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Moscow Turns Its Attention To Latin America

Summary

General Secretary Gorbachev's proposed tour through Latin America--probably in late 1987 or early 1988--will be the most dramatic example of Moscow's new attention to the area.

[redacted] the General Secretary stated that Soviet foreign policy should not be "locked in by an obsession with the Soviet-US relationship" and that Moscow should "broaden" its relations with the Latin American countries. Under Gorbachev, a new policy is emerging that places greater emphasis on state-to-state relations with the region's most important political and economic powers, especially Brazil and Argentina, and the expansion or renewal of ties with states such as Guatamala where they were broken in the 1950s. [redacted]

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The Soviets have capitalized on the emergence of democratic governments in the region. In the past, the military governments in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay were standoffish about contact with Moscow and forced the Soviets to keep an extremely low profile in their countries. Now, however, the Soviets have been able to increase the number of high level exchanges, raise the visibility of their personnel posted to the region, and aggressively court public opinion and attention. For example, a Soviet deputy foreign minister has made two swings through the area in less than a year, and Moscow's ambassadors in the region have begun to hold press conferences on a regular basis. In addition, the Soviets play on such issues as the Latin American debt, the continued controversy over the Falklands Islands, and the desire for a regional solution to problems in Central America. The Soviet effort is aided in part by the needs of regional leaders to placate leftist and nationalist elements in their own electorates. [redacted]

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Moscow's search for broader contacts in the region has not affected its commitments to Cuba and Nicaragua. The value of

This memorandum was prepared in the Office of Soviet Analysis [redacted] Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, Third World Activities Division [redacted]

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Warsaw Pact military aid to Nicaragua, for example, increased by over 100 percent last year, with Moscow providing the lion's share. In fact, Moscow appears to believe that its new approach can win immediate political payoffs for its clients especially in aiding the consolidation of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua and in accelerating the reintegration of Cuba into the diplomatic mainstream of hemispheric affairs. [redacted]

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Moscow will undoubtedly use whatever new influence it can muster to further its other objectives in the area, such as encouraging Latin American opposition to US policies and eroding US political influence in the region. In particular, by portraying themselves as supporting a regional solution to the problems in Central America, the Soviets may be increasingly effective in manipulating local opposition to US intervention in Nicaragua, possibly cutting off US policy options there and institutionalizing Soviet influence on the American mainland. The Soviets also will work to overthrow the Pinochet regime in Chile and to expand profitable trade relations. [redacted]

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Under General Secretary Gorbachev, Soviet diplomacy has been increasingly visible throughout the Third World. Senior Soviet Foreign Ministry officials have visited their areas of responsibility more frequently and hosted their regional counterparts in Moscow. Within the last year Deputy Foreign Minister Rogachev has made repeated trips through the Far East, Deputy Foreign Minister Adamishin has made the rounds through Africa, and First Deputy Minister Petrovskiy and Deputy Vorontsov have toured the Middle East. [redacted]

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[redacted] At the same time, the General Secretary stated that Soviet foreign policy should not be "locked in by an obsession with the Soviet-US relationship" and that Moscow should also develop relations with Third World countries--such as those in Latin America--on their own merits. At one point last summer, the MFA's spokesman Gennadiy Gerasimov proudly unveiled a map in Moscow, complete with varicolored little flags, that pinpointed the farflung travels of Foreign Ministry staffers. [redacted]

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Latin America can boast of many such flags. Within the last year Moscow has appeared as diplomatically active in this region as in the Middle East--an area that clearly overshadows it in strategic importance. [redacted] under Gorbachev a new policy is emerging in the Foreign Ministry which places greater emphasis on political ties with Latin American countries. The General Secretary's proposed visit to the

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region--in late 1987 or early 1988--confirms this trend. [redacted]

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It Wasn't Always This Way...

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[redacted] Overriding all other considerations in keeping the Soviet profile low was Moscow's perception that the United States had special prerogatives in the area and that it would probably respond strongly to any perceived encroachments by the USSR. The majority of Latin governments, in turn, were standoffish about contact with Moscow and thus opportunities for the Soviets to expand their influence in the region were limited. [redacted]

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From the 1960s until the beginning of this decade, Moscow gave only sporadic attention to Latin America. The Kremlin concentrated on diplomatic and commercial dealings--including some military hardware sales--and only selectively supported communist and leftist opposition groups. During the 1970s, for instance, Moscow provided concessionary terms to the leftist military government of Peru for the purchase of Soviet tanks, airplanes, and other military items, but it declined to build on this base by providing much economic assistance. Moscow also failed to provide economic sustenance to the troubled regime of Salvador Allende in Chile. At the same time, because of Cuba's internal economic problems and highly publicized failures such as Che Guevara's attempt to bring revolution to Bolivia, the Soviets actively discouraged Castro's efforts to export revolution to the Latin American mainland. [redacted]

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Only in the early 1980s did Moscow achieve some limited expansion of influence through increased trade arrangements. In Brazil and Uruguay, Moscow bought raw materials such as coffee and wool and when the US refused to sell wheat to the Soviet Union, Argentina became an alternative source. Official Soviet trade statistics indicate that Latin American earnings from trade with Moscow reached a high of approximately \$4.2 billion around 1981. [redacted]

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Overall state-to-state access remained limited, however, until the mid-1980s, when the important states of Argentina and Brazil shed their military leadership and became civilian-ruled democracies. At the same time, the pressure of mounting international debts stimulated Latin interest in further expanding trade--and it was hoped, profit--with the USSR. [redacted]

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Moscow found additional encouragement in the 1979 Sandinista victory in Nicaragua, which caused it to rethink the efficacy of

revolution in Latin America and to identify emerging targets of opportunity elsewhere in the hemisphere. In the early 1980s, the Soviets expanded their previously limited assistance to opposition leftists to include paramilitary training, increased funding, and massive propaganda support, although even this aid was granted selectively according to the Kremlin's perception of opportunity. While assistance to El Salvador and Guatemala, for example, has declined from a high in 1981-82, Moscow's support to the Communist Party of Chile has grown slowly but steadily, consistent with Moscow's judgment that violent revolution is a viable opportunity there. Finally, the survival of the Sandinista regime--despite US hostility--gave Moscow additional encouragement to broaden ties with Latin America. In effect, by the mid-1980s, Moscow had a growing sense that it could expand its influence in Latin America through overt trade and diplomacy and selective covert subversion without risk of serious penalty. [redacted]

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Under Gorbachev: What's New?

Although the Latin Americans have been more receptive than in the past, we believe that the intensity of the recent drive for increased ties originated with Moscow. Soviet MFA Latin expert Laptev claimed last January that Latin America's wealth, dynamism, and increasing independence from the US called for a new Soviet effort to increase Moscow's profile in the region. [redacted]

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Soviet objectives in Latin America have not altered discernibly since Gorbachev came to power in March 1985. Moscow remains committed to Cuba, to the survival of the Sandinista revolution, to the overthrow of Pinochet in Chile, and to expanding profitable trade relations. [redacted]

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Under Gorbachev, however, the Kremlin has significantly increased its efforts to strengthen official state-to-state ties, especially with the region's most important economic and political powers. Moscow also is attempting to sponsor the expansion or renewal of ties with states such as Guatemala where they were broken in the 1950s. The Soviets are aware, however, that some of these goals are not realizable in the short term. The Soviet-Latin American economic relationship, for example, is still in a building stage and real profit is some years off. [redacted]

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Political Payoffs. For now, however, Gorbachev presumably contemplates significant political payoffs--both regional and international--at a small cost in expanding contact with Latin America. He is seeking to:

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- ° Increase anti-Americanism and neutralize US political clout in the area.
- ° Reinforce the legitimacy of the USSR as an actor in Western Hemispheric affairs--thus further assaulting the Monroe Doctrine and gaining greater political access within Latin America.
- ° Draw US attention away from areas, such as the Middle East, that are of more importance to the USSR, and possibly compel the United States to redirect military and economic assistance back to this hemisphere.
- ° Aid the consolidation of the Sandinista regime by playing on regional concerns about US military support for the Nicaraguan insurgents and portraying Moscow as supportive of regional peace initiatives.
- ° Enlist regional support for Soviet positions on disarmament issues such as SDI and project this support into international fora such as the UN or the Non Aligned Movement (NAM). [redacted]

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The Soviets will probably have some success with these objectives. Although the Latin American leaders to a large extent seek to avoid involvement in East-West tensions and are careful in discussing issues such as Central America that would pose a direct risk to their relations with Washington, Moscow realizes that they also have internal political agendas and must work with nationalistic and leftist elements in their own electorates. The fear that the United States might take military action against the Sandinistas, for example, is widely held in Latin America; several states, such as Peru, Uruguay, and Argentina, have been vocal in denouncing aspects of US policy toward Nicaragua. Although these views are hardly identical to Moscow's, the Soviets have become skillful at manipulating such positions so that the Latins appear to be in alignment with Moscow. [redacted]

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Economic Benefits. Although Moscow is more interested in immediate political gain in its competition with the United States, it hopes that its initiatives will also foster long-term trade expansion. But in the short term these hopes are likely to be disappointed. The Latin Americans will probably continue to find standard Soviet trade terms--countertrade or barter and insistence on greater balance--unattractive and the Soviet trade bureaucracy unresponsive. For example, although the Soviets signed a long term grain agreement with Argentina in January 1986, they angered Buenos Aires by waiting until early this year to begin fulfilling their commitments. In February Foreign

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Minister Komplektov disappointed the Uruguayans by refusing to increase Soviet purchases of Uruguayan goods. [redacted]

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Moscow also continues to make offers to sell military hardware for both economic benefits and the increased contacts that such deals would create. The Soviets have reportedly made several offers to supply combat aircraft to the Argentines [redacted]

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[redacted] They invited Argentine officers to Peru to test Soviet equipment and in late 1986 hosted a group of students and staff from Argentina's Higher Military Air College in the USSR. Early this year Moscow offered to provide the Uruguayan Air Force with an aerial demonstration for its Air Force Day ceremonies this March, but Montevideo declined the offer. We believe that most Latin countries are leery of entangling themselves with military hardware deals with the Soviet Union. Moscow, however, will probably continue its efforts to entice Latin nations to purchase Soviet hardware. Initial offers probably would include helicopters or transport aircraft for civil/commercial use by regional airlines. [redacted]

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Support for Revolution. Moscow selectively supports revolutionary movements in Latin America and may believe that this goal too will ultimately be well served by increased state-to-state ties in the region. For the time being, it has apparently given priority to the survival of the Sandinista regime over the aspirations of other revolutionary groups in Central America--Soviet economic aid to Nicaragua reached an all-time high of \$560 million in 1985 and 1986, while assistance to other Central American revolutionaries has declined. [redacted]

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[redacted]

The Kremlin has also thrown its weight behind the overthrow of Chile's President Pinochet, by violence if necessary. Moscow may believe that regional dislike of Pinochet is so great that there will be few repercussions to its active support of leftist revolution in Chile. Although the Soviets appear to be letting Havana take the lead in arming and training Chilean revolutionaries, they have openly backed the Chilean Communist Party's violent tactics since 1980 [redacted]

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Public Diplomacy: A New Veneer?

In its efforts to increase contacts with Latin America, Moscow has sponsored an unprecedented series of bilateral meetings with regional leaders:

- Argentine President Alfonsin visited Moscow in late 1986 and Presidents Sanguinetti of Uruguay and de la Madrid of Mexico are on the agenda this year.
- In the last year and a half the Foreign Ministers of Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina have visited the USSR.
- Mexico's Foreign Minister Sepulveda is reportedly scheduled to go to the USSR in April.
- Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Komplektov has made two swings through the region, visiting Peru, Venezuela, and Cuba last summer and returning in February 1987 to visit Brazil, Uruguay, and Mexico.
- Foreign Minister Shevardnadze visited Mexico last October and is reportedly scheduled to visit Brazil, Uruguay, and possibly Peru this fall. [redacted]

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Soviet delegations have increased markedly in number and prestige compared to five to 10 years ago. Until 1984 the highest ranking Soviet visitors to Latin America were the Secretary General of the Soviet MFA who visited Peru, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, and Panama in the course of several trips and the Minister of Culture who visited Mexico in 1982. Mexican President Lopez-Portillo visited Moscow in 1978, but his visit came at Mexican initiative and was neither preceded nor followed by any other significant visits. Between 1976 and 1983 the average number of economic or political exchanges per year between Moscow and the Latin countries (excluding Cuba and Nicaragua) was 13. In the period from 1984 through 1986, this average jumped to 26 per year. By 1986 Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Mexico were the most frequent participants in exchanges with the USSR. [redacted]

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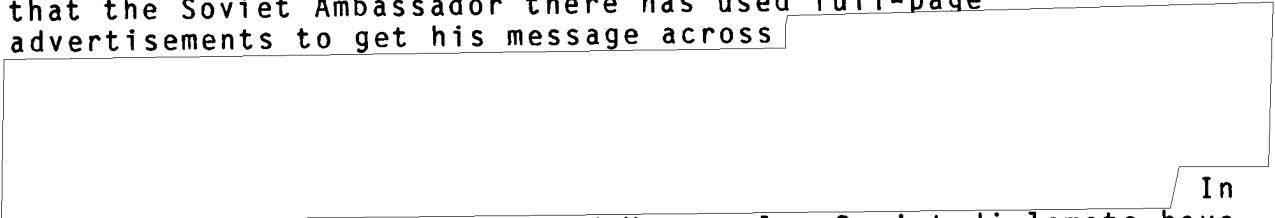
Along with the expansion of its diplomatic initiatives in Latin America, Moscow is stepping up its efforts at fostering a positive image. Soviet personnel posted to the region are more visible, actively courting public opinion and attention. [redacted]

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[redacted] The US Embassy in Caracas reported

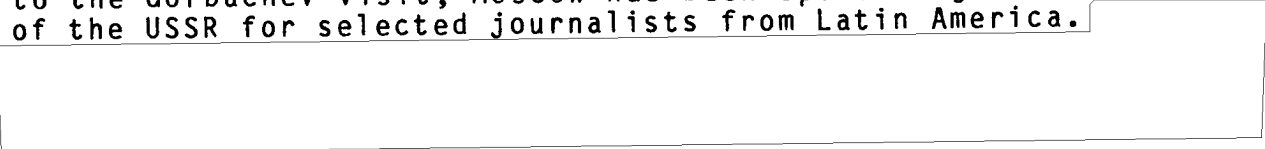
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that the Soviet Ambassador there has used full-page advertisements to get his message across



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In Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, and Venezuela, Soviet diplomats have begun to hold press conferences on a regular basis. As a prelude to the Gorbachev visit, Moscow has been sponsoring working tours of the USSR for selected journalists from Latin America.



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The Gorbachev Visit

A Gorbachev visit to the area--where the General Secretary would trade the prestige of his presence for possible concessions from the Latins--would enhance these new initiatives dramatically. If Moscow can get the itinerary that it desires--including a fall summit with President Reagan--Gorbachev would proceed from the US to Mexico, and then swing through Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and probably Peru. The General Secretary's plane almost certainly would make a refueling stop in Cuba, where we would expect him to have talks. Moscow, however, could use the technical excuse to downplay the significance of his stay in Havana. Unless Gorbachev feels pushed to make a dramatic gesture of support for Nicaragua, we do not believe that he will stop there; reporting indicates that the Soviet trip planners are aware of the highly provocative nature of such a visit to both the US and other regional states.

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Everything, however, is not going Moscow's way and some states--notably Argentina and Brazil--have important agenda items of their own to accomplish during the latter months of 1987. Some states are reluctant to schedule Gorbachev's trip during Moscow's preferred timeframe and the trip could easily be delayed until 1988. If scheduling problems continue, moreover, there is an outside chance that Gorbachev may contemplate two trips: one this fall consisting of a visit to Mexico City and to the United States for a summit and another, perhaps in early 1988, for a swing through South America.

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Outlook

The Gorbachev visit probably will take place, but the results will be mixed. In some--perhaps most--stops, Gorbachev is likely to come away with only cultural or scientific agreements, increased embassy slots, or low-volume economic



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deals. Because of internal pressure from varied interest groups and concern for Washington's reaction, we expect the Latin governments will remain cautious in discussing issues such as Central America, and the final communiques may only emphasize areas of generalized political agreement--such as consensus on the need for regional solutions to problems in Central America or on disarmament initiatives such as the Delhi Six or the South Atlantic Zone of Peace. Moscow has long been aware, however, that small advances such as these lay the ground work for greater influence in the future. [redacted]

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Although less likely--because of potential opposition from the United States and other regional actors--Gorbachev might decide to make a dramatic sign of support for the Sandinistas and stop in Nicaragua. We believe Gorbachev would consider this option if the United States were to rebuff Soviet overtures for a summit or if he is displeased with the progress of US-Soviet bilaterals. He might attempt to portray such a visit as part of Moscow's support for regional peace initiatives such as Contadora, especially if the recent momentum stimulated by developments such as Costa Rica's peace proposal move the negotiations toward an agreement. Moscow would probably calculate, however, that such a visit would increase Congressional support for the Nicaraguan insurgents as occurred when Daniel Ortega made his ill-timed visit to Moscow in spring 1985. [redacted]

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In the near term, Moscow will undoubtedly use whatever new influence it can muster to encourage Latin American opposition to US policies and to erode US political influence in the region. In particular, by portraying themselves as supporting a regional solution to the problems in Central America, the Soviets may be increasingly effective in manipulating local opposition to US intervention in Nicaragua, possibly cutting off US policy options there and institutionalizing Soviet influence on the American mainland. [redacted]

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The reintegration of Cuba into the diplomatic mainstream of hemispheric affairs will probably also accelerate under Moscow's expanding umbrella of contacts. Havana has begun a series of moves that parallel Moscow's efforts to reduce US political clout in the area, such as President Castro's attempts to rally regional solidarity on the issue of Latin American debt. Moreover, there are indications that Castro--like Gorbachev--is planning travel to the new democracies, especially Brazil and Argentina. [redacted]

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Annex: Gorbachev's Potential Itinerary

Mexico. Soviet MFA spokesman Gennadiy Gerasimov acknowledged during a press conference last December that there would be a visit to Mexico--a high-priority stop--but said that no dates had been determined. Some Mexican officials reportedly believe that Moscow would like to link Gorbachev's stop in Mexico City with a summit meeting with Reagan in the United States.

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Uruguay. Gorbachev and Uruguayan President Sanguinetti have officially agreed to exchange visits and Komplektov apparently worked to formalize the dates. In February Sanguinetti's special assistant informed the US Embassy in Montevideo that Gorbachev's visit was tentatively scheduled for next November. We believe that Moscow may be using Sanguinetti's compliance as a lure to gain the agreement of the more reluctant--but more important--states of Argentina and Brazil.

Brazil. Brasilia appears reluctant to commit itself to a Gorbachev visit.

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There have been no official statements in Moscow or Brasilia confirming the visit.

Argentina. During his visit to Moscow late last year, President Alfonsin officially invited Gorbachev to Buenos Aires. Gorbachev accepted, and, according to the US Embassy in Buenos Aires, the Argentine Foreign Ministry has confirmed that the only question pending resolution is the exact date of the visit. Nevertheless, a Soviet Embassy official in Havana implied that there was a special problem in scheduling the visit to Argentina. According to the US Embassy in Moscow, Argentine diplomatic officials there claim that Alfonsin will be tied up with local elections during fall 1987 and a visit by Gorbachev would be impossible then.

Peru. Until recently, little effort had been made to incorporate Peru into Gorbachev's itinerary, but there has been speculation in the Peruvian media that the visit would take place. Despite Moscow's economic and military ties to Lima, the terrorist problem--especially the direct targeting of Soviet interests there--may discourage a visit by the General Secretary.

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Cuba. We have no reporting beyond press speculation indicating that Cuba is on Gorbachev's agenda, but it would be a breach of protocol for Gorbachev to exclude Havana from his itinerary. In addition, Gorbachev's plane would almost certainly refuel in Havana. No Soviet leader has been to Cuba since Brezhnev visited in 1974.

Nicaragua. Nicaraguan media have speculated that Managua will be a stopover for Gorbachev, but Moscow has given no indication that Nicaragua will be included.

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- 1 - OGI/ISID/AT [redacted]
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- 1 - C/DEIG/DED
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- 1 - C/SOVA/TWA/AFLAME
- 1 - C/SOVA/TWA/FA
- 1 - AFLAME Chrono
- 2 - SOVA/TWA/AFLAME
- 2 - SOVA/TWA/AFLAME

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