporting revolutionary groups in Central America based on a PSF i view of global politics which conveniently combined Socialist ideology with French national interests. The Socialists saw Central America as a microcosm of broader trends in the Third World. In their view, inequality, exploitation and authoritarianism rather than East-West competition were responsible for instability in the Third World. In addition, they believed the US and the Soviet Union were exploiting this unrest in order to reassert their own faltering hegemony, thereby risking a dangerous confrontation. 

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According to the Socialists, socio-economic reform would lead to the domestic political stability needed to close off opportunities for super-power intervention and thus restore international stability. France could play a leading role in this process by supporting "progressive" (i.e. revolutionary) forces. Optimistic Socialists envisioned a global transformation bringing peace, independence and democracy to the nations of the world. In addition to these altruistic goals, pragmatic Socialists hoped to increase French influence with other Latin American countries and enhance France's prestige as a world power. 

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Once in power, the Socialists moved quickly to implement their goals. Paris issued a joint declaration with Mexico in August 1981 supporting El Salvador's guerilla movement, the Frente Democratico Revolucionario/Frente Nacional para la Liberacion Nacional (FDR/FMLN), and sold arms to Nicaragua in December 1981. This initial activism was short-lived, however, and French policy toward Central America was rather restrained during 1982 and 1983. The joint declaration with Mexico on the FDR/FMLN and the arms sale to Nicaragua drew heavy censure from the United States and many major Latin American countries. Increased repression by the Sandinistas and lack of popular support for the rebels in El Salvador convinced pragmatic Socialists that their original perceptions of these groups had been incorrect. Furthermore, after late 1982, the crisis over INF deployment in West Germany dominated France's foreign policy agenda. Faced with the need for NATO solidarity the French government became more reluctant to antagonize the US on Central American issues.

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Toward the end of 1983, France again assumed an active posture toward Central American affairs. Successful INF deployment in West Germany alleviated French security concerns, while the US-led Grenada invasion exacerbated French fears of direct US military intervention in Central America. France saw US economic and military pressure on Nicaragua as a dangerous step down this road and took a number of actions in various international fora to undermine US policy. By serving as an intermediary between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, p and the Duarte government and the

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FDR/FMLN, France tried to defuse the growing militarization of the Central American crisis. [REDACTED]

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#### FRENCH POLICY UNDER COHABITATION

While the tone of French policy has certainly changed since March, this has more to do with the vagaries of the political situation created by cohabitation than anything else. Chirac's proclaimed support for US policy in Central America, is probably rather thin. Neither Chirac nor his key advisers is very knowledgeable about Central American issues and Chirac has paid little attention to the region since coming to power. A dramatic move on Chirac's part in support of US policy, such as direct contact between Chirac and Nicaraguan rebel leaders is unlikely, especially after the July 1986 death of a French citizen at the hands of the contras. Furthermore, diplomatic relations between France and El Salvador had been gradually improving since 1983, culminating in the appointment of a permanent French ambassador in April 1985. In any case, the amount of redirected aid these democracies can expect from France will be low, since French aid to Nicaragua has been rather small at around \$15 million a year.

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Mitterrand, on the other hand, seems less willing to become involved in Central American issues than he has in the past. His reaction to US House of Representatives approval of contra aid in July 1986 was mild compared to his response to the US trade embargo against Nicaragua announced in April 1985. Furthermore, Mitterrand apparently has not tried to influence

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France's position on the UN Security Council's debate on the International Court of Justice decision that condemned the mining of Nicaraguan ports.

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For the time being, Central America is a banana peel no one wants to slip on. Both Chirac and Mitterrand probably worry that supporting either the Sandinistas or the contras is potentially embarrassing, and each is wary of making a mistake his opponent might exploit.

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With neither Mitterrand nor Chirac willing to take a leading role, Foreign Minister Jean-Bernard Raimond is likely to play a key role in determining the substance of Central American policy. Raimond, a compromise choice for Foreign Minister, is a career diplomat, not a Chirac loyalist. ■ A Soviet/East European specialist, Raimond does not have a strong background in Central American affairs, but he has laid down some principles for France's future Central American policy which emphasize continuity over change. Raimond has expressed continued support for the Contadora process and the EC's policy of granting aid to all the nations in the region, including Nicaragua. Raimond has stated that France will not undercut US policy in the region, and he is unlikely to seek a confrontation with the US on Central America. However, he has also stressed that France will reject military means to bring about change in the region and will continue to support the principle of non-intervention in internal affairs. Raimond has expressed the opinion to US diplomats that, unlike Cuba, Nicaragua is not yet a member of the Soviet bloc. As a result, Raimond is unlikely to support Nicaraguan rebels.

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As part of his effort to ensure continuity in French foreign policy, Raimond has left in place at the Foreign Ministry several officials responsible for Central America appointed under the Socialists, especially Remy Lahaye, the pro-Sandinista director for Central America. Furthermore actions by French officials in Managua indicate they remain strongly sympathetic to the Sandinistas. As a result, much of the information French policy-makers receive on Central American affairs carries a bias against US policy. [REDACTED]

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#### OUTLOOK

In the short run, the political situation will keep the French from undertaking any major new initiatives toward Central America. Support for the Sandinistas is likely to gradually. France will probably oppose military solutions to the region's problems, but not in a way that might provoke a confrontation with the US. France is also unlikely to support a policy of isolating Nicaragua diplomatically or economically. [REDACTED]

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However, the present political situation will probably not last a very long. Legislative elections are likely after France's next presidential election which will probably occur in March 1988. A left-wing president would seek to gain a governing majority, while a right-wing president would try to capitalize on his election victory to expand the right's razor-thin majority in the National Assembly. If the Socialists came back to power, they would probably again oppose US economic and military pressure against Nicaragua. They might also try to placate hard-core supporters of the

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Sandinistas on the party's left, by i making a few symbolic gestures toward Nicaragua. For the most part, however, the Socialists are likely to be suspicious of the Sandinistas and cautious in their dealings with Nicaragua. [redacted]

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If the right should take the presidency as well as maintain power in the National Assembly, the best that the US could probably hope for in Central American policy would be a kind of benign neglect. Although the right would certainly be less reluctant to criticize the Sandinistas, this will not necessarily translate into support for US policy. Chirac n has indicated such support, but his attachment to this position (as to any position) is probably not very deep. The French right has traditionally taken less interest in Latin American affairs than the left. Furthermore, broad elements of the center and right worry that US military involvement in Central America might weaken US commitment to Western Europe and provoke anti-American sentiment in France as it did in the Vietnam War. On a more negative note, many old and new style Gaullists on the French right might argue for a more active role in Central America. Therefore, if fears of US intervention were to increase, a right-wing French government might become more critical of US policy. However, for the most part, the right may feel there is little to be gained by provoking the US over Central America.

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Future French governments of either the left or the right could revive a more activist French policy in Central America. The persistent influence

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of Gaullism and the desire to play a world role often lead the French to prematurely herald the decline of superpower influence as the basis for French opportunity. However, France does not have the power to shape o events in the region, but can only react to opportunities as they arise. Furthermore, before making any serious effort to exercise its influence in Central America, France must feel that it can afford to provoke the US and that there is something to be gained by becoming involved in the region's affairs. 

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**CHRONOLOGY OF FRENCH POLICY IN CENTRAL AMERICA**

- 1978** Socialist International admits National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), left wing party in El Salvador headed by Guillermo Ungo, as member; grants observer status to Sandinista National Liberation Front; calls for suspension of economic, diplomatic and financial support for Sandinistas; provide Sandinistas financial and organizational support
- 1980** Socialist International calls for "active solidarity" with Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), political wing of guerrilla movement in El Salvador, headed by Guillermo Ungo and including his party, the MNR. EC Commissioner Cheysson advocates providing food and medical aid for Nicaragua
- 28 August 1981** France signs joint declaration with Mexico recognizing FDR/FMLN as "a representative political force" in El Salvador.
- 2 September 1981** Foreign Ministers from 9 Latin American countries -- Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Guatemala, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Paraguay & Venezuela -- sign joint statement condemning French-Mexican joint declaration as interference in Salvadoran internal affairs
- December 1981** France finalizes \$15 million sale of "defensive" weapons to Nicaragua; included 2 patrol boats, 2 Alouette-3 helicopters 45 trucks, 7000 air to surface rockets and training for 10 Nicaraguan naval officers and 10 pilots. 11 Latin American nations including Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela & Colombia express displeasure with French action
- March 1982** Sandinistas declare state of emergency in Nicaragua. Constituent Assembly elections in El Salvador; overwhelming turnout for candidates of centre and right.
- July 1982** Nicaraguan President Ortega meets with Mitterrand and Cheysson in Paris, after meeting with Brezhnev in Moscow. French grant Nicaragua US\$15 million in aid, but caution Nicaragua to maintain "genuine non-alignment".
- early 1983** France unsuccessfully tries to gain support of new Socialist government in Spain for joint diplomatic initiative toward Central America.
- February 1983** Roving Ambassador to Latin America Antoine Blanca announces

- [REDACTED]
- French intention to upgrade diplomatic relations with El Salvador to the charge level
- October 1983 US led invasion of Grenada
- November 1983 Foreign Minister Cheysson meets with Salvadoran Foreign Minister, Fidel Chavez Mena, in Paris. First official contact between Socialist government and the government of El Salvador
- April 1984 Cheysson sends letter to Colombian President Betancur proposing multinational force to remove mines from Nicaraguan ports planted by US-backed rebels. Letter reportedly authorized by Mitterrand. French offer resolution in UN Security Council calling for freedom of navigation in Central American region (vetoed by US) (AFP 4/9/84) Mitterrand meets with Guillermo Ungo, leader of FDR.
- June 1984 Duarte elected president in El Salvador.
- July 1984 France hosts border talks between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Mitterrand meets with Salvadoran President Duarte in Paris, encourages negotiations with FDR/FMLN.
- September 1984 Second round of Costa Rican-Nicaraguan border talks hosted by France. France attempts to solicit Canada, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Mexico for multinational peacekeeping force. EC, Contadora and Central American countries meet in San Jose, Costa Rica. French leak letter from US Secretary of State George Shultz calling on conference participants not to grant political or economic assistance to Nicaragua. France and West Germany facilitate negotiations between FDR/FMLN and Duarte government at La Palma.
- November 1984 Nicaraguan elections, French government declines to send observers, however, French National Assembly sends Jean Natiez, president of French-Nicaraguan friendship group as representative. Indication of PSF rank and file support for Sandinistas. [REDACTED]
- 1985 French lead European members of International Bank of Development protest US veto of \$58 million development loan to Nicaragua.
- January 1985 Inauguration of Daniel Ortega as President of Nicaragua,

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France sends low-level delegation. [REDACTED]

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- April 1985 France upgrades relations with El Salvador to ambassadorial level, appoints Alain Roquier as resident ambassador.
- April-May 1985 US declares trade embargo against Nicaragua. French protest embargo at Bonn summit. Mitterrand meets with Ortega in Paris May 13.
- June 1985 Costa Rica rejects French offer to mediate talks with Nicaragua in Paris.
- October 1985 French officials facilitate negotiations for release of Ines Duarte, kidnapped daughter of Salvadoran president.
- 15 October 1985 Sandinistas reimpose state of emergency in Nicaragua.
- December 1985 French UN delegation collaborates with Nicaragua to draft General Assembly resolution criticizing US embargo against Nicaragua. [REDACTED] Resolution passes 84-4-37. 25X1
- March 1986 French legislative election results in conservative majority
- 20 March 1986 Chirac indicates support for US Central America policy in meeting with Secretary Shultz, although other Gaullists voice reservations. [REDACTED] 25X1
- 22 May 1986 Chirac Foreign Policy speech calls for French "modesty" in Central America.
- 6 June 1986 Nicaraguan Vice President Sergio Ramirez pays official visit to Paris. Meets with Mitterrand and Foreign Minister Raimond, but not Chirac.
- 16 June 1986 French Embassy in Nicaragua refuses to send report by independent Nicaraguan human rights agency (Permanent Commission on Human Rights) to Paris unless data on human rights changed to reflect French embassy figures (which are

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based on Sandinista figures) [Redacted]

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20 June 1986

Chirac states "full support" for US policy in meeting with Special Envoy Habib. Also indicates that France will phase out aid to Nicaragua in favor of Central American democracies. [Redacted]

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25 June 1986

US House of Representatives approves \$100 million in aid for Nicaraguan contras. Sandinistas shut down La Prensa the next day.

July 1986

In UN Security Council, France abstains on Nicaraguan resolution on condemning US support for contras. French citizen killed by contras in Nicaragua.

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