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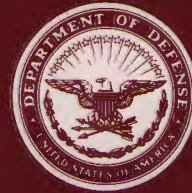
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# **The Sandinista Military Build-Up: An Update**

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October 1987

**Cover: Sandinista troops board sophisticated Soviet-built helicopters during operations near San Andres de Bocay in May 1987.**

Reuters/Bettmann Newsphotos



# **The Sandinista Military Build-Up: An Update**

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# The Sandinista Military Build-Up: An Update



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# The Sandinista Military Build-Up: An Update



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## Overview

Since taking power in Nicaragua, the Sandinista government has built a military machine without rival in Central America. The United States, Nicaragua's neighbors, and others view this continuing build-up and its impact on instability in the region with grave concern. Contributing to that concern is the recognition that the Nicaraguan military build-up:

- Is unprecedented in the history of Central America;
- Complicates the search for a peaceful resolution to the Central American crisis;
- Poses serious threats to neighboring nations;
- Enables the Sandinistas to tighten their control over the Nicaraguan people; and,
- Has exacerbated Nicaragua's economic crisis.

This study describes the build-up and supplements the information on Nicaragua published in two other State Department/Defense Department publications, *The Soviet-Cuban Connection in Central America and the Caribbean* and *The Challenge to Democracy in Central America*. It also outlines some implications of the Sandinista build-up and discusses U.S. policy toward Nicaragua.



## The Sandinista Military: 1979–1987

### Guerrilla Origins

In July 1979, a broad, popular coalition of Nicaraguan citizens calling for democracy overthrew the government of Nicaraguan President Anastasio Somoza. Opposition to the Somoza dictatorship had become widespread during the mid-1970s, and the assassination in January 1978 of Somoza's leading critic, *La Prensa* editor Pedro

Joaquin Chamorro, triggered demonstrations and a lengthy general strike.

The Sandinista National Liberation Front (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*—FSLN), which had been fighting a guerrilla war against the Somoza regime since the 1960s, capitalized on this mounting resentment and captured the imagination of the Nicaraguan people through spectacular actions such as Eden Pastora's (*Comandante Cero*) seizure of the National Palace in August 1978.

The ranks of the FSLN swelled; by late 1978, it had nearly 1,000 combatants,<sup>1</sup> and by the following summer the force had grown to about 5,000.<sup>2</sup> Although numerically smaller than

Somoza's 7,100-man National Guard (expanded to about 10,000 men), the Sandinistas were winning wider support from disgruntled Nicaraguans and received large amounts of materiel from abroad. In contrast, the National Guard was isolated from the people and faced increasing difficulties in obtaining supplies.

In June 1979, the Organization of American States, at the request of the United States, took the unprecedented step of calling for the "definitive replacement" of the Somoza regime.<sup>3</sup> With no hope of external support and having lost control of much of the nation's territory, Somoza fled Nicaragua on July 17. The National Guard disin-

Rally in Managua marking first anniversary of the Sandinista revolution.

Owen Franken/Sygma





tegrated literally overnight; many guardsmen, including most of the higher ranking officers, fled into exile, while thousands of others, mostly enlisted men, were imprisoned by the new government.<sup>4</sup>

When the Sandinistas marched triumphantly into Managua on July 19, 1979, there was great hope for Nicaragua's future. The leaders of the FSLN, a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist "vanguard," had nonetheless publicly pledged themselves to the principles of political pluralism, a mixed economy, and a nonaligned foreign policy. Although dominated by the Sandinistas, the new Government of National Reconstruction (GRN) included many others who also had participated in the anti-Somoza revolution.<sup>5</sup> The GRN enjoyed broad international support, and the United States took the lead in the assistance effort, authorizing \$118 million of economic aid and humanitarian assistance during the following 18 months.

## The Build-Up Begins

Once in power, the Sandinistas quickly set about building their armed forces and transforming their guerrilla army into a well-equipped professional military. The *comandantes* realized from the outset that they would need a large, *politicized* military to pursue their revolutionary objectives and to hold power once the bloom of the revolution had worn off and their true political orientation was exposed.<sup>6</sup> In the fall of 1979, they initiated a military build-up without precedent in Central America. In eight years, the Sandinistas have developed a military establishment with firepower and mobility unmatched in the region. This expansion has been made possible with massive assistance from Cuba and the Soviet Union. Indeed, only the militarization of Cuba itself in the

*"We reaffirm that we are arming ourselves without spending one cent and we reaffirm that we do not have to render accounts to anyone whether there are tanks, cannons, or planes here."*

—Defense Minister Humberto Ortega  
June 4, 1981



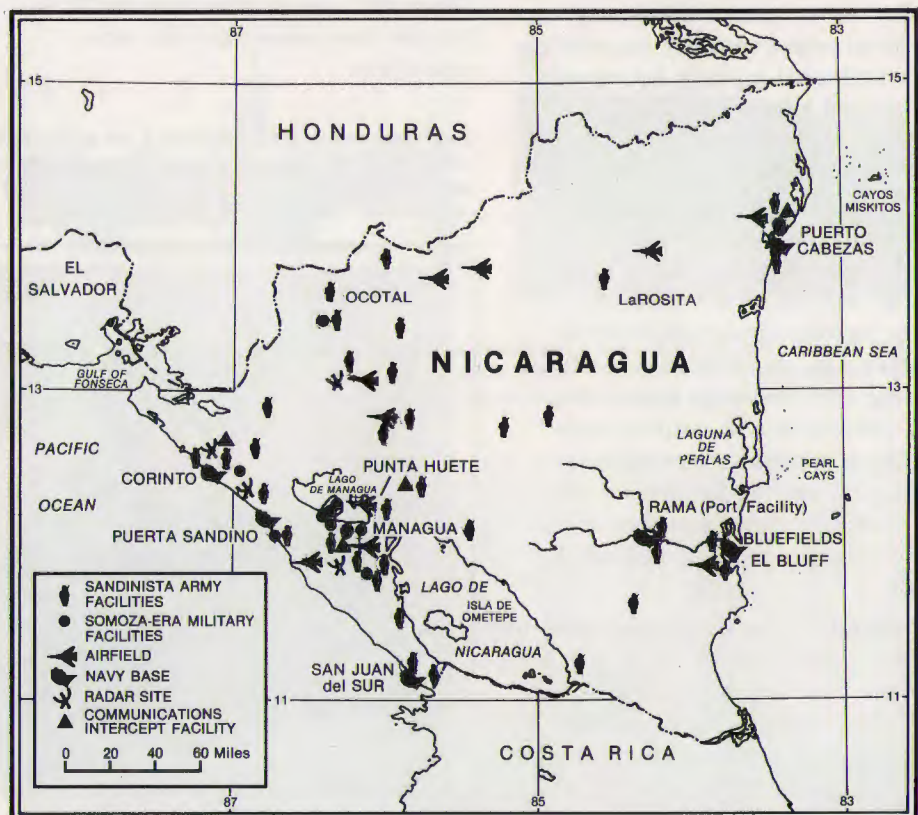
AP/Wide World Photos

1960s is comparable to what has been occurring in Nicaragua since 1979.

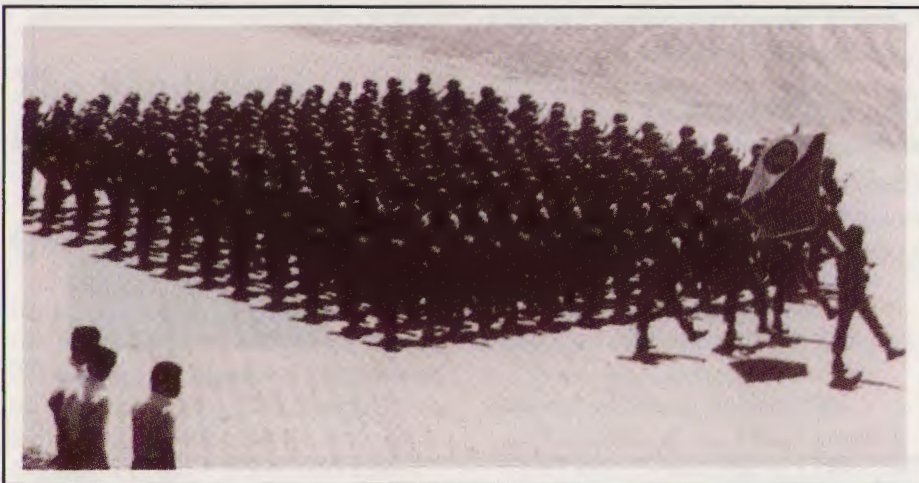
The Sandinista plan called for a steady increase in the number of men and women under arms, first through voluntary enlistment and later through conscription. By mid-1987, they had

amassed an active-duty force of more than 74,000. The Sandinistas' total strength, including all regular, reserve, and militia units and security forces, now is about 120,000 out of the 1.5 million adult Nicaraguan population.

The Sandinistas now have 40 major garrisons and smaller posts throughout the nation.







Sandinista troops passing in review. The militarization of Nicaraguan society has led to the building of armed forces nearly half the size of those of Mexico, a nation more than 20 times as populous.

## Ground Forces

The Sandinista Popular Army (*Ejercito Popular Sandinista*—EPS), the full-time, regular army of the FSLN, has grown to 37,000. The EPS has systematically moved toward developing a combined arms capability, augmenting its conventional infantry forces with mechanized infantry, armored, and artillery brigades. The Sandinistas also have emphasized the formation of reserve and militia forces; currently, these units total some 74,000 men, of which about one-third are on active duty at any one time. Sandinista reserves include combat-experienced veterans who are required to continue training after discharge from active duty. Dozens of new military bases have been constructed throughout Nicaragua, and the Sandinistas now have some 40 major garrisons and numerous smaller posts throughout the nation.

**Infantry.** The EPS has formed 10 regular infantry battalions. A special airborne battalion was inaugurated in 1982. The following year, special counterinsurgency battalions (*Bat-*

*talion de Lucha Irregular*—BLI) were trained and equipped to engage anti-Sandinista forces. There are now 14 such BLIs. Each Sandinista combat brigade has a counterinsurgency unit called a Light Hunter Battalion (BLC). These BLCs are smaller than the BLIs, but they have essentially the same capabilities.

The Soviet-made T-55 tank has a 100-millimeter gun. Once the Soviet Union's main battle tank, the T-55 now is produced for export. It is far superior to any other tank in Central America. The Sandinistas have more than 110 T-55s. In comparison, Somoza had three operational World War II-vintage U.S. tanks.



Units along Nicaragua's frontiers are organized as a special border guard force (*Tropas Guarda Fronteras*—TGF). The bulk of the Sandinistas' infantry forces now consists of roughly 110 reserve and militia battalions. These infantry units are equipped primarily with Soviet-bloc arms, such as the AK-47 assault rifle.

The Nicaraguan Interior Ministry, which controls the Sandinista Police (*Policia Sandinista*—PS) and the General Directorate of State Security (*Direccion General de Seguridad del Estado*—DGSE), the Sandinista secret police, has direct command of its own brigade of 2,000 highly trained infantry troops (*Tropas Pablo Ubeda*).

**Armor.** The Sandinista army has adhered closely to Soviet-Cuban military doctrine in the development of its armed forces.<sup>7</sup> When the Sandinistas seized power in July 1979, they inherited the hodgepodge collection of armor that had belonged to Somoza's National Guard, including some obsolete World War II-vintage tanks, only three of which were operational.



The remainder of Somoza's armor consisted of 25 antiquated Staghound armored cars.

The Sandinistas began building an armored force of unrivaled size and firepower in Central America. Crews and mechanics for tanks and other vehicles were sent to Cuba for training. Facilities to support the forthcoming arsenal were built.

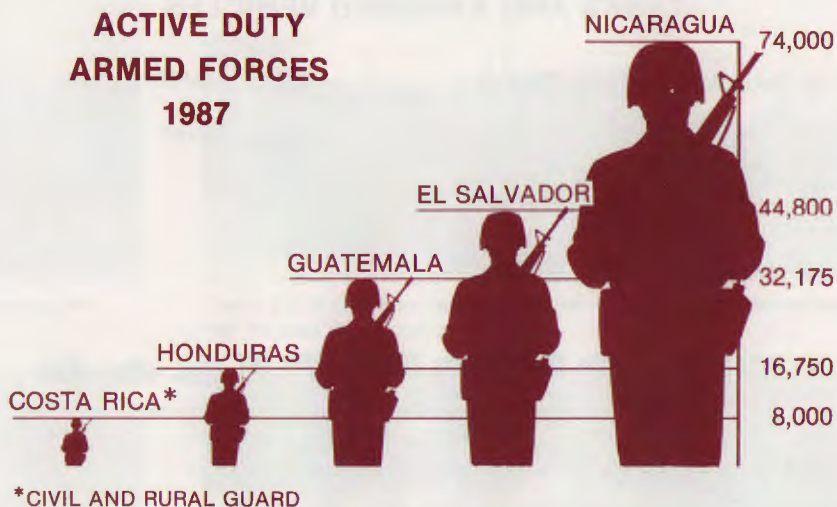
The first Soviet-built T-55 tanks arrived in mid-1981. The T-55, weighing 36 metric tons and armed with a 100-millimeter gun, can outgun any tank in the region. Formerly the Soviets' main battle tank, it still is being used by Warsaw Pact armies. The Sandinistas used the T-55s to form their first armored battalion, based just outside Managua. By 1982, the Sandinistas had obtained a sufficient number of T-55s to organize a second armored battalion. By the end of 1984, they had acquired more than 110 T-55 tanks, enough to form 5 armored battalions.<sup>8</sup>

In 1984, the Soviets provided the Nicaraguans with about 30 PT-76 light tanks. This amphibious tank, armed with a 76-millimeter gun, fords rivers easily and can maneuver in some of the difficult terrain found in parts of Nicaragua.

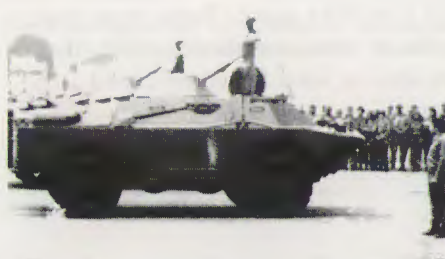
The Soviets, through their allies, also have equipped the Sandinista army with more than 250 armored vehicles, mostly BTR-60 and BTR-152 armored personnel carriers. These vehicles are armed with a machinegun and can carry a squad of infantry. The first BTR-60s began arriving in mid-1981. The EPS also has received Soviet-made command vehicles and BRDM-2 amphibious armored reconnaissance vehicles. The Sandinistas now have formed two mechanized infantry brigades.

The terrain in certain parts of Nicaragua is well suited to armored operations, although in other parts of the country the terrain imposes con-

### ACTIVE DUTY ARMED FORCES 1987



Nicaragua has a higher percentage of its population on active military duty than any other country in Latin America, except Cuba.

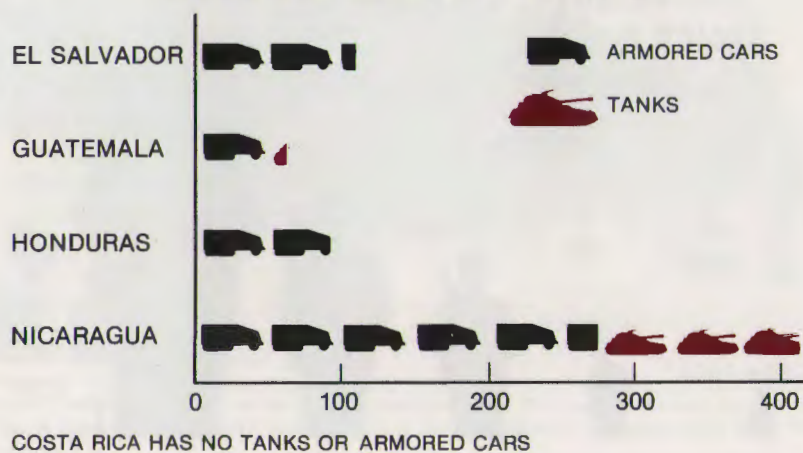


Somoza had 25 antiquated armored cars; the Sandinistas now have over 250. The BRDM-2 (left) is fully amphibious and armed with a machinegun. The BTR-152 (right) carries up to 17 infantry troops, and the BTR-60 (below) can transport a squad of infantry.





## TANKS AND ARMORED VEHICLES



straints. Tanks can operate in the flat plains of the west, which encompass the principal population and economic centers of the nation. On the other hand, the mountains and rugged terrain of the northern departments limit off-road maneuverability. The lowlands of the Atlantic Coast region inhibit off-road use of the heavy T-55s, but the Sandinistas can deploy the amphibious PT-76s in this region. While some observers have argued that

the terrain in Central America renders tanks of only marginal military value, the Sandinistas and their Soviet suppliers do not share this view; indeed, they have continued the rapid increase in the size of their tank force, doubling it in 1984 alone. Tanks have been useful in rural warfare situations; they can also be used for urban crowd control.

**Artillery.** The growth of the EPS's artillery force has been equally

dramatic. During the revolution, the Sandinistas' fire-support weapons consisted of nothing larger than mortars. When they defeated Somoza's National Guard, they inherited three 105-millimeter howitzers.

During their first year in power, the Sandinistas began receiving ZIS-2s, Soviet-made 57-millimeter antitank guns. By 1981, they were obtaining D-30s, Soviet-made 122-millimeter howitzers that far surpass in range and firepower all other artillery in Central America. That same year, they began receiving D-20s, Soviet-made 152-millimeter howitzers, which represented a further qualitative increase in their artillery capability.

In 1982, the Sandinistas took delivery of the first of their Soviet-made BM-21s, capable of launching a rapid-fire barrage of 40 122-millimeter rockets, greatly increasing their area bombardment capability. In 1983, the Sandinistas formally inaugurated a special artillery brigade, based in Managua. Currently, the EPS's inventory includes about 60 heavy artillery pieces, about 30 BM-21 multiple rocket launchers, more than 120 anti-tank guns, and hundreds of mortars.

**Support Units.** The Sandinistas have begun to build an elaborate infrastructure to support their combat forces. They have created a special engineering battalion and communications units. The East Germans alone have provided the Sandinistas with more than 3,500 IFA W-50 military transport trucks since 1980. Large numbers of other vehicles have been delivered by the Soviet Union and its allies. These include more than 800 jeeps, 40 flatbed trucks capable of transporting T-55 tanks, 6 tank ferries to shuttle the T-55s across rivers, numerous communications vans, and about 75 tanker trucks for fuel.

The Soviets and Soviet-bloc states also have provided a multitude of

The PT-76 has a 76-millimeter gun and is fully amphibious. The Soviets provided the Sandinistas with about 30 of these light tanks in 1984.







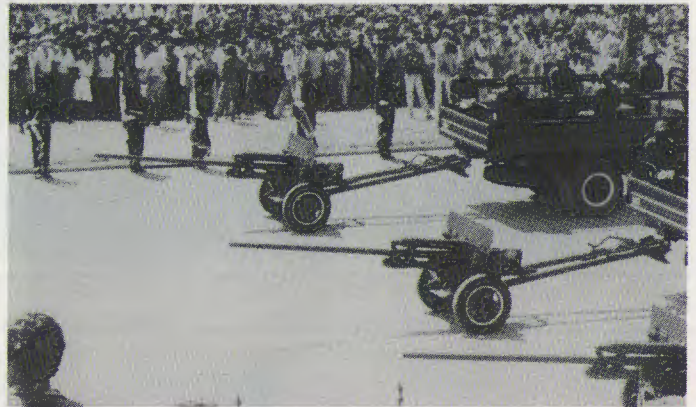
The Soviets have provided the Sandinistas with more than 800 jeeps.



These ZIL-131 trucks, when equipped with decontamination tanks, can be used for chemical warfare.



The BM-21 multiple rocket launcher (left) can fire a barrage of 40 122-millimeter rockets more than 12 miles. Shown at right are ZIS-2 57-millimeter antitank guns on parade in Managua. The D-20 152-millimeter howitzer (below) is the largest artillery piece in Central America. It can hurl a 96-pound shell nearly 11 miles.





other material ranging from mobile maintenance workshops and field kitchens to minelaying and communications equipment. In 1982, they furnished the Sandinistas with the equipment to build a communications intercept facility at Santa María near Managua. Subsequently, additional intercept facilities have been built at Puerto Cabezas, San Francisco, and Santa Rosa.

## Air Force and Air Defense

The 3,500-man Sandinista Air Force and Air Defense Force (*Fuerza Aerea Sandinista/Defensa Anti-Aerea*—FAS/DAA) has been undergoing substantial improvements since 1979. The Sandinistas began with the remnants of the National Guard's small air force, which included a handful of AT-33 jets, Cessna 337 "push-pull"

aircraft, transport aircraft, trainers, and helicopters. The Sandinistas placed a high priority on developing a more powerful air arm. Early on, they sent personnel to Cuba and Soviet-bloc countries to be trained as pilots and mechanics, and they made plans to expand existing airfields and to build new ones.

Because of the long lead time associated with the acquisition of air-



At left is one of four SIAI-Marchetti SF-260 military trainers acquired from Libya in 1982. Shown below is one of the world's most advanced attack helicopters, the Mi-24/25 HIND D. It has a nose-mounted machinegun and can carry up to 4 pods containing nearly 130 57-millimeter rockets as well as antitank missiles or bombs. This is the same helicopter used by the Soviets in Afghanistan. The Sandinistas now have 12 of these "flying tanks."

UPI photo





craft, that is, the need for lengthy pilot training and the construction of airfields, the FAS grew slowly in its early years. The first fixed-wing aircraft added to the inventory were older and unsophisticated models, such as Soviet-made AN-2s. In 1982, they acquired four Italian-made SF-260 trainer/tactical support aircraft from Libya. Six Soviet-made AN-26 medium transports have significantly improved the Sandinistas' logistics support capabilities.

The Sandinistas' helicopter inventory has grown more rapidly. The great majority of these craft have been obtained from the Soviets and their allies. In 1981, the first two Soviet Mi-8/17 HIP medium-lift helicopters arrived. The following April, the Soviets formally donated the HIPs to the Sandinistas, explaining that they were to be used to help develop the Atlantic Coast region of Nicaragua. In fact, the HIP is one of the Soviet Union's front-line combat helicopters and can be armed with machinegun and rocket pods. The Sandinistas have received more than 50 HIPs and have used them extensively in military operations. The Sandinistas also have acquired Polish-built Mi-2/HOPLITE utility/cargo helicopters.

In late 1984, the Sandinistas received the first of a new generation of helicopter gunships, the Mi-24/HIND D. This is the Soviets' principal attack helicopter, and it has been used extensively by the Soviets against resistance forces in Afghanistan. One of the most highly sophisticated attack helicopters in the world, it holds the world military helicopter speed record and can be armed with a multiple-barrel machinegun, guided missiles, rocket pods, and bombs.

The HIND's heavy armor, coupled with its high speed, greatly reduces its vulnerability to small arms fire.<sup>9</sup> Acquisition of the HIND D adds a new



In 1983, the Sandinistas acquired their first two Soviet-built AN-26 transports. They now have six.

dimension to warfare in Central America. Key targets in Honduras, Costa Rica, and El Salvador are all within the reach of this flying "tank." Some 12 Mi-24s have been delivered to Nicaragua and have been used against internal resistance forces.

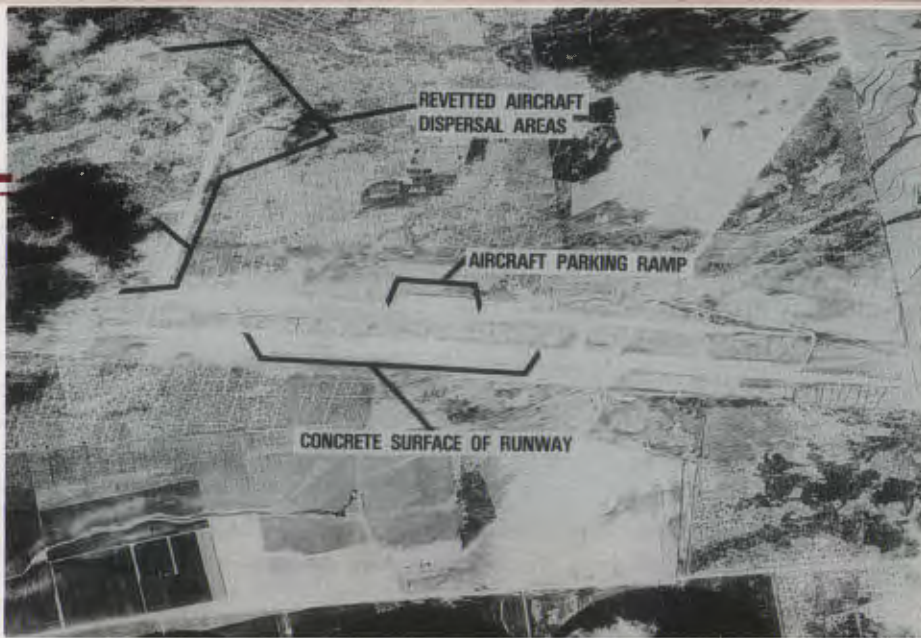
Top FSLN leaders have repeatedly proclaimed their desire to acquire high-performance jet fighters. Nicaraguan pilots and mechanics reportedly have

been undergoing training in Cuba and eastern Europe since the early 1980s. In 1982, with Cuban assistance, the Sandinistas began constructing the Punta Huete airfield in an isolated area northeast of Managua. The principal runway at Punta Huete is 10,000 feet in length, making it the longest military runway in Central America. It can accommodate any aircraft in the Soviet-bloc inventory. Sixteen revet-

The Mi-8/17 HIP is one of the Soviets' principal combat helicopters. It can be armed with a machinegun, rocket pods, and antitank missiles. Some HIPs also serve as transports for Sandinista troops and their equipment. The Sandinistas have received more than 50 HIPs.







The runway at Punta Huete now is operational. The 10,000-foot strip is the longest military runway in Central America, and can accommodate any aircraft in the Soviet inventory. Designed for jet aircraft, revetments are clearly visible in the alert and aircraft dispersal areas.

ments of the size and design appropriate for jet fighters have been constructed.

Helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft have been flying out of Punta Huete since 1986. In addition to Punta Huete, the Sandinistas have been upgrading their principal airbase at Sandino Airport in Managua as well as other airfields at Montelimar, Puerto

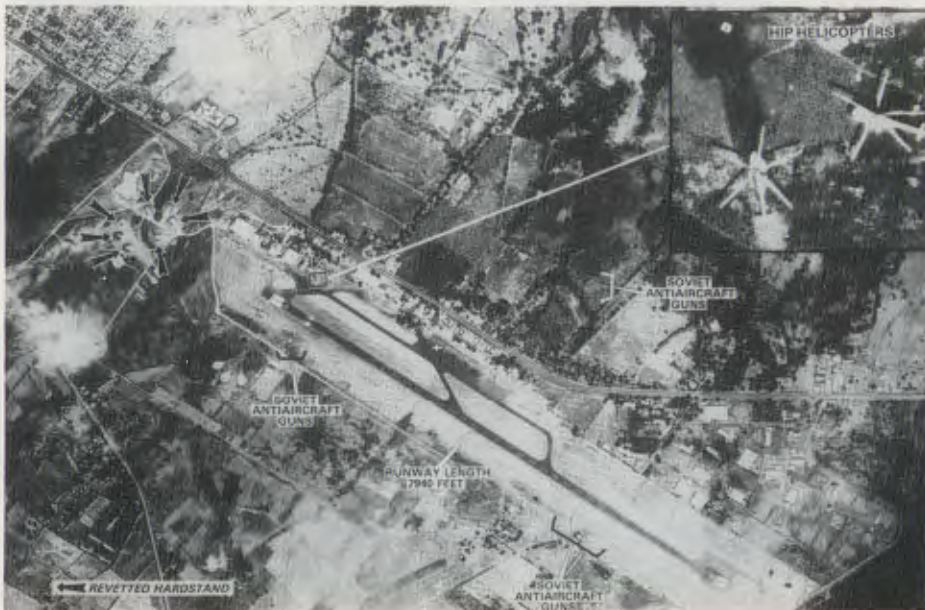
Cabezas, Esteli, La Rosita, and Bluefields.

Soviet air warfare doctrine calls for aircraft to operate in a "controlled air environment," that is, the aircraft are controlled by command elements on the ground that monitor their actions via radar. In 1983, the first Soviet-made Early Warning/Ground Control-Intercept (EW/GCI) facility in

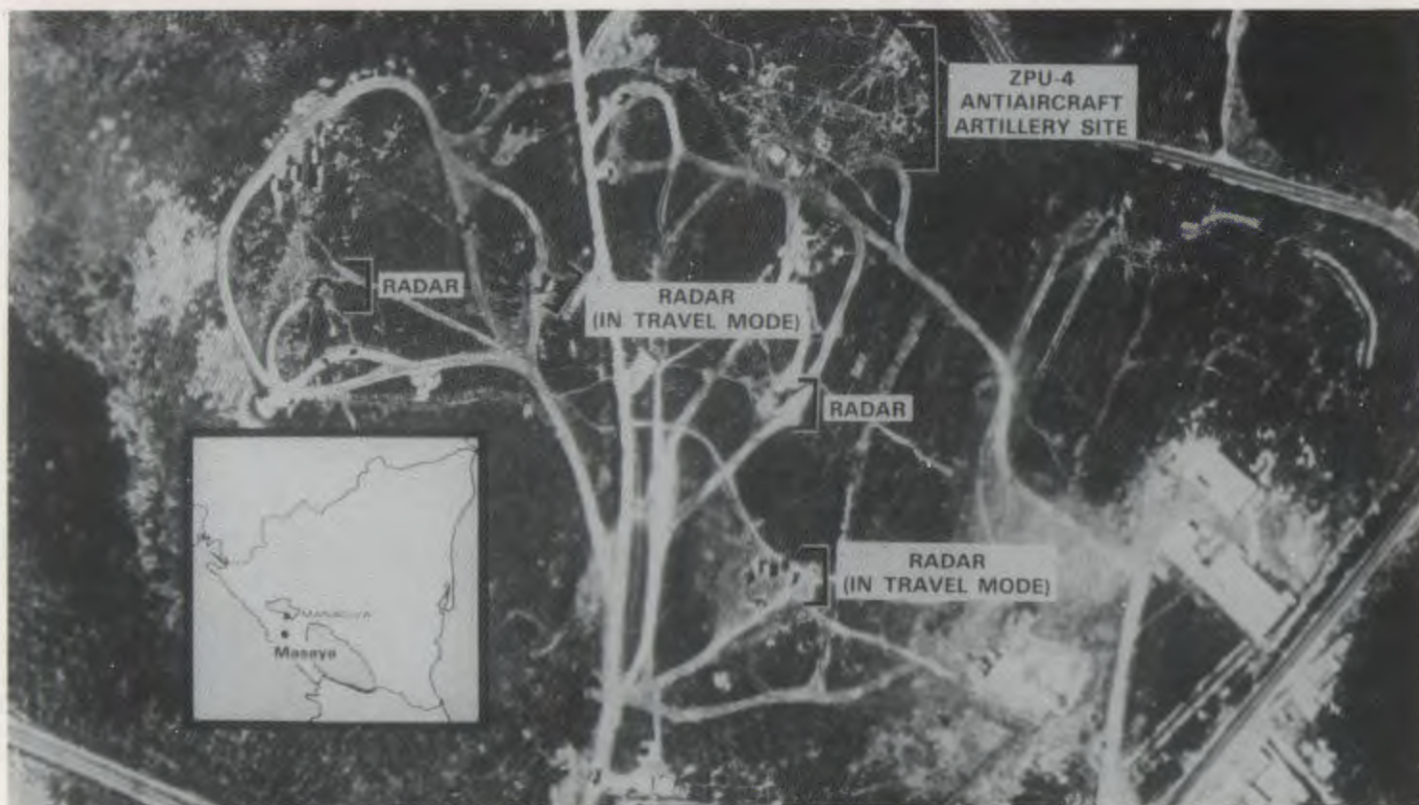
Nicaragua was assembled near Masaya. During 1984, additional radar sites were established at Toro Blanco and Esteli. Early in 1985, a fourth radar system was installed at San Juan del Sur. A temporary site at El Bluff has provided coverage of the Atlantic Coast as well. A coastal surveillance radar was installed at El Polvon in late 1984. The Sandinistas now have radar coverage over most of Nicaragua and can monitor and control their own aircraft movements deep into Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica. There is no comparable radar system anywhere in the region.

The early warning capability of the radar net also is associated with the Sandinista air defense forces. As early as 1980, the Sandinistas began acquiring ZPU-4, ZU-23, and M-1939 anti-aircraft guns and SA-7 surface-to-air missiles. The KS-19 100-millimeter cannon with fire-control radar was added in 1984. Some 400 pieces of anti-aircraft artillery and over 350 SA-7/SA-14 surface-to-air missile launchers are deployed to protect major Sandinista military facilities and units, along with political and economic facilities.

Augusto Cesar Sandino International Airport in Managua is the principal base for the Sandinista Air Force. The western portion of the airfield (left in photo) is the military area.







The Masaya Early Warning/Ground Control-Intercept radar facility was assembled in 1983.

The Sandinistas are upgrading the airfield at Puerto Cabezas, lengthening the runway by more than 2,000 feet.







New facilities have been added to the Montelimar airfield.

The runway at Esteli has been lengthened considerably. On the runway are two SF-260 aircraft given to the Sandinistas by Libya.







The M-1939, a 37-millimeter anti-aircraft gun, can fire at the rate of 160 to 180 rounds per minute. There are nine M-1939 sites in the Managua area alone.



The ZU-23 is a 23-millimeter anti-aircraft gun. Each of its two barrels can fire at the rate of 800 to 1,000 rounds per minute at a range of 8,000 feet. The soldier in the bed of the truck is holding a SA-14 surface-to-air missile with an infra-red guidance system. The Soviets have provided hundreds of these types of sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons to the Sandinistas.

## Navy

The 1,000-man Sandinista navy (*Marina de Guerra Sandinista*—MGS) has similarly undergone both a qualitative and quantitative transformation since 1979. Somoza's "navy" consisted of a handful of old patrol boats, a landing craft, and about 200 men. The Sandinistas are acquiring a fleet of more modern vessels. In 1983, they obtained two French Vedette patrol boats and two Soviet ZHUK patrol boats. Since then, the Sandinistas have received six more ZHUKs. North Korea has supplied two KIMJIN and two SINHUNG patrol boats. Two Soviet-built YEVGENYA-class inshore minesweepers have been delivered by Cuba, while four Polish-built K-8 minesweeping boats were delivered by the Soviet ship *Bakuriani*.

This Soviet-made ZHUK patrol boat is one of more than 12 vessels provided by the Soviet Union, Cuba, and North Korea.





## Recruitment and Conscription

The Sandinistas initially had no difficulty in finding recruits for their military. Many youths eagerly joined the ranks of the EPS in the days immediately after Somoza's fall. Gradually, however, voluntary enlistment declined as disillusionment with the FSLN grew, according to former Sandinista soldiers. To meet the goals for their mili-

tary build-up, the Sandinistas began using a variety of coercive measures at schools and workplaces. They also used the neighborhood Sandinista Defense Committees (*Comites de Defensa Sandinista*—CDS), "block committees" modeled after the Cuban Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, to coerce men and women to enlist in the army, the reserves, or militia units.

When these tactics failed to provide sufficient manpower, the Sandinistas turned to the draft.<sup>10</sup> In July 1983, Defense Minister Humberto Ortega proclaimed that the government would adopt mandatory enrollment. Despite widespread opposition, the Sandinistas enacted the draft law in September of that year, calling it Patriotic Military Service (*Servicio Militar Patriótico*—SMP). Technically, the law made males aged 18 to 40 eligible for the draft, with those in the 18- to 21-year-age bracket subject to conscription effective January 1, 1984, and those over 21 subject to subsequent service. It also provided deferments for those in special categories, such as government workers with key jobs.

In practice, the Sandinistas began inducting youths by late 1983, and six rounds of call-ups had taken place by early 1985. The Sandinistas claim that 30,000 men have been drafted, but many Nicaraguans believe that the real number is far higher. Thousands of youths were simply summoned by their local Sandinista draft boards, while many others were captured in house-to-house sweeps, roadblocks, and roundups at public places, such as movie theaters, dance halls, and ball parks.

The Sandinistas have been indiscriminate about the age of those they impress, often seizing youths in their mid-teens, below the official draft age. While most of those drafted do

Wide World Photos





enter the army rather than go to jail, thousands of youths have gone into hiding, and many others have joined the armed resistance or slipped across the borders into exile.

Many Nicaraguans have protested forced induction into the Sandinista military, which defectors have referred to as the political army of the FSLN. Also, there is broad resentment over the inadequate training given militia recruits. Frequently, draftees without adequate military training—but with heavy political indoctrination—are sent to face the resistance forces.

As a result of this resentment, spontaneous anti-draft demonstrations have erupted throughout Nicaragua, especially in 1984–85.<sup>11</sup> For example, for three days in September 1984, hundreds of students in Chinandega marched in protest. In December, the residents of Nagarote clashed with Sandinista troops who had come to sweep the town for draft-age youths. Similar acts of protest have occurred in other locations.<sup>12</sup>



Cuban-style barracks area near Villa Nueva. The Sandinistas signed a military agreement with the Cuban Army in 1979.

Sandinista soldiers board an Mi-8/17 helicopter. The government began inducting youths by late 1983, and six call-ups had taken place by early 1985. The Sandinistas claim that 30,000 men have been drafted, but Nicaraguans believe the real number is much higher. Wide World Photos





## Cuban and Soviet Assistance

The Sandinista military build-up would have been impossible without massive assistance from Cuba and the Soviet Union. Fidel Castro provided the Sandinistas encouragement, training, and refuge during their long struggle against Somoza, and he supplied them with weapons for their final offensive in 1979. The Cuban official who commanded the support network based in Costa Rica, Julian Lopez Diaz, was appointed Cuba's ambassador to Nicaragua as soon as the Sandinistas were in power.

Within a week of the fall of

Somoza, Cuba had placed about 100 military and security personnel in Nicaragua. By early 1985, the number of Cuban military/security advisers in Nicaragua had grown to some 2,500.<sup>13</sup> These Cubans permeate the Ministries of Defense and Interior, operating at all levels of the armed forces and security forces from the General Staff in Managua down to the battalion and, in some cases, even at company levels. They are prominent in military training facilities and in areas where technical expertise is required, such as aviation and telecommunications. There is evidence that they fill active roles, such as helicopter pilots and counterinsurgency combat command-

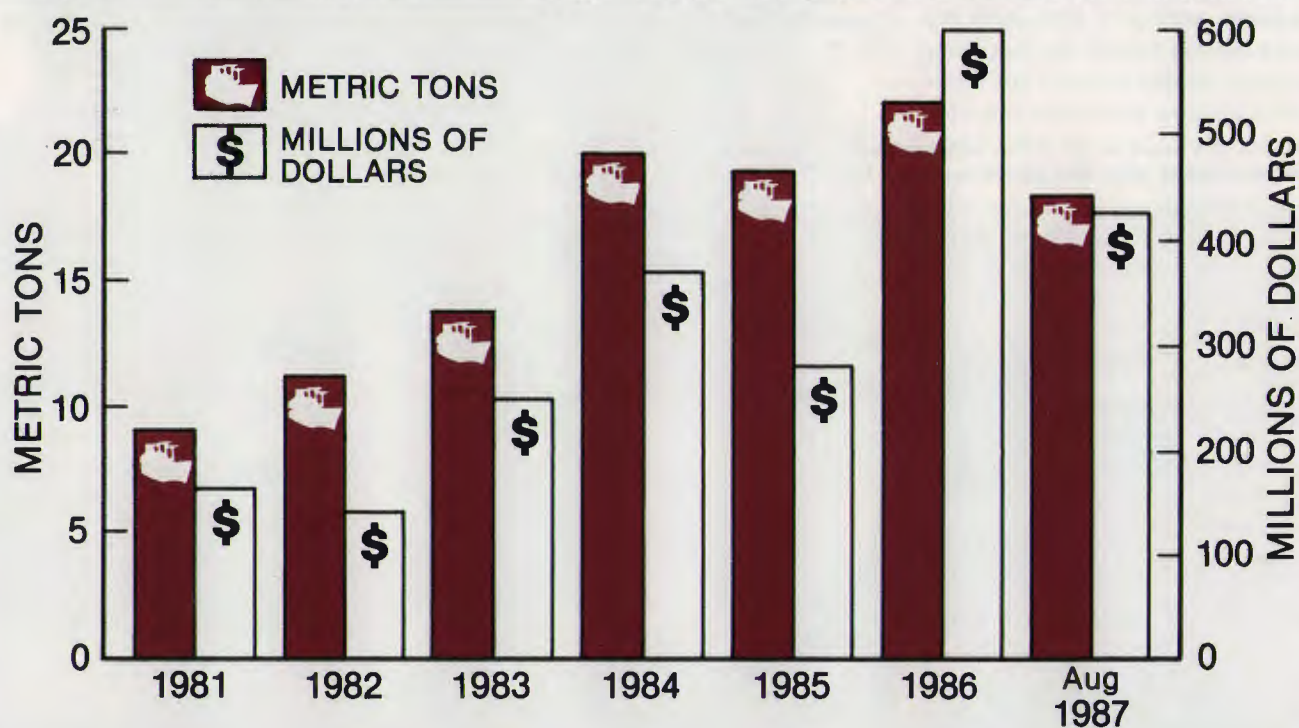
ers. An additional 100 Soviet and bloc military/security advisers also operate in Nicaragua.

These Cuban and Soviet-bloc advisers have strongly influenced the organization and tactics of the Sandinista military. The units of the Sandinista army and militia are modeled after their Cuban counterparts; in 1980, the Nicaraguans even copied the Cubans' four-digit unit identification system. Some Nicaraguan military bases are modeled after similar facilities in Cuba.

Until recently, the Soviets used surrogates to mask the extent of their own involvement in the Sandinista military build-up. Cuba was the first

Since 1979, the total value of tanks, helicopters, and other war materiel shipped to Nicaragua has exceeded \$2 billion.

### SOVIET-BLOC MILITARY DELIVERIES TO NICARAGUA

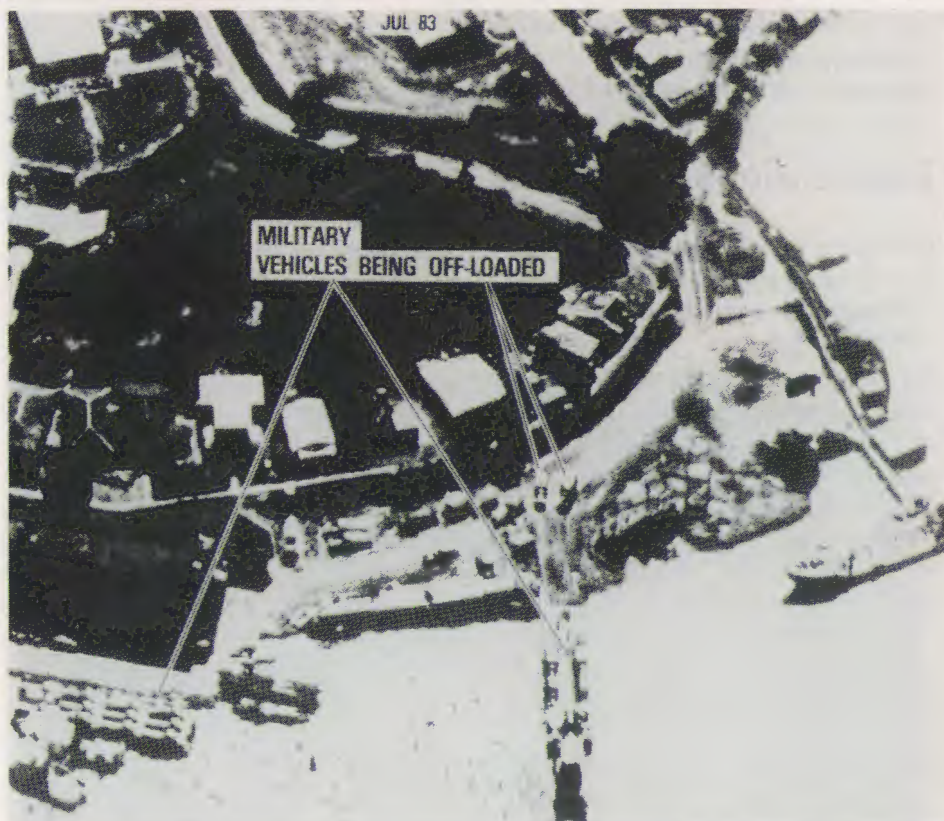




to make substantial deliveries of Soviet-made arms, and later Algeria and Bulgaria took on this role. Direct Soviet shipment of military-related goods occurred by 1981, but not until late 1984 did a Soviet ship directly deliver major weapons systems—Mi-24/25 helicopters and K-8 patrol boats—directly to Nicaragua.

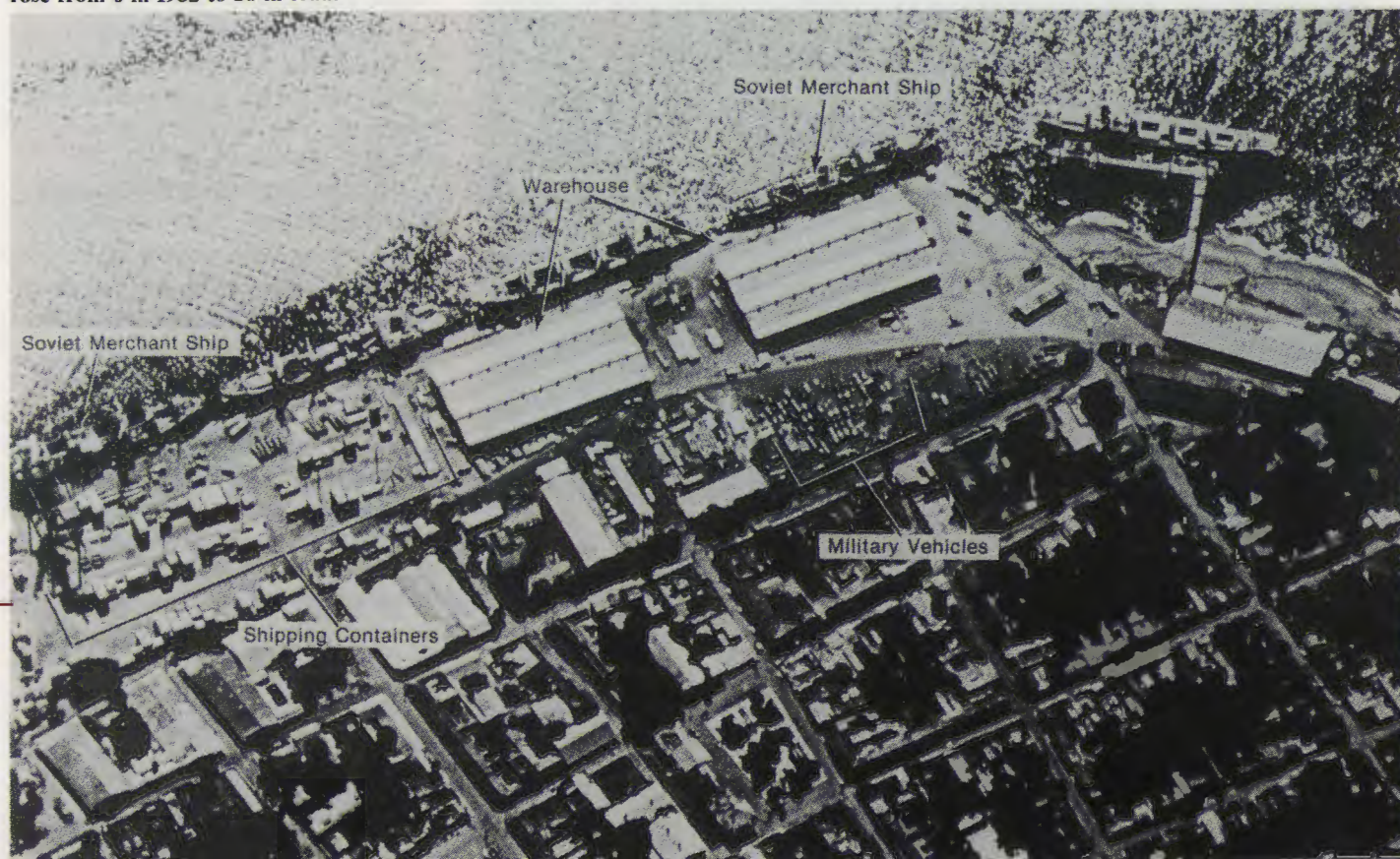
Because Soviet military hardware began arriving in Nicaragua in early 1980, it is likely that the Sandinistas' initial secret arms agreements with Cuba and the Soviet Union were concluded shortly after the Sandinistas seized power in 1979. In 1979, the FSLN signed a secret military cooperation agreement with the Cuban Army.<sup>14</sup> At that time, the Sandinistas were receiving hundreds of millions of dollars of economic aid from the United States and other Western sources.

The influx of military aid from the Soviet Union and its allies has risen steadily. The number of Soviet-bloc ship deliveries of military equipment rose from 6 in 1982 to 37 in 1984 to 50 in 1986. By mid-1987, the



The two main port systems used for arms deliveries are El Bluff/Rama on the Caribbean and Corinto on the Pacific Coast.

Corinto is Nicaragua's principal port, and large quantities of military cargo are delivered there. The number of Soviet-bloc ship deliveries rose from 6 in 1982 to 50 in 1986.





total value of tanks, helicopters, and other war materiel shipped to Nicaragua had exceeded \$2 billion.

## Implications

Contrary to assertions that this military build-up came in response to "counterrevolutionary activities" and "foreign aggression," the blueprint for the creation of the largest army in Central America was drawn at least two years before significant armed resistance had developed.<sup>15</sup> The Sandinistas planned and began to implement their build-up at a time when the revolution still enjoyed strong support at home and abroad.

*The Sandinista build-up is unprecedented.* Even at the height of the civil war that eventually deposed the regime of Anastasio Somoza, the country's National Guard never exceeded 10,000 men. The Sandinistas

now have a total armed force—regular army, air force, navy, reserves, militia, and security forces—of 120,000. That represents a higher proportion of the population on active duty than any other nation in Central America. In tanks and armored vehicles, Nicaragua now surpasses all the other countries of Central America combined.

*The militarization of Nicaragua has enabled the Sandinistas to tighten their control over the people.* The military itself has a political mission; key positions are held by members of the Sandinista Front, and recruits are indoctrinated with Marxist ideology.

*The military build-up has exacerbated Nicaragua's economic crisis.* Comandante Daniel Ortega has acknowledged that 50 percent of the 1986 budget was allocated to the military.<sup>16</sup> Resources needed for social programs and economic development have been diverted to military purposes. Moreover, the mobilization has

cut deeply into Nicaragua's work force, taking tens of thousands of people out of the productive sector. The latest harvests of coffee and cotton were reduced significantly because of the shortage of labor, resulting in sharp drops in Nicaragua's already reduced foreign exchange earnings.

*Nicaragua's disproportionate build-up has alarmed its neighbors.*<sup>17</sup> Costa Rica, Nicaragua's southern neighbor, with a population of 2.4 million, has no army; its 8,000-troop Civil Guard and Rural Guard are essentially constabulary organizations. They do not have heavy equipment such as tanks and artillery.

Honduras, Nicaragua's northern neighbor, with a population of 4 million, has a military of about 17,000. The Honduran army has about 20 regular battalions, of which fewer than 15 are actual maneuver units, compared to the Sandinistas' 34. The Hondurans have no tanks and are keenly aware that the Choluteca Gap, which stretches from western Nicaragua into southern Honduras, could provide an avenue of attack for a Sandinista armored thrust into their nation. Honduras' primary deterrent to a Sandinista attack is its air force.<sup>18</sup> Over the past few years, however, the credibility of this deterrent has eroded as the Sandinistas have developed a nationwide radar system and deployed hundreds of anti-aircraft guns and surface-to-air missiles.

Although El Salvador does not share a common border with Nicaragua, the government of President Jose Napoleon Duarte has repeatedly noted that the Sandinistas have supported leftist Salvadoran rebels.<sup>19</sup>

*Nicaragua's military build-up complicates the search for a peaceful resolution of the regional crisis.* In the past eight years, the Sandinistas have had unchallenged military superiority in Central America and have been





willing to use subversion to intimidate their neighbors.<sup>20</sup> The National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, chaired by Dr. Henry Kissinger, noted:

[T]he existence of a political order on the Cuban model in Nicaragua would pose major difficulties in negotiating, implementing, and verifying any Sandinista commitment to refrain from supporting insurgency and subversion in other countries.<sup>21</sup>

*The United States and its allies view the continued Sandinista build-up and resulting instability in the region with grave concern. Moreover, the role of Cuba and the Soviet Union in supporting this militarization on the American mainland cannot be overlooked and has implications for U.S. military commitments elsewhere.*

## The U.S. Response

To promote lasting peace, economic development, and democracy in Central America, the U.S. policy toward Nicaragua has four objectives:

- Severance of Nicaraguan military and security ties to Cuba and the Soviet bloc;
- Reduction of Nicaragua's military strength to levels that would restore military equilibrium in the area;
- An end to Nicaraguan support for guerrilla groups in neighboring countries and elsewhere in the region; and,
- Fulfillment of original Sandinista promises to support democratic pluralism and to respect human and civil rights.

These objectives were reflected in the 21 principles adopted in September 1983 by the participants in the Contadora process and were reemphasized in a bipartisan peace proposal suggested by the U.S. Government in August 1987. The United States has consistently made this position clear in fre-

quent meetings with the Nicaraguan Government and by supporting the regional peace process.

Only when Nicaragua frees itself of its military ties to Communist states, reduces the size of its military to levels commensurate with legitimate

defense needs, ceases to support Marxist-Leninist subversive groups in neighboring countries, allows genuine democracy and national reconciliation, and separates its armed forces from the Sandinista party can peace prosper in the region.

**Backed by Soviet-made Mi-8/17 helicopters, Sandinista soldiers patrol the northern province of Jinotega during a May 1987 offensive.**

Wide World Photos





## Notes

1. "Rebels Train to Overthrow Somoza," *Washington Post*, October 15, 1978, p. A-1.

2. "Nicaragua Junta Assumes Rule in Jubilant Managua," *Washington Post*, July 21, 1979, p. A-1.

3. The United States suspended military assistance to the Somoza regime in 1977. It participated in the OAS mediation effort in the fall of 1978 to resolve the growing crisis in Nicaragua, and in early 1979 the United States announced the suspension of other assistance programs to demonstrate its displeasure with Somoza's intransigence. The United States fully supported the June 1979 OAS resolution calling for Somoza's replacement.

4. The Sandinistas held more than 7,000 political prisoners in 1979, most of them former National Guardsmen. See *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1979*, Department of State, February 1980.

5. The original junta included Alfonso Robelo and Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, the widow of slain *La Prensa* editor Pedro Joaquin Chamorro. Both resigned in April 1980. Robelo now serves on the directorate of the Nicaraguan Resistance with other disaffected Nicaraguans, including Chamorro's son. Mrs. Chamorro now is a vocal critic of Sandinista policies, notably the censorship of *La Prensa*, the country's only independent newspaper, which the Sandinistas eventually closed in July 1986. (*La Prensa* was allowed to reopen in September 1987.)

The first defense minister of the new government, Bernardino Larios, was a National Guard colonel who had defected during the revolution. At the end of 1979, he was replaced by Humberto Ortega, a member of the FSLN National Directorate. Larios was subsequently imprisoned for alleged subversive activities. Even after his release from jail in March 1984, he was kept under virtual house arrest. In March 1985, he escaped to Costa Rica.

6. The top leadership of the FSLN held a secret meeting September 21-23, 1979 (barely two months after coming to power), to set forth plans for consolidating the revolution. The report from this meeting, formally titled "Analysis of the Situation and Tasks of the Sandinista Peoples' Revolution" but commonly referred to as "*The 72-Hour Document*," candidly revealed the Sandinistas' intentions to build a large politicized armed force despite their acknowledgement that "at present there is no clear indication that an armed counter-revolution by Somocista forces beyond our borders is going to take place and jeopardize our stability."

7. Soviet military doctrine emphasizes the use of massed armor. In terms of size and organization, Sandinista armored units are modeled after their Cuban counterparts.

8. In a February 1985 interview with CBS News, Sandinista Army Chief of Staff Joaquin Cuadra tacitly acknowledged that the EPS has

110 tanks and added that it planned to acquire up to a total of 150.

9. For further information on the Mi-24, see John F. Guilmartin, Jr.'s "Nicaragua is Armed for Trouble," *Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 1985, p. 28; and *Jane's All the World's Aircraft*.

10. In addition to prescribing the "purge [of] the army at all levels, eliminating those elements who are incompatible with revolutionary measures," the Sandinistas from the outset called for instituting "mandatory military service," which eventually became necessary as voluntary recruitment was not keeping pace with their militarization. (See *The 72-Hour Document*, reprinted in Department of State Publication No. 9464.) The desire for national military service under party control has been a priority for the Sandinistas dating back to the "1969 Historic Program of the FSLN."

11. See June Carolyn Erlick's "Draft Dodgers Flee Nicaragua for Honduras," *Miami Herald*, Jan. 4, 1985, p. 12; Steven Kinzer's "Nicaraguan Men Fleeing Draft Fill Honduran Refugee Camp," *New York Times*, April 11, 1985, p. 1; and Edward Cody's "Nicaraguans Choosing Exile to Avoid Draft, Uncertainty," *Washington Post*, April 12, 1985, p. A-1.

12. See "Nicaraguan Town Fights Recruiters," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 29, 1984, p. 5, and Steven Kinzer's "Town Battles Military Draft in Nicaragua," *New York Times*, Jan. 2, 1985, p. 9.

13. The Sandinistas' decision to turn to the Cubans was one of choice, not necessity. For example, immediately after its July 1979 victory, Panama sent military advisers and trainers to Nicaragua to help in converting the Sandinista guerrillas into a regular army. By the end of 1979, however, the preeminent position of the Cubans was firmly established, and the Panamanians returned home. See Shirley Christian's *Nicaragua, Revolution in the Family*, pp. 161-166.

14. In a May 25, 1980, speech, Interior Minister Tomas Borge identified governing junta member Alfonso Robelo as "the traitor" who made public the existence of a Sandinista agreement with the Cubans. The speech, given in Bluefields, is reprinted as "*La Cultura es el Pueblo*" [The Culture is the People] in *Habla la Direccion de la Vanguardia* [The Directorate of the Vanguard Speaks], Managua: Coleccion Juan de Dios Munoz, July 1987, p. 118.

15. Carlos Tunnermann, Nicaraguan Ambassador to the United States, wrote in a letter to the *Washington Post* that prior to November 1981, "There were only a few hundred ex-GN [Somoza's National Guard] soldiers staging sporadic raids on farms along the border. Their principal occupations were cattle-rustling and extortion." See "We Will Never Negotiate With the Contreras," *Washington Post*, March 30, 1985, p. 21.

16. Even this figure conceals the true ex-

tent of the build-up, however, since much of the arms and ammunition is obtained from the Soviets under long-term credits and, therefore, does not show up in the budget.

17. A 1983 Gallup International Poll showed that Nicaragua's growing military strength and support of subversive movements in other countries were a source of concern throughout the region. For an analysis of this poll, see *La Nacion Internacional* (San Jose, Costa Rica), November 20-24, 1983.

18. In 1987, the United States agreed to sell 12 F-5E jet fighters to Honduras. However, these aircraft will replace a badly deteriorating fleet of Super Mystere jets and will represent little change in performance or combat capability. The Sandinistas' procurement of jet fighter aircraft would effectively neutralize the Honduran balance of forces by matching Honduran airpower, while maintaining their advantage in ground forces. Thus, a Sandinista jet fighter fleet could further skew the balance of military power in Central America and would be destabilizing for the whole region. Saying the Sandinistas reserved the right to procure MiG fighter jets, Defense Minister Humberto Ortega stated, "We have the airfield; we have the men." (See Julia Preston's "Nicaragua Says It Will Proceed With Plans To Get MiGs," *Washington Post*, Aug. 3, 1987, p. 17.) The U.S. Government has made its opposition to MiG fighters clear to both the Government of Nicaragua and the Soviet Union.

19. Only days after assuming power, Sandinista officials met with Salvadoran guerrilla leaders in Managua to plan how to continue the struggle. The first arms to be shipped to the Salvadoran guerrillas came from Sandinista stockpiles in Costa Rica. On March 4, 1982, Congressman Edward P. Boland (D-MA), then Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, cited convincing evidence that the Salvadoran insurgents "rely on the use of sites in Nicaragua for command and control and for logistical support.... Contrary to repeated denials of Nicaraguan officials, that country is thoroughly involved in supporting the Salvadoran insurgency." See Department of State/Department of Defense publication, *The Challenge to Democracy in Central America*, October 1986, pp. 47-54.

20. Eduardo Ulibari, director and editor of *La Nacion*, Costa Rica's largest daily newspaper, referred to the impact of Nicaragua's military build-up on the other nations of Central America in his article "Costa Rica and Honduras Find Washington an Unreliable Ally," *Wall Street Journal*, January 25, 1985, p. 21. Ulibari concluded that, absent strong support from the United States, a likely consequence of the growing power of the Sandinistas would be the "Finlandization" of Costa Rica and the militarization of Honduras.

21. *Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America*, January 1984, p. 114.







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# The Sandinista Military Build-Up: --- An Update



Released by the Department of State and the Department of Defense

October 1987



**Cover: Sandinista troops board sophisticated  
Soviet-built helicopters during operations near San  
Andres de Bocay in May 1987.**

Reuters/Bettmann Newsphotos

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Department of State Publication 9432

*Revised October 1987*



# The Sandinista Military Build-Up: An Update

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Approved for Release by NSA on 09-11-2013 pursuant to E.O. 13526

# The Sandinista Military Build-Up: An Update

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Department of State Publication 9411

Revised December 1982



# The Sandinista Military Build-Up: An Update



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## Overview

Since taking power in Nicaragua, the Sandinista government has built a military machine without rival in Central America. The United States, Nicaragua's neighbors, and others view this continuing build-up and its impact on instability in the region with grave concern. Contributing to that concern is the recognition that the Nicaraguan military build-up:

- Is unprecedented in the history of Central America;
- Complicates the search for a peaceful resolution to the Central American crisis;
- Poses serious threats to neighboring nations;
- Enables the Sandinistas to tighten their control over the Nicaraguan people; and,
- Has exacerbated Nicaragua's economic crisis.

This study describes the build-up and supplements the information on Nicaragua published in two other State Department/Defense Department publications, *The Soviet-Cuban Connection in Central America and the Caribbean* and *The Challenge to Democracy in Central America*. It also outlines some implications of the Sandinista build-up and discusses U.S. policy toward Nicaragua.



## The Sandinista Military: 1979–1987

### Guerrilla Origins

In July 1979, a broad, popular coalition of Nicaraguan citizens calling for democracy overthrew the government of Nicaraguan President Anastasio Somoza. Opposition to the Somoza dictatorship had become widespread during the mid-1970s, and the assassination in January 1978 of Somoza's leading critic, *La Prensa* editor Pedro

Joaquin Chamorro, triggered demonstrations and a lengthy general strike.

The Sandinista National Liberation Front (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*—FSLN), which had been fighting a guerrilla war against the Somoza regime since the 1960s, capitalized on this mounting resentment and captured the imagination of the Nicaraguan people through spectacular actions such as Eden Pastora's (*Comandante Cero*) seizure of the National Palace in August 1978.

The ranks of the FSLN swelled; by late 1978, it had nearly 1,000 combatants,<sup>1</sup> and by the following summer the force had grown to about 5,000.<sup>2</sup> Although numerically smaller than

Somoza's 7,100-man National Guard (expanded to about 10,000 men), the Sandinistas were winning wider support from disgruntled Nicaraguans and received large amounts of materiel from abroad. In contrast, the National Guard was isolated from the people and faced increasing difficulties in obtaining supplies.

In June 1979, the Organization of American States, at the request of the United States, took the unprecedented step of calling for the "definitive replacement" of the Somoza regime.<sup>3</sup> With no hope of external support and having lost control of much of the nation's territory, Somoza fled Nicaragua on July 17. The National Guard disin-

Rally in Managua marking first anniversary of the Sandinista revolution.

Owen Franken/Sygma





tegrated literally overnight; many guardsmen, including most of the higher ranking officers, fled into exile, while thousands of others, mostly enlisted men, were imprisoned by the new government.<sup>4</sup>

When the Sandinistas marched triumphantly into Managua on July 19, 1979, there was great hope for Nicaragua's future. The leaders of the FSLN, a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist "vanguard," had nonetheless publicly pledged themselves to the principles of political pluralism, a mixed economy, and a nonaligned foreign policy. Although dominated by the Sandinistas, the new Government of National Reconstruction (GRN) included many others who also had participated in the anti-Somoza revolution.<sup>5</sup> The GRN enjoyed broad international support, and the United States took the lead in the assistance effort, authorizing \$118 million of economic aid and humanitarian assistance during the following 18 months.

## The Build-Up Begins

Once in power, the Sandinistas quickly set about building their armed forces and transforming their guerrilla army into a well-equipped professional military. The *comandantes* realized from the outset that they would need a large, *politicized* military to pursue their revolutionary objectives and to hold power once the bloom of the revolution had worn off and their true political orientation was exposed.<sup>6</sup> In the fall of 1979, they initiated a military build-up without precedent in Central America. In eight years, the Sandinistas have developed a military establishment with firepower and mobility unmatched in the region. This expansion has been made possible with massive assistance from Cuba and the Soviet Union. Indeed, only the militarization of Cuba itself in the

*"We reaffirm that we are arming ourselves without spending one cent and we reaffirm that we do not have to render accounts to anyone whether there are tanks, cannons, or planes here."*

—Defense Minister Humberto Ortega  
June 4, 1981



AP/Wide World Photos

1960s is comparable to what has been occurring in Nicaragua since 1979.

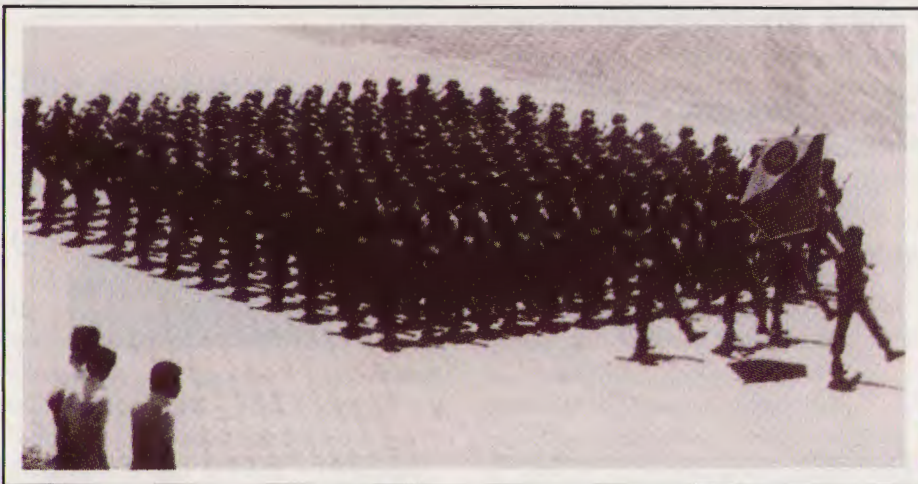
The Sandinista plan called for a steady increase in the number of men and women under arms, first through voluntary enlistment and later through conscription. By mid-1987, they had

amassed an active-duty force of more than 74,000. The Sandinistas' total strength, including all regular, reserve, and militia units and security forces, now is about 120,000 out of the 1.5 million adult Nicaraguan population.

The Sandinistas now have 40 major garrisons and smaller posts throughout the nation.







Sandinista troops passing in review. The militarization of Nicaraguan society has led to the building of armed forces nearly half the size of those of Mexico, a nation more than 20 times as populous.

## Ground Forces

The Sandinista Popular Army (*Ejercito Popular Sandinista*—EPS), the full-time, regular army of the FSLN, has grown to 37,000. The EPS has systematically moved toward developing a combined arms capability, augmenting its conventional infantry forces with mechanized infantry, armored, and artillery brigades. The Sandinistas also have emphasized the formation of reserve and militia forces; currently, these units total some 74,000 men, of which about one-third are on active duty at any one time. Sandinista reserves include combat-experienced veterans who are required to continue training after discharge from active duty. Dozens of new military bases have been constructed throughout Nicaragua, and the Sandinistas now have some 40 major garrisons and numerous smaller posts throughout the nation.

**Infantry.** The EPS has formed 10 regular infantry battalions. A special airborne battalion was inaugurated in 1982. The following year, special counterinsurgency battalions (*Bat-*

*talion de Lucha Irregular*—BLI) were trained and equipped to engage anti-Sandinista forces. There are now 14 such BLIs. Each Sandinista combat brigade has a counterinsurgency unit called a Light Hunter Battalion (BLC). These BLCs are smaller than the BLIs, but they have essentially the same capabilities.

The Soviet-made T-55 tank has a 100-millimeter gun. Once the Soviet Union's main battle tank, the T-55 now is produced for export. It is far superior to any other tank in Central America. The Sandinistas have more than 110 T-55s. In comparison, Somoza had three operational World War II-vintage U.S. tanks.



Units along Nicaragua's frontiers are organized as a special border guard force (*Tropas Guarda Fronteras*—TGF). The bulk of the Sandinistas' infantry forces now consists of roughly 110 reserve and militia battalions. These infantry units are equipped primarily with Soviet-bloc arms, such as the AK-47 assault rifle.

The Nicaraguan Interior Ministry, which controls the Sandinista Police (*Policia Sandinista*—PS) and the General Directorate of State Security (*Direccion General de Seguridad del Estado*—DGSE), the Sandinista secret police, has direct command of its own brigade of 2,000 highly trained infantry troops (*Tropas Pablo Ubeda*).

**Armor.** The Sandinista army has adhered closely to Soviet-Cuban military doctrine in the development of its armed forces.<sup>7</sup> When the Sandinistas seized power in July 1979, they inherited the hodgepodge collection of armor that had belonged to Somoza's National Guard, including some obsolete World War II-vintage tanks, only three of which were operational.



The remainder of Somoza's armor consisted of 25 antiquated Staghound armored cars.

The Sandinistas began building an armored force of unrivaled size and firepower in Central America. Crews and mechanics for tanks and other vehicles were sent to Cuba for training. Facilities to support the forthcoming arsenal were built.

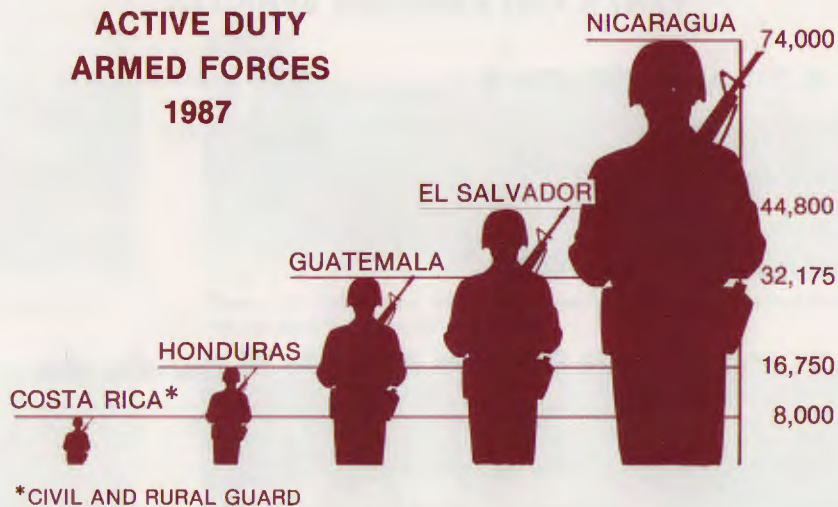
The first Soviet-built T-55 tanks arrived in mid-1981. The T-55, weighing 36 metric tons and armed with a 100-millimeter gun, can outgun any tank in the region. Formerly the Soviets' main battle tank, it still is being used by Warsaw Pact armies. The Sandinistas used the T-55s to form their first armored battalion, based just outside Managua. By 1982, the Sandinistas had obtained a sufficient number of T-55s to organize a second armored battalion. By the end of 1984, they had acquired more than 110 T-55 tanks, enough to form 5 armored battalions.<sup>8</sup>

In 1984, the Soviets provided the Nicaraguans with about 30 PT-76 light tanks. This amphibious tank, armed with a 76-millimeter gun, fords rivers easily and can maneuver in some of the difficult terrain found in parts of Nicaragua.

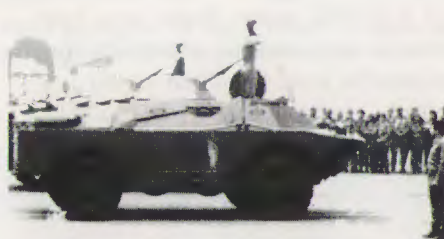
The Soviets, through their allies, also have equipped the Sandinista army with more than 250 armored vehicles, mostly BTR-60 and BTR-152 armored personnel carriers. These vehicles are armed with a machinegun and can carry a squad of infantry. The first BTR-60s began arriving in mid-1981. The EPS also has received Soviet-made command vehicles and BRDM-2 amphibious armored reconnaissance vehicles. The Sandinistas now have formed two mechanized infantry brigades.

The terrain in certain parts of Nicaragua is well suited to armored operations, although in other parts of the country the terrain imposes con-

### ACTIVE DUTY ARMED FORCES 1987



Nicaragua has a higher percentage of its population on active military duty than any other country in Latin America, except Cuba.

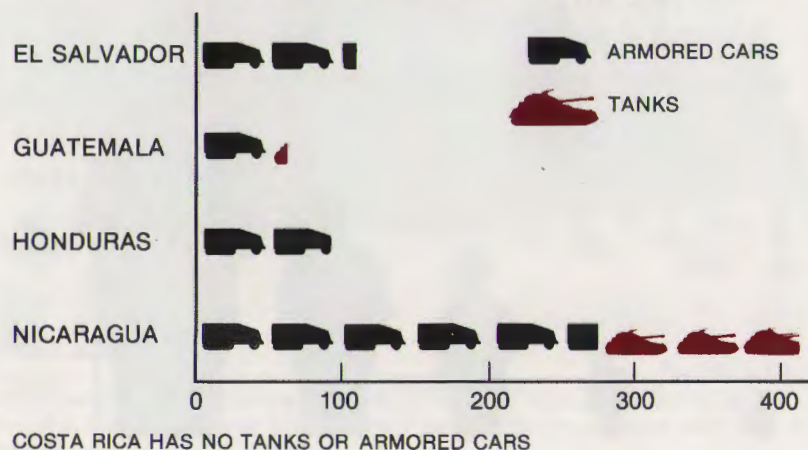


Somoza had 25 antiquated armored cars; the Sandinistas now have over 250. The BRDM-2 (left) is fully amphibious and armed with a machinegun. The BTR-152 (right) carries up to 17 infantry troops, and the BTR-60 (below) can transport a squad of infantry.





## TANKS AND ARMORED VEHICLES



straints. Tanks can operate in the flat plains of the west, which encompass the principal population and economic centers of the nation. On the other hand, the mountains and rugged terrain of the northern departments limit off-road maneuverability. The lowlands of the Atlantic Coast region inhibit off-road use of the heavy T-55s, but the Sandinistas can deploy the amphibious PT-76s in this region. While some observers have argued that

the terrain in Central America renders tanks of only marginal military value, the Sandinistas and their Soviet suppliers do not share this view; indeed, they have continued the rapid increase in the size of their tank force, doubling it in 1984 alone. Tanks have been useful in rural warfare situations; they can also be used for urban crowd control.

**Artillery.** The growth of the EPS's artillery force has been equally

dramatic. During the revolution, the Sandinistas' fire-support weapons consisted of nothing larger than mortars. When they defeated Somoza's National Guard, they inherited three 105-millimeter howitzers.

During their first year in power, the Sandinistas began receiving ZIS-2s, Soviet-made 57-millimeter antitank guns. By 1981, they were obtaining D-30s, Soviet-made 122-millimeter howitzers that far surpass in range and firepower all other artillery in Central America. That same year, they began receiving D-20s, Soviet-made 152-millimeter howitzers, which represented a further qualitative increase in their artillery capability.

In 1982, the Sandinistas took delivery of the first of their Soviet-made BM-21s, capable of launching a rapid-fire barrage of 40 122-millimeter rockets, greatly increasing their area bombardment capability. In 1983, the Sandinistas formally inaugurated a special artillery brigade, based in Managua. Currently, the EPS's inventory includes about 60 heavy artillery pieces, about 30 BM-21 multiple rocket launchers, more than 120 anti-tank guns, and hundreds of mortars.

**Support Units.** The Sandinistas have begun to build an elaborate infrastructure to support their combat forces. They have created a special engineering battalion and communications units. The East Germans alone have provided the Sandinistas with more than 3,500 IFA W-50 military transport trucks since 1980. Large numbers of other vehicles have been delivered by the Soviet Union and its allies. These include more than 800 jeeps, 40 flatbed trucks capable of transporting T-55 tanks, 6 tank ferries to shuttle the T-55s across rivers, numerous communications vans, and about 75 tanker trucks for fuel.

The Soviets and Soviet-bloc states also have provided a multitude of

The PT-76 has a 76-millimeter gun and is fully amphibious. The Soviets provided the Sandinistas with about 30 of these light tanks in 1984.







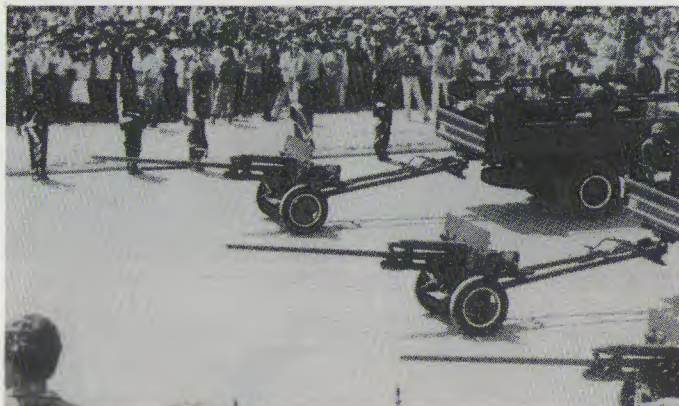
The Soviets have provided the Sandinistas with more than 800 jeeps.



These ZIL-131 trucks, when equipped with decontamination tanks, can be used for chemical warfare.



The BM-21 multiple rocket launcher (left) can fire a barrage of 40 122-millimeter rockets more than 12 miles. Shown at right are ZIS-2 57-millimeter antitank guns on parade in Managua. The D-20 152-millimeter howitzer (below) is the largest artillery piece in Central America. It can hurl a 96-pound shell nearly 11 miles.





other material ranging from mobile maintenance workshops and field kitchens to minelaying and communications equipment. In 1982, they furnished the Sandinistas with the equipment to build a communications intercept facility at Santa Maria near Managua. Subsequently, additional intercept facilities have been built at Puerto Cabezas, San Francisco, and Santa Rosa.

## Air Force and Air Defense

The 3,500-man Sandinista Air Force and Air Defense Force (*Fuerza Aerea Sandinista/Defensa Anti-Aerea*—FAS/DAA) has been undergoing substantial improvements since 1979. The Sandinistas began with the remnants of the National Guard's small air force, which included a handful of AT-33 jets, Cessna 337 "push-pull"

aircraft, transport aircraft, trainers, and helicopters. The Sandinistas placed a high priority on developing a more powerful air arm. Early on, they sent personnel to Cuba and Soviet-bloc countries to be trained as pilots and mechanics, and they made plans to expand existing airfields and to build new ones.

Because of the long lead time associated with the acquisition of air-



At left is one of four SIAI-Marchetti SF-260 military trainers acquired from Libya in 1982. Shown below is one of the world's most advanced attack helicopters, the Mi-24/25 HIND D. It has a nose-mounted machinegun and can carry up to 4 pods containing nearly 130 57-millimeter rockets as well as antitank missiles or bombs. This is the same helicopter used by the Soviets in Afghanistan. The Sandinistas now have 12 of these "flying tanks."

UPI photo





craft, that is, the need for lengthy pilot training and the construction of airfields, the FAS grew slowly in its early years. The first fixed-wing aircraft added to the inventory were older and unsophisticated models, such as Soviet-made AN-2s. In 1982, they acquired four Italian-made SF-260 trainer/tactical support aircraft from Libya. Six Soviet-made AN-26 medium transports have significantly improved the Sandinistas' logistics support capabilities.

The Sandinistas' helicopter inventory has grown more rapidly. The great majority of these craft have been obtained from the Soviets and their allies. In 1981, the first two Soviet Mi-8/17 HIP medium-lift helicopters arrived. The following April, the Soviets formally donated the HIPs to the Sandinistas, explaining that they were to be used to help develop the Atlantic Coast region of Nicaragua. In fact, the HIP is one of the Soviet Union's front-line combat helicopters and can be armed with machinegun and rocket pods. The Sandinistas have received more than 50 HIPs and have used them extensively in military operations. The Sandinistas also have acquired Polish-built Mi-2/HOPLITE utility/cargo helicopters.

In late 1984, the Sandinistas received the first of a new generation of helicopter gunships, the Mi-24/HIND D. This is the Soviets' principal attack helicopter, and it has been used extensively by the Soviets against resistance forces in Afghanistan. One of the most highly sophisticated attack helicopters in the world, it holds the world military helicopter speed record and can be armed with a multiple-barrel machinegun, guided missiles, rocket pods, and bombs.

The HIND's heavy armor, coupled with its high speed, greatly reduces its vulnerability to small arms fire.<sup>9</sup> Acquisition of the HIND D adds a new



In 1983, the Sandinistas acquired their first two Soviet-built AN-26 transports. They now have six.

dimension to warfare in Central America. Key targets in Honduras, Costa Rica, and El Salvador are all within the reach of this flying "tank." Some 12 Mi-24s have been delivered to Nicaragua and have been used against internal resistance forces.

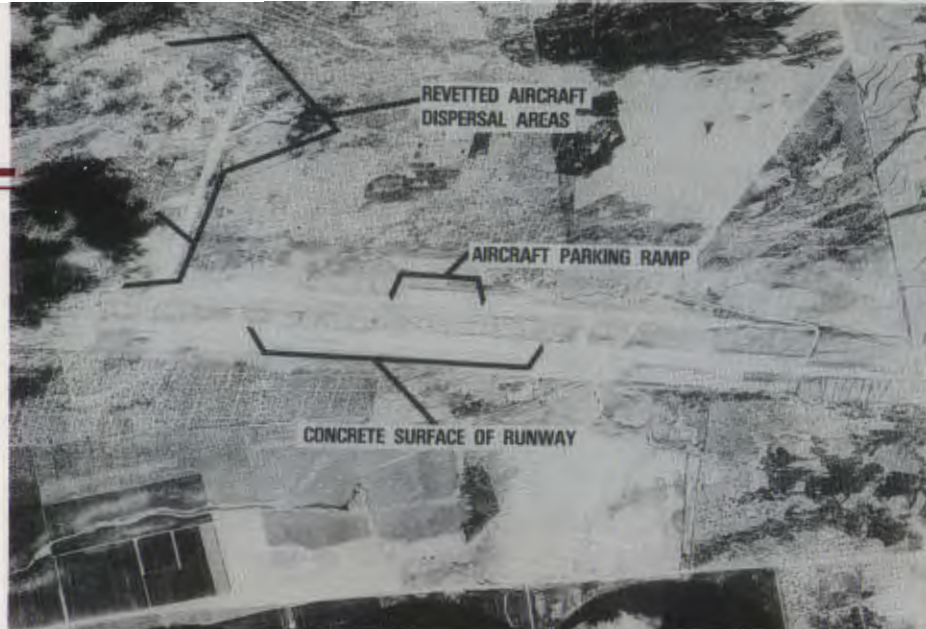
Top FSLN leaders have repeatedly proclaimed their desire to acquire high-performance jet fighters. Nicaraguan pilots and mechanics reportedly have

been undergoing training in Cuba and eastern Europe since the early 1980s. In 1982, with Cuban assistance, the Sandinistas began constructing the Punta Huete airfield in an isolated area northeast of Managua. The principal runway at Punta Huete is 10,000 feet in length, making it the longest military runway in Central America. It can accommodate any aircraft in the Soviet-bloc inventory. Sixteen re-  
vet-

**The Mi-8/17 HIP is one of the Soviets' principal combat helicopters. It can be armed with a machinegun, rocket pods, and antitank missiles. Some HIPs also serve as transports for Sandinista troops and their equipment. The Sandinistas have received more than 50 HIPs.**







The runway at Punta Huete now is operational. The 10,000-foot strip is the longest military runway in Central America, and can accommodate any aircraft in the Soviet inventory. Designed for jet aircraft, revetments are clearly visible in the alert and aircraft dispersal areas.

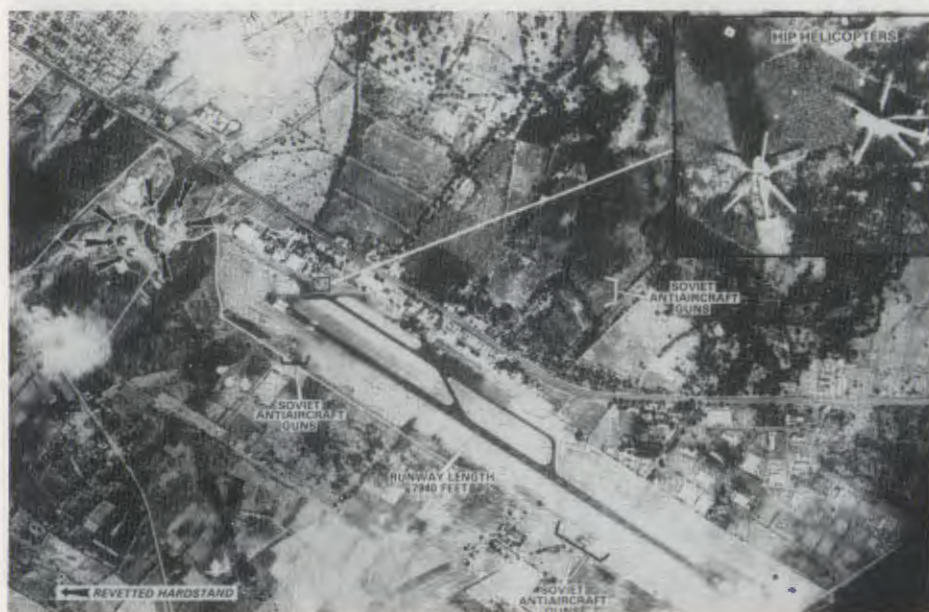
ments of the size and design appropriate for jet fighters have been constructed.

Helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft have been flying out of Punta Huete since 1986. In addition to Punta Huete, the Sandinistas have been upgrading their principal airbase at Sandino Airport in Managua as well as other airfields at Montelimar, Puerto

Cabezas, Esteli, La Rosita, and Bluefields.

Soviet air warfare doctrine calls for aircraft to operate in a "controlled air environment," that is, the aircraft are controlled by command elements on the ground that monitor their actions via radar. In 1983, the first Soviet-made Early Warning/Ground Control-Intercept (EW/GCI) facility in

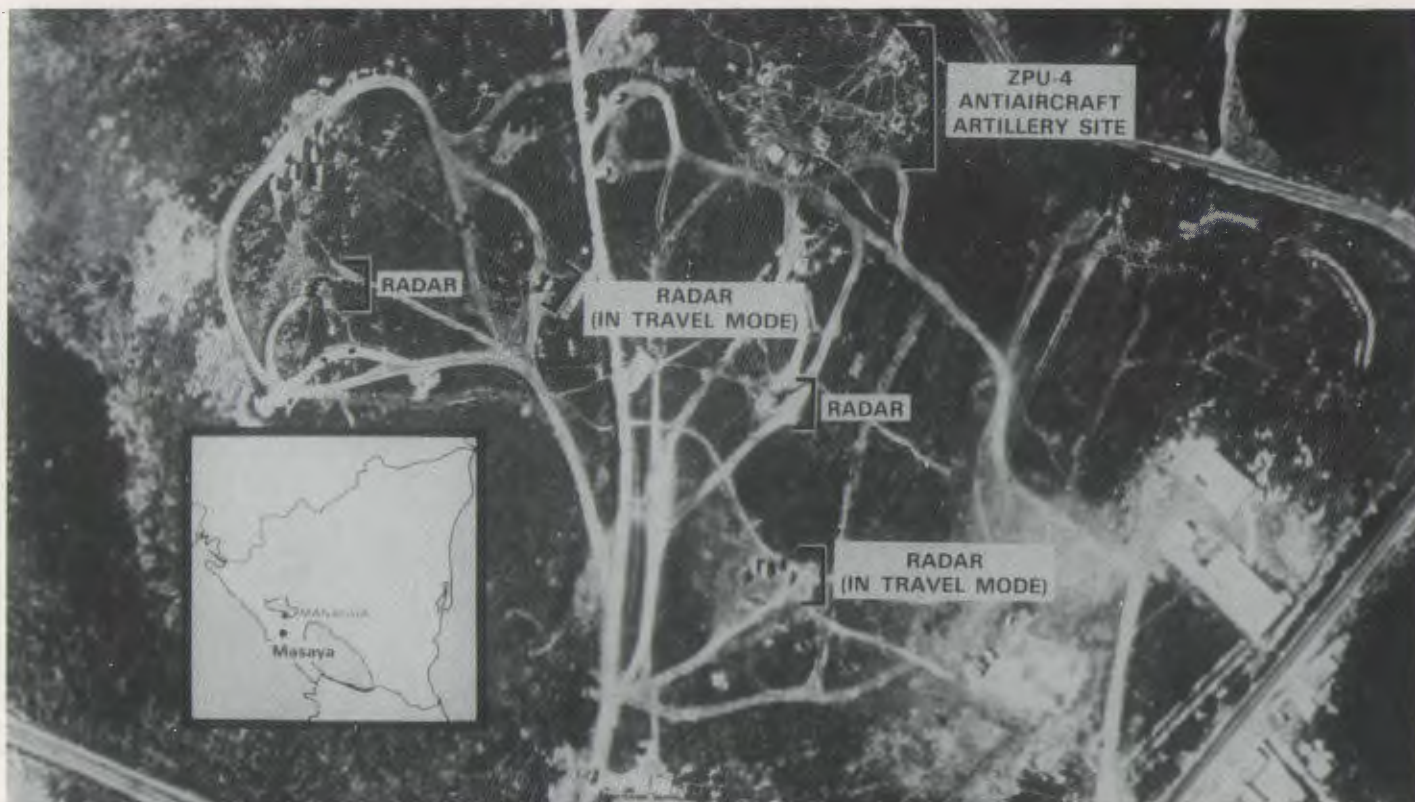
Augusto Cesar Sandino International Airport in Managua is the principal base for the Sandinista Air Force. The western portion of the airfield (left in photo) is the military area.



Nicaragua was assembled near Masaya. During 1984, additional radar sites were established at Toro Blanco and Esteli. Early in 1985, a fourth radar system was installed at San Juan del Sur. A temporary site at El Bluff has provided coverage of the Atlantic Coast as well. A coastal surveillance radar was installed at El Polvon in late 1984. The Sandinistas now have radar coverage over most of Nicaragua and can monitor and control their own aircraft movements deep into Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica. There is no comparable radar system anywhere in the region.

The early warning capability of the radar net also is associated with the Sandinista air defense forces. As early as 1980, the Sandinistas began acquiring ZPU-4, ZU-23, and M-1939 anti-aircraft guns and SA-7 surface-to-air missiles. The KS-19 100-millimeter cannon with fire-control radar was added in 1984. Some 400 pieces of anti-aircraft artillery and over 350 SA-7/SA-14 surface-to-air missile launchers are deployed to protect major Sandinista military facilities and units, along with political and economic facilities.





The Masaya Early Warning/Ground Control-Intercept radar facility was assembled in 1983.

The Sandinistas are upgrading the airfield at Puerto Cabezas, lengthening the runway by more than 2,000 feet.

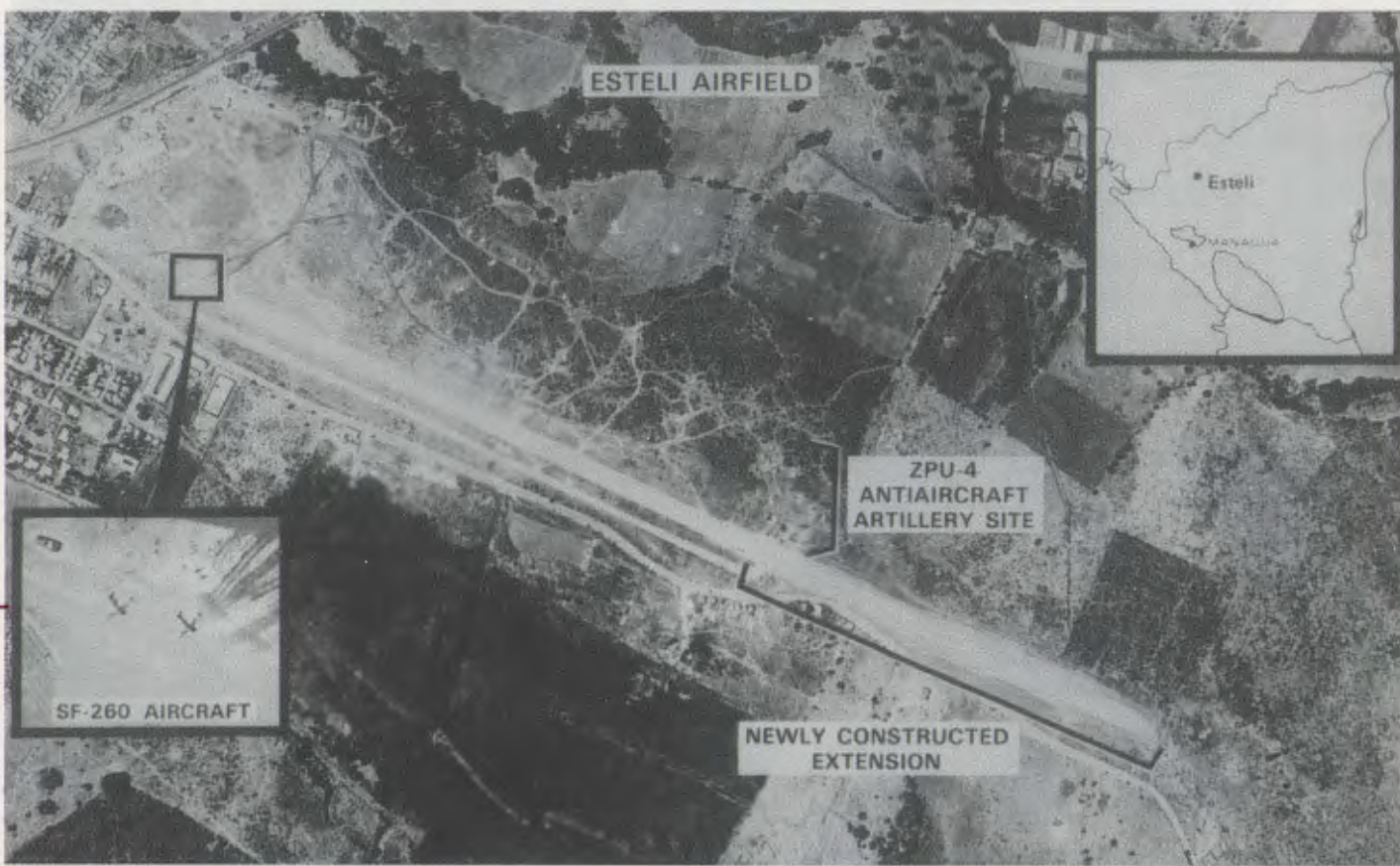






New facilities have been added to the Montelimar airfield.

The runway at Esteli has been lengthened considerably. On the runway are two SF-260 aircraft given to the Sandinistas by Libya.







The M-1939, a 37-millimeter anti-aircraft gun, can fire at the rate of 160 to 180 rounds per minute. There are nine M-1939 sites in the Managua area alone.

## Navy

The 1,000-man Sandinista navy (*Marina de Guerra Sandinista*—MGS) has similarly undergone both a qualitative and quantitative transformation since 1979. Somoza's "navy" consisted of a handful of old patrol boats, a landing craft, and about 200 men. The Sandinistas are acquiring a fleet of more modern vessels. In 1983, they obtained two French Vedette patrol boats and two Soviet ZHUK patrol boats. Since then, the Sandinistas have received six more ZHUKs. North Korea has supplied two KIMJIN and two SINHUNG patrol boats. Two Soviet-built YEVGENYA-class inshore minesweepers have been delivered by Cuba, while four Polish-built K-8 minesweeping boats were delivered by the Soviet ship *Bakuriani*.

This Soviet-made ZHUK patrol boat is one of more than 12 vessels provided by the Soviet Union, Cuba, and North Korea.



The ZU-23 is a 23-millimeter anti-aircraft gun. Each of its two barrels can fire at the rate of 800 to 1,000 rounds per minute at a range of 8,000 feet. The soldier in the bed of the truck is holding a SA-14 surface-to-air missile with an infra-red guidance system. The Soviets have provided hundreds of these types of sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons to the Sandinistas.





## Recruitment and Conscription

The Sandinistas initially had no difficulty in finding recruits for their military. Many youths eagerly joined the ranks of the EPS in the days immediately after Somoza's fall. Gradually, however, voluntary enlistment declined as disillusionment with the FSLN grew, according to former Sandinista soldiers. To meet the goals for their mili-

tary build-up, the Sandinistas began using a variety of coercive measures at schools and workplaces. They also used the neighborhood Sandinista Defense Committees (*Comites de Defensa Sandinista*—CDS), "block committees" modeled after the Cuban Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, to coerce men and women to enlist in the army, the reserves, or militia units.

When these tactics failed to provide sufficient manpower, the Sandinistas turned to the draft.<sup>10</sup> In July 1983, Defense Minister Humberto Ortega proclaimed that the government would adopt mandatory enrollment. Despite widespread opposition, the Sandinistas enacted the draft law in September of that year, calling it Patriotic Military Service (*Servicio Militar Patriótico*—SMP). Technically, the law made males aged 18 to 40 eligible for the draft, with those in the 18- to 21-year-age bracket subject to conscription effective January 1, 1984, and those over 21 subject to subsequent service. It also provided deferments for those in special categories, such as government workers with key jobs.

In practice, the Sandinistas began inducting youths by late 1983, and six rounds of call-ups had taken place by early 1985. The Sandinistas claim that 30,000 men have been drafted, but many Nicaraguans believe that the real number is far higher. Thousands of youths were simply summoned by their local Sandinista draft boards, while many others were captured in house-to-house sweeps, roadblocks, and roundups at public places, such as movie theaters, dance halls, and ball parks.

The Sandinistas have been indiscriminate about the age of those they impress, often seizing youths in their mid-teens, below the official draft age. While most of those drafted do

Wide World Photos





enter the army rather than go to jail, thousands of youths have gone into hiding, and many others have joined the armed resistance or slipped across the borders into exile.

Many Nicaraguans have protested forced induction into the Sandinista military, which defectors have referred to as the political army of the FSLN. Also, there is broad resentment over the inadequate training given militia recruits. Frequently, draftees without adequate military training—but with heavy political indoctrination—are sent to face the resistance forces.

As a result of this resentment, spontaneous anti-draft demonstrations have erupted throughout Nicaragua, especially in 1984–85.<sup>11</sup> For example, for three days in September 1984, hundreds of students in Chinandega marched in protest. In December, the residents of Nagarote clashed with Sandinista troops who had come to sweep the town for draft-age youths. Similar acts of protest have occurred in other locations.<sup>12</sup>



Cuban-style barracks area near Villa Nueva. The Sandinistas signed a military agreement with the Cuban Army in 1979.

Sandinista soldiers board an Mi-8/17 helicopter. The government began inducting youths by late 1983, and six call-ups had taken place by early 1985. The Sandinistas claim that 30,000 men have been drafted, but Nicaraguans believe the real number is much higher. Wide World Photos





## Cuban and Soviet Assistance

The Sandinista military build-up would have been impossible without massive assistance from Cuba and the Soviet Union. Fidel Castro provided the Sandinistas encouragement, training, and refuge during their long struggle against Somoza, and he supplied them with weapons for their final offensive in 1979. The Cuban official who commanded the support network based in Costa Rica, Julian Lopez Diaz, was appointed Cuba's ambassador to Nicaragua as soon as the Sandinistas were in power.

Within a week of the fall of

Somoza, Cuba had placed about 100 military and security personnel in Nicaragua. By early 1985, the number of Cuban military/security advisers in Nicaragua had grown to some 2,500.<sup>13</sup> These Cubans permeate the Ministries of Defense and Interior, operating at all levels of the armed forces and security forces from the General Staff in Managua down to the battalion and, in some cases, even at company levels. They are prominent in military training facilities and in areas where technical expertise is required, such as aviation and telecommunications. There is evidence that they fill active roles, such as helicopter pilots and counterinsurgency combat command-

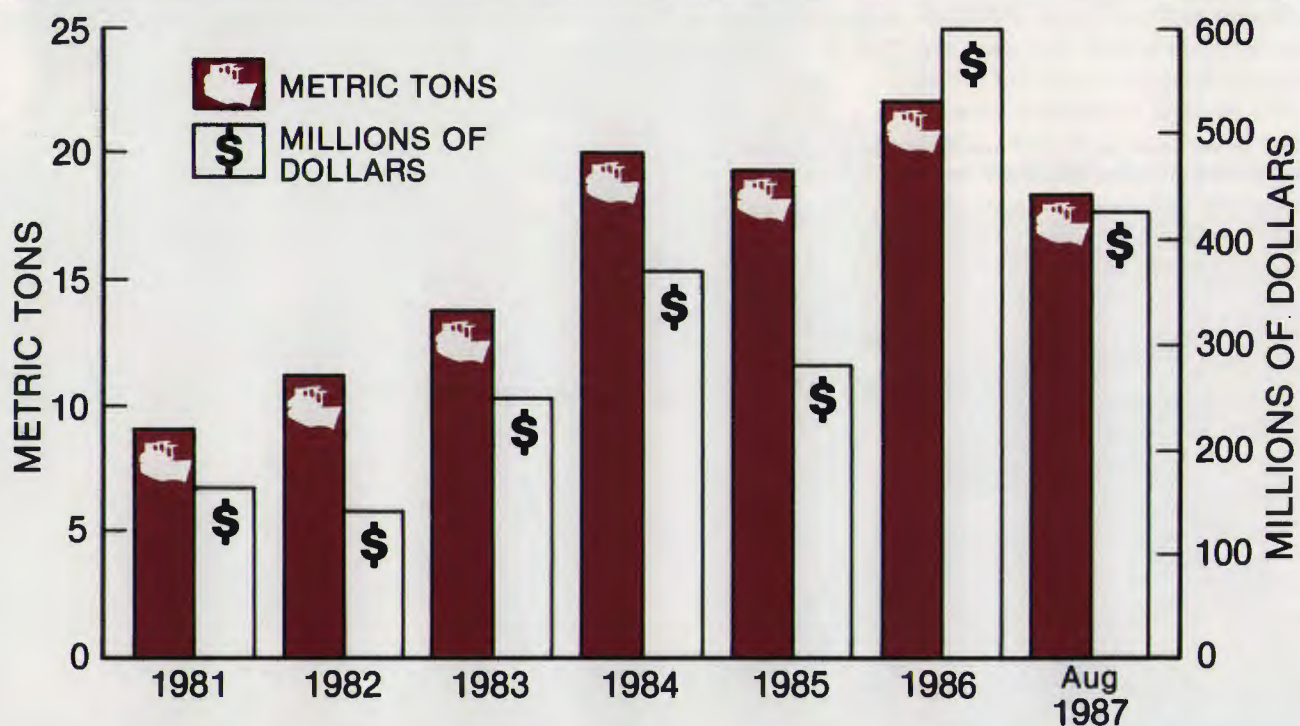
ers. An additional 100 Soviet and bloc military/security advisers also operate in Nicaragua.

These Cuban and Soviet-bloc advisers have strongly influenced the organization and tactics of the Sandinista military. The units of the Sandinista army and militia are modeled after their Cuban counterparts; in 1980, the Nicaraguans even copied the Cubans' four-digit unit identification system. Some Nicaraguan military bases are modeled after similar facilities in Cuba.

Until recently, the Soviets used surrogates to mask the extent of their own involvement in the Sandinista military build-up. Cuba was the first

Since 1979, the total value of tanks, helicopters, and other war materiel shipped to Nicaragua has exceeded \$2 billion.

### SOVIET-BLOC MILITARY DELIVERIES TO NICARAGUA

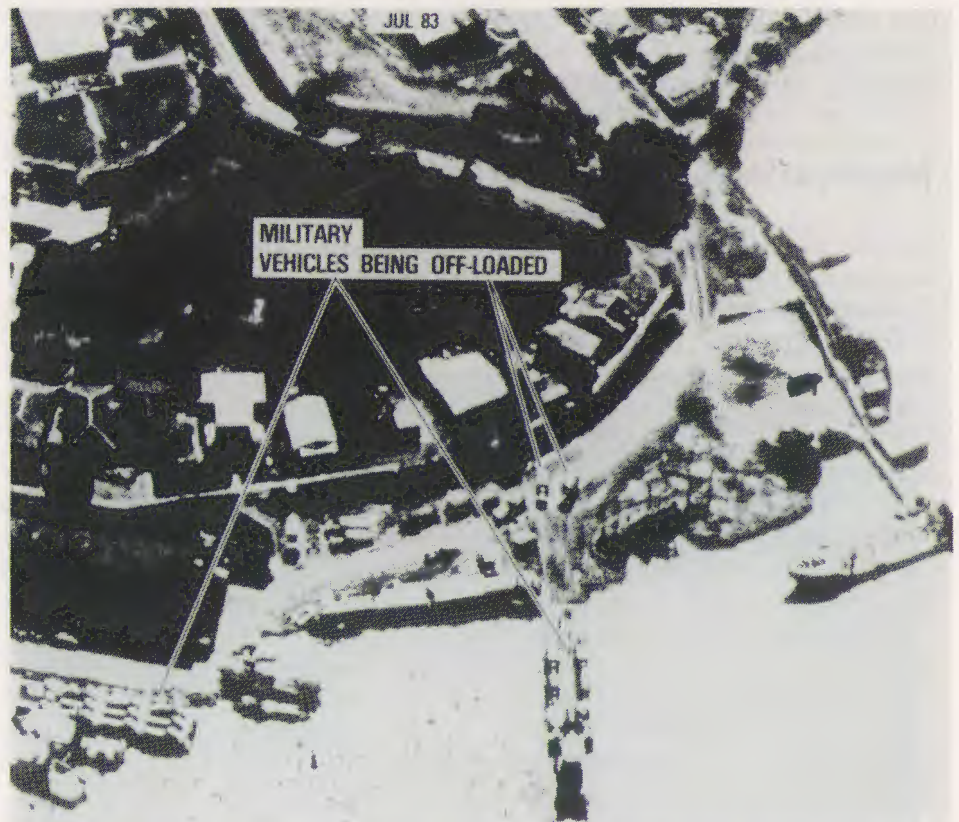




to make substantial deliveries of Soviet-made arms, and later Algeria and Bulgaria took on this role. Direct Soviet shipment of military-related goods occurred by 1981, but not until late 1984 did a Soviet ship directly deliver major weapons systems—Mi-24/25 helicopters and K-8 patrol boats—directly to Nicaragua.

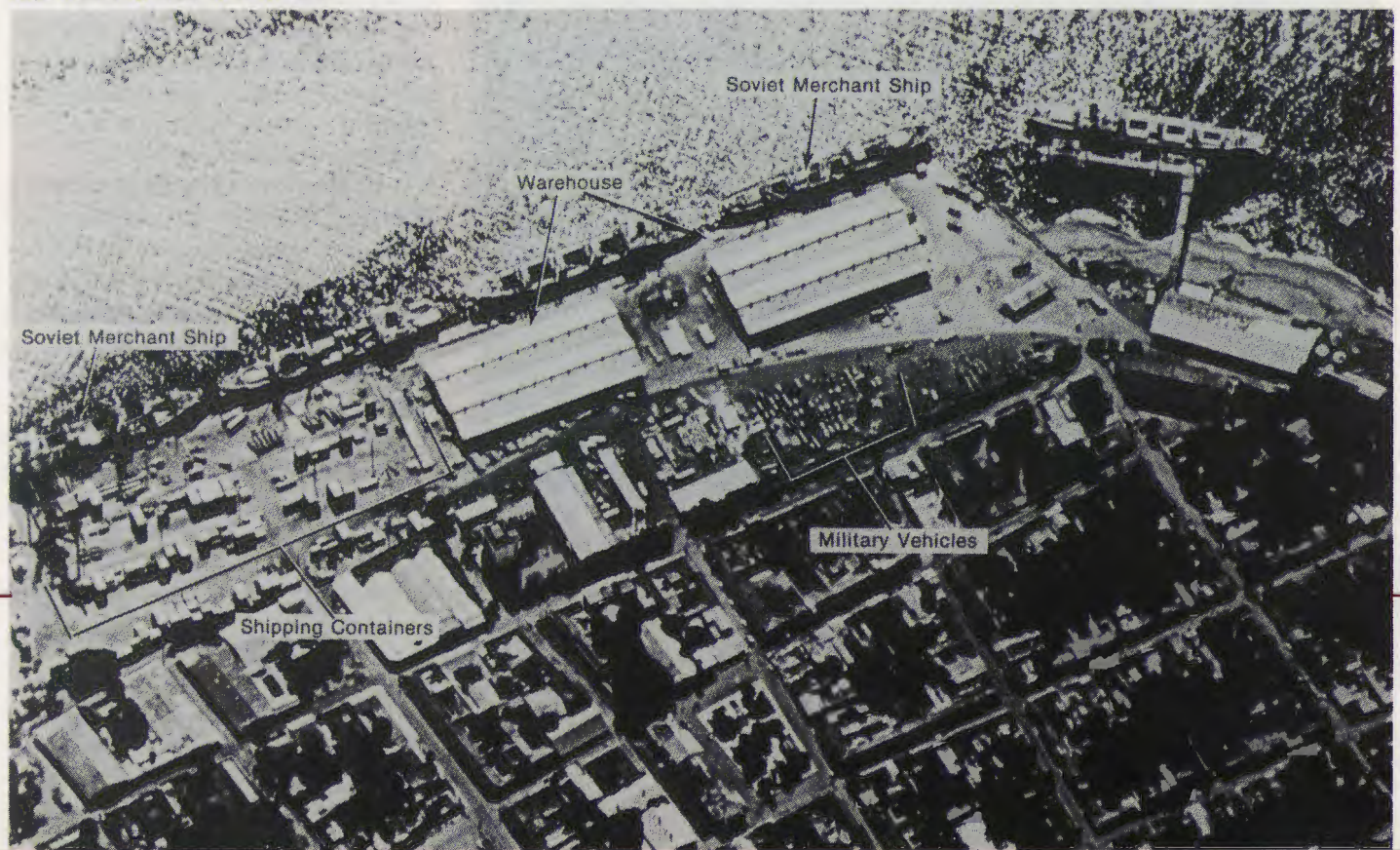
Because Soviet military hardware began arriving in Nicaragua in early 1980, it is likely that the Sandinistas' initial secret arms agreements with Cuba and the Soviet Union were concluded shortly after the Sandinistas seized power in 1979. In 1979, the FSLN signed a secret military cooperation agreement with the Cuban Army.<sup>14</sup> At that time, the Sandinistas were receiving hundreds of millions of dollars of economic aid from the United States and other Western sources.

The influx of military aid from the Soviet Union and its allies has risen steadily. The number of Soviet-bloc ship deliveries of military equipment rose from 6 in 1982 to 37 in 1984 to 50 in 1986. By mid-1987, the



The two main port systems used for arms deliveries are El Bluff/Rama on the Caribbean and Corinto on the Pacific Coast.

Corinto is Nicaragua's principal port, and large quantities of military cargo are delivered there. The number of Soviet-bloc ship deliveries rose from 6 in 1982 to 50 in 1986.





total value of tanks, helicopters, and other war materiel shipped to Nicaragua had exceeded \$2 billion.

## Implications

Contrary to assertions that this military build-up came in response to "counterrevolutionary activities" and "foreign aggression," the blueprint for the creation of the largest army in Central America was drawn at least two years before significant armed resistance had developed.<sup>15</sup> The Sandinistas planned and began to implement their build-up at a time when the revolution still enjoyed strong support at home and abroad.

*The Sandinista build-up is unprecedented.* Even at the height of the civil war that eventually deposed the regime of Anastasio Somoza, the country's National Guard never exceeded 10,000 men. The Sandinistas

now have a total armed force—regular army, air force, navy, reserves, militia, and security forces—of 120,000. That represents a higher proportion of the population on active duty than any other nation in Central America. In tanks and armored vehicles, Nicaragua now surpasses all the other countries of Central America combined.

*The militarization of Nicaragua has enabled the Sandinistas to tighten their control over the people.* The military itself has a political mission; key positions are held by members of the Sandinista Front, and recruits are indoctrinated with Marxist ideology.

*The military build-up has exacerbated Nicaragua's economic crisis.* Comandante Daniel Ortega has acknowledged that 50 percent of the 1986 budget was allocated to the military.<sup>16</sup> Resources needed for social programs and economic development have been diverted to military purposes. Moreover, the mobilization has

cut deeply into Nicaragua's work force, taking tens of thousands of people out of the productive sector. The latest harvests of coffee and cotton were reduced significantly because of the shortage of labor, resulting in sharp drops in Nicaragua's already reduced foreign exchange earnings.

*Nicaragua's disproportionate build-up has alarmed its neighbors.*<sup>17</sup> Costa Rica, Nicaragua's southern neighbor, with a population of 2.4 million, has no army; its 8,000-troop Civil Guard and Rural Guard are essentially constabulary organizations. They do not have heavy equipment such as tanks and artillery.

Honduras, Nicaragua's northern neighbor, with a population of 4 million, has a military of about 17,000. The Honduran army has about 20 regular battalions, of which fewer than 15 are actual maneuver units, compared to the Sandinistas' 34. The Hondurans have no tanks and are keenly aware that the Choluteca Gap, which stretches from western Nicaragua into southern Honduras, could provide an avenue of attack for a Sandinista armored thrust into their nation. Honduras' primary deterrent to a Sandinista attack is its air force.<sup>18</sup> Over the past few years, however, the credibility of this deterrent has eroded as the Sandinistas have developed a nationwide radar system and deployed hundreds of anti-aircraft guns and surface-to-air missiles.

Although El Salvador does not share a common border with Nicaragua, the government of President Jose Napoleon Duarte has repeatedly noted that the Sandinistas have supported leftist Salvadoran rebels.<sup>19</sup>

*Nicaragua's military build-up complicates the search for a peaceful resolution of the regional crisis.* In the past eight years, the Sandinistas have had unchallenged military superiority in Central America and have been





willing to use subversion to intimidate their neighbors.<sup>20</sup> The National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, chaired by Dr. Henry Kissinger, noted:

[T]he existence of a political order on the Cuban model in Nicaragua would pose major difficulties in negotiating, implementing, and verifying any Sandinista commitment to refrain from supporting insurgency and subversion in other countries.<sup>21</sup>

*The United States and its allies view the continued Sandinista build-up and resulting instability in the region with grave concern.* Moreover, the role of Cuba and the Soviet Union in supporting this militarization on the American mainland cannot be overlooked and has implications for U.S. military commitments elsewhere.

## The U.S. Response

To promote lasting peace, economic development, and democracy in Central America, the U.S. policy toward Nicaragua has four objectives:

- Severance of Nicaraguan military and security ties to Cuba and the Soviet bloc;
- Reduction of Nicaragua's military strength to levels that would restore military equilibrium in the area;
- An end to Nicaraguan support for guerrilla groups in neighboring countries and elsewhere in the region; and,
- Fulfillment of original Sandinista promises to support democratic pluralism and to respect human and civil rights.

These objectives were reflected in the 21 principles adopted in September 1983 by the participants in the Contadora process and were reemphasized in a bipartisan peace proposal suggested by the U.S. Government in August 1987. The United States has consistently made this position clear in fre-

quent meetings with the Nicaraguan Government and by supporting the regional peace process.

Only when Nicaragua frees itself of its military ties to Communist states, reduces the size of its military to levels commensurate with legitimate

defense needs, ceases to support Marxist-Leninist subversive groups in neighboring countries, allows genuine democracy and national reconciliation, and separates its armed forces from the Sandinista party can peace prosper in the region.

**Backed by Soviet-made Mi-8/17 helicopters, Sandinista soldiers patrol the northern province of Jinotega during a May 1987 offensive.**

Wide World Photos





## Notes

1. "Rebels Train to Overthrow Somoza," *Washington Post*, October 15, 1978, p. A-1.

2. "Nicaragua Junta Assumes Rule in Jubilant Managua," *Washington Post*, July 21, 1979, p. A-1.

3. The United States suspended military assistance to the Somoza regime in 1977. It participated in the OAS mediation effort in the fall of 1978 to resolve the growing crisis in Nicaragua, and in early 1979 the United States announced the suspension of other assistance programs to demonstrate its displeasure with Somoza's intransigence. The United States fully supported the June 1979 OAS resolution calling for Somoza's replacement.

4. The Sandinistas held more than 7,000 political prisoners in 1979, most of them former National Guardsmen. See *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1979*, Department of State, February 1980.

5. The original junta included Alfonso Robelo and Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, the widow of slain *La Prensa* editor Pedro Joaquín Chamorro. Both resigned in April 1980. Robelo now serves on the directorate of the Nicaraguan Resistance with other disaffected Nicaraguans, including Chamorro's son. Mrs. Chamorro now is a vocal critic of Sandinista policies, notably the censorship of *La Prensa*, the country's only independent newspaper, which the Sandinistas eventually closed in July 1986. (*La Prensa* was allowed to reopen in September 1987.)

The first defense minister of the new government, Bernardino Larios, was a National Guard colonel who had defected during the revolution. At the end of 1979, he was replaced by Humberto Ortega, a member of the FSLN National Directorate. Larios was subsequently imprisoned for alleged subversive activities. Even after his release from jail in March 1984, he was kept under virtual house arrest. In March 1985, he escaped to Costa Rica.

6. The top leadership of the FSLN held a secret meeting September 21-23, 1979 (barely two months after coming to power), to set forth plans for consolidating the revolution. The report from this meeting, formally titled "Analysis of the Situation and Tasks of the Sandinista Peoples' Revolution" but commonly referred to as "*The 72-Hour Document*," candidly revealed the Sandinistas' intentions to build a large politicized armed force despite their acknowledgement that "at present there is no clear indication that an armed counter-revolution by Somocista forces beyond our borders is going to take place and jeopardize our stability."

7. Soviet military doctrine emphasizes the use of massed armor. In terms of size and organization, Sandinista armored units are modeled after their Cuban counterparts.

8. In a February 1985 interview with CBS News, Sandinista Army Chief of Staff Joaquín Cuadra tacitly acknowledged that the EPS has

110 tanks and added that it planned to acquire up to a total of 150.

9. For further information on the Mi-24, see John F. Guilmartin, Jr.'s "Nicaragua is Armed for Trouble," *Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 1985, p. 28; and *Jane's All the World's Aircraft*.

10. In addition to prescribing the "purge [of] the army at all levels, eliminating those elements who are incompatible with revolutionary measures," the Sandinistas from the outset called for instituting "mandatory military service," which eventually became necessary as voluntary recruitment was not keeping pace with their militarization. (See *The 72-Hour Document*, reprinted in Department of State Publication No. 9464.) The desire for national military service under party control has been a priority for the Sandinistas dating back to the "1969 Historic Program of the FSLN."

11. See June Carolyn Erlick's "Draft Dodgers Flee Nicaragua for Honduras," *Miami Herald*, Jan. 4, 1985, p. 12; Steven Kinzer's "Nicaraguan Men Fleeing Draft Fill Honduran Refugee Camp," *New York Times*, April 11, 1985, p. 1; and Edward Cody's "Nicaraguans Choosing Exile to Avoid Draft, Uncertainty," *Washington Post*, April 12, 1985, p. A-1.

12. See "Nicaraguan Town Fights Recruiters," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 29, 1984, p. 5, and Steven Kinzer's "Town Battles Military Draft in Nicaragua," *New York Times*, Jan. 2, 1985, p. 9.

13. The Sandinistas' decision to turn to the Cubans was one of choice, not necessity. For example, immediately after its July 1979 victory, Panama sent military advisers and trainers to Nicaragua to help in converting the Sandinista guerrillas into a regular army. By the end of 1979, however, the preeminent position of the Cubans was firmly established, and the Panamanians returned home. See Shirley Christian's *Nicaragua, Revolution in the Family*, pp. 161-166.

14. In a May 25, 1980, speech, Interior Minister Tomás Borge identified governing junta member Alfonso Robelo as "the traitor" who made public the existence of a Sandinista agreement with the Cubans. The speech, given in Bluefields, is reprinted as "*La Cultura es el Pueblo*" [The Culture is the People] in *Habla la Dirección de la Vanguardia* [The Directorate of the Vanguard Speaks], Managua: Colección Juan de Dios Muñoz, July 1987, p. 118.

15. Carlos Tunnermann, Nicaraguan Ambassador to the United States, wrote in a letter to the *Washington Post* that prior to November 1981, "There were only a few hundred ex-GN [Somoza's National Guard] soldiers staging sporadic raids on farms along the border. Their principal occupations were cattle-rustling and extortion." See "We Will Never Negotiate With the Contrás," *Washington Post*, March 30, 1985, p. 21.

16. Even this figure conceals the true ex-

tent of the build-up, however, since much of the arms and ammunition is obtained from the Soviets under long-term credits and, therefore, does not show up in the budget.

17. A 1983 Gallup International Poll showed that Nicaragua's growing military strength and support of subversive movements in other countries were a source of concern throughout the region. For an analysis of this poll, see *La Nación Internacional* (San José, Costa Rica), November 20-24, 1983.

18. In 1987, the United States agreed to sell 12 F-5E jet fighters to Honduras. However, these aircraft will replace a badly deteriorating fleet of Super Mystere jets and will represent little change in performance or combat capability. The Sandinistas' procurement of jet fighter aircraft would effectively neutralize the Honduran balance of forces by matching Honduran airpower, while maintaining their advantage in ground forces. Thus, a Sandinista jet fighter fleet could further skew the balance of military power in Central America and would be destabilizing for the whole region. Saying the Sandinistas reserved the right to procure MiG fighter jets, Defense Minister Humberto Ortega stated, "We have the airfield; we have the men." (See Julia Preston's "Nicaragua Says It Will Proceed With Plans To Get MiGs," *Washington Post*, Aug. 3, 1987, p. 17.) The U.S. Government has made its opposition to MiG fighters clear to both the Government of Nicaragua and the Soviet Union.

19. Only days after assuming power, Sandinista officials met with Salvadoran guerrilla leaders in Managua to plan how to continue the struggle. The first arms to be shipped to the Salvadoran guerrillas came from Sandinista stockpiles in Costa Rica. On March 4, 1982, Congressman Edward P. Boland (D-MA), then Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, cited convincing evidence that the Salvadoran insurgents "rely on the use of sites in Nicaragua for command and control and for logistical support.... Contrary to repeated denials of Nicaraguan officials, that country is thoroughly involved in supporting the Salvadoran insurgency." See Department of State/Department of Defense publication, *The Challenge to Democracy in Central America*, October 1986, pp. 47-54.

20. Eduardo Ulibari, director and editor of *La Nación*, Costa Rica's largest daily newspaper, referred to the impact of Nicaragua's military build-up on the other nations of Central America in his article "Costa Rica and Honduras Find Washington an Unreliable Ally," *Wall Street Journal*, January 25, 1985, p. 21. Ulibari concluded that, absent strong support from the United States, a likely consequence of the growing power of the Sandinistas would be the "Finlandization" of Costa Rica and the militarization of Honduras.

21. *Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America*, January 1984, p. 114.







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