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# CIA, pope and liberals take aim at Sandinistas

By HARRY FRIED

Fighting in northern Nicaragua along the Honduran border has escalated as U.S.-backed counterrevolutionary forces based in Honduras appear to be attempting to establish "liberated zones" inside Nicaraguan territory.

Sandinista military spokespersons charged last week that a group of 900 counterrevolutionaries attempted to take over the area of Jalapa, Nueva Segovia, near the Honduran border. Most were driven back into Honduran territory.

Exposés of the Reagan administration's ongoing efforts to overthrow the Sandinista government, meanwhile, have made this operation the most overt "covert" CIA action in that institution's history. Recently, the defection of an Argentine intelligence agent has brought to light more details of the U.S. role in the counterrevolutionary attacks.

These revelations have provoked new domestic challenges to U.S. destabilization of Nicaragua on the congressional and judicial fronts. Nevertheless, the White House has given no indication that it intends to let up on its campaign to kindle the fires of war in the border region, which some observers fear could become the flashpoint of a regional Central American conflagration.

The external pressure on Nicaragua, at the same time, has increasingly polarized the internal political situation. The majority of Nicaraguans have rallied around their embattled revolution; but some liberal bourgeois figures, critical of emergency measures that restrict civil liberties, are withdrawing their tentative support of the Sandinista government. The most recent example of this was the resignation of Nicaraguan Ambassador to the U.S. Francisco Fiallos Navarro last weekend. While criticizing Reagan policy toward his country, Fiallos charged that Nicaragua was in danger of "going from a rightist dictatorship to a leftist dictatorship."

Pope John Paul 2 is also doing his part to sow internal rifts, by refusing to visit Nicaragua on his upcoming Central America tour next spring unless Nicaraguan priests resign from their government posts. The pope's projected visit has also set off a battle between the Catholic hierarchy and the government over who would be in charge of the pontiff's itinerary.

Fiallos, the country's fourth ambassador to Washington since the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) defeated dictator Anastasio Somoza three-and-one-half years ago, said he was leaving the post because of political differences with the FSLN leadership.

One week earlier, an interview Fiallos had granted to the opposition Nicaraguan daily *La Prensa* was censored in Nicaragua. "I decided that if they wouldn't let them print it, I would resign," he said in a press conference. In the interview Fiallos criticized the U.S. policy of destabilization of the Sandinista government and suggested that in order for Nicaragua to confront the threat, internal changes must take place. Such changes, he suggested, should include elections and an end to press censorship.

Fiallos' resignation is reminiscent of the exit just over a year ago of Nicaragua's previous ambassador to the U.S., banker Arturo Cruz. He has since worked with those anti-Sandinistas who, grouped around Eden Pastora ("Commander Zero") and Alfonso Robelo, have condemned both the FSLN leadership for being too radical and the Reagan administration for supporting ex-Somoza guardsmen. In their analysis, the Reagan policy further "radicalizes" the FSLN.

The revelations of an Argentine intelligence operative involved in anti-Sandinista activities meanwhile added new bits of information to the now irrefutable body of evidence that the CIA is spearheading the attacks on the Nicaraguan revolution.

In late October, Hector Frances of Argentina's "Intelligence Battalion 601"—the Argentine army intelligence agency—left San Jose, Costa Rica, where he had been based for several months. A few weeks later Frances appeared on Mexican television explaining that he had been part of an international plan to overthrow the Nicaraguan government.

Frances' declarations indicate that while Honduras has been the main base of ex-Somoza guardsmen, Costa Rica is also playing a key role in the CIA-sponsored conspiracy. The ex-intelligence agent told of his many contacts, describing a meeting in San Jose in early 1982 with a U.S. businessman and two Costa Rican businessmen.

**'OVERTHROW THE BASTARDS'**

The U.S. citizen, Nat Hemrick of North Carolina, was named by Frances as a key Washington contact for the anti-Sandinista groups. Hemrick, interviewed by the Washington Post, which also published details of Frances' story, admitted "knowing and liking" New Right Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), and also stated that he had a lumber company with operations in Central America. Though he denied any tie to the Nicaraguan counterrevolution, he did note: "I sympathize with them and I empathize with them and I hope they overthrow the bastards."

The Costa Rican businessmen were leading right-wing figures associated with the "Free Costa Rica Movement." The topic of discussion, according to Frances, was how to set up an incident to make it appear that the Sandinistas were involved in terrorist activities in Costa Rica. Such incidents would provide a pretext for the Costa Rican government to invite foreign troops to "defend" it from the Sandinistas.

Just such an incident took place in late July 1982, when Costa Rican authorities accused officials of the Nicaraguan embassy in San Jose of responsibility in the bombing of the Honduran airlines office. Since then relations between Nicaragua and Costa Rica have grown increasingly tense.

In the wake of several weeks of continuing revelations concerning the U.S.-sponsored paramilitary activity in Honduras, there has been speculation as to whether U.S. policy is shifting.

In late November the Honduran government indicated that the Somocista training camps along the Nicaraguan border were being dismantled. A Dec. 3 Washington Post story suggests that there have been significant movements of the counterrevolutionary forces. But while Honduran officials have claimed that most of the counterrevolutionaries have entered Nicaragua, it is doubtful that they will cease operating out of bases in Honduras. Without the collaboration of the Honduran authorities any large-scale push on the part of the "contras" into Nicaraguan territory would ultimately prove suicidal.

While there appear to be serious contradictions within the Reagan administration on the question of how best to overthrow the Nicaraguan government, there is no indication that the administration is about to cut off funding for the anti-Sandinista groups. Certain sectors of the administration, however, appear to be pushing for a more long-range strategy combining economic and diplomatic pressure with continuing military incursions.

Reacting to the reports of heavy U.S. involvement, the House debated on Dec. 8 legislation which would cut off U.S. funding for paramilitary operations directed against Nicaragua. Introduced by Rep. Tom Harkin (D-Ia.), the amendment to the defense budget stipulated that no funds could be used by the Defense Department or the CIA to militarily support "any group or individual, not part of a country's armed forces, for the purpose of assisting that group or individual in carrying out military activities in or against Nicaragua."

The amendment was not voted on, however, as Edward Boland (D-Mass.), chair of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, introduced a weaker alternate amendment. The Boland amendment, which passed 411-0, calls for no U.S. funding to paramilitary forces "for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua or provoking a military exchange between Nicaragua and Honduras." This language does not conflict with the Reagan administration's recently-stated aim to "harass" but not overthrow the Sandinista government, and to interdict supposed arms shipments from Nicaragua to Salvadoran revolutionaries.

House liberals view the amendment as a positive, albeit limited and loophole-ridden, step. Michael Barnes (D-Md.), chairman of the subcommittee on inter-American affairs, noted that "The House of Representatives made clear that the United States should not be in the business of overthrowing governments or starting wars."

Yet while the Reagan administration has publicly insisted that the \$19 million is not meant to overthrow the Nicaraguan government, Enrique Bermudez, widely believed to be one of the chief beneficiaries, recently refuted that view. The same day the House passed the Boland amendment, Bermudez, the military head of the counterrevolutionary Nicaraguan Democratic Force, denied that his group is working for the limited U.S.-stated objective of intercepting arms. "We are Nicaraguans," he said, "and our objective is to overthrow the communists and install a democratic government in our country."

The increasingly frequent border incursions from Honduras by Nicaraguan "contras" have meant kidnaping, rape, torture and murder for the hundreds of Nicaraguan border-area residents who have been victims of these attacks.

On Nov. 30 a lawsuit was introduced in the U.S. District Court in the District of Columbia on behalf of seven Nicaraguan citizens who have suffered directly from the attacks, and three U.S. citizens, including two Florida residents and one member of Congress. The suit, which is being handled by the Center for

Constitutional Rights (CCR) and the National Lawyers Guild, names as defendants 10 top U.S. officials, including Reagan, Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger; 10 leading Nicaraguan and Cuban counterrevolutionaries, including Bermudez; and eight right-wing Nicaraguan and Cuban terrorist organizations.

The seven Nicaraguans are suing for personal damages which have resulted from attacks over the Honduran border. Under the rarely used Alien Tort Claims Act, a foreigner can sue in a U.S. court for acts (assault, torture, rape, murder, etc.) committed outside the U.S. if he or she has reason to believe that those responsible for the violent action are residing in the U.S. Thus the suit charges a conspiracy among all the defendants to organize and direct violence against Nicaragua and its people.

The two Florida residents are suing to remove counterrevolutionary training camps from their state. Rep. Ronald Dellums (D-Calif) is suing on the basis of the Neutrality Act, which the Florida camps violate, as well as on the basis of his constitutional right as a member of Congress to participate in the decision to go to war, which he alleges has been violated.

During the first two weeks of December one of the Nicaraguan plaintiffs, Dr. Myrna Cunningham, was in the U.S., where she visited several major East Coast cities. Dr. Cunningham, of Miskito and Creole background, was kidnaped, beaten and raped in December 1981 by a band of ex-National Guardsmen and Miskito counterrevolutionaries operating out of Honduras.