

ping, air attacks on civilian communities and other repressive techniques regularly employed by both official and unofficial forces in El Salvador and Guatemala do not occur in Nicaragua.

Opposition to the Sandinista government has come from several quarters. The six other political parties which participated in the 1984 elections have led a spirited opposition to certain FSLN policies. They have influenced the drafting of legislation and would like to see changes in some of the regime's political practices, but they have pledged their support for the basic structures of the Nicaraguan Revolution.

This is not the case with the organization representing big business interests, the leaders of the Catholic Church, the four parties that boycotted the election, one newspaper (*La Prensa*) and one small labour federation, which all have more fundamental differences with the government. These organizations have led an intense anti-government campaign and have refused to condemn the armed groups who are attempting to overthrow the Sandinista regime.

These armies, referred to as *contras*, are led by the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO). Not all *contras* belong to the UNO, but this organization is by far the most influential force in the armed opposition. The UNO is nominally led by moderate civilian politicians such as Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo, but effective control rests with military leaders such as Enrique Bermudez, the former military attaché to Washington for the Somoza regime. The high command and the officer corps are made up largely of former members of Somoza's National Guard. Under the old regime, as reported by Amnesty International and Americas Watch, these men planned and implemented a campaign of violence outstanding for its brutality even by Central American standards. They continue to be responsible for systematic human rights violations as *contra* leaders today.⁷

The *contras'* past and present record, combined with the fact that they have had little success as a military force since 1985, make it unlikely that the government will agree to negotiations with them, as Washington has been urging.

EXTERNAL POWERS

There are several outside powers involved in Central America's military-security affairs, but the most important external actors are the Soviet Union, Cuba and the United States.

The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union has no important historical ties to Central America, nor does it appear to view the region as a core interest. But it faces some difficult choices. On the one hand, it has obvious ideological

affinities with many Central American revolutionaries. Moreover, support for "national liberation" movements is popular in the Third World and adds to Soviet prestige. On the other hand, there is little to be gained from establishing a military presence in Central America (given existing military installations in Cuba), and there is much to be lost in relations with the US, still the chief concern of Soviet foreign policy. The pursuit of too radical a course in Latin America would also threaten Soviet relations with key Latin American governments, such as Mexico, which are now relatively good.⁸

This mix of factors, combined with limited force projection capabilities in the region, have shaped the USSR's cautious and restrained policy towards Central America. The Soviet Union has declared its support for the Contadora Initiative. It has provided considerable support to the Nicaraguan Government, including substantial relief and development assistance, and major supplies of petroleum.

The Soviet Union and its allies have also become Nicaragua's main arms suppliers. In 1979 Nicaragua received \$5 million of defensive arms from Warsaw Pact countries. Arms transfers increased slightly in 1980 (850 metric tons) and 1981 (900 metric tons). In 1982, as *contra* attacks and border tensions increased, and as it became evident that no arms would be forthcoming from the West, the scale of these military supplies changed dramatically. According to the US Department of State, shipments increased to 6,700 tons in 1982, 14,000 tons in 1983 and 18,000 tons in 1984. Warsaw Pact countries have also sent military advisers to Nicaragua. Although the exact numbers are in dispute, it seems that there have been about 100 Soviet and East European advisers in the country since 1983.⁹

Cuba

Cuba is the major external socialist actor in Central America. Its commitment to revolutionary change in the region flows from its world view and its own strategic interests. Cuba has provided advice, some training and limited material support to the Salvadorean FMLN, although this support has decreased sharply since 1981. It is in Nicaragua that the Cuban presence is most pronounced.

Nicaragua has received a significant amount of assistance from Cuba in the fields of health, education, development, military and security planning assistance. The exact number of Cuban military advisers in Nicaragua is unknown: it lies somewhere between the official Nicaraguan figure of 500 and estimates of 3,000 by certain Western sources.¹⁰