Nicaragua: Living with the Sandinistas

I. The Sandinistas have made steady progress toward building a Marxist-Leninist regime since the revolution nine years ago and almost certainly will maintain their grip on power.

A. Prospects for the insurgency are bleak.

-- The flow of insurgents to Honduras is increasing, and their support structure in Nicaragua is eroding.

-- The Sandinistas have strengthened their military position.

B. Prospects for further cease-fire negotiations also are dim.

-- The delays have worked to Sandinistas' advantage.

-- Factionalism among insurgent political leaders has intensified, and they are not inclined to go back to the bargaining table.

C. The economy is the regime's most serious vulnerability.

- -- The Sandinistas will continue to rely on Soviet Bloc aid while aggressively seeking economic assistance from the West.
- -- The deepening economic slide could block some military modernization plans and jeopardize public support.
- D. Discontent is widespread, but internal opposition problems and Sandinista repression will likely prevent effective, united anti-regime action.

E. The Sandinistas will take measures to appear more pluralistic but will not allow any real power-sharing with their opponents.

II. Consolidation of the regime and a greatly weakened insurgency will pose new challenges to the US and Central America.

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-- The Hondurans will be reluctant to allow the insurgents to remain in their country and will press the US to accept them as refugees.

B. Regional peace talks have been ineffective so far in compelling the Sandinistas to democratize.

-- The Central American democracies will continue weaving a course between complete accommodation and containment of Nicaragua.

-- How aggressively the Sandinistas try to subvert neighboring countries will be a key determinant of local governments' reactions.

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