

2 May 1979

## MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Cuban Support for Central American Guerrilla  
Groups ~~(S)~~

Key Judgments

The Castro regime apparently concluded by at least last fall that prospects for revolutionary upheaval in Central America over the next decade or so had markedly improved largely because of the weakened position of Nicaragua's Somoza and the ripple effect his removal would have on other countries in Central America. As a result Cuba has intensified its attempts to unify insurgent groups not only in Nicaragua--where Cuba has concentrated its efforts--but in Guatemala and El Salvador as well. ~~(S)~~

While tailoring the extent of its support to the realities of the situation in each country, Cuba has stepped up its on-island training of guerrillas from each of these countries and--in the case of Nicaragua--has on at least two and probably three occasions supplied arms--for the first time in many years--to the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). Cuba has also made a concerted effort to persuade leftist movements and parties in the region to increase their assistance to the FSLN and has used these groups to funnel aid to the Sandinistas. (S)

Havana's approach to events in Central America, however, reflects a far more sophisticated and selective revolutionary doctrine than that which guided Cuba's actions during the 1960s. Cuba clearly believes it has a stake in preserving its improving image with many governments in the hemisphere and wants to avoid provoking a US counterresponse. As a result, Cuba has used third country intermediaries to deliver its assistance to the Sandinistas

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and has taken care that its aid not differ in kind from the material support supplied to the FSLN by several other governments in the region. (S)

While optimistic that trends in Central America favor the left, Havana has counseled patience and has urged its friends to prepare for a protracted struggle, even in Nicaragua. Cuban support, therefore, can be expected to continue to be geared toward helping the Sandinistas and other regional guerrilla groups develop the military and political infrastructure necessary to win a war of attrition, and the widespread grass roots support necessary to consolidate the victory. (S)

Given the low-key approach Cuba has employed in Central America, Havana is likely to do its best to avoid being placed in a situation where it might be called upon to intervene directly with its own military units and thus risk a military confrontation with the US. (S)

#### Nicaragua

The Cuban Government has long felt a deep enmity toward the Somoza regime in Nicaragua and has looked forward to its ouster not only because of the implications that such an event would have for Nicaragua but for the sake of revolutionary change throughout the region. As Somoza's position appeared to grow shakier last year, Havana intensified its effort to strengthen his opponents by urging unity among the various Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) factions. By early fall Cuba was sufficiently satisfied that this had been accomplished to increase significantly its support to the Sandinistas. (S)

#### Arms Supplies

Since late September our information indicates that Cuba has on at least two and probably three occasions supplied arms to the FSLN. "On each occasion Havana has limited its own direct involvement by relying on the Panamanian government to transport the arms." [redacted]

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Circumstantial evidence indicates that the Cubans were involved in the recent reactivation of the Panamanian-Costa Rican resupply route to the FSLN.

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On-Island Training

Training in Cuba of FSLN guerrillas--which has continued at low levels for years--has apparently been on the upswing, especially since January. Early that month a Panamanian emissary reached an agreement with Fidel Castro to send to Cuba FSLN exiles who formerly would have been granted safehaven in Panama.

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Evidence on the total number of FSLN guerrillas who have received training in Cuba is spotty. [Redacted]

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Encouraging Support for the FSLN From Neighboring Countries

A major element in Cuba's approach to the Nicaraguan situation has been its effort to encourage leftist groups in neighboring Central American countries to aid the FSLN. Havana especially wants regional Communist parties to support to the Sandinistas. Toward that end the Cubans in early February promoted a meeting in San Jose, Costa Rica that was attended by the Communist parties from the Central American countries as well as from Mexico and Panama. Cuban delegates used the occasion to urge their counterparts to bolster their assistance to the FSLN by creating safehavens in their countries, providing facilities for military training, and supplying arms and other equipment. Plans were also discussed for a follow-up meeting later this spring probably in Havana that would prepare a strategy for assisting revolutionary activity through out Central America.

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In part because of Cuba's urging, Central American leftist groups have for some time been developing support mechanisms responsive to Sandinista needs. For example, late last summer at Havana's direction the Honduran Communist Party established a support apparatus that has been responsible for finding sites in Honduras to train FSLN guerrillas. The apparatus has relied on sporadic Cuban financial aid to purchase arms, radios, and other equipment for the FSLN, and Honduran Communists have assisted the Sandinistas in border crossings. Since last fall, however--despite frequent prodding by Honduran Communist Party leaders--the Cubans have dragged their feet in providing promised financial aid for the apparatus. [Redacted]

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Cuba reportedly also funnels assistance to the FSLN through two groups in Costa Rica. [redacted]

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[redacted] The Cubans may also be helping to fund a "Committee of Solidarity with the Sandinista Front" headed by self-professed FSLN member Ernesto Cardenal, a Nicaraguan priest who resides in Costa Rica. [redacted]

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Promoting FSLN Unity

Fidel Castro's recent discussions with FSLN leaders may lead to more active Cuban support to the FSLN. In early March, leaders of the three major FSLN factions traveled to Cuba to meet with Castro. The Cuban leader is said to have spent nearly 48 hours over a four day period helping to hammer out a basis for cooperation. As a result of the meeting a unified FSLN directorate was established containing three members from each faction. [redacted]

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Havana has repeatedly urged leaders of the disparate Sandinista factions to cooperate in a unified effort against Somoza; their failure to do so has been a major deterrent to increased Cuban assistance and will likely continue to be so should the current unity effort falter. [redacted]

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Outlook

The Cuban leadership shares the belief of the Popular Prolonged War and the Proletarian Tendency factions that the Sandinistas are likely to achieve power only after a protracted struggle. [redacted]

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Castro took a similar position in early December when he reportedly urged [redacted] leaders to abandon plans for a large scale military offensive because he did not believe that the FSLN had the necessary logistical and organizational capability to sustain conventional operations against the Guard. Moreover, in mid-January two diplomats assigned to the Cuban embassy in Panama stated that Cuba no longer believed that the FSLN would be able to topple Somoza before his term expires in 1981. [redacted]

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Cuban support, therefore is likely to continue to be intended to help the Sandinistas develop the military and political infrastructure necessary to triumph in a war of attrition. The Cubans probably expect that--as was the case with the Batista army--popular sentiment will gradually turn against the National Guard and eventually render it ineffective. To make the FSLN a more potent guerrilla force, Havana can be expected to continue to emphasize the development of safehavens, training sites, and logistics bases in neighboring countries. Cuba is also likely to continue to provide arms and on-island training to FSLN members. [redacted]

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The Cubans have urged the Sandinistas to combine their efforts to intensify the guerrilla struggle with a highly pragmatic political approach designed to broaden the FSLN's base of popular support for a movement to oust Somoza. [redacted]

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[redacted] FSLN leaders have taken steps to comply with his request. [redacted]

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Given the low-key approach Cuba has pursued regarding the Nicaraguan situation, it is likely that Havana will do its best to avoid being placed in a situation where it might be called upon to intervene directly with Cuban military units. One possible scenario in which Havana might be confronted with such a choice is if the Sandinistas captured a portion of Nicaraguan territory and then--as a

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"provisional government"--requested Cuba to send troops. The sending of military personnel to Nicaragua by Honduras, El Salvador, or Guatemala would also raise the possibility of Cuban military intervention. In neither of these situations, however, do we believe that Havana would be likely to commit its troops for fear that this action would provoke a US counterresponse. (S)

### Guatemala

The focus of Cuban attention in Central America has been on Nicaragua, but Cuban contacts with Guatemalan leftists have also increased in recent months. The main thrust of Cuban policy at this point--as it has been for several years--is to encourage the various insurgent groups to join together in a common effort to undermine the government. Havana continues to insist that greater unity be achieved before Cuba undertakes any major increase in its support. Nonetheless, Cuba seems to be laying the groundwork for increasing its assistance to these groups. (S)

Havana's closest links are to the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), and the Cubans have used it as a hub to broaden their ties with other insurgent groups. According to a

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For some years the Cubans have trained EGP guerrillas in Cuba, and--impressed with that group's initial success in recruiting members of Guatemala's Indian population--Havana began early this year to train

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some of these recruits. The Cubans may also plan to train members of a new guerrilla group; which is located in western Guatemala and led by Rodrigo Asturias, a former FAR member. Asturias reportedly has visited Cuba on several occasions and his group was invited to attend Cuba's revolutionary celebrations in January. [redacted]

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There is some evidence to suggest that the Cubans may be willing to take a more direct role in counseling Guatemalan insurgents. [redacted]

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The Cubans--to the best of our knowledge--have not been involved in Central America in assisting local groups to carry out political assassinations at least in the recent past. Nonetheless, the Castro regime contends that in some circumstances the use of counterterrorism is a legitimate weapon in the effort to promote the cause of revolution, and it may well believe that the current situation in Guatemala justifies such an approach. (S)

The Cubans have also worked hard to encourage the orthodox faction of the Guatemalan Communist Party (PGT) to lend its support to local insurgent groups. [redacted]

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The Cubans clearly feel no urgency in promoting revolutionary activity in Guatemala; rather, their efforts seem designed to prepare local insurgent groups for the long haul.

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The nature of Cuban training of Guatemalan guerrillas also reflects a lack of urgency.

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El Salvador

While Havana has in the past given less attention to El Salvador than to Nicaragua or Guatemala, Cuban activities with Salvadoran insurgents have recently been on the up-swing. The Castro regime's interest in El Salvador has doubtless quickened as it has observed the spiraling violence and growing political polarization there, and Cuba's willingness to lend support has presumably increased because of the demonstrated willingness of the various guerrilla groups to cooperate in at least an informal alliance. (S)

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Cuba has also had links with at least one of the two smaller Salvadoran terrorist groups, the Armed Forces of the National Resistance (FARN). Eduardo Sancho Castaneda--reportedly the FARN's leading strategist--has apparently been his organization's chief conduit to the Cubans. He

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For some time the Cubans have also been pushing for greater cooperation between the El Salvadoran Communist Party and the various insurgent groups.

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[Redacted] Personal antipathy between the leaders of the FPL and the local Communist Party, as well as disagreements regarding the means and timing of staging a revolution in El Salvador have continued to prevent any meaningful cooperation between these two groups, however.

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