

15

14 September 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy NIO/Latin America

FROM:

[Redacted]

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International Security Issues Division
Office of Global Issues

SUBJECT:

Nicaragua: Accelerating Military
Assistance [Redacted]

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1. In response to your request, the attached memorandum discusses the Nicaraguan military buildup, emphasizing developments in 1983. The memorandum--a downgraded version of an intelligence assessment published in early July--is classified Secret, [Redacted]

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2. The memorandum was prepared by [Redacted] International Security Issues Division, Office of Global Issues. [Redacted]

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3. Questions and comments are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, Communist Activities Branch, OGI, [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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Attachment:
Nicaragua: Accelerating Military Assistance (U), GI M 83-10199, Secret

Unclassified When Separated
From Attachment.

[Redacted]

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SUBJECT: Nicaragua: Accelerating Military Assistance

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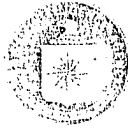
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(14 Sep 1983)

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

14 September 1983

NICARAGUA: ACCELERATING MILITARY ASSISTANCE

Summary

The pace of military-related deliveries to Nicaragua increased substantially during the first half of 1983, exceeding the total number of shipments observed during all of last year. Communist countries, led by the USSR, continued to be Nicaragua's main suppliers, providing hardware under 1982 and 1983 agreements. Most deliveries consisted of hardware such as helicopters and trucks to improve logistical capabilities against the insurgents, although Nicaragua also received additional ground force weapons. At the same time, Cuba reportedly substantially increased the number of military/security personnel in Nicaragua, including combat troops.

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Introduction

Efforts to provide military assistance to Nicaragua quickened in the first half of 1983. Cuba, the Sandinistas' staunchest benefactor, reportedly nearly doubled the size of its military/security presence in country and probably increased its involvement in counterinsurgency operations. The USSR, although relying on other countries to ship weapons, became more active in delivering military-support hardware to Nicaragua.

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GI M 83-10199

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The recent Nicaraguan buildup, precipitated by increasing anti-Sandinista military activity, demonstrates Havana's--and presumably Moscow's--growing concern that the insurgents pose a real threat to the stability of the regime. The revolution's success is critical to Havana because it vindicates Castro's activist policy in the region. For its part, Moscow--eager to undermine US influence--has gradually expanded its involvement in the region, believing that continuing instability undercuts and diverts US attention and resources from problems elsewhere. [redacted]

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Supplying Nicaragua: Patterns Through 1982

Soon after seizing control in July 1979, the Sandinistas began to develop Nicaraguan military capabilities to consolidate their power. Between July 1979 and the end of 1982, Managua concluded military accords valued at more than \$200 million, mainly with Warsaw Pact countries and Cuba. That level of assistance--unprecedented in Central America--was four times the worth of all agreements during the preceding 25 years. During the same period, the number of foreign military/security advisers in Nicaragua (mostly Cubans) increased to more than 2,000, and a large number of Nicaraguans were sent abroad for military training. [redacted]

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Communist countries--mainly the USSR, Cuba, and East Germany--have been Managua's principal benefactors:

- o Although Moscow initially moved cautiously in supplying Managua and took pains to conceal its role, by 1981 the value of Soviet military assistance far exceeded Nicaragua's accords with all other countries. Soviet agreements provided for a variety of tanks, other ground force weapons, helicopters, transport aircraft, and support equipment (such as trucks). Moscow, however, relied on other countries (Algeria and Bulgaria) to deliver the arms. The Soviets also assumed an increasingly influential advisory role, including formulating combat plans.
- o Identified Cuban materiel support consisted mainly of ground and air defense weapons and ammunition. Perhaps more important was Havana's provision of as many as 2,000 military/security experts by the end of 1982 to help transform Sandinista forces into a conventional army, upgrade airfields, and perform other tasks. Cuba also has been the principal foreign training location for Nicaraguans, providing aircraft and other instruction.
- o East Germany provided nearly 1,000 trucks and small numbers of advisers to Nicaragua. Most of these experts probably are security/intelligence officers--the specialty of most East Germans posted to LDCs. [redacted]

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Other countries, acting either on their own or on Moscow's behalf, also supported the Nicaraguan buildup:

- o Bulgaria delivered about 25 Soviet-made medium tanks last November and has provided instruction for Nicaraguan pilot candidates.
- o Other East European countries, such as Poland, reportedly have provided similar training.
- o Algerian ships delivered a variety of ground force weapons to Nicaragua in 1981 and 1982.
- o Libya supplied a few trainer/counterinsurgency aircraft and helicopters in 1982 and a small group of pilot-instructors.
- o France concluded a \$17.5 million contract in December 1981 for two helicopters, 100 air-to-ground rocket launchers, two patrol boats, 45 trucks, and training.

[REDACTED]

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Rapid Buildup in 1983

The pace of military assistance to Nicaragua became increasingly rapid during the first half of 1983, as Managua concluded accords estimated to be worth nearly \$50 million. Moreover, the rate of deliveries was about twice as fast as during all of 1982, when 14 military-related deliveries were observed.

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Identified deliveries in 1983 are estimated to be worth roughly \$40 million. The value of 1982 shipments is estimated at approximately \$100 million, but that figure included relatively expensive tanks. First-time deliveries to Nicaragua in 1983 included air-to-surface rockets and launchers from France and Soviet-made AN-26 transport aircraft, while additional MI-8 helicopters, ground force weapons (including armored vehicles) and trucks were also supplied. As in previous years, the USSR relied on other countries to deliver weapons, while it directly shipped military-support items. Although a Libyan effort to deliver weapons via Brazil was frustrated last spring, Qadhafi probably will attempt again to resupply Nicaragua.

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The fast pace of military deliveries in 1983 reportedly has been accompanied by sharp increases in the number of Communist--mainly Cuban--personnel posted to Nicaragua. The estimated number of Cuban military/security personnel in Nicaragua is approximately 3,000. Moreover, one of Cuba's top field commanders, General Arnaldo Ochoa, has arrived in Nicaragua to take command of both Cuban and Nicaraguan forces. Ochoa previously commanded Cuban forces in Angola and Ethiopia.

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Impact on Capabilities

Deliveries of helicopters, transport aircraft, rocket launchers, armored vehicles, and trucks this year will improve Managua's ability to conduct and support counterinsurgency operations. Helicopters will be especially useful for transport as the rainy season inhibits truck movement, and communications equipment will improve the Sandinista's ability to command and control units in the field. [REDACTED]

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Nicaragua's ability to pursue conventional operations has also improved with the acquisition of tanks, other armor, and training, but the Sandinistas still face problems:

- o The Sandinista military has a total strength of about 25,000 active-duty forces and some 60,000 to 80,000 reserves and militia. We believe this force could mount a successful defense against any one country in the region and could make limited cross-border strikes at any time with relative impunity. In a large-scale attack on Honduras, Sandinista forces probably would penetrate a considerable distance, but their progress eventually would be constrained by operational and logistic difficulties and insufficient training.
- o Air defenses, a Nicaraguan concern in view of the superior but aging Honduran Air Force, have been upgraded through the acquisition of air defense weapons. Still, the Air Force lacks jet fighters in Nicaragua to counter the threat posed by Honduras's Super Mysteres.
- o The Sandinista Navy is little more than a small coastal defense force. Indeed, its patrol boats are inadequate even for that task. More, the impending delivery of French vessels, which are lightly armed, will improve capabilities only marginally. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

We believe that continued insurgent pressure will force the Sandinistas to focus attention in the near term on further improving their capabilities to conduct small-unit antiguerrilla operations. They also will probably continue to strengthen forces along the border with Honduras. As a result, the composition of deliveries to Nicaragua in the near term probably will resemble recent shipments, rather than including significantly more advanced arms. The emphasis on containing the threat to the regime as well as constraints on capabilities, the fear of US retaliation, and probable Soviet disapproval still argue against Managua's initiating a major operation against Honduras. [REDACTED]

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Over the longer term, weapons could be transferred to Nicaragua from Cuba in the event of war with Honduras or if the Sandinistas and Cubans believed that collapse of the regime were imminent. Cuba probably would serve as the focus for an emergency resupply of Nicaragua, drawing from its extensive inventory of modern aircraft, ground force weapons, and air defense hardware. Castro also could send additional personnel.

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The USSR, Cuba, and selected East European countries will remain Nicaragua's largest and most dependable suppliers of military assistance. Under present circumstances, there is little apparent need for Moscow to abandon its policy of directly delivering only aircraft and support equipment, suggesting continued use of other countries to transship weapons. The most active non-Communist supplier probably will be Libya, although actual deliveries may continue to be erratic. In any case, completion and expansion of ports on Nicaragua's east coast would facilitate seaborne deliveries by providing an alternative to shipping through the Panama Canal. Capabilities for air resupply will expand as airfields are improved.

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