

Subject: National Security Council Presidential Decision Brief on Nicaragua

Purpose: To obtain from the President of the United States a Finding pursuant to Section 662 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, concerning operations undertaken by the Central Intelligence Agency in foreign countries, other than those intended solely for the purpose of intelligence collection in regard to the communist government in Nicaragua.



Background: The United States has had troops stationed in Nicaragua as early as 1912. From 1927 through 1933, U.S. Marines engaged in a running battle with rebel forces under the leadership of the liberal General, Augusto Sandino. He disregarded a negotiated agreement brokered by the United States to end fighting between the rival groups, the liberals and the rebels. The situation over time, with US intervention, solved itself, and the US recalled its troops in 1933. In 1936, the Nicaragua National Guard Commander Anastasio Somoza Garcia took over the presidency. In 1956 General Somoza was assassinated, but was succeeded as president by his son Luis Somoza Debayle, and then his brother Anastasio Somoza in 1967. The Somoza administration maintained close relations with the United States. The “Somoza dynasty” ended in 1979 with a massive uprising of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), which had launched small-scale guerrilla and hit-and-run warfare against the Somoza regime. Widespread poverty and inequality in the Nicaraguan society had led to revolution.

Out of a popular feeling of rising expectations, the FLSN took control and set up a communist dictatorship. Since then, U.S. ties with Nicaragua are decreasing, as there is evidence of their growing ties with Cuba, as well as solid links with Central American guerrilla movements and international terrorists. Furthermore, Cuban and Eastern European advisors are conducting a literacy campaign to inculcate communist thought into the population. There is credible evidence of an infusion of Soviet-supplied military

equipment in Nicaragua and evidence that arms are being supplied to other paramilitary/insurgent groups in Central America. Because of these recent gains of information retrieved from our intelligence and reconnaissance teams, the United States has suspended aid to Nicaragua.

It is the position of the United States Government that Nicaragua is developing along the lines of Communist Cuba. This Cuban surrogate on the American mainland is an unacceptable threat to US national security.

Assessment of the situation: The situation in Nicaragua shows a growing threat. The policy of “containment” fostered by the previous administration, which was based on non-forceful actions and negotiations to rid the country of communist activity, proved ineffective. The current NSC goal should be to repair the damage done to the security system caused by the Carter’s post-Vietnam foreign policy against communism by working covertly. Considering these trends, it is unlikely that negotiation alone, without applying economic, military and paramilitary pressure, will work. The NSC working group on Central America has identified these elements of the present situation that should shape US Central American policy. Given these considerations, it is in the best interest of the USG to:

1. Overthrow the Sandinista Government by political, economic and military means to retain the best possible US influence in Central America, preserve a democratic Nicaragua and install free elections.
2. Continually raise the cost of war, both in military and economic terms. The US government must make the citizens and leaders of Nicaragua understand that war is too costly to continue.
3. Neutralize the Communists in Nicaragua to “rollback” communism in the Western Hemisphere.
4. Stop the flow of arms to other rebel groups in Central America
5. Stabilize diplomatic relations with Nicaragua and promote stable relations with the rest of the region, supporting a conservative role of the Organization of American States as a way to strengthen that institutional capability for the future.
6. Minimize human suffering in Nicaragua.

Undercutting the Sandinista government will lead to popular unrest as people begin to distrust the government, which will lead to a counter-revolution to bring democracy back to the people of Nicaragua and demonstrate the failure of communism through the example of the Sandinistas . After overthrowing the dictatorship, free elections can be installed, as well as ending the flow of arms to neighboring El Salvador rebels.



Courses of action: These goals can be achieved, and are in the US best interest to do so. However, there are three paths that the United States can take:

1. Hold the course laid out by the previous administration, work for peaceful coexistence, i.e. do nothing and hope the situation solves itself. (Policy of appeasement)
2. Bring pressure on the Sandinista government to expel Cuban, Soviet and Eastern European military personnel and stop support to the regional insurgent movements. (Indirect intervention)
3. Intervene and overthrow the Sandinista government or force a change in the government, in order to slow the populace towards democracy and away from the Communist Sphere of Influence. (Direct intervention)



Analysis of Courses of Action:

1. To do nothing allows Communism to take hold and spread. This is against the President's objective to rollback communism.
2. Diplomatic initiatives alone are unlikely to succeed, and must be accompanied by economic and military pressures.
3. Open military action will destroy American credibility in a region long suspicious of US "adventurism." Use of force in Central America could cause a lack of public support in the United States: the public may fear getting dragged into another prolonged guerilla war.
4. Support covert paramilitary operations against the Sandinistas and Cuban presence in Nicaragua in order to speed the fall of the Nicaraguan government.



Sources:

Nicaragua: the making of U.S. policy 1979-1990

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/publications/nicaragua/nidoc2.html>

The DICE experiment: Sample Point Paper and Pol-Mil plan of Fictional North Korea conflict.

U.S. Foreign Policy: Nicaragua and Regan

<http://free.hostdepartment.com/n/nicklar/nicarga3.html>

Pol Sci 3103 Constitutional Politics in the U.S. – Class Discussion Notes—The Iran-Contra affair

<http://www.artsci.wustl.edu/~polisci/calvert/PolSci3103/classnotes.irancontra.html>

NJROTC Unit University of Arizona – Murphy’s Law of Combat Operations

Robert Shenk’s “Guide to Naval Writing: A Practical Manual”

5. The US has provided a policy that offered the Sandinistas a deal – stating that expulsion of the communists advisors and equipment and withdrawal of Sandinista support of regional insurgencies would, in return, guarantee US non-intervention in Nicaragua's internal affairs, strict enforcement of US neutrality and a renewal of economic aid. Likewise, his has proved to be ineffective.

Recommendation: Specifically, through this finding, the CIA will provide paramilitary support, equipment and training assistance to Nicaraguan resistance groups as a means to induce the Sandinistas and Cubans (and their allies) to cease to support regional insurgencies, hamper Cuban/Nicaraguan arms trafficking, divert Nicaragua's resources and energies from support of Central American guerilla movements and bring the Sandinistas into meaningful negotiations and constructive agreements.

Decision: The Sandinista government as a base of support for Cuban and Soviet presence in the American continent presents a clear and present danger to the national security of the United States. With your approval Mr. President, we can solve the problem before communism spreads to our Southern borders. It is strongly recomended recommend that you sign the Finding, at Tab A, to support and conduct covert paramilitary operations in Nicaragua. This course of action justifies the United States policy to counter communist aggression in Central America and within Nicaragua.

Tab A: Presidential Finding: Nicaragua

SECRET

Finding Pursuant to Section 662 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, Concerning Operations Undertaken by the Central Intelligence Agency in Foreign Countries, other than those intended solely for the purpose of Intelligence Collection.

I hereby find that the following operation in a foreign country (including all support necessary to such operation) is important to the national security of the United States, and direct the Director of Central Intelligence, or his designee, to report this Finding to the intelligence committees of Congress pursuant to section 502 of the National Security Act of 1947, as amended, and to provide such briefings as necessary.

Scope

Central America

Purpose

Support and conduct paramilitary operations against the Cuban presence in Nicaragua and Cuban-Sandinista support infrastructure in Nicaragua and elsewhere in Central America.

The White House
Washington, D.C.
December 1, 1981

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