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The Central American Core Four: Coping With Nicaragua and the Contras



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An Intelligence Assessment

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The Central American Core Four: Coping With Nicaragua and the Contras

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [Redacted] Office
of African and Latin American Analysis. Major
contributions were made by [Redacted]

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[Redacted] Office of African and Latin American
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**The Central American
Core Four: Coping With
Nicaragua and the Contras**



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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 15 May 1986
was used in this report.*

The commitment of Central America's "Core Four" countries—Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and El Salvador—to sign a regional peace treaty by early June suggests a critical juncture for their policies and for US interests in the region. Pressures are increasing that forbode an erosion of support for the US position because the Core Four will be lobbied more heavily by the Contadora mediators to show flexibility and are more likely to agree to a treaty that falls short of US policy objectives.



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Although the Sandinistas have said they would not sign a treaty unless the United States ended its "aggression," we believe that Nicaragua could reverse its stance if the Core Four agreed to an accord that lacks verification or postpones discussion of key provisions—such as democratic reform. In this scenario, the Sandinistas might calculate that they could draw out subsequent negotiations on arms levels and verification, effectively freezing the regional arms balance in their favor. The Sandinistas, for example, have already publicly asserted they will not surrender any of their arms.



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In the absence of a Contadora agreement, we believe US consideration of substantially increased military aid for the anti-Sandinistas will spur a search for alternative diplomatic solutions. Such initiatives, in our opinion, may provide opportunities for Managua to project a superficial image of cooperation and to intensify efforts toward bilateral, piecemeal agreements. Insurgent military prospects will be a key variable shaping Core Four attitudes, however, and significant progress by the Contras will stiffen opposition toward Managua and encourage greater cooperation with the Nicaraguan rebel effort.



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Over the last three years, the Core Four have attempted to reconcile their opposition to Managua with the fear of appearing opposed to the peaceful resolution of regional problems and of being perceived as subservient to the United States. Key factors in this tension include:



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- Fears of damage to their standing in Latin America and Western Europe, where there is opposition to military pressure on the Sandinistas and a disposition to settle for a weaker Contadora treaty.

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- Increasing frustration over what the Core Four regard as a lack of military progress by the guerrillas. [Redacted]

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We believe there is likely to be a continued tendency of Core Four leaders to [Redacted] criticize or distance themselves from US policies in public statements. These differences largely reflect the sensitivity of the Core Four to international opinion, and to a lesser extent represent dissenting voices and lack of coordination in their foreign policy establishments. The military is a major constraint on civilian policymakers in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, but there do not appear to be serious splits between the executive and the military in any of those countries. [Redacted]

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Honduras

[Redacted]

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[Redacted] has been an erratic backer over the last two years, however, because of doubts about the US commitment to the insurgency and the guerrillas' military ability, as well as concern over Sandinista incursions that have exposed insurgent use of Honduran territory. [Redacted]

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We expect Tegucigalpa periodically will attempt to "up the ante" with the United States by threatening to withhold cooperation with the insurgents. Honduras is likely to demand that the United States [Redacted] [Redacted] press the guerrillas to make military progress, including moving operations inside Nicaragua; provide increased military and economic aid to Honduras; and give clearer and more direct signs of security backing. Should it appear to Tegucigalpa that the insurgents have no chance of victory, we believe Honduras would [Redacted] begin to work for a bilateral solution with Managua. [Redacted]

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Costa Rica's policies toward Nicaragua and the insurgents have vacillated in recent years between hostility and accommodation, with the balance now tipping toward a more accommodationist policy toward Managua. [Redacted] [Redacted] this stance reflects changing views of anti-Sandinista prospects, shifts in Costa Rican public opinion, the stalemate at Contadora, and a desire to appear more independent of the United States. A Costa Rican bilateral accord with Managua—if concluded before a multilateral treaty—would shift the focus of negotiations away

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from a comprehensive regional settlement, complicate insurgent operations, and subject the United States to strong pressures to respect the agreement. [redacted]

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Guatemala's President Cerezo believes his domestic standing and the country's international position are best protected by a policy of "active neutrality." This means, in our view, he is likely to remain distant from attempts to press Nicaragua and probably will not fully identify with the Core Four. [redacted]

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El Salvador remains the most vocal critic of the Sandinistas in the region

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President Duarte probably will continue to stop short of endorsing US military aid to the Contras, however, because he fears that this would create the impression abroad of aiding aggression against Nicaragua, and thereby undermine his case that El Salvador is the victim of Nicaraguan aggression. [redacted]

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Core Four leaders have launched several initiatives designed to recapture the political initiative and to press Nicaragua, including a proposal to force Nicaragua to accept a timetable for democracy and President Duarte's offer to reopen talks with Salvadoran rebels if Nicaragua conducts a dialogue with the anti-Sandinista insurgents. In our view, these proposals are unlikely to trigger Sandinista concessions because Managua's behavior to date suggests the Sandinista leadership believes it can sidestep such commitments without paying any political price. For example, Cerezo's proposal for a Central American parliament is unlikely to isolate Nicaragua—even if the Sandinistas accept the idea of direct elections to choose national representatives—and probably will divert attention from the multilateral approach. [redacted]


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Nicaragua probably sees the new democratic governments in the region as a mix of increased challenges and new opportunities. The Sandinistas probably view Costa Rica as the most vulnerable of their neighbors because of its lack of an army and its responsiveness to public sentiment favoring neutralism. They are also likely to believe they can cultivate President Cerezo and turn his avowed neutrality policy to their favor. On

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the other hand, Nicaragua probably sees little prospect for better relations with El Salvador. Although Managua probably believes that the Azcona administration in Honduras is no improvement over its predecessor, the Sandinistas, in our view, calculate that greater military successes against the rebels will erode Tegucigalpa's support for the insurgents. 

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Central America Core Four



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The Central American Core Four: Coping With Nicaragua and the Contras

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Introduction

During the last three years, Nicaragua's Central American neighbors—Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, and El Salvador—have generally opposed the Sandinistas at regional peace talks [Redacted]

[Redacted] At the same time, the "Core Four" have attempted to reconcile their opposition to Managua with the fear of appearing opposed to a peaceful resolution of regional problems or being perceived as subservient to the United States. Managing this tension has been a central issue for newly elected governments in Honduras, Guatemala, and Costa Rica, as they seek to define their positions and, in some cases, launch new political initiatives. The Core Four are committed to signing a peace treaty by early June 1986, suggesting a critical juncture not only for their diplomatic policies toward Managua but also for US interests in the region as well. [Redacted]

This paper evaluates the major foreign policy and domestic concerns affecting the policies of each country and identifies key institutional factors that influence the decisionmaking process. It then analyzes policy directions the Core Four countries are likely to take toward Nicaragua and the anti-Sandinistas during the midterm—six to 12 months—both in the Contadora negotiations and via separate Core Four initiatives. Finally, it assesses the implications of these policies for the United States. [Redacted]

The Regional Setting: Concerns and Policies

Looking at Managua and the Insurgents

Reporting from US Embassies indicates that the Core Four countries share the view that Nicaragua poses a threat to their fragile democratic institutions. The Presidents of the developing democracies of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, as well as Costa Rica's President Arias, have expressed on numerous occasions their concern that Nicaragua's military

buildup—began shortly after the 1979 revolution and aided by Cuban and Soviet Bloc military and civilian advisers—puts at Managua's disposal a military force capable not only of solidifying Sandinista domestic control but also of subverting their governments.

All [Redacted] recognize the validity of evidence that details Managua's involvement in providing financial, training, and material support for insurgent movements throughout the region. [Redacted]

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US Embassy reporting also indicates Core Four leaders [Redacted]

[Redacted] share the view that without strong military pressure Managua is unlikely to alter its domestic and foreign policies. Guatemala's President Cerezo told US officials in late February, for example, [Redacted] that without such pressure Nicaragua would not make any concessions whatsoever. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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Regional perceptions of the seriousness of the Nicaraguan threat, however, vary from country to country.

[Redacted] the former military regime in Guatemala, and now the Cerezo government, feel little immediate threat from Managua and prefer to avoid taking positions that either criticize or defend the Sandinistas. On the other hand, El Salvador believes that Managua's support for Salvadoran rebels is a major factor in helping sustain the insurgency in El Salvador, according to US Embassy reporting. [Redacted]

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**Private Statements of Core Four Leaders
Supporting US Assistance to the Contras**

Core Four leaders generally have been reluctant to support US military aid to the anti-Sandinista insurgents in their public statements. [redacted]

[redacted]

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Costa Rica

In a meeting with US officials in February 1986, former President Monge expressed great interest in prospects for US Congressional approval of aid for the Contras, lamenting that the United States could not go ahead with a covert program should the Congress refuse the request. He stressed how unhelpful President-elect Arias had been in publicly opposing US aid and pledged to work with him over the coming weeks to repair the damage as much as possible. [redacted]

Guatemala

President Cerezo told US officials in late February that he was surprised at Arias's statements, saying he had no intention of involving himself in internal US affairs. Cerezo said that, while he could not openly support US assistance to the Nicaraguan insurgents, the United States could be confident that he would not oppose it. [redacted]

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Arias, who assumed office in early May, told US officials in February that he favored a moratorium on US aid to be used to pressure the Sandinistas to agree to a negotiated agreement. In a subsequent meeting he said he would seek to gain Western support for a timetable for Sandinista democratization and demilitarization. [redacted]

El Salvador

[redacted] President Duarte told US officials in March, for example, he was worried that a failure to supply aid would undermine the resolve of the other Central American democracies. Duarte has told the US Embassy that he cannot strongly support US aid publicly for fear of undermining El Salvador's position that it is a victim of Nicaraguan aggression. He said he [redacted] did not wish to be drawn into US political debates, but at the same time there should be no doubt that he regarded the Contras as a barrier to Sandinista support for Salvadoran guerrillas. The President added that he had also told his visitors that anything that aided the Nicaraguan resistance contributed directly to El Salvador's struggle to defeat a Communist-sponsored insurgency. [redacted]

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Honduras

[redacted] Honduran President Azcona favors US military aid to the anti-Sandinistas, although his public comments in support of US assistance have been circumspect. [redacted]

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At the same time, [redacted] the Core Four countries, especially Costa Rica and Honduras, also question the viability of the anti-Sandinista insurgency. Although all have provided [redacted] support to the insurgents, it has been tempered by frustration over what the Four see as a lack of significant military progress. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] US Embassy reports suggest that Central American officials also fear that more open and active support for the insurgents would be viewed as aggression by other Latin Americans and West Europeans, and thereby undermine the Core Four's international image. There have been a number of instances in which Core Four officials have criticized proposed US military aid to the guerrillas, and at best the public statements of Central American leaders have supported US aid indirectly. [redacted]

The Core Four and Contadora

The Core Four have attempted to compel Managua to accept a verifiable multilateral peace agreement, but the Contadora process has proved to be a difficult policy arena for the regional democracies. They have had problems maintaining unity and devising a coordinated strategy, a situation exacerbated by Costa Rica's willingness to enter bilateral talks with Managua and Guatemala's tendency to remain apart from group meetings and demarches. In addition to the Core Four's internal difficulties, the Contadora mediators—Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama—have actively intervened in the talks, frequently making recommendations for treaty language favoring Nicaraguan positions out of their desire for a quick settlement. The Contadora group, for example, has pushed for signature of a treaty before negotiating specific arms and troops levels, a violation of the Contadora principle of adopting a simultaneous solution of all problems. Moreover, the creation of the four-country support group—Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay—has generally worked to Nicaragua's advantage because of the group's repeated calls for an end to US aid to the insurgents and its endorsement of a resumption of US-Nicaraguan bilateral talks. [redacted]

In our view, the Sandinistas have been more skillful than the Core Four in keeping their positions in the forefront of public attention. [redacted]

[redacted] Managua has devoted considerable resources to its international propaganda campaign to achieve this objective whereas other Central Americans have undertaken no organized effort to influence foreign opinion. [redacted]

[redacted] until recently Nicaragua's ability to manipulate the meeting agendas had generally kept the Core Four on the negotiating defensive. [redacted]

After three years of negotiations, the Contadora process has reached a critical stage. At a Contadora-Central American Foreign Ministers meeting in early April 1986, the Core Four agreed to the mediators' proposal that additional talks be limited to two subjects—arms levels and military maneuvers—and that they sign a treaty by 6 June. Nicaragua refused to sign the communique at this meeting—despite great Contadora pressure, according to US Embassy reports—saying it could not discuss arms control as long as US "aggression" persisted. The Sandinistas modified their position a few days later, however, to end their isolation and growing Latin American criticism of their intransigence. Nicaragua offered to sign the treaty on 6 June if "US aggression totally ceases." Although they agreed to discuss arms levels, the Sandinistas continued to maintain that security concerns would prevent them from agreeing to any reduction. The Contadora countries, meanwhile, have become increasingly impatient with a process that has failed to produce results. [redacted]

they are considering abandoning it and moving the talks to the Organization of American States (OAS) or the United Nations if the deadlock persists. [redacted]

Country Perspectives

Honduras

Honduras has remained a firm opponent of the Sandinista regime [redacted] since the Sandinistas

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took power in 1979 [redacted] Tegucigalpa has been seriously troubled by the Sandinista military buildup, numerous border incidents, the transportation of arms to Salvadoran guerrillas across Honduran territory, and Nicaraguan support for Honduran subversive groups. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] Honduras also recognizes that its open political climate and new democratic institutions make it vulnerable to meddling by an entrenched Communist regime in Managua. In 1983 and 1984 Nicaragua infiltrated two groups of guerrillas into Honduras—totaling about 100 men—in an unsuccessful attempt to foment an insurgency. In 1985 smaller numbers of cadre reportedly infiltrated from Nicaragua to recruit and build a guerrilla infrastructure. [redacted]

[redacted] the Sandinistas have continued to train and arm up to several hundred Honduran leftists in Nicaragua. [redacted]

Lacking the military and security resources needed effectively to counter Nicaragua's border buildup and subversive efforts, Honduras has responded by supporting the anti-Sandinista insurgents. [redacted]

[redacted]

Since 1984, however, Tegucigalpa's support for the insurgency has been erratic and qualified, largely because of its belief the rebels are incapable of overthrowing the Sandinistas and doubts over the US commitment to support them. [redacted]

[redacted] Honduras has attempted to induce the United States to assume greater and more direct responsibility for the guerrillas' military progress. Over the past two years, government leaders have increasingly attempted to define the insurgency as strictly a US program. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] Honduran apprehensions were heightened [redacted] by the cutoff of US aid to the anti-Sandinistas and by Tegucigalpa's perception that they were making little military progress. In addition, press reporting [redacted]

[redacted] the government and raised doubts about the military's ability to counter escalating Sandinista incursions. [redacted]

[redacted] the Hondurans are concerned that the guerrillas could become more of a security threat than a defense buffer because of increasing numbers of Sandinista attacks and Nicaraguan refugees in the border area, as well as the growth in rebel troops—surpassing the strength of Honduras's own ground forces. [redacted]

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[Redacted]

Probably believing that its support for the insurgents has given it some leverage over the United States, Tegucigalpa has pressed for more economic aid and firmer security pledges. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Who Decides? US Embassy [Redacted] reporting indicates that the Honduran military high command is the dominant partner in government decision-making concerning Nicaragua. [Redacted]

[Redacted] although civilian and military leaders appear to agree on the benefits and risks of supporting the insurgency, the domestic consensus has been complicated by poor communication and mutual suspicion. [Redacted]

[Redacted] early in the Azcona administration the military excluded the President from most major decisions on cooperation with the rebels. The President's inability to control press statements by his

advisers—at times in contradiction to military statements—has not only given his administration an image of confusion and weakness, but has also reinforced the military's suspicions that some of Azcona's advisers are too leftist. [Redacted]

[Redacted] President Azcona and the military high command appear to have improved their coordination on policy toward Nicaragua and the insurgents. [Redacted]

[Redacted] key military commanders appear increasingly persuaded that Azcona's positions to a large extent parallel their own. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

We expect both sides will work hard to preserve this more cooperative relationship, realizing that their interests, at least in the short run, are best served by avoiding confrontations. Nevertheless, a number of issues—including differences over how to respond to subversive activities [Redacted]

[Redacted]—will continue to test this relationship. In addition, continued Nicaraguan border incursions or a decline in insurgent prospects probably will sharpen the policy debate in both civilian and military circles and could prompt the armed forces to seek to renew its exclusive control over policymaking concerning the rebels. [Redacted]

Likely Moves. We expect Honduras will threaten more forcefully to withhold cooperation with the insurgents, although it is unlikely to remove its support precipitously. [Redacted]

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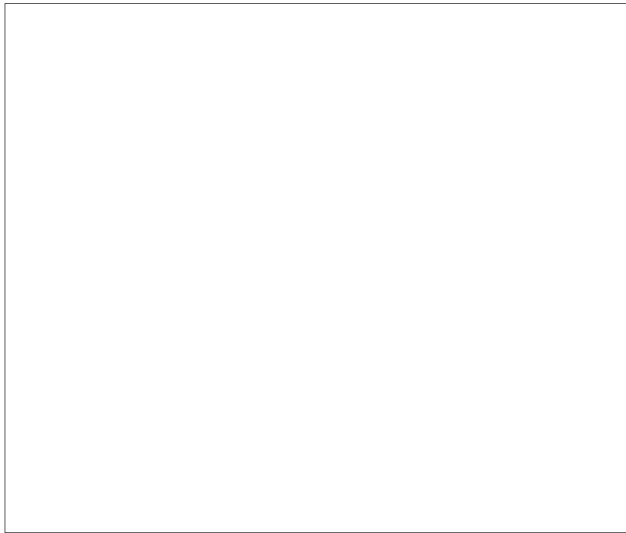
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Costa Rica

San Jose's policies toward Nicaragua have vacillated in recent years between confrontation and accommodation, but the balance now appears to have tipped toward a softer line. On the one hand, US Embassy reporting indicates that Nicaraguan cross-border incursions have fanned anti-Sandinista sentiment in Costa Rica and prompted sharp official protests. Since President Monge took office in 1982, Costa Rica has spoken out in diplomatic forums against Sandinista sponsorship of subversion in the region. On the other hand, Costa Rica's pacifist traditions and desire to avoid being seen as a surrogate for US policy led Monge to declare that San Jose must remain neutral in the Nicaraguan conflict.

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In tandem with its support for military pressure on Managua, we expect the Azcona administration to intensify efforts to achieve a Contadora treaty.

although Honduras believes a comprehensive and verifiable Contadora agreement will be difficult to achieve, it considers a negotiated settlement to be the most practical hope for long-term regional peace because the insurgents are not capable of overthrowing the Sandinista regime. Tegucigalpa is likely to try to keep up its behind-the-scenes pressure on Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Guatemala, which Honduras believes have not done their part to keep Contadora on an anti-Sandinista track, and often have left Tegucigalpa alone in its opposition to Managua.



President Arias—inaugurated in May 1986—has emphasized those aspects of Costa Rica's public position that call for reaching a bilateral agreement with Managua and restricting rebel military operations.

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San Jose's increasing disposition to reach a bilateral understanding with Managua is keyed to a series of factors that include changing views of anti-Sandinista insurgent prospects, shifts in Costa Rican public opinion, the stalemate in the Contadora talks, and a perceived need to appear more independent of Washington.

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Should it appear that the rebel cause has been damaged beyond repair, either because of decreased external support or military setbacks, Honduran fears would probably grow that they were about to be left with no hope of a multilateral peace agreement. Under this scenario, we believe Tegucigalpa would feel it had no choice but to threaten to withhold permanently all support if Washington did not take more direct responsibility for the insurgency. Failing that, and perhaps at the same time, Tegucigalpa would probably begin to distance itself from the conflict by working openly and seriously toward reaching a bilateral solution with Managua.

San Jose is now convinced that the Sandinista regime is too well entrenched to be ousted by the rebels. Its tolerance for the rebels also has been strained by allegations of their involvement in arms and drug smuggling on the border. Moreover, Costa Rica fears a prolonged conflict that ended with the collapse of the rebels would result in a massive influx of anti-Sandinista exiles that would seriously strain the country's already fragile economy. US Embassy reporting indicates government leaders have been able to draw some support and justification for their growing inclination for accommodation with the Sandinistas from

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public opinion polls that indicate that while most Costa Ricans oppose the regime in Managua they also do not want to become more directly involved in the conflict. [redacted]

Embassy reporting also suggests Costa Rica's disbelief that a comprehensive Contadora treaty can be engineered has made a bilateral deal with Managua more attractive. In early 1986 President Monge's decisions to normalize diplomatic relations with Nicaragua and request formation of a joint border commission reflected, in our judgment, Costa Rica's belief that it could not rely on multilateral solutions to protect its interests. [redacted]

US Embassy reports indicate that the attitudes of West European socialists and some Latin American governments have also been an important factor influencing San Jose's declaration of neutrality and its receptivity to bilateral talks. The Costa Ricans were particularly disappointed at the failure of the Latin democracies to back them when San Jose brought a complaint of a border clash with Nicaragua before the OAS last year. Costa Rica's governing National Liberation Party was so angered by Socialist International criticism of official complicity with anti-Sandinista attacks on Nicaragua in mid-1985 that some party leaders urged withdrawal from the organization. [redacted]

Who Decides? US Embassy reporting suggests President Arias plans to bring a stronger sense of direction and a more assertive style to the presidency than did his predecessor. President Monge often was willing to delegate authority in dealing with Managua to the foreign ministry and to the security ministry for contacts with the anti-Sandinistas. According to US Embassy reports, Arias is an introspective intellectual who depends on only a small inner circle of advisers. With greater need to retain control over decisionmaking, we expect Arias to try to keep a tight rein on the foreign ministry. US Embassy reports suggest that, while the new foreign minister was appointed by Arias primarily because of his pro-US views, he is not likely to be granted much autonomy. [redacted]

Likely Moves. We expect President Arias will try to stay on the fine line that allows him to maintain close ties to Washington but coexist with Managua. US Embassy reporting suggests Arias may believe that a more neutralist foreign policy could win more economic aid, investment, and tourism from West European and Latin American countries. Nevertheless, Costa Rica's need for US economic aid to help stabilize the economy is likely to prove an incentive for Arias to proceed cautiously. [redacted]

We expect continuing discrepancies between private remarks by government officials supporting US policy and their public statements. In private, Arias, like his predecessor, is likely to seek to reassure Washington that he understands its position. He told US officials in February, for example, that he would back lethal aid to the Nicaraguan rebels or even direct US military intervention if the Sandinistas did not respond to international pressure and accept a timetable for democratization and demilitarization. In addition, Arias repeatedly has assured the US Embassy that he prefers a comprehensive, rather than a bilateral, accord. In public, however, Arias has been critical of US policy and in April, while on an official visit to South America, again denounced US military aid to the insurgents. He is likely to continue to stress that political solutions to the regional conflict deserve priority. [redacted]

We believe Arias will proceed with negotiations for a bilateral agreement, especially if multilateral talks falter. From his perspective, he probably can justify such an accord on the basis of public opinion polls, a longstanding Costa Rican pacifist tradition, the lack of a military counterforce to Managua, and the chance to bolster his standing in Madrid and other European capitals. At the same time, Arias is likely to

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send messages to Washington that any changes are much less significant than may appear on the surface and do not signal a "fundamental" or "radical" shift in San Jose's policies. [redacted]

In our judgment, a formal bilateral agreement between Managua and San Jose is likely to lead to international pressure on Honduras to sign a similar accord and, at a minimum, to complications for insurgent military operations and resupply activities across the Costa Rican border. The proposed international border patrols probably would be small and face considerable difficulty monitoring the 300-kilometer border, but the Costa Ricans are likely to cooperate with such an international force [redacted]

[redacted] On the basis of Costa Rica's longstanding tradition of hospitality to political exiles, we think Arias is unlikely to agree to close insurgent political offices located in San Jose. [redacted]

Guatemala

US Embassy [redacted] reporting suggests President Cerezo believes his domestic standing and Guatemala's international position are best served by pursuing a vaguely defined policy of "active neutrality." He is convinced that, in order to gain the more visible regional role for Guatemala he seeks, he must avoid either open support or condemnation of Nicaragua or the anti-Sandinistas. [redacted]

[redacted] According to US Embassy reporting, Cerezo recognizes that Managua presents a threat, albeit limited in his judgment, to Guatemala's domestic security. [redacted] Cerezo's stance is based on a number of foreign policy currents:

- Guatemala's long-held sense that its size, population, and relative economic and military strength entitle it to play a leadership role in the region.
- A belief that a more neutral policy toward Nicaragua can more quickly end Guatemala's international isolation and secure foreign assistance.
- A desire to avoid offending Mexico, its major petroleum supplier.

- A belief that the Guatemalan insurgents' use of Mexican territory is a more important factor for their survival than is support provided by Nicaragua. [redacted]

Guatemalan officials have told the US Embassy they agree in principle with most positions held by fellow Core Four members, but that Cerezo is intent on maintaining a separate and distinct role for their country. Guatemala, for example, has not participated in most Core Four strategy sessions since Cerezo's inauguration. US Embassy reports suggest that Cerezo views his proposal for a Central American parliament primarily as a means to project Guatemala's role and diminish the influence of the Contadora countries in the region. [redacted]

Who Decides? US Embassy [redacted] reporting indicates President Cerezo has clear ideas about the tone and direction of Guatemala's foreign policy and has moved quickly to assert policy leadership. Nevertheless, his freedom of action is circumscribed by the need to accommodate the interests of the military. [redacted] the military wants to avoid direct involvement in the regional conflict while opposing moves to develop friendly relations with Managua. Thus far, according to US [redacted]

[redacted] initiatives, and sees his policies as little more than public posturing that could help ease Guatemala's isolation and keep pressure on the Sandinistas. [redacted]

Cerezo's policy leadership has also been complicated by competing voices within the foreign ministry. A lack of coordination often has resulted in the issuance of conflicting public statements, according to US Embassy reports. In March 1986, for example, at a time when President Cerezo was attempting to avoid being drawn into the debate over the US Congressional vote on aid to the anti-Sandinistas, several foreign ministry officials were making comments to

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the press expressing Guatemalan opposition to aid to the insurgents. The US Embassy expects, and we agree, that this pattern is likely to continue and that debates within the government over policy are likely to find their way into the public arena. [redacted]

Likely Moves. In our judgment, Cerezo is likely to remain committed to a regional policy that attempts to gain greater prestige for Guatemala by remaining distant from attempts to pressure Nicaragua. Cerezo probably will adopt a slightly more cooperative position in the Core Four group in the Contadora talks, but he is unlikely to fully identify with it. In discussions with US officials, we believe Cerezo will continue to say he recognizes the Nicaraguan regional security threat, but he is likely to argue that diplomatic pressure is a more effective way to deal with Managua. [redacted]

Nor do we expect Cerezo to see any advantage to altering his position toward the anti-Sandinistas. In public, he probably will attempt to avoid specific reference to the rebels while stressing the need for a regional and nonmilitary solution to the conflict. At the same time, however, he is likely to continue to believe [redacted]

[redacted] that Managua will not make concessions unless militarily pressured to do so. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] If other regional governments, such as Venezuela and El Salvador, were to extend more aid to the anti-Sandinistas, we believe Cerezo's government would be more likely to follow suit. [redacted]

El Salvador

El Salvador remains the most vocal critic of Nicaragua in the region. Press and US Embassy reporting indicates that since his election in 1984 President Duarte has intensified this criticism of Managua,

scoring the regime for attempting to export its revolution to the region and for failing to restore civil liberties at home. In public forums, Duarte has been openly supportive of US policy toward Nicaragua, although his statements have endorsed US aid to the anti-Sandinistas only indirectly. [redacted]

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[redacted]

In our judgment, El Salvador's primary goal in its policy toward Nicaragua has been, limiting and, ultimately, eliminating Sandinista support—including training, resupply, and funding—for El Salvador's leftist rebels. Duarte has supported the need for a Contadora agreement but believes that a Marxist government in Managua will not honor a treaty commitment to nonintervention, according to US Embassy reporting. Duarte apparently believes multilateral pressure can focus attention on Nicaragua's intransigence and could force the Sandinistas to make at least cosmetic changes at home. He fears, however, that the newly elected governments in Honduras, Guatemala, and Costa Rica lack the long-term resolve needed to oppose the Sandinistas and that San Salvador could be left politically isolated as the region's only staunch opponent of the Sandinista regime. [redacted]

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Who Decides? US Embassy [redacted] reporting indicates that, although President Duarte and his close advisers make policy toward Nicaragua and the anti-Sandinistas, they pay close heed to the attitudes and concerns of the Salvadoran military. [redacted]

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[redacted] Some, like armed forces chief Blandon and Air Force chief Bustillo, may in fact favor even more dramatic action, such as breaking diplomatic relations. The military has been suspicious of negotiations with the Salvadoran rebels, but the President reportedly has been able to convince Army

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officers that his call for simultaneous Salvadoran and Nicaraguan negotiations has put greater pressure on the Sandinistas. [redacted]

Likely Moves. We see little likelihood that President Duarte-or the military high command will alter substantially their positions toward Nicaragua or the anti-Sandinistas. We believe Duarte will continue publicly to criticize the Sandinistas' domestic and regional policies, while working to build Core Four unity. Nevertheless, Salvadoran officials probably will continue to stop short of publicly endorsing US military aid to the anti-Sandinistas. [redacted]

[redacted] Duarte is concerned such a move would undermine his case that El Salvador is a victim of external aggression in the form of Nicaraguan support for Salvadoran rebels. [redacted]

US Embassy reports suggest Duarte is unlikely to adopt a softer line toward Nicaragua, not only because of Salvadoran military pressure and his government's need for US aid, but also because of his personal convictions. However, in our view, he might publicly temper, but not abandon, his outspoken stance if other Core Four governments moved to accommodate the Sandinistas. We see little prospect that El Salvador under Duarte would see any advantage in seeking a bilateral agreement with Managua. [redacted]

New Peace Initiatives

Recently, the Core Four nations have suggested some new ideas designed to capture the political initiative, demonstrate their flexibility, and pressure Nicaragua. In our view, the proposals are unlikely to lead to Nicaraguan concessions. Nevertheless, these proposals potentially offer a means to increase marginally Managua's isolation in the region and perhaps influence other countries to pressure the Sandinistas. [redacted]

President Duarte's proposal to reopen talks with the Salvadoran rebels if Nicaragua would begin talks with the anti-Sandinistas was presented as a step to comply with the Contadora principle of national reconciliation. Backed by other Core Four leaders, it was timed to be of specific use to US policy goals. Although Duarte gained a slight propaganda advantage from Managua's immediate rejection of the offer, in our view, the initiative has not put effective pressure on the Sandinistas because it has not been consistently reiterated by El Salvador or the Core Four, nor presented formally to the Contadora group. [redacted]

President Cerezo of Guatemala hopes his proposal for a Central American parliament, which has won Contadora endorsement, can put pressure on Nicaragua to hold elections for the body, supervised by independent observers. Cerezo has told US officials he believes Nicaragua will be forced to open up its political system or face international isolation. In our view, however, the proposal may provide opportunities for Managua to project a superficial image of cooperation at little cost. Even if Nicaragua accepts the election proposal, it is likely to adopt campaign rules similar to those used in the Sandinista election of 1984, which limited political competition. Moreover, the parliament's likely diverse political complexion probably would diminish its potential to adopt resolutions embarrassing to Managua. [redacted]

Both Cerezo and Arias have told US officials they hope to use a Central American summit meeting—now scheduled to be held in Guatemala in May—to propose a timetable for democratization in Nicaragua. Spelling out a political timetable could help Core Four efforts to define standards by which implementation of Contadora commitments could be judged. Nevertheless, Nicaragua probably would reject the idea as another Core Four attempt to interfere in its internal affairs, while again asserting that it would relax political restrictions if US "aggression" ceased. [redacted]

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Regional Prospects and Implications

We expect that the Core Four as a whole will focus their policies toward Nicaragua on achieving a comprehensive peace treaty. [redacted]

[redacted] the governments, convinced Nicaragua will never agree to a treaty that fully implements Contadora objectives, believe their best strategy is to attempt to put the onus on the Sandinistas by presenting a draft they have jointly approved and by announcing their willingness to sign it. US Embassy reporting indicates they believe they have the Nicaraguans on the defensive as a result of the Sandinistas' behavior in the 5-7 April Contadora meeting in Panama. Moreover, conversations between Core Four officials and US diplomats indicate the growing disposition of the four governments not to be painted as the obstacles to agreement. [redacted]

Core Four unity will probably be tentative and increasingly tested, as it has been previously, by Contadora pressures to make compromises in the draft treaty, Costa Rica's potential bilateralism, and Guatemala's aloofness. Moreover, as a group, the Core Four are growing less enthusiastic about the anti-Sandinista insurgents and are increasingly likely to view them as a burden if the guerrillas do not make military progress. Aid to the insurgents is almost certain to remain exclusively a subject of national rather than regional policy, and cooperation among Core Four members on this issue is unlikely. [redacted]

In our view, there is likely to be a continued tendency of Core Four leaders [redacted]

[redacted] to criticize or distance themselves from some US policies in public statements. As in the past, these differences will largely reflect the sensitivity of Central American leaders to the prevailing international environment, which opposes military pressure on the Sandinistas. To a lesser extent, statements to the press that criticize US policy also may reflect dissenting voices or lack of coordination in their foreign policy establishments. [redacted]

In the absence of a Contadora agreement, we believe US policies and anti-Sandinista military prospects will be key variables in shaping Core Four attitudes

over the next year. Although all Core Four countries are likely to resist US efforts to secure their public endorsement of military aid for the insurgents, they all—especially Honduras and El Salvador—probably look upon US aid to the guerrillas as a test of US resolve. Costa Rica, however, probably will continue to express misgivings about such aid publicly and is unlikely to halt its steps to disengage from the conflict. Tangible insurgent progress almost certainly would stiffen Honduran resolve not to reach an accommodation with Managua, even if the Sandinistas were to retaliate for increased activities through border violence. Lack of progress, however, is likely to increase Honduran uncertainty and to cause new tensions with the United States and the guerrillas. [redacted]

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On balance, a slight shift in Core Four policies toward Nicaragua and the insurgents that poses problems for US interests appears to have taken place, and we believe the chances are greater for an erosion of support for US policies than for an increase in backing for them. Costa Rica's new President, for example, appears more committed to disengagement than did his predecessor. Guatemala's "active neutrality" probably will translate into more criticism of US policy, a reluctance to contribute to Core Four unity, and the possible emergence of the Central American parliament as a distraction. The Hondurans have shown themselves willing to disrupt insurgent activities if they view Tegucigalpa's needs as not being adequately considered. [redacted]

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Because the Core Four will continue to feel pressure from the Contadora mediators to show flexibility, we doubt they can achieve a draft treaty that meets all US policy objectives. In fact, the minimum treaty requirements acceptable to the Core Four probably fall considerably short of US goals. A stronger draft treaty is probably unlikely without diplomatic assistance from Washington to help redraft proposals and mobilize Contadora support. A Costa Rican bilateral accord with Nicaragua—if concluded before a multi-lateral treaty—would shift the focus of negotiations

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away from a regional settlement, complicate insurgent resupply, and subject Washington to strong pressure to respect such an agreement.

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In the event the Core Four agree to sign a regional treaty lacking strong arms control, verification, and democratization provisions, we believe Nicaragua could also sign, as all sides try to avoid being blamed for being the obstacle to a settlement. The Sandinistas might calculate that any treaty-imposed restraints on their policies would only last five years—the projected duration of the agreement—while allowing them to concentrate on destroying the insurgent forces. The Nicaraguans may condition their final ratification of the document on US agreement to respect it, judging that the United States eventually would be forced to accept any treaty that all the Central American governments have agreed to. They almost certainly would attempt to draw out subsequent negotiations on arms levels and verification, believing international pressure on Honduras and the United States would force them to end their aid immediately to the anti-Sandinista insurgents. In our view, a weak treaty would amount to international protection for the consolidation of a Marxist-Leninist state in Central America. It could freeze the regional arms balance in Managua's favor—the Sandinistas already have publicly asserted they will not surrender any of their arms. It would, meanwhile, restrict US military aid to El Salvador in its war against the Communist insurgents while Managua, in our judgment, would continue to supply some assistance to the Salvadoran rebels. The Contadora mediators, having successfully brokered a reduction in regional tensions, probably would be reluctant to abandon the accord in the event that the Sandinistas refused to relax their domestic control.

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Appendix A

Status of the Contadora Peace Talks

The Contadora talks have made only halting progress since they began in January 1983 under the mediation of Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, and Panama. The Core Four, although often disunited, have generally focused on obtaining a multilateral treaty that would address all key issues simultaneously—including support for subversion, arms and troop levels, foreign military advisers, and internal democracy—with international verification of compliance. Nicaragua's strategy has centered on restricting the US military role in the region, minimizing the impact of the treaty on its arms levels or internal policies, and attempting to give priority to bilateral border agreements. []

[] the Contadora mediators have been primarily concerned with avoiding an escalation of tensions that they believe could lead to a US intervention. Such a development, they believe, would complicate relations with Washington, hand leftists at home a political issue, and promote even greater regional instability. Statements by the Contadora parties to US officials indicate that their priority has been to keep Nicaragua in the talks and to reach an agreement promptly. They believe that even an imperfect treaty or one that resolves only some issues is preferable to no agreement. On balance, we believe the group's compromise proposals have tended to favor Managua's positions for this reason. In addition, the mediators may have attempted to soften some Core Four proposals out of a traditional Latin American reticence to accept treaties that sacrifice sovereignty. []

The Contadora group has assumed an active mediation role, formulating its own treaty drafts based on a 21-point "Document of Objectives" that all parties signed in September 1983. Nicaragua announced that it was ready to sign a draft proposed in September 1984, but conditioned its acceptance on the exclusion of any changes. The Core Four countries demanded more talks to remedy what they saw as inadequate

treatment of security and verification issues in the draft, a deficiency that the mediators eventually recognized. []

Nicaragua's Boycott Tactics

Subsequent negotiations have been interrupted by Nicaragua on several occasions. Usually, the mediators have revived the talks by making concessions to meet Sandinista demands. Managua bolted the talks in June 1985, for example, protesting that the Contadora should focus on the US economic embargo and resumption of aid to the insurgents. Nicaragua also proposed enlargement of the Contadora group in an attempt to include South American countries that it believed would favor its interests. These countries—Brazil, Peru, Argentina, and Uruguay—formed a "support group" in August, with Contadora concurrence. The mediators used the tactic of meeting individually with the Central Americans to pressure them to make concessions, resulting in a new treaty draft in September 1985 (see table). []

Objecting to some proposed changes in the 1985 draft, the Sandinistas refused to negotiate and asked for a six-month suspension of the treaty talks. Managua insisted that the United States cease "aggression" and formally agree to support a Contadora agreement as preconditions for negotiations. In January 1986 the Contadora countries and the support group attempted to break the impasse at their meeting in Caraballeda, Venezuela. They supported US-Nicaraguan bilateral talks—a key Sandinista demand—and called for a series of simultaneous steps to achieve peace. US Embassy reports indicated that the mediators intended to defer resumption of negotiations on the draft treaty while pressuring for US and Central American gestures to improve the political climate for talks. []

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Key Provisions of the September 1985 Treaty Draft ^a

Issue	Proposals of the Contadora Mediators	Core Four Position	Remarks
Simultaneous treatment of all issues	Immediate ban on support to insurgent groups and freeze on arms imports upon signature; arms levels to be negotiated within three months after signature; verification mechanism may be negotiated after signature.	Proposes to negotiate all issues before signature.	Staggered process means a lack of simultaneity; Nicaragua likely to draw out negotiations on arms and troop levels while attempting to defeat the insurgents.
National reconciliation	Calls for measures to improve democratic systems; free access to periodic electoral process; encourages national reconciliation, "within existing national laws."	Believes it is politically unrealistic to insist on Nicaraguan talks with anti-Sandinista insurgents.	Managua interprets this to mean it can refuse to negotiate with its armed opponents, and Contadora does not insist otherwise.
Arms and troop ceilings	Arms limits to be recommended by verification commission within 60 days based on inventories provided by parties 15 days after signing; additional 30 days for parties to agree on recommendations and set limits and schedules for reduction.	Prefers negotiation of arms and troop levels before signature; proposals would require Nicaraguan cuts.	Nicaragua proposes to limit only "offensive" weapons; a freeze would give treaty sanction to a regional arms imbalance in Nicaragua's favor.
Foreign/military security advisers	Each country to submit census of advisers within 15 days after signing; foreign military advisers and other personnel in military, paramilitary, and security activities to leave within 180 days; limits to be set on other military advisers with technical duties.	Accepts draft.	Regime has always claimed much lower number of Cubans than Intelligence Community estimates; likely to falsify census; have provided some Cubans with Nicaraguan identities; no constraints on civilian advisers with military capabilities.
Military exercises	Permits one foreign military exercise per year with view to elimination; sets limits on participants and 15-day length; requires 90 days' prior notice; prohibition to take effect once arms and troop ceilings are set; requires 30-day notification for national maneuvers.	Proposes limits on size and duration of foreign maneuvers within 30 km of the border; no limits outside the border zone.	Managua insists on total elimination of US exercises; treaty theoretically sanctions Nicaraguan exercises with Cuban or Soviet forces.
Foreign bases	Foreign military bases or schools to be proscribed; existing bases to be dismantled six months after signing.	Accepts draft.	Sandinistas claim there are no such bases in Nicaragua.
Verification	Upon signature, Contadora will propose membership of commission to be approved by parties.	Believes provisions on verification are weak and intends to strengthen before signature.	Verification likely to prove difficult, particularly on political provisions; parties may agree to non-Latin American troops, which would establish a hemispheric precedent.

^a Issues of arms levels, military maneuvers, and verification were still under discussion last fall when Nicaragua called for a temporary suspension of the talks.



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New Pressure for a Treaty

The Contadora countries reversed course at a meeting in Panama in early April, again pushing for a final round of treaty talks, despite Nicaragua's refusal to negotiate. In our view, this change reflected the strong US and Core Four stance in favor of negotiations and the mediators' belief that progress was necessary to forestall renewal of US aid to the anti-Sandinistas. The mediators declared that only two issues remained to be resolved—arms control and military maneuvers—and imposed a 6 June deadline for completion of the treaty. US Embassy reports indicate that the Contadora group is likely to mount heavy pressure for signature of the treaty, arguing that details on verification and "implementation" can be worked out later.



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Appendix B

Nicaragua's Regional Strategy

Since they came to power in 1979, the Sandinistas have followed a strategy designed to induce their neighbors to reach an accommodation with their revolutionary government. In our judgment, Nicaragua's immediate foreign policy goal is to generate internal and external pressures on Honduras and Costa Rica that would deny safehaven and end their assistance to the anti-Sandinista insurgents. The Sandinistas' medium-term objective is to coerce the other Central American governments into taking a more benign attitude toward Nicaragua and into reducing their support for US policies. [redacted]

Nicaragua has preferred a bilateral approach to resolution of problems with its neighbors, in our view, because it does not want a comprehensive accord that could interfere with its domestic policies and military posture. Once involved in a multilateral peace process, however, the Sandinistas saw opportunities to turn it to their advantage. They probably offered to sign the Contadora-proposed treaty draft of September 1984 because its provisions were relatively weak and they saw it as a means of checking US military activities in the region. At the same time, they tried to cut a bilateral deal with the United States—the Manzanillo talks—that would obviate the need for a regional solution. Managua became intransigent after the treaty draft was modified to take account of some Core Four objections. Nicaragua was especially dissatisfied with provisions that permitted international military maneuvers and that seemed to endorse talks with the anti-Sandinista insurgents, [redacted]

[redacted] Moreover, the breakoff of talks with the United States—along with US statements insisting on treaty verification and the need for dialogue with the Contras—probably persuaded the Sandinistas that Washington was unwilling to be bound by a weak regional settlement. Given these circumstances, the Sandinistas refocused attention on their bilateral strategy. Although Managua was largely successful in early 1986—it stalled the regional talks, rekindled interest in a border agreement with Costa Rica, and gained Contadora endorsement for a renewal of the

Manzanillo talks—the renewed push for a treaty by the Contadora countries, the Core Four, and the United States has forced Managua to return to the multilateral forum. [redacted]

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The Sandinistas probably see the new democratic governments in the region as a volatile mix of increased challenges and new opportunities. [redacted]

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Costa Rica

The Sandinistas almost certainly view the Costa Ricans as the most vulnerable of their neighbors because they lack a military and because Costa Rican public opinion has shown concern over potential hostilities with Managua and a preference for official neutrality in the regional conflict. Although Nicaragua attaches priority to concluding a border agreement in pursuit of its larger strategy, we believe Managua may pursue a tough line in the negotiations—without jeopardizing them—because of perceptions of Costa Rican weakness. Nicaragua probably would seek to avoid border incidents that could damage prospects for an agreement, but it is likely to continue its efforts to train and arm Costa Rican Communists, some of whom have fought alongside Sandinista forces in Nicaragua. [redacted]

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Guatemala

The Sandinistas probably believe they can cultivate President Cerezo and turn his policy of “active neutrality” to their advantage. In our view, Nicaragua has welcomed Cerezo's proposal for a Central American parliament as a way to divert attention from discussions of a multilateral treaty. Managua will be wary of Cerezo's prodemocratic stance, and, should his efforts begin to affect the regime adversely, it will almost certainly raise questions about Guatemala's alleged neutrality and cast Cerezo as a lackey of Washington. We do not expect the Sandinistas to

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decrease their support to the Guatemalan insurgents, probably calculating that it is sufficiently clandestine and modest to avoid a Guatemalan response. [redacted]

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Honduras

In our view, the Sandinistas probably calculate that greater Nicaraguan military successes against the rebels—and the resulting spillover of combat and refugees into Honduras—will erode Tegucigalpa’s support for the insurgents. [redacted]

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[redacted]

[redacted] On several occasions in the past, Nicaragua has attempted to lay the groundwork for a rural insurgency in Honduras, and we believe that at a minimum the regime will continue to give military training to Honduran radicals. [redacted]

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El Salvador

Nicaragua probably sees little prospect for improved relations with El Salvador. The Sandinistas may renew offers to meet with President Duarte as part of their regional strategy, but they are unlikely to make any commitments that would compromise their support of the Salvadoran insurgents. The Sandinistas are almost certain to continue to resist efforts to establish a linkage between government-insurgent dialogue in El Salvador and their own situation. [redacted]

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[redacted] Nicaragua has again requested the Salvadoran insurgents to lower their profile in Managua, but this action has not affected the command and control apparatus that the guerrillas maintain in Nicaragua. Moreover, the discovery in Honduras last December of a vehicle carrying munitions and communications gear to El Salvador [redacted]

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[redacted] are indications that the Sandinistas are continuing to provide the rebels with material aid. [redacted]

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