

# RADIO TV REPORTS, INC

4701 WILLARD AVENUE, CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815 (301) 656-4068

FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM The Fred Fiske Show STATION WAMU-FM  
DATE March 15, 1985 9:05 P.M. CITY Washington, D.C.  
SUBJECT Nicaragua

FRED FISKE: The controversy over Nicaragua continues, with President Reagan taking a firmer, more open stance regarding the Sandinista regime and the United States-supported Contras, and with divisions in the Congress as well as in the press concerning all of this.

Recently, the Council on Hemispheric Affairs released a report, "The Military Balance in Central America: An Analysis and Critical Evaluation of Administration Claims."

That's a long title, Larry.

Among the writers of this report are Colin Danvy (?), who is with COHA, Colin?

COLIN DANVY: Yes.

FISKE: David McMichael, who is a former CIA analyst. And we have both of those gentlemen here.

David, good evening to you, so we can establish your voice.

DAVID MCMICHAEL: Thank you.

FISKE: And a more familiar voice, that of Lawrence Burns, who is Director of COHA.

Now, I understand that you are a former Marine, David, and that you were a CIA analyst concerned with Central America?

MCMICHAEL: Both those statements are true, Fred. Yes.

2

FISKE: And that your contract with the CIA was not renewed.

MCMICHAEL: That is true. I left on the expiration of my two-year contract in April of 1983.

FISKE: Why was your contract not renewed?

MCMICHAEL: Well, it was a two year contract and I had completed two years, and the determination was not to extend or to renew it.

FISKE: Well, do you suspect that there was some reason for that? Were you expecting or hoping that the contract would be renewed, as it usually is? Don't I understand that you, in fact, made arguments or recommendations or criticisms in the CIA concerning Central America which didn't sit well with your superiors?

MCMICHAEL: Well, I certainly was in disagreement with the policy toward Nicaragua, especially as it was based on the alleged arms flow from Nicaragua to El Salvador, because in my judgment the evidence did not support Administration claims of such a flow.

FISKE: Didn't that play a part in the decision not to renew your contract?

MCMICHAEL: Arguably, it did. But that was not so stated to me at the time I left.

FISKE: All right.

You charge in this report, gentlemen, that the Administration is misleading the Congress and the public about Nicaraguan activity in El Salvador. Would you make the case?

COLIN DANVY: Well, it's not so much the activity in El Salvador, something that David has worked on before, so much as the intentions that lie behind the arms buildup that has been carried on by the Sandinista government. The Administration has consistently claimed that their intentions are aggressive, that they want to intimidate, or perhaps even conquer, neighboring states.

We found that the buildup -- and there certainly has been a buildup -- is in fact defensive, and that it has been impelled by the attacks by the Contra forces backed by the United States, and also by the very real fear of a direct U.S. invasion.

MCMICHAEL: Another factor there, too, Fred, is that

this is not a study simply of Nicaragua's arms buildup, it is an examination of the regional arms buildup. The whole region has been militarizing, and over the last four years the armed forces of all the countries in Central America, save in Costa Rica, which has no formal military, have doubled, even tripled in size. And the amount of sophisticated weaponry that's been introduced into the region, particularly in aircraft -- which, incidentally, one of the things, we point out, that Nicaragua almost entirely lacks -- has really changed the situation there. And in the regional context, one of the things we point out is that Nicaragua is far more defensively postured than the other countries, in terms of weaponry it does possess. And in terms of the overall size of its armed forces, it is by no means predominant in the region. The other countries, alone or in combination...

FISKE: Do I understand correctly from your report that in fact the Nicaraguan armed forces are probably larger and stronger than those of any other single Central American country, but that when you add up the forces, the manpower, the tanks, the planes and so on, of other countries in the area, that in fact they would outbalance those of Nicaragua?

MCMICHAEL: The total Nicaraguan armed forces on active duty, in terms of number of personnel, are larger than any other single country, but not by very much, as a matter of fact. A very few thousand in the case of, for example, El Salvador, particularly. But since they, for example, possess no combat aircraft worth mentioning at all, it's very difficult to say they are stronger than any other country.

DANVY: In overall terms, the armed forces of El Salvador are probably the strongest, particularly given their ability to move an entire battalion of troops by means of their Huey helicopters supplied by the United States, the strength of their Air Force to conduct bombing, and the extent of U.S. training that they've gotten.

As David pointed out, the Nicaraguans have the largest military force in terms of personnel, although it's only really about ten thousand larger than those of El Salvador. But in terms of hardware, equipment and capacity, El Salvador probably has the strongest. Honduras still has an air force which is predominant in the region.

But the overall point, if we're trying to make these comparisons -- and this is something that we point out in the report -- is that there is no country in Central American that really has the military capacity decisively to invade any other country. These are all small countries. None of them are very strong militarily. The difficulties of terrain and logistics are

4

so great that in fact it's, in the case of Central America, only the United States that possesses the capacity to invade any other country at the moment.

FISKE: Larry, this is the longest you've ever sat at a microphone without saying something.

LAWRENCE BURNS: I'm sitting here in rapt amazement at my colleagues, their sound perceptions.

What are we talking about here? I think what we're talking about is an environment, a political and military environment that has been superheated by Administration policy, an overreaction, a significant, almost a desperate overreaction that is proving to be extremely costly in terms of our generalized foreign policy goals.

We were visited recently by the Swedish Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry, Pierre Sharie (?), a man who is probably Europe's most knowledgeable Latin Americanist, a person who's written a book, knows all of the actors...

FISKE: Sort of a Swedish Larry Burns?

BURNS: He's a Swedish Larry Burns, and he gets his regular briefings from the American Larry Burns.

But what he said to me -- we were talking about U.S. policy. And he was going to meet a series of U.S. dignitaries. He just met them, including the Deputy Secretary of State and others. And I was coming forth with a modality of what I would say if I would be he at these meetings. And he said to me, "I think that you are a patsy. That you're much too mild on this. Because I think that U.S. national interests are being betrayed right now in Central America. And I think a much more forthright presentation has to be made."

And then he went through an extraordinary litany of reports coming out of Europe that I wasn't even aware of.

For example, the Spanish Parliament, including the most conservative political parties, as I understand it, unanimously passed a resolution condemning U.S. policy in Nicaragua.

All the parties of the Swedish Parliament, conservative as well as the Social Democratic Party, have passed a similar resolution. In fact, the Secretary General of the Social Democratic Party called us up the other day from Stockholm and he wanted the telex numbers of all the congressmen and senators to send them telegrams from Swedish parliamentarians.

They have been -- our congressmen have been visited and

have received communications from parliamentarians throughout Europe. Even a man like the Italian Prime Minister, on his recent trip here, who toes the line on Administration NATO policy, said, when he was here, "We're unhappy about Nicaragua."

And one of the things they're unhappy about is they feel, quite correctly, that the kinds of quality moments, in terms of foreign policy strategizing, that the Administration should be given over to the problems in the Philippines and the problems in Afghanistan, the problems in Central Europe and disarmament, are being diverted to a minor foreign policy where no real national security interests are at stake.

FISKE: I don't know if you fellows know somebody named Jim Girard, Jr. He wrote to me recently and he did this column for the Washington Times. He's concerned with the problems of Central America. He's formerly a Hill staffer. And he quotes Humberto Ortega, who is Minister of Defense of Nicaragua and a brother of Daniel Ortega, chief of the junta: "We are not going to give ourselves a false name. Our revolution has a profoundly anti-imperialist, profoundly revolutionary, profoundly class nature. We are anti-Yankee. We are against the bourgeoisie. We guide ourselves by the scientific doctrine of revolution, of Marxism-Leninism. Without Sandinism, we cannot be Marxist-Leninists. And Sandinism without Marxism and Leninism cannot be revolutionary. So we are making the effort to transform our society in a revolutionary way, not a reformist way."

If in fact he's describing the Sandinista government, they describe themselves as Marxist-Leninist, it would seem that the United States would have some justifiable concern about their eventual intentions and their existence in this hemisphere. It would seem -- this column goes on to point out that many of the people who are in the opposition, among the Contras, are people who were Sandinistas, who supported their revolution, who were opposed to the Somozas. People like Alfonso Robain (?), like Eden Pastora, like Arturo Cruz, like Jose Francisco Cardenal, Jose Esteban Gonzales.

How do you like that Spanish?

BURNS: Excellent. It's bilingual.

FISKE: Violetta Chamorro, and on and on and on, a whole long list of people who are anti-Somozista.

BURNS: Your Spanish began to lapse there....

FISKE: If these people are concerned about the direction that the Sandinista revolution has taken, why are we not justified being concerned?

6

BURNS: Well, I'll have a quick go at that, and then I'll turn it over to the rest of you folks.

I was down in Nicaragua on several occasions and I had conversations with various members of the junta. In fact, we attended a meeting with the directorate, the junta, and the details of that meeting were later relayed in the New York Times article by Alan Riding, who was also at that meeting. And he quoted me as saying to the junta people, "Why do you have to use all this Marxist palaver? Why don't you just get on with reconstructing this country?"

And the response, both at that meeting and afterward at a reception that evening which a lot of the folks from the Sandinista government came to, was that this is a mixed government, there are Marxists in this government. There are non-Marxists in the government. The important determinant is that this is not a Moscow satellite. This had very little to do with Moscow. It was not Moscow that brought about the victory of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. It was the social democrats in Venezuela. It was Torrijos in Panama. It was the PRE (?) Party in Mexico. And it was the PLM Party, and so forth, in Costa Rica. The Soviets had no role in the Sandinista victory.

Now, right after July '79, when they came to power, I feel, my own perception, that the Sandinistas were excessive in some of their policies, certainly their policy toward -- the initial policy towards the Miskito Indians, which they themselves acknowledge was a mistake. It was clearly a mistake.

I think that they were too flippant in terms of press censorship questions, and there were human rights violations, which caused concern to folks like ourselves, who expressed them publicly at the time.

But we felt that the situation in Nicaragua was very fluid, very open to all kinds of influences, and that the status of pluralism in Nicaragua waxed and waned according to outside conditions, and that there was a kind of struggle, both on the outside and the inside, to maintain pluralism against the more doctrinaire thinkers there.

But the question really was, and came down to, was there an open society in Nicaragua? And the answer that I would come up with that, at any time, the situation in Nicaragua, while never comparable to a Sweden or to a Holland or to a Costa Rica, it was certainly easily comparable to situations in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, which would be much more logical places to compare Nicaragua, because its history was more similar to those countries. And certainly Nicaragua was never a threat to any of its neighbors.

7

DANVY: And actually, if we're going to make that kind of a comparison, its human rights picture, while not perfect, is qualitatively better than that of any of those three neighbors that you just mentioned.

Certainly, the U.S. has rights to be concerned about threats to its national security and the security of the hemisphere in general. But...

FISKE: Don't we, with justification, have a right to understand that Marxist-Leninist states regard it as a sacred duty to spread their political philosophy?

DANVY: Well, that's very frequently asserted, but no one's been able to confirm quotations attributed to that effect. There is nothing in Marxist writings that...

FISKE: Well, not in Marxist writings, but in Leninist writings there certainly are.

DANVY: Well, even in Leninist writings. This is an attempt to make, usually, an a priori argument: Because these people are Marxist, therefore they're communists, therefore they're aggressors.

FISKE: What does Marxist-Leninist mean to you? What does Marxist-Leninist mean to you?

MCMICHAEL: You know, before, you know, we get into that sort of near-theological question, I think I could refer many of your listeners to, I think, the very best book on this with reference to the region, particularly, is that by Arthur McGovern, the Jesuit priest on the philosophy faculty at the University of Detroit, called Marxism and American Christianity. That's slightly mistitled but that's basically it, which handles many of the varieties of descriptions of Marxism-Leninism, particularly the way it's been used in Latin America and so forth.

Getting back to some of your previous statements, Fred, the one I would choose to deal with is that introducing most of those involved today, either in the Contra or in the overt and very strong opposition to the Sandinistas, as former Sandinistas or former fighters in the revolution. I think it has to be understood that by 1977-78, when it was clear that Somoza's game was up and he had to leave -- and, of course, he overstayed and his whole system came down with him -- that there were many people in opposition to Somoza, for a whole variety of reasons. And most of those you mentioned were not Sandinistas. So that Eden Pastora is the only one demonstrably so.

FISKE: According to this column by Girard, he lists a

whole lot of them as former Sandinistas. Robain, for example. Alfonso Robain, a leader of the first revolution, a member of the original Sandinista junta.

MCMICHAEL: Oh, that's Alfonso Robelo. Alfonso Robelo was never a Sandinista. As a matter of fact, he's the head of something -- his own group called the Movemento Democratico Nacional, the National Democratic Movement. And that is true. He was, as a matter of fact, on the first junta of the Government of National Reconstruction, and quit that himself.

Arturo Cruz, whom you mentioned, for example, has not lived in Nicaragua...

FISKE: He was the Sandinista Ambassador to the United States.

MCMICHAEL: He was the Ambassador of Nicaragua to the United States.

FISKE: Under the Sandinistas.

MCMICHAEL: Under the current government, yes, the Government of National Reconstruction. And he was an official of the Inter-American Development Bank. You know, has not lived in Nicaragua for many, many years, and is not, by any definition, a Sandinista.

Violetta Chamorro, who was also originally on the first junta...

FISKE: Well, let me point out...

MCMICHAEL: What this does point out, Fred, is the pluralist nature of the governing structure from the very beginning in Nicaragua, where all these people had posts within the government, and for whatever reason have decided to leave them. In some cases stay within the country in opposition, and in other cases go out of the country in opposition.

FISKE: It could also be argued that if people of such wide-varying background who had confidence and faith in and hope for the Sandinista revolution at the outset, so that in fact they served it -- and there's a list of 20 of them here -- and who, in spite of their varying backgrounds, have parted company with this administration and look upon it and speak about it critically, and in some cases are actively opposing it, they're working with the Contras, that there'd be some sane reason for it.

BURNS: Well, Fred, not entirely, actually. It would be very much like listing to a foreign audience a list of



conservative Democrats who defected from the Democratic Caucus vote in the House of Representatives, that if these people are leaving or dropping out of the caucus or voting against official Democratic Party positions, that somehow this is something to say about the Democratic Party. Now, it clearly...

FISKE: Larry, it seems to me that on previous programs you have spoken with great affection and admiration of Arturo Cruz.

BURNS: Right.

FISKE: And he's among these.

BURNS: Right. Okay. Let me just run over those names a bit for you. Each name deserves its own story.

Arturo Cruz is clearly in a class by himself, as is Eden Pastora. Those are two special situations.

Violetta Chamorro, the wife of the famous publisher, a totally apolitical person. She used to live just a block or two away from this radio station when she was in Washington. She was brought on the junta as an act of sentiment by the government. She was never very political political and she was never professedly a Sandinista, really. She had a personal problem, and the problem was that her family was split over the Sandinista government. That is, one of her sons was vigorously, Pedro Joaquin, was vigorously opposed to the government from the very beginning. Another one was the editor of the government newspaper. There were splits in the family. And she had a neurological situation, and for reasons of health she dropped out.

Now, in recent years her criticism of the government has increased. But it was not so much a political statement, about her departure. It was really a more personal matter.

FISKE: Well, even if I accept that, we have people, for example, as Archbishop Obando y Bravo, who's head of the Nicaraguan Catholic Church and a former Sandinista.

MCMICHAEL: Wait a minute. He is not. Let's get this straight, Fred. Dr. Obando y Bravo is the Archbishop of Managua, which does not make him the head of the Nicaraguan Catholic Church, if you know the structure of governance in the Catholic Church.

FISKE: Well, that's the way Girard lists him.

MCMICHAEL: Well, you see, that displays Mr. Girard's ignorance, which goes throughout the column.

10

FISKE: Did you read the column? Have you read this column?

MCMICHAEL: I have just heard your reading of it. And as I say, when he lists these people...

FISKE: Well, then, maybe you oughtn't say it goes throughout the column.

MCMICHAEL: Well, yes. But when he lists these people as former Sandinistas, who are not -- on July 19th, 1979, for example, Archbishop Obando y Bravo was found not in Managua celebrating the triumph. He was in Caracas, Venezuela trying to round up opposition to the Sandinistas. That's precisely where he was on that day. He has been a determined enemy of the Sandinistas throughout.

BURNS: If one would have nothing to say about any of the other names, I think that the fact that the author of that column lists that man's name as a Sandinista somewhat casts a shadow on the research that went into that.

FISKE: He says "former Sandinista supporter."

BURNS: He was never a Sandinista supporter. Quite to the contrary, he was a vigorous Somoza supporter.

Now, at the end, of course, it was very much like after World War II. There were no Germans, there were just Austrians, if you took a trip to Central Europe. Naturally, no one close to the end of -- you see, one of the problems, one of the unique situations in Nicaragua was that the upper class and the solid middle class had become more and more anti-Somoza because of Somoza's domination of the economy -- it amounted to something like 65 percent of the economy was personally owned -- and the limitation of opportunities for entrepreneurship under the Somoza regime. So Somoza -- and Somoza, of course, had a policy of great favoritism to certain people. So the people who were not being favored, people of wealth and station, were very anti-Somoza.

Now, it is clear that what they wanted was a change of government, an ouster of Somoza, and a continuation, more or less, of a political system that would be open to the kinds of activities, private-sector activities, that they wanted to carry out.

Now, the people who did the fighting, the people who actually suffered the 50,000 casualties, they had a different vision, which was a transformed Nicaragua.

11

Now, the question is, there were certain differences within Nicaragua as to how that transformation would take place. And there was also a dearth of talent in terms of administering that transformation, because many of the formerly trained people in public Administration, and so forth, left the country because their jobs had been in the public sector. They had worked for Somoza.

In the beginning of the revolution -- that is, in 1979 through 1980 -- the government really didn't know what to do with the private sector, and they came forth with regulations that were self-contradictory, and you couldn't function in the private sector, even if you wanted to, easily. And you know who told me this? A couple of cabinet ministers in the government said to me that if things are hopeless here -- you know, one agency comes out with one list of directives, another comes out with another.

But what was taking place in Nicaragua was, you know, in terms of the church, no priests murdered, compared to the 14 or 15 priests killed in Guatemala and El Salvador. No journalists murdered, compared to the more than 30 journalists murdered in El Salvador, and an even larger number murdered in Guatemala.

In other words, you didn't have a bestial society. You had a confused, erratic society with political -- some of them being ideological extremists, some of them not. You had a fluid situation. And instead of trying to work with this fluid situation, what we did is we tried to eliminate it.

FISKE: Let me understand one other thing. A while ago, Colin spoke about the Nicaraguan government arming itself because it was faced with the danger of the Contras. Now, this is a chicken-and-egg situation, of course. Maybe a leapfrog situation. The same set of problems that we find ourselves in with regard to the Soviet Union. The Contras presumably were organized because the Nicaraguans posed a threat. Now the Nicaraguans feel that they have to increase their armaments because the Contras are present.

DANVY: The Contras were never organized because of the armaments the Sandinistas were getting. The Contras were built on a force of something over a thousand former members of the National Guard during the Somoza regime. These are people who fled after the Guard disintegrated in July of 1979. Many of them ended up in Honduras and took to cattle rustling, cross-border raiding, occasional assassinations, that kind of thing, during 1979 and 1980. Anyone...

FISKE: Do you mean Contras generally, or a portion of them.?

DANVY: Okay. These are the people upon whom the force

12

that we now know as the Contras was built by the CIA.

But to get back to the beginning. People who were in the country in the fall of '79 say that they were hearing gunfire every night. That is, there was a Contra problem from the beginning. I mean Somoza was toppled, but a lot of his followers kept fighting, and they're still fighting.

You also had a certain amount of doubt among the Sandinistas about the intentions of the United States, and this is fairly early on. Certainly when President Reagan came into office, the Republican platform on which he ran was very hostile to the Sandinista government. So that you can't claim, as the Administration does, that the Contras didn't start until a long time after the pattern of armaments was clear. And in that pattern of armaments, again, we see a very clearly defensive posture. We don't see the sort of armaments that would be necessary to attack any of the neighboring countries. There is no capacity there. We see a defensive posture and defensive armaments.

FISKE: The Sandinista government is very fearful of an American invasion. This question has been raised by some of my listeners from time to time, and I personally have the feeling that there's not likely to be any kind of an American invasion of Nicaragua. I can understand that they would have this fear. But what's your assessment of it?

DANVY: I would certainly share your feelings that a direct U.S. invasion is not likely, given the various political problems that that would create here.

However, for the Sandinistas, they don't necessarily see what's going on now with the Contras and a U.S. invasion as totally different things. That is, they've seen the Contras built by the CIA from roughly a thousand Somoza National Guardsmen to its present 12 to 15 thousand, and this was done on schedule by the CIA, according to their own plans. They've seen the Central Intelligence Agency...

BURNS: Don't knock the CIA.

DANVY: Well, I'll do my best.

In any case, they have seen the CIA carry out attacks on their four major ports, using Contra personnel, but planning and conducting these attacks.

So that all of these things, for them, you might say, are part of the U.S. invasion.

As far as actually using U.S. troops, no. That seems

13

very unlikely. But from someone sitting down in Managua, that may not be very reassuring for us here in Washington to say, "No, we don't think it's going to happen." And they can remember the Bay of Pigs. They can remember the Guatemalan coup in 1954, any number of U.S. interventions. They have to take the statements by the Reagan Administration seriously. They see the maneuvers going on in Honduras, the naval maneuvers off both their coasts. And, you know, they're undertaking their defense.

FISKE: I suspect that voicing fear of an actual United States invasion helps to mobilize their population.

MCMICHAEL: Arguably, Fred, that does do it. But I think if you had been there, for example, in the first week of November of last year, when...

[Confusion of voices]

MCMICHAEL: ...certain, I would have to say, puerile and mean-spirited persons in the United States Administration decided that the reconnaissance aircraft which overfly Nicaragua on a continual basis, U.S. aircraft in their airspace, you know, were going to fly faster and lower to produce sonic booms over the country twice a day for a period of about a week.

FISKE: What was the reaction there?

MCMICHAEL: Well, the reaction, you know, a lot of children were frightened. You know, that's the way these people are. They like to frighten children.

During the deliberately manufactured so-called MiG crisis of November the 6th and the few days thereafter, when the actual threat of invasion seemed very great, you know, as a matter of a show of force, I believe, the Nicaraguans themselves put tanks into what I do not believe were their real defensive positions around Managua. They partially mobilized youth who had been prepared to go on the coffee harvest into defensive brigades for Managua. You know, it was a show of determination in the face of a threat.

But there is no doubt, as Colin has pointed out, that the United States, either by proxy, through the Contras, trained, supported, paid, directed by the United States, operating out of bases both in Honduras and Costa Rica, carrying out military attacks against Nicaragua.

And secondly, as the recent series of articles in the Wall Street Journal pointed out, the air and sea attacks against Nicaraguan ports and oil facilities were actually carried out directly by United States personnel. So they've been attacked, you know.

14

FISKE: I take it that you made some of these arguments in your reports when you were in the CIA. What were you told?

MCMICHAEL: To tell you the truth, Fred, my concern at that time, when the Contra war was being organized and defended on the basis that it was necessary to interdict the flow of arms going from Nicaragua to El Salvador, what bothered me was (A) that I hadn't seen and couldn't find any evidence of this arms flow. I was told that it went on, but I had access to intelligence and did not see it. Wayne Smith, for example, who at that time was head of the U.S. Interest Section in Havana, was also calling for that information.

FISKE: Did you have a top security clearance?

MCMICHAEL: Oh, yes -- and not finding it.

Now, you know, this -- you know, this is my judgment as an analyst. There are perhaps, you know, other people reach different judgments.

But what concerned me, as a person who had worked in counterinsurgency for many years in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam period...

BURNS: It's a ten-year Marine fellow here.

MCMICHAEL: And I've done other work in that line -- you see, is that the critical point, in most counterinsurgency doctrine, is to be able to cut the supply links to an insurgency in the field. And if we were really interested, you know, in crushing the FMLN in El Salvador, a great deal of analysis should have been going into how that supply system was organized, where it was coming from.

And what I saw instead was a great deal of effort going into incriminating the Nicaraguan government in this, but without any real description of the supply system that the FMLN does have.

FISKE: I don't know whether any of you saw CBS News tonight. Dan Rather was in Cuba for a lengthy interview with Fidel Castro, and they showed a piece of it tonight. And one of the questions that Rather asked Castro was whether -- you know, he asked him why he hadn't been to the funeral, and so on; and if he was seeking to improve his relations with the United States, whether he would consider removing his military advisers from Nicaragua. Now, there has been some question about whether in fact there had been Cuban military advisers there. And Castro set that to rest. He acknowledged that there were.

DANVY: I think it's always been clear that there were.

15

The number's been in dispute, but it's always been clear there were Cuban military advisers.

FISKE: And, of course, he said he would under no circumstances remove them because it would be a betrayal of the Sandinistas, and so on.

But what does the presence of Cuban advisers there tell you? What does it mean to you? Why are they there?

MCMICHAEL: Well, I'll tell you the reason that they give for having there, and the Nicaraguans give, is that they had a guerrilla army that in 1979-1980, a ragtag bunch of guys that had just chased the Guardia Nacional out of the country. They're now in the process of changing that into a regular army, and they need instructors in communications, logistics, command procedures, and so forth. And this is the stated reason and the stated purpose for the Cuban advisers within the country.

Now, I was a little surprised and a little disappointed, frankly, because the figure most frequently given to me by the Nicaraguans and by Cubans I talked to in Nicaragua for the number of those advisers had consistently been 250 to 300. And the Nicaraguan government, on announcing that they, as a conciliatory gesture, are sending 100 of the advisers home, are now saying that the number is actually about 800.

So, whether this means there's been a redesignation, a redefinition of who is a security adviser and who is not, I don't know. But these are the numbers.

FISKE: Or an attempt to obscure it. You don't know.

MCMICHAEL: Well, probably. I'd say that that might well be the case.

BURNS: In my experience with Nicaraguan officials, I have found a certain sense of guilelessness and innocence in terms of what to do with data. I was very surprised -- this raising the number of officially acknowledged Cuban military folks in Nicaragua is very recent, just a few days ago. I was very surprised because, characteristically, the Nicaraguans have been very forthcoming in giving out information, surprisingly forthright. In fact, they understated the total number of civilian casualties that they were suffering for some period of time, I guess not to cause domestic alarm over the high toll that the Contra attacks were taking place.

But I just wanted to make an observation about U.S. military intentions in Nicaragua. I think that there have been a series, there have been parallel military projections of what to

16

do with Nicaragua that have taken place over the last year and a half. There have been military options that have been entertained, usually based on plans that would involve provocations coming from the Honduran military, overflights and artillery being laid down, to lure the Nicaraguans into counterattacking, which would then turn Honduras to CANDECA, the Central American Defense Community, very much like Barbados turned to the OECS with Grenada in 1983. And at that point, CANDECA would turn to Washington and say, "Our ally is being attacked." And at that point, Washington would send in naval and air power to attack Nicaraguan military targets, broadly defined to include economic targets as well.

FISKE: Okay. I'm long past the time when I usually invite listeners to join, so let's do that....