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Cuba: Reassessing the Central American Wars



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An Intelligence Assessment

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*ALA 85-10079
July 1985*

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Cuba: Reassessing the Central American Wars




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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by 
Office of African and Latin American Analysis. It
was coordinated with the Directorate of
Operations. 

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be
directed to the Chief, Middle America–Caribbean
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[Redacted]

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Cuba: Reassessing the Central American Wars [Redacted]

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Key Judgments

Information available as of 28 June 1985 was used in this report.

We believe that Cuba's ultimate goal of replacing governments in Central America with radical revolutionary regimes hostile to the United States remains unchanged. Cuba's shrinking policy options in the region, however, have caused President Castro to look for negotiated settlements to the wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador to preserve the Sandinista regime and prevent a defeat of revolutionary groups in El Salvador. In our judgment, Castro's desire to negotiate is a tactical response that would dissipate quickly if the pressures that drove him to seek an accommodation are reduced. [Redacted]

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Havana appears to us genuinely concerned over the possibility of a US military intervention in Central America or even an attack on Cuba itself. The US intervention in Grenada showed Cuban leaders that Washington is willing to use force to protect its interests in the area. Soviet unwillingness to be drawn into a superpower confrontation over Central America, [Redacted]

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[Redacted] further reduced Castro's options and probably persuaded him that caution must be the mainstay of his policies to avoid a showdown with the United States. The shift in the political and military balance favoring US allies in El Salvador and Guatemala, Costa Rica's adherence to democracy, and the weakness of leftist forces in Honduras also have caused Cuba to change the focus of its tactics, in our view. [Redacted]

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In the past, Castro has sought talks only to gain a propaganda advantage. Now, however, he seems to realize that negotiations are necessary if he is to halt current trends in Central America, which he believes, according to the US Interests Section in Havana, favor the United States. Castro, in our opinion, has concluded that a pact under Contadora sponsorship—the only negotiations initiative with any serious chance of success at this time—offers him the best opportunities for achieving two minimum goals:

- Preserving the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua by ending all foreign support for the anti-Sandinista guerrillas and reducing, if not eliminating, the likelihood of a US military intervention.
- Limiting US military assistance to the government of El Salvador—

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We believe Cuba's desire for a negotiated settlement to protect Nicaragua will diminish if the regime in Managua succeeds in reducing the anti-Sandinista insurgency and Havana believes that Washington will not take other military measures against Managua. On the other hand, as long as Havana is uncertain about the United States' next moves against the Sandinistas, including the possibility of a direct US military attack, and the heavy fighting continues in Nicaragua, Cuba will push for a negotiated solution under Contadora auspices. To that end, Castro will probably encourage the Sandinistas to accept verification provisions in the Contadora draft treaty.

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Even without a Contadora settlement, however, we believe that Havana will refrain from committing major Cuban combat forces to Nicaragua under most circumstances for fear of provoking Washington. Havana probably would limit its direct role in Nicaragua to strengthening the Sandinistas' military capabilities with Cuban advisers and Soviet-made weapons.

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In our judgment, Castro's tactics toward El Salvador will continue to focus on a negotiated settlement that preserves the integrity of the guerrilla movement. If the guerrillas' position continues to deteriorate, however, we believe Havana will probably urge the rebels to temper further their demands for power sharing to induce the government of President Duarte to negotiate.

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We have no evidence, however, that Cuba is ready to retreat on the fundamental issue of its "right" to support revolutions in Central America—at least as long as Castro and his coterie of guerrilla veterans and "old guard" Communist Party functionaries rule in Havana. For these individuals, promotion of revolution is at the core of their ideological beliefs, and any restraints they might agree to in the context of negotiations would be temporary.

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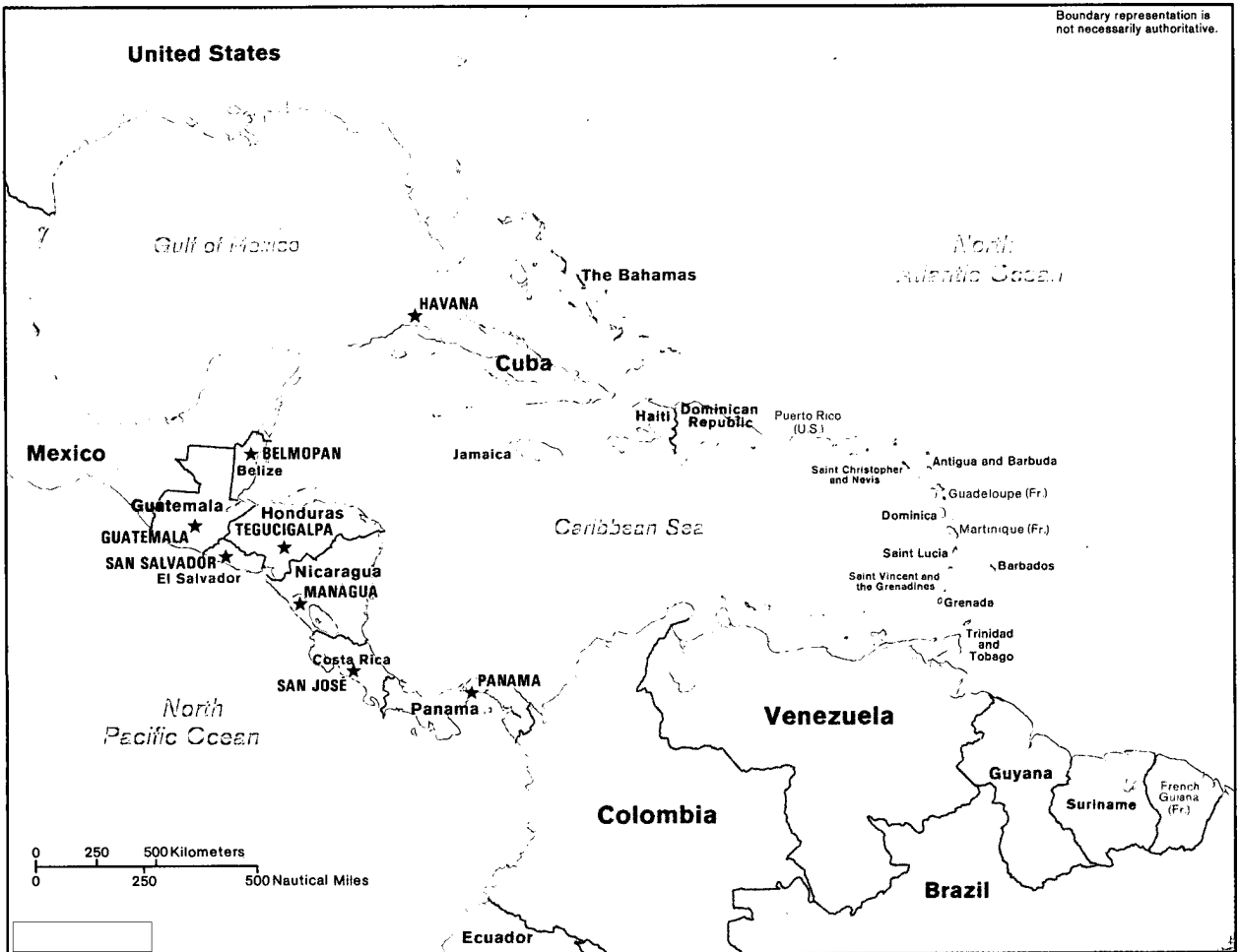
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


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Cuba: Reassessing the Central American Wars



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Introduction

Military and political pressures from the United States and Moscow's reluctance to be drawn into a major confrontation with Washington over Central America have, over the past few years, reduced President Castro's policy options in the region. The same factors also have limited Havana's ability to help duplicate the Sandinista revolution elsewhere. These constraints have forced Cuba for now to stress caution and negotiation rather than promote an ever-expanding guerrilla struggle. Nevertheless, according to  public   statements by Cuban leaders, Castro remains committed to consolidating the regime in Managua and to preserving the political and military integrity of the insurgency in El Salvador. 




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This paper—
—assesses Cuba's tactics in support of its main regional allies, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the Salvadoran insurgents, in the light of developments since 1982. It examines Havana's adjustments to subsequent setbacks and pressures—such as the US military intervention in Grenada—and explores the motives behind Cuba's professed willingness to negotiate a political solution to the Central American problem. Finally, it speculates on likely future actions by Havana in both Nicaragua and El Salvador, and assesses the implications for the United States. 


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Adjusting to Setbacks and Pressures

In our judgment, Castro has been forced temporarily to set aside his goals of revolutionary upheaval in Central America as the political, military, and economic climate has turned against him. The US invasion of Grenada, the strong public support in the United States for that operation, and the lack of a




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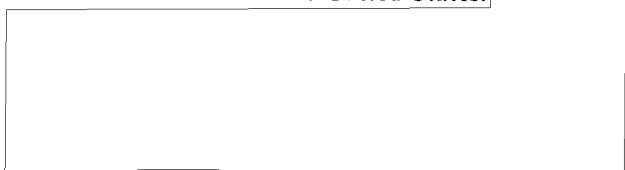

firm Soviet response to the US action underscored to Cuban leaders Washington's willingness and unchallenged capability to use force successfully to protect its interests in the area. Moreover, the growth of the anti-Sandinista insurgency in Nicaragua and the shifts in the political and military balance in El Salvador and Guatemala in favor of US allies since 1982 have made it more risky for Castro to push revolution in Central America. In weighing his policy options, moreover, Castro has appeared increasingly concerned about the possibility of US military intervention in the region and even an attack on Cuba itself. 

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The Impact of Grenada

In our opinion, the US intervention in Grenada and the large US military exercises held in the region over the past three years, more than any other factors, have convinced Castro that caution must be the mainstay of his policy in Central America if he is to avoid a showdown with the United States. 

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After the invasion, senior Cuban officials publicly admitted that Grenada was a major blow to their interests in the region. 

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Since the Grenada intervention, Cuban officials have expressed publicly particular concern about Washington's ability to act forcefully against a Cuban ally without significant domestic opposition in the United States. Support in the United States for the Grenada action, in our view, caused Castro temporarily to lose confidence in his ability to use his propaganda apparatus and public relations skills to manipulate public sentiment in the United States against Washington's policies. For example, his public declarations immediately after the events in Grenada were marked by

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Havana's Goals and Priorities

The Castro regime is clearly on record that its long-term goal in Central America is the replacement of pro-US governments with radical revolutionary regimes hostile to Washington and dependent on Cuba for ideological guidance and inspiration.

bases for a politically stable and militarily strong Marxist-Leninist state. Cuban assistance thus far has focused on the development of the Sandinista military and security services, the militia, and other mass organizations as instruments of social control and regimentation typical of a totalitarian regime. Cuba's actions also show that, as a related goal, it wants to use Nicaraguan territory as a secure base for supporting other Central American revolutionaries.

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Indeed, throughout the 26-year history of the Cuban revolution, its leaders have made no secret of their conviction that Latin American countries will eventually follow Cuba's revolutionary example. Moreover, the historical record shows that Havana has actively supported radical leftist efforts to overthrow regimes in such disparate countries as Argentina, Nicaragua, Bolivia, El Salvador, and Venezuela. Cuba's almost indiscriminate meddling in its neighbors' internal affairs during the 1960s, however, has given way to a far more sophisticated and selective approach that, since the late 1970s, has made Central America the fulcrum of Cuban revolutionary activism.

[Redacted]

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The presence in Nicaragua, [Redacted]

[Redacted] of two highly regarded senior Cuban military officers—Generals Ochoa and Escalante—to coordinate Havana's assistance to the Sandinista armed forces and the Salvadoran guerrillas demonstrates the depth of Castro's commitment to strengthen the regime in Managua and to use Nicaragua as a springboard for regional revolution. Ochoa played a major role in Havana's military interventions in Angola and Ethiopia and is one of only two men in Cuba—the other being General Abelardo Colome—to be declared a "national hero."

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Cuba has concentrated its efforts on uniting, training, and supplying regional leftist movements to:

- Support the new regime in Nicaragua.
- Intensify the armed struggle, especially in El Salvador.
- Prepare the way for violent change elsewhere in Central America.

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Consolidating Sandinista Rule in Nicaragua

[Redacted] the survival of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua is Cuba's highest priority in Central America. The two countries are linked by a mutual defense treaty, [Redacted] as well as by strong political and ideological ties. Thousands of Cuban technicians and advisory personnel have served in Nicaragua since 1979, and several thousand Nicaraguans have been trained in Cuba in a variety of civilian and military fields. Havana remains the predominant foreign influence on Nicaragua and has acted as broker between Managua and the Soviet Bloc to ensure the flow of Communist economic and military assistance to the Sandinista regime. Furthermore, the Sandinista revolution represents Cuba's most successful achievement in more than two decades of support to radical revolutionaries in Latin America.

Promoting Violent Revolution Elsewhere

In our judgment, Havana regards its main efforts in Central America—consolidation of the Sandinista regime and export of the revolution—as complementary. Cuban and Nicaraguan leaders share the belief that, in a region dominated by the United States, the ability of revolutionary governments to resist foreign pressures is linked to the fortunes of revolutionary movements in neighboring countries. From their point of view, therefore, the defeat of the Salvadoran—or Guatemalan—insurgents would threaten Managua by increasing its ideological isolation and encourage its more conservative neighbors and the United States to destroy the Nicaraguan revolution. This siege mentality is underscored by the Sandinistas' private description of the Salvadoran insurgents as "our shield," and by Havana's doctrine of "internationalism"—the right and duty to render aid to wars of national liberation—which is enshrined in the Cuban Constitution.

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Havana's main goal in Nicaragua, in our judgment, is to help the Sandinistas develop the institutional

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personal invectives against US leaders and reflected, in our opinion, his profound bitterness over the setback he had suffered and frustration over his inability to retaliate with anything more than words. [redacted]

Grenadian revolution and Cuba's inability to reinforce militarily its personnel already on Grenada underscored the geopolitical realities behind the lack of a firm Soviet commitment to defend Cuba. The episode almost certainly reinforced his sense of vulnerability to a US attack. In public statements after the invasion, [redacted]

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Although showing verbal defiance, Castro reacted with considerable caution and defensiveness to Grenada. [redacted] at the time of the intervention in Grenada that Havana and Managua genuinely expected an imminent invasion of Nicaragua by US or proxy forces. [redacted]

[redacted] Castro has touched repeatedly on Havana's understanding that it cannot count on direct Soviet military support in the event of Cuban-US hostilities. [redacted]

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[redacted]

The Soviets, in fact, have directly warned the Cubans to move cautiously in Central America. [redacted]

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[redacted] Soviet pressure on Cuba to avoid a showdown with the United States has worried Castro and forced him to moderate his revolutionary activities in Central America. [redacted]

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[redacted] Despite the atmosphere of panic in Nicaragua, Castro publicly warned the Sandinistas that he would be unable to send reinforcements if the United States attacked. Castro's warning under such circumstances was remarkable in that it undercut Cuba's commitment to fulfill its obligations under the mutual defense pact that [redacted] links the two countries, and risked being perceived by Washington as a sign of weakness. [redacted]

[redacted]

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Moreover, recent Soviet pressure on Cuba to improve its economic performance apparently has led to a resurgence of the influence of those individuals in the Cuban leadership who traditionally have argued for pragmatic policies on both the domestic and international fronts.² Although these pragmatists—such as Vice President Carlos Rafael Rodriguez—are known to share the same revolutionary goals and deep antipathy toward the United States as the ideologues in the leadership, they have shown themselves to be more attuned to Moscow's interests and to have a preference for nonconfrontational tactics. Because they are responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the Cuban economy, we believe their growing influence may precipitate a reordering of priorities toward

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Castro's concern about a possible US attack also was reflected, we believe, in his decision to change the composition of the Cuban "internationalist" corps in Nicaragua. Shortly after Grenada, Havana withdrew most Cuban women and all children from Nicaragua, and gradually replaced older Cuban males there with younger men with prior military training, [redacted] [redacted] Castro, [redacted] gave direct orders to these younger Cubans to defend themselves if attacked by hostile forces. This apparently was as far as Castro felt he could go in reassuring the Sandinistas without provoking a forceful US response. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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Soviet Caution

We believe the Soviet Union's unwillingness to be drawn into a major confrontation with Washington over Central America and the Caribbean is a key factor limiting Cuba's policy options in the area. For Castro, Moscow's inaction during the demise of the

better economic relations with the West, and thus to reduce temporarily Cuba's support for violent revolution abroad. [redacted]

teams play an active advisory role in the counterinsurgency effort. Cubans pilot some of Nicaragua's MI-8 helicopters in combat areas and accompany MI-24 helicopter gunship crews on training missions, for example. [redacted]

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25X1 **The Insurgency in Nicaragua**

The anti-Sandinista insurgency has continued to grow since 1982 despite Managua's increased efforts—with Cuban support—to suppress it. As a result, we believe that Havana's concern about the stability of the Nicaraguan regime and Washington's intentions toward it has risen accordingly. Since 1981, the rebels have grown from a ragtag band of some 500 men, largely former members of President Somoza's National Guard, to a guerrilla army of about 18,000, comprising mostly peasants, Indians, and ex-Sandinista supporters. Over the last three years, the guerrillas have made substantial military progress, inflicting thousands of casualties on the regime's troops and significant economic damage, [redacted]

[redacted] We estimate, based on the number of active Sandinista counterinsurgency battalions, that as many as 100 advisers are located in zones of substantial fighting. [redacted]

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Shifts in El Salvador

In our judgment, the declining fortunes of Cuban-supported rebels in El Salvador have also caused Castro to moderate his Central American policies. Even before the Grenada setback, Havana apparently had realized that the struggle in El Salvador would be a long-term affair. [redacted]

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[redacted] Although the largest of the rebel groups apparently has had to scale back objectives and adopt new tactics to conserve resources, we believe it has adapted relatively well to the US military aid cutoff; it apparently has raised substantial funds from private sources, and has received greater cooperation from Honduras and Guatemala. Moreover, we estimate that its ranks have been increased over the past year by several thousand recruits. [redacted]

[redacted] progress toward a more open political system in El Salvador following the 1982 and 1984 elections and the growing capabilities of the Salvadoran armed forces—largely through US assistance—have further reduced Cuban expectations for the near term. [redacted]

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We believe that the insurgency's persistence and growth have been key factors in shaping Cuban and Sandinista objectives and strategy in the Contadora negotiations, as well as in forcing Havana to devote greater resources to Nicaragua. The Cubans almost certainly view the insurgency as the clearest expression of US determination to undermine the Sandinistas and prevent the consolidation of a Marxist-Leninist regime in Nicaragua. [redacted]

[redacted]

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[redacted]

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Havana's concern was underscored in early 1983 with the assignment of a prestigious Cuban army officer with extensive experience in Angola and Ethiopia, Division General Arnaldo Ochoa, as chief of the approximately 2,500 to 3,500 Cuban military personnel in Nicaragua. In addition, although no Cuban military units appear to be directly engaged in combat with the anti-Sandinistas, [redacted]

[redacted] We believe that the Salvadoran armed forces' increasingly successful use of US-supplied airpower to hit the rebels in recent months has dashed Cuban hopes that the insurgents would be able to improve significantly their military position in the short term. [redacted]

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[redacted] military advisers and training

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How Far Would Castro Go To Protect the Sandinistas?

We believe the Cubans would be unwilling to reinforce the Sandinistas with combat troops in the event of a US military attack on Nicaragua. Castro recognizes that the United States has an overwhelming advantage on the sea and in the air, and is unlikely to waste Cuban resources challenging such superiority once a US attack on Nicaragua has begun. [redacted]

ty services, and some 3,500 to 4,000 Cuban civilians are involved in construction, health, and other activities. The civilians have been armed, and most have undergone military training, [redacted]

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Cuba would be unable to protect its supply lines to Nicaragua in the face of US military intervention. Castro openly admitted as much shortly after the invasion of Grenada, when he warned the Sandinistas that Cuba would be just as helpless to assist them militarily if the US intervenes in Nicaragua as it was in the Grenada intervention. In our opinion, Castro has written off any plans to introduce a large Cuban military contingent into Nicaragua in the event of a US intervention. [redacted]

[redacted] Cuban civilians in Nicaragua already have been assigned to Sandinista Army units in the event of major hostilities. Havana probably considers these personnel an expendable force, and they are likely to receive only token reinforcements, if any. [redacted]

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This, however, does not preclude a military role for Cuba in Nicaragua's defense during a US attack. We believe Castro has every intention of using the Cuban military personnel and civilian advisers now in Nicaragua to make any US intervention as costly as possible. He probably calculates that such a conflict would be bloody enough to discourage Washington from ordering an assault on Cuba itself. There are enough Cuban military personnel and civilian advisers capable of immediate military mobilization already present in Nicaragua to stiffen Sandinista defenses significantly. [redacted]

We do not believe the Cubans would commit a large number of troops to help the Sandinistas crush genuine and widespread popular resistance in Nicaragua. We believe, however, that they might undertake the more limited objective of protecting key cities and installations with some combat units while Sandinista armed forces bear the burden of combat against large insurgent forces. Havana, in our opinion, would accept such a role only if there were a cowed population and no widespread civilian resistance such as street demonstrations and labor strikes. [redacted]

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[redacted] an estimated 2,500 to 3,500 Cuban military personnel are attached to the Nicaraguan armed forces and securi-

We believe that Castro would adopt a more aggressive course of action if, for example, he were convinced beyond all doubt that US intervention in Nicaragua was merely a prelude to an attack on Cuba itself. In this scenario, Castro might be willing to make a major commitment of Cuban military forces to Nicaragua before US attacks began in hopes that the decisive battles would be fought there rather than on Cuban soil, and that he would have time to generate international pressure on Washington from Latin America and Europe. [redacted]

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Longer Term Prospects in Guatemala

In Guatemala as well, Havana has few reasons to be optimistic about the pace of Cuban-supported insurgency. After a period of growth and increased effectiveness between 1979 and 1982, the insurgents were dealt a series of political and military setbacks by government forces from which they have not been able to recover. Since 1982, the government has forced the rebels into a reactive and defensive posture

by expanding the deployment of small military units, forming large civilian militia forces, and emphasizing psychological operations. We estimate, [redacted] that fighting and amnesty programs have cut insurgent strength from over 3,000 to between 1,500 to 2,000 in the past three years. [redacted]

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[redacted] Cuban officials believe the Guatemalan Army's tactics are isolating the rebels from the rural population and thereby complicating their ability to obtain recruits, supplies, and political support. [redacted]

flexing, Soviet caution, and setbacks in El Salvador and Guatemala have caused Castro to refocus his policies from the battlefield to the political arena. In our view, Castro is looking to a negotiated settlement as a way of reducing pressures on the Sandinistas and preventing a complete reversal of revolutionary gains in El Salvador. In the past, Castro has viewed talks only as a means of gaining a propaganda advantage. Now, however, he seems to realize that a negotiated agreement is necessary if he is to attempt to halt current trends in the region, which, according to the US Interests Section in Havana, he believes favor the United States. [redacted]

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Changing Tactics

Since 1982, it has become clear that Cuba has shifted toward less openly confrontational policies in Central America, in hopes of forestalling US military activities in the region and reducing the risk of an armed confrontation with Washington. These new tactics include:

- A propaganda campaign aimed at projecting an image of flexibility and moderation in contrast to Washington's alleged intransigence. A favorite ploy, for example, is Castro's use of personal diplomacy to impress Western visitors with his sincerity, statesmanship, and reasonableness.
- Support for the Contadora initiative, despite indications of continuing Cuban misgivings regarding some limitations it imposes on Nicaragua's domestic affairs, such as proposals for democratization and national reconciliation, and its failure to address El Salvador's internal situation.

On several occasions during the past few months, Cuban officials have expressed pessimism about developments in Central America. These officials have stated in private that Washington holds the initiative in the region and that events "are going the Americans' way," according to the US Interests Section in Havana. Consequently, Havana now appears more willing to support the Contadora initiative, despite some misgivings over the proposed treaty provisions calling for democratization. This support indicates, in our view, that Cuba is seeking more than propaganda points and would like to see a settlement reached that would eliminate all foreign support for the anti-Sandinista rebels and reduce US military aid to El Salvador. [redacted]

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- Advising the Salvadoran insurgents to support a negotiated settlement. [redacted]

Castro, in our opinion, has concluded that the Contadora pact offers him the best short-term defense against US activities in the region and one that would require him to offer few significant concessions. Although Castro has given verbal backing to the regional peace process since its inception in 1982, he previously insisted that, before Cuba would honor a Contadora pact, it had to be supported not only by Nicaragua but also by the Salvadoran and Guatemalan insurgents, as well as the Communist parties and leftist groups of both Honduras and Costa Rica. Such a broad formula gave Havana latitude to renege on its pledge of support and avoid any serious commitment to abide by a possible treaty. In what seems to be a major departure from supporting the negotiating process for propaganda purposes while simultaneously

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- Courting South American nations, and inducing them to upgrade political, commercial, and cultural relations with Cuba to reduce Havana's isolation in the hemisphere. [redacted]

25X1 The Push for Negotiations

We believe that Cuba's shrinking policy options in Central America as a result of US military muscle

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obstructing the possibility of an actual agreement, the Cubans and Nicaraguans have accepted the draft submitted by the Contadora sponsors last September.

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In our judgment, a negotiated settlement under Contadora—the only initiative with any serious chance of agreement at this time—would give the Cubans a considerable advantage. It probably would allow Havana to make some progress toward achieving two minimum goals:

To preserve the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. The settlement would end all significant foreign support for the anti-Sandinista guerrillas and, from Havana's perspective, reduce or eliminate the likelihood of a US military intervention in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas would then be able to roll back the insurgents and proceed at their own pace to consolidate the institutional bases for a Marxist-Leninist state.³ The Cubans almost certainly are concerned that in the absence of a negotiated settlement the Reagan administration will resort to other measures to maintain or increase military pressure on Managua, even direct US military action. Moreover, Havana's uncertainty about US moves is compounded by the US administration's recent success in obtaining Congressional approval for nonmilitary funds for the rebels and by press reports about increasing disillusionment with the Sandinista regime among US legislators. Castro publicly admitted such concerns earlier this year, when he termed Washington's future policy "an enigma."

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To reduce US military assistance to the Salvadoran Government. The Cubans believe, [redacted] that US military aid is the main reason the rebels have lost momentum in the battlefield. Although a reduction of US support probably would not take place immediately upon signing of the Contadora formula—the treaty draft calls for a 90-day arms freeze beginning 30 days after signing—the pact includes provisions that would limit the size, composition, and weaponry of the region's military establishments; end the involvement of foreign military advisers; and put a cap on foreign military assistance. Such limitations, at a minimum, probably

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[redacted]



Fidel Castro looks on at Daniel Ortega's presidential inauguration in Managua, 10 January 1985.

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would slow the growth of the Salvadoran armed forces' capabilities and give the insurgents a chance to recover gradually the initiative on the battlefield.

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The treaty also might affect the external arms flow to the guerrillas. The Cubans probably hope, however, that the rebels would be able to capture more of their weapons and ammunition from government forces, and reduce their munitions expenditures by avoiding major clashes with the Army, concentrating instead on small ambushes, sabotage, kidnaping, and political penetration of parties and labor unions.

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In any case, Havana has acknowledged that current interdiction efforts by the United States and its allies already have made rebel logistic operations increasingly difficult, and [redacted] resupply difficulties have forced Cuba and Nicaragua to reduce the arms flow to the Salvadoran insurgents.

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Castro's Likely Next Moves

We believe that under the present conditions—that is, fluctuating prospects for the insurgents in Nicaragua,

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Would Cuba Sacrifice the Salvadoran Insurgents for the Sake of Nicaragua?

We believe that from the Castro regime's point of view the rebels in El Salvador would become expendable if this were necessary to preserve Sandinista rule in Nicaragua. [redacted] in October 1983 that Havana had informed the Salvadoran guerrillas that its assistance would be curtailed because increasing problems in Nicaragua had compelled the Cubans to allocate greater resources to the Sandinistas. Although we realize that Havana may have intended its warning primarily to encourage the rebels to conserve their resources or as an incentive for greater unity among the various guerrilla factions, its position clearly shows the order of Cuban priorities. If conditions were such that Havana had to make a clear-cut choice, and if such a sacrifice would guarantee the consolidation of Sandinista rule in Nicaragua, we believe Cuba would view the fate of the insurgency in El Salvador as a necessary tactical concession. [redacted]

It seems to us, however, that Cuba views its aid to the insurgents as complementary to its support of the regime in Managua. From their perspective, the defeat of the Salvadoran rebels would be detrimental to the security of the Sandinistas and increase their isolation in the region. In addition, Castro probably would calculate that his suspension of support for the Salvadorans need only be temporary until the danger to Nicaragua dissipated. [redacted]

declining fortunes for the rebels in El Salvador, and uncertainty about Washington's next moves against the Sandinistas—Cuba will continue to focus on achieving a negotiated settlement under Contadora auspices. To that end, Havana probably will go along with the objectives of the Core Four countries—Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala—for strict verification of treaty provisions. Havana almost certainly realizes that any verification mechanism, while able to monitor the activities of the United States and its allies, would encounter considerable difficulties in detecting Cuba's and Nicaragua's non-compliance with treaty provisions because of the



Presidents Castro and Ortega at ceremony inaugurating Cuban-financed sugar mill in Nicaragua, 11 January 1985. [redacted]

clandestine nature of many of their actions, particularly support for insurgents, and the ease with which Castro and the Sandinistas can conceal the presence of Cuban military advisers in Nicaragua. [redacted]

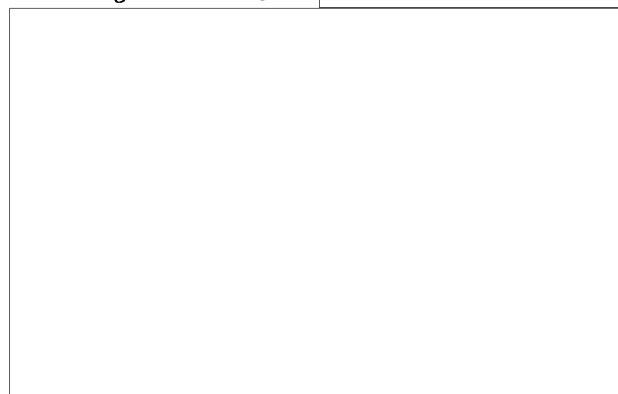
Moreover, the verification proposals submitted by the Core Four countries do not include a mechanism to inspect the dismantling of guerrilla training camps in Cuba. Furthermore, we believe it would be practically impossible to verify that Cuba and other Communist countries have ended financial support to leftist rebel forces in the region. Although verification almost certainly would require the withdrawal of at least a substantial number of Cuban military advisers from Nicaragua, Havana probably calculates that any consequent deterioration in Sandinista military capabilities would be balanced by a decline in the Nicaraguan insurgents' ability to sustain themselves without foreign support. Consequently, the Cubans are likely to urge the Sandinistas to moderate their opposition to verification provisions in the treaty, but we expect them to try to ensure that restrictions on US military aid to El Salvador are not diluted. [redacted]

In our judgment, Havana will press the Contadora sponsors and other Western countries to support negotiations between the government and the insurgents in El Salvador. The Cubans probably expect

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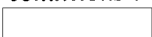
Preparing the Ground for Revolution in Honduras and Costa Rica

We believe the Cubans have also earmarked Honduras and Costa Rica for violent revolution. Havana, however, probably realizes that present conditions in these two countries—a weak and factionalized radical left in Honduras and strong democratic traditions in Costa Rica—do not favor armed struggle. The thrust of Cuba’s strategy, therefore, has been to weaken Honduran and Costa Rican support for US policies against Managua and the Salvadoran insurgents while laying the long-term groundwork for eventual guerrilla warfare.



With Cuban support, several hundred Costa Rican and Honduran leftists are fighting alongside the Sandinista Army against the antiregime guerrillas in Nicaragua.

Castro probably calculates that these combatants will form the nucleus of an insurgent movement when conditions are more favorable in their own countries.



that Contadora and other international pressure may help move the Salvadoran Government to make some concessions to the left that could either provoke a rightwing reaction against President Duarte or, less likely, result in a power-sharing arrangement that would eventually lead to leftist domination of the government. A rightwing reaction in the form of a coup or a resurgence of death squad activities would be likely to turn international opinion against San

Salvador and complicate US efforts to continue providing military and economic assistance to the government.

however, the Cubans believe that the Salvadoran rebels must regain some military and political momentum before sufficient international pressure for negotiations can be mobilized. Cuba, therefore, probably will urge the guerrillas to enhance their credibility and enter new rounds of talks from a position of strength by increasing attacks against low-risk, high-visibility targets and bringing the war closer to the capital.

Paralleling Cuba’s efforts to support Contadora—which, from Castro’s point of view, must remain relatively low-key so as not to give the appearance of undue anxiety and weakness—Havana probably will continue a broad range of propaganda activities to enhance its international image. In our view, Castro’s personal diplomacy will play a major role in this effort, including more invitations for leading foreign figures to visit Cuba and possibly trips by Castro to Western Europe and Latin America. Castro probably hopes to influence lawmakers, journalists, and religious leaders in the United States and some allied countries, in hopes of inducing the United States to moderate its Central American policies.

The Cubans and the Sandinistas also will continue efforts to exploit doubts among Central American countries—especially Honduras, Costa Rica, and to a lesser extent Guatemala—about the reliability of the United States as an ally. In doing so, Havana and Managua hope that Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala will adopt a neutral position regarding the internal conflicts in Nicaragua and El Salvador. On several occasions during the past few years, Havana has requested private meetings of Cuban and Honduran officials to sow dissension and reinforce fears in Tegucigalpa that Washington’s attention to Central American developments would eventually fade. Honduras would then be left alone to face a powerful Marxist-Leninist Nicaragua and a victorious revolutionary movement in El Salvador, according to Cuban

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Some Alternative Scenarios

Cuban tactics in Central America, in our judgment, are largely determined by the volatile security situations in Nicaragua and El Salvador, as well as by Havana's perception of likely US responses to such changing situations and Havana's own moves. We have selected three alternative security scenarios in the absence of a regional settlement, and speculate on Cuba's likely responses to them. We are assuming in these scenarios that Havana's perception of US willingness to use military force to prevent a rebel takeover in El Salvador and increase pressure on the Sandinistas—a key factor in determining Cuba's choice of tactics—remains high. If that perception diminishes, in our opinion, Cuban responses to the following scenarios would, in our view, be generally more aggressive

If he failed to get negotiations going in El Salvador and Salvadoran rebel operations threatened to rout government forces and provoke a US intervention, Castro could be faced with the dilemma of trying to restrain the insurgents at a time when their increasing strength made them less susceptible to his influence. If Castro became convinced that the situation in El Salvador was leading to US intervention there, he might send a small number of Cuban combat units to Nicaragua in hopes of reassuring the Sandinistas and making a US attack on Nicaragua as costly as possible for Washington. He might calculate that high US casualties in Nicaragua would cause Washington to think twice before following with an attack on Cuba.

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Prospects for the Nicaraguan Insurgents Decline While the Salvadoran Rebels Make Gains. This scenario, although representing a significant advance in the achievement of Cuba's goals in Central America, is one in which Castro probably would likely perceive the danger of direct US military intervention to be the greatest—in El Salvador because of rebel advances and in Nicaragua because US options to press the Sandinistas would narrow with the insurgents' waning prospects. Castro probably would use all the resources at his disposal to mount a major public relations and diplomatic campaign in favor of a negotiated regional settlement to stabilize a situation favorable to the Sandinistas and the Salvadoran guerrillas. If he thought that the likelihood of US intervention were high, he might privately call on the rebels in El Salvador to declare a ceasefire to enhance the chances for negotiations.

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In Nicaragua, we believe the Cubans would urge moderation and even some temporary unilateral concessions—such as restoring press freedom and closing

Insurgents Make Gains in Both Nicaragua and El Salvador. In such a scenario, Castro probably would increase—covertly and modestly—the number of Cuban military advisers in Nicaragua to help the Sandinistas deal with the insurgents. We believe he would be particularly concerned, however, that rebel advances in El Salvador not provoke a US military intervention in that country. Consequently, he would take advantage of the Salvadoran situation to mobilize international opinion for a negotiated settlement in El Salvador that would give the rebels a role in the government, while trying to deflect pressure for parallel negotiations between the Sandinistas and their armed opposition. He would claim that negotiations in El Salvador are necessary to avert both a collapse of the Salvadoran armed forces and consequent US intervention. Castro might counsel the Sandinistas to negotiate with their opponents as a last resort if the regime was unable to stem insurgent advances, and if such a move appeared likely to improve the chances for a settlement in El Salvador favorable to the rebels.

propaganda efforts aimed at Tegucigalpa. We believe that Costa Rica's official stand of neutrality toward regional conflicts is partly intended as a hedge against possible US failure to prevent the consolidation of a Communist regime in Nicaragua, and that Castro is

likely to try to exploit such sentiments in San Jose. In our view, Havana's flaunting of its immigration agreement with the United States reached last December was in part an effort to strengthen the

the Salvadoran communications command facility in Managua—to preempt a US attack. Havana probably would refrain from sending more advisers, combat troops, or offensive weapons systems for fear of further provoking Washington. []

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Insurgents Make Gains in Nicaragua While Prospects for the Salvadoran Rebels Decline. Under this scenario, Havana probably would pursue the negotiations route forcefully and might urge its allies in the region to offer substantial concessions if their positions deteriorated drastically. For example, Cuba might urge the Sandinistas to negotiate with their armed opponents and offer them a role in the government and the armed forces. The Cubans might press the Salvadoran insurgents to declare a cease-fire and temper their demands for power sharing. []

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If concessions failed to bring about a negotiated settlement, Castro probably would conclude that the United States was not serious about negotiating, short of a total surrender by Cuba and its revolutionary allies. Moreover, he might calculate that the trends so favored the United States that a military intervention by Washington was highly unlikely. Consequently, he might resort to more aggressive tactics to protect his interests in the region. He might ask Salvadoran rebel leaders to transfer a substantial number of their combatants to Nicaragua to assist the Sandinistas while the remaining guerrillas in El Salvador avoid direct combat and increase political penetration and low-risk, highly visible terrorist actions to sustain the leftist cause until more favorable conditions develop. Castro probably would intensify efforts to mobilize Latin American leftists to join the fighting in Nicaragua. He might also send a few Cuban combat units to help the Sandinistas if he thought they would make a difference in the battlefield situation. []

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impression Castro is trying to create that Washington would negotiate with Cuba behind the backs of US allies. []

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Despite Havana's apparent desire to reach a negotiated settlement, we have no evidence that Castro is ready to retreat on the fundamental issue of his "right" to support revolutionaries in Central America. Indeed, in view of Castro's continuing support for his allies in the region, we judge that Cuba's push for a negotiated agreement is a tactic aimed at preventing the defeat of the Salvadoran insurgents, relieving pressure on Nicaragua, and avoiding an armed confrontation with the United States that Havana and its revolutionary allies cannot hope to win. We believe, moreover, that any restraint the Cubans might agree to in the context of negotiations would be temporary. Castro's behavior over the years has demonstrated that he is personally and ideologically committed to the support of revolutions abroad as a matter of general policy, and, in our judgment, he is highly unlikely to give up what he regards as his moral duty. Castro publicly rejected the possibility of Cuban concessions across the board on this key issue in an interview with editors of *The Washington Post* earlier this year. []

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Implications for the United States

We believe that the United States will continue to face formidable Cuban competition for power and influence in Central America at least as long as Castro and his coterie of guerrilla veterans and "old guard" Communist Party functionaries remain in power. These individuals share a deep ideological and emotional antipathy toward the United States, which they justify even in geopolitical terms. Castro, for example, stated in a recent public speech that, even if the United States became "socialist," Cuban military preparedness would remain high simply because of the disparity of power between the two nations. Moreover, the promotion of armed revolution is at the core of Cuban Communist philosophy. This virtually guarantees, in our judgment, that Havana's ultimate goal of replacing pro-US governments in Central America with revolutionary regimes hostile to the United States will remain unchanged for the foreseeable future. []

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Nevertheless, Cuba's pursuit of its goals in the region probably will continue to fluctuate in intensity, as US policies and Castro's perception of US intentions change. In our view, any relaxation of US pressure—especially military—on Cuba and its regional allies probably would make Castro more reluctant to moderate his policies. Maintaining or increasing pressure while leaving him a way out through mutual concessions in negotiations, on the other hand, would add to his sense of urgency, prompt him to be more judicious in pursuing his goals, and make him more accommodating in negotiations. [redacted]

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Castro's position would undoubtedly harden if he thought that inaction or concessions by him in the face of mounting US pressures were being perceived at home and abroad as an abandonment of his revolutionary commitment. Above all, he does not want to appear to be buckling under to US pressure. If he believed there were no graceful way out, he might dare the United States to intervene militarily in Central America by increasing substantially his activities there in the expectation that US intervention would poison relations between Washington and Latin America for a long time to come and improve the fortunes of leftist groups in the area. [redacted]

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