

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

10 June 1983

NICARAGUA: The Arms Buildup and  
Increasing Cuban Support

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Castro's Determination

Once the Sandinista forces ousted the Somoza government, the Castro regime set about the task of creating a totally new professional military establishment in Nicaragua, one that would help consolidate the revolutionary victory by maintaining internal order and defending the country from any attempts to launch a counterrevolution from abroad. Havana, sensitive to the history of US intervention in the region, gave the task high priority because it expected that, at some point in the development of the Sandinista regime, the US might try to reverse

This memorandum was requested by the Director of Central Intelligence. It was prepared by [redacted] of the Office of African and Latin American Analysis and [redacted] of the Office of Global Issues. It was coordinated with the Office of Soviet Analysis and the Office of Near East and South Asia Analysis. Information as of 10 June 1983 was used in preparation of this paper. Comments and questions are welcome and should be addressed to Chief, Middle America-Caribbean Division, [redacted]

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the revolutionary process in Nicaragua by organizing another Bay of Pigs-type operation.

Consolidation of the Nicaraguan revolution is extremely important to the Cuban leadership because it is the only success--as opposed to many defeats--that Cuba has had in two decades of promoting armed struggle in the hemisphere. The success of the Sandinista regime is, in the eyes of the guerrilla elite in Havana, a vindication of the activist foreign policy it has been advocating for so long and an outstanding precedent that justifies the continuation of that policy. Castro, and probably many other guerrilla veterans in the Cuban leadership, got tremendous vicarious satisfaction out of seeing a repetition of their own Cuban experience in Nicaragua. He and his clique are wedded to the Nicaraguan revolution psychologically as well as ideologically, and a reversal of the political process there would be a shattering blow to them.

Cuba originally saw its military role in Nicaragua as one of advice and technical support and has had some 1,500 to 2,000 military and security advisers and technicians in the country for several years. Although some military hardware has been shipped from Cuba, Havana looks to the USSR and other suppliers as the primary sources of Nicaragua's weapons and military equipment. Nevertheless, the Cubans recognized the possibility that the fledgling Nicaraguan armed forces might be compelled to defend the country prematurely, and entered into a mutual defense pact

with the Sandinista government that paved the way for the introduction of Cuban troops should they ever be needed.

Havana has been seriously concerned since late 1980 that the US might resort to direct intervention as a result of events in Central America and since then has undertaken a number of precautionary defensive measures--forming a territorial militia; digging trenches, bunkers, and revetments for personnel and equipment; arming to the teeth--in Cuba to prepare for an attack. Little was done, however, to bolster the Cuban military presence in Nicaragua until Washington's close links to the anti-Sandinista insurgents became apparent. Castro seems to have been confident that, without US help, the insurgents could be handled easily by the Nicaraguan security forces. Washington's decision to help the insurgents, however, was a signal to Castro that the US was finally prepared to act. The evidence suggests that he suspects the US is using the guerrillas as bait, hoping to tempt the Nicaraguan military into attacking Contra bases in Honduras and thus providing an excuse for the introduction of US military forces.

Evidence of acute Cuban concern over the turn of events in Central America is substantial. Our Interests Section in Havana was told last month by several Western diplomatic missions that high Cuban officials had been sounding them out since late April as to what they thought the US would do if Cuba sent troops to



Nicaragua. At the time, the process of increasing the Cuban military presence there was already under way.



Our Interests Section in Havana reported that when Castro and other top Cuban officials met with visiting advisers to President Mitterrand and the French Prime Minister in early May,

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[redacted]

the Cubans gave the impression that their preoccupation with the Nicaraguan situation overshadowed even their concern over the developments in El Salvador. The French Ambassador subsequently told our officials that the Cuban leadership was extremely concerned about Washington's reaction to the situation there. French officials here in Washington relayed the same message to US officials, and added that Castro had admitted getting signals from the Soviets warning him that if he precipitated a military confrontation with the US, Moscow would not come to his aid.

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While the Castro regime obviously has reason to mislead the French [redacted] we believe that the concern the Cubans expressed over the turn of events in Central America is genuine. [redacted]

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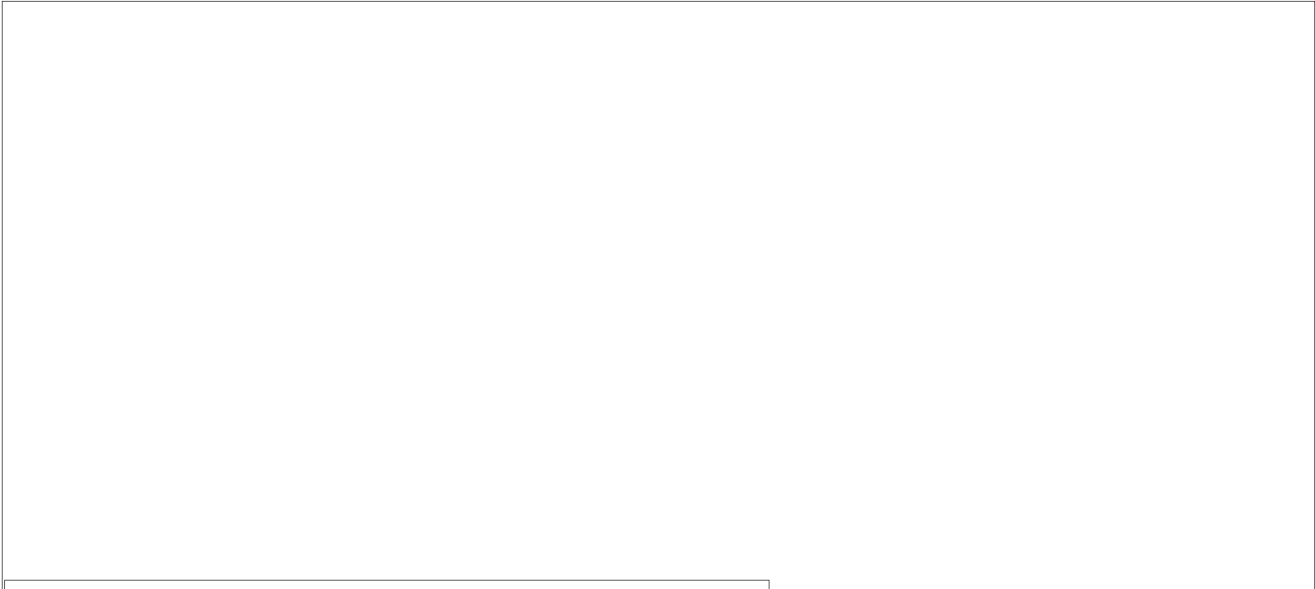
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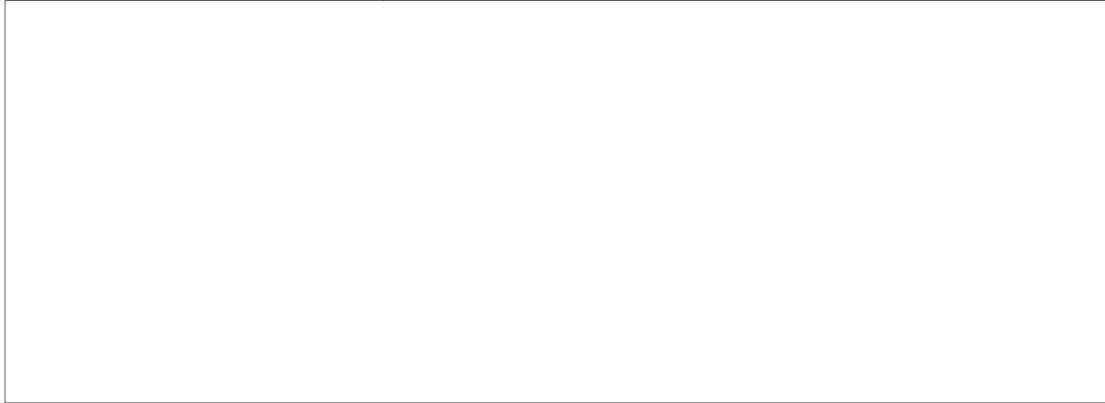
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as of mid-April, high Cuban and Nicaraguan officials did not believe press reports that ex-Sandinista leader Eden Pastora had entered Nicaragua. They were concerned about the possibility, however, because they believe he has great popular appeal and could cause them a great deal of trouble. Now that more evidence has surfaced about his presence, those fears presumably have increased.

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Cuban's determination to support the Sandinista government is strong. Havana has delivered this message to many diplomatic missions in Havana



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Cuba is

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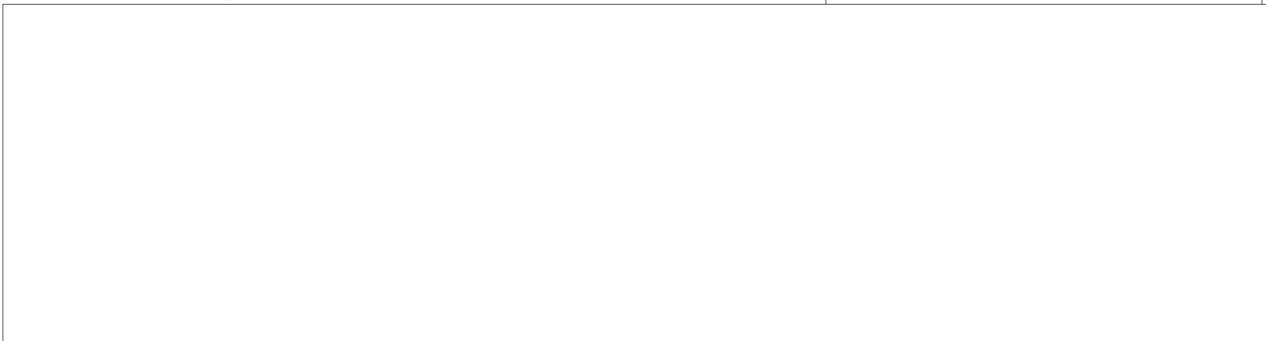
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prepared to become even more involved in Central America, especially Nicaragua, but is following Moscow's lead and restraining its activities in the region.



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The most significant and alarming indicator of Cuba's dedication to the defense of the Sandinista regime is the bolstering of the Cuban military presence with Division General Arnaldo Ochoa in charge. Ochoa's previous experience suggests that he is on the scene to supervise a major buildup of Cuban forces in Nicaragua. He is probably also under orders to restrain the Nicaraguans from some precipitate action--such as a military invasion of Honduras to destroy insurgent bases--that could be used by the US to justify US military intervention. The Cubans apparently have a low regard for the professionalism of the Nicaraguan military and do not want to be dragged into a confrontation with the US that resulted from some rash Nicaraguan military operation.

Nevertheless, the posting of Ochoa--one of the most highly regarded and experienced of Cuba's top military officers--to Managua underscores Cuba's alarm over events there as well as Cuba's determination to fulfill its commitments



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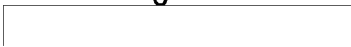
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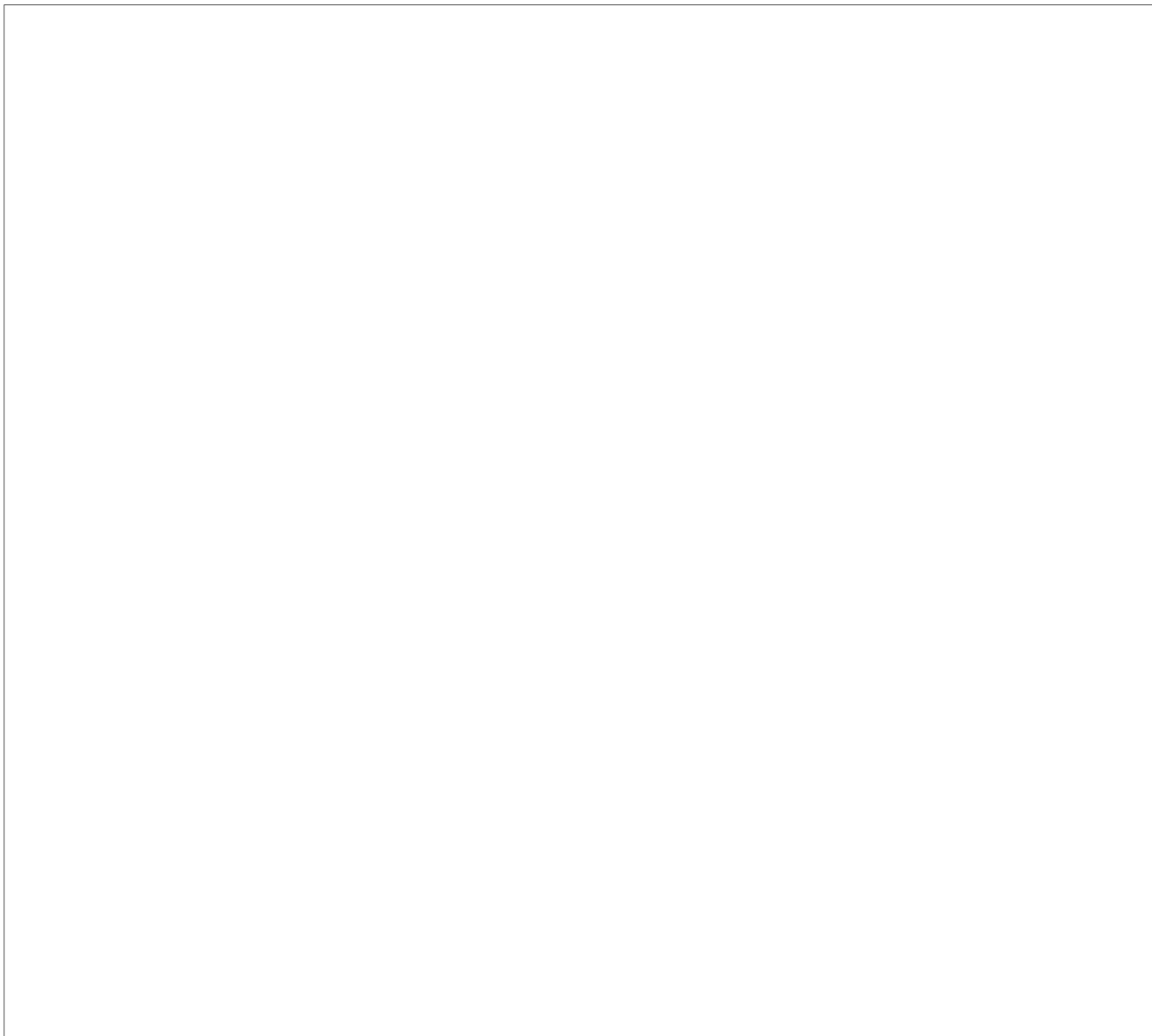
We believe that only a clear and unpublicized signal to Castro--either direct or through the Soviets--that the US is prepared to intervene militarily would dissuade him from establishing a Cuban military presence in Nicaragua on the scale of the Cuban military presence in Ethiopia or even Angola, should he decide that it was required to maintain the Sandinistas in power.

Arms Buildup

The Sandinistas continue to acquire military materiel at a rapid rate.





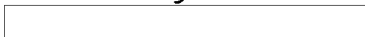


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The impact of the buildup over the last few months has been to provide the Sandinistas with increased conventional and counterinsurgency capabilities. The equipment will probably be used against the anti-Sandinista insurgents as well as to strengthen conventional defenses on the Honduran border.



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Reported Cuban Troop Buildup

[redacted] since mid-March Cuba has increased its military presence in Nicaragua by introducing as many as 1,500 combat troops. [redacted]

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[redacted] these new troops included both Cuban Army regulars and reservists with combat experience, in addition to Special Troops from the Ministry of Interior. [redacted]

1,000 combat troops were sent to Nicaragua by sea in late April or early May. These troops were reportedly sent to counter the expected offensives by anti-Sandinista forces and, once in Nicaragua, were integrated into Nicaraguan units. [redacted]

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[redacted] 500 Special Troops had been sent since mid-March to supplement the contingent of 150 that had been present in Nicaragua for about two years. [redacted]

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Prior to the reported troop augmentation, Cuba had an estimated 1,500 to 2,000 military advisers and security force personnel in Nicaragua, helping the Sandinistas build their military establishment and assisting them in the counterinsurgency campaign. Included in this total are an estimated 150 to 300 Special Troops--the only true combat contingent that was present before the reported buildup. The bulk of these Cuban military personnel were present strictly in an advisory or training role, but in recent months [redacted]

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[redacted] at least some of them have [redacted]

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been attached to Nicaraguan units involved in combat operations against anti-Sandinista forces.

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one of Cuba's top field commanders, General Arnaldo Ochoa, has now arrived in Nicaragua to take command of both Cuban and Nicaraguan forces. Ochoa is a highly respected military officer who previously served as commander of the Cuban expeditionary forces in Ethiopia and, prior to that, led a Cuban combat brigade in Angola. In both cases, Ochoa's arrival presaged the major buildup of Cuban combat forces in those countries. Posting of Ochoa to Nicaragua may have been done to once again pave the way for the introduction of Cuban combat forces. His presence would also give Havana a greater degree of control over Nicaraguan military actions and policy. The reported integration of the newly arrived Cuban troops into Nicaraguan units lends credence that Ochoa is in command of joint forces in Nicaragua.

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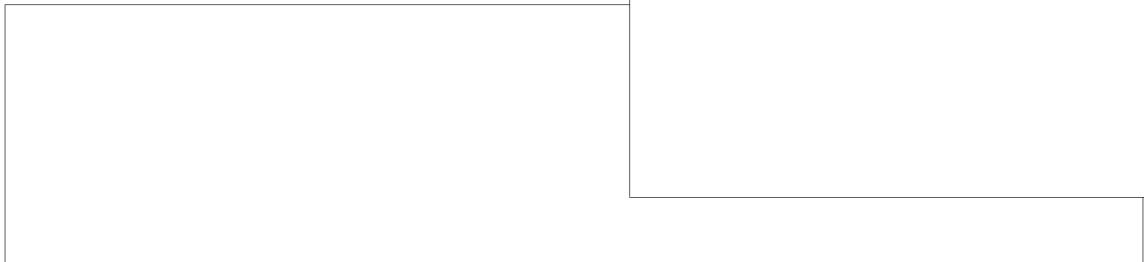
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Ochoa's presence in Nicaragua is an indication of Cuban intentions to defend the Sandinista regime at all costs.

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Cuban

military activity and policy in Nicaragua is being closely

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supervised by Cuban Armed Forces Minister Raul Castro. Castro reportedly has set up a command center in the Armed Forces Ministry to keep track of what is going on in Nicaragua and coordinates closely with Sandinista military commander Humberto Ortega.

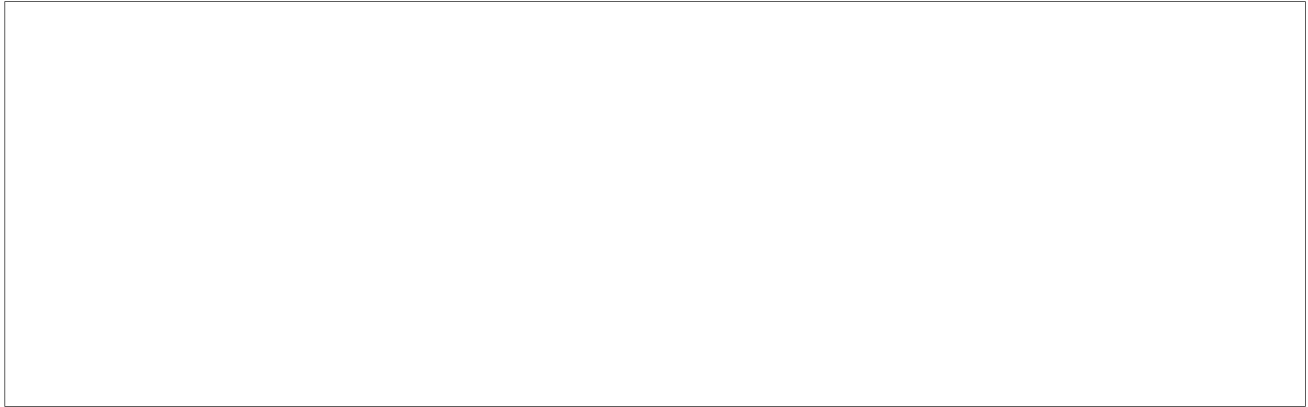


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Cuban Forces Available for Nicaragua

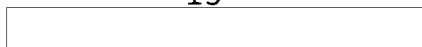
Cuba has the largest military in the Caribbean Basin littoral and would be able to commit substantial combat forces should it decide to intervene on a major scale in Nicaragua 

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 A potential Cuban military intervention in Nicaragua would differ from their operations in Africa in two important respects. First, Cuban forces would be primarily engaged in guerrilla warfare operations in difficult terrain and would not be able to use their conventional force superiority and training to full advantage. Second, such an operation would probably be beyond the capabilities of Cuban logistic capabilities and might require Soviet materiel support. The Soviets might be reluctant to provide the kind of highly visible support that was noted during the height of Cuba's African deployments for fear of provoking a US reaction. During the African buildups, the Soviets not only provided combat equipment and supplies, but also transported troops and increased their naval presence in the area. 

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[REDACTED]

The types of Cuban combat forces available for operations in Nicaragua each have particular strengths and weaknesses, and, therefore, would have varying suitability for the potential missions required of them. [REDACTED]

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Mechanized infantry units from the Army, which Cuba deployed in both Angola and Ethiopia, would be more than a match for any conventional forces the Cubans might face in Nicaragua. They are most suitable for operations aimed at controlling major population centers and lines of communication, and could also be used effectively in a static defense role guarding airfields, outposts, and key economic targets. Unless supported by troop-carrying helicopters, however, they are neither trained or equipped for search-and-destroy missions against insurgent-type forces in rugged terrain. Their utility in combatting anti-Sandinista forces, therefore, would be limited. [REDACTED]

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Cuba's two elite airborne and airmobile units--the Landing and Assault Brigade and the Special Troops--would be the best-suited for counterinsurgency operations in Nicaragua. These lightly armed and highly trained troops, transported by helicopters and light transport aircraft, could react quickly to counter irregular forces in isolated areas. They would be ideally suited for search-and-destroy missions to locate and strike remote insurgent bases and for reconnaissance patrols to locate insurgent positions for airstrikes. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

Cuba's naval infantry--an estimated 400- to 500-man force, or about a battalion--equipped with amphibious armored personnel carriers and light tanks would be suitable for amphibious assault operations in coastal regions. This force is capable of conducting landing operations using the two Polnocny amphibious assault ships provided to Cuba last year. Each of these ships can transport up to 180 troops or six armored vehicles and their crews a distance of 1,500 miles. The naval infantry was noted conducting its first amphibious assault landing exercises with the polnocnys in northwest Cuba during May. We do not know if the naval infantry has yet had sufficient training to be able to use this new amphibious lift capability for offensive purposes. The transport of the entire battalion and its equipment would probably require up to three lifts by the two landing ships. [REDACTED]

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TABLENICARAGUA: Estimated Weapons Inventories

|   | <u>June 1983</u> | <u>June 1982</u> |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| <u>GROUND WEAPONS</u>                                 |                  |                  |
| <u>Tanks</u>  | <u>48</u>        | <u>28</u>        |
| T-54/55 (USSR)  | 45               | 25               |
| M-4 medium (US)                                       | 3                | 3                |
| <u>Other armored vehicles</u>                         | <u>81</u>        | <u>38-45</u>     |
| BTR-60 armored personnel carriers (USSR)              | 12               | 12               |
| BTR-50 command vehicles (USSR)                        | 1                | 1                |
| BTR-152 armored personnel carriers (USSR)             | 30               | 0                |
| T-17 (Staghound) armored reconnaissance cars (Israel) | 25               | 25               |
| BRDM-2 armored reconnaissance cars (USSR)             | 13               | 0-7              |
| <u>Artillery/mortars/rocket launchers (USSR)</u>      | <u>225</u>       | <u>221</u>       |
| 105-mm howitzer (US)                                  | 4                | 4                |
| 122-mm howitzer (possibly Cuba)                       | 8                | 8                |
| 152-mm gun/howitzer (USSR)                            | 12               | 12               |
| 120-mm mortar (Cuba, France)                          | 24               | 24               |
| 82-mm mortar (Cuba)                                   | 10               | 10               |
| 60-mm mortar (France)                                 | NA               | NA               |
| 81-mm mortar (France)                                 | NA               | NA               |
| BM-21 rocket launcher (USSR)                          | 16               | 12               |
| Jarara rocket launcher (Argentina)                    | 3                | 3                |
| 40-mm RPG-7 grenade launcher (Cuba)                   | 100              | 100              |
| 57-mm ZIS-2 antitank gun (Cuba or USSR)               | 48               | 48               |
| <u>Small arms</u>                                     |                  |                  |
| Various models (numerous suppliers)                   | NA               | NA               |

AIR DEFENSE WEAPONS

|   |              |              |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| <u>Surface-to-air missiles</u>                            | <u>NA</u>    | <u>NA</u>    |
| SA-7 (Cuba, USSR, and/or Algeria)                         | NA           | NA           |
| <u>Antiaircraft weapons</u>                               | <u>133</u>   | <u>133</u>   |
| 14.5-mm antiaircraft machinegun<br>(various types) (Cuba) | 96           | 96           |
| 23-mm antiaircraft artillery (USSR)                       | 31           | 31           |
| 37-mm antiaircraft artillery (Cuba<br>or USSR)            | 6            | 6            |
| 50 caliber antiaircraft machinegun<br>(US)                | NA           | NA           |
| <u>Aircraft</u>   | <u>28</u>    | <u>20</u>    |
| Transport   | 14           | 10           |
| C-47 (US)   | 1            | 1            |
| DC-6 (US)   | 1            | 1            |
| HS-125 (UK)   | 1            | 1            |
| Aviocar (Spain)   | 2            | 0            |
| AN-2 (USSR)   | 6            | 6            |
| AN-26 (USSR)  | 2            | 0            |
| Arava (Israel)  | 1            | 1            |
| <u>Trainer/Counterinsurgency</u>                          | <u>11</u>    | <u>11</u>    |
| T-33 (US)   | 2            | 2            |
| T-28 (US)   | 5            | 5            |
| SF-260 (Libya)  | 4            | 4            |
| <u>Utility</u>  | <u>8</u>     | <u>8</u>     |
| Various (US)  | 8            | 8            |
| <u>Helicopters</u>  | <u>18-19</u> | <u>15-17</u> |
| Sikorsky S-58 (US)  | 2            | 2            |
| Hughes 500 (US)   | 2            | 2            |
| OH-6 (US)   | 2            | 2            |
| UH-1 (US)   | 1            | 1            |
| MI-8 (USSR)   | 6            | 2-3          |
| Alouette III (France)                                     | 2            | 0            |
| MI-2 (Libya)  | 3-4          | 0            |
| <u>Major Aircraft Armament</u>                            |              |              |
| Air-to-ground rocket launchers<br>(France)                | 40           | 0            |
| Air-to-ground rockets (France)                            | 2,000        | 0            |



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|  |           |           |
|--|-----------|-----------|
| <u>Naval craft</u>                             | <u>12</u> | <u>12</u> |
| Patrol boats (various types)<br>(Israel, USSR) | 11        | 11        |
| Medium landing craft (US)                      | 1         | 1         |



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TABLEMilitary Forces in Nicaragua, June 1983

## Personnel

|                              |        |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Army                         | 18,000 |
| Ministry of Interior forces  | 1,500  |
| Air and air defense forces   | 1,500  |
| Navy                         | 500    |
| Army reserves on active duty | 4,000  |
| Total                        | 25,500 |
| <br>                         |        |
| Other reserves               | 21,000 |
| Militia (Organized)          | 25,000 |

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