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PRC MEETING, 1530  
TUESDAY, 31 OCTOBER 1978

Nicaragua

Copy For: Secretary of Defense

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Refer to CIA for review. No DIA objection to  
declassification subject to results of CIA review and  
results of concurrent State review. JDC 14 Jan 15

SIO QC Review: 15  
Jan 2015/wcj

Nicaragua  
Doc# 273

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Date: AUG 24 2016

Office of the Secretary of Defense <sup>5 USC §</sup>  
Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS <sup>552</sup>  
Date: 24 Aug 2016 Authority: EO 13526 +  
Declassify: \_\_\_\_\_ Deny in Full: \_\_\_\_\_  
Declassify in Part: X <sup>§ 552</sup>  
Reason: 1.4(C) + 5 USC (b)(3); 10 USC § 424  
MDR: 15-M-0475

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ON  
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NICARAGUA SITUATION

(S//~~INTTEL/NOFORN/NOCONTRACT/ORDCON~~) At present, the situation in Nicaragua is generally calm on the surface. Nevertheless, underlying political tension remains and the potential for renewed turmoil and unrest continues. Meanwhile, the Sandinista National Liberation Front is still reported to be planning new attacks in early November.

-- President Somoza continues to maintain a hard line in public, claiming he will not step down and that any solution to Nicaragua's problems must be in accordance with the constitution. Other information, however, indicates the President at least recognizes the possibility he may have to leave office before 1981. For the present, Somoza will probably seek to drag out the mediation process in an effort to buy time to shore up his position. He almost certainly will not leave power until circumstances make it inescapably clear to him that he has no other alternative.

-- The political opposition, although united in their demand Somoza leave power, has been divided on when, how, and with whom to replace the President. Consequently, they have been slow to develop a realistic position for presentation to the government side in the mediation process. After considerable debate between its moderate and radical elements, the Broad Opposition Front (FAO) has tabled a proposal in effect calling for a phased transition of power:

- Somoza resignation
- Interim constitutional successor
- Amendment of the present constitution
- Unelected interim government
- New Constitution and elections

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-- The Group of Twelve, a small but symbolically important element of the radical opposition, has labeled the FAO position unacceptable. It has resigned from FAO and denounced the mediation effort. The Group of Twelve reportedly spoke for Sandinista interests and its withdrawal from the mediation effort may be a political indication the guerrillas are ready to launch a new offensive.

-- The Sandinista National Liberation Front is reportedly planning new attacks which could come as early as the first week of November. For the first time since the September attacks, the guerrillas also believe they have adequate arms, ammunition and food to carry out new operations, although they admit additional supplies would still be useful. While still divided into three factions, the FSLN apparently has been able to establish at least a working unity among the various groups.

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-- The National Guard is anticipating renewed Sandinista action since early October and has increased patrolling in threatened areas. The Guard has contracted with Israel and possibly other international arms suppliers for additional weapons and ammunition. There is no hard information on recent deliveries, but the Guard has probably been able to restock at least some of its munitions requirements. Over the longer term, the Guard is planning to expand its forces from 8,000 to 15,000 men. Pay and benefits continue to be attractive to the rural population and the Guard has been able to recruit 2,000 additional men since September.

-- On the political side, recent statements by a number of Nicaraguan military officers suggest that at least some elements of the National Guard are reassessing their support of President Anastacio Somoza. Several Guard staff officers are even said to be weighing the advisability of leading a coup against the President.

It is too early to tell if this represents a trend in the National Guard. The U.S. Defense Attache in Managua believes the majority of Guard officers would not oppose a mediated solution providing for Somoza's departure, as long as the GN's institutional interests are protected.

Prepared by: 

OSD 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(3), 10 USC § 424  
+ 1.4(c)

DIA 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(3), 10 USC. § 424  
+ 1.4(c)

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POINT PAPER

SUBJECT: Issues to Consider - Nicaragua

(S) The Broad Opposition Front (FAO) on 26 October, presented a proposal for a provisional government of national reconciliation, a significant advance in the mediation process. (Summary of FAO Plan, next under.)

(S) Issue: Should USG Support the FAO Plan? If so, what should be the timing and modalities?

Discussion:

- A dramatic announcement on mediation progress is needed to help forestall renewed hostilities.

- It is unlikely that either Somoza or the National Guard will accept the FAO plan without U.S. pressures and assurances.

-- Somoza will want U.S. assurances of a non-Communist regime, protection for his family financial interests and the facade of constitutionality.

-- The National Guard will want assurances of a non-Communist regime that will protect the Guard's institutional interests.

-- U.S. imposition of the FAO plan upon Somoza and the National Guard, at this point, would be viewed as intervention.

-- The FAO plan has the appearance of being Constitutional, however, we expect Somoza to context that view.

Recommendation:

- Use FAO Plan as a starting point, or means of getting an alternate Somoza Plan. A demarche suggesting that the U.S. is inclined to support Somoza's early departure and urging Somoza's forthcoming response to the FAO Plan is appropriate.

- Timing and modalities can best be determined by the U.S. Negotiator and the U.S. Ambassador in Managua.

Prepared by: LTC E. W. Smith, USA  
OASD/ISA-IA  
4B856/56411

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## SUMMARY OF BROAD OPPOSITION FRONT PLAN

The plan calls for Somoza's early resignation and departure from the country, along with his half-brother and son who are in key positions in the National Guard. The Congress would then follow the Constitution by selecting one of its members as President (presumably a member of Somoza's liberal party), who would declare a general amnesty for all politically-motivated crimes. The Congress would then proceed to amend the Constitution, a process which might require until May 1979. The amendments would provide for an interim non-elected Council of State, which would be composed of two members from each of the Front's fifteen or so constituent elements as well as two from the presently governing liberal party, and which would replace the present Congress. The Council would elect a triumvirate which would then replace the Interim president, would reform the courts and National Guard, and would conduct elections in 1980 for a constituent assembly, which would then replace the Council. The assembly and the triumvirate would then exercise legislative and executive power pending installation of a new president and Congress in December 1981, which would be elected under a new constitution providing for representative and pluralistic democracy.

The Opposition Front's proposal was presented to President Somoza on October 26 by the mediation team, and arrangements were made to meet with Somoza's Liberal Party negotiators on October 27. The next phase of negotiations will presumably focus on the Front's document, and will be through separate meetings by the mediators with the two sides, since the Opposition is still not willing to sit down at the same table with the Liberal Party negotiators.

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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

VIA LDI

October 31, 1978

~~IDENTICAL~~  
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MEMORANDUM FOR:

- The Secretary of State
- The Secretary of Defense
- The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
- The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT:

PRC Meeting on Nicaragua

Attached is a memo sent from the State Department to the NSC which describes the current situation in Nicaragua and suggests a strategy for dealing with it.

It is expected it will be useful to the participants in today's PRC meeting on Nicaragua.

*Christine J. Cleveland*  
Christine Dodson  
Staff Secretary *for*

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MEMORANDUM FOR DR. ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI  
THE WHITE HOUSE

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Chief, Records & Declass Div, WWS  
Date: AUG 24 2016

Subject: Nicaragua

The Nicaraguan mediation effort has reached a critical point. It is clear that no negotiated solution which will achieve reconciliation or bring peace and democracy to that country will be possible without Somoza's early departure from power. None of the opposition will accept less. The moderate and responsible opposition have taken a leading role under the mediators' sponsorship. They have presented for negotiation a realistic proposal for a political transition to a provisional government and to eventual elections, but based upon the prompt departure from power of Somoza and his family. They have placed their faith in the mediation process -- and in us.

If the mediation process fails, the moderates will be discredited, extremism and a strategy of violence to achieve political change will be legitimized, and the polarization which we have sought to avoid will occur with the accompanying danger of a Marxist takeover.

Somoza for his part has made clear he will not give up power voluntarily. He apparently intends to bring out the negotiation, expecting the opposition to break up and split, which it has already shown signs of doing. He may actually seek the polarization we are trying to avoid on the premise that if he can stabilize the situation in terms of Somoza vs. Marxists, he will have no choice but to support him. From

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his point of view therefore delay, even violence, will help him achieve his objective of holding on to power for himself and his family.

Overhanging this situation is the threat of an early renewal of widespread violence by the Sandinista guerrillas which intelligence indicates may come as early as next weekend or even before. They too want to discredit a peaceful mediated solution because within the mediation they cannot dominate the moderates and control events. Polarization therefore suits them too. Our mediator, Ambassador William Bowdler, believes that we will have to move quickly now if we are to avoid violence -- and even civil war -- and a discrediting of both the moderates and the process of negotiating a national reconciliation. (See Managua 5430.) We had hoped that the process of negotiation would in itself have a leavening effect on Somoza, but we no longer have the luxury of waiting for that to occur.

The only way that Somoza will agree to negotiate a transition promptly is if he believes that he has no alternative. In the last analysis, whether he comes to that conclusion is likely to depend on what the U.S. says. He counts on and needs our support to legitimize himself and stay in power. Up to now, our public posture vis-a-vis Somoza and Nicaragua has been neutral. We have suspended bilateral assistance to the Government of Nicaragua in order to underscore our neutrality. Nevertheless, the opposition in Nicaragua and hemispheric opinion generally view our position as ambiguous, with many believing we quietly back Somoza. The extremists in Nicaragua have played on that fear, charging that the mediation process is a trap designed only to give Somoza time to weaken his opposition. Certainly as far as Somoza himself is concerned, we have never clearly told him what he can expect from us if he tries to hang on to power.

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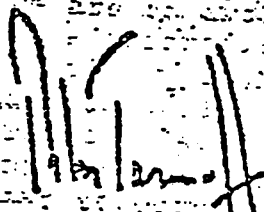
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Hence we are now at the point where, if the mediation is to succeed, we must speak frankly to Somoza to make clear that the Government of Nicaragua cannot expect continued support from the U.S. if he does not promptly accept a transition formula and relinquish power. Attached at Tab A are talking points for Ambassador Bowdler to use in such an approach to Somoza. In conjunction with this demarche, we would also be prepared to take a series of measures, such as withdrawing our military mission, to make our point as necessary.

Please inform us as soon as possible whether you concur in the use of the attached talking points.



Peter Tarnoff  
Executive Secretary

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