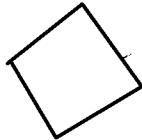


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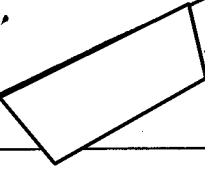
You may find the attached of interest, in light of continuing Congressional hearings on the subject.



File
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Current
Policy No. 352

Strategic Situation in Central America and the Caribbean

December 14, 1981



United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Following is a statement by Thomas O. Enders, Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs, before the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, December 14, 1981.

Major Developments

There are four major developments that have come together to create what can only be described as a state of danger in the Caribbean Basin.

One is the new Cuban strategy for uniting the left in the countries of the region, committing it to violence, arming it, training it in warfare, and attempting to use it for the destruction of existing governments. I say new because it is only 3 years ago that the policy was adopted. Prior to 1978—for some 10 years since the death of Che Guevara on an Andean hillside—Cuba had made a sustained effort to portray itself as a member of the international community not unlike others, carrying on state-to-state relations through embassies, emphasizing trade and cultural contacts.

Observing this pattern, many in this and other countries of the hemisphere began to hope that revolutionary Cuba was on the way to becoming a status-quo nation. The 1970s, of course, were marked by Cuban intervention in Africa on a continent-wide scale. But, it was argued, Africa was a special case.

The turn came in 1978, when Cuba decided to back the insurrection in Nicaragua. At first it was not apparent to many that a new Cuban strategy was in operation, for Nicaragua seemed like a case all of its own. But then the same thing was tried in El Salvador, in Guatemala, in Colombia; now it is being tried in Honduras.

We have attempted to identify and illustrate the full scope of this new Cuban strategy in a research paper [see Special Report No. 90], which I would like to submit to the committee for its study. The paper is based on both public and intelligence sources. It was not written to make sensational revelations, and it does not. But I wonder how many Americans are aware of the sweep and the sophistication of what is going on. In many countries of the region, Cuba is attempting no less than to construct a machine to destroy the established governments.

The pattern is always the same. For years the radical left in the area has been divided by disagreement over tactics. The old-line Comintern parties argued patience: You only had to wait for Marx's famous objective conditions to emerge, and the revolution would occur. Other factions were for setting up Che Guevara-style *focos*: put some armed *guerrilleros* into the countryside and their presence will radicalize the peasants. Others were for *guerra prolongada*: discredit the regime by hitting the economy. Still others advocated spectacular kidnappings and assassinations.

Under the new strategy Cuba is approaching each of these groups, often calling them to Havana. Cuba offers to supply (or arrange for the supply of) arms and training. But there are conditions: The left must unite, it must create a single directorate for command and control, it must commit to a single strategy (which often is written out and approved by Castro personally). And that strategy is always the same: armed struggle against the established government.

It is important to be clear about the effects of this process. It enhances Cuba's role as the guide (and sometimes as the arbiter) of each revolutionary movement. It increases the pressure on democratic movements on the left to make common cause with the men with the guns rather than face blame as the obstacle to the unity of the left. Once unity on the left has been created, democratic socialists in the hemisphere and in Europe face the dilemma of whether or not to support it. Many have supported such movements—only to learn with bitterness that their money and political backing are welcome; their ideas are not.

This is not only history. The process goes on. In Honduras, Cuba has just now completed the same unification operation: Parties have been joined together in a national directorate committed to armed struggle. A new attempt to overthrow an established government by force is underway.

The democracies in the hemisphere have had to break, suspend, or downgrade relations with Cuba: Colombia, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Venezuela, Peru, and Ecuador.

The second development is the economic and social crisis in the region. It also began in 1978, just as Castro was launching his new policy of intervention.

For the past two generations, most of the Central American countries and many of the islands compiled an enviable record of economic and social change. But in 1978 a serious deterioration began. Prices for export commodities—coffee, sugar, cocoa—began to decline sharply. Prices for imported oil and imported capital kept going up. With slowed economic growth in the industrial world, tourism stagnated. Run-on credit crunches resulted. Some countries are bankrupt. Others are threatened with bankruptcy. In two, Cuban-assisted insurrections are destroying power plants, bridges, and crops and attempting to disrupt the tourist trade.

The result is a grave, general economic crisis bringing with it misery and despair for many millions of people in the region. Coinciding as it does with the Cuban drive to unify the left and commit it to violence, economic crisis creates great potential political vulnerability throughout the area.

The third factor is developing the role of Nicaragua as a platform for intervention throughout Central America. We have watched with deepening concern as Nicaragua has moved away from pledges of political pluralism toward a repressive, one-party state. At the same time it is greatly expanding its army and building up an inventory of heavy arms. It continues to be deeply involved in logistics and other support for the insurgency in El Salvador.

The United States and a number of other countries have tried to provide an alternative to these trends, notably by providing economic aid but also by maintaining political contacts. Since 1979 the United States alone gave \$120 million in assistance. Recently we tried by diplomatic means to achieve a rapprochement with Managua. And we don't close the door on future attempts.

But frankly there is little to show for our efforts. Indeed, I wonder whether any of the democratic countries that have supported Nicaragua can claim to have slowed down, much less to have stopped the negative trends.

There are more than 1,500 Cuban military and security advisers in Nicaragua, twice as many as there were at the start of the year. More tanks are reported on their way. Preparations for the receipt of MiGs are well advanced.

A final factor is the special importance of the struggle in El Salvador for the future of the area. El Salvador is the second largest Central American state in population and in the past has achieved a relatively high level of economic development.

But El Salvador is important not only for itself. There are underway these two critical experiments in reform: one in land tenure, the other in the creation of democratic institutions and strengthening the political center. If these reforms are defeated by arms, prospects for peaceful change elsewhere will be seriously set back.

There is something else. If, after Nicaragua, El Salvador is captured by a violent minority, what state in Central America will be able to resist? How long would it be before the major strategic U.S. interests—the canal, sea lanes, oil supplies—were at risk?

U.S. Strategy

To meet and overcome these challenges the United States must also have a comprehensive strategy. Let me summarize briefly the line of action we are now developing.

First, we must make sure that our friends have the means to defend themselves. El Salvador and Honduras are the two most threatened countries. The buildup in Nicaragua menaces both; targeting of El Salvador's economy by Nicaraguan-supported insurgents creates a situation of emergency in that country. Both need more resources—above all, economic but military as well. We will be consulting with the Congress on how we can best provide help.

Second, we must join with others to help provide the Caribbean Basin countries the opportunity to achieve long-term prosperity. President Reagan is preparing for submission to the Congress early next year a far-reaching package of proposals. Because the markets in the countries of the basin are so small, investment other than in staples is often unattractive. But if investors could be sure of unimpeded access to outside markets, particularly to the vast U.S. market, at least for a defined period of time, then investment in the area becomes more interesting. The skilled and relatively low-cost labor of the area becomes an attraction. We are developing proposals for one-way free trade arrangements and for investment incentives; there will also be provision for preventing abuses. At the same time we will present proposals for emergency financial assistance to tide countries over until they can take advantage of the new opportunities to begin earning their own way.

Third, we must not falter in our pursuit of democratic values—for they assure the legitimacy of governments we hope to help. In a free, open election with broad participation, Honduras chose a new government last month. Costa Rica—whose deeply rooted democratic institutions are helping it to weather a brutal economic crisis without violence—goes to the polls in February. El Salvador will follow with elections for a constituent assembly—the first step in creating representative, constitutionally bound government in that nation. In Central America only the Nicaraguan Government refuses to go before the people.

Let me in this regard make a remark on the subject of proposals for negotiation between the government and the insurgents. Members of the Frente Democratico Revolucionario (FDR) say they want to talk about "restructuring the army" and "establishing a new order." In their view such changes are conditions precedent to elections.

But the establishment of a new order and the status of the army are among the subjects for the constituent assembly to be elected in March. Why should they only be debated and decided with the insurgents and not with the *campesinos*, the labor unions, and the political parties? Why shouldn't the FDR have—only have—the representation in the assembly it can get by campaigning?

In July the United States said it would facilitate contacts and discussions on election issues. In September we sent a group to El Salvador and talked to all interested in talking to us, including the Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario (MNR), a member of the FDR. The representative of another member of the FDR has asked to see us in Washington this week, and we are receiving him on the same basis. If there are opposition elements who believe in a democratic solution, we will help them participate in the electoral process. But it would be wrong to assist those—in negotiations or otherwise—who are committed to the destruction of democracy.

Fourth, we must continue the pursuit of justice for the countries of the area. Lawlessness from both the left and right has been a major weakness in El Salvador. But the government is making progress in bringing it under control. Violent deaths other than in combat as reported each week by our Embassy in San Salvador are down by more than a half since last year. I do not want to give you the impression that our weekly figures are complete. But the trend is significant. Progress is unmistakable. I wonder whether the insurgents have made any contribution to that progress at all. For they claim that their violence is justified by a higher goal.

Fifth, our emphasis should be on collective action. Last week the Organization of American States voted 22 to 3 with 4 abstentions in support of free elections as a means to a political solution in El Salvador. In the same forum Secretary Haig has suggested that all countries in Central America should address the arms race that now threatens in Central America as a result of Nicaraguan imports of heavy weapons and the Cuban military adviser presence

in Nicaragua. Should more serious threats emerge, it is in collective security that we should seek solutions.

Finally, we must communicate to Cuba that the costs of escalating its intervention in the region will be very high. We have readied measures to prevent another Mariel sealift should Cuba again seek to utilize the longings of its own citizens to harm this country. We are tightening the economic embargo. We are preparing creation of a radio devoted to Cuba news and beamed to the island, so that Cubans can be better able to hold their government accountable for its actions. Our underlying message is clear: We will not accept, we do not believe the countries of the region will accept, that the future of the Caribbean Basin be manipulated from Havana. It must be determined by the countries themselves. ■


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