



Executive Registry
82-4013

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

March 15, 1982

CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM

TO: ARA - Mr. Bosworth
FROM: ARA/PPC - Luigi R. Einaudi *LE*
SUBJECT: Nicaragua - El Salvador Briefing Draft

Attached as promised is the latest version.

Attachment:
As Stated

cc: INR - Mr. Stoddard
P - Mr. Palmer ✓
C - Mr. Ledeen
S/P - Mr. Glassman
PA/PRESS - Mr. Romberg
ARA - Mr. Briggs
ARA - Mr. Bushnell
ARA - Mr. Gillespie
ARA/CEN - Mr. Johnstone
ARA/P - Mr. Biggs

CONFIDENTIAL
GDS 3/15/88

State Dept. review completed

C-388

15 March 5:00 p.m.

CUBAN AND NICARAGUAN SUPPORT FOR THE SALVADORAN INSURGENCYI. INTRODUCTION

This briefing deals with the question of Cuban and Nicaraguan support for the guerrillas in El Salvador. As you are all aware, we have been conducting highly classified briefings in recent weeks for leading members of Congress and for distinguished officials from previous administrations. You are also aware that the persons who have seen the sensitive intelligence have overwhelmingly agreed that it is convincing, and that the Government's contention of a close working relationship between the Salvadoran guerrillas on the one hand, and the governments of Cuba and Nicaragua on the other, is firmly based on information in our possession.

We will not be sharing those secrets with you today. This is not the same briefing given to Congress, and it is hardly necessary to dwell on the reasons for withholding certain secrets from the world at large. Were we to release them, we would not only lose access to critical information, but we might well risk the lives of some brave people who feel

-2-

it is important that the Government of the United States know what is going on. A Government that does not keep secrets does not receive them.

We have nonetheless pulled together for some information that describes the general pattern of outside support for El Salvador's violent left. Some of this information comes from classified sources. Most of it can be obtained by careful analysis of public sources. The cumulative weight of this information leaves no reasonable doubt that the guerrilla movement in El Salvador receives vital assistance of many kinds, including arms and political-military training and counsel, from an international infrastructure outside El Salvador. The two most immediate links in this international chain are Nicaragua and Cuba, which is heavily subsidized by the Soviet Union.

In what follows, you should keep the following themes in mind:

-- First, that the most recent information -- the information we cannot provide to the general public and therefore not contained in this briefing -- is consistent with patterns of guerrilla activity and foreign support evident for two years

and more. As you will see, a clandestine support system established at the time of the Nicaraguan civil war continued to operate afterwards with a new final destination El Salvador. Cuba played a major role in developing this network, and remains its key link;

- Second, that the existence of this network -- initially identified by the Carter Administration -- has been repeatedly and vigorously denied by Nicaraguan and Cuban spokesmen. Yet a considerable quantity of solid information shows that those denials are false, and that the network is vital to the Salvadoran insurgency.

- Third, that many elements of the pattern have been repeatedly confirmed by independent researchers and journalists who have gone into the field to investigate the actual situation on the ground. Confirmation has come from as far away as Lebanon and Vietnam.

- Fourth, that in assessing the situation in El Salvador today, one should pay attention to the nature of the guerrilla movement. To this end, we have appended to this report a schematic history

-4-

of the development and organization of El Salvador's violent left.

-- Finally, that we are witnessing in El Salvador a drive for power controlled by groups as or more extreme than any that took power in Nicaragua in 1979, or, twenty years before that, in Cuba. Our decision to support the government of El Salvador rests upon both the aggressive actions of Cuba and Nicaragua and the unhappy state in which their citizens now find themselves. If a Cuban-style totalitarian pattern is repeated in Salvador, no evolution toward democracy would be possible.

II. THE PATTERN

Outside backing for the insurgency in El Salvador has taken many forms over time. The pattern is intricate, but has three major components.

External Arms Supplies. Within weeks after the fall of Somoza in July 1979, the Sandinistas began to cooperate with Cuba in support of the Salvadoran extreme left by establishing training camps and the beginning of arms supply networks. This clandestine

-5-

assistance initially involved local black markets and relatively limited resources. In 1980, after a unified command structure under Communist control was established for the Salvadorans with Cuban help, the Sandinista leadership decided to directly manage an arms trafficking system of unprecedented proportions and which originated outside the hemisphere.

Arms for the Salvadoran insurgents reach Nicaragua by direct flights from Havana to Nicaragua. Two Nicaraguan ships, the Aracely and the Nicarao, also frequently transport arms to Nicaragua from Cuba in their cargo, as do Cuban and other vessels. These arms are stockpiled in Nicaragua until guerrilla headquarters near Managua arranges for their shipment into El Salvador. The timing of deliveries is coordinated with the planned level of fighting.

The arms reach the guerrillas from Nicaragua by several means. The guerrilla support networks vary the routes for security reasons. Aerial supply was an important means of arming the Salvadoran guerrillas for the failed January 1981 final offensive, but air deliveries do not now provide the bulk of the guerrillas' weapons. The guerrillas' main overland routes from Nicaragua to El Salvador are through Honduras.

-6-

Honduran officials succeeded in closing several routes in November 1981. With the compromise of so many air and overland routes, since late 1981 deliveries by sea have increased. From the southeast coast of El Salvador, these supplies then move inland along various routes to the north and northwest.

Let me provide some concrete illustrations of the arms flow.

The Papalonal Airfield provides a clear case of the direct airlift of weapons from Nicaragua to guerrillas in El Salvador. Papalonal is a remote area 23 nautical miles northwest of Managua. The airfield is accessible only by dirt roads (Photo). In late July 1980, the airfield was an agricultural dirt airstrip approximately 800 meters long. By mid-December, the length had been increased by 50 percent to approximately 1,200 meters; a turnaround had been added to each end; a dispersal parking area with three hardstands -- a feature typical of a military airfield -- had been constructed at the west end of the runway; three parking aprons had been cleared; and three hangar/storage buildings, each about 15 meters wide, had been constructed on one of the aprons (Photo). After mid-December, at least three more hangars and two support

-7-

buildings were added, and future additions were initiated. Hangars were to stockpile arms for the Salvadoran guerrillas. Extensive photography showed that these hangars resembled those at major Cuban airbases. Other sources confirmed Cuban involvement in the construction. C-47 flights from the airbase, confirmed by photographic evidence, corresponded with sightings in El Salvador. We identified five pilots in Nicaragua who regularly flew the route into El Salvador. Deliveries from Papalonal dropped dramatically as a result of the January 1981 capture of pilot Julio Romero by Salvadoran officials. Pilot recruitment then became difficult, despite Sandinista offers of substantial bonuses to fly the route.

Weapons delivery by overland routes from Nicaragua is mainly through Honduras. In early January 1981, Honduran police intercepted a shipment of arms concealed in a large truck enroute from Nicaragua. The police caught six individuals unloading weapons from the truck. The six identified themselves as Salvadorans and as members of the International Support Commission of the Salvadoran Popular Liberation Forces (FPL). They had in their possession a large number of altered and forged Honduran, Costa Rican, and Salvadoran passports and other identity documents. This one truck

-8-

contained over 100 M-16 automatic rifles, fifty 81-mm mortar rounds, approximately 100,000 rounds of 5.56-mm ammunition, machine gun belts, field packs, and first aid kits. We traced over 50 of these M-16 rifles to numerous U.S. units assigned to Vietnam in 1968-69, and which remained in Vietnam after U.S. troops departed.

Honduran authorities have continued to intercept arms smuggled from Nicaragua. This particular truck was apparently heading for Guatemala when it was captured in April 1981 crossing into Honduras from Nicaragua (photo A). Ammunition and propaganda materials were hidden in the side walls of the trailer. This picture shows a storehouse prepared by these same arms traffickers in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, with a false floor and special basement for storing weapons (photo B).

It should be noted that when a clandestine shipment of arms is intercepted or a safehouse is found containing arms and terrorist supplies it is often impossible to know with certainty whether the ultimate are Guatemalan, Honduran or Salvadoran terrorists, since the arms supply networks established by Cuba and Nicaragua are funnelling lethal military supplies to terrorists and guerrillas in all three countries, using the same clandestine smuggling techniques and routes.

Training. Cuban and Nicaraguan political and military training create the basic framework for the use of the arms by the guerrillas within El Salvador. Nicaragua and Cuba coordinate training efforts, with Cuba providing key specialized training.

Salvadoran guerrillas train at several military sites in Nicaragua under guidance from Cuban and other foreign advisors. The Sandinistas have trained Salvadoran guerrillas in military tactics, weapons, communications, and explosives at temporary training schools scattered around the country and on Sandinista military bases. This training has increased the tactical skills of the guerrillas in El Salvador. For more specialized training, guerrillas transit Nicaragua for Cuba. The Managua-Havana air shuttle link is in daily operation and the increase in traffic has required a ticketing system where none had been required before. Guerrillas are provided false identity documents to allow them to transit third countries. The Cubans are training guerrillas in sabotage and demolition efforts and reinfiltrating them through Nicaragua back into El Salvador. Guerrilla operations -- such as the attacks on Ilopango airport and the El Oro bridge -- were performed by trained saboteurs and underwater demolition experts.

The link between training and the regional infrastructure behind guerrilla activity is evident in this next series of photographs, taken following a raid by the Honduran police on a FMLH safehouse. In an October 1981 interview in the pro-government Nicaraguan newspaper El Nuevo Diario, "Octavio", a founder of the Morazanist Front for the Liberation of Honduras (FHLP) explained that his self-described political-military organization was formed in view of the "increasing regionalization of the Central American conflict." This raid took place on 27 November 1981, in the Loarque section of Tegucigalpa, Honduras. By way of background the Honduran police were attempting to search this house when a firefight broke out, resulting in the deaths of one policeman and two guerrillas. The police ultimately captured four of the nine known members of this group. This particular cell of the FMLH consisted of one Honduran, one Uruguayan, and seven Nicaraguans. The Nicaraguan Government provided funds for training and travel expenses, as well as explosives.

Captured documents and declarations from detained guerrillas indicated that:

-11-

- The group was formed in Nicaragua at the instigation of high-level Sandinista leaders;
- The group's chief of operations resided in Managua; and
- Members of the group received military training in Nicaragua and Cuba.

The documents included classroom notebooks from a one-year training course held in Cuba in 1980. Other documents revealed that guerrillas at one of the three safehouses were responsible for transporting arms and munitions into Honduras from Esteli, Nicaragua.

Command and Control. The military forces of the FMLN guerrilla movement are controlled by the Unified Revolutionary Directorate (DRU) with three members from each of the guerrilla groups active in El Salvador.

The DRU was formed in Havana in 1980 after meetings that began under Castro's sponsorship in late 1979. Creating a unified military command that included the Moscow-line Salvadoran Communist Party before supplying modern armaments was a key to Cuba's political-

-12-

military strategy. This pattern, applied previously in Nicaragua and since then elsewhere in Central America, draws on ideologically-committed Cuban-trained military cadres to ensure Marxist-Leninist control of the insurgent process and any government emerging subsequently from it.

The DRU command headquarters is in Nicaragua, and is part of an extremely sophisticated command and control relationship. This system is more elaborate than that used by the Sandinistas when they were fighting Somoza. Planning and operations are guided from this headquarters in Nicaragua. The guidance flows to guerrilla units widely spread throughout El Salvador. This headquarters coordinates logistical support for the insurgents to include food, medicines, clothing, money and most importantly weapons and ammunition. Although some free-lancing inevitably exists, the Managua headquarters decides on locations to be attacked as well as coordinating supply deliveries.

We have information that Cuban and Nicaraguan advisors are present at DRU guerrilla headquarters in Nicaragua, where they are intimately involved in planning Salvadoran operations.

-13-

Recent Developments. The 5000 full-time front line and 5,000-10,000 part-time guerrillas consume roughly 10 to 20 tons of lethal supplies each month when engaged in hit-and-run attacks. This far exceeds what they capture from government forces. Three months ago -- in mid-December 1981 -- Fidel Castro decided, in consultation with guerrilla leaders, that external supplies of arms to FMLN units should be stepped up to make possible an offensive to prevent a peaceful vote in the March 28 Constituent Assembly elections. Extreme leftist groups throughout Central America were mobilized to support the effort. Nicaraguan Junta coordinator Daniel Ortega recently predicted privately that there would be an increase in spectacular actions by Guatemalan and Salvadoran guerrillas.

Shipments of arms into El Salvador have increased markedly within the past three months. During the past year, we have been able to follow closely deliveries of arms to the Salvadoran insurgents. The recent Cuban-Nicaraguan arms flow into El Salvador has emphasized both sea and overland routes through Honduras. Early this month, for example, a guerrilla unit in El Salvador received several thousand sticks of TNT and detonators. Five sticks of TNT are sufficient to blow up an electrical pylon. Last month, a Salvadoran

-14-

guerrilla group picked up a large shipment of arms on the Usulután coast. This shipment came by sea from storage sites in Nicaragua.

These and other recent external supply efforts have furnished heavy weapons, including M-60 machine guns, 57mm recoilless rifles, and M-72 antitank weapons, thus significantly increasing guerrilla firepower. Individual units also regularly receive tens of thousands of dollars for routine purchases of non-lethal supplies on commercial markets.

III. CONFIRMATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC RECORD

On March 8, 1982, Stephen Rosenfeld wrote in the Washington Post that the evidence of the Nicaraguan-Salvadoran connection "is lying all over Central America." The following examples are all drawn from the public record.

1. The Sandinistas on their own role in Salvador:
The official position of the Nicaraguan regime is that they have provided only "political and moral" support to the Salvadoran guerrillas. Yet in recent months leading Sandinistas have confirmed that material support does in fact exist.

-15-

-- Sandinista Directorate member Bayardo Arce told an American Embassy official on 16 September of last year, "when will you Americans ever understand that nothing and no one will prevent us from helping our fellow guerrillas in Central America?"

-- One month later, Arce was quoted in the official publication Barricada to the effect that American demands that Nicaraguan aid to the Salvadoran guerrillas cease "will never be accepted by Nicaragua."

-- When American journalists have pressed Nicaraguan officials, the Nicaraguans have admitted that there is material support. Stephen Rosenfeld of the Washington Post wrote that Foreign Minister D'Escoto admitted "on the record" that Nicaragua is in fact giving help to the guerrillas. "All he denied," wrote Rosenfeld, "was that there is a substantial flow and that it is authorized."

2. Yasir Arafat on the PLO role in Nicaragua and El Salvador: PLO chief Arafat confirmed to a group of Palestinian journalists on January 11, 1982, that "there are Palestinian pilots in Nicaragua,

there are Palestinian revolutionaries with the revolutionaries in El Salvador...."

3. Sandinista and Vietnamese leaders on the Vietnamese role: Last March, Sandinista Directorate member Humberto Ortega travelled to Hanoi. In a speech given there, Ortega said, "we sincerely thank the Vietnamese people and highly value their support for the heroic Salvadoran people...The fierce and bloody struggle in El Salvador requires the support of all progressive nations and forces throughout the world".

-- Vietnamese support for the Salvadoran guerrillas was confirmed by author William Shawcross when he travelled to Vietnam last year (New York Review of Books, 24 September 1981):

Had Vietnam been distributing any of the vast pile of weapons left by the Americans? Colonel Bui Tin acknowledged, in effect, that it had. In El Salvador? "It's not fair to say the US can help the junta but we cannot help our friends. We do our best to support revolutionary movements in the world...."

-17-

4. On Cuban Activities in Nicaragua and El Salvador:

-- Fidel Castro publicly denies providing assistance to the Salvadoran guerrillas, and avoids commenting on Cuban military advisers in Nicaragua.

-- Yet just a few days ago, Sandinista leader Jaime Wheelock confirmed to the Washington Post that Cuban military advisers were present in his country, although he claimed that there were only about a dozen of them.

-- In a speech in Havana (18 November 1981) Castro said, "we had also foiled other lies of theirs (the Americans): The lie that we sent advisers to El Salvador, the lie that the arms we received here for the defense of the country...we were redistributing in Central America."

-- Yet in April, 1981, when German Social Democratic leader Hans-Jurgen Wischnewski personally confronted Castro with State Department contentions that Cuba had shipped weapons to Salvadoran guerrillas, Castro admitted it was true.

-- Castro again confirmed the reports of transshipment

-18-

of arms to the Salvadoran guerrillas in discussions with several Interparliamentary Union delegations in Havana last September.

-- A Special Legislative Commission established in June 1980 by the Costa Rican legislature confirmed that the Cubans had established a clandestine arms-supply link between Costa Rica and Nicaragua during the Nicaraguan civil war, and that the link continued to function between Costa Rica and El Salvador once the Sandinistas had come to power in Nicaragua. After the Nicaraguan civil war was over, according to the Costa Rican Commission's report, "arms trafficking (began), originating in Costa Rica or through Costa Rican territory, toward El Salvador, indirectly or using Honduras as a bridge."

-- American journalist Shirley Christian had earlier investigated these charges, and confirmed them (Miami Herald, July 18, 1980):

"Large-scale arms traffic through Panama and Costa Rica to leftist guerrillas in El Salvador has surfaced in the wake of a series of accusations and resignation in the Costa Rican government. This traffic...appears to follow the same route and methods, and involve many of the same suppliers and go-betweens, as the supply line to the Sandinistas during the Nicaraguan war that ended a year ago."

-19-

-- Top Cuban leaders have confirmed that Salvadoran guerrillas are trained in Cuba. Vice-President Caslos Rafael Rodriguez, for example, confirmed it in at least two interviews (Der Spiegel, 28 September, 1981 and El Diario de Caracas, 29 October, 1981), and journalists exploring the question have been able to confirm it. For example, a reporter for the Toronto Globe and Mail reported last month that "at least 30 Salvadoran guerrillas" were currently training near Havana. The report was based on an interview with a Salvadoran guerrilla billeted in a Havana hotel, which according to a hotel employee had been booked by the Cuban Foreign Ministry for "Latin American" guests.

5. On the Nicaraguan Link to El Salvador:

-- In the New York Times (15 January, 1981) Ambassador Robert White said "it is my personal conclusion that there has been a change in the amount and sophistication of weapons coming to the guerrillas". In the Washington Post the following day, Ambassador White was quoted as saying that "compelling and convincing evidence existed of Nicaragua's material support for guerrillas...."

-- In an interview with editors of the Washington Post published January 30, 1981, former Secretary of State Edmund Muskie said that Cuban arms and supplies being used in El Salvador's bloody civil war were flowing through Nicaragua "certainly with the knowledge and to some extent the help of Nicaraguan authorities."

-- Alex Drehsler, a reporter for the San Diego Union (1 March, 1981) interviewed a guerrilla leader in El Salvador who said that "the Salvadoran guerrillas have a permanent commission in Nicaragua overseeing the smuggling of weapons from that country to here." He also said there have been Cuban advisers in the province of Morazan, and that Vietnamese advisers have made several trips to guerrilla camps in El Salvador.

-- A Salvadoran guerrilla, who defected in September 1981, Santo Salome Morales, reported that he and twelve others left El Salvador and entered Nicaragua via a point near the Gulf of Fonseca in May, 1980. From Managua, they proceeded to Cuba where they received extensive military training; together with over 900 Salvadorans. Morales said he was trained in underwater demolition.

-- Two Salvadorans and one Costa Rican arrested in Costa Rica on January 29 in connection with an attempted kidnapping of a Salvadoran businessman told Costa Rican police that they were recruited by a Salvadoran guerrilla organization and had been given military training in Nicaragua where they were provided false identity documents.

IV. CONCLUSIONS OF DISTINGUISHED AMERICANS WHO HAVE BEEN GIVEN ACCESS TO SENSITIVE INTELLIGENCE ON THIS SUBJECT

We have presented detailed classified information to appropriate congressional committees and to many American statesmen, who have served both Republican and Democratic Administrations. Let me quote from some of their statements.

Former Secretary of State William Rogers said that anyone who heard the information would have to be convinced that the Government's position is sound. Ambassador Sol Linowitz said, "I found what we were shown to be credible and quite persuasive. It was sobering and reason for concern." Former Democratic party chairman Robert Strauss told the press that the government had "put on a rather impressive bit of evidence."

-22-

Lloyd Cutler, former advisor to President Carter, issued a statement March 10 that he was satisfied that available intelligence justifies the conclusion that the Nicaraguan Government is assisting the Salvadoran guerrillas "to organize and command forces" and "is providing them with the bulk of their military weapons and the means of their delivery." Mr. Cutler said that he was satisfied that "a substantial portion of these weapons are supplied to Nicaragua via Cuba, and that the Cuban Government is directly participating in Nicaragua's military assistance to the Salvadoran guerrillas." He also noted that detailed public disclosures would pose an unreasonable risk of compromising the sources.

Ambassador Anne Armstrong, Chairwoman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB), characterized the group of distinguished citizens receiving the intelligence briefing as "a bi-partisan group of patriotic Americans" and said she believed all present found the evidence convincing. She said the information was too sensitive to be made public, adding "I wish it were not so because it's a story that desperately needs to be told to the American people."

-23-

After similar intelligence briefings, House Intelligence Committee Chairman Edward Boland (D-Mass.) said there was evidence of Sandinista involvement in training, arms, and financing of the Salvadoran guerrillas, while Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Barry Goldwater (R-Arizona) said "the officials charged with developing and implementing U.S. policy in this area are doing so on the basis of solid information".