

BALTIMORE SUN  
27 February 1985ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 4A

STAT

U.S. FOREIGN RELATIONS

# Nicaragua building forces to avert U.S. attack, ex-CIA analyst reports

WASHINGTON (AP) — A report on Central America's military balance, coauthored by a former CIA analyst, concludes that Nicaragua's leftist government has bolstered its armed forces to defend against a feared U.S. attack, not to invade neighboring countries.

"The truth is that the only Central American nation in danger of an invasion by regular forces is Nicaragua," said the 28-page report released yesterday by a private group that has been critical of President Reagan's Latin American policies. "The only nation likely to do that is the United States.

"Nicaragua believes that the most important deterrent it possesses against that threat is a level of modern armament sufficient to inflict severe casualties on an attacking U.S. force."

The Reagan administration has charged repeatedly that Nicaragua's military buildup, supported by the Soviet Union and its allies, is a threat to other Central American countries and indirectly to U.S. national security.

The report, challenging that assumption, was written by former CIA analyst David MacMichael with Colin Danby and Franz Schneiderman, two researchers for the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, which released the study.

Mr. MacMichael was an analyst under contract to the CIA from 1981 to 1983 and left after disputing U.S. allegations that Nicaragua's Sandinista government was shipping large stocks of weapons to leftist guerrillas in El Salvador. Mr. MacMichael, who went public with his dispute in June, 1984, said that evidence of a

significant weapons flow "just disappeared" after the spring of 1981.

Asked about the new report yesterday, a State Department official said that even if Nicaragua did not invade neighboring countries, its buildup allowed the leftist regime to back subversion and to "effectively blackmail" weaker countries into making concessions.

Drawing from U.S. government figures and published accounts of relative military strengths, the report's authors contend that the administration has exaggerated Nicaragua's military might to justify an increasingly tough policy toward the leftist government that took power in 1979.

"The Nicaraguan military clearly does not fit the frightening picture painted of it by the Reagan administration," the report contends. "Taken as a whole, the Nicaraguan armed forces make an even less impressive offensive force."

The report notes growing U.S. aid to the armed forces of nearby El Salvador and Honduras and CIA support for rebels fighting to overthrow Nicaragua's government. It also cites large-scale U.S. military exercises held in Honduras, near Nicaragua's border, and U.S. naval maneuvers off Nicaragua's coast.

The report puts the effective size of Nicaragua's armed forces at 61,800, compared with President Reagan's estimate of that nation's "trained forces" at more than 100,000.

Despite administration warnings that the Sandinistas are preparing to import sophisticated Soviet warplanes, the report describes Nicaragua's current air force as "all but

nonexistent," having no bombers or modern fighters. It said Nicaragua's most advanced aircraft are probably Soviet Mi-24 helicopters that the administration says were recently delivered.

By comparison, the report said Honduras has 12 French-built supersonic Mystere fighter-bombers, 10 to 12 A-37B counterinsurgency jets, and four to six F-86 Sabre fighter-bombers. The report said El Salvador's air force has 41 combat aircraft and 65 combat helicopters.

"Air superiority is a prerequisite to any successful sustained offensive operation," the report said. "Yet it is in this area that Nicaragua is unquestionably weakest."

Meanwhile in Managua, President Daniel Ortega Saavdra told U.S. Catholic Church leaders that he wanted friendly relations with the United States and that his government wanted to avoid problems with the Nicaraguan church.

Mr. Ortega met with five senior U.S. clergymen for two hours late Monday night.

"We discussed every problem that we could have discussed," he said after the meeting. "There is a coincidence [among us]. There is a desire to face the problems and to solve the problems."

Archbishop John O'Conner of New York, the leader of the U.S. delegation, described the exchange with Mr. Ortega as very frank. He said the Nicaraguan president "listened very carefully to what we had to say. We talked about problems of the Nicaraguan church as we have come to understand them."