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NICARAGUA'S TERRORIST CONNECTION

INTRODUCTION

International terrorists have established a base in Central America. Their patron is Nicaragua's communist Sandinista regime. Since coming to power nearly seven years ago, the Sandinistas have been providing bases, training, weapons, and logistical support for numerous Latin American revolutionaries and have been working with such international terrorists as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the Basque ETA, and Libyan dictator Muammar Qadhafi. The Sandinistas also work closely with Cuba's Castro regime in supporting terrorism and smuggling narcotics from Latin America into the United States. Drug trafficking is used not only to addict American society but to provide operational funds for terrorism.

As a haven for terrorists on the mainland of the Americas, Nicaragua represents a serious threat to the U.S. and to the growth of democracy and economic development in Latin America and the Caribbean. Terrorist attacks in El Salvador have been used to intimidate voters, while such actions elsewhere cause economic disruption by destroying infrastructures and scaring away foreign investors.

U.S. policy makers must join with their counterparts in Latin America to devise a comprehensive strategy for dealing with this terrorist threat.

DEVELOPING THE SANDINISTA BRAND OF TERRORISM

There are many types of terrorism. That fostered by the Sandinista government is the deliberate and systematic policy and tactic of violence or the threat of violence to attain strategic and political objectives by acts intended to create overwhelming fear in a targeted population, especially in democratic countries.

The goal of psychological terror and physical violence employed by totalitarian dictatorships is to maintain total control of their own peoples and to expand this kind of control over other regions and other peoples. V. I. Lenin, who is greatly admired by the Sandinistas, viewed terrorism as a "science," saying "we have never rejected terror in principle, nor can we ever do so."¹

The Sandinistas (Frente Sandinista Liberacion Nacional, or as they are more popularly known, FSLN) have had international terrorist connections since the movement was founded in the early 1960s. In 1966, Fidel Castro brought to Havana more than 500 representatives of radical international leftist groups for the Tri-Continental Conference. There the Sandinistas, the PLO, and others met to formulate a strategy for what they called "the global revolutionary movement."² Three years later, Tomas Borge, now Nicaragua's Interior Minister, was one of the 50 to 70 Sandinistas sent to Lebanon for training by Cubans and the PLO. Other Nicaraguan leftists received training at PLO camps in Libya. PLO-trained Sandinistas took part in several terrorist operations in the Middle East during the early 1970s, including an attempt to overthrow the government of Jordan's King Hussein.

In addition to guerrilla training and Marxist-Leninist indoctrination in Cuban and Middle Eastern camps, the Sandinistas forged ties with a variety of Soviet-allied governments and organizations, who provided them with the arms and funding to conduct the insurgency against Nicaragua's Somoza government. Borge served as the Sandinistas' main liaison in obtaining weapons from North Korea, Vietnam, and the PLO. On March 6, 1978, the Sandinistas and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) issued a joint communique in Havana proclaiming a mutual declaration of war against

1. Milorad M. Drachkovitch, ed., Marxism in the Modern World (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1964), pp. 83-139.

2. U.S. Department of State, The Sandinistas and Middle Eastern Radicals, August 1985, p. 1.

3. Ibid.

"Yankee imperialism, the racist regime of Israel," and the Somoza government of Nicaragua.⁴ Early the following year, Libya's Qadhafi invited the Sandinistas and other Central American revolutionaries to a meeting in Libya, where he promised substantial financial and political support for their "wars of national liberation."

Within weeks of taking power in Managua, the Sandinistas began turning Nicaragua into an operational center for "revolutionary internationalism"--a euphemism for terrorism on a global scale. Cuban and Soviet bloc specialists in subversion and low-intensity warfare assisted the FSLN in establishing Managua's two main bodies for the conduct of such operations: the Fifth Directorate of Intelligence of the FSLN's General Directorate of State Security (DGSE) and the Sandinista government's Department of International Relations (DRI). The chief of the Fifth Directorate is Andres Barahona, a career Cuban intelligence officer from the Cuban Communist Party's espionage and subversion arm, the Americas Department (DA).

The Sandinistas and their Soviet bloc supporters almost immediately launched their Marxist revolutionary offensive. Only four days after Somoza left Nicaragua, Salvadoran guerrilla leaders met with Borge, Daniel Ortega, and other Sandinista leaders to plan guerrilla operations in El Salvador. Shortly afterwards, a PLO "embassy" was established in Managua with the senior Palestinian representative holding the title of "ambassador." One year later, PLO chief Yasser Arafat made a four-day "state visit" to Managua to formalize full diplomatic ties between the Sandinistas and the PLO. By May 1981, the PLO was deeply involved in military and guerrilla training activities in Nicaragua. One month later, the FSLN staged a lavish celebration to mark the Qadhafi's regime's ouster of U.S. bases from Libya eleven years earlier.

Iran's radical Khomeini regime also is believed to be providing arms and funding for Sandinista terrorist activities.⁵ Some of these funds are used for the training and international travel of major European terrorist groups such as Germany's Baader-Meinhof Gang, Italy's Red Brigades, and the Basque ETA. All are believed to have used Nicaraguan passports to enable them to travel in Western countries without detection by authorities.⁶

Nicaragua's borders with other Latin American countries allow the easy infiltration of terrorists and revolutionaries throughout Central

4. The Detroit Jewish News, December 29, 1978, p. 18.

5. The Washington Post, January 25, 1985, p. A1.

6. The Sandinistas and Middle Eastern Radicals, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

and South America. The destabilization of those nations, which form the "southern flank" of the U.S., serves Moscow's interests well.

THE SANDINISTA TERROR CONNECTION IN LATIN AMERICA

Support for Colombia's M-19

Colombia's radical April 19 Movement (M-19) has attempted to overthrow the elected government of this South American country for a decade. The M-19 and the FSLN have been allies since 1976; Colombian guerrillas fought in the Sandinista ranks during the Nicaraguan Revolution. Since 1979, the Sandinistas have provided training, arms, and financial assistance to the M-19. Example: in 1984, at least 60 M-19 guerrillas were trained in Nicaragua. One member of the M-19 now works at the General Directorate of State Security (DGSE) in Managua as a liaison with revolutionary groups in other countries; another M-19 operative, also employed by the DGSE, is "on loan" to the Salvadoran guerrillas.

On November 6, 1985, about 70 M-19 terrorists seized the Colombian Palace of Justice in Bogota, taking hostage many of the country's supreme court justices along with other civilians. During the two-day siege that followed, 120 people were killed, including the President of the Colombian Supreme Court and all the guerrillas.

An investigation into the bloody incident revealed that a five-man Sandinista commando unit coordinated the operation and gave tactical instructions to the M-19 guerrillas. Using false passports, the FSLN team had entered Colombia one month before the assault, establishing an operations center in a Bogota safehouse from which they communicated with Cuba and Nicaragua via codes and radio frequencies smuggled into the country with them. For two weeks, the Sandinistas drilled the M-19 assault group using a scale model of the Palace of Justice constructed in the yard of the safehouse.⁸

Of the 40 weapons found in the Palace of Justice at the end of the siege, 20 were identified as supplied directly by Nicaragua, as were all the ammunition and explosives used in the attack. The remainder of the weapons originated in the U.S., where they reportedly were traded for a shipment of Colombian drugs. The weapons

7. Bogota El Tiempo, December 20, 1985, p. 8a; FBIS, Latin America, December 26, 1985, p. F1.

8. Diario Las Americas, December 22, 1985, pp. 1 and 15A.

9. El Tiempo, December 20, 1985, p. 8a.

supplied by the Sandinistas included U.S. M-16 and AR-15 rifles left behind after American forces withdrew from Vietnam. These rifles were sold by Vietnam to Libya and were shipped by the Qadhafi regime to Nicaragua. The weapons were then smuggled into Colombia by a terrorist named Rosenberg Pabon, who had received training in Libya during the preceding months.¹⁰

The Sandinistas demonstrated both their contempt for international law and their overt support for terrorism by holding a special service for the slain M-19 guerrillas at a church in Managua only two days after the siege ended. During the service, an M-19 flag was displayed on the altar, and a Sandinista official delivered a homily praising the terrorists. The ceremony was attended by Tomas Borge.¹¹

Although the Colombian government temporarily recalled its ambassador from Managua and sent a formal note of protest to the Sandinistas detailing their involvement, the matter was quickly dropped. Apparently Colombia feared that it would jeopardize the Contadora Process, the effort by eight Latin American states to negotiate an end to the Nicaraguan Civil War.¹²

The "Americas Battalion"

The Sandinistas play an active role in unifying various Latin American revolutionary and terrorist groups into a single command structure dominated by Nicaraguan and Cuban advisors. The most recent example is the creation of the "Americas Battalion," the military wing of the Colombian-based National Guerrilla Coordinating Board (CNG). The members of the CNG are reportedly from five Western Hemisphere countries, including the U.S.,¹³ and they established the "Americas Battalion" in 1985 for combat operations in Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Peru. The Unit is also designed to provide military training and Marxist-Leninist indoctrination for "subversive personnel to extend their antisocial influence along the

10. Bogota El Espectador, December 19, 1985, pp. 1A, 13A; FBIS, Latin America, December 30, 1985, p. F2.

11. Bogota Emisoras Caracol Network, January 4, 1985; FBIS, Latin America, January 6, 1985, p. F1.

12. The Washington Post, January 6, 1986, p. A14.

13. Lima El Comercio, January 28, 1986, p. A2; FBIS, Latin America, February 13, 1986, p. J1.

subcontinent"--meaning that it seeks to replace traditional Latin American social, cultural, and religious values with a Soviet-style system.¹⁴

The "Americas Battalion" is composed of guerrillas from the Colombian M-19, the Ecuadorean Alfaro Vive Carajo, the Peruvian Tupac Amaru II movement, and the Venezuelan Red Flag. The Colombian authorities report that at least two U.S. citizens are members of the terrorist organization. Communiques intercepted by the Colombian military indicate that the "Americas Battalion" soon may be strengthened by a detachment of Palestinians, almost surely members of the PLO.¹⁵

Nicaragua's role in the National Guerrilla Coordinating Board and the Americas Battalion extends beyond command, control, and communications. Sandinista advisors from an elite commando unit, modeled on the Cuban Directorate of Special Operations (DOE), which serves in the field with guerrillas. As such, the Nicaraguans are engaged in military operations against Latin American nations that maintain friendly relations with Managua.

The Narcotics Connection

Sandinista involvement in international narcotics trafficking aims at subverting the U.S. through drug use and destabilizing other Western Hemisphere nations by financing revolution with narcotics profits. The drug trade is part of a Soviet-Cuban-Nicaraguan strategy against the West. Indeed, Fidel Castro has boasted: "We are going to make the people up there [the United States] white, white with cocaine."¹⁶ The Cuban dictator reportedly coordinated this strategy with Tomas Borge and other Sandinistas during a 1982 meeting in Havana.

Sandinista drug trafficking is handled by the Ministry of the Interior under Borge's direct control. In 1982, this ministry ruled that all cocaine, precious metals, and U.S. dollars recovered by the Ministry's Department of Criminal Investigations (DIC) must be sent to Borge's office. The proceeds from the sale of this contraband is used to help finance international clandestine operations.¹⁷

14. Ibid.

15. Lima El Comercio, January 28, 1986, p. A2.

16. Uri Ra'anán, Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, et al., Hydra of Carnage (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1986), p. 330.

17. U.S. Department of State, Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean, Inside the Sandinista Regime: A Special Investigator's Perspective, p. 19.

Borge made contact with Colombian cocaine dealers through Captain Paul Atha, manager of a Nicaraguan Interior Ministry front operation called Holding Investment Corporation, which handles business activities in Managua and abroad to obtain U.S. dollars. The Nicaraguan government provides aircraft for cocaine traffickers and allows them to use Nicaraguan airports for refueling stops between Colombia and the U.S.¹⁸

A number of middle level Sandinista officials in the Interior Ministry have records of drug dealing and other criminal activities. These include Lt. Mauricio Aguilar, chief of the DIC, Lt. Dean Dixon Buttigan, DIC deputy chief, and two DIC operations officers. The Interior Ministry's network of secret police informants throughout Nicaragua have a dual purpose: informing the police about persons who use or deal in drugs and then often reselling the drugs when confiscated by the police; these informants control and manage the local drug market in an almost monopolistic fashion under DIC protection.¹⁹

Terrorist Attacks in Costa Rica

Newly elected Costa Rican President Oscar Arias Sanchez has stated a desire "to remain outside the military conflicts" of Central America.²⁰ Nicaragua ignores his desire. In the past five years, Managua has triggered a number of terrorist attacks that violated Costa Rican sovereignty.

In January 1982, two members of the Central American Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRTC), a multinational coalition of Latin American revolutionaries, were arrested in Costa Rica in connection with the attempted kidnapping of a Salvadoran businessman. When interrogated by Costa Rican police, they said that they had received "military and political training" in Nicaragua and that the Sandinistas had provided them with false identity documents to enter Costa Rica.²¹ Later that year, three Nicaraguan Embassy officials were expelled from Costa Rica for their involvement in the bombing of the San Jose offices of SAHSA, the Honduran national airline. The Costa Rican investigation of the case implicated a Colombian terrorist recruited by the Sandinista officials in Costa Rica. The Sandinistas

18. Ibid., p. 18.

19. Inside the Sandinista Regime, p. 20.

20. The New York Times, February 26, 1986, p. A3.

21. U.S. Department of State, "Revolution Beyond Our Borders," Special Report No. 132, September 1985, pp. 17-18.

have also been named in several assassination attacks on Nicaraguan exiles in Costa Rica, including Alfonso Robelo and Eden Pastora.²²

Former Sandinista DGSE officer Miguel Bolanos Hunter was involved in strategy sessions for the subversion of Costa Rica and other neighbors of Nicaragua. In an interview given at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, he said:

The Sandinistas are trying to destabilize Costa Rica by advising the Unions to make unreasonable demands in their negotiations with the government. They are trying to force a confrontation between the government and the unions which would lead to repression.²³ Repression would justify the creation of armed bands.

POLICY OPTIONS

Only ending the use of Nicaragua and Cuba as bases for terrorism and subversion will eradicate the growing menace they pose to the Western Hemisphere. In the case of Nicaragua, the most effective means of dealing with the problem would be the replacement of the Sandinista regime with a democratic government truly reflecting the legitimate aspirations of the Nicaraguan people. If "people power" worked in the Philippines, it could work in Nicaragua. To set the preconditions for this, the U.S. must continue supplying the anti-communist Nicaraguan democratic resistance--fighting on several fronts in Nicaragua--with enough military and economic assistance to allow them to win the same type of freedom from tyranny that the people of Haiti and the Philippines recently have achieved.

The U.S. also must help its Western Hemisphere neighbors expand their counterinsurgency and counterterrorism capabilities. A major obstacle to this is Section 660 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, which prevents training and assistance to the police forces of Colombia, Ecuador, and other nations, despite their proved record of respect for democracy and human rights.

Although the U.S. has improved its ability to interdict narcotics shipments to North America, there is still a need for closer cooperation with drug enforcement agencies of other nations in the Western Hemisphere. The Reagan Administration should increase the number of Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) officers now serving in Latin America and the Caribbean, and should also push for a special

22. Ibid.

23. Ra'anana, et al., op. cit., p. 318.

anti-narcotics body with police powers to be created within the framework of the Organization of American States (OAS).

CONCLUSION

Sandinista support for regional and international terrorism and subversion is founded on the strategic objective of exporting Marxism-Leninism. Such a strategy ignores the sanctity of human life, the rights of individuals, and the strictures of international law. Nicaragua has become one of the world's terror capitals. It threatens its neighbors and the U.S. A prudent U.S. foreign policy must seek to remove this terrorist threat to the Americas.

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