

RED
E-22

WASHINGTON POST
23 MARCH 1983

JACK ANDERSON

New Civil War About to Start In Nicaragua

Another civil war is about to explode in Nicaragua, less than four years after Sandinista guerrillas overthrew the U.S.-backed dictator, Anastasio Somoza.

Thousands of well-armed and trained anti-Sandinista rebels have infiltrated northern Nicaragua, and their leaders say they are ready to launch an offensive against the Managua regime. They say they believe their chances of success are excellent.

Coordinated with this military action, exile leaders of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN) plan a diplomatic move designed to give their cause international credibility.

They intend to create a state within a state—a "Free Nicaragua"—in the area that comes under their control.

By moving into Nicaragua from their sanctuaries in neighboring Honduras, the FDN units have already discarded the image of a futile exile movement.

Setting up a rival government within Nicaragua's borders would be

the next step in the FDN's quest for recognition.

My associate Jon Lee Anderson interviewed FDN leaders in Washington and Miami. They emphasized what they feel are crucial points about their movement:

- Though the core of the FDN's fighting strength is made up of former members of Somoza's defeated National Guard, people from all sides of the political spectrum have joined up. Their common bond is opposition to the Sandinistas' Marxist regime.

- Unlike the Sandinistas, FDN leaders insist they will hold completely free elections within 18 months and that even leftist parties will be allowed to take part.

- The FDN guerrillas say they have no connection with the much-publicized joint exercises held across the border by the U.S. Special Forces and the Honduran army. "We don't have any gringo trainers," an exile leader stressed. "We are all Nicaraguan fighters, fighting inside Nicaragua."

Despite this claim of independence, intelligence sources say the Reagan administration is unquestionably giving at least tacit support to the FDN movement.

The reason for this is the administration's belief that Nicaragua is the key to Central America's future. In a sort of reverse domino theory, U.S. planners figure that an ouster

of the Sandinistas from Nicaragua would cause the collapse of the leftist guerrillas in El Salvador and Guatemala.

The reasoning behind this theory is that once the Sandinistas are no longer in power there will remain no direct airlift route for the Cubans to send arms and advisers to a safe haven on the mainland, from which they can be transported easily to leftist guerrillas throughout Central America.

FDN leaders claim to have wide support in their northern Nicaraguan bridgeheads and to have recruited not only many peasants, but also disenchanted Sandinista militiamen. They say that for months they have been carrying out reconnaissance and infiltration raids deep into the country's interior.

The FDN claims to have about 6,000 fighters in its various encampments. It needs and expects support of city dwellers, mainly those who helped the Sandinistas overthrow Somoza, but hid their weapons instead of turning them in "just in case." The FDN also may get help from Miskito Indian guerrillas.

Footnote: A former Sandinista diplomat says Cuba's Fidel Castro may try airlifting troops to Nicaragua if his Sandinista clients are threatened seriously. In this case, it would behoove the United States to impose a blockade on Nicaragua, he said.