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THE SOVIET-CUBAN CONNECTION
IN
CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

as edited 27 February 1985

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INTRODUCTION

We Americans should be proud of what we're trying to do in Central America, and proud of what, together with our friends, we can do in Central America, to support democracy, human rights, and economic growth, while preserving peace so close to home. Let us show the world that we want no hostile, communist colonies here in the Americas: South, Central, or North.

RONALD REAGAN
May 1984

This booklet provides information about Soviet and Cuban military power and intervention in Central America and the Caribbean. The threats resulting from this factor are as much a part of the region's crisis as are better known indigenous and historic factors.

United States policy in the area is based on four mutually supportive elements that are being pursued simultaneously:

- o To assist in the development of democratic institutions and to encourage creation of representative governments accountable to their citizens.

- o To address on an urgent basis the economic and social problems of the region by providing economic assistance to stimulate growth, create opportunity, and improve the quality of life of the people.

- o To provide security assistance to enable the countries to defend themselves against Soviet-bloc, Cuban and Nicaraguan supported insurgents and terrorists intent on establishing Marxist-Leninist dictatorships.

- o To promote peaceful solutions through negotiation and dialogue among the countries of the region and among political groups within each country.

This policy is working. Democracy is now emerging as the rule, not the exception. Four of the five countries in Central America have conducted elections widely judged free and fair. Only in Nicaragua did people go to the polls with no real choice, due to Sandinista harassment of the democratic opposition.

Cuba, Nicaragua, and the Soviet Union are the principal threats to democracy in Central America. In El Salvador, the guerrillas are fighting the reforms of President Jose Napoleon Duarte and his elected government with arms channeled through Nicaragua with the active support of the Sandinistas. Since 1979, guerrilla actions have cost the Salvadoran people endless suffering and their economy more than \$1 billion. The goal of the guerrillas, acting in concert with Havana and Managua, is to establish a Marxist-Leninist government in El Salvador.

Marxist-Leninists promise freedom, national development, and a classless society. In reality, they deliver repressive governments that are unable to produce economically, but are ever ready to give assistance to foreign groups trying to seize power in other countries. Castro's Cuba has been the prime example of this form of government in the Western Hemisphere. Sandinista Nicaragua is following the Cuban example. Grenada was on the same path until October 1983.

Soviet interest in exploiting the economic, political, and social problems of Central America and the Caribbean is evident in a document found by U.S.-Caribbean security forces during the Grenada rescue mission. In a 15 April 1983 meeting with Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko was quoted as describing the region as "boiling like a cauldron" and saw Cuba and Nicaragua as "living examples for countries in that part of the world."¹

Over the last five years, the Soviet Union has sought to exploit this "boiling cauldron" by providing more military assistance to Cuba and Nicaragua than the United States has provided to all of Latin America. The Sandinista military buildup began in 1980, two years before there was any significant armed opposition to the Managua regime. From July 1979 through April 1981, the United States was providing generous economic assistance to Nicaragua (\$117 million) and providing only small amounts of military assistance to Nicaragua's neighbors. Subsequent increases in U.S. military assistance to these neighboring countries has been a direct reaction to the military buildup and support for guerrillas undertaken by Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Soviet bloc.

The Soviet Union sees in the region an excellent and low-cost opportunity to preoccupy the United States--the "main adversary" of Soviet strategy--thus gaining greater global freedom of action for the USSR. While the Soviets are not likely to mount a direct military challenge to the United States in the Caribbean Basin, they are attempting to foment as much unrest as possible in an area that is the strategic crossroads of the Western Hemisphere. Working through its key proxy in the region, Cuba, the Soviet Union hopes to force the United States to divert attention and military resources to an area that has not been a serious security concern to the United States in the past.

President Reagan outlined the challenge faced by the United States in his 9 May 1984 televised speech to the nation:

As the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, chaired by Henry Kissinger, agreed, if we do nothing or if we continue to provide too little help, our choice will be a Communist Central America with additional Communist military bases on the mainland of this hemisphere, and Communist subversion spreading southward and northward. This Communist subversion poses the threat that 100 million people from Panama to the open border on our south could come under the control of

pro-Soviet regimes.

If we come to our senses too late, when our vital interests are even more directly threatened, and after a lack of American support causes our friends to lose the ability to defend themselves, then the risks to our security and our way of life will be infinitely greater.

CUBA: THE KEY SOVIET PROXY

The 1959 revolution carried out by Fidel Castro and his 26th of July Movement has been of inestimable value to the Soviet Union. The first proof that the USSR understood the strategic advantages it could gain from Cuba came in the early 1960s. At that time, the USSR lagged behind the United States in long-range nuclear systems, and in 1962, the opportunistic Soviets secretly introduced medium- and intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Cuba. Had they succeeded in keeping the missiles in Cuba, the Soviets would have controlled a nuclear base only 90 miles from the Florida coast.

The Soviets now have in Cuba 7,000 civilian advisers, a 2,800-man combat brigade, another 2,800 military advisers, plus about 2,100 technicians at the Lourdes electronic intelligence facility. Since 1969, the Soviet navy has deployed task forces to Cuba and the Caribbean 24 times. Soviet long-range naval reconnaissance aircraft are also deployed to Cuba. From there, they operate along the U.S. East Coast and in the Caribbean, shadowing carrier battle groups and spying on other U.S. military forces and installations. The Soviets also use Cuba as a stopover point for reconnaissance aircraft enroute to Angola.

To protect their military investment in Cuba, the Soviets are making a sizeable economic investment as well. Each year the Soviets provide more than \$4 billion to the Cuban economy. During the last four years alone, they have given the Cubans almost \$3 billion in military aid. In fact, since the early 1960s, Cuba has not paid for any of the military assistance it has received from the Kremlin.

This substantial investment in Cuba gives the Soviet Union both military and intelligence capabilities in an area that is a lifeline for the U.S. economy. The Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico maritime routes carry about 55% of imported petroleum to the U.S., as well as approximately 45% of all U.S. seaborne trade. Furthermore, in any NATO-Warsaw Pact confrontation, more than half of all NATO resupply would be shipped from Gulf ports and would have to pass by Cuba.

Cuba's strategic location makes it an ideal site for an intelligence facility directed against the United States. The Soviet Union established such a site at Lourdes near Havana in the mid-1960s. Lourdes is the most sophisticated Soviet collection facility outside the Soviet Union itself. From this key listening post, the Soviets can monitor U.S. commercial satellites, U.S. military and merchant shipping communications, as well as NASA space program activities at Cape Canaveral. Lourdes also enables the Soviets to eavesdrop on telephone conversations in the United States.

It is no surprise that a 1983 article in Forbes asked, "Why do the Russians pump \$4 billion to \$5 billion a year into Cuba's collapsing economy? Because they know it is their best buy when it comes to making trouble for the U.S. For less than the annual cost of supporting a single aircraft carrier task force, the Soviet Union has developed a wondrous weapon."²

Castro and Communism

It is sometimes asserted that Fidel Castro took Cuba into the Soviet orbit because the U.S. turned a cold shoulder to his 1959 revolution. This is a double distortion.

In April 1959, Fidel Castro made his first visit to the United States after coming to power. The U.S. was ready to discuss foreign aid with the new government. Privately, however, Castro forbade his economic minister to consent to even preliminary discussions with the United States on the topic of economic aid.³

During the first years of Sandinista rule in Nicaragua, Castro advised the Sandinistas to hide their adherence to Marxism-Leninism. This is the same pattern that Castro followed in Cuba. To obtain and hold the support of moderates in Cuba and abroad, Castro portrayed himself as a democrat while the struggle against Batista was underway. After his own dictatorship was firmly established, Castro changed his tune. In a 2 December 1961 speech, he told the Cuban people that he had been an "apprentice Marxist-Leninist" for years, that he had disguised his true political beliefs, and that he would remain a Marxist-Leninist until he died.⁴

In a May 1977 interview with Barbara Walters of ABC television, Castro said that he had made the decision to become a communist while he was a student in law school in the late 1940s.⁵ During a TV interview in Spain in January 1984, Castro dismissed U.S. hostility as a major factor in his decision to take Cuba into the Soviet camp, adding that "inexorably, we considered ourselves to be Marxist-Leninists."⁶

A Garrison State

Under Soviet tutelage, Cuba's armed forces have expanded steadily. They now include 160,000 active duty military personnel, plus up to 135,000 well-trained and experienced reservists who can be mobilized in two to three days. This total force exceeds that of the active duty armed forces of Brazil, a country with 13 times Cuba's population. Through its operations in Africa over the past decade, Cuba has gained more extensive and more recent foreign combat experience than any other country in the Western Hemisphere.

Cuba has more than 950 tanks and more than 200 jet fighters, principally the widely exported MiG-21 but also the MiG-23, a front-line fighter of the Soviet Union's air force. In addition, the Soviets have given Cuba an improved naval capability with frigates, submarines, and missile/torpedo firing patrol boats. The Cuban air force and civil air fleet could transport at least 15,000 combat soldiers anywhere in the Caribbean Basin within two to three weeks. Important elements of this force could be in place within a few hours. No single country in the basin, except the United States, has the means to repel such an attack without external assistance.

Cuba has developed the capability, through the recent addition of two amphibious landing ships, together with smaller amphibious craft of the Cuban navy, of placing an initial assault force of about 1,000 men, with either tanks or artillery support, on nearby island nations. The Cuban merchant marine could transport personnel to any country in the Caribbean area as well. This ability, sharpened by extensive training exercises in recent years, is an ominous threat to Cuba's small island neighbors.

The capability of Cuban MiG-23s to support operations throughout the Caribbean cannot be overlooked. These planes have the range to attack targets in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico, including key oil fields and refineries. Its operations in Africa, especially those in Angola and Ethiopia, have shown that Cuba can project its military power over great distances.

One more submarine, one more plane, one more ship at a time may not seem important. However, by gradually increasing every aspect of its military power, Cuba has made itself a potential military threat to its Caribbean and Central American neighbors.

A Strong Supporter of Communist Expansion

There are now about five times as many Cuban soldiers in Africa alone as there were in the Cuban armed forces that Castro defeated in coming to power in 1959. Ten years after Cuban troops first arrived there, Castro still has a force of 30,000 soldiers in Angola. Since 1975, Castro has sent military forces and/or advisers to Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, South Yemen, Congo, Ghana, Mali, Guinea-Bissau, as well as Grenada and Nicaragua. Although the propaganda focus is on such ideals as "socialist solidarity," Castro is known to charge many of these countries for Cuban troops, "construction workers," and other "internationalists," draining scarce foreign exchange from local economies. According to reliable sources, recipient governments must pay Cuba a fixed sum per month for each Cuban soldier and each civilian technician. Thus, Castro is simultaneously playing the world revolutionary role he has always desired, supporting Soviet foreign policy goals, and acquiring hard currency.

Cuba needs the money it gains from foreign ventures. The state-controlled economy of Cuba has shown little growth in the 26 years Castro has been in power. It has become heavily dependent on the Soviet Union. As Hugh Thomas, the noted British historian of Cuba, has written:

The Revolution has preserved, even heightened, the extent to which the country depends on one crop [sugar]. For that reason, if no other, Cuba's foreign policy is as dependent on the Russians as it used to be on the U.S. Most of the Russo-Cuba commerce concerns sugar which Russia buys at a price formally about three times higher than present world market prices.⁷

Castro's assistance is indispensable for guerrilla movements in Latin America. Since the early 1960s, Cuba has attracted guerrillas from virtually every country in the region. Castro has given logistical and financial support to thousands of these guerrillas as well as providing them military training, usually in courses lasting three to six months. The alumni of Castro's guerrilla training range from most of Nicaragua's current Sandinista leadership to the demolition experts sabotaging the economy of El Salvador. A 1981 State Department analysis of Cuba's support for violence in Latin America showed the extent of Castro's efforts to train and supply urban and rural terrorists.⁸

Cuban and Soviet efforts to gain influence are not limited to the military realm. One of their goals is to shape the political attitudes of foreign students who are provided scholarships. Since the mid-1970s, more than 20,000 students--pre-school through university--have studied at Cuba's Isle of Youth educational complex. Students have come from several countries, principally Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, and Nicaragua. In addition to this Cuban effort, the Soviets and their Eastern European allies are providing thousands of government-sponsored scholarships specifically to Latin American and Caribbean students.⁹

The Soviet Union and Cuba have worked effectively toward the objective of establishing additional Marxist-Leninist regimes in Central America and the Caribbean. Although Castro has become more calculating in his export of violence and exploitation of poverty, his aims remain as they were in the 1960s. He publicly proclaimed in the 1976 constitution Cuba's right and duty to support revolutionary and national liberation movements. For its part, the Soviet Union has intensified its efforts to create chaos or conflict near the United States to divert U.S. attention and resources from Soviet challenges in other critical areas of the world.

GRENADA: A FAILED REVOLUTION

Grenada turned toward the Cubans and the Soviet bloc in 1979 when Maurice Bishop led a coup to depose the unpopular prime minister, Eric Gairy. Contrary to Bishop's promise that his revolution would modernize the economy, improve living standards and promote democracy, life in Grenada deteriorated steadily during his four-year regime, 1979-1983. Bishop secretly planned to impose a single-party dictatorship while promising a pluralistic democracy. The Soviets and Cubans were party to the entire deception.¹⁰

A basic objective of Bishop was to consolidate power in his New Jewel Movement (NJM). The NJM was organized along classic Marxist-Leninist lines, with power concentrated in a single leader and exercised through a small central committee and political bureau. Bishop called his regime the People's Revolutionary Government and established close ties with the Soviet Union and Cuba, and to a lesser extent, Libya, North Korea, and Vietnam.

Grenada Followed Cuba's Model

Following Castro's strategy, the NJM first established a broad coalition. It was led by the radical left, but it also included non-communist elements. "This was done," Bishop explained in his famous 13 September 1982 "Line of March" speech, "so imperialism won't get too excited."¹¹ Later, he removed the moderates from government, as Castro had done 20 years before in Cuba. Elections were never held. Opposition was dealt with firmly, often through imprisonment. The media was controlled. Church leaders were denied access to radio since they were seen as a principal impediment to the goals of the NJM.

As in Cuba, Bishop adopted the control and surveillance measures normally found in totalitarian regimes. The Ministry of the Interior kept Western diplomats, businessmen, and local opposition groups under surveillance. The right to privacy of Grenadians and foreigners was routinely violated. Telephones were tapped and mail intercepted as were personal records and private bank accounts. The People's Revolutionary Army was given police functions, conducting searches and detaining

suspects without warrants. Human rights violations included torture, beatings, imprisonment, and psychological intimidation. Opposition political parties were forced to disband or go underground. Some opposition leaders left. Independent churches were seen as a threat. The so-called "People's Laws" gave Bishop and his top lieutenants nearly unlimited power. An important step in assuring Bishop and the NJM total control was a propaganda and indoctrination campaign. Children and adults were required to attend political orientation classes. Ideological training was given to virtually all Grenadians, with the army a special target. In many respects, Bishop was repeating the steps taken by Castro in consolidating power in the early 1960s.

The Soviet-Grenadian Connection

Cubans and Soviets were key actors in Bishop's Grenada, but the extent of Soviet-Grenadian relations after the 1979 coup was not made known until after the Bishop visit to Moscow in July 1982, and even then key details were kept from the public. Among the 35,000 pounds of documents collected in October 1983 were five secret military agreements signed by Grenada--three with the Soviet Union, one with Cuba, and one with North Korea.

The Soviet Union used Cuba to funnel military, economic and technical assistance to Grenada. This included Soviet and Cuban material and equipment to build the Point Salines airport. This airport, ostensibly for civilian use, was built primarily by armed Cubans, despite the high unemployment on the island of Grenada. The Point Salines airport project was a key issue for Maurice Bishop in his 15 April 1983 meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. Bishop's "Outline of Presentation" for this meeting emphasized the economic benefits of the project, but also included the cryptic phrase, "There is also the strategic factor which is well known!!"¹²

Once completed, Point Salines could have provided a stopover point for Cuban flights to Africa, an additional facility for Soviet long-range reconnaissance aircraft, and possibly a transshipment point for arms and supplies for Latin American insurgents and for the Sandinistas. Had the Point Salines airport been operational in April 1983, for example, the Libyan aircraft detained in Brazil, while clandestinely ferrying a cargo of military supplies to Nicaragua, could have refueled in Grenada instead of in Brazil.

Military Assistance

The Soviets and Cubans were quick to exploit the potential of Grenada. Only a month after Bishop seized power, the first large shipment of Eastern-bloc manufactured arms arrived from Havana. This included 3,400 rifles, 200 machine guns, 100 heavier weapons, and ammunition.¹³

Cuban military advisers were assigned by Fidel Castro to organize and train the Grenadian military and internal security forces. Hundreds of young Grenadians were sent to Cuba for military training.

The covert nature of much of this assistance was exemplified by boxes of ammunition labelled "Cuban Economic Office" shipped to Grenada by Cuba. By October 1983, tiny Grenada had more men under arms and more weapons and military supplies than all of its Eastern Caribbean neighbors combined.

Support for Soviet/Cuban Policies Leads to Instability

Under Bishop and the NJM, Grenada fully supported Soviet/Cuban policies, including the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan.

From the beginning, Bishop and his followers were anxious to prove their usefulness to the Soviet Union. In June 1983, the Grenadian Ambassador to Moscow sent a message to his Foreign Minister reviewing Grenadian-Soviet relations. He emphasized the continuing need to convince the Soviets that the Grenadian revolution was part of a

world wide process with its original roots in the Great October Revolution (Note: a reference to the Russian Revolution of October 1917). For Grenada to assume a position of increasingly greater importance, we have to be seen as influencing at least regional events. We have to establish ourselves as the authority of events in at least the English-speaking Caribbean, and be the sponsor of revolutionary activity and progressive developments in this region at least.¹⁴

To further Grenada's regional ambitions, the Bishop government adopted an active program of meeting with "progressive and revolutionary parties in the region" twice a year. Bishop apparently saw such meetings as a means to convince the Soviets of the pivotal role Grenada could play as the Soviets' Eastern Caribbean agent. The meetings concentrated on developing strategies to counter the U.S. sponsored Caribbean Basin Initiative. Belize, Suriname, St. Lucia, Dominica, and St. Vincent were seen as ripe for exploitation.¹⁵

Ultimately, of course, it was the Grenadian government that disintegrated when a power struggle erupted within the NJM

during the fall of 1983. The assassination of Bishop, three of his closest deputies, and a number of innocent persons by troops of the People's Revolutionary Army led to the collapse of the NJM. All ports of entry and departure were closed and a 24-hour shoot-on-sight curfew was declared.

The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States made a formal request to the United States for assistance. In addition, the sole remaining source of governmental legitimacy, the Governor-General of Grenada, Sir Paul Scoon, made an urgent and confidential appeal to the regional states to restore order on the island. The United States, responding to these requests and concerned over the safety of 1,000 American citizens on the island, participated in a combined U.S.-Caribbean security force that landed on Grenada on 25 October 1983. Peace and public order were restored.

The reaction of the Grenadian people to the U.S.-Caribbean security force was overwhelmingly supportive. A CBS News poll of 3 November 1983 found that 91% of the Grenadian people expressed strong approval for the actions taken by the United States. On 3 December 1984, the people of Grenada formally closed the books on the failed Marxist-Leninist revolution by successfully holding the island's first election in eight years.

NICARAGUA: A BETRAYED REVOLUTION

In July 1979, a broad and popular coalition led militarily by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) overthrew the government of General Anastasio Somoza and ended a family dynasty that had ruled Nicaragua for more than four decades. The new government owed much of its success to international support for the anti-Somoza forces. The Organization of American States (OAS) had even adopted a resolution calling for the "definitive replacement" of Somoza and free elections as soon as possible.¹⁶ In gaining this support, the Sandinistas had pledged to have free elections, political pluralism, a mixed economy, and a non-aligned foreign policy. The first junta formed after Somoza fled appeared to confirm the belief that Nicaragua was on the road to democracy.

Since those hopeful early days, Nicaragua has moved not toward democracy, but toward a new dictatorship tied ever more closely to Cuba and the Soviet Union.

The Sandinistas' betrayal of the ideals of the revolution and the establishment of a closely controlled society have driven many of their key allies and thousands of their former rank-and-file supporters out of the country. Former junta members Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo, and even the legendary "Comandante Cero" (Eden Pastora, who served as Deputy Defense Minister), left Nicaragua to take up the fight against their former colleagues. In a 1984 interview, Pastora explained his reasons for leaving the Nicaraguan government. Speaking of the Sandinista leaders he said: "They isolated themselves from what Sandinismo is supposed to be about. Violations of human rights, Cuban troops in Nicaragua, the alignment toward the Soviet bloc, the moral deviations, it's a long list."¹⁷

By words and deeds, the Sandinista leaders have demonstrated that they are, in fact, dedicated Marxist-Leninists. On 25 August 1981, Comandante Humberto Ortega, the Minister of Defense, told his subordinates that "Marxism-Leninism is the scientific doctrine that guides our revolution....We cannot be Marxist-Leninist without Sandinismo, and without Marxism-Leninism, Sandinismo cannot be revolutionary....Our doctrine is Marxism-Leninism."¹⁸

Tomas Borge, the powerful Minister of the Interior whose responsibilities include internal security and censorship, stated in a September 1983 interview that he was a communist.¹⁹ According to an article on 24 December 1984, he reconfirmed his views in Cuba: "You cannot be a true revolutionary in Latin America without being Marxist-Leninist."²⁰ Borge controls the feared turbas divinas, or "divine-mobs," composed of Sandinista militants used by the government to raid Catholic churches, break up political rallies, and otherwise harass opponents of the regime. The turbas were used in the government's efforts to intimidate potential voters for opposition presidential candidate Arturo Cruz before the November 1984 elections.

Revealing statements of the Sandinista political philosophy were made in May 1984 by Comandante Bayardo Arce who had been assigned to run the Sandinista election campaign. Speaking in what he thought was a private and off-the-record meeting with one of the Marxist-Leninist parties "competing" with the Sandinistas, Arce stated that the upcoming elections were a "nuisance" and should be used "to demonstrate that...the Nicaraguan people are for Marxism-Leninism." He further stated that "if we did not have the U.S.-imposed state of war, the electoral problem would be totally out of place in terms of usefulness." He concluded his lengthy remarks by stating that the election process could have "positive benefits: the unity of the Marxist-Leninists of Nicaragua."²¹ (This speech was not reported in the Nicaraguan press.)

In the view of many former supporters of the Sandinistas, the Managua regime has demeaned the name of their patron, Cesar Augusto Sandino. This fervent nationalist of the 1930s was opposed to all forms of foreign intervention, by international communism as well as the United States. The guerrilla leader Augustin Farabundo Marti, commenting on Sandino, said: "[Sandino] did not wish to embrace the Communist program which I supported. His banner was only for independence, a banner of emancipation, and he did not pursue the ends of social rebellion."²²

Today in Nicaragua, the banner of Sandinismo is giving way to the reality of communism. Since 1979, the Sandinistas have consolidated control over the government and the armed forces. They have placed under direct state control nearly half of Nicaragua's industry and forty percent of its agriculture. By the selective application of monetary and labor laws, they exert pressure against the remainder of the industrial and agricultural sectors. The Sandinistas control all media outlets through censorship. La Prensa, the only major opposition newspaper, is continually censored and its writers and editors harassed. Neighborhood watch committees, informant networks, rationing of many basic necessities and enforced participation in Sandinista organizations are all used as forms of population control and intimidation.

The Sandinistas' economic mismanagement, human rights violations, and abuse of governmental authority have driven more than 120,000 Nicaraguans into exile. An even greater reflection of popular discontent has been the number of Nicaraguan citizens who have taken up arms against the Sandinistas. The armed opposition, which began in 1982, has now grown to a strength of some 15,000, most of whom were sympathetic to the ideals of the 1979 revolution. It is interesting to compare this strength with that of the Sandinistas in their long struggle against Somoza. As of late 1978, the Sandinista guerrillas numbered less than 1,000.²³ By the July 1979 victory, they still had only 5,000 in their ranks.²⁴

The Sandinista Military Machine: Central America's Largest Armed Forces

The comandantes realized from the outset that they would need a large, politicized military to pursue their revolutionary objectives and maintain themselves in power once the bloom of the revolution had worn off and their true political orientation was exposed. In their five years in power, the Sandinistas have followed Cuba's example in developing a massive military establishment. Nicaragua today has the largest, most powerful armed forces in the history of Central America.

On 5 October 1979 the Sandinistas distributed to their followers the results of a three-day meeting held the previous month for the Sandinista political cadre. In discussing the security situation, the document stated that "at present there is no clear indication that an armed counter-revolution by Somocista forces beyond our borders is going to take place and jeopardize our stability."²⁵ Nevertheless, they began to build a large and well-equipped military. In February 1981, the Sandinistas announced that they would build a 200,000-man militia to "defend the revolution" against "counter-revolutionaries." But, as the 20 February 1981 New York Times article reporting this announcement pointed out, there was "surprisingly little counter-revolutionary activity" faced by the Sandinista government at that time.²⁶

The lightly armed Sandinista guerrilla force of about 5,000 in 1979 has now grown to a 62,000-man active duty force, with an additional 57,000 in the reserves and the militia. In late 1983, the Sandinistas instituted the first draft in Nicaragua's history. This action has caused strong popular resentment, with hundreds of young Nicaraguans fleeing their homeland to avoid the draft. In rural areas of Nicaragua, there has been open, active resistance by the people against conscription.²⁷

In their struggle against Somoza, the FSLN guerrillas had no tanks or other armored vehicles, no artillery, no helicopters. After their victory in July 1979, they inherited from the Somoza National Guard three tanks, 25 armored cars, seven helicopters and three artillery pieces. They now have at least 340 tanks and armored vehicles, more than 70 long-range howitzers and rocket launchers and 30 helicopters, including a half dozen of the world's fastest, best armed attack helicopter, the Mi-24/HIND D. This is the principal attack helicopter of the Soviet army and holds the world helicopter speed record. Its heavy underside armor makes it less vulnerable to small arms fire. It has a heavy machine gun, can fire anti-tank missiles, and can drop bombs. The HIND D adds a new dimension to warfare in Central America since areas of Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica would be within range of these flying "tanks" as they are described in Jane's All the World's Aircraft.²⁸

The first Soviet-made armor arrived in Nicaragua in 1981, shortly after the 200,000-man militia buildup was announced, but still about a year before significant anti-Sandinista armed opposition had developed. The mainstay of this armored force

is some 110 Soviet-made T-55 medium tanks. The T-55 was the main battle tank of the Soviet army for years. Although obsolete on the battlefield against most modern anti-tank weapons, it is a powerful weapon in Central America. None of Nicaragua's neighbors have tanks with the T-55's firepower. Moreover, the Sandinistas have received in the past year nearly 30 PT-76 light tanks. With their river-crossing capability, these amphibious tanks provide more flexibility than the T-55s.

The Soviets have considered the Central American terrain in tailoring the Sandinista armed forces. They have provided about 40 flatbed trucks, which are designed to carry the T-55 tank. The Sandinistas have also been provided with six large ferries, which will enable the tanks to be shuttled across rivers to fighting zones, a significant capability given the fact that much of the borders with Honduras and Costa Rica is demarcated by rivers. The PT-76s, of course, can cross rivers and be used to secure a beachhead while the T-55s are shuttled across.

The Sandinistas have also been provided with more than 1,000 field kitchens, a number of mobile maintenance workshops, and about 75 gasoline tankers, all requirements for an offensive-minded army. However, logistics support continues to be a major problem for the Sandinista army.

Honduras shares a 570-mile border with Nicaragua. Should the Sandinistas decide to launch offensive operations against Honduras, the most obvious avenue of approach would be through the area known as the Choluteca Gap, in the northwest coastal plain of the Honduran/Nicaraguan border. The Sandinistas have conducted training with tanks, armored personnel carriers and long-range artillery in areas close to the Choluteca Gap. This narrow routing could prove difficult for the Sandinista tanks if the Honduran Air Force retains the air superiority it currently enjoys. But, if this Honduran deterrent capability is sufficiently neutralized by a strengthened Sandinista air force and an effective air defense system, then the disadvantage of a restricted route into Honduras would be appreciably reduced.

The regime in Nicaragua poses both a real and a psychological threat to the countries of Central America. This fact is readily perceived by the citizens of Nicaragua's neighboring countries as was revealed in a public opinion poll conducted by Gallup International in 1983. This poll showed that Nicaragua's growing military strength and support for subversive movements in other countries was a source of concern throughout the region. In Honduras, for example, about 80% of the respondents saw Nicaragua as the principal cause of instability and as the primary military threat faced by their country.²⁹

Panama played a key role in providing military support to the Sandinistas in 1978 and 1979. After the Sandinistas came to power, however, they rejected Panama's advice and offers of assistance. Recently, General Manuel Noriega, Commander of Panama's Defense Force, told the editors of Costa Rica's principal newspaper, La Nacion, that the Sandinista arms escalation posed a danger to the entire region. In the article reporting Noriega's views, La Nacion's editors, reflecting widespread

preoccupation in that most democratic of Latin American countries about the militarization of Nicaragua, wrote that "Sandinista militarism has to be halted before it produces a holocaust in the entire Caribbean region."³⁰

The Honduran army is striving to modernize and professionalize, but it lags behind the rapid expansion of the Sandinista army. Costa Rica has no army. The Salvadoran armed forces are fully occupied with combating Sandinista-supported insurgents. Clearly, Nicaragua's military power threatens--and is not threatened by--her neighbors.

Cubans in Nicaragua

Fidel Castro clandestinely provided weapons and other aid to the Sandinistas during their struggle against Somoza. The first military advisers to the new government were Cuban, arriving on 19 July 1979, the day the Sandinistas took over.

This was the beginning of the Sandinista military alliance with the Soviet bloc. Soviets and East Germans have followed the Cubans as advisers to the Sandinista military. Members of the armed forces of Libya and members of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which has collaborated with the Sandinistas since at least 1970, are also playing a minor role in the development of the Sandinista armed forces.

Although there have been upwards of 9,000 Cubans in Nicaragua, recent reports indicate that about 1,500 teachers have returned to Cuba. Out of the total 6,000 Cubans now present in Nicaragua, some 3,000 are military or security personnel attached to the armed forces, internal security and intelligence organizations. These military and security advisers have made possible the rapid development of Nicaragua's military and security machine. The other Cubans are involved in construction, teaching, medicine, and similar programs. The bulk of these civilians are younger men who have received some military training.

The total of 3,000 Cuban military and security personnel in Nicaragua is almost half the total of Somoza's entire National Guard until the last two years of its existence. This disproportionate presence of Cuban military and security personnel is resented by many Nicaraguans and is often cited by refugees fleeing Nicaragua as a factor contributing to their decision to leave their homeland.

Nicaragua--Growing Soviet Investment

Several huge construction projects backed by Cuba and other members of the Soviet bloc represent the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars, to include \$70 million for nearly 40 new

military facilities. In addition, Nicaragua's allies, such as Bulgaria, East Germany, and Cuba, are building critical infrastructure facilities which will have important military uses.

The 10,000-foot runway at the Punta Huete airfield, when completed, will be the longest military runway in Central America. Sandinista leaders long claimed that the Punta Huete airfield was intended for civilian use. But as the base took on the unmistakable signs of a military air base, such as protective earthen mounds (or revetments) for fighter aircraft, the Sandinista Air Force Commander admitted that it would be a military air base.³¹

When Punta Huete becomes operational, it will be able to accommodate any aircraft in the Soviet-bloc inventory. The potential threat to Nicaragua's neighbors would then increase dramatically. The recent acquisition of Mi-24 attack helicopters, along with the existing inventory of Mi-8 troop-carrying helicopters, provides the Sandinistas with a powerful helicopter force. The Sandinista regime has declared repeatedly its intention to acquire combat aircraft, and Punta Huete would be a logical base from which such aircraft could operate. Nicaraguan jet pilots and mechanics have been trained in Eastern Europe and are reportedly now flying in Cuba. Sandinista acquisition of such jet aircraft would further destabilize the regional military balance; the United States has consistently made clear in diplomatic channels its concern about such weaponry.

The Soviets could decide in the future that it is to their advantage to fly long-range reconnaissance aircraft from Punta Huete along the West Coast of the U.S., just as they currently operate such flights along the East Coast of the U.S. by flying out of Cuba.

The decisions of the Soviet Union and Cuba to make this investment in Nicaragua indicates that Soviet leaders consider Nicaragua an important complement to Cuba in the Soviet strategy to increase pressure on the United States in the Caribbean Basin.

EL SALVADOR: A DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

For more than five years, El Salvador has been a target of violence carried out by Cuba and Nicaragua, with the support of the Soviet Union. With a population density greater than India, a feudal land tenure system, and a violent history, in 1979 El Salvador seemed a logical place for communist exploitation. An indigenous guerrilla force, which developed in the mid-1970s in reaction to government-sponsored political abuses, began receiving extensive support from Nicaragua soon after the Sandinistas came to power in July 1979.

Having seen the Somoza regime in neighboring Nicaragua resist social change and subsequently collapse in the face of a popular uprising, reform-minded Salvadoran military officers overthrew the authoritarian government of General Carlos Romero in October 1979. Romero was replaced by a civilian-military junta that pledged social and economic reforms and democratic elections. The successive governments of El Salvador have worked to follow through on these pledges and El Salvador has begun to build democracy for the first time.³²

Since 1982, the people of El Salvador have shown their support for the democratic process by going to the polls three times in the face of threats and harassment by the guerrillas. In March 1982, they selected a constituent assembly in an election considered fair and free by the many distinguished observers and journalists from Western democracies that monitored the process. Jose Napoleon Duarte, a reform-minded Christian Democrat previously jailed and sent into exile by the military, was elected president in the spring of 1984.

The guerrillas had initially attempted to encourage the people of El Salvador to boycott the 1982 election. When it became apparent that this tactic would not succeed, they resorted to violence, burning buses, and otherwise trying to intimidate the people to prevent them from voting. The response of the people was dramatic; more than 80% of those eligible to vote did so. They repeated their strong support for democracy in the 1984 presidential elections. Again impartial international observers and journalists saw these elections as a true expression of the popular will, and a repudiation of the guerrillas. Commenting on the electoral process, the official voice of the Salvadoran Catholic Church said:

... we can say with absolute certainty that three elections in a two-year period have contributed to a true plebiscite in which the people have expressed their will, their faith in democracy, their desire for peace, their rejection of violence, and their intrinsic condemnation of the guerrillas.³³

Among numerous economic reforms, the most sweeping has been agrarian reform. Although extremists at both ends of the political spectrum resisted these changes, more than 25% of the rural population now either own their land outright or participate as co-owners of agricultural cooperatives. These people have a personal stake in seeing a democratically oriented system flourish in their country.

El Salvador is, in fact, moving toward the goal of establishing a government that is accountable to its citizens. This is being carried out behind the shield of the much improved armed forces, whose initiative on the battlefield, combined with President Duarte's popular mandate, moved the guerrillas to participate in a dialogue with the government beginning on 15 October 1984.

The Guerrillas

Lacking broad popular support, the guerrillas continue to be a potent military force because of the extensive support they receive from Nicaragua, Cuba, other communist countries such as Vietnam, and radical regimes such as Libya. The unification of the Salvadoran guerrillas was coordinated by Fidel Castro. Shortly after General Romero was overthrown, Castro brought Salvadoran guerrilla leaders to Havana, and directed them to forget past rivalries and forge a united front. This led to the creation of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), in which five previously separate guerrilla military factions banded together. Along with the FMLN, the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), a parallel political arm, was established.

The newly united guerrillas attempted a Nicaraguan-style "final offensive" in January 1981. Their defeat by the Salvadoran army was made possible by the Salvadoran people's refusal to respond to the guerrillas' call to rise up against the government. After this defeat, the guerrillas shifted their tactics to destroying the economic infrastructure of the country. They later openly acknowledged this decision in an April 1983 guerrilla radio broadcast when they declared: "With these acts of sabotage to the country's economy, we mark the start of our campaign to destroy the economy".³⁴ This "campaign" has included the destruction of bridges and electrical towers, as well as the cash crops so vital to the Salvadoran economy. The government's budget has been severely strained to repair the damage caused by this systematic sabotage. The armed forces have been stretched thin to defend vital facilities and areas of agricultural productivity.

Through mid-1984, the war was a military stalemate. But the Salvadoran army now has the initiative. This has been made possible by the expanded training and additional mobility permitted by increased U.S. military assistance.

The Logistics Network

The guerrillas depend on an elaborate logistics pipeline to support their military operations. The majority of the U.S.-made M-16 rifles captured from the guerrillas by the Salvadoran military have been traced, by individual serial numbers, to shipments made by the United States to South Vietnam, and subsequently captured by communist forces after the 1975 fall of Saigon. But guerrilla propaganda efforts seek to create the impression that virtually all of their weapons are taken from government troops. In fact, only a small portion have been captured from Salvadoran forces. Alejandro Montenegro, a former high ranking guerrilla, has stated that it was guerrilla policy, directed from Managua, to mislead international media on the true source of guerrilla arms.³⁵

Soviet-bloc countries have played a key role in sending weapons to Cuba and Nicaragua, which in turn have moved them into El Salvador through a complex land, sea, and air infiltration network.

The principal land route for supplying the guerrillas originates in Nicaragua and passes through Honduras into El Salvador. A road and trail network has been developed, with the actual flow of ammunition, supplies, and weapons varying to meet the tactical requirements of the guerrillas.

Seaborne delivery of arms and supplies is carried out largely by 30-foot ocean-going canoes powered by 100-horsepower engines. These canoes are difficult to detect on radar because of their low profile and wooden construction. Leaving Nicaragua after sundown, the canoes make their drop at predetermined points along the southeast coast of El Salvador and return to Nicaragua by dawn.

Aerial deliveries are also employed by the guerrillas. Light planes fly at low altitudes across the Gulf of Fonseca from Nicaragua, landing at isolated airstrips and unloading their cargo of arms and ammunition. Air drops are also used.

Within El Salvador, pack animals, and vehicles with compartments designed to conceal their contents, are used to move supplies to more than 200 camps, which are linked by an elaborate series of corridors. Within these corridors, guerrillas select multiple routes and patrol them frequently to assure their security.

Government forces are having some success slowing the arms infiltration, but geography favors the insurgents: a 200-mile coastline, 6,000 miles of roads, 150 airstrips, and a mountainous, ill-defined northern border.

Disinformation and Propaganda

Another aspect of the FMLN's "total war" effort is the utilization of classic Soviet disinformation, propaganda, and deception techniques. The guerrillas' goal in applying such measures is to gain sympathy for their cause. At the same time they wish to sway international and United States public opinion against the Salvadoran government and U.S. economic and military assistance. The political leaders of the guerrilla movement realize the importance of the media in shaping political attitudes in the United States. In February 1982, one of the FDR's political leaders, Hector Oqueli, told the New York Times: "We have to win the war in the United States."³⁶

The guerrillas back up their disinformation operations with constant propaganda, flowing from their own radio stations (Radio Venceremos and Radio Farabundo Marti), friendly embassies, and solidarity committees formed to provide propaganda outlets within the United States, Latin America, and Europe.

The Soviet Union also contributes to the guerrilla cause through its extensive "active measures" program. This is a term used by the Soviet KGB for its program of overt and covert deception operations, including use of forged documents, front groups, agents of influence, and clandestine broadcasting. One example that follows the pattern of Soviet active measures targeted on Central America is the forged "State Department dissent paper," which surfaced in 1981. The paper purported to be the thoughts of State Department, National Security Council, and CIA staff officers who disagreed with U.S. policy. Actual "dissent papers," in fact, are used within the government to allow expression of views at variance with current policy. The paper in question warned that further U.S. aid to El Salvador would soon result in U.S. combat involvement. The paper also supported U.S. recognition of the guerrillas, long an insurgent goal. However, this "dissent paper," originally accepted as genuine by the news media, was checked carefully and found to be a forgery.³⁷

Soviet front groups have accused the United States of conducting chemical and biological warfare in Central America. Moscow's Radio Peace and Progress, a well-known disinformation outlet, has broadcast such inflammatory allegations as:

The CIA kidnaps children of Salvadoran refugees in Honduras....Some are sent to special schools for brainwashing. Others, because they are inept for these activities, are sent to CIA research centers. Here they are used as guinea pigs.³⁸

U.S. military advisers participate in torturing Salvadoran rebels and prisoners....³⁹

Everything that is known, up to the present time, indicates that the Yankee CIA, corporation of murderers, is implicated in the death of Torrijos.⁴⁰

Broadcasting by the guerrillas follows this Soviet disinformation pattern. One such example occurred in November 1984 in Suchitoto, a small town 50 kilometers northeast of San Salvador. The guerrillas attacked the town in the early morning hours of 9 November. Their Radio Farabundo Marti announced that the Salvadoran air force had indiscriminately bombed the town to include "the church, the hospital, the kindergarten and the central market of Suchitoto."⁴¹ In reality, as reported by the Washington Post the following day, "The quaint, whitewashed central Catholic church, the hospital and the kindergarten, which rebel broadcasts had said were bombed by the government, were found undamaged. Residents of the city denied that government forces had bombed the city during the fighting today...."⁴²

The Future of the Guerrillas

The future does not appear bright for the guerrillas. They now enjoy far less support from the Salvadoran people than at any time in the last five years. It has become increasingly obvious that they represent only a small segment of the population.

The 1981 guerrilla decision to resort to the tactic of destroying the economy, as a means of undermining the confidence of the people in the legitimate government, has failed. The guerrillas continue to operate as a viable military force largely because of the support they are receiving from the Soviet Union and its allies.

The Salvadoran Catholic Church has been in the forefront in the battle for social and economic change. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, church leaders were critical of the government's unwillingness or inability to implement required changes. By 1984, however, Salvadoran church leaders noted that the political and economic conditions for the people had improved significantly. San Salvador Auxiliary Bishop Rosa Chavez argued this way in a July 1984 sermon:

This then, is the great question the guerrillas have to ask themselves. No matter how often they attempt to justify their actions of sabotage with arguments that they fight against the government, against oppression and what they call the oligarchy, it is the people who ultimately pay the price. It is the people who suffer when the guerrillas down the towers that carry the cables of electric power; it is the people who suffer when the guerrillas dynamite telephone installations; it is the people who suffer when the guerrillas recruit youths by force....Therefore, I ask myself, in whose favor are they really fighting?⁴³

CASTRO TODAY

Acting to fulfill his own revolutionary ambitions as well as being an agent of Soviet influence, Fidel Castro is working closely with subversive elements throughout Central America and the Caribbean. Castro's goal in the 1980s remains much as it was when he assumed power: to oppose the United States and create Marxist-Leninist regimes that mirror his own dictatorship. But the means to achieve this goal have become more sophisticated, in part, because of the lessons he learned from guerrilla failures in the region during the 1960s.

Castro has also had to adapt to the changing popular perception of his revolution. Where once Castro was a folk hero to most Latin Americans, today he is seen as having converted Cuba into a bankrupt and oppressive state beholden to a foreign power.⁴⁴

Although Castro's image has dulled with Central Americans at large, he continues to be popular with violent, radical groups throughout the region. This support provides Castro with political and psychological capital. The governments of the region are acutely aware of Castro's ability to orchestrate events in their countries. When the brother of President Betancur of Colombia was kidnapped by guerrillas in November 1983, it was largely the efforts of Castro that eventually gained his release. It was obvious that Castro could also have influenced the guerrillas to keep the President's brother. This case was a vivid example of how Castro has perfected the techniques of political blackmail.

In addition to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras have been targets of Castro's subversion. In Guatemala, he has provided training and some financial support to three guerrilla factions, although he has not succeeded in unifying them to the extent he did in El Salvador.

Honduras does not have an active insurgency at present. Honduran territory is used principally as a conduit of support for the Salvadoran guerrillas, but Honduras has been a target of Cuban destabilization. In June 1983, about 100 Hondurans trained in Cuba infiltrated into eastern Honduras from Nicaragua. The would-be guerrillas were totally defeated, in great measure, because of the Honduran people's support of the government forces. A year later another group of Cuban-trained guerrillas entered Honduras and many of them met the same fate.

A disturbing aspect of the current Castro offensive is the apparent use of money generated by narcotics to supply arms for guerrillas. Several high-ranking Cuban officials have provided protection for planes and small ships carrying drugs. The drugs move northward from Colombia to the United States, at times via Cuba and on at least one occasion via Nicaragua. In 1981, the Colombian government discovered that the Cubans had been using a narcotics ring to smuggle both arms and funds to Colombian M-19 guerrillas. When the Colombian armed forces

and National Police entered the town of Calamar in February 1984, they discovered that the guerrilla Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia had campesinos cultivating hundreds of hectares of coca plants.

Recent United States Congressional hearings have established the linkage of Cuba, narcotics, and guerrillas.⁴⁵ U.S. arrest warrants have been issued for one Nicaraguan and several Cuban officials involved in drug trafficking from Colombia. Reacting to an all-out anti-drug campaign by the Colombian government, the Colombian drug criminals have murdered Colombian government officials, bombed the U.S. embassy, and issued death threats against U.S. diplomats and their families, Colombian President Betancur, his cabinet, and members of the Colombian supreme court.

The emerging alliance between drug smugglers and arms dealers in support of terrorists and guerrillas is a troublesome new threat to the Western Hemisphere.

THE CHALLENGE AND THE RESPONSE

The countries of Central America and the Caribbean, struggling to defend or develop pluralistic political systems, are confronted with Soviet-backed guerrilla movements attempting to seize power. The Soviet Union has long pledged support of "national liberation movements," and current Soviet actions in Central America and the Caribbean are consistent with this commitment. Ideology plays an important role in their motivations, as the creation of additional communist states validates the tenets of Marxism-Leninism and bolsters the Soviet Union itself. Most importantly, Kremlin leaders hope that ultimately the United States could become so preoccupied with turmoil in the Central American and Caribbean region that it would be less able militarily and politically to oppose Soviet goals in other key areas of the world.

The Soviets are using Cuba and Nicaragua to exploit the instability and poverty in the area. There is a high degree of congruence in Soviet, Cuban and Nicaraguan foreign policy goals. These three countries are working in concert to train and support guerrilla organizations in countries throughout the area. Should these guerrillas succeed in coming to power, they undoubtedly will establish regimes similar to those of their patrons--one-party communist dictatorships maintained in power by military force and political and psychological intimidation. The consequences of a Soviet-aligned Central America would be severe and immediate. The United States would be faced with:

- o Additional platforms for regional subversion and Communist expansion, north to Mexico and south toward Panama, and a perception of U.S. ineptitude and powerlessness in the face of Soviet pressure even close to home.

- o Far more complicated defense planning to keep open the sea lanes through which pass half of the U.S. trade, two-thirds of U.S. imported petroleum, and more than half of the resupply and reinforcements needed by NATO in time of war.

- o Expanded centers for terrorist operations against the United States and its neighboring countries.

The human costs of communism should also not be forgotten. History shows that the establishment of a communist regime brings with it severe and permanent suppression of basic human rights, the outpouring of refugees as exemplified in Eastern Europe, Cuba, and Vietnam, militarization of the affected society, and economic deterioration.

The countries of Central America and the Caribbean are at a critical juncture. But this can be the impetus for the United States to devote the attention and resources necessary to assist the countries of the region. As the President's National Bipartisan Commission on Central America stated:

Our task now, as a nation, is to transform the crisis in Central America into an opportunity:47

A cornerstone of United States policy is the belief that the best means to assure the failure of communist expansionism is the development of democratic institutions, leading to governments that are accountable to the people and not imposed on them by either left or right extremes. The basic social and economic inequities which breed frustration and its offspring--insurgent movements--must be addressed if this policy is to succeed.

U.S. aid is designed to improve the quality of life of the people of Central America. In the last four years, 78% of U.S. aid to Central America has been economic. But the 22% devoted to military assistance is essential if these sovereign nations are to have the capability to defend themselves against the onslaught of Soviet/Cuban-backed guerrillas.

The Caribbean Basin Initiative, the Central America Democracy, Peace and Development Initiative, and U.S. security assistance programs will help to check Soviet and Cuban aggression in this region. But this is only the beginning. The long-term goal is to lay a foundation--a truly bipartisan policy--on which to help build a future for the all people of the region.

If the United States and the countries of the region can marshal the necessary will and resolve to respond to this challenge, then, in the words of the President's National Bipartisan Commission on Central America:

The sponsors of violence will have done the opposite of what they intended: they will have roused us not only to turn back the tide of totalitarianism but to bring a new birth of hope and of opportunity to the people of Central America.48