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WASHINGTON POST  
26 May 1986

*Rowland Evans and Robert Novak*

# Commander Zero, Deserted

Further poisoning the well for jailed freedom fighter Eden Pastora, shadowy U.S. agents have told Costa Rica not to offer political asylum to the fabled anti-Sandinista guerrilla leader whose lieutenants were suborned to desert him and who then gave himself up for lack of ammunition, boots and clothes for his troops.

Republicans with close White House ties believe but cannot prove that these agents are tied to local CIA operations, conceivably acting without Reagan administration approval. "It is not possible to prove," a highly knowledgeable insider told us, "but if not the CIA, who could do this?"

What can be stated as fact is that four of Pastora's top guerrilla lieutenants went to a safe house in San Jose early this month. Each received \$5,000 cash to desert Pastora's movement and join the United Nicaraguan Opposition. The payment was personally made by Alfonso Robelo, a key UNO leader.

That tightened the net on Commander Zero, famed throughout Nicaragua for his role in overturning Anastasio Somoza and then defecting from the communist regime established by his revolutionary comrades. Deserted by four of his six commandantes (two refused to leave him) he turned himself in to Costa Rican authorities on May 16.

Only weeks before that tragic series of events, Pastora had been promised by an unofficial U.S. negotiator that he would get immediate help. He was promised ammunition, boots, clothes and a secure communications system in exchange for this pledge: deliver his 2,000-plus guerrillas to a Nicaraguan meeting place with UNO; cooperate with UNO leaders; accept a retired U.S. officer as military adviser to end his movement's organizational troubles.

Even though this arrangement is believed to have had the blessing of Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams, it was systematically subverted. Instead of getting what had been pledged, Pastora found his lieutenants suborned, his ability to keep going ruthlessly choked.

This repudiation of a patriot and a political pluralist seemingly violates the Reagan doctrine of support to anti-communist movements.

At least temporarily blocked from asylum in Costa Rica, Pastora finds his movement killed by an unseen hand. A proposal here that he should travel in Europe as a modern-day Minuteman to explain the truth about Nicaragua's communist regime may also be dead. In the shrouded world of freedom fighters acting under the thumb of covert intelligence agents to advance the cause of democracy, Pastora has been hung out to dry.

Costa Rican authorities, urging him to seek asylum in Panama, say that is what the United States wants. "If they send him to Panama," an insider with wide experience in Central America told us, "they are sentencing him to death." The reason: Cuban agents are beginning to overrun Panama.

Here in March, Pastora's hand was warmly shaken by no less than Secretary of State George Shultz. That gesture was seen by U.S. admirers as showing Shultz's support for Pastora.

If so, Shultz has now been overruled by those shadowy on-the-scene U.S. agents who regard Pastora as a troublemaker because he does not play by their rules—and possibly because they know he would not negotiate with the Sandinistas unless he was certain that they could be defeated militarily.

When we saw the anti-Somoza revolutionary leader at one of his jungle headquarters a year ago, the duplicity of Washington-connected political attacks against him was plain. He had been charged with being a mere propagandist who operated only on the Costa Rican side of the border, with hints that he might be in cahoots with the old Sandinista comrades he deserted long ago.

The day we were there, wounded guerrillas were arriving by ramshackle boat in a camp with primitive medical facilities. The crisis he faced was vivid: no ammunition, food or clothing. He had already been frozen out by the CIA and

victimized by grand-scale thievery when his Hughes 500C helicopter was stolen and flown to Costa Rica. It ended up with UNO. The bribe that financed the theft was \$30,000.

Pastora's worsening crisis this spring resulted in a semi-private effort by retired Gen. John Singlaub, backed by congressional conservatives, to rehabilitate him both in the Nicaraguan jungles and with anti-Pastora UNO leaders in the CIA. Just before Easter, Singlaub went to Central America and reached the across-the-board agreement with Pastora. It was accepted by Abrams who, with other officials, believes Pastora's name alone is a priceless asset for the contras throughout Nicaragua.

But in the real world of the Reagan administration, policy operates according to no rules. Although the nominal victim in this tragedy is a single man, the real victim is one of Ronald Reagan's major principles.

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30 May 1986

# C.I.A. Role Reported in Contra's Fall

WASHINGTON, May 28 (AP) — A man known to Nicaraguan rebels as an official of the Central Intelligence Agency induced six senior commanders to desert the insurgent leader Edén Pastora Gómez, according to officials of rival rebel factions.

Mr. Pastora, a hero of the Sandinista revolution who later turned against the Nicaraguan Government, announced May 16 that he was giving up his guerrilla campaign because the C.I.A. "denied us aid." There was speculation that the desertion of most of his high command was a major factor in his decision to quit.

Mr. Pastora, known by the nom de guerre Commander Zero, had refused to ally his Democratic Revolutionary Alliance with the C.I.A.-organized Nicaraguan Democratic Force, arguing that it was dominated by former National Guardsmen who had served the dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle.

Mr. Pastora, now seeking political asylum in Costa Rica, is being detained by authorities there. In a telephone interview from jail, he declined to discuss the reported C.I.A. role in his ouster, but said: "The Americans want to remove one government and impose another. We want nothing to do with that."

## C.I.A. Refuses to Comment

Asked about a C.I.A. role in the end of Mr. Pastora's guerrilla movement, a C.I.A. spokesman, Kathy Pherson, had no comment.

Rebel officers said a man identified only by the cover name of "Armando" but previously known to them as a C.I.A. contact offered Mr. Pastora's commanders military aid if they would join the United States-sponsored umbrella group known as the United Nicaraguan Opposition, or UNO.

The rebels were told that the military aid would come through UNO but not where it would originate.

Since 1984, Congress has barred the C.I.A. from giving military aid and ad-

vice to rebels, although the agency is allowed to exchange intelligence with them. The C.I.A. has also secretly funneled several million dollars to the rebels, who are generally called contras, for political projects this past year, United States officials say.

Rebel officials said UNO's Costa Rican-based forces recently received five shipments of arms that were used to entice Mr. Pastora's poorly supplied troops to switch allegiances. Bosco Matamoros, a contra spokesman, said UNO's military supplies came from "international sources," but would not elaborate.

The rebel officials, representing both Mr. Pastora and UNO, said they had known "Armando" as an American C.I.A. officer attached to the United States Embassy in Costa Rica. The rebels, including Alvaro Jerez, a leader of a Pastora-allied political group in Costa Rica, said "Armando" has been a C.I.A. liaison to the rebels for several years.

## Aid Reportedly Offered

One Nicaraguan at a weeklong series of meetings in a suburb of San José, Costa Rica, said "Armando" opened the talks by offering military aid but insisting that the commanders first join UNO "because that was the instrument

the Americans had chosen to help Nicaraguans."

On May 9, the aid-starved Pastora commanders signed an agreement accepting Fernando Chamorro as the chief military commander of the Costa Rican-based rebels. Mr. Chamorro leads an UNO-allied group of about 400 contras known as the Nicaraguan Democratic Union. Mr. Pastora's army, the Democratic Revolutionary Alliance, claims a force of several thousand men but independent estimates are much lower.

Mr. Jerez said Mr. Pastora believed he had an agreement with the State Department on sharing future United States aid in exchange for cooperation with other rebel factions.

Mr. Jerez said that when Mr. Pastora learned about the attempt to lure away his commanders, rebels loyal to him protested to the State Department and C.I.A. headquarters but the talks continued.

A UNO spokesman, Carlos Ulvert, disputed the assertions that the commanders had been lured away from Mr. Pastora. He said that several months ago, the commanders — not UNO — made "the first contact" in the talks that led to their desertion from Mr. Pastora.

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