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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

20 June 1980

MEMORANDUMCuba-Nicaragua: Support for Central American Insurgencies [REDACTED]

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Summary

Revolutionary unity and solidarity emerged as major themes in Central America during the past month, highlighted by the decision of Guatemala's four main insurrectional groups--at Cuban urging--to form a united front. Castro reportedly repeated the promises of greater financial aid and training--though still short of direct arms shipments--that he used successfully several years ago to resolve differences within Nicaragua's Sandinist movement. The Guatemalan revolutionaries' "unity" declaration, however, seems at this juncture to represent more hope than reality, since--as they themselves acknowledge--there are still significant obstacles to overcome. [REDACTED] 25X1

Information from a number of reports and sources, although still scattered and fragmentary, tends to confirm the existence of land, sea, and air "routes" for arms shipments through Nicaragua to El Salvador, but Managua's involvement remains veiled and deniable. [REDACTED] 25X1

This memorandum was requested by the National Security Adviser to the President. It responds to specific questions and is not intended to be an analysis of the overall relationship between Cuba-Nicaragua and Central America. It was prepared by the Latin America Division of the Office of Political Analysis under the direction of the National Intelligence Officer for Latin America, and coordinated with the Directorate of Operations and the Office of Strategic Research. Information in this memorandum reflects information available through 15 June 1980.

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Guatemala

At a mid-May meeting in Havana, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), the Organization of People in Arms (ORPA), the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), and the dissident faction of the Guatemalan Communist Party (PGT) agreed to enter into a "popular and democratic front," which at the moment is probably little more than a loose working alliance among the guerrilla groups. (See 15 April 1980 memorandum, pp. 7-8, for reports on earlier Cuban efforts to bring these organizations together.) [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the head of the umbrella organization is called the Coordinator for the Revolutionary Forces for the Liberation of Guatemala. [REDACTED]

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Fidel Castro's personal role in bringing about even this much unity among the guerrilla organizations is detailed in reports from other sources. At the Havana meeting, for example, the Cuban leader is said to have offered the groups both training and funds to purchase arms. He explained that he could not undertake direct shipment of arms to Guatemala because of the political damage to Cuba if it were discovered.

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In regard to the training, Castro is alleged to have acknowledged that 250 Guatemalan revolutionaries from ORPA, FAR, and the EGP were now in Cuba, and he offered to accept an additional 50 from the PGT dissidents. The group is said to be selecting its first 25 candidates, who reportedly will travel to Cuba via Nicaragua for the training, which is supposedly to last at least six weeks. [REDACTED]

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Castro also urged the dissidents to establish a permanent representative in Havana, as other radical leftist groups had done, as this would give the dissidents a chance to "meet comrades from all over the world and . . . appeal to them for help." The dissidents reportedly have decided to hold the offer in abeyance, however, largely because their political commission could not agree on a candidate.

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Apparently feeling considerable urgency about the situation in Central America, and in Guatemala especially, Castro reportedly said that "the time for words, for politics, was past, the fight is here and now." The Cuban leader explained that the pressure to have "revolutionaries" trained and in place as soon as possible arises from several factors. One is his feeling that there is an imminent threat to the position of President Lucas, who Castro believes should be kept in office because he is "stupid" and is alienating the Guatemalan people. Another element is the possibility that the US would recognize what is happening and become directly involved. [REDACTED]

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Moreover, the revolutionaries are concerned about the recent announcement in Paris by Guatemalan political exiles that they had formed a so-called Patriotic Liberation Front. This supposedly broad coalition, which has so far received scant support from anti-government groups in Guatemala, was considered by the guerrillas to be a preemptive effort that threatens the "correct road of armed revolution." [REDACTED]

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Despite Castro's urgings, and the public pledge of the four guerrilla groups to strive to overcome their differences, their announced unity seems fragile. Even the declaration published by Prensa Latina on 26 May acknowledged that the four groups "still had problems to solve." Aside from the personal jealousies and conflicting ambitions of the various leaders, the main stumbling blocks reportedly are:

- What groups and sectors should be included in the political Broad Front (Frente Amplio) the revolutionaries want to form, and what role this Frente should play.
- Whether or not the guerrilla groups should try to "win over" younger and supposedly more reform-minded officers in the Guatemalan military.

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Cuba - Central America

At the meeting with the Guatemalans, Castro reportedly said that he was expecting delegations of Nicaraguans and Salvadorans, and that he planned to "stress with them as well the need for not only internal unity but also unity on a Central American scale." Castro then allegedly went on to give his overall evaluation of the situation in the area:

--Nicaragua: "The revolution is advancing very rapidly there...the Sandinistas are consolidating their position in order to make it impossible for the US to take the country back,"

--El Salvador: "The next to be liberated...the revolution is progressing there very rapidly."

--Guatemala: "Will be next...after that bastion of Yankee imperialism (El Salvador) is overcome."

--Honduras: "We are getting involved, but it will be a race between the 'gringos' and us."

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The Cubans reportedly have been behind several efforts to develop greater solidarity for the Salvadoran and Guatemalan insurgents:

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--Also in mid-May, a member of Fraccion, a pro-government Panamanian leftist group, reportedly traveled to Honduras and Guatemala at the behest of Cuba. His alleged mission was to organize

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solidarity committees for the Salvadoran and Guatemalan guerrillas among students and faculty at the national universities. [redacted]

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El Salvador

Perhaps reflecting Castro's concern regarding a possibly greater US role in Central America, the past month saw a barrage of charges from Cuba, Nicaragua, and the Salvadoran radical left regarding alleged "imperialist intervention." Havana's Prensa Latina, for example, featured a diatribe against a so-called "Brzezinski Plan," which supposedly calls for the "extermination of 500,000 human beings" as a means of ending the "people's revolution" in El Salvador.

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In late May, Salvadoran government officials and the local press came out with a spate of charges of their own, accusing the Nicaraguans of being deeply involved with the radical left in El Salvador. These allegations were quickly denied as totally false by several high-ranking Sandinist leaders, although we continue to receive reports suggesting that Nicaraguan territory is being used for training, staging, and the transshipment of arms. [redacted]

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the Panamanian Fraccion member who went to Honduras and Guatemala was also infiltrated into El Salvador from Nicaragua. While in El Salvador, he claimed to have been told during a briefing at the general headquarters of the Revolutionary Coordination of the Masses (CRM) that:

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- The organization has some 16,000 armed and trained sympathizers in El Salvador and Nicaragua.
- CRM guerrillas are being trained at five camps in Nicaragua, in addition to facilities in El Salvador.
- There were 50 Cuban advisers serving with the CRM.

Although there may be an element of fact in these claims, they seem to be largely overdrawn. [REDACTED]

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The same is probably true of the statements of a senior member of the Farabundo Marti Popular Liberation Forces (FPL) [REDACTED]. The FPL member alleged that a Soviet ship, flying a false flag, was due early next month in Nicaragua with some 5,000 weapons, including bazookas, mortars, and possibly light artillery. The FPL member also reportedly claimed that three Soviet advisers were working with a Cuban team in Nicaragua to organize and train a unit of Nicaraguan and other radicals to fight in El Salvador. [REDACTED]

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The CRM's briefing of the Fraccion member provides further confirmation of fragmentary reports regarding clandestine arms supplies to El Salvador's guerrilla terrorists. According to the Fraccion member, there are three general "routes": by land, from Nicaragua's east coast via Honduras; by sea, using small boats sailing across the Gulf of Fonseca from ports in Nicaragua's extreme northwest; by air, using light planes that either transit or stage directly from Nicaragua. [REDACTED]

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The efforts of Salvadoran and Honduran government security forces to interdict these various routes are apparently having at least limited success. The Fraccion member reportedly was told, for example, that the Salvadoran guerrillas are planning--with Cuban approval--to launch an offensive this month with the aim of "liberating" some territory having a sea frontier with Nicaragua. Although

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the guerrillas anticipate a tough fight, their strategists believe this to be the most practical infiltration route for Cuban arms shipments because neither El Salvador nor Honduras has much in the way of patrol craft. [redacted]

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Other Developments

Hugo Spadafora: We have received a number of additional reports regarding the recent activities of Panama's Hugo Spadafora (see 15 April memorandum, pp. 6-7). The former Vice-Minister of Health who resigned to lead the now-dissolved Victoriano Lorenzo International Brigade that fought in Nicaragua during the last days of the Somoza regime has continued to contact government officials and leftist leaders throughout the Caribbean basin trying to drum up support for a reconstituted brigade. The Panamanian's grandiose plans suggest he sees himself as a latter-day Bolivar embarked on a campaign to liberate all of Latin America's "oppressed peoples." He has claimed or hinted at backing from, among others, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Panama. [redacted]

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Belize: Several reports suggest that Belize has contacted, among others, Nicaraguan and Cuban officials for the purpose of developing what are termed "discreet understandings" regarding support in the event of Guatemalan hostilities in the future. [redacted]

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Attorney General said Musa claimed that Cuba, Guyana, Jamaica, and Panama had all "explicitly promised" to send troops to help Belize in the event of Guatemalan military action. The Cubans, according to Musa, said they would send "10,000 men whenever they are needed." [redacted]

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It would be in the Belizeans' interest to develop closer ties with their Central American and Caribbean neighbors, especially for the feeling of security inherent in promises of support in the event of British withdrawal or Guatemalan hostility. There is no evidence to suggest, however, that the Belizeans have received anything more than

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gestures of support such as contained in the communique issued on 2 June in Havana at the time of the visit of East Germany's party and state chief Honecker.

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