

two nations have different areas of strength and weakness but the overall effect is a balance of force in the realm of more sophisticated armaments. While the Honduran Air Force is markedly superior to Nicaragua's, the Nicaraguan air defense offsets this advantage. And while the Nicaraguans may have a slight advantage in heavy armored vehicles (tanks), this equipment is of limited effectiveness in the region and of inferior quality. The projected US-financed arms buildup to Honduras could tip this balance, and would likely elicit a countervailing reaction from Nicaragua. In both cases, poor nations are being forced to divert scarce resources from social and economic development into costly and increasingly lethal military hardware.

At present, the most volatile areas likely to erupt into full-scale combat are located along the Río Coco near the Miskitu coast and in the mountainous border area of northwest Nicaragua. Of these two areas, it is the isolated Miskitu region that seems to be the focal point of the conflict.

In August, USAF C-130's from the Southern Command in Panama flew a battalion of Honduran troops and their equipment into Puerto Lempira (ostensibly as part of an exercise). The Honduran battalion is now headquartered in Mocorán, about 15 miles north of the Nicaraguan border. Allegedly its mission is to prevent a Nicaraguan incursion into the Miskitu Indian camp located in Mocorán.

Perhaps the battalion is not meant so much to protect the Miskitus as to confine them. Information reaching me is that many of the older people want very much to reach an accord with the Sandinistas and return to Nicaragua. It is the young bucks who want to continue to fight and need to keep the Miskitus in Mocorán for cover and recruits.

It is no coincidence most of the counterrevolutionary military bands operating in the area are also entrenched in the vicinity of Mocorán. In actuality the Honduran battalion provides a protective screen for the Somocistas and counterrevolutionaries returning from terrorist incursions into the Miskitu coast of Nicaragua. The battalion's presence in Mocorán provides an excellent means of arming and equipping the counterrevolutionaries. Who, in that forsaken region, can keep an accurate account and control of weapons, ammunition, radios, etc. which are supplied to the battalion? How many of them reach the hands of the Somocistas?

And since our ambassadorial family in Honduras has taken a personal humanitarian interest in the Miskitu Indians in Mocorán it seems that ample food, medicine, clothing, etc. is being flown into the area. How much of this material reaches the counterrevolutionaries? Would that the same humanitarian interest was shown for the Salvadoran refugees at Mesa Grande.

Perhaps the biggest question in everyone's mind is how much coordination goes on between the battalion and the counterrevolutionaries. Do they orchestrate operations, share communications, etc? And just how much is the United States involved? At this point it is impossible to answer these questions definitively. Dr. Thomas P. Anderson, in testimony before this Subcommittee, asserted that highly placed sources within the State Department had confirmed the existence of direct US covert intervention against the Sandinista government. Given the history of US intervention in Chile, Guatemala and Cuba—not to mention Nicaragua itself—these

reports are entirely credible and Mocorán is a likely element in this strategy.

One possible scenario for the outbreak of a conflict between Nicaragua and Honduras is the following. If Sandinista troops or militia are in hot pursuit of a counterrevolutionary group that is escaping back into Honduras, they must break off their pursuit at the border. If they do not, they will likely confront a unit of the Honduran Regular Army. That confrontation would be an act of war.

I would like to make one final comment about the internal situation in Honduras. When asked if significant leftist guerrilla organizations currently operate within their country, most of the Hondurans I talked to—military and civilian—say No. Clearly, however, many Hondurans fear that the political violence which characterizes El Salvador and Guatemala will spread to Honduras. Many are also leery of the Sandinista experiment that is transpiring across the border. Perhaps their greatest source of concern is that their nascent democracy, unfolding under the watchful eye of the military, will be snuffed out by the armed forces. US military aid strengthens the hands of those who are most likely to terminate democratic government in the country. Significant divisions exist within the Honduran military regarding the conflict in Nicaragua, involvement in El Salvador's civil war and the future of democratic rule. This is evident in the statement by Colonel Leónidas Torres Arias on August 31 in Mexico City in which he condemned the intent of Gen. Álvarez and other hardliners to lead Honduras into a war with Nicaragua.

Such a war would truly be a "war without winners." It seems a terrible price to pay for this administration's determination to seek a military solution to what are deep-seated social, economic and political problems. Such a war could easily spark off a regional conflagration involving all the nations of Central America, and perhaps the US and Mexico—on opposing sides. It would exact a terrible price from the people of Honduras and Nicaragua, and stain the name of the United States in the eyes of all Latin America and the world.

11. Peace Efforts in Central America and the US Response*

By Peter Crabtree

Over the past two years Central America has developed an increasingly explosive potential. The current worldwide recession has shaken the region's agro-export economic base, further aggravating social tensions. Popular struggles in El Salvador and Guatemala are visible evidence of social crises originating in decades

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of harsh military rule imposed by US foreign policy imperatives. There is a direct relationship between these backward political structures and a narrow concentration of economic benefits, as well as social and moral breakdown. Costa Rica's economic collapse is merely indicative of the larger economic crisis: reliable estimates indicate that the region will require as much as \$20 billion in international transfer payments over the course of the present decade in order to preserve economic stability.

This complex, delicate regional situation requires tactful political solutions involving all relevant political forces. Resolution of border tensions between Nicaragua and Honduras is also of highest priority. It is important therefore to examine the record of the past two years in order to identify the openings for and the blocks impeding the peaceful resolution of regional conflict.

Chronology of Key Events, 1981-1982

February 1981

US State Department releases a "white paper" depicting Nicaragua as the epicenter for arms traffic to Salvadoran insurgents.

The US government begins a process of cutting off all economic loans and credits to Nicaragua.

Nicaragua calls for joint Honduran-Nicaraguan border patrols to curb any arms flow or suspected arms flow.

March 1981

Parade magazine discloses that ex-Somoza guardsmen are being trained in the US for paramilitary attacks on Nicaragua. (See Reading 29 in this volume.)

April 1981

In an official government communiqué Nicaragua protests US aid cuts and the threat of paramilitary aggression being prepared on US soil. Nicaragua also "reiterates its hope of having respectful and stable relations with all countries in the world, including the United States. We reaffirm our wish that the Central American area become a zone of peace and security."

Nicaraguan government urges Honduran government to halt paramilitary attacks on Nicaragua originating from Honduras. Honduran President Policarpo Paz agrees to meet with Nicaraguan government coordinator Daniel Ortega.

May 1981

General Policarpo Paz and Daniel Ortega meet in Guasaule, Nicaragua to discuss border tensions. Paz promises to restrain paramilitary supporters in the Honduran army.

Sergio Ramírez, a member of Nicaragua's governing junta, meets with Costa

Rican President Carazo Odio in San José. The two agree to strengthen peaceful relations between the two countries.

June 1981

In apparent response to widespread rejection of US charges against Nicaragua contained in February "white paper," Secretary of State Haig raises new charges that Nicaragua has received Soviet tanks, Press criticism of "white paper" allegations stops.

The Nicaraguan interior minister and the Costa Rican security minister sign a joint declaration establishing a base of peace and respect between the two countries.

August 1981

After repeated requests by Nicaragua for talks with US officials about improving US-Nicaraguan relations, President Reagan sends Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America Thomas Enders for discussions in Managua. While Enders is tight-lipped after the meetings, the Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Miguel D'Escoto expresses optimism. "It is premature to judge the American intentions," D'Escoto tells reporters. "We are committed to and continue to be committed to bettering the increasingly deteriorating relationship with the United States. We have made it a priority to make every effort to reach an understanding, a *modus vivendi*, with the United States," D'Escoto adds.

Honduras grants permission to the US to build a military base in the Gulf of Fonseca, a body of water shared by Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador.

September 1981

France and Mexico issue a joint declaration recognizing the FDR/FMLN as a "representative political force" in El Salvador.

FDR president Guillermo Ungo travels to the US to "test international reaction" to the French-Mexican declaration. Ungo declares that "the door is now open" for talks with the United States.

US State Department officials respond that the declaration will not cause the United States to re-evaluate its opposition to negotiations.

Joint US-Honduran military maneuvers are held.

October 1981

Nicaragua government coordinator Daniel Ortega addresses the United Nations General Assembly in support of a peace plan for El Salvador through negotiations without preconditions.

Nicaraguan Ambassador to the US Arturo Cruz reiterates his country's desire for a "positive and harmonious" relationship with the US. Cruz declares that "Nicaragua

has not and will not permit its sovereign territory to be used as a staging point for any direct or indirect military intervention in the affairs of El Salvador, or of any other country." Cruz adds that Nicaragua "is completely and totally committed to a peaceful solution to the tragic internal conflict" in El Salvador. "The government of Nicaragua has fully endorsed the joint French-Mexican proposal for a peaceful and negotiated solution in El Salvador."

November 1981

Reagan administration intensifies charges and threats against Nicaragua. Secretary of State Haig tells members of Congress that Nicaragua is becoming a powerful totalitarian state which threatens US interests and refuses to rule out military action against Nicaragua.

Regular Honduran troops attack the Nicaragua border post at Guasaule on two separate occasions using machine guns and mortars.

Nicaraguan Foreign Minister D'Escoto, in communiquéés with his Honduran counterpart, protests attacks on Nicaragua, noting that "provocations of this nature only tend to obstruct the efforts made by Nicaragua to lessen the tensions in Central America and avoid them between our two countries." D'Escoto urgently requests the Honduran government to honor the May 1981 agreements for continued dialogue and cooperation.

December 1981

President Reagan authorizes a \$19 million CIA-directed plan for paramilitary and terrorist operations against Nicaragua. In apparent initial implementation of this plan, terrorist attacks, code-named "Red Christmas," are launched in Nicaragua's remote northeast border area. Other immediate targets of attack are Nicaragua's only oil refinery and cement plant.

January 1982

After meetings with US Under-Secretary of State James Buckley in San José, Costa Rica, the foreign ministers of Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Honduras announce the "surprise" formation of the "Central American Democratic Community." Nicaragua, Panama, and other Central American governments are conspicuously excluded from the meeting.

February 1982

At a meeting of Latin American political parties (COPPAL) in Managua, Mexican President López Portillo proposes a regional peace plan with three main points: the United States should cease its threats and military actions against Nicaragua; if the paramilitary units operating from Honduras are disbanded,

Nicaragua should reduce the size of its armed forces; the various affected countries should enter into mutual non-aggression pacts.

The Nicaraguan government welcomes López Portillo's proposals; the US response is uncertain.

March 1982

The US government launches a major public relations effort to demonstrate the threat posed by Nicaragua. The effort fails to demonstrate that Nicaraguan military dispositions are anything more than defensive.

The Mexican government announces that US-Nicaraguan negotiations will begin in April in Mexico City; the State Department immediately responds that the Mexican announcement is "premature."

Speaking before the U.N. Security Council, Nicaraguan government coordinator Daniel Ortega denounces the paramilitary attacks on his country. (See Reading 1.) Ortega tells reporters that Nicaragua would welcome immediate and unconditional negotiations with the US.

April 1982

The US and Nicaragua exchange negotiating positions. US official Stephen Bosworth denies that the State Department is footdragging on possible negotiations.

Despite Nicaraguan readiness to negotiate, the US stalls. A US official tells the *New York Times* that "we want to do some more probing to make sure that they're serious."

May 1982

Mexican officials express pessimism about the likelihood of US-Nicaraguan talks.

A US official tells the *New York Times* that "as you know, we were cool to the Mexican initiative from the beginning, but we were effectively ambushed by Congress and public opinion. We had to agree to negotiate or appear unreasonable."

July 1982

Paramilitary attacks on Nicaragua increase dramatically.

Joint US-Honduran military maneuvers are held near Nicaragua's remote northeast border. US planes move equipment and a battalion of Honduran troops to a new permanent base in the border area.

August 1982

Nicaraguan government reiterates its desire for talks with the US. Nicaragua

proposes that the negotiating points of each side last spring be the basis for initiating talks.

September 1982

The Presidents of Mexico and Venezuela send an appeal to the heads of state of Honduras, Nicaragua, and the United States which calls for an "exploration of ways that remain open to halt the worrying escalation" of the crisis. 106 members of Congress endorse the proposal.

Lt. Col. John Buchanan, USMC (Ret.), briefs a House subcommittee on the critical border tension between Honduras and Nicaragua. (See Reading 10.) In a detailed analysis on Nicaragua's military capability, Buchanan describes Nicaragua's "military buildup" as defensive in nature. Buchanan also warns of a possible Honduran invasion of Nicaragua in December.

Buchanan states that his assessment of the Nicaraguan military leads him to conclude that the capabilities of the Sandinistas have been deliberately exaggerated by the Reagan administration. "One can only conclude that the Reagan administration is distorting the facts in order to justify covert operations aimed at overthrowing the Sandinistas and an unprecedented military buildup in Honduras," says Buchanan.

October 1982

In an apparent attempt to blunt the Mexican-Venezuelan peace initiative, the Reagan administration backs a "forum for peace and democracy" in San José, Costa Rica. Nicaragua is excluded from the forum, and Mexico and Venezuela decline to attend.

November 1982

Newsweek reveals extensive details of the US paramilitary war on Nicaragua. (See Reading 30.) US officials confirm that the operation is intended to "keep Managua off balance and apply pressure."

During a visit to Washington, Costa Rican President Monge warns President Reagan of the dangers of current US policies in the region. Reagan responds with a polite silence.

December 1982

US President Reagan designs his Latin American trip to include visits with the leaders of all three countries neighboring Nicaragua. Nicaraguan leader Sergio Ramírez points out that US diplomats continue to refuse to see high-level Sandinistas officials. The US has still not responded to Nicaragua's last diplomatic note of August 1982 urging peace talks. The US also continues to oppose peace talks between

Nicaragua and Honduras.

As the chronology reveals, efforts by various countries to promote negotiations and political solutions in the region have thus far been unsuccessful. One explanation for this failure was offered by Wayne S. Smith, former chief of the US Interests Section in Havana: "the [US] administration has denigrated negotiations and grossly misanalyzed the situation in Central America. Initially, it insisted that conflicts there were not internal . . . incredibly, at one point the administration even suggested that there was 'no native insurgency' in El Salvador." Such thinking has led the US administration to block negotiations and pursue "total military victory."