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FILE

25 AUG 1987

MEMORANDUM FOR: See Distribution

SUBJECT: The Insurgent Military Challenge: A Comparative Look at Nicaragua, El Salvador, and the Philippines [Redacted]

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1. Attached for your information is our comparison of the insurgent military challenge in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and the Philippines. It argues that the Nicaraguan rebels have improved their military capabilities and are incorporating tactics common to the insurgencies in El Salvador and the Philippines. [Redacted]

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2. This memorandum was prepared by [Redacted] Foreign Subversion and Instability Center, Office of Global Issues. Your comments and suggestions are welcome [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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Chief, Foreign Subversion and Instability Center
Office of Global Issues
Directorate of Intelligence

Attachment:
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[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

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SUBJECT: The Insurgent Military Challenge: A Comparative Look
at Nicaragua, El Salvador, and the Philippines

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OGI/FSIC/I (20 Aug 87)

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- 1 - Arthur W. Long, Acting Special Assistant to the Secretary for National Security, Department of the Treasury
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- 1 - Vice Admiral Jonathan T. Howe, U.S. Navy, Assistant to
- 1 - Kenneth Rosen, Deputy Chief of the Central American Joint Intelligence Team, Department of Defense
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1 - SSCI, Attn: [REDACTED] 7B02 HQ 25X1
 1 - HPSCI, Attn: [REDACTED] 7B02 HQ
 1 - ADCI, 7D60 HQ
 1 - DDCI, 7D6011 HQ
 1 - DCI/DDCI/Executive Staff, 7E12 HQ
 1 - SA/DCI/IA, 7E12 HQ
 1 - Executive Director, 7D55 HQ
 1 - Executive Secretary, 7E12 HQ
 1 - Executive Registry, 7E12 HQ
 1 - Comptroller, 7C21 HQ
 1 - D/Congressional Affairs, 7D43 HQ
 1 - Congressional Affairs, Att: [REDACTED] 7B04 HQ 25X1
 1 - NIO/LA (R.D. Vickers, Jr.), 7E62 HQ
 1 - NIO/GPF (Maj.Gen. Larry D. Budge), 2E49 HQ
 1 - NIC/AG, 7E47 HQ
 1 - C/LA/DO, 3C3202 HQ

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1 - DDI, 7E44 HQ
 1 - ADDI, 7E44 HQ
 1 - C/PES/DI, 7F24 HQ
 1 - D/CPAS, 7F16 HQ
 1 - PDB Staff, 7F30 HQ
 1 - CPAS/ILS, 7G50 HQ
 1 - SCIO/CPAS, [REDACTED] 7F27 HQ 25X1
 1 - PPS/PO/RPB, [REDACTED] 3D02 HQ 25X1
 5 - CPAS/IMC/CB/DI, 7G07 HQ
 1 - CPAS/ISS/DI, 7G50 HQ
 1 - CPAS/CDPB/CC/DI, GH25 HQ

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1 - DD/OGI, D/OGI/DI, 3G00 HQ
 1 - OGI/DI Research Director, 3G00 HQ
 1 - C/OGI/PG, 3G04 HQ
 3 - OGI/PS/DI, 3G04 HQ
 1 - OGI/FSIC/DI, 3G13 HQ
 1 - OGI/FSIC/AM/DI, 3G13 HQ
 1 - OGI/FSIC/CMP/DI, 3G13 HQ
 1 - OGI/ISID/DI, 2G28 HQ
 1 - OGI/GD/WH/DI, 2G00 HQ
 1 - C/OGI/ECD/DI, 3G46 HQ
 1 - C/AL/LDA/DI, 1H39 HQ
 2 - D/ALA/DI, 3F45 HQ
 2 - PS/ALA/DI, 4F21 HQ
 1 - C/ALA/MCD/DI, 4F29 HQ
 2 - DC/ALA/MCD/DI, 4F29 HQ
 1 - C/ALA/MCD/NIC/DI, 4F29 HQ
 1 - C/ALA/MCD/CA/DI, 4F39 HQ
 1 - C/ALA/MCD/MX/DI, 4F39 HQ
 1 - C/ALA/MCD/CU/DI, 4F39 HQ

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- 1 - C/ALA/MCD/CAR/DI, 4F21 HQ
- 5 - OGI/FSIC/I [Redacted]

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Central Intelligence Agency

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Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

20 August 1987

The Insurgent Military Challenge: A Comparative Look at
Nicaragua, El Salvador, and the PhilippinesSummary

Over the past eight months, the Nicaraguan rebels have significantly improved their military capability. We believe this turn of events is due, in large part, to the utilization of strategies and methods similar to those that have long been employed by the insurgents in El Salvador and the Philippines. A heavy emphasis on small-unit tactics, coupled with prolonged guerrilla operations, has been particularly effective in preventing the Sandinistas from bringing their superior conventional forces and firepower advantages to bear against the rebels. In several other categories of combat proficiency--including numerical strength, armament, and total casualties inflicted in the target country--the Nicaraguan rebels are also now exhibiting the signs of progress that for many years have been associated with insurgent success in the Philippines, El Salvador and elsewhere. As a result, for the first time since its inception, the Nicaraguan insurgency--like its two Communist counterparts--is posing a serious, albeit not regime-threatening, military threat to the host government. [redacted]

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Nevertheless, in any comparison between the relatively young insurgency in Nicaragua and the older, more established guerrilla movements in El Salvador and the Philippines, the deficiencies of the Nicaraguan rebels become quite evident, in our view. Unlike their Marxist counterparts, the Nicaraguan guerrillas have developed few of the organizational infrastructures in-country that have proven critical to insurgent success in numerous cases since World War II; the most glaring of these weaknesses include an inability to bring the war to the country's most populous region and the lack of many aspects of a political program capable of attracting significant popular support. [redacted]

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This memorandum was requested by the National Intelligence Officer for Latin America, and prepared by [redacted] the Office of Global Issues. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Foreign Subversion and Instability Center, [redacted]

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The Insurgent Military Challenge: A Comparative Look at
Nicaragua, El Salvador, and the Philippines

Introduction

Based on our analysis of insurgencies since World War II, we judge most insurgencies that have attempted to achieve their objectives through purely military means have failed. The vast majority of successful guerrilla movements complement their armed components with appealing political programs and functional infrastructures. The former garners popular support and new recruits for the guerrillas' cause. The latter not only provides a basis for successfully managing the movement's progress, but lays a strong foundation for running the country in the event of an insurgent victory. [redacted]

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Nevertheless, a credible and effective military capability-- as one integral part of a well-coordinated, multi-faceted effort--is critical, in our view, if an insurgency is to ultimately succeed. [redacted] when judged solely by combat performance, the Nicaraguan rebels are now pursuing a tactical and strategic course that has proven to be extremely beneficial to more established insurgencies like those in El Salvador and the Philippines. [redacted]

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Combat Activity

Insurgent military success, in our judgment, is heavily dependent on an ability to:

- o Employ small-unit tactics,
- o Sustain prolonged guerrilla operations in-country,
- o Mass troops for occasional multi-unit attacks,
- o Engage government forces in several areas simultaneously.

These courses of action frequently permit the guerrillas to offset any advantage the incumbent regime may have in terms of superior conventional forces. Moreover, few governments can widely disperse their counterinsurgency troops without severely limiting their effectiveness. [redacted]

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Insurgencies often rely on small-unit ambushes to demonstrate their military capability. Government patrols, isolated garrisons, vulnerable economic projects, individual military vehicles and small convoys are prime targets. The Communist insurgents in the Philippines and El Salvador, [redacted] have scored many military victories by engaging in such small-unit combat. We judge it to

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be especially significant that the Nicaraguan rebels apparently have overcome their previous reluctance to engage in--and profit from--such warfare. [REDACTED]

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Many successful insurgencies occasionally stage spectacular attacks either to publicly demonstrate their proficiency, highlight their opponent's military vulnerabilities, or strike at a key target of opportunity. Such raids also usually demonstrate an ability to mass forces as necessary for an assault on a provincial city or a major government outpost or garrison. Both the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador and the New People's Army (NPA) in the Philippines already have carried out such operations this year--the former attacking a major Salvadoran military garrison at El Paraiso in March and the latter in May raiding the town of Flora and attacking a police station in Quezon. The Nicaraguan Resistance (NR) has recently begun to demonstrate an ability to successfully launch similar raids. A rebel attack on Abisinia--a resettlement camp garrisoned by Sandinista military personnel--in June and an assault on San Jose de Bocay--the Sandinistas' main forward base in north central Nicaragua--in July indicates, in our view, that the NR is moving in a direction militarily that has long proven beneficial to other, more established insurgencies. [REDACTED]

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Finally, all three insurgencies apparently are able to acquire good intelligence on their opponent's troop dispositions and strongpoints, [REDACTED] In general, such data allows guerrilla commanders to more easily move their forces from one area to another; this, in turn, complicates a government's counterinsurgency efforts by forcing its troops to attempt to defend simultaneously many localities and potential targets--an impossible task, in our opinion, for most Third World military establishments. We believe effective use of such intelligence information will become increasingly important to the NR as it attempts, in the coming months, to expand the pace and scope of its military operations throughout Nicaragua.

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Insurgent Armament

Small arms are the staple weapon in the inventories of insurgencies worldwide. Availability of such armament--particularly assault rifles, machineguns, pistols, and assorted handguns--facilitates the rapid expansion of combatant ranks with available recruits. Most insurgencies rely on captured government stocks or sympathetic foreign suppliers to meet their needs; the latter either supply the arms directly or provide funds to purchase them. [REDACTED]

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In comparison with the NPA, the NR and the FMLN not only are better provisioned with small arms and munitions but more dependent on direct, foreign-supplied shipments of weapons. At present, for example, the vast majority of the rebels in Nicaragua possess operable firearms; replacement weapons and

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ammunition are largely resupplied through airdrops. Similarly, the Salvadoran rebels are generally believed to have sufficient weapons to arm all of their 6,000-8,000 combatants; although the majority of these arms came from foreign sources and transited Cuba and Nicaragua before reaching the guerrillas' hands, the FMLN also actively supplements its inventories with arms captured or stolen from the Salvadoran armed forces. The NPA, on the other hand, has more recruits than weapons [Redacted]

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[Redacted]; no more than 12,000 of the Communists' approximately 17,000 regulars are currently armed,

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[Redacted] Moreover, because the majority of the NPA's weapons have been captured over the years from government forces, the arms are not [Redacted]

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[Redacted] in uniformly excellent condition. [Redacted]

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Despite the Nicaraguan rebels' currently strong armaments position, we believe their near total reliance on external support also represents a potentially serious weakness. In our view, while a reduction or cut-off of such aid--in terms of direct arms shipments to the Salvadoran guerrillas or funds from front groups and sympathizers abroad to the Philippine insurgents to purchase arms--would not cripple either Communist insurgency, such a turn of events could imperil the continuation of the NR's war against the Sandinistas. [Redacted]

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Insurgent Numerical Strength

The actual number of guerrilla combatants represents another important barometer of the seriousness of the threat against a government. An insurgency with numerous combatants can strike effectively at widely dispersed targets, taxing an incumbent regime's ability to defend territory. According to a variety of open source literature, military analysts generally agree that a viable counterinsurgency campaign--obliged to defend static targets--needs to put 10 government troops in the field for each guerrilla fighter. [Redacted]

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[Redacted] the NR currently enjoys a more advantageous force ratio vis-a-vis its government opponents than does either the NPA or the FMLN.

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Nonetheless, we judge any comparative advantage the NR enjoys in this category over the NPA and the FMLN is tempered by the Nicaraguan rebels' lack of non-combatant supporters, especially in key urban areas. The NPA, for example, is believed to have a mass base of over half a million active sympathizers. These supporters--labeled masas by the Salvadoran rebels--provide logistic, courier, and intelligence assistance to guerrilla combatants in both the Philippines and El Salvador. They also engage in strikes, demonstrations, and other civilian-related activities. In our judgment, these non-combatants greatly enhance any insurgency's challenge to an incumbent regime. [redacted]

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Total Casualties

We believe a final indicator of the relative seriousness of an insurgency's military threat is the number of deaths caused measured against total population figures. Relatively high ratios can erode civilian and government morale, complicate military recruiting, and divert the young adult male population from more productive economic activity. A comparatively high casualty rate also provides a rough index of the extent of the social disruption caused by an active insurgency. [redacted]

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We estimate total casualties inflicted by the three insurgencies since approximately 1982 at about 17,000 in the Philippines, 30,000 in El Salvador, and roughly 35,000 in Nicaragua. The total insurgency-related casualties in Nicaragua appear especially high when measured against the small total Nicaraguan population of 3,300,000. In our view, this comparatively high ratio reflects, at a minimum, the seriousness of the overall disruption to the Nicaraguan social structure currently being caused by the NR's activities. [redacted]

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Conclusion

In our judgment, the NR's increasing proficiency, at a minimum, has established the movement's credentials as a serious military threat to the incumbent regime. The NR is successfully making a determined effort to address several of its most serious military deficiencies. We believe the relative effectiveness of this campaign is due, in large measure, to the employment of tactics and strategies that the FMLN and the NPA have long turned to their advantage. An increasing reliance on small-unit tactics, coupled with a newly developed ability to both maintain a substantial military force in-country and expand its zones of operation, has proven particularly effective against the Sandinistas' counterinsurgency efforts. [redacted]

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[redacted]

The anti-Marxist insurgency in Nicaragua, however, still lags considerably behind its more established counterparts in El Salvador and the Philippines in most comparative categories. A paucity of key organizational infrastructures in-country, an inability to bring the war to Nicaragua's populous western coastal regions, a heavy reliance on external support, and the lack of many aspects of a popularly-supported political program probably remain the most powerful constraints, in our view, on the NR's future maturation.

[redacted]

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