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Cuba/Nicaragua & El Salvador  
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SUBJECT: Cuban Covert Action in Central America and the Caribbean

Over the past year Cuba has carefully orchestrated an extensive and complicated covert action operation designed to bring down the Somoza government and put the FSLN in power. During the last few months Cuban clandestine support, became massive, with known results. Nevertheless, while overall Cuban assistance to the Sandinistas was very important in sustaining the insurgents during the 17-year campaign against the Somoza regime, massive Cuban support was provided only when the Sandinistas began their final offensive in late May 1979. Cuban arms and technical military advice were the major factors in the speed with which the FSLN achieved victory in Nicaragua. Prior to the final stages of the FSLN offensive, Cuban support was reasonably circumspect, and they were careful to coordinate their efforts with the governments of Panama and Costa Rica in an attempt to minimize the chances of an external reaction. Following the Sandinista victory, Cuban military advisers moved quickly into Nicaragua, and a military--as distinct from a diplomatic--communications network was rapidly established, linking Havana with Managua. Subsequently, a relatively large number of Cubans have arrived in Nicaragua, and their influence over the military and security forces is predominant.

Thus far, there is no firm evidence that Cuba or Nicaragua is attempting to introduce weapons and other assistance to insurgent groups in El Salvador or Guatemala, although there are a number of indications that preparations for such introduction are underway. Salvadorans are being trained in Nicaragua for eventual action in their home country, and the groundwork for Cuban support mechanisms are being prepared. It is likely that Cuba will provide significant support when the Northern Tier insurgents, particularly those in El Salvador, appear ready to launch a major and sustained campaign.

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**SUBJECT:** Cuban Covert Action in Central America and the Caribbean

In the Caribbean, open parliamentary systems, demographic factors, and economic problems--not to mention the absence of insurgents--all point toward political means rather than insurgency to advance Cuban goals. The Cubans have been active politically for five years in the English-speaking Caribbean. Because of geographic propinquity and what it considers the relevance of the Cuban model of development, the Castro regime believes it has a natural leadership role to play in the region. The Cubans have also taken advantage of the emergence of left-leaning governments in the area as a base from which to expand Cuban/Soviet influence in the eastern Caribbean.

Nonetheless, the coup in Grenada has undoubtedly heightened Cuban and Soviet ambitions in the eastern Caribbean and could spur additional interest in this type of subversion. Certainly, the appointment of Ulises Estrada, a veteran intelligence officer with a history of involvement with Central American and Caribbean insurgent groups, as Ambassador to Kingston could signal a greater Cuban interest in supporting such groups as the New Jewel Movement in their quest for political power. Estrada's presence in the Caribbean could have been motivated by a decision in Havana to move more aggressively to radicalize the Caribbean, including possible efforts to destabilize such countries as Trinidad/Tobago. The presence of Julian Lopez Diaz as the Cuban Ambassador in Nicaragua is regarded as an ominous development vis-a-vis stability in Central America; the same holds true for the assignment of Estrada in the Caribbean.

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