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Eden Pastora's hard choices — interview

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"To have the ability and moral authority to democratize the Sandinista government, we must first democratize the opposition."

This was one of the key points made by Nicaraguan insurgent leader Edén Pastora Gómez in an exclusive interview with The Christian Science Monitor and in an ensuing series of short press conferences here.

The sessions were held at the Caracas hospital where he is recovering from a May 30 bomb attempt on his life — the guest of former Venezuelan President and Socialist International leader Carlos Andrés Pérez.

Edén Pastora returned to this theme several times as the crux of his independent position. It is a position that has pitted him against both the government of Nicaragua and the Reagan administration. And it now forces Pastora and his followers to make some very difficult choices.



Pastora: Nicaragua must be democratized

The Democratic Revolutionary Alliance (ARDE), Pastora's guerrilla group operating on the Costa Rican-Nicaraguan border, has been strapped for funds since, according to press reports, the CIA stopped financing it more than a month ago. The agency has cut off funds in an attempt to force ARDE to unite with the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN), the other anti-Sandinista guerrilla group, which is dominated by former supporters of dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle. The FDN operates in the Honduran-Nicaraguan border area.

Pastora and his followers, however, have refused to unite with the FDN unless it is purged of its pro-Somocista and right-wing leadership. In spite of ARDE's bleak financial situation, Pastora and his closest advisers have emerged from several days of bedside conferences in the Caracas hospital still saying they are determined that ARDE will not unite with an unpurged FDN.

What ARDE will do has not yet been fully decided.

But this correspondent's long discussions with ARDE leaders and the interview with Pastora himself show that some general policy directions are emerging.

ARDE will continue to pursue its main goal of pushing the ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) toward more democratization and fewer ties to the Soviet bloc — a return to what ARDE perceives as the "goals" of the Sandinista revolution.

Pastora says that he will attempt to do so by "political means." If this fails, he says, he will "go back to the mountains" to continue fighting.

A clue as to what "political means" might be is given by top Pastora adviser Carlos Coronel Kautz, a former Sandinista minister of fisheries and guerrilla leader who fought with Pastora on the southern front in the Sandinista struggle against Somoza.

"The Americans want to turn Edén into a counter-revolutionary," he says, "and that is something no one can do. The great weakness of the FSLN is that because of, among other things, factional differences, it has never been able to really define what Sandinismo is. However, Jaime Wheelock, Humberto Ortega, Daniel Ortega [all members of the Sandinistas' FSLN Directorate], and Edén Pastora are the vital ingredients of the Sandinista synthesis."

This statement fits in with the opinion of many analysts in Latin America and in Washington: that negotiations with the less radical members of the FSLN Directorate are a strong possibility on Pastora's agenda. The aim would be to reunite with the Sandinista front after some of its more radical elements had been removed from the top leadership.

All indications are, however, that Pastora would want such an arrangement only if a general democratization and moderation of the revolution accompanied a leadership reshuffle.

This view is reinforced by the comments of another top Pastora adviser, Donald Castillo Rivas, a leading Nicaraguan intellectual: "The most important thing is that the Sandinistas themselves get rid of some of the most orthodox Marxist-Leninist sectors, the sectors least interested in an authentically national revolution. We, Edén's group, should draw closer to the responsible sectors of the FSLN."

Some analysts believe that the powerful and politically pragmatic Ortega brothers would find a rapprochement with Edén Pastora as good a reason as any to get rid of fellow directorate members Tomás Borge Martínez and Ballardo Arce Castano. Borge and Arce are the leaders of a more radical Sandinista faction and the Ortega brothers' main rivals in the struggle for political predominance.

As Pastora himself says, "In the Managua government there are many different currents, some of them democratic. . . . If I could send a message to the *comandantes*, it would be that they should reflect on how peace can be brought to Nicaragua and to the region."

He goes on to cite differences between his group and the Honduras-based FDN guerrillas.

"We are Sandinistas. We support revolutionary changes. We support the gains already made by the Nicaraguan revolution. We are not interested in overthrowing the government in Managua for the sake of overthrowing it. We want rather to democratize the Sandinista revolution."

"Managua," says Pastora, "should look for a solution within Nicaragua with us, the Nicaraguans. But the problem is that there is a wing of the opposition [in Hon-