

**THE SOVIET ATTITUDE TO POLITICAL AND  
SOCIAL CHANGE IN  
CENTRAL AMERICA 1979-1990, CASE STUDIES:  
NICARAGUA, EL SALVADOR AND GUATEMALA**

Danuta Paszyn

School of Slavonic and East European Studies

University of London

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis analyses Soviet policy towards Nicaragua during the ten year rule of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) and towards the guerrillas fighting for political and social change in El Salvador and Guatemala respectively. It covers the period from the Sandinista victory in July 1979 until the loss of power in February 1990.

The Soviet-Nicaraguan relationship is analysed in the context of both parties' relation with the United States, which conditioned the evolution of Soviet-Nicaraguan links. Much of the existing literature, particularly work published in the United States, on Soviet policy towards Central America tends to treat the subject in isolation and as a result we often come across distortions as to the motives behind the Soviet policy towards the region. In addition, the study pays attention to the important and independent role played by Cuba in Central America which so far has been much underestimated.

While the treatment of Soviet policy towards Central America has been overshadowed by Soviet-Nicaraguan relations, the USSR's attitude towards the armed struggle in El Salvador and Guatemala has been neglected. It is crucial to look at this in more detail in order to assess adequately the Soviet aims in the area.

The study aims to counter the tendency found in the western literature which over-emphasizes the ideological and strategic factors motivating Soviet policy towards Nicaragua and Central America as a whole. The analysis concludes that the USSR was primarily driven by political and tactical objectives to cause problems for the United States in its "strategic backyard". This was Moscow's reaction to its perception of being undermined by the United States in its own spheres of influence.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This thesis sets out to analyse the Soviet approach to the Nicaraguan leftist government that came to power in the revolution of July 1979 and the revolutionary process, accelerated by the events in Nicaragua, in El Salvador and Guatemala. It focuses on a historical period between July 1979 and February 1990, when the Sandinistas lost their power. The main objective of this study is to establish the chief determinants underlying the Soviet involvement in the US "strategic backyard" and the extent of this involvement.

#### The Literature

Hitherto western studies dealing with Soviet policy towards the Central American crisis have concentrated on Soviet-Nicaraguan relations. Only scant attention has been paid to the Soviets and the guerrilla struggle in El Salvador and Guatemala; and mostly with reference to the White Paper or to the Kissinger Report. ( 1 ) Jiri Valenta in his chapter entitled 'Soviet Strategy and Policies in the Caribbean Basin' in *Rift and Revolution - The Central American Imbrolio* edited by H. Wiarda, ( 2 ) and more recently Jan Adams in her book, *A Foreign Policy in Transition - Moscow's Retreat from Central America and the Caribbean, 1985-1992* ( 3 ) have briefly and superficially treated the issue, but, exaggerated the Soviet involvement and influence. To assess the Soviet aims and tactics in the region, a broader perspective is needed which requires a more detailed analysis of the Soviet attitude to the revolutionary process in the respective countries.

Most of the literature tends to see Soviet behaviour towards Central America as aggressive and expansionist, and portrays the United States and other countries in the

region as mere passive observers. Any serious analysis of Soviet policy in the region must be set in the context of both parties' (Soviet and Nicaraguan) relations with the United States; otherwise it would not be possible to treat the subject with objectivity. Indeed, this approach was adopted by Nicola Miller in her book ( 4 ) which contains a chapter on Soviet relations with Nicaragua. This approach is also prevalent, though more focused on the consequences of the US policy towards Nicaragua which led to closer links between the Nicaraguan government and the Soviet bloc, in the chapter entitled 'Diversifying Dependence: Nicaragua's New Economic Links with Socialist Countries', written by Ruben Berrios and Marc Edelman in *Vital Interests - The Soviet Issue in US Central American Policy*, edited by Bruce D. Larkin. ( 5 ) Thus, this study will further contribute to the redressing of the existing imbalances.

Few analysts have recognised not only the extent to which Cuba acted as an independent actor in the Soviet/Central American equation but also its influential role over the USSR policy towards Central America and the Caribbean (at least until 1988). One notable example is Peter Shearman in his monograph, *The Soviet Union and Cuba*; ( 6 ) and more recently a new light on this relation was shed by Iuri Pavlov a former Soviet Foreign Ministry official, in his work: *Soviet-Cuban Alliance 1959-1991*. ( 7 ) Others have either misunderstood or wittingly underplayed Cuba's role in Central America. They tend to characterize the Soviet low-key approach to Nicaragua, and the revolutionary movements in El Salvador and Guatemala in terms of a tactical move by using Cuba as its proxy. For instance, often-quoted publication of Robert Leiken, *Soviet Strategy in Latin America*. ( 8 ) or a book edited in 1986 by Dennis L. Bark entitled: *The Red Orchestra - Instruments of Soviet Policy in Latin America and the Caribbean*. ( 9 ) It is misleading to make such characterisations. In this thesis the argument is that Cuba acted as a partner, influencer and a source of reliable advice; not a surrogate. Cuba was pursuing its own policy goals which harmonised with those of the Soviet Union and, thus, Moscow gave it lots of leverage as well as the necessary support to carry out this



policy. It should be remembered, however, that the revolutionary success in Central America was of higher strategic and ideological importance to Cuba than to the USSR.

Those analysts who depict Cuba as a Soviet proxy also tend to see the Soviet policy towards the area in strictly ideological and geo-strategic terms and fail to take into account the changes in the ideology and the perceptions of policy-makers which was already under way in the Kremlin prior to Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power. Parallels have often been drawn between the development of USSR-Nicaraguan and USSR-Cuban relations. This is clearly indicated by the Valentas in 'Soviet Strategy and Policies in the Caribbean Basin' in Howard Wiarda (ed.), *Rift and Revolution - The Central American Imbroglia*. ( 10 ) For example, to quote the Valentas:

The Nicaraguan pattern of rapid revolutionary transformation and Soviet involvement in the early 1980s is very reminiscent of the Cuban pattern in the early 1960s'. ( 11 )

This approach is a simplistic generalization and fails to take into account the multiplicity of factors both external and internal, constant and variable, which help to shape any nation's foreign policy at a given time.

By the time the Nicaraguan revolution had taken place the Soviet perception about the Third World 'socialist-oriented' states and the liberation struggle was beginning to change, driven by both internal and external consideration.

Thus, the ideology was being adjusted to reality. Every Soviet leader from Lenin to Gorbachev had made major emendations in Soviet ideology in terms of its relevance to foreign policy. As Alvin Z. Rubinstein said:

That Marxism-Leninism, like all other ideologies, is infinitely malleable and offered successive Soviet leaders alternative justification for preferred courses..... ( 12 )

Khrushchev himself stated that 'it was necessary to observe and understand the specifics of concrete situations and apply doctrine creatively in the light of contemporary conditions, not in accordance with a predetermined formula'. ( 13 ) His revision of Stalin's "two camp" doctrine and promulgation of the concept of a "zone of peace" justified the policy of lending support to the newly liberated Third World countries who did not join Western-sponsored military pacts.

Faced with a disappointing balance sheet after a decade of Khrushchev's adventurous and expansionist policy in the Third World, the Brezhnev leadership modified its policies on the basis of the following perception, as Vernon Aspaturian has observed:

Not only that an aggressive ideological orientation in foreign policy tends to mobilize the capitalist world against them but also that it serves to drain scarce resources required to enhance the material prosperity of the Soviet population, ideologically described as 'building Communism'. (14 )

Thus, there was a shift towards a more economically beneficial policy in the Third World and *détente* with the West. Moscow looked to trade as the main way of expanding Soviet influence in the Third World. It attempted to develop new partners in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. However, this did not mean that the support for national liberation movement was abandoned. But it was given a lower priority in overall Soviet foreign policy towards the Third World than under Khrushchev; and was more selective in choosing countries for its support, i.e. in accordance with geostrategic importance. The first ten years of Brezhnev's leadership, for example, neglected sub-Saharan Africa and only revived interest when the Portuguese dictatorship was overthrown and independence for Portugal's African empire became imminent. Soviet policy was generally reactive not instigative. The early 1970s was largely a period of greater restraint, while the mid-to -late 1970s was a period of greater involvement.

Indeed, as time went on, the original role of ideology as a guide to USSR policy was eroded. As Aspaturian has argued:

Soviet ideology over the years has increasingly become less a guide to Soviet policy than a legitimization of Soviet behavior. ( 15 )

As the 1980s unfolded the Soviet leadership had to make their Third World policies in the context of heightened East-West tension and renewed American determination to meet the Soviet global challenge. This not only affected Soviet thinking on its political and military involvement in the Third World regions but also meant that requests from clients for increased economic assistance had to compete for limited resources (due to declining economic growth) with a Soviet military establishment concerned with matching the Western military build-up. In the 1970s the Soviet Union had acquired a



number of new client states pursuing a non-capitalist path of development, in other words "socialist oriented", some of whom, such as Angola and Ethiopia owed their survival directly to Soviet assistance. These debates had become more pronounced during Andropov's tenure and had laid down the foundations for Gorbachev's policy of *perestroika* and "new thinking".

These factors contributed to making foreign policy towards the Third World less driven by Soviet ideological goals of world domination and more by "normal" great power considerations of influence and security. ( 16 )

Soviet scholarly analyses and the content of speeches of Brezhnev's successor, Iuri Andropov (e.g. his speech given to Central Committee in June 1983) were less ideology-laden and more pragmatic. They reflected pessimism about the Third World states of "socialist orientation", in particular, their economic prospects and possibility for a transition to "real socialism", political stability and significance for the outcome of East-West competition. In Andropov's speeches as Galia Golan pointed out:

Gone were the glowing references to past Soviet support: the only example for relations with the Third World was India : not a national liberation movement, nor even a "socialist oriented" state. ( 17 )

The pragmatic school of thought argued that the preservation of some elements of capitalism was essential for the economic and political development of Third World countries. To give ideological legitimization to their ideas they referred to Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP).

It was within this framework that the Soviet policy towards Nicaragua was formulated. Sergo Mikoian, Latin American specialist, and the chief editor of the *Latinskaia Amerika* journal, had specifically recommended the USSR's NEP experience to the young Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. ( 18 )

This gradualist approach had apparently received recognition even among orthodox thinkers such as Boris Ponomarev, the head of the Central Committee's International Department, who stated:

In following this path there are varied forms of economic management-state owned, state capitalist, co-operative and private-capitalist-that can be used to rebuild the national economy, carry out industrialisation, widely introduce the co-operative form in the countryside and provide the national economy with new technology. (19 )

The post-Brezhnev period generally saw the successor leaderships' position drawing closer to most of the theoreticians, thus moving away from too great a commitment or involvement on behalf of the national liberation movements towards a Soviet-first orientation. This growing tendency in the 1980s towards a pragmatic approach in Soviet-Third World relations clearly exemplifies the playing down of ideology and the putting forward of the "national interest" in its traditional sense; and "common security" which was later vindicated by Gorbachev's policies.

### Overview

This thesis attempts to analyse the evolution of Soviet policy towards Central America during the above-mentioned period. The study primarily focuses on the

relationship between the USSR and Nicaragua within the context of both countries' relations with the United States. It will be argued that from the outset the development of Soviet-Nicaraguan relations was not conditioned by ideological and strategic considerations, as was the case with Cuba three decades ago, but by political and tactical considerations. As regards the armed struggle in El Salvador and Guatemala it will be argued that Moscow adopted an ideologically neutral stand.

Chapter 1 looks at Soviet contacts with Central America in the historical perspective. The purpose of this is to determine if there were any Soviet interests or involvement in the Sandinista revolution prior to the victory.

Chapter 2 examines the Soviet reaction to these new opportunities presented by the Sandinista victory with emphasis on the Soviet attitude towards the Sandinista style of socialist experiment, and towards revolutionary strategy in the region.

Chapter 3 gives a detailed account of the extent of Soviet military and economic commitment to the Sandinista leftist government before Gorbachev's accession to power.

Chapter 4 looks at the effects of Gorbachev's policy of "new political thinking" on Soviet-Nicaraguan relations, and explains these changes within the Third World context and in relation to regional conflict resolution and superpower cooperation.

Chapter 5 examines the Soviet attitude to the revolutionary struggle in El Salvador, in order to establish if there was any Soviet involvement in the process.

Chapter 6 attempts to analyse the Soviet approach to the revolutionary process in Guatemala.

FOOTNOTES

1. See *The Report of the President's National Bipartisan Commission on Central America*, New York : Macmillan, 1984, and *Communist Interference in El Salvador* in the White Paper issued by the US State Department.
2. Jiri and Virginia Valenta, 'Soviet Strategy and Policies in the Caribbean Basin', in Howard J. Wiarda (ed.), *Rift and Revolution: the Central American Imbroglia*, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1984, p.219.
3. Jan S. Adams, *A Foreign Policy in Transition - Moscow's Retreat from Central America and the Caribbean*, 1985-1992, Duke University Press, 1992.
4. Nicola Miller, *Soviet Relations with Latin America - 1959-1987*, Cambridge University Press, 1988.
5. Ruben Berríos and Marc Edelman, 'Diversifying Dependence: Nicaragua's New Economic Links with Socialist Countries' in Bruce D. Larkin (ed.), *Vital Interests - the Soviet Issue in U.S. Central American Policy*, Lynne Rienner Publishers - Boulder/London, 1988.
6. Peter Shearman, *The Soviet Union and Cuba*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1987.
7. Iuri Pavlov, *Soviet-Cuban Alliance: 1959-1991*, University of Miami/Transaction Publishers, 1994.
8. Robert Leiken, *Soviet Strategy in Latin America*, New York: Washington Papers - Praeger, 1982.
9. Dennis L. Bark (ed.), *The Red Orchestra: Instruments of Soviet Policy in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1986.
10. Jiri and Virginia Valenta in Wiarda (ed.), op. cit.
11. Ibid., p. 219.
12. Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Moscow's Third World Strategy*, Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 65.
13. Ibid.
14. Cited in Erik Hoffmann, 'Soviet Foreign Policy Aims and Accomplishments from Lenin to Brezhnev', in Frederic J. Flernon, Erik P. Hoffmann and Robbin F. Laird (eds.) *Classic Issues in Soviet Foreign Policy - From Lenin to Brezhnev*, Walter de Gruyter, Inc., 1991, p. 69.

15. Vernon Aspaturian, 'Gorbachev's "New Political Thinking" and Foreign Policy', in Jiri Valenta and Frank Cibulka (eds.), *Gorbachev's New Thinking and Third World Conflicts*, Transaction Publishers, 1990. p. 7.
16. George F. Kennan, 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct', in Fleron, Hoffmann and Laird, op. cit., pp. 313-27.
17. Galia Golan, 'Moscow and Third World National Liberation Movements: The Soviet Role', *Journal of International Affairs*, Winter/Spring 1987, vol. 40, no.2, p. 306.
18. Sergo Mikoian, 'Ob Osobennostiakh Revoliutssi v Nicaragua i ee Urokakh s Tochki Zreniia Teorii i Praktiki Osvoboditel'nogo Dvizheniia', *Latinskaia Amerika*, March 1980, pp. 42-3.
19. Golan, op. cit., p. 307.

## CHAPTER 2

**SOVIET INTERESTS AND COMMUNIST TACTICS IN CENTRAL AMERICA PRIOR TO THE SANDINISTA VICTORY OF 1979**

It would not be an underestimation to say that until the victory of the Sandinista revolution in July 1979, Central America was the most neglected region in Latin America in Soviet foreign policy formulation. Even the victory of Castro's revolution did not alter much the Soviet perception of the area. Two major factors had placed limitations on Soviet interests and activities in Central America. Firstly, its close proximity to the United States, and thus its falling within the American geopolitical sphere of influence. The Soviet analysts and policy makers were apprehensive of the Monroe Doctrine (proclaimed by Washington in 1823), which has been applied successfully in the Nineteenth and the Twentieth century in the Western hemisphere, comprising Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, where American security interests are exposed most. The Panama Canal, the Central American countries and the Caribbean Basin provide a geographic link with South America that carries important strategic raw materials, such as minerals, ores, oil, refined petroleum products and so forth, which are essential, not only for the United States' economy but for its defence. Thus, keeping pro-American politically stable regimes in the region has been vital to the US security interests.

Since President Theodore Roosevelt declared his corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, which gave the US the right to intervene to restore "order" and stability in the region, the United States did not hesitate to use military force where it felt that its interests were threatened. For example, between 1900 and 1930 the United States carried out 28 military interventions in the Caribbean Basin. ( 1 ) North American commitment to sustain governments and political systems that maintained capitalist relations in the

economic, political and social spheres, was confirmed to Moscow when the United States intervened in Guatemala in 1954 to oust Arbenz's populist government.

After the success of the Cuban revolution in 1959, Khrushchev announced, in 1960, that the Monroe Doctrine was no longer valid. ( 2 ) However, the Bay of Pigs operation (1961), though unsuccessful, the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) and the US intervention in the Dominican Republic (1965) showed that Khrushchev's boast was hollow.

The second important factor which contributed to the lack of early Soviet interests in Central America, was that the ruling elites of Central American countries were staunchly anti-communist and opposed to any links with the Soviet Union whatsoever. This hostility was derived largely out of fear for their own positions and an unwillingness to put their relations at risk with their protector, the United States. This anti-Soviet attitude had intensified after the abortive communist uprisings in El Salvador (1932) and Brazil (1935). For the Soviets, these small Central American agricultural societies, which were mainly monocultural, had not much to offer economically.

Nevertheless, Moscow did succeed in establishing diplomatic relations with Nicaragua and Honduras in 1944 and 1945 respectively. The USSR's war-time alliance with the United States had facilitated those relations. The only Central American country which itself had expressed an interest in establishing diplomatic relations with Moscow was Costa Rica. ( 3 ) Its socio-economic make up differed from that of the other four countries in the region. This was due to the fact that its agricultural system was based largely on medium-size, self-sufficient farms, as opposed to the usual pattern of large estates owned by a few families who were directly descended from the original European colonists. However, after the Costa Rican revolution of 1948 these diplomatic relations were broken off and not resumed until the end of the 1950s. The links with Costa Rica were viewed by Moscow as a sign of greater capacity for autonomy on the part of those countries under the United States hegemony. Although these relations were kept at low

profile throughout the years as there was not much compatibility in terms of trade between the two countries, they still had some political significance to the USSR. Costa Rica was the only country in the region where the USSR had an official foothold, at least, until the Cuban revolution. Therefore, this enabled the Soviets to monitor the developments in the neighbouring states. With the other four Central American states the Soviet Union had maintained contact via unofficial party channels.

The USSR from its earliest days conducted a two-track foreign policy towards the outside world based on state-to-state and party-to-party relations. Lenin, from the beginning of the October Revolution until his death in 1924, maintained that socialism could not succeed totally in one country and that there was therefore an urgent need to promote socialist revolution throughout the world. From this premise began the initiative to create communist parties in Latin America, and in other parts of the world, that would function on this Leninist principle.

To coordinate the strategy and tactics pursued by newly established communist parties and leftist movements around the world, the Soviets set up a special agency, in 1919, the Comintern (Communist International). During the First Congress of the Comintern, which took place in Moscow, Lenin underlined the importance of this organization by stating that:

The formation of the Communist International opens the doors to the International Soviet Republic and to the victory of socialism internationally. ( 4 )

Soviet control of the international Communist movement was conducted formally via the Executive Committee of the Comintern through which practical and ideological guidance was provided until its dissolution by Stalin in 1943. Since 1945 representatives of the CPSU, men such as Mikhail Suslov and Boris Ponomarev, exercised Soviet influence through regional groupings such as the short-lived Cominform (1947-1956) and subsequently by the World Marxist Review, Party Congress, reciprocal visits and so forth.

At the beginning the Communist International attracted the attention and enthusiasm of different radical groups in Latin America who were inspired by what they had heard and read about the revolutionary experiment in Russia. Utopian socialist, anarcho-syndicalist, Leninist and Trotskyite ideas slowly filtered into the region. The reform-minded Latin American radical intelligentsia had found Marxism a respectable political philosophy that provided a rational explanation for the social and economic contradictions which prevailed in their countries. Lenin made Marx's ideas more relevant to Central America by stating that the decisive factor was the nature of political organization rather than the existing stage of social and economic development within a state. Lenin's ideas on imperialism formed the foundations upon which were built the dependency theories that became popular among many Central American radicals.

The Socialist Worker's Party in Argentina (1921) and Uruguay (1920) were the first in Latin America to affiliate with the Communist International on their own initiative. Undoubtedly, these contacts facilitated the setting up of the official Soviet Trading Corporation (Yuzhmatorg), which opened its first office in Montevideo (1925), and a second in Buenos Aires the following year. Apparently this agency served as a link for all Latin American Communist parties with Moscow until 1935 when its operations were terminated in both countries. The authorities of several South American republics suspected that the director of Yuzhmatorg and his associates were engaged in subversive

activities, such as the incitement of Communist riots in Uruguay, Argentina and other neighbouring states. ( 5 )

The first Latin American country that attracted the Comintern's attention was Mexico, where revolutionary zeal still lingered following the agrarian and peasant revolution of 1910-17. Its first emissary to Mexico, in 1919, was Mikhail Borodin, who was sent to promote communist activities, as Nicola Miller has suggested, in order to distract the United States from intervening in the Soviet Union. ( 6 )

Under the guidance of successive Comintern representatives the Mexican Communist Party became instrumental in promoting the communist movement in Cuba, Central America and the Caribbean. Despite its regional success, the Mexican Communist Party made little headway in Mexico itself, where workers and peasants preferred their own method of carrying out revolution. As a result the Comintern became increasingly hostile to the Mexican revolutionary leaders.

The Communist Party of Central America was formed in 1925 and lasted only until 1929, when its leaders decided that it was more convenient for each country to have its own Communist party. The strongest among them were the Communist parties of Costa Rica and El Salvador as a result of solid organizing and party platforms emphasising economic independence and political democracy. ( 7 )

By 1930 communist parties were functioning in all the major Latin American countries, and by the end of the decade, had been established in most of the other countries in the region. However, in its first years, Comintern paid little attention to Latin America as a whole. Victor Alba attributes this to the importance of the Soviet Union's other foreign policy concerns. During this period the Soviet leaders were too preoccupied with the danger of "encirclement", by the British and the French, and thus concentrated their extra-European activities on the Asiatic and African territories of

those Great Powers; whereas Latin America, being firmly kept within the US sphere of influence, was considered to be of little importance. ( 8 )

Furthermore, the states of Latin America, in particular, Central America, were seen as a group of countries that had still to pass from feudal-agrarian to capitalist forms of economic organization before they could move towards a socialist revolution. The earlier Soviet experience with the Mexican revolution reinforced this view. The USSR then focused its attention on the development of diplomatic and trade ties with these nations rather than forging effective operational links with their Communist parties.

However, from mid 1920s the leaders of the International Communist movement began to take more interest in Latin American affairs. A South American Bureau of the Comintern was established in Montevideo (1929) through which most of Comintern's operations in the region were directed. A Caribbean branch was opened in New York in 1928, which also gave instructions to Central American Communists. It has been reported that the Salvadoran Communist party received instructions from the New York branch before the disastrous uprising of January 1932. ( 9 )

In 1929 the first conference of Latin American Communist parties was held in Buenos Aires at which considerable attention was paid to the problems facing Communists in the region and the continent's revolutionary potential. During this period a young liberal Nicaraguan army officer, Augusto César Sandino, had raised the nationalist banner to challenge US imperialism. He was fighting against the US marines who had occupied his country, except for a short period between 1925 to 1927, from 1912 to 1933. His three hundred followers had adopted classic rural guerrilla tactics and posed a threat to both the United States and its newly created National Guard.

The Comintern attempted to capitalize on Sandino's struggle and dispatched two of its agents to assist him, one of whom was Augusto Farabundo Martí from El Salvador, a founder of the Salvadoran Communist party. These two men became important aides to Sandino's high command. However, their attempts to transform the struggle into a socialist revolution were strongly resisted by Sandino, for whom the most important thing was national liberation followed later by a social revolution. The ideological disagreement resulted in the expulsion of Martí from Sandino's staff, in 1930, and Sandino breaking off all connections with the Comintern and denouncing its activities.

Soon after the withdrawal of American troops from Nicaragua, in 1933, Sandino entered into peace negotiations with his government. In response to this initiative the Comintern's mouthpiece, International Press Correspondence, accused him of the 'betrayal of the Nicaraguan independence movement' because he had confined his struggle to the fight against the US marines, and called him a 'petty bourgeois liberal caudillo'. ( 10 )

This example clearly demonstrated the Comintern's misunderstanding of both Sandino's populist ideology and the Nicaraguan political situation. He was not a Marxist and his anti-imperialism was aimed primarily at the occupying forces of the United States rather than constituting antagonisms towards it. ( 11 ) Furthermore, there was no Communist party at the time of Sandino's struggle in Nicaragua, with the exception of a few communists operating within the Partido de Trabajadores Nicaragüenses (the Nicaraguan Labour Party), which could have given the movement a sound organizational base to lead it into a socialist revolution.

The basic problem with the Comintern's attempt to formulate a revolutionary strategy for colonial and semi-colonial countries was that questions such as the nature of the revolution and the role of classes, were examined through a formal analogy with the

Russian revolution rather than a structural analysis of the specific conditions existing in each individual state. ( 12 )

The nature of the revolution in Latin America was, in its basic framework, no different to that prescribed by Soviet theory for the colonial countries of Asia and Africa. A two-stage revolutionary model was proposed for these countries. The first stage was bourgeois-democratic (anti-imperialist, agrarian and democratic revolution), with an orientation towards socialism. This was to be implemented by the proletariat under the leadership of the Communist Party in alliance with other "progressive" elements of the national bourgeoisie, intelligentsia and peasants. Once this first stage was completed the second was to follow immediately; this was to be a socialist revolution carried out by the proletariat under the leadership of a Communist party vanguard.

In the early 1930s Stalin, having asserted his dominance over the Comintern, insisted that a true revolution was one led by an orthodox Marxist-Leninist Party. He urged Communists to undertake armed struggle by themselves, without making alliances with other political forces, wherever the opportunity presented itself. In other words the Communists everywhere were to declare themselves as such and stop cooperating with "bourgeoisie" and "leftist reformist" elements. They were to establish purely Communist organizations which would then strive to foment and seize the leadership of a proletarian revolution.

This major shift in doctrine and policy, with regards to national liberation, was partially a product of the Comintern's experience with Ataturk in Turkey (early 1920s) and Chiang Kai-shek in China. For instance, Chiang Kai-shek had first cooperated closely with the Communists in the initial stages of his revolution and then turned brutally against them in 1927, when he began to win. Both leaders were provided with substantial military assistance by the Soviets. Therefore, the national bourgeoisie could not be trusted because of their links with imperialism.

These new directives had far-reaching effects on the activities of Latin American Communists. In 1932, a leader of the Salvadoran Communist Party, Farabundo Augustin Martí launched an armed insurrection. The Communist Party of El Salvador had emerged in 1925 and had become a real force in the country's political life by the late 1920s and early 1930s. The country had been a fertile ground for communist propaganda as the extremes of wealth and poverty were far greater in El Salvador than in any other Central American country. In El Salvador a small elite group of land owners, thirty to forty families, had controlled nearly all the fertile soil which constituted sixty percent of all the land, and had dominated all spheres of the Salvadoran society. Being the most densely populated country in the region, the demand for land has had always been very high. Most of the country's peasants, predominantly Indian, had no land of their own and had to work as wage labourers. They constituted a large rural proletariat among whom the Communists could carry on their propaganda and organizational activities. In contrast with Nicaragua, social contradictions in El Salvador predominated over anti-imperialist feeling among the population.

The upheaval was triggered when General Martínez's government allowed, for the first time in the country's history, the Communist party to run in the local elections of January 1932. The Communists won in several towns, but the army prevented them from taking office. As a result the Communist party led an almost spontaneous peasant insurrection in the Western coffee-growing areas where economic conditions were poor, against the national oligarchy and their military supporter, the Martínez regime. Unfortunately, this attempt to seize power ended in fiasco. According to Thomas Anderson the rebels killed about eighty people, but the government retaliated with *el matanza*, literally the "slaughter" which took 30,000 lives, mostly Indian peasants. ( 13 )

These campesinos were moved not by communist ideals but by starvation. Surveying the Salvadoran scene in the year before the matanza, a US military attaché for Central America A. Harris observed:

About the first thing one observes when he goes to San Salvador is the number of expensive automobiles on the streets. There seems to be nothing but Packards and Pierce about. There appears to be nothing between these high priced cars and the oxcart with its barefooted attendant. There is practically no middle class between the very rich and the very poor.....

The situation is ripe for Communism and the Communists seem to have found that out. On the first of December 1931, there was in the Post Office in San Salvador over 3000 pounds of Communist literature emanating from New York City.....

socialist or Communist revolution in El Salvador may be delayed for several years, ten or even twenty, but when it comes it will be a bloody one. ( 14 )

Subsequently, virtually all the leaders of the Communist party, including Farabundo Martí, were captured and executed. Only a fortunate few managed to escape to Guatemala. Thereafter, all political parties, labour unions and peasant organizations were banned.

Although there were close contacts between the Salvadoran Communists and the Comintern through the International Red Aid, however, there is little evidence suggesting Soviet involvement or direct instigation of the 1932 insurrection. For example, the only survivor of the Salvadoran Communist party, Miguel Mármol had claimed that 'the Comintern played no role and the decision to launch the insurrection was made with complete independence by the leadership of the Salvadoran Communist

party'. ( 15 ) On the other hand, it can be argued that the Comintern's branch in New York could have given guidance independently of the USSR.

Following the Soviet disappointment with Augusto Sandino and the suppression of the Communists in El Salvador, the Comintern's interests in the revolutionary movements of Central America had almost completely lapsed.

At the seventh Comintern congress, in 1935, the radical experiences and activities of the early 1930s were condemned. The Communist parties of Central America and elsewhere were instructed to pursue united front tactics. These were to form "four-class alliances", by joining with workers, peasants, petit-bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie, in order to accomplish "national and democratic tasks". Stalin's united front strategy was in line with Moscow's need to build up broad-based alliances to counter the threats posed by Nazi Germany and Japan's growing militarism. Moreover, this strategy also aimed at eliminating the Western Powers' suspicions as to the Soviet Union being the inspirational force behind rebellions in their colonial domains.

During this period as Edmé Domínguez stated:

The "Stalinization" of Latin American Communist parties was finally consolidated (by which we mean that the parties' constitution and leading bureaucratic hierarchy was linked in an ideological and political way to the Soviet leadership and its foreign policy " zigzag"). ( 16 )

In other words relations between the Comintern and the Communist parties of western hemisphere had to be in harmony with the foreign policy of the USSR.

The change to this "Popular Front" strategy gave the South American Communist parties a chance to regain the ground that they had lost, due to their isolationist policies of the 1920s and the early 1930s. In Cuba, where the Communists had pursued relatively strong class collaboration tactics, the party was given a ministerial position, under Batista (1943-44), and the control of the officially recognised Confederation of Cuban Workers.

The "Popular Front" period witnessed the emergence of the only Communist party in Latin America that has never actually called itself communist: this is the Socialist Party of Nicaragua (Partido Socialista de Nicaragua, PSN). It was formed in 1937 as a result of a split in the Party of Nicaraguan Workers within which the Communist had operated. The PSN was declared illegal a year later and became a clandestine organization from then onwards. However, due to the repressive rule of the Somoza regime it was never able to recruit many followers and so its effect on the national political life of Nicaragua was negligible.

Despite being a constant target for repression the Central American Communists gained important leadership roles in regional labour movements in the 1930s. These gains were threatened by the Stalin-Hitler pact of 1939 as rigid attempts to justify Stalin's course of action by the party leadership discredited Central American Communists just as they had their South American counterparts. However, this situation changed with the Soviet alliance with the West, during World War Two, and gave the region's tiny Communist parties, and their more successful trade union members, a brief political opening into mainstream domestic politics in the early 1940s. They began to make strides as their numbers and influence grew. For example, the Costa Rican Communists became influential in the administration of Calderon Guardia and its successor. In Nicaragua the Somoza government gave the Partido Socialista de Nicaragua (PSN) more freedom. In 1944 they held their first national congress, which marked the party's official founding.

Throughout this period the PSN made the most of their opportunities to function without the government's interference. By the mid-1940s they completely controlled the Trade Union movement and by December 1946 they claimed to have 1500 members and the support of 25% of the electorate. ( 17 ) Apparently, the PSN's activities were very well financed, during this period, by funds coming from the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City. ( 18 ) The Communists had even began to press Somoza to grant them influence within the government; he did not, however, succumb to these pressures.

The Partido Socialista de Nicaragua's short-lived honeymoon with the Somoza regime came to an end with the onset of the cold war and as a result of their own tactical failures. The party, like its counterparts elsewhere, was soon subjected to repression. In 1947 the United States formed the Río de Janeiro pact, with the Latin American oligarchies, as the start of a general anti-Communist offensive in the whole of Latin America. The Partido Socialista de Nicaragua was outlawed for the rest of the Somoza dynasty's rule. The Trade Union central organization under its control was also made illegal.

However, despite the repression of the left, in most Central American countries in the immediate post-war period, communists still managed to become junior partners, in more conservative government coalitions, in Costa Rica in the 1940s and in Guatemala in the early 1950s. The implementation of Stalin's instructions given towards the end of the war, to form a collaborationist alliance with democratic forces fared particularly well in Guatemala. After the fall of the Ubíco dictatorial regime in 1944, the new political leadership embarked on a bourgeois-democratic revolution, which sought to make the existing semi-feudal and capitalist system more responsive to popular needs within the democratic framework. The newly elected president, José Arévalo, allowed the formation and free operation of parties of all political persuasion. But as Arévalo's social-reformist, pro-labour policies came into direct conflict with the existing vested interests, both domestic and foreign, chiefly the American, he became increasingly dependent on

the left. This led to a further radicalization of Guatemalan politics under his constitutional successor, Jacobo Arbenz, who in 1947 introduced a labour code which recognized unions, established a minimum wage, an eight hour day and labour courts, and gave preferential judicial protection to workers as compensation for economic inequities. The Communists gained control of both labour and agricultural organizations, giving the party links with the masses and providing a base from which to influence national politics and government. The Communist Party grew rapidly from about forty members in 1949 to some 4000 in 1954. ( 19 ) Towards the end of Arévalo's term of office the Communists, as a political party, were allowed to hold posts in his administration and, after the assassination of Araña, the staunchest anti-communist in his cabinet, one communist group openly took the name, Partido Comunista de Guatemala (PCG), which was subsequently changed, in 1952, to the Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajo (PGT).

The agrarian reform programme introduced by President Arbenz in the early 1950s, though bourgeois in conception, provoked a strong anti-government reaction among the large estate owners and the American banana enterprise, the United Fruit Company (UFCO). Also the neighbouring states felt uneasy about this situation, in particular, in Nicaragua and El Salvador, where pressures for land reform were growing.

Washington branded Arbenz's revolutionary regime as "communist" and denounced his reforms as 'international Communist subversion, which constituted a threat to the whole hemisphere'. ( 20 ) Thus, the Eisenhower administration authorized the CIA to cooperate with the domestic opposition to oust Arbenz. The U.S. had enormous interests in Guatemala so in fear of nationalization, between 1944 and 1954, it embarked on a bogus anti-communist crusade to prevent it. G. Toriello, who served as ambassador to US and the U.N. under both Arévalo and Arbenz administrations indicated that the entire Guatemalan Communist party had only 532 registered members, 17 of whom held government positions, including four out of sixty two who served as national deputies.

The coup that removed the Arbenz regime from power, in 1954, tarnished Soviet hopes for a revolution in Central America until the victory of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua in 1979.

The US allegation that the Guatemalan Communists not only took orders from Moscow but also controlled the Arbenz government was a gross exaggeration and was not substantiated. In fact they had limited influence in the body politic. Roland Schneider who has studied documents from the Arbenz government and the Guatemalan Communist organization, presented little evidence of direct official Soviet contact with Arbenz . ( 21 ) Similarly, Cole Blasier asserted:

I have, however, found no convincing evidence of the exercise of direct control over the Arbenz government or for that matter much evidence of direct Soviet contact. ( 22 )

Nevertheless, as the Soviets shared political views in support of social changes in Guatemala, they obviously were 'the major source of Guatemalan Communists' external financial, political and moral support'. ( 23 ) As regards Arbenz , Moscow characterized him as representing the interests of "petty bourgeois democrats". ( 24 )

This turn of events in Guatemala, without doubt, not only destroyed the Guatemalan Communist party and other leftist elements but also had negative repercussions on other Communist parties and their sympathizers in Central America. This most successful application of communist popular front strategy demonstrated that the existing oligarchic



opposition to meaningful reforms within Latin America, backed by the United States, was too powerful for such a strategy to ultimately succeed.

Thus, throughout the 1950s Khrushchev's expansion of Soviet interests remained confined to the countries of Asia and Africa, whereas Latin and Central America occupied a low position on Moscow's agenda of Third World relations.

The Cuban revolution of 1959 opened a new period in Latin American history, not only for its consequences in respect of the East-West conflict, but also because of the challenge it posed to the traditional Communist parties, and to the Soviet perspective on revolutionary strategy in Latin America.

Cuba, like China, demonstrated that aggressive, unorthodox Marxist approaches to revolution could succeed in non-industrial nations. Thus, Third World-based revolutionary strategy became a possibility for Latin America.

The overthrow of Batista, in 1959, by the 26th of July Movement, led by a guerrilla leader, Fidel Castro, was not foreseen by Moscow. Nonetheless, the Soviets had doubts as to the revolution's survival, and even more as to its transformation into a socialist revolution. There was a general feeling amongst the Khrushchev's leadership that a similar fate awaited Castro as that which befell the Arbenz government in Guatemala.

But once Castro had demonstrated that he could successfully defy the United States, Moscow reassessed not only its prospects of establishing a strategically valuable relationship with Cuba, but also the possibility of a revolutionary change throughout Latin America. By 1962 Moscow was looking to Castro's Cuba as a potential client that broke the myth about the region's "geographic fatalism". ( 25 )

Although Castro's revolutionary strategy did not exactly fit into the classic Marxist-Leninist theory of proletarian revolutions, it did square well with Lenin's thesis of a possible progressive role for some segments of the national bourgeoisie in colonial and semi-colonial countries fighting for their national independence. This was the theoretical basis for Khrushchev's policy of cultivating friendship with left-wing, radical, "national democratic" regimes in the Third World countries regarded as valuable assets for the USSR in its global confrontation with the West and as potential converts for the non-capitalist path of development.

The Soviet Union's links with Cuba, prior to the Castro revolution, were limited to the pro-Soviet Popular Socialist Party (PSP) which had contributed too little and too late to the armed struggle against the Batista regime. It was not until 1958 that the PSP integrated itself into the July 26 movement's struggle. Fidel Castro made his revolution independently of the local Communists, winning immense authority among revolutionary movements in Latin America and around the world. In reuniting Marxism and nationalism under the anti-imperialist banner, Castro succeeded at one stroke where the Communist parties had failed for years. Furthermore, Castro managed successfully to transform the democratic revolution into a socialist one by the year 1961.

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a consolidation of radical trends within Latin and Central America. A number of radical Marxist parties such as Castroite, Maoist and others have grown up to challenge the orthodox Communists for control of the revolutionary movement. 'The Latin American "New Left" sought radical social change in the continent.....This new vanguard, however, abstained from the effort to win the masses away from the influence of the populist and Stalinist formations. Instead, it devoted itself to the establishment of guerrilla fronts. The masses were left in the hands of the reformists'. ( 26 )

The Cuban Revolution was a determining factor in the growth of revolutionary consciousness among a number of the middle classes and students, which overcame the prejudices felt towards the peasantry and saw an armed struggle as the most viable means for getting rid of oligarchic dictatorship. Cuba has become a model for Latin American revolutionaries as was the Soviet Union for European Communists after 1917. According to the Nicaraguan Marxist thinker and a co-founder of the Sandinista movement, Tomás Borgé:

Fidel was for us the resurrection of Sandino, the answer to our reservations, the justification of the dreams and heresies of some hours before. ( 27 )

The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) was a typical product of the Cuban "first revolutionary wave". It was founded in Honduras in July 1961 by a tiny group of radical, left-leaning nationalists such as Carlos Fonseca, Tomás Borgé, and Silvio Mayorga. Both Fonseca and Borgé had experience with the Nicaraguan Communist Party (PSN). Fonseca had participated in Communist student movements, in the 1950s, and had travelled to Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and Cuba. However, in 1960 he had become disillusioned with the peaceful strategy for social change pursued by the Communist parties, and therefore left the PSN to follow, like many of his contemporaries in the rest of Latin America, the *foquista* line of Ché Guevara and Castro. ( 28 )

The FSLN's first recruits were young idealists, mainly of middle-class background without military training or lengthy political formation, but with experience of Somoza's prisons. They all agreed on the following basic principles: firstly, that the only way to

overthrow Somoza's repressive and brutal regime was through armed struggle; secondly, the struggle in Nicaragua would have to be an anti-imperialist movement; and thirdly, a guerrilla *foco* would spark the eventual revolutionary victory. ( 29 )

Similarly in Guatemala, a group of radicalized army officers, who staged an abortive coup in protest against the Yodígoras government had become converts to the leftist revolutionary ideas.

The guerrilla *foco* was to replace the Leninist party as the revolutionary vanguard while the experience of combat would "proletarianize" both the guerrilla fighters and the peasantry. During the next decade the FSLN modelled their actions on both the theories of Ché Guevara and the Cuban example. 'The FSLN had learnt from the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cuban experience that a socialist revolution can triumph in the Third World only if it mobilizes the nationalist sentiments of the masses, as well as their ideals of liberty and equality. In declaring itself the inheritor and continuator of Sandino's epic struggle, the FSLN rooted itself in a living Nicaraguan tradition, emerging as the unswerving champion of national independence and identifying against US domination and its local agents'. ( 30 )

In the late 1960s the FSLN guerrilla movement had transformed itself from a small Castroite guerrilla band into an Asian-style protracted people's war, as advocated by Mao Tse-tung and Vo Nguyen Giap. As the government's brutality and corruption grew combined with growing economic depravation, so did the Sandinistas' popularity.

At the end of 1974 the FSLN carried out the first of a series of spectacular operations that reinforced their heroic image; and both embarrassed and discredited the Somoza regime and his National Guard. At the time, the Sandinista numbered less than three hundred fighters.

Between 1975 and 1976 they split into three factions as a result of some ideological and strategic differences, of the kind experienced earlier by other guerrilla movements in Latin America. The three factions were: firstly, the Proletarian Wing which was led by intellectuals and academics who were critical of the FSLN's leaning towards the "traditional Marxist line"; secondly, the advocates of a "prolonged people's war", (GPP) who preferred to pursue a cautious strategy which accumulated forces over a period of time and was led by Tomás Borgé and Henry Ruíz; lastly, the Terceristas or Insurreccional Tendency, which was ideologically plural and led by Eden Pástora and the Ortega brothers. Their ranks included many catholics and non-Marxist revolutionaries. (31) The Terceristas were strongly committed to Ché Guevara's principle that there is no need to wait until all conditions for making revolution exist as the insurrection itself can create them.

Over the next two years the encounters between the FSLN and the Guardia Civil brought about mixed results. The FSLN had neither the political nor the military strength to offer a serious challenge to the Somoza regime. However, the assassination in 1978 of Pedro Joaquin Chamoro, the editor of the opposition daily *La Prensa* and the leader of the Democratic Liberation Union (UDEL), which was founded in 1974 and supported by private capital, incited public outrage throughout the country and galvanized the anti-Somoza opposition into action.

The increased activity of UDEL, in cooperation with the newly created Broad Opposition Front (uniting non-Marxist movements) along with a widespread popular resistance, and a shift in US foreign policy significantly contributed to the weakening of Somoza's grip on power.

Under President Carter's human rights policy there was a substantial drop in U.S. aid to the Somoza regime. According to John Booth, economic assistance for the year 1977-78 declined by 75%, in real terms, and military aid was cut by almost 45%. ( 32 )

However, the political pressures from the United States and the moderate domestic opposition failed to force Somoza to resign. Thus, the only viable option left for the non-Marxist opposition was to join the armed struggle.

In August 1978 the seizure of the National Palace led by Pástor and his Tercerista faction brought the FSLN a major military propaganda victory, and further undermined the credibility of the Somoza regime. Subsequently, the Sandinistas emerged as a clear vanguard of the anti-Somoza struggle.

In early 1979 with the encouragement of Fidel Castro, the three Marxist factions of the FSLN united, and set up a joint command which consisted of three members from each faction. They were determined to win a decisive political and military victory over the Somoza forces, that it would preclude any future attempts to install "Samozista without Somoza". By playing down the radical elements of their programme and by effective political recruitment, the Sandinistas broadened popular support for their efforts to succeed Somoza, not only at home but also abroad. Various governments, such as the Panamanian, Costa Rican, Cuban, Mexican and Venezuelan, provided material and political support for the FSLN. ( 33 )

The triumph of the Sandinistas on 19 July 1979 came as a great surprise to the Soviet Union. As Richard Feinberg who visited Moscow in 1981 pointed out:

Neither the experts, at the Institute of Latin America, nor government officials had predicted such an outcome to the civil war. ( 34 )

According to Sergo Mikoian, the editor of the *Latinskaia Amerika* journal, 'few could see the possibility of a Sandinista triumph even in 1979'. ( 35 ) S. A. Sergeev argued in his article of *Latinskaia Amerika* that the guerrillas had limited chances to win the war against Somoza's well-equipped army. ( 36 ) Richard Feinberg stated that:

This alleged naivety is given credibility by the fact that the Moscow-line Nicaraguan Socialist party (PSN) also had failed to recognize the potential for revolution. The PSN supported the ill-fated US plan to engineer a moderate alternative to Somoza in 1978, and opposed the Sandinistas' insurrectionary strategy as adventurist. ( 37 )

The Sandinista victory renewed the hopes of the revolutionary forces, in El Salvador and Guatemala, and reinforced their determination to continue their struggle despite the growing repression from their respective governments.

There is convincing evidence that the Soviet Union played no active role, nor gave any direct material assistance to the guerrilla war in Nicaragua. However, it has been alleged that the Sandinistas received some support in the form of training, weapons and limited financial aid from their friend and ally, Cuba. According to a report issued by the CIA in May 1979, Havana sent to Nicaragua only two to three planeloads of light weapons. (38) The support given by other Latin American countries, notably those mentioned earlier, was much more significant when compared to that of Cuba. ( 39 ) Apparently during the last months of the offensive Castro sent a few military advisers. But Cuba's primary contribution to the struggle was a political one. Cuba played a

faciliatory role in resolving the differences between the divergent factions that paved the way to the unification.

In summary, as with the Cuban revolution twenty years earlier, the Soviet Union watched the Nicaragua's autonomous armed uprising with only the remotest interest. Even when the Sandinista-led insurrection gathered momentum, in late 1978 and early 1979, Soviet press coverage and analysis were sparse and revealed a lack of in-depth knowledge of the FSLN. For example, in October 1978, *Komsomol'skaia pravda* printed a sympathetic interview with Tomás Borgé, who had recently arrived in Havana after being freed from prison in return for the FSLN hostages seized in the raid on the National Palace, but, the paper wrongly identified him as Tomás Jorge Martínez. ( 40 ) Several months later *Pravda* published an interview with Luiz Guzmán, another Sandinista prisoner, who had been released as a result of the takeover of the National Palace. ( 41 )

It can be argued that the lack of Soviet interest in the Nicaraguan revolutionary process stemmed from the fact that many scholars and policy-makers did not believe that the United States would let a left-wing revolution succeed on their own door step. Further, remembering the aborted guerrilla campaigns of the 1960s, Moscow tended to look on the Sandinista revolutionaries, like in the rest of the region, as romantic, unreliable and petty-bourgeois, with little chances of success. This view was also shared by the pro-Moscow Nicaraguan Communist party (PSN), which described the FSLN insurrection as too daring. It was not until the beginning of 1979, when the Sandinistas were close to victory, that the PSN joined the struggle. Even in the last few months of the war its role was confined to mere propaganda support, clandestine radio broadcasts, and some financial aid. ( 42 )

For their part, the Sandinistas, though most of them had Marxist and Socialist views, did not accept the Soviet orthodoxy and disliked the pro-Soviet PSN. However, there is

no doubt that Castro must have been telling Moscow that the revolution in Nicaragua was likely to happen. But the Kremlin seemed to play down these reports knowing of Castro's tendency towards revolutionary euphoria.

The USSR was being rather cautious; carefully considering the broader implications of their involvement in the revolutionary process in the region.

FOOTNOTES

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10. Alexander, op. cit., p.379.
11. John A. Booth, *The End and the Beginning - Nicaraguan Revolution*, Westview Special Studies on Latin America and the Caribbean, 1982, p. 237.
12. Rodolfo Cérdas Cruz, *La hoz y el machete*, Editorial Universidad Estatal a Distancia, San Jose, 1986, p. 182.

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14. Cited in Ernesto Ché Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare - with an Introduction and Case Studies* by Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davies, Jr., Manchester University Press, 1985, p. 395.
15. Löwy, op.cit., p. XXV.
16. Edmé Domínguez Reyes, 'The Latin American Communist Movement: Realities and Relations with the Soviet Union' in Eusebio Mujal-Leon (ed.), *The USSR and Latin America - A Developing Relationship*, Unwin Hyman Inc., 1989 p. 134.
17. Alexander, op. cit., p. 381.
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20. Stephan Shlesinger and S. Kinzer (eds.), *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, London, Sindair-Brown, 1982, p. 9.
21. Schneider, op. cit., p. 282.
22. Cole Blasier, *The Hovering Giant - U.S. Responses to Revolutionary Change in Latin America*, University of Pittsburg Press, 1976, p. 158; see also Ralph Lee Woodward, *Central America - Historical Perspectives on the Contemporary Crisis*, Greenwood Presss, 1988, p. 158.
23. Blasier, op. cit., p. 157.
24. Ibid.
25. Iu. H., Korolev, 'Revoliutsionnoe Protsessy i Voprosy Sotsial'no-Politicheskogo Razvitiia v Latinskoi Amerike', *Latinskaia Amerika*, April 1981, p. 64; see also an article by an International Research Group entitled 'A Continent in Struggle - the International Factor in the Revolutionary Struggle of Latin American Peoples', in *World Marxist Review*, vol. 24, no.6, June 1981, p. 76.
26. Cited in Che Guevara, op. cit., p. 15.
27. Cited in Donald C. Hodges, *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, University of Texas, 1986, p. 104.
28. The *foco* theory held that the guerrillas should base themselves in a remote part of the country and gradually build up their military strength, and then 'come down from the Sierra Maestras' to engage and defeat the regular army in a series of

conventional battles. The rural guerrillas of the 1960s were basically pursuing the strategy of the *foco*. (Ché Guevara, op. cit., pp. 14-19.)

29. Ché Guevara, op. cit., p. 15.
30. Ibid., p. 366.
31. Booth, op. cit.; see also Thomas Walker (ed.), *Nicaragua in Revolution*, New York: Praeger, 1982.
32. Booth, op. cit., p. 128.
33. Walker, op. cit., p. 333.
34. Cited in Miller, op. cit., p. 195; see also Jerry Hough, *The Struggle for the Third World - Soviet Debates and American Options*, Washington, D.C. Brookings Institution, 1985, p. 175.
35. Sergo A. Mikoian, 'Revolutsionnoe Tvorchestvo Prokladyvaet Put' k Pobede', *Latinskaia Amerika*, February 1980, p. 5.
36. S.A. Sergeev, 'Latinskaia Amerika: God 1978', *Latinskaia Amerika*, January 1979, p. 23.
37. Richard Feinberg, 'Central America: The View from Moscow', *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 5, Spring 1982, p. 172.
38. *New York Times*, 4 July 1979; see also Jiri Valenta, 'The USSR, Cuba, and the Crisis in Central America' in Larkin (ed.), op. cit., p. 341.
39. Miller, op. cit., p. 195; also see Richard L. Millett, 'From Somoza to the Sandinista: The Roots of Revolution in Nicaragua' in Wolf Grabendorff, Heinrich Krumwiede and Jorg Todt (eds.), *Political Change in Central America - Internal and External Dimensions*, Westview Press, 1984, pp. 216-28.
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41. A. Serbin, 'Luis Prodolzhaet Bor'bu', *Pravda*, January 8, 1979, p. 4.
42. Valenta, op. cit., p. 340.

## CHAPTER 3

**THE SOVIET REACTION TO THE OPPORTUNITIES CREATED BY THE NICARAGUAN REVOLUTION**

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the Soviet Union had kept aloof from the development of the revolutionary situation in Nicaragua and in the rest of Central America before the success of the Nicaraguan revolution of July 1979. Moscow had played no active role in the Sandinistas' struggle against Somoza and had given no direct material aid. Although its ally Cuba had demonstrated some active involvement, however, it had exercised considerable restraint.

The overthrow of Somoza was undoubtedly a welcome event to the Soviet Union. It created a further opening of the breach in the doctrine of "geographic fatalism" and thus presented a new opportunity to increase Moscow's political influence in the region. On 20 July 1979, Brezhnev congratulated the FSLN on its victory and stated that the USSR was prepared 'to develop multifaceted ties with Nicaragua' and on 19 October 1979 diplomatic relations between the two countries were established. ( 1 )

For the Soviet ideologues the Nicaraguan revolution had great significance. It signalled the reversal of the decline in Communist fortunes, since the overthrow of Allende's Marxist-Leninist government in Chile (1973), and it suggested that there might be greater potential for successful anti-imperialist movements in Latin America than they had earlier estimated. In an address, on 6th November 1979, honouring the 62nd anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, Andrei Kirilenko, a high-ranking Politburo member, stated that:

The Soviet people rejoice that in recent years the people of Angola, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Nicaragua and Grenada have broken the chains of imperialist domination and have embarked on a road of independent development. ( 2 )

In their view, the "correlation of forces" or the world balance of power was shifting further towards socialism while capitalism was on the decline. ( 3 ) From this view flowed a further belief that United States' influence, even in its own "backyard" was diminishing and there was an ever growing independence of Latin American states from the US hegemony. The coming to power of two Marxist-Leninist governments in one year under the very nose of the United States, in Nicaragua and Grenada respectively, and the increasing role in world affairs of Latin American countries, such as Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela and Peru confirmed this perceived trend. Thus, the potential for spreading the Soviet brand of socialism world-wide and reducing the global influence of the United States and its Western allies was expanding. Boris Ponomarev, the leading Central Committee authority on the Third World, had stated that:

Powerful blows were struck at imperialism by the people's revolutions in Ethiopia and Afghanistan, and the victory of the people of Nicaragua. ( 4 )

This unexpected victory naturally created a great interest among the Soviet Latin American specialists as regards the FSLN movement, their strategies and revolutionary policies, as well as the political situation in the region, which had been neglected for so long.

There was a hope that the Nicaraguan victory would be quickly followed by another in El Salvador, and perhaps in Guatemala too, as the objective conditions for revolution were considered to be existent in these two countries.

This exaggerated optimism prompted many Soviet analysts to re-examine the tactical prospects for armed struggle in Latin America. The Nicaraguan experience clearly vindicated the Cuban revolutionary strategy, whereas the peaceful road attempted in Chile or reliance on leftist military regimes as in Peru and Bolivia had failed.

Kiva Maidanik, Sergo A. Mikoian and N. Leonov propagated with great enthusiasm the armed path to power as the only viable strategy that could be used all over the hemisphere. To quote N. Leonov:

The significance of the Nicaraguan revolution is that it gave once more an answer to a question what path is the most effective for achieving revolutionary victory in Latin America. ( 5 )

Ché Guevara, formerly repudiated by the Soviets, was rehabilitated along with his main insurrectionary principles. ( 6 ) Boris Koval' explicitly suggested that the past opposition to this form of struggle should be reconsidered:

The Nicaraguan experience refuted the previously held, simplified interpretation of partisan actions, and confirmed the correctness of many of the strategic positions of Che Guevara, and put into life his idea of the creation of powerful and popular partisan movement. ( 7 )

These views appear to have been relatively isolated, not generally repeated or apparently shared either by the military or even by all Latin American specialists. ( 8 ) For example, A. F. Shul'govskii had contended that the armed path was the only path possible in the Nicaraguan political situation, which he regarded as being 'unique in many ways'. ( 9 ) He sent a clear warning that no single form of struggle should be 'absolutised' by stating that:

From the analysis of the Nicaraguan revolution one can hardly come to the conclusion that there exists in Latin America just one path that will lead to the success of the revolution, namely the armed path. ( 10 )

Shul'govskii's view had been shared by many others, including M. F. Gornov. ( 11 ) Their sober and objective appraisal of the uniqueness of the Nicaraguan conditions was soon confirmed by the fiasco of the "final offensive" in El Salvador (January 1981) and the guerrillas' subsequent failure to achieve a revolutionary breakthrough. The Guatemalan revolutionary experience further justified the validity and sobriety of the realists' argument.

Nevertheless, there was a uniform position with regard to the unity of the revolutionary forces, in particular of the left. All assessments of the Nicaraguan revolution stressed the importance of such a unity, and praised the successful unification of the different FSLN factions. Kiva Maidanik wrote that:

Unity of the left forces represents a chief and decisive link in the development of the revolutionary process [in Nicaragua]. ( 12 )

The tendency towards fragmentation of the political left along ideological and tactical lines has been a common feature in Latin America and proved to be particularly acute, in Guatemala and El Salvador. In April 1980, the Salvadoran revolutionary left achieved unity, followed by the unification of the Guatemalan left in 1982.

It should be noted, however, that the Soviet and Cuban role in encouraging those different Central American guerrilla factions has been over-emphasized by many Western analysts. Here, I would endorse the argument put forward by Marc Edelman, who quotes R. Leiken in his support:

Whatever the Soviet-Cuban role is in this, it remains true, as [Shafik] Handal affirms in his Kommunist article, that the situation in the country demanded unification of all revolutionary and democratic forces. ( 13 )

With regard to Nicaragua, Cole Blasier has pointed out:

It is difficult to find evidence that Castro was decisive in implementing such a strategy in Nicaragua. In any case the Nicaraguans themselves claim credit for the unification of anti-Somoza forces. ( 14 )

In an interview, one of the Sandinistas commandants, Tomás Borgé, stressed that:

Reality showed comrades....he answered....that unity was essential for the struggle against the enemy. ( 15 )

Indeed, the coordinated action between the three main guerrilla factions during the taking over of the National Palace in Managua (September 1978), and their subsequent successes that resulted in the seizure of the main towns of the country must have convinced the leaders of the different guerrilla groups that in order to achieve victory over the Somoza forces they need to unite their ranks.

Despite the euphoria over the success of the Nicaraguan revolution expressed in academic circles and by some officials, the Soviet leadership demonstrated considerable caution towards the Sandinistas. No official statement had ever referred, except once in *Pravda*, to Nicaragua as a state of socialist orientation. ( 16 ) To acknowledge that the revolution had taken place, Soviet commentators resorted to different vocabulary, using such phrases as, for instance, 'embarked on the road of independent development'; 'victory of the patriotic people's anti-imperialist revolution' or describing Nicaragua as a 'progressive democratic state'. Words like Marxist-Leninist or any other that might have connoted socialism were carefully avoided for purely tactical reasons. The granting of

'socialist status' to Nicaragua would have required a significant Soviet commitment, and Moscow was not only reluctant to commit itself to a new regime in Nicaragua that was not yet stable, but certainly less able to do so. One Cuba in Latin America was enough for the USSR. The director of the Latin American Institute in Moscow, Viktor Vol'skii stated the following:

We would not like to repeat - in Nicaragua - on a larger scale, the commitment which we have made to Cuba for the last twenty years.....Nicaragua must maintain flexibility in its international relations; it must not adhere to a single country. ( 17 )

Furthermore, there was a question of the regime's survival. Somoza's departure from the political scene, however, did not mean that the Nicaraguan revolution was irreversible. The newly established revolutionary government faced serious threats to its security from the ex-Somoza guardsmen, who with US backing, had entrenched themselves along the Honduran border in 1979 and begun to conduct raids into Nicaragua as well as economic and political pressure from the United States.

Moscow's cautious approach towards revolutionary Nicaragua was clearly signalled by a marked decline in its media coverage on the consolidation of the Sandinista power. (18 )

This low key approach to the new revolutionary Sandinista regime was in sharp contrast to that of Havana. The Cubans had been operating ahead of the Soviets and had made greater commitments of manpower and resources. Within months of the Sandinistas coming to power Castro sent Cuban specialists such as teachers, healthcare

personnel and military instructors to help with the reconstruction of Nicaragua. According to Peter Shearman Cuba despite its limited resources was the most generous aid donor to the new Nicaraguan state. ( 19 )

No significant contacts were made between the Soviet and the Nicaraguan governments until March 1980, when the Sandinista leaders went to Moscow following the suspension of US aid in January 1980. They were received by high-ranking party officials, Politburo member A. P. Kirilenko and a candidate member, B. Ponomarev, who oversaw communist activities outside the communist countries. During the following visit, on 23 March 1980, the inter-party agreement between the FSLN and the CPSU was signed.

This indicated the Soviet recognition of the FSLN as the vanguard and leading force in the Nicaraguan revolution, a role traditionally ascribed to communist parties. This, of course, did not contravene the Soviet ideology; Lenin himself emphasized that the leading role in the struggle 'goes to him, who fights most energetically, who never misses a chance to strike a blow at the enemy, who always suits the action to the word'. ( 20 )

Moscow also granted vanguard status to Castro's 26 July movement soon after the revolution. Sergo Mikoian had pointed out that:

Such movements as the FSLN and the 26 July movements can replace the Communist parties as vanguards.....and this has become a new feature in many Latin American countries. ( 21 )

The Nicaraguan Communist party (PSN) seemed to be ignored by the Soviet Union since 1979 and even faced criticism, for example, Boris Koval' has stated:

The FSLN by far outstripped the PSN in direction, scale, and efficiency of its political work. ( 22 )

However, Kiva Maidanik came out in defence of the PSN, by arguing that:

The Nicaraguan Socialist party was, throughout the course of its history, one of the weakest links of the Communist movement in Latin America, and not at any stage of the political crisis could it carry out the role of the vanguard of the revolutionary struggle in the country. ( 23 )

The USSR gave its support to non-Communist radical movements in the Third World when such movements were more promising than the local communist parties. Equally, those newly emerged radical regimes, in order to get Soviet financial aid, formed vanguard parties and expressed adherence to the principle of "scientific socialism" and called themselves Marxist-Leninist.

However, it should be noted that despite the recognition given to the vanguard parties as a force capable of leading a developing nation towards socialism, they were still ranked below the fully fledged CPs. ( 24 ) Moscow conceded that "political-military

fronts" might play the primary role in the creation of united fronts, displacing the CP as instigator, though not as inheritor, of revolutions. ( 25 )

Having attained the first revolutionary goal, i.e. national liberation and the initial consolidation of political power, the Sandinistas embarked on the realization of the second goal, which was - social liberation.

The ability of the FSLN to establish its hegemony in post-Somoza Nicaragua permitted the government to move decisively on number of critical issues and to escape power sharing that could have turned the policy making process into a protracted struggle against entrenched interests.

The ultimate objective of the FSLN was to establish socialism in Nicaragua, but their own "brand of socialism", which differed from that of Cuba or African countries, whose model depended upon highly centralized structures with a single charismatic leader.

The new Nicaraguan state was ruled by the Governing Junta in consultation with the National Directorate, which consisted of representatives of the main revolutionary faction and formed a collegial style of leadership, ( 26 ) and the advisory, co-legislative Council of State until January 1985, when the Junta and Council of State were replaced by the directly elected president, vice-president and constituent National Assembly.

In the economic sphere, state ownership of the means of production was to coexist with private ownership. The revolutionary government drew lessons from the Cuban example and had the early intention to avoid premature state control of the economy.

Thus, the post-Somoza model of politico-economic development offered by the Sandinistas was a model of "democratic socialism" where a "popular hegemony" ( 27 )



would operate in a system of political pluralism and a mixed economy, instead of a centralized command structure. In the words of vice-President Sergio Ramírez:

Pluralism is .....essential to the revolution, maintained not merely by the recognition of certain right-wing parties so that they can function within the country, but also to make possible the political and democratic participation of different sectors of the population that never before in our history had access to that participation. ( 28 )

The "Sandinista democracy" differed substantially from the "popular democracy", one party system, which existed in Cuba and other socialist states, because it permitted political pluralism. All social sectors were given the opportunity to participate in the new project, albeit under popular hegemony.

The Sandinistas preferred a participatory direct model of democracy ( 29 ) to representative democracy which was essential to their notion of "popular hegemony". As I. Luciak has observed:

The participation of the masses would set the priorities of a proposed socio-economic transition according to "the logic of the majority" yet this transformation would occur within a kind of national unity that required a mixed economy and political pluralism. ( 30 )

By the "logic of the majority" the Sandinistas meant "the logic of the poor" as the leading Nicaraguan economist Father Xabier Gorostiaga has explained:

Instead of organising the economy from the perspective and interest of the top 5 percent, as was done during the Somoza dynasty, we are trying to organize the economy from the perspective of the majority. ( 31 )

The Sandinistas' immediate concern was to improve the conditions of the impoverished workers and peasants. They envisaged the redistribution of the wealth to the poor through an institutional framework in which the rich were to be represented. From the early days the FSLN realized that cooperation from the business community was crucial to the programme of reconstruction, and a stimulus for the bourgeoisie to cooperate was the policy of national unity which in turn required a strong commitment to political pluralism and a mixed economy.

The Sandinista mixed economy model consisted of three key sectors; a state sector, based principally upon the expropriation of Somoza properties and his associates, a cooperative production sector and a private sector of traditional business.

Internationally, the Nicaraguan revolutionary leaders chose to pursue a non-aligned stance for philosophical and practical reasons. By joining the non-aligned movement just six weeks after the revolution, the Sandinistas indicated their determination to avoid the international isolation from which Cuba suffered after its revolution and to work in collaboration with similarly-oriented states. Nicaragua sought political support, diplomatic relations and aid from all states sympathetic to or respectful of its revolution regardless of their ideological make-up, and above all to maintain relations with all countries of Latin America. As a Foreign Ministry official, Alejandro Bendaña, put it:

The Sandinista commitment to political pluralism at home found its counterpart in a foreign policy seeking to maintain friendly relations with as many countries as possible. ( 32 )

The FSLN also wished to maintain their links with the United States; however, they were aiming at reducing the US influence over the Nicaraguan economy and the political system. In other words they had rejected the dependent and asymmetrical pre-revolutionary relationship.

In the formulation of their policies of socio-economic transformation, instead of following orthodox Marxism, the Sandinistas were guided by the legacy of their national hero, August Sandino, mentioned earlier, as well as by contemporary Marxism and Christianity. Donald Hodges called the Nicaraguan variation of Marxism; "new Marxism" and described it as follows:

Unlike the orthodox-Soviet style Marxism of the Nicaraguan communist party the "new Marxism" allowed for a residue of Sandinismo that was not an extension of scientific socialism, it was a residue of revolutionary myths, the moral values of Christianity, the liberal commitment to human rights, and patriotic values of Sandino. ( 33 )

The principal intellectual support for the "new Marxism" was found in the works of the Peruvian Communist, José Carlos Mariategui (1895-1930) and the Italian Communist party founder, Antonio Gramsci. Mariategui was considered, by both the Sandinistas and Castro, to have been the most original Marxist thinker in Latin America. ( 34 )

The USSR viewed positively the political and socio-economic programme put forward by the Sandinistas. Many Soviet commentaries emphasised the significance of "political pluralism". ( 35 ) The existence of political parties, other than the FSLN, which were in support of the revolutionary policies also was approved. It was the first time that a reference to pluralism was made with a positive connotation. Until then, it was seen as a device that masked "the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" in capitalist states. ( 36 )

The Sandinista strategy of attempting to enlist all the sectors of the society, not just the left forces, into the process of revolutionary transformation, was praised by Moscow. It is interesting to note, that at the same time as the Soviet commentators applauded the FSLN for not having alienated the middle classes, they were cautious to stress how correct the FSLN had been to have gained full command over the main levers of power, notably the army - something that Allende failed to do in Chile and Arbenz in Guatemala. Both the Chilean and Guatemalan experience taught the FSLN that it was important for a revolutionary regime to obtain the support of the armed forces. Thereby, they had eliminated the vulnerability which led to the fall of Allende and Arbenz.

The creation of the Sandinista Defence Committees (SDC), modelled on the Cuban Committees for the defence of the revolution, but with greater political autonomy, received full Soviet approbation. The main task of these committees was to crush any possible opposition to Sandinista rule. I. M. Bulychev described their activities as follows:

The range of responsibilities of the members of this mass organization [i.e. SDC] is extraordinarily broad, but their main attention is concentrated on the mobilization of all for the defence of the revolution, to the struggle against speculation and against other forms of sabotage, to give a decisive rebuff to all manifestations of ideologies hostile to the popular Sandinista revolution, to attempts to change the course of the revolution, and to use religious sentiments of believers in the interests of counterrevolution. ( 37 )

The USSR also sanctioned the Sandinistas' pragmatic and flexible economic policy and hailed the advantages of a mixed economy, where the private sector, instead of being limited or gradually eliminated, actively participated in reconstruction and development. ( 38 ) The latter would lay foundations for the development of a centrally planned economy.

It was considered that a flexible economic system combined with political pluralism provided optimal solutions. Domestically, it made it possible to solve difficult economic problems at a smaller social cost, as well as accelerating economic growth and improving living standards. Secondly, it ensured the continued survival of the revolution as it, to paraphrase Sergo A. Mikoian: 'snatches from the hands of counterrevolutionaries and its allies a favoured propaganda weapon'. ( 39 )

Being a proponent of the pragmatic approach to the young developing countries, he had specifically recommended the New Economic Policy (NEP), followed in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, to the Sandinista regime. He argued that: Nicaraguan leaders should establish a 'classic three-sector economy', combining state ownership of some parts of the economy with private control and government regulation of others. ( 40 ) According to him, such a pluralistic approach would create the best conditions for a 'rapid rebirth of the country'. It would avoid the expenditure of state resources on 'replacing what already

exists' and would preserve a broad base of support for the regime, since there would be 'no rupture with the middle classes'. ( 41 ) Other analysts who propagated the NEP policy were Anatolii Butenko and V. M. Davydov.

On the international level, it was argued that such a policy would help Nicaragua to maintain trade relations with the capitalist countries; it would facilitate the obtaining of economic assistance from a variety of sources, and discourage economic blockade and other forms of exclusion. This in turn would enable Nicaragua to be largely self-financing and not become another burden for the Soviet Union like Cuba. ( 42 )

Overall, despite the enthusiasm emanating from some academic sources and official pronouncements in the wake of the Sandinista victory, it is evident that the USSR was not prepared to take on yet another commitment on the scale of that given to Castro's Cuba. Moscow's positive appraisal of the Sandinista socio-economic model of development clearly demonstrates that it wanted the Sandinistas to achieve their socialist goals through gradualist economic policies rather than politically motivated radical programmes. In other words they were signalling Nicaragua not to count too much on Soviet economic support and, thus, to keep economic links with capitalist countries. Evgenii Primakov had argued that it is no longer possible for states that propose to build socialism to rely on close economic alliance with the Soviet Union. ( 43 )

During Daniel Ortega's visit to Moscow, in May 1982, Brezhnev emphasized repeatedly the 'vast oceanic expanse' separating the Western hemisphere from the USSR. ( 44 ) This cautious approach to the Sandinista revolutionary regime was not only reflected in words but also in deeds. For example, Soviet economic aid to Nicaragua between 1979 and 1982 amounted to \$76 million which constituted only about one-half the amounts sent by the United States.

However, as the US economic and political pressure began to mount after the coming to power of President Reagan, the USSR, though reluctantly, had steadily increased its economic and military assistance.

FOOTNOTES

1. Cited in Morris Rothenberg, 'The Soviets and Central America', in Robert Leiken (ed.), *Central America: Anatomy of Conflict*, New York, Pergamon Press, 1984, p. 133; see also O. Ignat'ev, 'Pobeda Naroda Nicaragua', *Kommunist*, no. 13, September 1979, p. 101.
2. *Pravda*, 7 November 1979.
3. Boris Ponomarev, 'The Cause of Freedom and Socialism is Inevitable', *World Marxist Review*, vol. 24, no. 1, January 1981, p. 13.
4. Ibid.
5. Kiva L. Maidanik, 'Kliuchevoi Vopros - Edinstvo', *Latinskaia Amerika*, February 1980, p. 44; and Sergo A. Mikoian, 'Ob Osobennostiakh Revoliutsii v Nikaragua i ee Urokakh s Tochki Zreniia Teorii i Praktiki Osvoboditel'nogo Dvizheniia' (Zakliuchitel'noe slovo), *Latinskaia Amerika*, March 1980, p. 37; see also N.S. Leonov, 'Massa, Avangard, Lider', *Latinskaia Amerika*, February 1980, p. 36.
6. The three basic tenets of Che Guevara, which are in disagreement with the teachings of Marxism-Leninism, and to a certain extent even with Maoism, are as follows:
  1. Popular forces can win a war against the regular army, provided the government is unconstitutional and the people recognize the impossibility of defending their rights through legal channels.
  2. It is not necessary to wait until all conditions for making a revolution exists, the insurrection can create them.
  3. In an underdeveloped America the countryside is the most suitable terrain area for armed struggle.

(Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla - A Historical and Critical Study*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977; also Roy C. Macridis, *Contemporary Political Ideologies*, Little Brown and Company, 1986, p. 317.)
7. Boris I. Koval', 'Revoliutsiia - Dlitel'nyi i Istoricheskii Protsess', *Latinskaia Amerika*, March 1980, p. 15.
8. See Galia Golan, *The Soviet Union and National Liberation Movements in the Third World*, Unwin Hyman, 1988, pp. 198-99.

9. A. F. Shul'govskii, 'Eksperiment Bol'shoi Istoricheskoi Vazhnosti', *Latinskaia Amerika*, March 1980, p.7.
10. Ibid.; see also 'A Continent in Struggle - The International Factor in the Revolutionary Struggle of Latin American People', (International Research Group) *World Marxist Review*, vol. 24, no.6, June 1981, p. 82.
11. M. F. Gornov, 'Latinskaia America : Usilenie Bor'by Protiv Imperializma i Oligarkhii, za Demokratiu i Sotsial'nyi Progress', *Latinskaia Amerika*, July 1982, p. 12.
12. Maidanik, op. cit., p. 42.
13. Cited in Marc Edelman, 'Soviet - Cuban Involvement in Central America: A Critique of Recent Writings', in Bruce D. Larkin (ed.), *Vital Interests - The Soviet Issue in U.S. Central American Policy*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1988, p. 149.
14. Cole Blasier, *The Giant's Rival - The USSR and Latin America*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983, p. 115.
15. Cited in U. M. Bimov, 'Sandinistskii Front Natsional'nogo Osvobozhdeniia-Reshaiushchaia Sila v Bor'be', *Latinskaia Amerika*, January 1980, p. 45.
16. *Pravda*, March 1983, in Elizabeth Kridl Valkenier, 'Soviet Decision Making in Central America'- conference paper.
17. Cited in Boris Yopo, 'Soviet Military Assistance to Cuba and Nicaragua', in Augusto Varas (ed.), *Soviet - Latin American Relations in the 1980s*, Westview Press, 1985, p. 112.
18. For example see *Izvestiia*, issues from September 1979 to March 1980.
19. By the end of 1982, aid provided by Castro totalled \$286 million. (Peter Shearman, *The Soviet Union and Cuba*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1987, p. 70); By mid-1983 Cuba was involved in 1 003 economic and social projects in Nicaragua. (C.G. Jacobson, 'Soviet Attitudes Towards Aid and Contacts with Central American Revolutionaries', in Larkin (ed.), op. cit., pp. 248-59.)
20. Konstantin Zarodov, 'Leninism and the Question of Creating the Political Army of the Revolution', *World Marxist Review*, vol. 23, no. 7, July 1980, p. 31.
21. Mikoian, op. cit., p. 36.
22. Koval, op. cit., p. 17.
23. Cited in Mark A. Smith, 'Soviet Perceptions of Latin America 1959-1987', unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1988, p. 133.

24. Nicola Miller, *Soviet Relations with Latin America 1959-1987*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 197.
25. Jacobsen, op. cit., p. 298.
26. The National Directorate was set up to head the united revolutionary movement and it was composed of the main leaders of the three guerrilla factions: Daniel Ortega and Victor Tirado of the Insurreccional Tendency, commonly known as Terceristas; Tomás Borgé, Bayardo Arce and Henry Ruíz of the Prolonged Popular War faction, and Carlos Núñez, Luis Carrion, and Jaime Wheelock of the Proletarian Tendency.
27. 'The Sandinista concept of popular hegemony can be contrasted with the Marxist-Leninist concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. As used by the Sandinistas, popular hegemony does not refer to the dictatorship of one class over another, but to the predominance of the interests of the popular majority over those of the privileged minority who benefited from the exploitation and oppression of the Somoza dictatorship...'. (Mary B. Vanderlaan, *Revolution and Foreign Policy in Nicaragua*, Westview Special Studies, 1986, p. 44.)
28. Cited in Ilya A. Luciak, 'Democracy and Revolution in Nicaragua' in Kenneth M. Coleman and George C. Herring (eds.), *Understanding the Central American Crisis - Sources of Conflict - U.S. Policy and Options for Peace*, Scholarly Resources Inc., 1991, p. 93.
29. Representative democracy stressed electoral process, while, participatory democracy placed emphasis on mass participation. The Sandinistas preference for participatory democracy over electoral one was attributed to the past political experience. (For details, see *ibid.*, p. 81.)  
However, to attain national unity and to legitimise the revolutionary government the Sandinistas had to institutionalise representative model by holding elections.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
31. Cited in Vanderlaan, op. cit., p. 24.
32. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 29.
33. Donald C. Hodges, *Intellectual Foundation of the Nicaraguan Revolution*, University of Texas, 1986, p. 187.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
35. See Iu. N. Korolev, 'Istoricheskii Opyt Perekhodnogo Perioda', *Latinskaia Amerika*, June 1984, p. 20; see also Maidanik, op. cit., p. 50 and Mikoian, op. cit., p. 44.

36. G. Shakhnazarov, 'O Demokraticheskom Tsentralizme i Politicheskome Pliuralizme', *Kommunist*, no. 10, July 1979. p. 107.
37. Cited in Smith, D. Phil. thesis, op. cit., p. 141.
38. Thomas J. Zamostny, 'Moscow and the Third World: Recent Trends in Soviet Thinking', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2, April 1984, p. 228.
39. Mikoian, op. cit., p. 42.
40. Zamostny, op. cit., p.228.;

The NEP was a mixed economy initiated in the USSR in 1921 and abandoned in 1928-29 in favour of a centrally planned economy and collectivization of agriculture.

41. Ibid.
42. V. M. Davydov, 'Ob"ektivnaia Osnova i Perspektivy Sotsial'no-Ekonomicheskikh Preobrazovaniy', *Latinskaia Amerika*, no.3., March 1980, p. 30.
43. Evgenii Primakov, 'Strany Sotsialisticheskoi Orientatsii: Trudnyi no Real'nyi Perekhod k Sotsializmu', *MEMO*, no.7, ( July1981), pp. 8 & 16.
44. Cited in Peter Clement, 'Moscow and Nicaragua: Two Sides of Soviet Policy', *Comparative Strategy*, January 1985, p. 80.

## CHAPTER 4

**THE EXTENT OF SOVIET MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO THE SANDINISTA LEFTIST REGIME PRIOR TO GORBACHEV ASSUMING OFFICE**

Although the Soviet Union was quick to establish diplomatic relations with the new revolutionary government in Nicaragua (October 18, 1979), it was slow in developing economic relations and extending concrete material assistance.

As noted earlier, this attitude stemmed from economic and political considerations to avoid creating yet another regionally isolated dependent regime like Cuba and to avoid a direct confrontation with the United States in a region where Soviet interests were limited and where the United States would have the advantage of fighting in its own backyard.

For their part, the Sandinistas initially were not unhappy about the USSR keeping its distance. Given a fierce controversy in Washington over sending aid to Nicaragua, the FSLN did not want to give further justification to those who opposed it. Apparently, the Cubans and the Soviets warned the Nicaraguan regime not to cut their links with the West for both political and economic reasons. ( 1 ) Indeed, many Sandinista leaders themselves recognized the flaws in the Cuban model of development and were wary of rejecting one dependence for another, as Cuba and other states had been forced to do. According to Father Xavier Gorostiaga:

The politics of isolation which Cuba had accepted as a cost from holding out to U.S. pressures offers the world one particular experience that should not be repeated....Cut off from its traditional markets and even

from neighbouring countries in the region, Cuba has been forced to survive in a cold war environment in which socialist countries provided the bulk of the aid needed to survive.( 2 )

Thus, diversity in political and economic relations was fundamental to Nicaragua's foreign policy and critical for its survival. In particular, Western support and aid along with Latin American solidarity were considered vital in the face of the Reagan administration's growing hostility and economic pressure.

It should, however, be noted that at the time when the Nicaraguan revolution took place Latin American countries were seeking greater economic and political independence from the United States, and for modification of their political and social structures. As Rodolfo Stavenhagen writes:

Rarely in history has there existed over an entire continent, as there currently is in Latin America, such a generalized awareness among the most diverse social groups as to the necessity of carrying out major modification of the political and social structures. ( 3 )

Thus, Nicaragua was seen by many Latin Americans as a test case, opening the possibilities for a moderate model of structural change, i.e. "democratic socialism" where a "popular hegemony" would operate in a system of political pluralism and a mixed economy, which was more appealing than the Cuban model of politically closed society and dependent on the Soviet Union.



Indeed, the FSLN recognized that the much needed Latin American solidarity for its security depended largely on the appeal of their model of development.

The Nicaraguan leaders found Mexico to be its most faithful supporter and ally, at least until it could not afford any longer to withstand the US pressure. Mexico's solidarity with Nicaragua was initially demonstrated by its aid commitments. It was a primary source of economic support for Nicaragua while the US economic assistance was being gradually reduced. Mexico and Venezuela each provided, on concessionary terms, half of Nicaragua's oil needs until 1983 when they, especially Mexico, faced with economic problems themselves, became vulnerable to US pressure. Mexico encouraged increased nonaligned behaviour among Latin American States and hoped that the Sandinistas' Nicaragua would present a model to other underdeveloped states of development without alignment.

In the political-diplomatic sphere Mexico led Latin American initiatives for a political settlement among contending forces in the Central American crisis, known as the Contadora peace process. Other Latin American states notably, Colombia, Peru, Brazil and Argentina, provided Nicaragua with \$105 mln in trade credits during 1983. ( 4 ) Also a substantial amount of aid and credits came from Western European states. ( 5 )

By comparison, Soviet and East European economic assistance was insignificant. For example, total Eastern bloc credits to Nicaragua from 1979 to 1983 amounted to just \$466.7 million of which the USSR's share was less than half percent. ( 6 ) According to the *New York Times* (17 July 1983) a mid-1983 analysis concluded that about half of Nicaragua's economic assistance came from Western Europe and Latin America and only 20% from communist countries, including Cuba. ( 7 ) Also the Soviet emergency aid donated to Nicaragua soon after the revolution was negligible. Moscow first sent material assistance to the literacy campaign which apparently consisted of 20,000 note books, 10,000 pairs of shoes, 1000 radios and helicopters. ( 8 )

Even Cuba with its limited resources offered more generous aid. By July 1980, Cuba had provided 1,200 school teachers and 40 university professors who helped Nicaragua with the literacy campaign, and about 400 doctors, nurses and technical assistants to help the Sandinista government to implement its public welfare programme. The numbers increased over the following years. ( 9 ) Hundreds of Nicaraguan teachers, doctors, technicians were granted scholarships to study in Cuba. By November 1980, Cuba had provided \$10 million in emergency relief and economic aid. In April 1981 an economic cooperation agreement was signed with the FSLN worth \$64 million. ( 10 )

The Nicaraguan revolutionary leaders readily accepted Cuban aid and advice. This, however, was not surprising as they shared common experience with US-backed dictators and with the restructuring of their societies. This suggested that Nicaragua might benefit from the successes and failures of the Cuban model. Moreover, deep fraternal ties existed between the Cuban and Nicaragua revolutionaries which began with Castro's early support for the embryonic FSLN organization as it developed under the leadership of Fonseca and others. For the Cubans, the Nicaraguan revolution was by far the most important international development since its own revolution of 1959. Having been isolated for so long by the United States as well as by many of the Latin American states, they were glad to see the triumph of another anti-imperialist revolution in the region. Therefore, it was in their interest to keep it alive.

Overall, the Nicaraguan revolution in its early stage received overwhelming international support, and the Sandinistas succeeded in their attempts to diversify away from the United States without tying themselves to the Soviet bloc. However, for a small state like Nicaragua this ambitious project to pursue sovereignty and self-determination in foreign affairs was not acceptable to the United States administration and to the ruling elite throughout Central America. As Mary Vanderlaan writes:

The view from Washington, however, was that Nicaragua's example of political defiance and economic independence signalled the emergence of an unacceptable political reality in the U.S. backyard. ( 11 )

President Reagan had made clear his total opposition to the Sandinistas even before taking office in January 1981, and he was poised to destroy the revolution and put the Sandinistas out of power. The Nicaraguan revolution and the growing revolutionary tide in neighbouring states of Central America, notably El Salvador and Guatemala, were viewed by Reagan and his advisers in an East-West context instead of the indigenous and North-South contexts. The Sandinista regime from day one was classified as Marxist-Leninist and its nationalist-socialist model was equated with Sovietism. Furthermore, such regimes by nature were considered to be aggressive, totalitarian and in pursuit of exporting revolution (domino theory), opposed to US interests and a part of the Soviet conspiracy to undermine democratic regimes through subversion or terrorism. Therefore, the US accommodation of such a regime would indicate weakness and lack of firmness vis-à-vis the USSR. With this in mind, the Reagan administration set off on a crusade against Soviet expansionism in the Western Hemisphere by trying to dislodge the FSLN revolutionary regime - "Moscow's beachhead". In early 1980 the US Congress attached a series of conditions to the outstanding \$75 million loan package for Nicaragua proposed by the outgoing Carter administration, which was perceived by the Nicaraguan government and private sector as deeply humiliating and unreasonable. ( 12 )

The postponement of the planned \$75 million loan on March 12, 1980, precipitated the announcement by the Nicaraguan government of its first high-level visit to the USSR and other East European countries in order to seek economic aid. During that visit

various economic, technical and cultural bilateral agreements were signed with the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic. ( 13 ) This move together with the growing Cuban presence in Nicaragua obviously was not well received in Washington.

Soon after the inauguration President Reagan unleashed a hostile campaign against Nicaragua and increased military assistance to El Salvador. He began with the suspension (15 January 1981) of the aid payment that was due out of this \$75 million loan, shortly followed by the suspension of \$9.6 million in US credits for wheat purchases. Subsequently in March 1981 the remaining \$15 million out of the loan package was cancelled on the grounds that the Sandinistas were heavily involved in supplying and training the guerrillas in El Salvador. ( 14 ) This prompted the Sandinistas to turn to Moscow for more support.

During the Soviet Communist Party Congress in February 1981, a member of the Nicaraguan delegation, Carlos Núñez Telles, pleaded for help from the socialist countries, in view of this situation, 'even though they are thousands of kilometres away'. ( 15 ) However, the Kremlin did not seem to take much notice of it just as they did not ten years earlier when faced with similar requests made by Chilean Communists. Brezhnev, in his Congress speech did not even refer to Central America, and although he publicly announced meetings with the leaders of Ethiopia and Angola, he did not grant such a meeting to the leader of the Nicaraguan delegation. ( 16 )

Nonetheless, in April 1981, in response to the US cut off of grain purchases credit, Moscow donated 20,000 tons of wheat, which received high publicity and manifested a contempt for the American behaviour. ( 17 ) In 1983 almost two-thirds of Nicaraguan wheat needs were filled by Soviet donations.

Not until a visit of Interior Minister Tomás Borgé to Moscow in August 1981, did the Soviet government offer Nicaragua substantial technical assistance comprising \$50 million credit loan for purchasing of Soviet agricultural, construction and transport machinery. Apparently, the agreement did not meet fully the Sandinistas' expectations. (18 )

Furthermore, the visit to Moscow in December 1981, by the Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Father Miguel D'Escoto resulted in signing an agreement for scientific and cultural exchanges.

Towards the end of 1981 and beginning of 1982 the US administration stepped up its campaign to destabilize Nicaragua through economic, political and military pressures. Military pressures included the funding in August 1981, with the CIA's assistance, of the main Contra (counter-revolutionaries) organization and the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN). Contra training camps were set up in Honduras and within Nicaragua. Shortly afterwards CIA-directed military and paramilitary activities against Nicaragua began. The State Department allocated more than \$19 million to finance those operations. ( 19 ) Direct damages inflicted on Nicaragua's economy towards the end of 1983 were estimated at \$150 to \$300 million and the number of deaths arrived at 8000 by the end of 1984. ( 20 )

Following the precedent set by US economic destabilization policies against Brazil (1964), Chile (1973), Bolivia (1971) and so forth, the Reagan administration introduced a series of policies in 1982 to disrupt the Nicaraguan economy. It moved to cut off both bilateral and multilateral sources of assistance. US private business was discouraged from investing in or trading with Nicaragua and private banks from offering loans. Using its voting strength, veto powers and political influence, the United States blocked multilateral development loans from both the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank. ( 21 )

In addition to the covert war and the effort to strangle the Nicaraguan economy, the Reagan administration's policy of hostility included a major political offensive such as: intimidation of the Sandinistas by threatening them with military action including a naval blockade, impassioned denunciation of the FSLN regime in order to build domestic political support for the overall Reagan policy in Central America, and diplomatic efforts to isolate Nicaragua internationally.

The curtailment in multilateral and bilateral lending from Western sources as a result of the American pressure left the Nicaraguan leaders with little choice but to seek more assistance from the USSR. In May 1982 Daniel Ortega Saavedra (the Junta coordinator) went to Moscow for talks with the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, during which technical assistance and financial agreements worth over £200 million were signed, covering hydroelectric, communications, geological, agriculture and public health projects. ( 22 ) This was one of the largest aid packages granted since the 1979 revolution, and the visit marked the beginning of a closer Soviet-Nicaraguan cooperation. However, there was no indication that the USSR was willing to provide either significant subsidised support for Nicaraguan exports or the hard currency that the Nicaraguan government needed so badly. ( 23 )

In June 1982 the Soviet Union sent a further \$30 million, in emergency aid, to help alleviate damage caused by widespread flooding in the preceding month. For comparison, Cuba donated about \$80 million in emergency aid. Meanwhile, the US contra-operation and US military activity in the region were steadily intensifying. The contra attacks led to the imposition of a state of emergency in Nicaragua, in March 1982, which was later extended. ( 24 )

The primary impact of the Reagan administration policy towards Nicaragua was to convince the FSLN leadership that a US invasion was likely to happen. This situation

certainly resulted in strengthening of the hardline elements within the Sandinista government headed by the Moscow-trained Planning Minister, Henry Ruíz, who among others argued that closer ties with Moscow represented the best defence option against Washington, and that the toleration of internal political opposition was a luxury. Thus, under the state of emergency act, constitutional guarantees were suspended and press censorship was imposed and justified on the grounds of national security. Also, tougher economic measures were adopted, signifying a move away from a mixed economy towards a more centralized model with emphasis on the public sector.

As tension heightened between the United States and Nicaragua by mid-1982, many Nicaraguans feared that the US invasion was imminent. ( 25 ) The fact that the Reagan administration rejected that year both Mexican and U.N. initiatives for peaceful settlement of the conflict led the Nicaraguan policy makers to conclude that the American intention was to destroy their revolution. Therefore, the defence of the revolutionary gains became the priority for the Sandinistas, and consequently their economic policy began to shift from national reconstruction to a war economy for national defence.

By then also Washington to a large extent succeeded in applying pressure on its western and Third World allies not to sell arms to Nicaragua. This forced the Sandinistas to step up the urgency with which it requested more military aid from the USSR and other Eastern bloc countries.

Though Moscow's response with regard to the supply of weapons to Nicaragua was positive, it, however, remained very cautious in the pursuit of military relations between them. This was demonstrated by the quality and quantity of the arms delivered, which were not of offensive but of defensive nature, in order not to provoke any confrontation with the United States. For example, the Soviets did not supply the Sandinistas with MiG

aircraft or other offensive armoury which could have been used to invade neighbouring states, despite the FSLN's repeated requests.

This cautious approach carried an implicit message to the United States that the USSR was not intending to transform the region into a new point of confrontation between East and West. Nonetheless, the Reagan administration still perceived the Nicaraguan military build-up as a part of a Soviet-Cuban conspiracy to take over Central America, posing a serious threat to Mexico and even casting a shadow over the United States.

Also, the USSR was very reticent about its military assistance to Nicaragua which was, therefore, difficult to trace. The arms purchases were often sold or delivered by third parties; notably, Cuba, East Germany and North Korea. The available data from western sources as to the quantity and the type vary widely, depending on the source. For example, there is a discrepancy regarding Nicaragua's military capacity between numbers quoted by the Pentagon, the State Department, CIA and other independent institutional sources. The figures cited by the Pentagon and the State Department usually exceed the ones given by the CIA or other sources. Therefore, the reliability of this information is questionable.

The first Soviet-bloc weapons deliveries began to arrive in Nicaragua towards the end of 1980 after when the early requests for major arms purchases from the US and other Western countries appeared not to bear much fruit. ( 26 ) The Nicaraguan army displayed its first equipment of Soviet origin, which included SA-7 ground-to-air missiles and RPG-7 antitank shells valued at \$5 million, ( 27 ) during the celebration of the first anniversary of the Sandinista revolution on the 19th of July 1980. ( 28 ) According to Ruben Berrios the total figure of Nicaraguan arms purchases from the socialist countries for the year 1980 was estimated at \$6 million to \$7 million. ( 29 ) The estimates given by US intelligence sources were \$12-13 million. ( 30 ) However, this was still much less

than US deliveries to the neighbouring Central American states, which reached \$36.3 million. In summer 1981 the Sandinistas received about 25 Soviet-made T-54 and T-55 tanks, which were delivered by Algerian ships. (31) This caused an exaggerated alarm in Washington. The State Department called the introduction of Soviet tanks into Nicaragua a threat to the regional stability of Central America. ( 32 ) Ironically enough the T-54 and T-55 model was an obsolete World War II vintage which was discontinued in 1963, and could hardly provide Nicaragua with an offensive capacity. ( 33 )

In the face of the escalating contra forces attacks, which by then were receiving US funds, the Junta sent at the end of November 1981 its Defence Minister, Humberto Ortega (the brother of the Junta leader, Daniel Ortega), to Moscow to discuss the increase of military assistance with three top Soviet military figures, the Minister of Defence, Dimitri Ustinov, General Nikolai Ogarkov and General Alexander Iepishev. (34 )

Since then the military cooperation between the two parties had gradually increased and was determined by the US policy towards the Sandinista revolutionary regime. With each major escalation in US rhetoric or military presence new shipments of arms arrived in Nicaragua. Yet this Soviet commitment to Nicaragua was restricted to supplying only the weapons considered necessary to defend the revolution and not those needed to export it.

According to Boris Yopo between 1981 and 1982 the total delivery of military resources inclusive of fifty T-54 and T-55 tanks from the USSR, which constituted the bulk of Soviet aid from the USSR, Cuba and Eastern Europe was worth \$28 million. (35) The estimates given by the US Department of State for the same period arrived at approximately \$80 million including the above mentioned tanks, six 105mm howitzers, twelve BTR-60 armoured personnel carries, about thirty eight 215-237 mm anti-aircraft guns, SA-6 GAINFUL surface-to-air missiles, SA-7 GRAIL light anti-aircraft missiles,

small transport and trainer planes. ( 36 ) The figure for 1982 quoted by the US intelligence was approximately \$56million ( 37 ); however, the same source valued the total Soviet-bloc military deliveries between 1979-1982 at \$125 million. ( 38 )

For comparison, the United States granted \$115 million of military aid to its Central American allies in the year 1982 alone, and an additional subsidy of \$20-55 million to cover the CIA operations in Nicaragua. ( 39 ) Furthermore, the right wing, military governments in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, at their own accord, acquired new high-performance aircraft and other weapons from Israel and Brazil.

Further friction between Nicaragua and the United States developed over the number of Cuban and East European military advisory presence. The US administration claimed that by 1983 there were 6000 Cuban troops and personnel in Nicaragua as well as 7000 Soviet and Eastern-bloc personnel in all fields. ( 40 ) According to the counting given by Latin American governments well disposed to the United States there were then about 1000 Cuban military advisers, ( 41 ) which was closer to the figure admitted by Cuban and Nicaraguan authorities, i.e. between 500 and 800. ( 42 )

Cuban military advisers apparently played a key role in organizing the Nicaraguan army and East Germans in the formation of the internal security apparatus, according to defence officials. ( 43 ) In 1985, the Nicaraguan government claimed to have 786 Cuban military advisory and trainers in their military establishment. ( 44 ) According to the CIA by early summer 1983 there was about 100 Soviet advisers. Some seventy Nicaraguan pilots and mechanics completed training in Bulgaria in December 1982. Nonetheless, the combined number of East European and Cuban advisers was still much below that of US military personnel present in Central America. ( 45 ) The escalation of the military conflict in 1983 forced the FSLN to seek more military and economic aid from Eastern bloc as the assistance from the Western countries had been substantially reduced in response to the US pressure. The most explicit example of US coercion and of its ability

to set limits on Nicaragua's room for manoeuvre was the French arms sale to Nicaragua in December 1981 worth \$15 million, which constituted the largest military aid package acquired by the FSLN regime up to that time. ( 46 ) France had to eventually give in to US pressures and withdrew as a potential source of future military supplies to the FSLN. Similar pressures were put on other West European countries not only to prevent arms shipments to Nicaragua but to reduce economic support for the Sandinistas as well. The US effort was only partially successful. Although no further military equipment was sent to Nicaragua from Europe, significant amounts of economic assistance continued to flow.

During the early months of 1983 the Reagan administration expanded the covert war against Nicaragua. In March of that year, 1500 Contra troops with the support of the Honduran army invaded Nicaragua to provoke an open conflict between Honduras and Nicaragua, which presumably could serve as a pretext for US military intervention in Nicaragua. ( 47 ) Fortunately, the Nicaraguan army successfully pushed back the aggressor avoiding any major confrontation. Moreover, the United States launched Big Pine I operation in February 1983 and Big Pine II in August 1983, which lasted seven months and during which two carrier battle groups stood off the Nicaraguan shore. The Pentagon also announced a series of further military exercises. These developments were perceived by the Nicaraguans as a threat to their security and resulted in the increase of arms transfers from the USSR. Daniel Ortega on his way back from the Non-aligned conference in Delhi stopped over in Moscow for talks with Brezhnev's successor Yuri Andropov, in March 1983. It can be assumed that a further request for military aid was the top issue on his agenda. The following months witnessed greater numbers than ever of Soviet ships, laden with arms and military equipment calling at Nicaraguan ports. (48 ) They 'shipped eight to ten Mi-8 troop-carrying helicopters and more appeared to be en route..... In May a Soviet vessel unloaded about 350 trucks.... a one-third increase in the roughly 1000 trucks from East Germany previously delivered', in addition, '20 to 25 Soviet-built BRDM 2 armoured personnel carriers have arrived in recent months, along

with BM 21 multiple rocket launchers, ZIS 2 57mm anti-track guns and a handful of additional tanks to boost the Sandinistas' total to about 60'. ( 49 )

According to the US administration sources estimates, the socialist military aid to Nicaragua in 1983 was worth over \$100 million which doubled the 1982 figure. The continued growth of the Nicaraguan military build up, and above all its sophistication, caused great concern in Washington.

The US invasion of Grenada in November 1983 mesmerized and even threw into a paranoic state not only Nicaragua but also its closest friend and ally Cuba. The attack increased the possibility that Reagan's belligerent rhetoric against the respective countries might be translated into actual behaviour. The Grenadian fate also changed the Soviet perception. Moscow now feared that the Reagan administration was determined to crush the Sandinista regime and that perhaps Cuba might be the next target. V. Ovchinnikov in his article published in Pravda wrote as follows:

The US President publicly announced his intention to overthrow Nicaragua's democratic government, which was legally elected by its people. All attempts at hiding this have been abandoned. The New York Times notes that the Washington administration is no longer trying to justify its hostile actions with arguments to the effect that Nicaragua should cease buying weapons abroad and get rid of its foreign military advisers, or trying to term Nicaragua's aid to the Salvadoran guerrillas its "greatest sin" . Now the White House is saying that it simply "will not tolerate" the government that is not to its liking. ( 50 )

Afraid of being soon the next target for the US direct military intervention, the Sandinistas continued augmenting their military arsenal both in terms of numbers and

sophistication. Western analysts in Managua estimated a 25% increase over 1983 in the value of arms shipped in 1984, i.e. over \$100 to \$150 million. ( 51 ) This level continued well into 1985.

On 15 February 1984 at Andropov's funeral Daniel Ortega met with USSR Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, and the new General Secretary, Konstantin Chernenko. During the meeting military as well as economic relations of an urgent and long-term nature were discussed. Apparently, the Tass report indicated that Chernenko was less forthcoming in his comments on support for Nicaragua than was expected. ( 52 )

As the war intensified the FSLN focused its attention on obtaining anti-aircraft systems that could respond to the Contra-related overflights. In 1984 the Defence Minister, Humberto Ortega travelled to Moscow to meet Marshals Ustinov and Ogarkov. It can be assumed that the MiG issue had a priority on his agenda. Humberto Ortega openly asserted on several occasions in 1984 and 1985 that Nicaragua would seek Soviet MiG fighter jets if the US would deliver F-5 fighters to Honduras, which would introduce a new level of military sophistication in the Central American region. Furthermore, he admitted that Nicaragua already had several dozen trained pilots ready to fly this type of aircraft. In mid-1983 the USSR received five members of the Nicaraguan armed forces who were to undergo the training in use of MiG-21 aircraft. (53 ) There were also reports that Moscow had already supplied Nicaragua with MiG-21 fighter aircraft, but these planes were being held in Cuba. ( 54 ) This was emphatically denied by Moscow. ( 55 )

In response to that, the White House warned the Soviet Union, Nicaragua and Cuba that it would retaliate possibly with surgical air strikes, to destroy such planes. The MiG issue was used by the Reagan administration as a political weapon in its efforts to convince Congress to continue funding the Contras.

However, the USSR did not acquiesce to the repeated FSLN's demands for the MiGs. Such caution stemmed more from political than military considerations.

The delivery of Mi-8 helicopters for troop transportation (about 12 in total), and several Mi-24 'Hind' helicopter gunships (from 6 to 12) during 1984 was an example of the Soviet response which was balanced between Nicaraguan demands and the limits imposed by the United States on the transfer of certain weapons. ( 56 ) Western diplomatic sources said that the USSR's supplies to Nicaragua in 1984 also included AK-47 assault rifles, rocket launches, patrol boats, artillery and radar equipment. ( 57 )

By the end of 1984 Nicaragua had the heavy military equipment that it needed not only to eliminate the Contra threat in the near future but also to increase military costs to the United States, if invaded. According to US intelligence information there was a sharp reduction in arms shipment to Nicaragua between November 1984 and November 1985. ( 58 )

Since 1983 there was a marked increase not only in Soviet military aid to Nicaragua but also in economic assistance, and as the evidence suggested, the Sandinistas' growing reliance on the support from the Soviet bloc was not their particular choice but the necessity in the face of the American bellicose policy towards them. Thus, Soviet-Nicaraguan ties developed proportionately in response to the increasing US hostility in both the economic and the military spheres. Despite the Sandinistas' pragmatic rather than dogmatic approach towards solving Nicaraguan socio-economic problems, the country's economic situation worsened substantially by the end of 1982 as a result of a significant increase in military spending, which went up to 50% of GDP in 1986.

Until 1982 economic aid from the USSR was rather insignificant, estimated at \$443.7 million, compared to \$286 million from Cuba. ( 59 ) The majority of this aid came in the form of medium-to long-term concessionary trade credits and development-

related economic assistance. ( 60 ) Lesser amounts came as donations, non-trade-related loans and technical assistance, but no foreign exchange assistance was granted. Apart from the Soviet Union, Bulgaria was next in importance in terms of aid among the East European countries. In 1981, Bulgarian donations were worth about \$20 million. (61) Subsequently, other cooperation agreements were signed, and a number of scholarships were offered to Nicaraguan students to study in Bulgaria. In March 1983, Bulgaria provided Nicaragua with \$170 million in financial assistance for 89 projects over a three-year period. ( 62 ) However, the bulk of the early aid came from developed capitalist states and nearly half of the total came from Latin America.

As the economic situation deteriorated further in early 1983 and the economic aid from Western sources declined the FSLN leaders began to pay routine visits to Moscow and its East European allies in search of more aid. Daniel Ortega's meeting with Iurii Andropov did not, however, yield concrete economic assistance. ( 63 ) The results of these negotiations were as follows: an agreement on Soviet cooperation in the development of Nicaragua's mining industry and mineral prospecting, and Soviet help in the building of a power station, an experimental cotton farm, two training centres and two hospitals. ( 64 ) In July 1983 Agrarian reform Minister Jaime Wheelock signed an agricultural-technical agreement. ( 65 ) In May 1983 the United States decided to cut Nicaragua's sugar quota by 90%. As a result of this Moscow agreed to make a substantial purchase of sugar, in that year, from Nicaragua. ( 66 )

Similarly, when Mexico reduced its concessionary sales of oil to Nicaragua in late 1983, the USSR at Nicaragua's request, sent its first fuel supplies in January 1984, (67) providing 25% of Nicaragua's oil requirements. ( 68 ) When Contra rebels destroyed oil storage facilities at Puerto Sandino, the Soviets responded to the FSLN's new requests for fuel and increased the delivery substantially. The Nicaraguan Planning Minister, who during the incident was in Moscow to sign aid contracts, stated:

By destroying our storage of oil in Puerto Sandino, the U.S. imperialists forced us to request help. ( 69 )

In April 1985, Mexico's President De la Madrid demanded of Nicaragua cash payment for most of the future oil delivery (80%). The FSLN could not possibly meet the demand as they did not have hard currency reserves. Consequently, Daniel Ortega announced his wrongly-timed visit to Moscow at the end of April, which precipitated the imposition of a US economic embargo on Nicaragua. During this visit Ortega obtained formal Soviet guarantees for any oil shortfalls. ( 71 ) The USSR apparently agreed to provide about 90% of Nicaragu's fuel requirements. ( 72 )

In the wake of these developments, the Congress immediately overturned its earlier decision and approved the earlier Reagan's requests for \$14 million aid to Contra forces, and granted an additional sum of \$13 million. ( 73 ) Subsequently, President Reagan announced the trade embargo on Nicaragua on 1 May 1995, declaring Nicaragua to be 'an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States'. ( 74 ) Ruben Berríos and Marc Edelman concluded that:

The embargo reflects the Reagan Administration's goals of increasing Nicaraguan reliance on the socialist countries and of using that reliance to justify further intervention. The Nicaraguan visit to the socialist countries suggests that they foresaw increased U.S. economic pressure even if the Reagan Administration's *contra* aid bill was defeated in Congress. ( 75 )

Indeed, by 1984 and 1985 the aid from multilateral sources which in 1979 accounted for 78% of Nicaragua's total borrowings, ceased altogether because of increasing US pressure. In fact the World Bank did not offer new loans since 1982, and in September 1984 it suspended disbursement of previously allocated funds. ( 76 ) Also aid from Western countries decreased significantly, from 51% of total borrowing in 1983 to 40% in 1984, and to 20% in 1985. ( 77 ) Therefore, the Sandinistas were compelled to turn to the USSR and other Eastern bloc countries whose aid was becoming crucial to Nicaragua's continued economic survival.

The US embargo against Nicaragua evoked parallels with an embargo against Cuba in 1960 and Cuba's subsequent drift into the Soviet bloc. From 1983 onwards Soviet-Nicaraguan trade grew significantly, with Soviet exports to Nicaragua in 1983 valued at 42.2 million roubles against 0.1 million roubles in 1980, and more than tripled in 1984 reaching 138.0 million roubles. In 1985 it was worth 212.6 million roubles. ( 78 ) This was partly a reflection of the fact that in 1985, the Soviet Union assumed the burden of providing almost all of Nicaragua's oil and partly the fact that much of the economic "aid" was granted as a credit for the purchase of Soviet exports mainly machinery and equipment. In early 1985 a regular maritime link was established between Leningrad and the Nicaraguan port of Corinto. Although the volume of Nicaraguan-Soviet commercial exchange expanded between 1980-1985, still Soviet exports and those of other COMECON states accounted for about 25% of Nicaragua's total imports in 1985 while the balance was provided by imports from capitalist states.

Furthermore, the trade between the two countries was imbalanced with Nicaragua running a deficit. For example, from its peak in 1983 at 9.5 million roubles declined to 0.3 million roubles in 1985 ( 79 ) despite the fact that Nicaraguan exports were hit by the US trade embargo that was imposed in 1985. This stemmed from the fact that Nicaragua had little to offer to the USSR, its exports consisted chiefly of sugar, cotton and coffee,

which had already been supplied by Cuba, Brazil and other major developing states, with whom Moscow wished to maintain and develop further its trade relations. Clearly the Soviet Union demonstrated reluctance to import Nicaraguan goods at subsidised price; and were not willing to export goods on concessionary terms. Even the Nicaraguans' observer status in CMEA in 1983 (a status that Mexico held since 1975) did not alter this position. In October 1984, at the CMEA meeting in Havana Nicaragua submitted a proposal to expand bilateral and multilateral cooperation, but without results as no agreement was announced at the end of the meeting.

In summation, the evidence suggests that the overall Soviet commitment of economic and military resources to the Sandinista revolutionary regime in the pre-Gorbachev years were rather modest.

While economic relations between Nicaragua and the USSR had gradually increased they were still limited by a number of factors. Firstly, the heterodox nature of Sandinismo and the revolution itself made it difficult for the Soviets to make any major commitment to Nicaragua. Moreover, the Soviets did not seem to see that objective conditions necessary for the transition to socialism were existent there. As one communist bloc envoy to Managua stated in 1985 that:

This is hardly what we would call socialism. It is much too undisciplined, much too chaotic. ( 80 )

The Nicaraguan economy remained mixed, with about 60% of production activity in private hands.

Secondly, due to their own economic decline, the USSR was unable to subsidise the ailing Nicaraguan economy that was running a severe shortage of hard currency reserves. As a result of the absence of economic complementarity between the two countries, the Soviet trade with Nicaragua did not produce hard currency earnings, and prospects for increased Nicaraguan exports to the Soviet Union were rather dim. The fact that Nicaragua was so heavily connected to the US market, a close relationship would require retooling of Nicaraguan industry and reorienting its economic system. Thus, expansion of Eastern bloc trade and assistance in the future was limited. Also, the geographical distance constituted a further constraint on future trade. Therefore, the Soviet Union along with Cuba were urging the Sandinistas not to cut off their economic and trade links with the West.

Lastly, and most importantly, the Nicaraguan proximity to the United States was a discouraging factor in making risky commitments to the country which was peripheral to Soviet security concerns and yet exposed to economic boycott and economic harassment by the United States.

Moscow repeatedly made it clear that it would not underwrite the economic and financial costs of the revolution as it had done in Cuba, but as the US hostility increased so did the Soviet Union's commitment. Apparently, TASS had officially stated that:

The Soviet Union would continue to render "friendly" Nicaragua assistance in solving the urgent tasks of economic development and defence of its sovereignty. ( 81 )

Given Reagan's very strong anti-Soviet rhetoric and actions after 1981, and the heightening of the cold war feelings in the first half of the decade, the USSR had little to lose by supporting Nicaragua, which was striving to escape US hegemony.

Soviet military cooperation with Nicaragua, though there was a sharp increase in the delivery of arms and equipment between 1983 and 1985, was kept at a low profile, despite the Reagan administration's claim to the contrary.

FOOTNOTES

1. *The Observer News Service*, 25 April 1983; see also W. Raymond Duncan, *The Soviet Union and Cuba - Interests and Influence*, Praeger, 1985, p. 179.
2. Cited in Nicola Miller, *Soviet Relations with Latin America, 1959-1987*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 205.
3. Cited in Mary B. Vanderlaan, *Revolution and Foreign Policy in Nicaragua*, Westview Special Studies on Latin America and the Caribbean, 1986, p. 15.
4. *Central America Report*, 15 April 1983, p. 4.
5. For comparison of Soviet and Western economic aid see C. G. Jacobsen, 'Soviet Attitudes Towards Aid and Contacts with Central American Revolutionaries', in Bruce D. Larkin (ed.), *Vital Interests - The Soviet Issue in U.S. Central American Policy*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988, pp. 308, 314-17; see also Vanderlaan, op.cit., pp. 252-56 and 239-48.
6. Miller, op. cit., p. 205.
7. Jacobson, op. cit., p. 317.
8. Ruben Berríos, 'Relations Between Nicaragua and the Socialist Countries', in Augusto Varas (ed.), *Soviet-Latin American Relations in the 1980s*, Westview Press, 1985, p. 154.
9. Ibid.
10. Vanderlaan, op. cit., p. 250; see also Jiri and Virginia Valenta, 'Sandinistas in Power', *Problems of Communism*, vol. 34, Sept-Oct., 1985.
11. Vanderlaan, op. cit., p. 380.
12. For details of the conditions see Ruben Berríos and Marc Edelman, 'Diversifying Dependence: Nicaragua's New Economic Links with Socialist Countries', in Larkin ( ed. ), op. cit., p. 403. or in *Journal of Communist Studies*, vol. 2, March, 1986, p. 36.
13. Ibid.
14. *The Financial Times*, 5 March 1981.
15. Jonathan Steele, *The Limits of Soviet Power - The Kremlin's Foreign Policy - Brezhnev to Chernenko*, Penguin Books Ltd., 1984, p. 220.
16. Ibid.

17. *The Guardian*, 7 May 1981.
18. Also Moscow committed itself to buy annually 3000 tons of coffee, 20,000 of cotton and the same quantity of sugar, (*Inforpress Centroamericana*, No. 455, 13 August 1981.)
19. See footnote 74 in Berrios and Edelman, op. cit., p.171; see also *The Guardian*, 11 March 1982; and *International Herald Tribune*, 11 March 1982.
20. Berrios, op. cit., p. 171, (footnote 74).
21. For more details see Vanderlaan, op. cit., pp. 171-75; see also William Leogrande, 'The United States in Nicaragua' in Thomas Walker (ed.), *Nicaragua: The First Five Years*, Praeger, 1985, pp. 434-44.
22. For details on the Nicaraguan-Soviet cooperation treaties see *Central America Report*, 21 May 1982, vol. IX. 19, p. 149.
23. *International Herald Tribune*, 9 July 1982; see also *ibid.*, 11 May 1982.
24. Armed raids were regularly carried out from the territory of Honduras, where 6000 officers and soldiers from Somoza's National Guard had entrenched themselves. The Contras' strategy of low intensity, attrition warfare, especially after 1983, was aiming at undermining the Nicaraguan economy and faith in the Sandinista government; see also *International Herald Tribune*, 11 August 1982, and *The Financial Times*, 28 July 1982.
25. On 5 November 1981, the Secretary of State Alexander Haig, questioned by the House Foreign Affairs Committee, refused to rule out the possibility of direct intervention in Nicaragua. (*New York Times*, 6 November 1981.)
26. U. Kab'eses and A. Chervonnyi, 'Nikaraguanskaia Revoliutsiia ot Iiulia 1979 goda k Fevraliu 1990', *Latinskaia Amerika*, July 1990, p. 17.
27. Berrios, op. cit., p. 159.
28. Boris Yopo, 'Soviet Military Assistance to Cuba and Nicaragua-1980-1984', in Varas (ed.), op. cit., p. 109.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Miller, op. cit., p. 201.
31. Valenta, op. cit., p. 23; see also *The Military Balance*, 1982-1983, (The International Institute for Strategic Studies), p. 123.
32. *International Herald Tribune*, 16 July 1981.



33. In a Congressional testimony given by a military expert, Lt. Colonel John Buchanan regarding the Reagan Administration's claim about the Soviet tanks, he argued: 'The Nicaraguans do have a lot of tanks, but they're not in very good condition. The gun is so bulky and the crew is cramped that their lives are endangered. Mechanically they're not reliable, and they're easily turned into a pyre. Moreover, you don't make a tank attack without massive supplies of fuel to sustain the attack, and without the mobile infantry accompanying the tanks, they're dead ducks.....'. (Vanderlaan, op. cit., p. 301.)
34. By then the Contra insurgents had taken Bluefield on the Atlantic coast for a day with CIA support, and an armed opposition to the Sandinistas was being organized by CIA operations among Miskito Indians inhabiting the Atlantic coast region.
35. Yopo, op. cit., p. 110.
36. See table 8.1 in Vanderlaan, op. cit., p. 292.
37. Miller, op. cit., p. 202.
38. See Theodore Schwab and Harold Sims, 'Relations with the Communist States', in Walker (ed.), op. cit., p. 454.
39. Miller, op. cit., p. 202. For more details on U.S. military assistance to Nicaragua's neighbours see the footnote no. 60 in Ruben Berríos, op. cit., p. 170; also see *New York Times*, 27 July 1983.
40. Jacobsen, op. cit., p. 306.
41. Ibid.
42. Berríos, op. cit., p. 160; and Vanderlaan, op. cit., p. 297.
43. *International Herald Tribune*, 28 April 1983.
44. Vanderlaan, op. cit., p. 297.
45. Berríos, op. cit., p. 160.
46. *The Financial Times*, 8 January 1982; see also *New York Times*, 27 April 1983.
47. *The Guardian*, 26 March 1983.
48. *International Herald Tribune*, 7 August 1983.
49. Jacobsen, op. cit. pp. 303-04.
50. *Pravda*, 5 March 1985.

51. *The New York Times*, 28 March 1984.
52. *International Herald Tribune*, 20 March 1984.
53. Miller, op. cit., p. 203.
54. The Valentas, op. cit., p. 23.
55. *International Herald Tribune*, 17 September 1984.
56. The use of Mi-24 helicopter gunships in the fighting with the Contras in August 1985, near the town of Trinidad, marked an important change in the nature of the war against the counter-revolutionaries.
57. *International Herald Tribune*, 29 March 1984.
58. Vanderlaan, op. cit., p. 293; see also *International Herald Tribune*, 16 February 1984.
59. Ibid., p. 344.
60. The CMEA states offered Nicaragua 2-12 year loans, credits at low interests - 2.5% - 7% and grace periods up to 5 years. These seem to be more favourable than the terms offered by Latin American countries, but perhaps less than West European countries.
61. Schwab and Sims, op. cit., pp. 455-56.
62. *Central America Report*, 25 March 1983, p. 95.
63. Miller, op. cit., p. 207.
64. Ibid.
65. V. V. Vol'skii, *'Strany Tsentral'noi Ameriki - Tendentsii Ekonomicheskogo i Sotsial'no - Politicheskogo Razvitiia*, Nauka (Moskva), 1986, pp. 272-73; also see Jacobsen, op. cit., p. 309.
66. *Latin American Weekly Report*, 10 May 1985.
67. Two Soviet tankers arrivad at Puerto Sandino carrying 242, 000 barrels of crude oil and 25, 000 barrels of jet and aviation fuel; and the third tanker was on its way. (See Jacobsen, op. cit., p. 310.)
68. *International Herald Tribune*, 29 March 1984.
69. Cited in Vanderlaan, op. cit., p. 258.

70. The trip included visits to seven other socialist countries and also to Finland, Italy, Spain, Sweden and France.
71. *The Guardian*, 3 September 1985.
72. *The New York Times*, 21 May 1985.
73. *The Guardian*, 3 September 1985; see also *The Financial Times*, 8 May 1985.
74. *The New York Times*, 2 May 1985.
75. Berríos and Edelman, op. cit., p. 411.
76. *The Washington Post*, 11 October 1984.
77. Miller, op. cit., p. 208.
78. *Vneshniaia Torgovlia SSSR*, (Moscow), year 1981, p. 268; year 1982, p.269; year 1983, p. 269; year 1984, pp. 267-68; year 1985, pp. 266-67.
79. Ibid., year 1983, p. 268; year 1985, p. 267.
80. Cited in Vanderlaan, op. cit., p. 57.
81. Yopo, op. cit., p. 123.

## CHAPTER 5

**THE IMPACT OF GORBACHEV'S POLICY OF *PERESTROIKA* AND "NEW THINKING" ON SOVIET-NICARAGUAN RELATIONS**

In order to understand the effects of Gorbachev's policy of *Perestroika* on Soviet-Nicaraguan relations it is necessary to look first not only at the impact of this policy on USSR-Third World relations in general, but also how the "new political thinking" had itself been shaped by broader national security and domestic economic concerns.

When Mikhail S. Gorbachev assumed the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985, he inherited, as one observer described it, an 'exhausted empire'. ( 1 ) Though the Soviet Union still ranked as a superpower with a formidable military arsenal, its economy was in shambles averaging just below two percent GNP growth per annum between 1981-1985. ( 2 )

After decades of trying to catch up with the West in a wide range of fields and having succeeded in establishing itself as a global power, ( 3 ) the Soviet Union was faced at the beginning of the 1980s with the prospect of stagnation and declining economic growth. The expansion of economic problems and the technology gap between the Soviet Union and the West suggested a decreasing ability of the Soviet economy to support the basic needs of its own people and to ensure military security as well as the global standing of the Soviet state in the twenty-first century.

Disillusionment and a feeling of betrayal by Marxist-Leninist predictions that capitalism was on the brink of collapse and socialism in the lead was felt among a number of Soviet analysts and policy makers when they finally conceded that not capitalism but the Soviet model of socialism was in decay. To quote Alexander Bovin,

the well-known journalist, adviser to Gorbachev and one of the intellectual architects of *perestroika*:

....Under the form of socialism that took shape.... socialism's principal economic task-overtaking capitalism in labour productivity and per-capita output was not solved. We had not created a society that in every respect was capable of serving as an example, as a model for imitation, and as a stimulus in the struggle for the socialist transformation of the world..... Apathy and social passivity grew.... the management system...has completely exhausted its capabilities. Rationing it was causing economic stagnation, bringing our society to the brink of a crisis, and weakening the Soviet Union's prestige and influence in the international arena. ( 4 )

Gorbachev himself observed that:

The present stage of the crisis [of capitalism] does not lead to any absolute stagnation of capitalism and does not rule out possible growth of its economy and the mastery of new scientific and technical trends. ( 5 )

The slowdown of the Soviet economy had not only international political implications but also disastrous social consequences. It had created corruption, job absenteeism, low productivity, alcoholism, inertia and popular discontent. ( 6 ) This situation could hardly constitute an endorsement of the Soviet model of development or provide inspiration for other revolutions.

Internationally, Gorbachev had inherited, firstly, a renewed Cold War with revised US nuclear strategies. The announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative by President

Reagan in March 1983, had signalled that the USSR had lost the technological race. The pursuit of a more aggressive foreign policy by the Reagan administration and the technological advancement, through the SDI programme, suggested the readiness to engage in a limited nuclear war against what Reagan referred to as the 'evil empire'. As early as the beginning of the 1980s Soviet leaders had expressed their concern about it. As one senior Soviet military analyst observed:

....Considering that many people in the new administration base their nuclear strategy on the possibility of a "limited" nuclear war, it should be noted that this fact is fraught with extreme danger. Directives like PD-59 give the Secretary of Defense and the joint Chiefs of Staff a foundation for convincing the country's political leadership of the possibility of military victory in a nuclear war. ( 7 )

Secondly, the growing costs of Soviet commitments to the Third World began to exceed its real political and economic potential. During the Brezhnev years the Soviet Union had acquired a significant military stake in the Third World countries but often at an economic cost that exceeded the benefits derived. In particular, Moscow's direct involvement in regional conflicts proved to be not only of high economic, but also political and diplomatic costs. For example, the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan contributed to the end of *détente*. Moreover, Moscow had lost the support of the Islamic world and most members of the nonaligned movement. Finally, Gorbachev inherited the unresolved Polish crisis where the political and economic demands of the Solidarity independent trade union movement threatened the political stability throughout the East-European empire and the Soviet Union itself. Although there had been other workers revolts in Eastern Europe since the last war (1953, 1956, 1970), none had been

as fundamental as Solidarity's challenge in Poland (1980), which had caused great concern in Moscow. In other words, the economies of Eastern Europe were as much in need of reform as the Soviet economy.

These problems, in a nutshell, formed the Brezhnev (and Andropov and Chernenko) legacy to Mikhail S. Gorbachev, who, when he became General Secretary of the Communist Party, had committed himself, under a policy of *perestroika* (restructuring), to a major reform of the entire Soviet socio-economic and political system to resolve these problems.

In the context of this radical restructuring, *glasnost* (openness) was conceived as a necessary prerequisite for the transfers of technology and innovation, and *demokratizatsiia* (democratization) to making officials more responsive to the needs of economic rationality. As Abel Aganbegyan put it:

We plan to step up the pace of growth in the economy, but this cannot be separated from the process of democratization and of what we call *glasnost*, a greater openness in all aspects of government and social organization. ( 8 )

Gorbachev himself described the concept of *glasnost* in the following terms:

*Glasnost* accentuates an environment allowing citizens to effectively participate in discussing all of the country's affairs, in elaborating and

making decisions that affect the interests of all of us and monitoring the implementation of these decisions. ( 9 )

Also, Gorbachev made it clear that the process of perestroika was to be carried out within the socialist framework despite the introduction of the market economy. To quote him:

I would like to point out once again that we are conducting all our reform in accordance with the socialist choice. ( 10 )

The essence of perestroika lies in the fact that it unites socialism with democracy and revives the Leninist concept of socialist construction both in theory and in practice. ( 11 )

The Soviet leader and his team of reformers have increasingly acknowledged the viability of market forces as a legitimate means of economic development capable of coexisting with socialism. But the reforms were not meant to turn the Soviet Union into a Western style free market democracy, they were designed to improve the efficiency, productivity and humanizing of the existing one party system and thereby ensuring the viability of the USSR as a superpower in world affairs.

Gorbachev's programme of domestic reforms was accompanied by calls for "*new thinking*", (*novoe politicheskoe myshlenie*) in the realm of foreign relations. It is to state the obvious that a nation's foreign policy is in large part determined by its domestic and

economic potential. Thus, "new thinking" and *perestroika* were mutually reinforcing.  
(12)

The policy of "new thinking" in international relations was inaugurated by Mikhail Gorbachev in his political report to the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in February 1986, and further developed in speeches and statements thereafter. It consisted of three basic components, which Vernon V. Aspaturian summarised as follows:

- Recasting the ideological parameters of Soviet foreign policy and reconceptualizing perceptions of the international system, national security, defense, military doctrine, and strategy in accordance with the "new foreign policy philosophy", essentially a subset of the "new political thinking".
- Redirecting Soviet foreign policy goals and reordering Soviet foreign policy priorities.
- Reorganizing the foreign policy decision-making system, involving personnel, institutions, and processes. ( 13 )

The new thinking demonstrated a greater synchronization of the domestic and economic policy with foreign and security policy, with the preeminence of Soviet 'national interest' over all other commitments. This approach clearly marked a departure from the previous USSR attitudes.

Gorbachev and other top leaders realized that the Soviet economic revival badly needed a nonthreatening environment which would not place demands upon the Soviet system and drain its resources while it proceeded along the path of economic and

political reforms. Defence spending had to be cut in order to increase investment in the civilian economy. Thus, Gorbachev's leadership placed a heavy emphasis on decreasing international tension and improving Soviet-American relations. In this context Moscow displayed increasing flexibility and willingness to compromise in arms reduction and other East-West negotiations, notably the settlement of regional conflicts in the Third World. To implement these policies Gorbachev first needed to get rid of the old thinkers. Within 4 months of coming to power he had removed Gromyko and initiated sweeping changes in party and government foreign policy personnel in favour of the "new thinkers". ( 14 )

Gorbachev's "new thinking", in Soviet foreign policy, adopted the position that there can be no victory in a nuclear war; that military superiority is impossible and that Soviet foreign policy should therefore give priority to Soviet-US and also Sino-Soviet détente in order to develop interdependence and mutual security, rather than, as Brezhnev had, give priority to the global struggle against "imperialism". As Evgenii Primakov, a prominent Soviet academician and Gorbachev's key foreign policy adviser, throughout the entire period since 1985, said:

Searches for military superiority will inevitably backfire against those who make them - after all the other side will inevitably search for and find countermeasures. ( 15 )

Furthermore, the new political thinking supported the view that Soviet security was closely tied to international and global security. Gorbachev's leadership argued that in today's world the concept of security had changed in the sense that national security must now become mutual security, and that, in the interdependent world, an adversary's

security was as important as that of one's own. Gorbachev, in his 27th Party Congress speech called for a 'world security system' to provide guidelines for dialogue among leaders of the world community. In this context, he emphasised the role of politics and diplomacy, in ensuring security, by stating that:

The nature of today's weapons leaves no state with the hope of defending itself by technical means alone - let us say, with the creation of a defense, even the most powerful one. Ensuring security is more and more taking the form of a political task and it can be solved only by political means. ( 16 )

Gorbachev insisted that arms control at all levels between the superpowers was critical for the deterrence of nuclear war. It was more critical than the possession of superior military capability. His first priority was to eliminate intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) in Central Europe. Thus, the INF treaty was signed between the Soviet Union and the United States in December 1987 and came to force in June 1988. ( 17 ) Beyond agreeing to asymmetric nuclear weapons reduction in the 1987 INF accord, Gorbachev acceded to on-site inspections of military installations to verify compliance with the INF agreement. ( 18 )

These steps reflected a significant shift in Soviet military doctrine, which had began in the late 1970s, when Soviet leaders both civilian and military recognized the objective reality of the doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), and had striven for nuclear parity with the United States and the West. Gorbachev's leadership advocated military sufficiency, instead of strict parity, and defensive rather than offensive strategy. By sufficiency in military policy, they meant the possession of adequate military means to defend against an attack but, not enough to gain victory through aggressive action. ( 19 )

Moreover, the "new political thinking" aimed at integrating the socialist economies into the world economy, and at a more active participation in international organizations. This attitude was based upon new perceptions of the realities of economic life. Many observers in the USSR during the 1970s had realized that the international economy operated more as a single interdependent system than as two opposed socialist and capitalist camps. ( 20 ) Also, problems facing the contemporary world, such as those affecting the environment, natural resources and world cultures demanded common solutions and thus indicated an interdependence in the world. The continued belief in opposing systems led to the Soviet isolation from international trade and monetary institutions, which in turn made Moscow's exports uncompetitive and hindered domestic technological progress.

The revised thinking about the international economic system and strategic military competition had far-reaching effects. Above all, it enhanced the role of politics in Soviet foreign relations. The new Soviet leadership and analysts began to focus their attention on the political balance of power and on the political competition, between the two systems, instead of the military competition. However, this is not to say that the USSR had given up military power altogether as an instrument of foreign policy, nor that it had rejected Marxist-Leninist perception of competition between capitalism and communism. Gorbachev had only moved away from the narrow and belligerent Marxist-Leninist approach in his endorsement of a flexible cooperation between communists and capitalists. ( 21 )

Overall, the "new thinking" in Soviet foreign policy was designed to manage East-West relations more effectively in a quest for economic revival and strategic priorities. By pushing arms control Gorbachev had tried to undermine the rationale for the SDI project and an expensive arms race in outer space and so slow down the procurement of new weapons in the US ( 22 ), which ultimately would lessen the cost of Soviet military

spending and divert scarce resources to the civilian sector, reduce East-West tensions and thus create a more favourable international environment for economic and technological cooperation.

Another aspect of the "new thinking" that promoted the very same goal - a relaxation of international environment and offered financial savings - was the Third World issue. Gorbachev's "new thinking" introduced major changes in Soviet foreign policy towards the Third World.

By the time Leonid Brezhnev died (November 1982) Moscow's policy towards the Third World had already entered a period of reassessment. There were three major concerns that had preoccupied Soviet analysts as to the Soviet Third World involvement: the escalating costs borne by the Soviet Union in supporting clients, the poor record of the ability of these clients to create a stable political systems, and functioning economies, once they had achieved independence. In most of these countries economic production was falling and most governments were faced with guerrilla or civil war, for example, Nicaragua, Angola and Afghanistan (though in all these instances the counter-revolutionaries received external backing). And lastly, Soviet Third World policies had an adverse effect on relations with the United States and China. ( 23 )

However, Brezhnev's leadership did not seem to pay much attention to analyses and recommendations given by the Third World experts. ( 24 ) In contrast, Brezhnev's successor, Iurii Andropov, during his brief tenure as CPSU General Secretary, made a number of statements that appeared to question the benefits gained from the extensive Soviet involvement in the Third World, and the capability of these regimes to build socialism. He made it clear that he was not prepared to extend any further Soviet economic assistance to "socialist oriented" states, and that these regimes would have to build socialism by their own efforts:

We contribute also, to the extent of our ability, to economic development. But on the whole their economic development, just as the entire social progress of those countries, can be, of course, only the result of the work of their peoples and of a correct policy of their leadership.  
(25 )

On another occasion, during his important speech in 1982, Andropov underlined the difficulties experienced by different regimes of "socialist orientation" that had received aid from the USSR, he stated, 'one thing is to proclaim socialism and quite another to build it'. ( 26 ) However, like so much in the Andropov and Chernenko interims, the illness of the two leaders makes it difficult to know to what extent a change of policy was contemplated.

Thus, when Gorbachev acceded to office in 1985, the analytical groundwork for a change of policy had already been laid down by Soviet Third World experts and their earlier observation had become increasingly valid. Moreover, by then it had also become clear that a Soviet victory in Afghanistan was not to be expected soon, if at all. Gorbachev in his report to the 27th CPSU Congress publicly referred to the Afghan situation as a 'bleeding wound' that had to be resolved. The civil wars being waged in Cambodia and Angola had not produced victories for Moscow's proxies, Vietnam and Cuba respectively, or for the Soviet Union itself, and in Ethiopia the separatist rebels movement of Eritrea and Tigre had intensified their fight against the Mengistu regime. Furthermore, Gorbachev's predecessors, notably Andropov, as mentioned earlier, had already begun to set out the agenda for changes in the Soviet approach to its Third World client states.

Moreover, in the climate of *glasnost*, academic literature had gone even further in its criticism of the past Soviet Third World policies. Viacheslav Dashichev of the Institute of the Economics of the World Socialist System argued that the Brezhnev leadership had no clear ideas about the USSR's state interest when it embarked on its Third World policy in the 1970s and that it misused material resources in the pursuit of petty gains. ( 27 )

From these analyses one could assume that the Soviet Third World policies in the pre-Gorbachev era were pursued without any regard for East-West relations and for broader economic and security concerns. On the contrary, Soviet Third World activities had always been conditioned by USSR-US bilateral ties and so had reflected Soviet prevailing assumptions about its economy and strategic goals, but perhaps were not given enough consideration as to their negative impact on the Soviet economic and strategic priorities. However, at times Moscow demonstrated its willingness to sacrifice Third World positions for more important interest in the West.

Gorbachev's "new thinking" in relation to the Third World incorporated the views expressed in previous academic writings. His leadership recognized that Third World policies could not be orchestrated as a spin-off from more dominant East-West relations, but had to be viewed in terms of how they affected central economic and strategic interests. This new concern about Soviet policy in the Third World had an important impact on a reconceptualization of regional conflicts and the most appropriate Soviet response to those conflicts.

The directives for Moscow's new approach to the Third World were presented by Gorbachev at the 27th Party Congress and further elaborated upon in his speech to the United Nations in December 1988. He suggested the following:

- the demilitarization of regional conflicts and the search for political solutions based on a balance of interests.
- deideologization (secularization) of interstate relations, in other words not to view regional conflicts through prism of East-West, ideology guided confrontation, and taking mutual interest as the basis for those relationships.
- refraining from violating the sovereignty of another nation, hence, opposing the export of revolution.

For Gorbachev the resolution of regional conflicts was the most urgent issue, as it had proved to be one of the most important obstacles to the improvement of relations with the United States and, to a lesser degree, for the broadening of cooperation with Western Europe, Japan and China. As one Soviet foreign ministry official pointed out:

Our direct and indirect involvement in regional conflicts leads to colossal losses by increasing general international tension, justifying the arms race and hindering the establishment of mutually advantageous ties with the West. ( 28 )

Furthermore, regional conflicts placed a drain upon Soviet resources and distorted the USSR's economic, domestic and military interests. Also, they had led to the deterioration of Soviet relations with other Third World states, especially those bordering conflict areas, and finally, but most importantly, they had posed a danger to global security. According to Evgenii Primakov:

Most important, however, is that under persisting international tension regional conflicts could upset the military-political stability in the world and pose a real threat to universal security. ( 29 )

The most dangerous regional conflicts to threaten world peace were those where superpowers were already involved or could become involved. Primakov considered these to be the 'Arab-Israeli and Iran-Iraq conflicts, the conflicts in Afghanistan and around it, in Central America, around Kampuchea and southern Africa.' ( 30 )

It is interesting to note that Moscow had accepted the concept of "regional conflicts", which until then, had been rejected, by both Soviet analysts and officials on ideological grounds, for being simply an "imperialist" concept that grouped together "wars of national and social liberation" and so "just wars" with "imperialist wars" and so "unjust wars" into one category. ( 31 )

Traditionally, national liberation movements were identified as anti-colonial movements but once they had achieved independence they were seen as movements likely to develop along independent paths which could possibly advance towards "pro-socialist paths of development". ( 32 ) Thus, the Soviets perceived such movements to be important allies of the socialist bloc, at a time when the socialist world was confronted by a Western anti-communist alliance, and so provided them with direct or indirect support in their struggle against "imperialism". This Soviet assistance came in the form of military, economic and political support. The USSR justified their involvement, in most of the Third World conflicts, on the grounds of having a moral obligation to support progressive forces throughout the Third World opposed to regimes backed by the United States and its allies. The Third World, thereby, had become a battlefield of military antagonism and rivalry between the great powers.

In the context of new political thinking, the key role ascribed to "imperialism" in the earlier analysis of the wars in the Third World, was played down and the moral distinctions between "just and unjust" wars lost its significance because both were capable of escalating into thermonuclear war. One Soviet academic, Yegor Plimak, came out in support of this argument stating that in the nuclear age even a revolutionary struggle was dangerous, because it could lead to a regional or local war and thus to a superpower confrontation. ( 33 ) Instead, the speeches and statements made by Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, and Primakov's academic analyses, indicated that traditional concepts such as "national interests" and "defence", defined within a nonoffensive context, were assuming a greater conceptual and analytical role in the USSR's thinking about foreign relations.

Having acknowledged that either direct or indirect military intervention in regional conflicts could result in nuclear war, and that the costs of these interventions now exceeded benefits, Gorbachev and his close advisers had repeatedly expressed a desire to form a new international security system based on demilitarized norms of behaviour and problem solving approaches. This meant finding political solutions to regional conflicts by means of superpower cooperation with all other parties involved (internal or external local actors), and with the help of international bodies such as the UN offices. To quote Gorbachev:

Regional conflicts in Asia, Africa and Latin America..... are spawned by the colonial past, new social processes, or recurrences of predatory policy, or by all three.... The main thing here is to take the interests of all sides into considerations and .... search for a just political settlement. (34)

Evgenii Primakov confirmed this in one of his articles by calling for 'a joint search [by US and the Soviet Union] for a way to solve regional conflicts - in the Near East, in Central America, in South Africa - everywhere where breeding grounds exist for a military threat'. ( 35 ) Furthermore, Primakov, in his call for understanding the real causes of regional conflicts cautioned against viewing them 'solely through the prism of confrontation between the USSR and the US', ( 36 ) and underlined the importance of paying more attention to internal causes of these conflicts. Paraphrasing Gorbachev, he said:

Mikhail Gorbachev emphasised the need to analyse in their complexity the various economic, political, social, historical and military causes that lie at the root of each conflict situation. ( 37 )

Primakov stated that the Arab-Israeli and the Afghan conflicts were clear examples of such a complexity, and added that a clear-cut distinction between the the internal and external causes of conflict situations would make it possible to take a much more realistic approach to solving them. ( 38 ) In this context the idea of national reconciliation was favoured as a means of eliminating the internal causes of regional conflicts or to lessen their impact; in Primakov's words: 'perhaps the only acceptable platform which offers the possibility of joint action by neighbouring states in order to end regional conflicts.' ( 39 )

The pursuit of such a policy was embarked upon in Afghanistan, which Kabul endorsed in January 1987. At the time, Najibullah declared a six month cease-fire (though this was promptly rejected by the Peshawar seven factions), and claimed that

Kabul was now ready to compromise with the opposing Afghan elements based abroad. Cambodia together with Vietnam sanctioned national reconciliation policy in mid-1987 which resulted in the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces (accomplished in September 1989) simultaneously with the ending of outside interference in the country, and establishment of a coalition government. In Nicaragua, with the cooperation of the Sandinista regime, an agreement on a regional settlement reached by the five Central American governments in April 1987 facilitated direct talks between the government and the counter-revolutionary forces, the Contras. Finally, Angola endorsed such a policy in 1989, when the conditions for the pulling out of Cuban troops from the country was arranged, so setting the stage for talks between Unita's leader, Jonas Savimbi, and the leader of the Angolan government, Dos Santos, in June 1989.

Furthermore, Moscow increasingly advocated the idea of involving international bodies in solving international problems, in particular the United Nations as well as some regional organizations and commissions. This approach was demonstrated by Soviet support for the U.N. involvement in peace-keeping efforts and by their endorsement of U.N. resolution 598, designed to bring an end to the Iran-Iraq war. Also, the USSR supported the U.N. call for a United Nations arms embargo on Iraq and eventual military action. In a September *Pravda* article, Gorbachev even suggested enhancing the role of the U.N. and strengthening the role of the Secretary General. ( 40 ) This, indeed, marked a major departure from the previous policies. As regards the Gulf War which followed the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, a number of Soviet scholars agreed that in the earlier times Moscow would have supported Iraq's action 'as an overthrow of a reactionary monarchist regime in Kuwait'. ( 41 )

Most commentators agreed that the Soviet position on the Gulf crisis was in keeping with their national interests and prevailing realities.

At this juncture, however, it should be noted that this change in the USSR's attitude to conflict resolution was facilitated by the down-playing of ideology in Soviet foreign policy. In fact, the policy of "new thinking" called for 'removing the ideological edge from interstate relations'. ( 42 )

Gorbachev and his close aides, notably Alexander Iakovlev and Edward Shevardnadze claimed that Soviet foreign policy should no longer be subordinated to ideology, that the class struggle was no longer considered a primary objective in international relations, and that the class interests would have to be subordinated to the interests of nations and mankind. ( 43 )

This, no doubt marked a break with the past two-track approach to Soviet foreign policy, (one - Party and the other - State, each operating in two separate spheres, the former - ideological and nonstate and the latter - nonideological and non - Party). Admittedely, under Brezhnev the distinction between Party and state activities in international relations became increasingly blurred. The Gorbachev leadership had recognized that this approach contributed to the creation of international tensions, the deterioration of Soviet - US relations, and to a negative image of Soviet international behaviour in general. Soviet security, prestige and ideological commitments in the conduct of its foreign policy led to the military intervention in Afghanistan and to military and economic support to Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movements and regimes in the Third World. According to Aspaturian:

The overt subordination of Soviet foreign policy to ideology and the priority of class interests were more clearly pronounced [by invading Afghanistan ] than on any other occasion. ( 44 )

Thus, the de-ideologization of Soviet foreign relations, the subordination of the international class struggle to "peaceful coexistence" and the "interests of mankind" signalled the abandonment of support of Third World Marxist-Leninist regimes and movements. In other words future Soviet foreign relations were to be guided by traditional diplomacy where mutual interest would be taken into account as the basis for those relations regardless of socio-economic system. Shevardnadze in his important address to the Soviet foreign policy establishment on 25 July 1988 confirmed this by stating:

The principle of the new political thinking..... most clearly evidences the direct dependence of a state's foreign policy on its domestic affairs. And here rising before us is that mighty range of vitally important categories brought together by the concept of " national interests.".....National interests are a very mobile category, dynamic and constantly changing..... In the light of this concept, the philosophy of peaceful coexistence, as a universal principle of international relations, takes on a different content..... Quite validly, we refuse to see it in a specific form of class struggle. Coexistence .....cannot be identified with the class struggle..... It is difficult to reconcile the equating of international relations to a class struggle with a recognition of the real possibility and inevitability of peaceful coexistence, as a higher universal principle, and mutually advantageous cooperation between states with different socio-political systems.....In order to correctly assess and and ensure our national interests, it is essential to recognize the trends and understand the directions in the common movement of mankind. ( 45 )

The non-ideological approach to Soviet foreign relations was closely associated with Gorbachev's third directive - opposing the export of revolution or counter-revolution.

Evoking Lenin's belief, Primakov stated that 'a revolutionary situation cannot be introduced from outside'; however, at the same time he was trying to defend Soviet support for revolutions which were the products of internal forces. This approach seemed to indicate a problem in reconciling Moscow's acceptance of the concept of "regional conflicts" with previous thinking about "wars of national liberation" and "just wars"; thus, the inconsistency with the new thinking that was attempting to abandon an ideological commitment.

At the same time the denial of external assistance in creating a revolutionary situation has nothing in common with a refusal to assist revolutionary forces which rely on objective conditions in their struggle to end the national and social oppression of their peoples. ( 46 )

The concept of exporting counter-revolution was also strongly disapproved of by Primakov who seemed to suggest a trade-off between the Soviet non-export of revolution for the United States agreement not to export counter-revolution against the existing Marxist-Leninist regimes. The most explicit example of American support for counter-revolutionary forces he quoted the *Contras* in Nicaragua fighting against the Sandinista revolutionary regime. This approach undoubtedly illustrated the Soviet desire to preserve the existence of those regimes, but at the expense of not supporting "movements of national liberation" fighting for dominance. ( 47 ) Indeed, Moscow decided to stop supporting national liberation movements in countries such as Panama, Philippines, Oman and South Africa where the success of revolution would have ultimately impaired United States security interests. Nevertheless, the Gorbachev leadership still granted some military aid and propaganda support to the PLO, ANC, SACP and until Namibian independence to SWAPO. ( 48 )

Moscow's de-emphasis on the export of revolution was even more drastic in Central America when Gorbachev, in his speech to the Cuban National Assembly on 5 April 1989, signalled to Castro that he wanted him to renounce revolutionary adventurism in the area, and called for the 'cessation of [the supply of] military arms to Central America from any quarter'. ( 49 ) Moscow had down-played the support for the revolutionaries in El-Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras and had sought to establish diplomatic relations with their respective governments. Gorbachev regarded any aggressive revolutionary activity as unlawful interference in the affairs of another nation. This strong emphasis on the respect for other nations' sovereignty indicated a repudiation of the Brezhnev doctrine, which was reflected not only in Soviet policy towards the Third World countries, but also to its East European allies. Moscow called for the United States to adopt a similar approach and so discard the validity of the Monroe Doctrine. ( 50 )

Closely linked with the shift away from strong support of and major involvement in regional conflicts, was the appraisal of the cost and long term value to the Soviet Union of both the military and economic relationships that had been established ever since Khrushchev came to power.

Encouraged by *glasnost*, not only the economic, political and human cost of the Afghan war came under fierce scrutiny by Soviet analysts and officials, but also criticism of the entire gambit of Third World policy was openly expressed. For example, in the pre-glasnost era, casualty figures and the traumas of fighting in Afghanistan were hidden from the Soviet population. After Gorbachev's accession to power, the horrors of Afghanistan had been disclosed, the decision-making process itself was questioned, and journalists were forced to admit lying to the Soviet public. ( 51 )

Also, some basic theoretical issues such as the concept of socialist oriented states, the non-capitalist path of development, and the understanding of the whole process of

socio-economic development in the Third World were questioned. The pinnacle of the debate on these issues was reached during 1988 and 1989 and thereafter resulted in a general agreement that the theoretical foundations of Soviet policy towards the Third World, had been 'unsubstantiated and faulty'. ( 52 ) For instance, it was argued that the traditional approach of Soviet theoreticians, that blamed "imperialism" and the legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism for all the Third World problems, obscured the fact that, as one analyst noted:

The crises which have hit many Third World countries in the 1980s are explained not so much by external causes as by mistakes in the economic policies of their regimes. ( 53 )

Marina Chumakova, a Latin American specialist, in a round table discussion on "totalitarianism, authoritarianism and democracy" came out in support of this argument stating, with reference to Nicaragua, that the growing crises in the Nicaraguan economy could be attributed to a great extent to economic mismanagement, wastefulness of Soviet aid, and to the course of economic and political development taken by the Sandinista ruling government, which she held was heading towards totalitarianism. Even, such an important ally as Castro's Cuba did not escape her criticism. She referred to it as 'a left-wing authoritarian regime' and stated, with regret, that as far as such regimes were concerned, 'we do not, as a rule, touch upon the observance of human rights, political and civil freedoms', and whenever this subject was brought up, it was in the context of the 'intrigues of imperialism, intended to destabilize progressive governments.' ( 54 )

Special criticism was levelled at the Soviet economic assistance to the Third World clients. In January 1990, the Supreme Soviet for the first time disclosed the value of the economic aid provided to the Third World allies up to November 1989, (totalled approximately 78 billion roubles). The major recipients of that aid were, in order, Cuba, Mongolia, Vietnam, India, Iraq, and Afghanistan. ( 55 ) Though compared to that of the Western aid, the amount was not that great but it was still substantial for the Soviet economy. As domestic problems and crises, arising out of *perestroika*, were mounting more harsh criticisms was forthcoming. There were some who argued that the USSR should be guided by the principles of mutual advantage in its economic relations with the Third World. For example, Andrei Koslov pointed out that :

Economic expediency, not ideological and political preferences, should become the determinant for developing economic ties with the Third World. ( 56 )

Similarly, one foreign ministry official, while describing what type of policy the USSR should no longer follow towards the Third World, also suggested the adoption of a more beneficial economic policy vis a vis the developing world similar to that of the West:

Our interests in the developing countries must be defined above all by the real potential for setting up mutually advantageous economic and technological cooperation. From this point of view, it is not difficult to see that the West's interests of this kind are immeasurably deeper and broader. To attempt to balance this asymmetry by building up the potential of one's naval presence and strengthening one's strategic ties with individual states that might "act in opposition to Western influence"

would be to construct one's relations with the developing countries on a very shaky and short-term basis. ( 57 )

Nikolai Volkov, for example, suggested that instead of indulging in criticism, no matter how beneficial this could be in seeking alternatives, it would be more constructive to go straight into setting up new programmes for economic cooperation with the developing world. He also stressed the importance of mutually advantageous exchanges. Thus he proposed the following:

The new programs should furnish an answer to the question of not what we must but rather how we have to employ new patterns of external economic activities in forging viable and, therefore, most efficient forms of economic relations between the USSR and the Third World. ( 58 )

From the above examination it appears evident that throughout the Soviet political spectrum there was a recognition that future Soviet involvement in the Third World would have to be more cost-effective and so contribute both directly and immediately to the interests of the Soviet Union.

Moreover, a number of Soviet officials and analysts argued that the emphasis of USSR policy in the Third World should shift from weak Marxist-Leninist states to large, more developed and geopolitically important capitalist states in Latin America and Asia, such as Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and India respectively. This view was strongly propagated by Karen Brutents, a deputy head of the CPSU Central Committee's

International Department since mid-1970, and Alexander Iakovlev, one of Gorbachev's closest advisers and the party secretary with main responsibility for implementing the policy of *glasnost*. ( 59 ) Brutents had never in fact expressed particular enthusiasm for Marxist-Leninist vanguard parties. He was consistently sceptical about the possibility of building genuinely socialist institutions in backward developing countries. ( 60 ) Indeed, high level official visits to Latin America and Asia, in the early years of *perestroika*, demonstrated that the policies recommended by Iakovlev and Brutents had been put into action. Shevardnadze visited Mexico in October 1986 and shortly after followed with visits to Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. Gorbachev himself went to India in November 1986, which clearly demonstrated its continued importance to Moscow (the Soviets had maintained close relations with the country since the mid-1950's). Gorbachev and other officials viewed Soviet-Indian relations as a model for Moscow's ties with Third World countries. Gorbachev in his address to the Indian parliament said:

To me personally, it is quite obvious that much of what we call new political thinking manifested itself internationally for the first time in relations between the Soviet Union and India. And the fact that differences of socio-political system and ideology and our national, cultural and other distinctions have not hampered our dialogue is extremely important as a guiding examples for others . ( 61 )

In addition Moscow tried to develop a better economic cooperation with South-East Asian countries, notably with Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand.

Overall, the Soviet policy of *perestroika* and the "new thinking" led to a number of policy changes which resulted in a reorientation of its policies in key conflict regions throughout the Third World which became more evident towards the end of the 1980s.

The USSR decision to withdraw its military forces from Afghanistan, which began in May 1988 and was completed in February 1989, was the most dramatic indication of the implementation of the new thinking in the Third World. Also, Moscow began gradually to reduce commitments to some of its established ideological allies. Nevertheless, as far as Cuba was concerned Gorbachev tried to continue giving the highest priority to economic cooperation with its Caribbean ally. This was in spite of the ongoing intensive debates in Moscow among politicians and party and government officials as to the prudence and morality of this ideologically and strategically motivated, large-scale economic assistance to Cuba while the economic crisis in the USSR was deepening. (62) According to Iuri Pavlov, the head of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's Latin American Department, some Soviet parliamentarians, notably Nikolai Shmelyov, a well-known economist, were publicly demanding a halt to the "hidden" sugar and oil subsidies. ( 63 ) Indeed, Gorbachev in his speech to the Cuban National Assembly, in April 2, 1989, indicated that the Soviet Union was intending to introduce changes in its economic relations with Cuba by stating:

As life moves ahead, new demands are made on the quality of our interaction. This applies particularly to economic contacts; they should be more dynamic and effective and bring greater returns for both our countries, our peoples. ( 64 )

Indeed, soon afterwards Soviet economic relations with Cuba underwent transformation and the bilateral arrangements reached in December 1990 between the respective countries comprised reduction of price subsidies, credits, and technical assistance with the aim of eventually placing them on commercial basis. ( 65 ) From January until May 1991, Soviet supplies to Havana were limited almost exclusively to oil

and petroleum products (4, 160, 000 barrels as planned). Other basic necessities such as rice, beans, butter and many other products previously exported to Cuba, were no more delivered. Out of the total value of \$710 million for products supplied, oil and its products accounted for \$650 million. ( 66 ) However, despite the declining industrial production and the worsening financial position the USSR still continued some of its economic assistance programmes to Cuba. For example, in the first five months of 1991, 4.7 percent of the total expenditure went to finance the economic and military aid to Afghanistan, Cuba and other client states. ( 67 ) Democratic political forces in the Kremlin who demanded an end to support for Cuba, faced the opposition of Gorbachev himself, who maintained the views held by his predecessors that the political and strategic benefits from close cooperation with Cuba had justified the massive economic expenditure involved in preserving this de facto alliance. According to Pavlov: 'the relationship with Cuba was the biggest single expenditure of the USSR on a friendly political regime, amounting to hundreds of millions of tons of oil and other raw materials .....'. ( 68 ) Nonetheless, in the middle of 1991, the reduction of Soviet assistance to Cuba was under way. Castro, towards the end of 1991 repeatedly raised alarm about the progressive reduction of Soviet oil supplies. ( 69 )

I shall, in the light of these changes in the Soviet Third World approach under Gorbachev's *perestroika*, be discussing how the Soviet-Nicaraguan relations were effected.

From the outset, and especially in 1987 and 1988, Gorbachev supported all proposed negotiated settlements to the Central American conflict, that would guarantee Nicaragua peaceful coexistence with other Central American states, the United States, and at the same time remove one of the major obstacles to the Soviet-US rapprochement. Thus, Moscow, unlike the United States, gave unconditional support to the Contadora peace process from the moment of its inception (January 1983), and later endorsed its

successor, the Arias Plan or the Esquipulas II, which was signed by all Central American states in Guatemala (August 1987). ( 70 )

However, in the meantime the Gorbachev leadership continued its military and economic support to the Sandinista regime.

During President Ortega's trip to Moscow at the end of April 1985, Gorbachev confirmed that the USSR would step up its support for Nicaragua, in response to the US trade embargo of May 1, 1985, while not furthering any special relationship that could mean new heavy investments, which the Soviets wished to avoid for both economic and political reasons. Any dramatic increase in the Soviet presence in Nicaragua would have given fresh credibility to the arguments put forward by the hostile Reagan administration that the country had become a "Soviet satellite". There was also, an understanding in Moscow that continued international support for the Sandinistas depended very much on the maintenance by the FSLN of a strategy of diversified relations with the outside world. For their part, the Sandinistas themselves did not wish to lose their links with the capitalist economic system, and Cuba had kept reminding them not to follow its footsteps. In mid-June 1985, the Nicaraguan government signed debt rescheduling agreements with 130 private banks in New York, in an attempt to pave the way for further loans. ( 71 ) Despite severe currency shortages, the Sandinistas had maintained debt servicing as an indication of their commitments to stay within the international economy. The FSLN had some success in overcoming the US trade embargo; for instance, it had managed to secure spare parts from US subsidiaries in Canada and Mexico, helped by the decision of the twenty four countries of the Latin American Economic System (SELA). If the embargo was to hit Nicaragua really hard, it would have to embrace US subsidiaries overseas and include pressures against other major trading partners with Nicaragua, both of which would entail heavy political battles for the Reagan Administration. Western and Eastern European manufacturers were to become the principal suppliers of advanced technology and machinery, while Latin

America was to fill the gap in raw material supplies. According to the head of an Economic Research Institute in Managua:

The embargo will in the medium to long term be beneficial to Nicaragua, in that it will procure better trading relationships with Europe, Latin America, the Socialist bloc and the rest of the world; but in the short term it will be painful to readjust. ( 72 )

It is within these limits that the USSR had increased its commitment to Nicaragua. TASS, the official Soviet news agency, quoted Gorbachev, in 1985, as saying that the Soviet Union would assist Nicaragua in 'resolving urgent problems of economic development and political and diplomatic support in its efforts to uphold its sovereignty'. ( 73 )

President Ortega, was reported to be seeking economic aid to the tune of \$200 million cash from Moscow. ( 74 ); however, he received less than requested, an equivalent sum in credits, \$130 million. ( 75 ) On his return, Ortega commented that although the Soviet bloc states had pledged economic help, however, 'we are not expecting abundance and a solution to all our problems from this'. ( 76 ) Apparently, the Soviet economic assistance for 1985 was three times greater than military aid. ( 77 ) Although the Nicaraguan leader said that his country was not seeking military aid during this visit, nonetheless, the presence of Joaquin Cuadra Lacayo, chief of staff of the Sandinista People's Army, in the Nicaraguan delegation, indicated that some talks may have had been held on this matter. ( 78 )



In 1985, it was estimated that the Soviet Union provided \$100 million in military aid alone. ( 79 ) According to Pentagon officials a Soviet ship docked at the Pacific port of Corinto on 13 May 1985 unloaded more than 100 cargo containers, some of which supposedly contained Mi-18 Hip helicopters and spare parts for the Hind helicopter gunship. This was said to be the first direct shipment from the Soviet Union to Nicaragua since 1984. ( 80 )

In early 1985, the Defence Minister, Humberto Ortega announced a year-long major offensive to give the Contras a 'strategic blow' and to root them out from Nicaragua. While the Contras still did not pose a strategic threat to the Nicaraguan revolution in 1985, however, its sabotage attacks were disrupting socio-economic development plans; and thus the course of the revolution.

In fact, the FSLN military campaigns, (i.e., handing out rifles to peasants and organizing local self-defence militias) put the Contras into strategic decline during 1985. Not only were Contra fighters outfought by apparently highly motivated Sandinista Popular Army (EPS) and militia forces, but the Contras proved logistically weak and unable to counter the EPS's heavy artillery. Moreover, according to US Embassy sources in Nicaragua, the Sandinistas by 1985 had the Contras deeply penetrated with intelligence agents. Furthermore, the introduction of the more sophisticated Mi-24 Hind helicopters into combat (in August 1985) made a decisive impact on the war in 1985. (81 )

Domestic political pressure on the Reagan Administration and the Contras to produce results against the FSLN led, in the fall of 1985, to talks in the United States about wider Contra assaults or even a US military intervention in 1986. President Reagan in June 1986 began a new campaign for Congressional approval of military aid to the Contras worth \$100 million, which finally was successful. In turn the Sandinistas sought new arms. Apparently, according to the Reagan Administration source, new shipments

including more T-54 tanks were on their way to Nicaragua through Cuba in November 1985, which caused a renewed alarm in Washington. Defense Minister Ortega justified it, by saying that Washington was sending small, armoured, high powered speed boats to the Contras and that Nicaragua would obtain any air, land, and naval material needed to counter what were expected to be decisive confrontations with the Contras in 1986.

Thus, Nicaragua continued to brace itself for major Contra assaults and for a US military move.

According to the Pentagon spokesman, the Soviet Union surpassed its previous records for arms shipments to Nicaragua in the year of 1986, that up to October 1986 the USSR had delivered 18,800 metric tonnes of military and military associated equipment by 43 ships. ( 82 ) During the first half of 1987, the CIA estimated that the Soviet arms shipment to the Sandinistas was more than \$300 million. ( 83 ) Significantly, Eastern bloc military aid shipments came in response to US regional military activities. With each major escalation in US rhetoric or military presence new shipments of arms arrived in Managua.

Contrary to the United States propaganda, Nicaragua's military posture remained defensive and unsuited for any offensive actions against its neighbours despite its military build-up and weapons purchases from the Soviet bloc. Firstly, Nicaragua was dependent on imported oil which was received at one main port (Corinto), and thus an enemy could easily cut off the supply route. Secondly, it had a limited number of military vehicles and air transportation facilities. Furthermore, it had no military industry of its own and lacked back-up support for offensive moves.

At the Comecon summit in Warsaw (June 1985) the Nicaraguan Minister for Foreign Cooperation (formerly the Minister of Planning), Henry Ruiz, stated that Nicaragua

needed much more assistance from the Soviet bloc in the face of growing costs of the war against the Contras and the cumulative effect of US economic sanctions. ( 84 )

This reflected the plight of other developing nations with the observer status, i.e., that this status did not lead to a considerable increase in involvement with the Eastern bloc economies. For example, both Ethiopia and PDRY had rather limited trade exchanges with the USSR and other Comecon members. This was attributed to the lack of economic complementarity with the latter, as was the case with Nicaragua. ( 85 )

In October 1986, the Soviet delegation headed by the Deputy Economic Planning Minister, Nikolai Lebedinski visited Nicaragua. As a consequence, an economic co-operation agreement was signed between the two countries to be worth about \$250 million. ( 86 ) Indeed, the year 1986 witnessed a substantial increase in the total volume of Soviet-Nicaraguan trade, reaching 277.1 million roubles, (in 1985 it had been 212.6 million roubles). ( 87 ) Moscow supplied more than 80 percent of Nicaragua's total oil needs since mid-1985 at a much lower price than the market one.

However, in 1987 the USSR cut its oil delivery to Nicaragua, which triggered off a severe fuel shortage. Nicaragua would have run out of oil by mid-autumn. The Soviets provided only 300, 000 tonnes out of 765, 000 needed that year; and other Comecon countries were to provide about 310 to 320, 000, tonnes, thus leaving Nicaragua with a shortfall of approximately 155, 000 tonnes. Most of the extra oil needed in 1987 was to fuel a growing fleet of Soviet-made combat helicopters for the Nicaraguan air force. The Sandinistas' attempt to seek relief from Mexico, Venezuela, Iran and other oil states proved to be fruitless as Nicaragua had no hard currency to pay with. It already owed substantial amounts to Mexico and Venezuela. According to Jonathan Steele, the *Guardian's* Correspondent in Moscow, the USSR denied its cutback in oil deliveries to Nicaragua. The Soviet Foreign Ministry spokesman, Gennady Gerasimov, in reply to the statement made earlier by the Nicaraguan Vice-President, Sergio Ramirez, that

Nicaragua was facing a severe oil crisis, said: 'If other countries cut back, it does not automatically mean the USSR should increase its supplies'. Moreover, he said that Nicaragua's oil crisis was the result of a cut in Mexican and Venezuelan deliveries. ( 88 )

However, in early September 1987, Gorbachev's special envoy to Managua, Deputy Head of the International Department of the Central Committee, Vadim Zagladin, informed the FSLN leaders that Moscow agreed to send 100, 000 tonnes of crude oil to avert the crisis situation. Nonetheless, President Ortega admitted that despite this Nicaragua was still left with a shortfall of some 55, 000 tonnes. ( 89 ) The total Soviet oil delivery for that year constituted just over 50 percent of Nicaragua's fuel needs. It can be said that Zagladin's announcement made it clear that Moscow was not prepared to abandon the Sandinistas; however, at the same time, it indicated Soviet reluctance to remain the sole supplier of such a crucial commodity. Furthermore, the Soviet decision can also be interpreted as a sign of its displeasure with the Sandinistas' economic mismanagement, especially with the alleged wastefulness of Soviet aid. Although the disruption in oil supplies in 1987 led to an increase in petrol prices, this did not lead to oil being used more economically. In the end, perhaps the USSR intention was to put pressure on the Sandinistas to be more flexible in their negotiations with other Central American states in order to get the Esquipulas II peace accord signed.

It is to be noted that a chance to restore peace in Nicaragua was on the table since the talks between Moscow and Washington were already under way. The Reagan Administration had come to the conclusion that the regional realities of the mid-1980s and thereafter were such that military solution would be too costly both in the short and long-term not only for relations with Central American states but also with the rest of Latin America. Thus, it was more willing to accept a peaceful settlement to the Central American conflict as well as the Soviet participation.

In October 1988, when the presidential campaign was under way in the United States, on the initiative of the Foreign Ministry, a decision was reached in Moscow to suspend temporarily the delivery of heavy weapons to Nicaragua and, also, to limit the deliveries of light weapons. There were two main motives behind this decision; firstly, the suspension, since February 1988, of US military aid to the Nicaraguan Contras, secondly, the considered view, in the light of this situation, that continued Soviet deliveries, in particular, of heavy weapons would have had an adverse effect on the formulation of a policy towards Nicaragua by the new administration. ( 90 ) Apparently, Moscow made this move without first informing Washington, Nicaragua or Cuba.

Shevardnadze, the then Soviet Foreign Minister, put a special emphasis on the importance of shifting away from general declarations about the USSR's willingness to help negotiate settlements of regional conflicts to taking practical steps towards bringing these about. He emphasised that priority should be given to the long-term interests of the Soviet Union and warned against acceding to the whims of foreign ideological friends if they run counter to these interests. He ordered a revision of Soviet priorities on all regional conflicts and spoke in favour of cooperation with all those who wished to contribute to a peaceful resolution. ( 91 ) Shevardnadze's tone clearly indicated that the role of ideology in the definition of priorities and formulation of Soviet foreign policy had begun to decline. So, there was a corresponding decline in the influence of the CPSU Central Committee apparatus in the foreign - policy decision-making process.

It should be noted here, that due to these changes Cuba began to lose influence on Soviet policy towards the Third World. Havana was involved with Moscow's blessing, in regional conflicts, notably in Central America and Africa and Cuba had become leader of the militant group of developing countries with radical left-wing regimes, which provided active political and material support to "national liberation movements" worldwide. Castro was involved in coordinating their strategies in the Third World with those of Moscow

through direct contacts with the CPSU Central Committee, bypassing the USSR Foreign Ministry. ( 92 )

The loss of Cuban direct influence on Soviet foreign policy became particularly apparent after the Kremlin, following its decision to withdraw Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1988, undertook a policy of cooperation with the US in the settlement of regional conflicts. In addition, the new Bush administration was more willing than its predecessor to shift away from confrontation with the Soviet Union over regional conflicts to cooperation in facilitating their political settlement. Thus, this provided Moscow an opportunity for restoration of peace in Nicaragua.

In May 1989, Gorbachev, without consulting Castro and Ortega, informed President Bush that 'In order to promote a peaceful settlement of the conflict, bearing in mind that the attacks by the Contras' troops against Nicaragua have stopped, the USSR has not been sending weapons since the end of 1988'. ( 93 ) This news, no doubt, caused great anger and suspicion in Nicaragua and Cuba.

Apparently, Iuri Pavlov, the head of the Latin American Section of the Foreign Ministry, travelled urgently together with a Foreign Ministry official, Georgi Mamedov, on Shevardnadze's instructions, to calm the situation in both Havana and Managua. The Cubans and Sandinistas warned that the suspension of Soviet military aid to Nicaragua was putting the Sandinista revolution at grave risk, and that Washington could never be trusted to accept the existence of the Sandinista regime, regardless of the results of the elections which were scheduled for February 1990 in compliance with the Esquipulas II peace accord signed in Guatemala (1987). ( 94 )

The Sandinista government, faced with the fait accompli of Moscow's moratorium on arms shipments to Nicaragua, finally, having not much choice, declared that it was

prepared to suspend imports of arms until the February 1990 elections, provided that the Contras completely stopped their armed activities.

Furthermore, Shevardnadze during his trip to Managua in early October (1989) stated that the USSR was prepared to maintain contacts with all parties in the conflict situation in Central America, including those states with which 'we have no diplomatic relations'. He added that he was referring to both the Salvadoran government and the FMLN as well, suggesting that the time was ripe for Moscow to consider the establishment of diplomatic relations with all Central American countries. ( 95 ) Moscow did not consult Castro on these steps either. In any case, Castro would not have approved of them.

Despite Moscow's pledges, arms were still being delivered to Nicaragua and to the Salvadoran rebels through third parties. While conceding that Moscow had stopped direct arms supplies to Nicaragua, the White House had repeatedly claimed that Cuba and unnamed Eastern bloc countries continued to run weapons to the FMLN and the Sandinistas. The Sandinistas had, in fact, received more weapons than before the Soviet suspension of arms deliveries to Nicaragua. According to the State Department spokesman there was an indication that Nicaragua had received 27 shipments of military goods from the Soviet Union and its allies. The US officials claimed that in 1988 the Soviet Union supplied \$575 million worth of military equipment and \$50 million in economic aid to Nicaragua. ( 96 )

The US Secretary of State, James Baker, stated that the 'Soviet Union bears a special responsibility because its arms and money moving through Cuba and Nicaragua, continue to support violence, destruction and war'. Moreover, he added that 'the lack of Soviet "new thinking" on resolving regional conflicts was our biggest disappointment to date in the relationship'. ( 97 )

The November 1989 offensive of the FMLN forces in El Salvador threatened to cause a crisis of confidence between the USSR and the United States because there was evidence that the Sandinistas had not only continued to supply the FMLN with Soviet made small arms and ammunition, despite Moscow's assurance to the contrary, but also had delivered for the first time surface-to-air missiles to the Salvadoran guerrillas.

This clearly demonstrated that Castro was intentionally misleading the Soviet Foreign Minister with regard to the weapon deliveries. Cuba and Nicaragua were both, apparently, given instructions by Moscow a few days before the December 1989 Malta summit, not to transfer USSR-supplied weapons to any other party without prior Soviet consent. Castro denied any Cuban involvement in the transport and delivery of Soviet surface-to-air SAM-7 missiles through Nicaraguan territory into El-Salvador. Supplying sophisticated Soviet arms to the FMLN was a sheer betrayal of the Soviet policy in the area, and of the widely supported negotiation process. ( 96 )

Castro not only opposed Gorbachev's policy to Central America, but the whole concept of "new thinking" and *perestroika*. From the outset, he was sceptical about the prospects of national reconciliation and democratization in Nicaragua, and considered this to be a betrayal of the revolution. Castro had remained very defiant to any application of *perestroika* in Cuba.

However, further exchanges between the two superpowers regarding Nicaragua and Cuba during the Gorbachev-Bush summit in Malta at the beginning of December 1989, gave fresh impetus to US and the Soviet Union to search for ways and measures, both of promoting a peace settlement in Nicaragua and El Salvador as well as trying to neutralise Cuba's negative influence on some of the main parties to the regional conflict.

The United States demanded that the USSR show its commitment to demilitarising the Central American conflict by compelling Cuba and Nicaragua to cease all arms shipments to the Salvadoran guerrillas and by forcing the Sandinistas to deny the use of Nicaragua's territory to third parties arming the FMLN in compliance with the Esquipulas agreement. Indeed, the Soviet Union took several steps designed to demonstrate their commitment to making the superpower partnership work. On one occasion Moscow rejected the Sandinistas' request for emergency funds to improve the Nicaraguan economy, a request which, if fulfilled, might have strengthened the Sandinista appeal to voters in the upcoming elections. On another occasion the USSR persuaded the Sandinista leadership to turn their back on the Salvadoran rebels and to sign a declaration with other Central American presidents at San Isidoro, Costa Rica, on 12 December 1989, calling on the FMLN forces to disarm and enter into negotiations with the Salvadoran government. ( 99 ) This move led to a serious rift between Managua and Havana. Castro had kept reminding the Sandinistas that it was their revolutionary duty to continue to aid the FMLN.

Due to Washington's pressure, the Soviets eventually expressed a willingness to reduce considerably the volume of their military cooperation with Cuba, however, on condition that the United States was prepared to take appropriate steps as to the lessening of the military tension in the region and not to threaten Cuba's security.

Apparently, Gorbachev himself conceded to President Bush that the Soviet economic ties with Cuba were undergoing changes, but this would take some time. The Soviet-American dialogue continued well into 1991 without any tangible results.

In the meantime, the Sandinistas had succeeded in holding out militarily but were losing economically. Apparently, in view of the worsening economic situation in Nicaragua, Shevardnadze expressed some concern about the Sandinistas' chances of winning the the February 1990 elections. He said that 'Daniel Ortega's defeat would be a

terrible blow to progressive forces - worse than in Poland - and all possible measures should be taken to satisfy Managua's requests for additional economic assistance.' ( 100 )

Fortunately, the Sandinista leaders were not as obsessed with power and socialist dogma as their Cuban mentors, and did not allow these sentiments to prevail over their common sense. They understood that the Soviet Union would neither welcome nor give support to a socialist revolution in Nicaragua to the same extent as it had done in Cuba.

Thus, left with not much choice the Sandinista government, in compliance with the February 1989 agreement, prepared for the elections scheduled for 25 February 1990 elections by constituting a Supreme Electoral Tribunal with the UNO, (the opposition party led by Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, and backed by the United States) representation. The U.N. and OAS observer teams were invited into all electoral districts to monitor the entire process.

The Bush administration proposed that the US and the Soviet governments agree to respect the results of free and fair elections in Nicaragua, to recognize the elected government, and to support its respect for democratic pluralism and human rights. This agreement was incorporated into the Baker-Shevardnadze joint communique signed in Moscow on 9 February 1990. In fact, this was a mutual Soviet-American guarantee against the possibility of a breach in the rules of the democratic game in Nicaragua by the loser, whoever that was.

When the election results were announced and President Daniel Ortega conceded his defeat, there were apprehensions in Moscow that Cuba might try to use its influence in Managua to hamper the process of transfer of power to Violeta Chamorro. However, the Kremlin took the necessary steps to let both Castro and the Sandinistas know that, regardless of the outcome of the elections, it would not accept any actions that would worsen the situation in Nicaragua and thereby lead to the hostilities being resumed.

Though the Sandinistas were voted out of power on 25 February 1990, they still carried weight in the National Assembly, and they also dominated the armed forces, the national bureaucracy, and the unions, but they no longer exercised executive authority.

From the USSR perspective, in terms of old thinking, the Sandinistas' loss of power was a great setback, but in terms of the new thinking it was a positive outcome.

In summary, Gorbachev's policy towards Nicaragua during the FSLN's rule reflected revised assumptions about the Soviet role in the Third World. By analysing what had happened to the Soviet Union as a result of Brezhnev's expansionism of the 1970s, Gorbachev and his advisers concluded that Moscow's aggressive military policies undermined its fundamental security interests. It led to the formation of rival coalitions to combat Soviet expansionism and unleashed an economically damaging and unwinnable arms race with the United States. The Gorbachev leadership realized that a more pragmatic and deideologised approach to the Third World was needed, more in tune with Soviet economic capabilities and reform objectives and less geared to concepts of class struggle and military competition with the West. A more aggressive political and commercial approach to developed Third World countries suppressed support for national liberation movements. Diplomacy and the politics of cooperation replaced military intervention and security assistance as the preferred options in regional conflict situations. This approach, indeed, contrasted markedly with the Soviet Union's previous tendency to try to capitalize on regional conflicts situations to advance its own position and to undermine the position of the United States. By its own behaviour in the Third World, the USSR also altered the regional environment and affected the American behaviour. The United States became more willing to cooperate with the Soviet Union in regional conflict resolutions. Indeed, Soviet-American cooperation led to the resolution of conflict in very "hot spots" around the Third World, notably in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia and Nicaragua.

The Soviet-US partnership proved to be very effective in settling the Nicaraguan crisis and trying to resolve the Salvadoran civil war. For example, in January 1991 after Salvadoran guerrillas downed a series of Salvadoran and US planes with Soviet missiles, four officers in the Sandinista Popular Army (EPS) were arrested for smuggling Soviet missiles stolen from EPS warehouses to the FMLN. The Soviets were reported to have helped the United States to verify the origin of the missiles. Furthermore, the USSR volunteered to send a delegation to Nicaragua to make an inventory of the remaining Soviet arms from pre-1989 deliveries still held by the Nicaraguan army. One Sandinista military officer criticized this proposal as unnecessary interference in Nicaragua's affairs. A former Sandinista diplomat described Soviet actions throughout this period, 'a dark chapter in the relations between Nicaragua and the USSR, which has opened the doors to a new campaign against the EPS [which was still under Sandinista command] and the Revolution.' ( 101 ) Other Sandinista critics spoke scornfully of Soviet actions as 'the USSR's submission to Washington's interest' and 'collaboration among the powerful'. (102)

FOOTNOTES

1. Cited in W. Raymond Duncan and Carolyn McGiffert Ekedahl, *Moscow and the Third World under Gorbachev*, Boulder: Westview Press Inc., 1990, p. 53.
2. Ibid., see table 3.1, p.54; see also Mikhail S. Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for our Country and the World*, New York: Harper & Row, 1987, p.19; and Deborah N. Miner, 'Soviet Reform in International Perspective', in Roger E. Kanet, Deborah N. Miner and Tamara J. Resler (eds.), *Soviet Foreign Policy in Transition*, Cambridge University Press, 1992. p. 11.
3. It was widely accepted by Western analysts that the role of the Soviet Union as a global power was based almost exclusively on the military capability.
4. Cited in Vernon Aspaturian, 'Gorbachev's 'New Political Thinking' and Foreign Policy', in Jiri Valenta and Frank Cibulka (eds.), *Gorbachev's New Thinking and Third World Conflicts*, Transaction Publishers, 1990, pp. 21-22.
5. Gorbachev, op. cit., p. 29.
6. See Boris Kagarlitsky, 'Perestroika: The Dialectic of Change', *New Left Review*, no. 169, May-June 1988, pp. 63-83; see also W. Raymond Duncan and Carolyn McGiffert Ekedahl, op. cit., pp. 51-54.
7. Cited in Robin F. Laird and Dale R. Herspring (eds.), *The Soviet Union and Strategic Arms*, Westview Press, Inc., 1984, p. 105.
8. Abel Aganbegyan, 'New Direction in Soviet Economics', *New Left Review*, no. 169, May-June 1988, p. 89.
9. Gorbachev, op. cit. pp. 110-11.
10. Ibid., p. 36.
11. Ibid., p. 35.
12. Bhabani Sen Gupta, 'Gorbachev's "New Thinking" on Regional Conflicts : Theoretical Analysis', p. 46., in Valenta and Cibulka (eds.), op. cit. p.46.
13. Aspaturian, op. cit. p. 3.
14. For details of change of personnel see Margot Light, 'Foreign Policy', in Martin McCauley, (ed.), *Gorbachev and Perestroika*, The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1990, p. 173.; Jan S. Adams, *A Foreign Policy in Transition - Moscow's Retreat from Central America and the Caribbean, 1985-1992*, Duke University Press, 1992, pp. 46-62.

15. See Evgenii Primakov, 'A New Philosophy in Soviet Foreign Policy', *Pravda* 10 July 1987, p. 4.
16. Cited in G. Bochkarev & Don L. Mansfield (eds.) *The United States and the USSR in a Changing World - Soviet and American Perspective*, Westview Press, Inc., 1992, p. 87.
17. The treaty called for destruction within three years of all U.S. Pershing IA, Pershing II, and ground-launched cruise missiles. In return, the Soviets pledge to destroy all SS-4, SS-5, SS-12, SS-20, and SS-23 missiles. Moscow also promised to destroy its experimental new cruise missile, as did the United States its experimental new Pershing missile - the IB. see *The Washington Post*, 9 December 1987 and W. Raymond Duncan and C. McGiffert, op., cit. p. 58.
18. Duncan and McGiffert Ekedahl, op. cit., p. 59.
19. Ibid., p. 51.
20. See Elizabeth Valkenier, *The Soviet Union and the Third World: An Economic Bind*, New York : Praeger, 1983, (chs., 2-3).
21. Duncan and McGiffert Ekedahl, op. cit., p. 61.
22. Ibid., p. 58.
23. Roger E. Kanet, 'The Evolution of Soviet Policy Toward the Third World', in Carol R. Saivetz (ed.), *The Soviet Union in the Third World*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1989, pp. 15-16.
24. Ibid., p. 16. also see William E. Griffith, 'Gorbachev's Policies Toward the Third World', pp.136, in Mark N. Katz (ed.), *The USSR and Marxist Revolutions in the Third World*, Woodrow Wilson Center Series, 1990; Francis Fukuyama, 'Patterns of Soviet Third World Policy', *Problems of Communism*, Sept-Oct. 1987.
25. Cited in Kanet, op. cit. p 15.
26. 'Rech General'nogo Sekretaria TSK KPSS Tovarishcha Iu. V. Andropova', *Kommunist*, no.9 June 1983, pp. 14-15.
27. Duncan and McGiffert, op. cit. p. 75.
28. 'The USSR and the Third World', (Guest Club), *International Affairs*, (Moscow) no. 12, 1988, pp. 133-36.
29. Evgenii Primakov, 'USSR Policy on Regional Conflicts', *International Affairs*, (Moscow), no. 6, 1988. p. 1.

30. Ibid., p.1.
31. See Aspaturian, op. cit. pp. 28-29.
32. Anuradha M. Chenoy, 'Soviet New Thinking on National Liberation Movements: Continuity and Change', in Kanet, Miner and Resler, op. cit, p.149.
33. *Pravda*, 16 November 1986.
34. Evgenii Primakov, 'XXVII s"ezd KPSS i Issledovanie Problem Mirovoi Ekonomiki i Mezhdunarodnykh Otnoshenii', *MEMO*, no. 5, 1986, p. 12.
35. Primakov, op. cit. p. 6.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., p.7.
38. Ibid., p.6.
39. Ibid., p. 7.
40. *Pravda*, 17 September 1987, p.2.
41. Carol R. Saivetz, 'Soviet Policy in the Middle East: Gorbachev's imprint' in Kanet, Miner and Resler (eds.), op. cit. p. 207.
42. Gorbachev, op. cit. p.221.
43. Aspaturian, op. cit. p. 7.
44. Cited in ibid.
45. Cited in ibid., p. 24.
46. Primakov, op. cit. p. 5.
47. Aspaturian, op. cit. pp. 31-2.
48. Mark N. Katz, 'Gorbachev and Revolution' in M. N. Katz (ed.), op. cit., pp. 124-27.
49. Cited in Jan S. Adams, 'Soviet Policy in Central America during the Gorbachev Period', in Kanet, Miner and Resler (eds.), op.cit.169.
50. Ibid., p. 170.
51. Saivetz, op. cit., p. 208.

52. Zafar Imam, 'The implication of Perestroika for the Third World- particularly Asia' in Kanet, Miner and Resler (eds.). op. cit.
53. See *New Times*, No. 44, October 1988, p. 21.
54. See Kiva Maidanik, 'Pogovorim vse-taki o Latinskoi Amerike' in Diskusii, Obsuzhdeniia - 'Totalitarizm, avtoritarizm i demokratiia v global'nom kontekste', *Latinskaia Amerika*, February, 1990, pp. 65-66.
55. Imam, op. cit. pp. 222 & 26.
56. Andrei Kolosov, 'Reappraisal of USSR Third World Policy', *International Affairs*, (Moscow), No.5, 1990, p. 41.
57. *International Affairs*, No. 12, 1988, p. 134. op. cit.
58. Nikolai Volkov, 'Cooperation with the Third World', *International Affairs*, (Moscow), no. 9, 1989, p. 103.
59. *Pravda*, 19 January 1986; also see Francis Fukuyama, 'Patterns of Soviet Third World Policy', *Problems of Communism*, vol. 36, September-October, 1987, p.6.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
61. Cited in *ibid.*, p.7.
62. Iuri Pavlov, *Soviet-Cuban Alliance 1959-1991*, Transaction Publishers, 1994. p. 125.; also see *Latinskaia Amerika*, February 1990, pp. 45-73.
63. Pavlov, op. cit. p. 125.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 136.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
69. See Castro's speech at the 5th Congress of the Trade Union of Agricultural Workers in *Granma*, 26 November, 1991.
70. The Contadora peace plan was set up by the heads of four Latin American states, Columbia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela in January 1983, and called for the ending of hostilities, the reduction of armaments and the elimination of foreign

bases and advisors. Nicaragua agreed to sign the Contadora proposal even though it called for the expulsion of Soviet bloc military advisors, reduction of the armed forces, arms cessation and a dialogue with the internal opposition. However, as expected the United States objected to it, and suggested substantial modifications, which were not acceptable to Nicaragua, as it relieved the United States of the commitment to remove its military bases and cease the backing of the Contras. However, the entire process bogged down. After 1986, the Central American countries took the matter into their own hands and President Arias of Costa Rica put forward a proposal for a Central American Peace accord, known as the Arias Plan or the Esquipulas II.

Up to the February 1990 elections, nonetheless, the Arias peace process was mainly focused on Nicaragua, and with the help of OAS and the U.N. a cease-fire was worked out between the Nicaraguan government and the Contras on March 1988, and agreed upon national elections to be held in Nicaragua no later than 25th February 1990. However, the Nicaraguan success was not repeated in El-Salvador and Guatemala.

71. *The Guardian*, 19, June 1985.
72. *The Financial Times*, 8 May 1985.
73. *The Financial Times*, 30 April 1985.
74. *The Times*, 30 April 1985; and *The Guardian*, 16 January 1986.
75. See Nicola Miller, *Soviet Relations with Latin America, 1959-1987*, Cambridge University Press, 1989. p. 214.
76. *The Times*, 11 May 1985.
77. *The Sunday Times*, 3 October 1986.
78. *The Sunday Times*, 28 June 1986.
79. *The Guardian*, 16 January 1986.
80. *The Guardian*, 16 January 1986.
81. Mary B. Vanderlaan, *Revolution and Foreign Policy in Nicaragua*, Westview Press, 1986, p. 284.
82. *The Sunday Times*, 29 October 1986.
83. *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 July 1987.
84. *The Times*, 28 June 1985.
85. Miller, op. cit. p. 214.



86. *The Sunday Times*, 3 October 1986.
87. See *Vneshniaia torgovlia SSSR*, (Moscow), years, 1985 and 1986.
88. Cited in Jonathan Steele, 'Russians deny oil crisis blame', in *The Guardian*, 26 August 1987.
89. *The Sunday Times*, 9 September 1987.
90. Pavlov, op. cit., p. 142.
91. Ibid., pp.142-43.
92. Ibid., p. 143.
93. Ibid., p. 147; also see *The Sunday Times*, 18 May 1989.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid., p. 148; also see *Pravda*, 6 October, 1989.
96. *The Sunday Times*, 18 May 1989.
97. Cited in *The Sunday Times*, 15 November 1989.
98. Pavlov, op. cit., pp. 150-51.
99. Ibid., p. 149.
100. Jan S. Adams, *A Foreign Policy in Transition - Moscow's Retreat from Central America and the Caribbean, 1985-1992*, Duke University Press, 1992, p. 124.
101. *Barricada Internacional*, 2 February 1991, p. 7.
102. Ibid.

## CHAPTER 6

**THE SOVIET ATTITUDE TO THE REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE OF THE FARABUNDO MARTI NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (FMLN) IN EL SALVADOR**

The triumph of the Nicaraguan revolution, in July 1979, gave immense encouragement to the Salvadoran and Guatemalan guerrillas who had already been engaged in a long struggle against their own incumbent, repressive, right-wing military regimes.

Indeed, soon afterwards, the Salvadoran left was poised to emulate the Sandinistas' experience. The new slogan of the guerrilla armies and political organizations was: 'if Nicaragua was victorious, so too will be El Salvador.' ( 1 ) Having realized the importance of unity among all revolutionary forces in the FSLN victory, they called upon their own various factions to unite.

Thus, the opposition forces ranging from the centre-left to far left of the political spectrum united in April 1980, into the Revolutionary Democratic Front of El Salvador (FDR). This was followed by the merger of the different guerrilla groups on 10 October 1980 - the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN) - named after the leader of the Communist Party executed by the army in 1932. The FMLN in unity with its political arm, the FDR, launched an intensive campaign which led to the general offensive on 10 January 1981. The so called "Final Offensive" intended to present the newly inaugurated US president, Roland Reagan with a *fait accompli*.

Somoza's defeat in July 1979 had also a profound effect on the Central American communist parties. The pro-Moscow Salvadoran Communist Party (Partido Comunista de El Salvador - PCS) broke with their past commitment to legal tactics to support the armed struggle strategy. In fact, the decision about this had already been made at the

Party's 7th Congress in April 1979, but it was reinforced by the Sandinista victory. The PCS was determined not to be relegated to the sidelines by the left radicals as the PSN had been by the FSLN in Nicaragua. General Secretary of the El Salvadoran Communist Party, Shafik Handal stated: 'Our decision is a bit late, but we are in time'. ( 2 ) He went further stating that the PCS was always ready to resort to revolutionary warfare at the right moment, and 'the right moment is now'. ( 3 )

The Soviets, in the wake of the Sandinista victory, fully endorsed the FMLN's tactics of armed struggle. From their point of view, El Salvador and Guatemala were the only two Central American countries where objective conditions for such struggle existed.

Having not expected the Sandinistas' victory, Moscow initially overestimated the FMLN's chances. As Fainberg said:

At first, the Soviets stated emphatically that the Salvadoran left would triumph..... Initial bravado gave way to indecisiveness. ( 4 )

Soviet Latin American analysts in their appraisals of the "Final Offensive" acknowledged that it was launched prematurely. For instance, N.S. Leonov stated that the decision of the timetable for the offensive was made in apprehension that the United States under the new Reagan administration would take a more active role against the guerrillas. Thus the revolutionaries considered this the final chance to seize power through military action alone. ( 5 ) Furthermore, it was recognized that the Salvadoran bourgeoisie proved to be more resilient than their Nicaraguan counterparts and that the

guerrillas, while enjoying mass support had failed to spark the necessary popular uprising. However, Leonov points out that despite the defeat, the guerrillas 'retained all their political and combat organizations, withdrew their armed forces in full order to operational bases, became stronger and broadened their links with the population.' ( 6 ) Overall, the insurgents did demonstrate their strength and capacity to orchestrate a coordinated country-wide offensive against far better equipped government forces.

El Salvador's revolutionary movement contrasted vividly with Nicaragua's in many aspects, most importantly in terms of the correlation of its internal forces. The oligarchic-military regimes of El Salvador and Guatemala had both enjoyed the support of their respective upper and important parts of their middle classes, whereas, in Nicaragua a large part of the "bourgeoisie camp" had always been opposed to the Somoza clan and their regime. The Somoza government eventually lost political legitimacy not only at home but also abroad. In the end it lost the support of its major backing power, the United States, which constituted an important contributory factor to its final downfall. President Carter's abandonment of the Somoza dynasty, after 1977 paralleled that of the Eisenhower administration's lack of support for Batista in Cuba throughout 1958.

Subsequently, the FSLN emerged as the dominant force in the opposition camp whose strategy was the overthrowing of the Somoza regime by force, because all other alternatives for peaceful transformation of the system had failed. Thus, the armed strategy appeared to be the only viable option to the entire opposition. In contrast, the Salvadoran regime have enjoyed full US support, especially in the wake of the Sandinista revolution. The Carter administration, just before its departure, finally abandoned its emphasis on human rights, with respect to El Salvador, and sent five million dollars worth of weapons in order to prevent the Left's victory. The Reagan administration followed this with a sharp increase in the amount of military assistance provided to the Salvadoran regime. Thus, the extremely fragmented Salvadoran

revolutionary forces were now confronted with a far more difficult military and international situation than that which had faced their Nicaraguan counterparts. Moreover, the Salvadoran government had undergone substantial changes during the period of increasing civil strife, and introduced in March 1980 some nominal land reforms, which at first glance seemed quite impressive, in comparison to attempted land reforms in the past. The expropriation of some 280 large estates as well as some smaller holdings denied the insurgents potential pockets of support.

The Reagan administration inaugurated in 1981 was determined to recapture US control over Central American affairs. The war in El Salvador was seen strictly in East-West terms, in other words as a by-product of Soviet-Cuban machinations rather than a genuine popular resistance to El Salvador's military-dominated repressive regime. The then US Secretary of State General Alexander Haig claimed that the Soviet Union had a 'hit list for the takeover of Central America'. ( 7 ) Soon after Reagan's inauguration and the "Final Offensive" in El Salvador, the US State Department issued in February 1981, a controversial White Paper, entitled 'Communist interference in El Salvador', which was alleged to have been based on documents captured from People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) and Salvadoran Communist Party guerrillas. The White Paper stated that the insurgency in El Salvador had become a 'textbook case of indirect armed aggression by the Communist powers via Cuba'. ( 8 ) President Reagan declared that the United States had to act decisively so as to deter a Soviet-Cuban threat on the US "Southern flank". By invoking national security as the rationale for committing the United States to El Salvador, Reagan argued that if the guerrillas had won, they would have established a Communist regime which would naturally ally itself to Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Soviet Union, and export violence to their neighbours. Dominoes would then had fallen north towards Mexico, and south towards the Panama Canal. He warned that the US itself could be "the last domino". ( 9 )

The White Paper alleged that over 200 tons of arms had been shipped to Salvadoran guerrillas, following a June-July 1980 arms purchasing mission by PCS Secretary General Shafik Handal to USSR, Eastern Europe, Vietnam and Ethiopia. ( 10 ) The Soviet Union was alleged to have played a major role in arranging these supplies and their transport to El Salvador via Cuba and Nicaragua. Furthermore, the White Paper claimed that Cuba had not only played a key role in unifying the Salvadoran guerrilla organizations but had also been directly assisting, with Nicaragua, the FMLN in their preparation for the "Final Offensive" .

The Soviet Union responded swiftly and firmly to the US charges. V. Vasyev, counsellor of the Soviet Embassy in Washington, publicly denied that Moscow was supplying arms to leftist guerrillas in El Salvador. However, he pointed out that the Soviet Union did supply arms to Cuba and Ethiopia. He went on to say that:

The Soviet Union is not concerned with arms shipments to [El] Salvador and that's a statement of fact. The Soviet Union is not involved and you can't pin it on us. ( 11 )

The White Paper's evidence that El Salvador's civil war was the result of direct Soviet and Cuban instigation was subsequently severely criticised, not least by a former director of the State Department's Office of Cuban Affairs (1977-1979) and the chief of the US interest section in Havana (1979-1982) Wayne Smith, who admitted that the paper had become a source of acute embarrassment to the administration by revealing its:

Shoddy research and a fierce determination to advocate the new policy, whether or not the evidence sustained it. Some of the supporting documents turned out to be forgeries. Others were of such vague origin as to be worthless. None of the documents linked the USSR to the supply of guerrilla forces in El Salvador or demonstrated that the violence there was a cause of external aggression rather than an internal conflict. ( 12 )

Moreover, John Glassman, the principal State Department author of the White Paper, acknowledged himself that it contained 'mistakes' and was 'misleading' and 'over-embellished'. ( 13 )

The White Paper also received harsh criticism from the US media, for example, The *Wall Street Journal* detailed numerous errors and distortions in the paper which suggested that there were good reasons to doubt many of its claims. *The Washington Post* followed with similar criticisms. Both reports pointed out the inconsistencies in the documents and in the government's analysis. Several of the most important documents were attributed to guerrilla leaders who did not write them. Apparently, statistics regarding arms shipment were not found in the documents, but were "extrapolated", while much of the other information in the White Paper was not in the content of these documents at all. ( 14 ) John Dinges, in the *Los Angeles Times*, and Jonathan Kwitney, in the *Wall Street Journal*, both concluded that the White Paper did not prove that the Soviets were supplying the FMLN, nor that Cuba played a central political role in the Salvadoran civil war. ( 15 ) Regarding Shafik Handal's trip to Moscow, in summer 1980, to arrange for weapons transfers, it turned out that the documents did not indicate that the USSR provided air transport for them, but did mention Handal's continues frustration with Moscow. ( 16 ) When Handal arrived in Moscow, representing not only the Salvadoran Communist Party but also the entire FMLN, no high level officials

agreed to meet him. His request for aid was not even answered. He was received only by Mikhail Kudachkin, deputy chief of the Latin American section of the Central Committee's International Department. Apparently the total reward for his trip was a free Aeroflot ticket out of the country. ( 17 ) Disappointed at this lack of interest in the Salvadoran revolutionary struggle among Soviet officials, Handal travelled on to other communist capitals where he also received no significant promises of aid. Apparently, Handal negotiated deliveries of US made weapons from Ethiopia and Vietnam, while East European countries agreed to provide communications equipment, uniforms and medical supplies. According to Nicola Miller, Moscow committed itself only to help in arranging the transfer of these supplies to Cuba and agreed to provide training to a few dozen Salvadoran recruits. ( 18 )

The FMLN received more concrete support from Havana and Managua, but hardly of the quantity or quality alleged by the State Department. Wayne Smith pointed out that while some arms had been sent from Cuba to El Salvador, the quantity was far less than alleged. Furthermore, he stated that 'if the guerrillas had received all the arms reported by US intelligence, the Salvadoran army would be outgunned 20 to 1'. ( 19 )

The White Paper's claim about Cuba's major role in the unification of the five Salvadoran guerrilla groups in late 1979 and 1980, arranged at meetings in Havana attended by Fidel Castro, again can be open to discussion bearing in mind the inconsistencies in the documents. One can ask the question whether Cuban tutelage was all that necessary, given the Nicaraguan experience and the situation on the ground. As already quoted in chapter 2, the PCS's leader Shafik Handal conceded that 'the situation in the country demanded unification of all revolutionary and democratic forces'. ( 20 ) Whatever Castro's or the Sandinistas' role was in this, it should be noted that the Salvadoran Communist Party played a significant part in the unification process.

The paper in itself confirms that Soviet policy was one of restraint. This proves the USSR's reluctance to get involved in the liberation struggle in a Third World country which was of primary security concerns to the United States and of marginal strategic interest to Moscow. According to Kiva Maidanik the reason that the Soviet Union never became directly engaged in El Salvador was because they 'believed the moral and legal aspects of intervention were far more dubious than in the Nicaraguan case'. ( 21 ) Furthermore, a decision to provide substantial material support to the high-profile Salvadoran guerrillas could have caused fears of a more general USSR revolutionary offensive and thus seriously damaged Soviet relations not only with major Latin American countries, two of which, Argentina and Brazil, were vital to Moscow being able to offset Carter's grain embargo, but worldwide.

Unlike the Soviet Union, Cuba and Nicaragua, in the spirit of regional solidarity, played a more active role in supporting the FMLN, especially in the final months of 1980, in anticipation of the January 1981 offensive. The Sandinistas in particular felt that they had a moral obligation to do so. According to several former FSLN guerrilla leaders, the FSLN was repaying a debt to the FMLN for the assistance received from them while fighting the Somoza regime. For example, in 1978 Salvadoran guerrilla organizations had donated \$10 million to the Sandinista revolution. ( 22 )

However, disappointed by the failure of the FMLN "Final Offensive" and the threat of possibility of direct US intervention forced both Cuba and Nicaragua to reevaluate their positions. Alexander Haig's pledge 'to go to the source' of the trouble gave substance to this threat. ( 23 ) As result they reduced drastically their support for the guerrillas and signalled a desire for improved relations with the United States and for a negotiated solution to the Central American conflict. The Reagan administration, however, declined to meet them at a negotiating table.

The FMLN's January 1981 fiasco prompted many Soviet area specialists to reconsider the validity of the armed struggle in the region. The moderates were cautious about the prospects for revolution in El Salvador. For example, Mikhail Kudachkin (under his pseudonym M.F. Gornov) argued, in the July 1982 issue of the *Latinskaia Amerika* journal, that the revolutionary process was still headed by the working class, represented by the Communist Parties. This conventional argument appears to be a way of saying that revolution was an unlikely prospect in that region. He described the political situations in El Salvador and Guatemala without giving endorsement to the validity of the armed struggle in either cases. Furthermore, he quoted recommendations from the declaration of the 1975 meeting of Latin American Parties in Havana which included, 'diverse forms and methods of struggle'. ( 24 )

Nevertheless, any remaining debate over tactics was clarified at the meeting of Communist and revolutionary parties held in Havana in 1982. Also, it was agreed that the armed struggle remained a valid tactic as long as the right conditions prevailed. El Salvador and Guatemala were still considered to fit this criteria. Subsequently, Guatemala was excluded following the elections there in 1985. Thus, El Salvador became the only country where doctrinally it might have been correct to support the armed struggle. Soviet and Cuban analysts came to an agreement that what the Sandinista victory really pointed to was not the efficacy of armed struggle but the need for the unity of all progressive forces. ( 25 ) In other words, the old popular-front tactics had been right, but, needed to be carried out on a larger scale.

Although the Soviet Union continued to acknowledge the existence of the proper conditions for the armed struggle in El Salvador, however, it refrained from material support for the guerrillas and advocated a negotiated settlement, since the chances of success were slim, and the costs and risks too high to make such revolutionary adventurism worthwhile. This attitude was reflected in V. Kristianov's statement in the *International Affairs* journal (June 1983) that 'complete victory ..... demands a long and

difficult struggle'. ( 26 ) With the introduction of Gorbachev's policy of "new thinking" in 1985, Moscow's advocacy for a peaceful settlement to the Central American crisis became more pronounced. Thus, the only option open to the Salvadoran guerrillas was to negotiate with the Duarte regime that could set El Salvador on the road toward peaceful transformation.

By and large, it can be said that the prevailing view of Soviet analysts and area specialists, from 1982 onwards, was rather sceptical with regard to the effectiveness of armed struggle altogether. Nikolai Vasetski in the January 1987 edition of *Latinskaia Amerika* dismissed not only the armed struggle but its practitioners, both past and present. For example, he labelled the Montoneros in Argentina, the Tupamaros in Uruguay and the M-19 in Columbia as "pseudo-radical". ( 27 ) Furthermore, M-19's famous November attack on the Palace of Justice in Bogota he described as 'an act of terrorism'. Various other groups favouring armed struggle were dismissed and defined as "Trotskyite". ( 28 )

The Cubans, keeping with the conclusions of the 1982 meeting in Havana, would appear to have continued to give some degree of support to the FMLN, though that support was never of the magnitude or importance suggested by the Reagan administration. Cuba had also pursued a cautious strategy since 1981 in respect of the Reagan administration's wish to go to 'the source' of insurgency in Central America and since April 1981 had denied shipping weapons to El Salvador. However, this is not to say that Cuba did not assist the guerrillas in obtaining the weapons on the international market. A FMLN defector, N. Romero said that he believed Cuba was responsible for coordinating much of the international support for the Salvadoran insurgents. ( 29 )

It is interesting to note, however, that Cuba had eventually preferred a peaceful solution to an outright military victory of the FMLN. With reference to this Cuban Vice-President Carlos R. Rodríguez said:

A military victory by the guerrillas now in El Salvador would provoke an immediate US reaction. [He went on saying that] although Cuba believes the guerrillas can win we consider the most opportune for El Salvador and for Latin America, for the general context, is first to begin with the principle that the guerrillas can win and second through negotiations, to avoid what might occur if they do. ( 30 )

This statement clearly demonstrates that Castro's revolutionary zeal had begun to fade away in favour of realism. It is, however, not surprising that Castro arrived at this conclusion. He must have realized by then, that Moscow was not interested in seeing yet another "Nicaragua" in the region, for both economic and political reasons. This had already been indicated through the limited support given by the USSR to the Sandinistas. Secondly, the FMLN's military victory, as Rodrigues stated, would certainly have triggered a US intervention. Also, Castro, as a realist, could see that the guerrillas had no chance of victory in the light of drastic increase in US military aid to the Salvadoran regime.

Meanwhile, having reviewed the mistakes of the "Final Offensive", the FMLN retreated back to its past strategy of a protracted popular war, and so embarked on launching attacks against the government. By 1983 the guerrillas had established, and had sustained their capacity to present a military challenge to the Salvadoran armed forces. Between 1982-1983 the army suffered very heavy casualties, leading some US military analysts to worry that the guerrillas were near victory. The FMLN had demonstrated that it was too strong both militarily and politically to be defeated by the Salvadoran army alone, despite its intensive training and heavy arming by the United

States. The Reagan administration mostly blamed the Sandinistas for the Salvadoran army failures and for the guerrillas' success. These accusations were discredited by the findings of US embassy analysts in Managua and Tegucigalpa in 1982 and 1983, which explained the lack of evidence against Nicaragua by arguing that arms were shipped in small, undetectable amounts in dug-out canoes across the Gulf of Fonseca and on mule-backs across narrow mountainous passage through southern Honduras. ( 31 ) According to Mary Vanderlaan, by 1985 top analysts of the US embassy in Nicaragua had acknowledged an apparently minor role for the FSLN. ( 32 ) Furthermore, their analyses confirmed that the gun-flow had dropped off after 1981 and that 'Nicaragua is a supermarket of last resorts' for the FMLN. ( 33 )

For their part, the Sandinista leaders themselves were open about the general support for the FMLN's cause among the Nicaraguan people and their desire to assist the insurgents. Furthermore, they claimed that if guns had been flowing through Nicaragua, this was without the government's knowledge or support. Daniel Ortega stated that on several occasions the government had stopped gun-carrying Nicaraguans heading for El Salvador. ( 34 ) The Salvadoran rebels themselves admitted that they had smuggled weapons and ammunition via Nicaragua, but these were obtained on the international market and not from the Sandinista government. ( 35 )

By invoking Lenin, the FSLN leaders argued that any popular movement had to be viable and self-reliant enough to command and arm its combatants by using its own resources. Nevertheless, the Sandinistas continued to offer political and moral support which they never denied. The FMLN, openly, had offices in Managua and some of its leaders lived there. However, as the US charges of Nicaraguan complicity in FMLN's successes on the ground increased, so did Nicaraguan fears of direct US military action against it, especially in the wake of the US invasion of Grenada in October 1983. Thus, the US pressures and threats led the Sandinista government to withdraw some of its support to the Salvadoran rebels, not only by suspending ammunition shipments but also

by restricting the FMLN's activities in Managua itself. As a result the FMLN offices were officially relocated to Mexico and by 1984 the FMLN became less visible and had lesser diplomatic status in Nicaragua. ( 36 ) However, these moves did not stop Washington's charges against the Sandinistas.

Seeking to block the alleged arms flow, and to get proof of Nicaraguan intervention the United States had controlled since 1982 an extensive military apparatus along both the Honduran-Nicaraguan and the Honduran-Salvadoran borders. The United States radar installations covered both Salvadoran and Honduran airspace and US military officials, together with officials from other respective countries as Narin described it 'map every acre of guerrilla territory with radar and infra-red computer-analysed photographs' none of which 'has produced a single consignment of incoming Cuban/Nicaraguan arms'. ( 37 ) In 1982, the Honduran army reported that it had not intercepted any major gun shipments since January 1981. ( 38 )

Moreover, Salvadoran and US military officials who were directly involved in monitoring shipments confirmed, in interviews with the *Washington Post*, the lack of evidence on the alleged arms flow. A senior US military official stated:

I wish I could say, this is what's coming in, and this is where it's coming in, and this is how much. We just don't know.....I have been wrestling with this since 1981, and I don't know much more now than I did then.  
(39)

These sources also disputed a statement made by the administration's officials as to the increase in supplies to the rebels, in summer 1984, in view of the preparation for a "Tet-style" offensive in the autumn of that year. A commander of Salvadoran army

troops said as follows: 'I think their supplies of weapons and ammunition are very low right now'. ( 40 )

These US efforts to stem arms flows to the guerrillas, were in fact of very limited success. Contrary to the US claims, Cuba and Nicaragua were not the only suppliers of arms to the FMLN, and after 1983, their supplies were restricted to insignificant amounts. For example, captured rebel notes and correspondence indicated that Nicaragua had cut back assistance following the US invasion of Grenada, which caused a concern amongst the guerrillas. The Salvadoran guerrillas, however, had many other sources of supplies which included, as Richard Feinberg pointed out: the West European and Florida arms markets, the expensive Central American black markets, and captured or purchased weapons from the Salvadoran military itself. The rebels apparently had sufficient funds from kidnappings and fund-raising in Western Europe to be able to afford the purchases through these networks. ( 41 ) Weapons reportedly had arrived by air or land from the Southern United States and via private farms in north Costa Rica. ( 42 ) Also some weapons came from corrupt officials in Honduras, Guatemala and Panama. ( 43 )

Ironically, as the evidence suggests the Reagan administration itself had become the insurgents primary, though indirect, arms supplier. This was even implied by an US official and one of the critics of the extended military aid to El Salvador, during the debate in Congress on the aid issue to that country, Mr Clarence who argued that:

More and more of our money is going down there into a situation that seems to be deteriorating,.....is that death squad murders continue in El Salvador; the judicial system is inert; troops desert and sell their arms to the guerrillas; the Salvadoran army is corrupt, and recruits by dragging young men off the street. ( 44 )



The extent of arms sales by soldiers to guerrillas was difficult to qualify. The defense undersecretary Fred Ikle estimated that half of the guerrillas' arms and a fifth of their ammunition was captured or taken from Salvadoran troops and that US-made M-16 had become the FMLN's standard weapon. ( 45 )

The administration, however, ignored this evidence and continued to blame Nicaragua and Cuba for arms deliveries and the deepening of the Central American crisis, in order to justify its own extensive aid requests, for the Salvadoran army and the Contra anti-revolutionary forces in Nicaragua, to Congress and the public. These were the means to an end of the Reagan policy objectives in Central America: to achieve military victory over the FMLN and to destabilize the Nicaraguan revolutionary government.

From the start the Reagan administration's efforts to secure the full public and Congressional support and thus financing needed to carry out its policies were hindered by the fact that a very substantial portion of the US Congress, the news media and the public in general did not accept the premise that the Central American problems derived essentially from the outside i.e. Soviet-Cuban meddling. But, on the contrary, almost all informed opinion in the United States saw the revolutionary struggle, in El Salvador and Guatemala, as a natural response to the decades of repression, exploitation and the systematic destruction of reformist politics and reformist politicians. The failure of the Salvadoran governing civilian-military junta (which came to power in the young officers' coup of 1979, staged against the repressive regime of General Romero, on the basis of bringing an end to a political system based on a tight oligarchic-military alliance) to transform itself into a liberal and democratic regime made the matter worse. Being unable to create either peace or social and economic improvements, in the sense of

carrying out meaningful land and other reforms that could stimulate the economy, the government continued to lose popular support and credibility not only within the country but also in the eyes of the United States.

Thus, the escalation of human rights violations in El Salvador and the fear that Reagan's Central American policy was dragging the US into another Vietnam, unsurprisingly, made the Congress reluctant to grant approval to the administration's further requests for military aid.

To overcome all this, President Reagan and his close aides established in July 1983 a national bi-partisan commission on Central America headed by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. The commission's findings were intended to provide the political and analytical bases for building a bipartisan consensus behind Reagan's policies. The report which was issued by the commission in January 1984, while having recognised that the Central American upheavals stemmed from poverty and repression, at the same time emphatically stressed the old Reagan assertion that the Soviet Union and Cuba were acting as both 'agents provocateurs' and financiers of revolution in the region (as usual this was more an ideological statement than a proven fact). ( 46 ) As a result the commission proposed a massive increase in the military and economic aid programme for Central America, in particular to El Salvador, where they believed that the collapse of the Salvadoran army was not inconceivable especially after the losses of September 1983. In general, the commission endorsed the US interventionist posture towards the region.

However, the report still did not seem to have changed domestic opinion or defused congressional criticism. In fact, after the invasion of Grenada (October 1983) and the April 1984 disclosures of CIA involvement in the mining of Nicaragan ports, Congressional and public opposition seemed to have been growing to at least some aspects of US policy . ( 47 )

A second initiative, taken by the US administration, was designed to defuse the discontent by the sponsoring of presidential elections in El Salvador which were intended to restore the regime's slipping legitimacy. In fact, since 1981, the US policy had centred around the creation of political legitimacy for the Salvadoran state, in order to secure bigger increases in US aid and thereby break the military stalemate in the civil war. This policy had gone through three main stages: the elections of 1982; an interim period of adjustment; and the elections of 1984. ( 48 ) However, the first elections of 1982 backfired on the United States, and produced a conservative army-controlled government, which was associated with horrible human rights violations. During the elections of 1984, the administration made sure that an acceptable civilian government would emerge led by the Christian Democratic Party (PDC). To this end the United States used public relations devices and front organizations operated by the CIA, together with the US embassy in San Salvador to work out and supervise the elections process. ( 49 ) The Reagan administration poured over \$10 million into the elections. (50 )

In this manner, elections became an integral part of US military policy. They were conducted not to create a nationally accepted government, but to create a regime that appeared more legitimate and thus more capable of mobilizing North American support to conduct military campaigns against the insurgents.

In the final vote run-off, in the May 1984 presidential elections, a leader of the right wing of the Christian Democratic party, José Napoleón Duarte defeated Roberto D'Aubuisson, the candidate of the extreme right wing ARENA (National Republican Alliance) party, which was associated with the notorious death squads.

By and large, the administration appeared to have succeed in achieving its original objectives: legitimacy for the Salvadoran regime and allocation of massive increases in

US aid. Subsequently, the administration obtained approval for \$4 million in additional military assistance for the year 1984 and \$255.9 million for 1985. ( 51 ) After 1984 the Reagan administration faced no significant congressional opposition to its massive aid programme, which eventually poured \$4.5 billion into El Salvador in the course of the 1980s. For the next five years the Congress did not even hold a serious debate about El Salvador.

However, as time passed on, the military victory over the left seemed to become elusive, despite the enormous influx of US aid and military advisers which followed Duarte's election. The improved mobility of the government's US trained troops and a heavy firepower of its rapidly expanding air force prevented the FMLN from launching a sustained offensive, however, the guerrillas did continue a war of attrition without exposing themselves to the government's superior armoury. Rather than seeking to expand their territory as before, the guerrillas tended to operate in small units, concentrating on killing army soldiers and sabotaging the economy so as to wear down the government.

The power of President Duarte and his civilian government was strictly limited. On the one hand, the PDC was restricted by its key allies - the United States and the Salvadoran military who both had been opposed to any form of negotiations with the FDR-FMLN, unless the guerrillas first laid down their arms. Given this unrealistic precondition, it was obvious that neither the United States nor the army had any real interest in negotiations; instead they were aiming at achieving a complete military victory.

Gambling on his own indispensability to both the US and Salvadoran hardliners, Duarte agreed to open a dialogue with the FDR and the FMLN, in accordance with his election pledges. The first round of talks held in La Palma followed by the meeting in Ayagualo both in November 1984 ended in a deadlock because neither side would

accept any significant modification of its initial negotiating position. The proposal put forward by the government simply demanded that the guerrillas lay down their arms and join the existing political process. Whereas, the FDR-FMLN demanded the establishment of an interim government that included their representatives prior to new elections being held. Secondly, the guerrilla army was to be incorporated into the military after the armed forces were purged of the officers responsible for human rights abuses.

The stalemate in the negotiation process continued until the Esquipulas talks in Guatemala, August 1987, that gave a new impetus to the peace process. In accordance with the Esquipulas agreement Duarte resumed negotiations with the FDR-FMLN. (52) But again no progress was made during the two meetings that took place. The assassination of Herbert Anaya, president of the Salvadoran Human Rights Commission, prompted the rebels to withdraw from the peace talks.

At the height of the presidential campaigning, in January 1989, the FMLN revealed its new peace proposal. However, in anticipation of ARENA victory at the ballot box, neither the party nor the military were willing to acquiesce in the attached conditions. (53) However, regardless of the FMLN's peace proposal being rejected and the guerrillas call on their supporters to boycott it, the FDR decided to go ahead with its participation in the electoral process with Manuel Ungo as their presidential candidate. This move marked the division between the politicians of the FDR and combatants of the FMLN.

The electoral victory of an extreme right-wing regime led by Alfredo Christiani of the ARENA Party certainly was not conducive to the peace process. Soon after assuming office the new government proposed an anti-terrorism law that criminalised virtually all forms of political dissent, including the provision of information to international human rights groups. ( 54 ) The death squads resumed their terror, and the

level of violence escalated between the opposing sides. President Christiani eventually agreed to meet the FMLN negotiators in September 1989, but the talks ended in a deadlock due to the government's intransigence.

The FMLN, therefore, was faced with a difficult problem. On the one hand, an outright military victory remained out of reach, but a political solution was still equally unattainable so long as the armed forces and the United States believed that the army was winning the war. Given this situation, the FMLN's strategy for the late 1980s, while preserving the strength of its combatants in the countryside, was to rebuild up the urban movement that had been squashed in the early 1980s by the armed forces, and thus make its fighting more effective by coordinating attacks from both fronts.

The continued lack of any prospect for a breakthrough in the ongoing negotiating process and the growing level of atrocities committed by the death squads of the extreme right prompted the FMLN to embark on mounting a new sustained offensive.

The bombing of the headquarters of the National Federation of Salvadoran Workers (FENASTRAS), a leftist trade-union federation in the late October 1989, which killed twelve union members, was the catalyst for the launching on 11 November 1989 of a major urban offensive. This was the FMLN's most aggressive offensive since the "Final Offensive" of 1981; in simultaneous action the rebels attacked military positions throughout San Salvador. ( 55 ) Without meaningful popular support and outgunned by the security forces, the rebels managed to gain and keep control of numerous neighbourhoods which constituted about one-third of the capital city. The army responded with heavy aerial attacks, bombing both FMLN strongholds and residential districts alike. By the end of the month the army had regained some ground but the guerrillas demonstrated that they were by no means defeated.

Any suggestion that the purpose of the offensive was to take power over the government, Sandinista style, was emphatically rejected by the FMLN insurgents. Instead, they insisted that their objective was to show the government and the army as well as their supporter, the United States, that they were still strong and capable of sustaining prolonged warfare. Therefore, they hoped that their endurance would eventually force the Christiani regime into introducing the substantial reforms that would limit the power of the oligarchy and the military, and thereby create the right conditions for a peaceful evolution towards democracy and social justice.

The Salvadoran government immediately accused Cuba and, in particular, Nicaragua of supplying weapons to the FMLN and suspended relations with the Sandinista regime.

It was reported that Nicaragua and Cuba had not only supplied the FMLN with significant amount of arms for the 1989 offensive, but also with missiles, which were considered particularly lethal in the Central American context. This caused alarm within the Salvadoran military and on the Capitol Hill.

Apparently, several covert arms shipments were discovered, including a van loaded with largely Soviet-made arms intercepted in Honduras in mid-October and the remains of two light planes flown from a Nicaraguan airport to El Salvador in November. One of the planes had been destroyed just after the delivery of its load, the other, a Cessna 310, had crashed in eastern El Salvador carrying a cargo of arms that included twenty four SAM-7 surface-to-air missiles. ( 56 )

The Cessna discovery occurred on 25 November 1989 just a week before the Bush-Gorbachev Summit in Malta, and so threatened the newly developed superpower cooperation in striving to improve the international political setting. The resolution of

the Central American conflict was one of the top issues to be discussed at the Summit since it was proving to be an obstacle in furthering detente between the two countries.

In the light of confirmed evidence that the plane with missiles took off from Managua, both Cuba and Nicaragua were upbraided by the Soviets for ignoring Moscow's earlier requests not to send weapons to the FMLN insurgents.

Cuba apparently had sent the consignment of arms destined for the rebels, using Nicaraguan territory with the complicity of Nicaraguan army and party officials, who may not have informed the nine members of Nicaragua's National Directorate. ( 57 ) However, both sides denied that the deliveries had taken place. Iuri Petrov, the Soviet ambassador to Havana, was adamant in insisting that Castro was telling the truth, but it became evident that Castro wilfully misled the USSR. ( 58 )

Furthermore, there was a suspicion in the Kremlin that the FMLN's offensive of 1989 and the deliveries of the Soviet-made weapons to the rebels were timed to coincide with preparations for the Gorbachev-Bush December summit in Malta. ( 59 ) This seems to be a plausible argument taking into consideration Castro's resentment towards the application of "new thinking" in Central America, i.e. the abandonment of solidarity with the revolutionary struggle in favour of *détente* with 'imperialists' - the United States. This was further confirmed when the USSR Foreign Ministry, commenting on the 1989 offensive, for the first time ever publicly criticised the FMLN rebels along with the Salvadoran army. While the latter was denounced for their indiscriminate use of power and the artillery, the former was denounced for carrying out offensives in densely populated urban areas. Moreover, in February 1990, Shevardnadze accepted Baker's proposal to express jointly the opposition of the United States and the Soviet Union to the use of any Central American state's territory for rendering assistance to irregular forces in the area, and to support the Central American

presidents' appeal that all states outside the region end such military assistance to these forces.

It can be argued that Cuba not only planned to spoil superpower cooperation but also to hinder Soviet diplomatic efforts to establish relations with the Salvadoran regime, which was announced by the Soviets in 1989, without prior consultations with Castro, as normally would have been done in the past. This was, no doubt, considered to be in conflict with the interests of the Salvadoran revolutionaries.

Despite the breakthrough in Nicaragua that resulted from superpower cooperation, the resolution of the Salvadoran conflict proved to be more difficult. However, the Gorbachev leadership continued to support efforts to solve the crisis by peaceful means. It pressed for international supervision of the Salvadoran conflict by such organizations as the United Nations and the Organization of American States and also increased pressure on Cuba and Nicaragua to be more cooperative.

In summary, contrary to the Reagan administration's propaganda, the Soviet Union, even in the pre-Gorbachev period, paid only lip service to the Salvadoran revolutionary struggle. This attitude was not surprising as the new hard-line anti-Soviet Reagan administration had decided to make El Salvador a testing ground of East-West relations. Whilst there may have been some arms transfers by the USSR to the FMLN, these were not substantial.

The initial enthusiasm, expressed by some USSR scholars in the year 1980, about the likelihood of the FMLN's victory, did not seem to have much resonance within the Soviet leadership, as the reception given to the leader of the Salvadoran Communist Party, Shafik Handal, shortly before the offensive, indicated.

At the 26th CPSU Congress (February 1981), soon after the ill-fated January 1981 offensive, Brezhnev made only a brief reference to the liberation struggle in Central America without mentioning the FMLN specifically. Also, there was no delegation representing the Salvadoran Communist Party at the Congress. This attitude, it can be assumed, stemmed from a desire not to undermine Brezhnev's proposed summit with the new American President, Ronald Reagan. The Soviet media coverage had also declined. ( 60 )

Ironically, as Landau pointed out, the Kremlin's Central American experts in 1982 were worried more about the conversion of leading Guatemalan Communists to the 'pro-Chinese line' than about events in El Salvador. ( 61 )

For its part, it should be noted here, the Salvadoran revolutionaries never had close ties with the Soviet Union and did not derive inspiration or assistance from the Soviet Communist Party. In fact, the majority of the guerrilla factions were anti-Soviet with the exception of the tiny Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL), and the hardliners (the old leadership that come from the Communist Party) of the Farabundo Liberation Forces (FPL). ( 62 ) However, the younger leaders of the FPL and militants with Christian activist origins were antagonistic towards the USSR and considered it corrupt and oppressive. Historically, the FPL was the group closest to Cuba and Nicaragua. But the FPL's former leader Cayetano Carpio's intransigent opposition to a political settlement had resulted in frequent tensions with Castro. ( 63 )

Furthermore, the majority of the FMLN, but, in particular, its FDR members and the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) faction preferred a policy of independent non-alignment and a mixed economy, rather than a pro-Soviet command-style economy. The ERP, the biggest and most effective fighting force, was fiercely nationalistic and suspicious of "socialist" solidarity. For example, the Cuban presence and influence in Nicaragua were strongly criticised by the ERP. ( 64 )

Moscow's contact with the guerrillas was conducted through the Salvadoran Communist Party. Therefore, the Soviet Union did not have as direct influence over the FMLN revolutionary struggle as the US administration portrayed. It was its ally, Cuba, that enjoyed this influence, since it provided the training, advisers, theory and ideology. Cuba was given much of a free hand in El Salvador, as in the rest of Central America, due to its expertise and the convergence of its policy with that of the USSR, at least until the late 1980s.

In 1988 there were increasing signs, not only that Moscow wanted to implement Gorbachev's new political thought in the Salvadoran context to end military action and seek a political settlement, but also that the Kremlin was watching Washington very closely for indications of the new Bush administration's possible readiness to help end the civil war.

By the fall of 1989, public announcements of an end to the world revolution were emanating so clearly from Moscow that Washington was hard pressed to continue blaming the Soviet Union for the crises in Central America. Since then, Cuba had become Washington's sole *bête noire*. Ironically, rather than accusing Cuba of being a proxy for Soviet expansionism in the hemisphere, as the United States did for the last three decades, Washington was pleading with the Soviets to restrain its ally.

The Soviets welcomed each step towards a final settlement, such as the successful meeting in the late September 1991 between Salvadoran President Cristiani and the FMLN representatives under the U.N. auspices. In November, when the FMLN announced that it had ceased offensive operations the Soviets were again very quick to applaud this. Throughout 1991 the Soviet foreign ministry did all in its power to help bring about a settlement of the Salvadoran armed conflict. Thus, Moscow's policy was a reflection of its earlier efforts in assisting to end the Nicaraguan civil war.

FOOTNOTES

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53. For the first time, the guerrillas agreed to participate in elections conducted by the existing government and within the framework of the existing constitution, and to cease their armed struggle regardless of the electoral result. But under the condition that the elections will be postponed for six months to allow the FMLN-FDR to mobilize its supporters for a campaign.
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## CHAPTER 7

THE SOVIET POSTURE VIS-À-VIS THE GUATEMALAN  
REVOLUTIONARY PROCESS

Encouraged by the Sandinista victory, the Guatemalan revolutionaries, like their Salvadoran counterparts, believed that they too could make a bid for power, and thus intensified their struggle against the oppressive rule of General Romero Lucas Garcia.

Ever since the US backed military coup of 1954, ( 1 ) Guatemala had been torn by a civil strife. The post-coup political situation produced the so called "*estado de excepcion*" literally translated as a state of emergency or a situation of crisis, which lasted for nearly three decades. According to Torres Rivas's description, the "*estado de excepcion*" in Guatemala was 'a counter-revolutionary state that utilized all material and ideological instruments of counterinsurgency which aimed at a total physical annihilation of the adversary'. ( 2 )

However, the counterinsurgency measures undertaken by the successive military regimes, in particular after 1965, did not succeed in exterminating the guerrillas, but instead created a resurgence of the left to the point that by the end of 1970s the armed struggle became generalized. ( 3 ) For the first time, Guatemala's majority - the Indians, constituting about 60% of the country's population, began to join the swelling guerrilla ranks. ( 4 ) Indeed, the defeated guerrillas of the 1960s had realized that no revolution would be possible without Indian participation and began to capitalize on the accumulated grievances of the Indian peasantry. ( 5 ) The increased violence against Indian villagers under the regime of General Lucas García forced the hitherto passive and exploitable Indians to support the guerrilla forces. The Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), the biggest of the four insurgent groups that came into existence in 1976, and

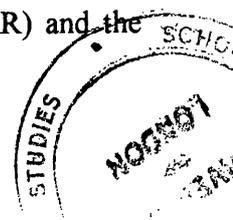
operating mainly in the western highlands inhabited by the Indian communities, benefited most from the Indian support. The Indians not only provided the recruiting ground for the guerrilla armies but also the main refuge. The guerrillas entrenched in the mountains presented the Guatemalan government with its most serious threat since the late 1960s.

In the cities, the trade unions, although still weak, had reached their highest peak in numbers and militancy since 1954. Some elements of the middle class become radicalized too. Therefore, the urban areas had become a fertile recruiting ground for the guerrilla groups who by then had abandoned the guevarist *foco* theory in favour of prolonged popular war and began their operations within these areas.

Alarmed by the growing unrest at home and in the neighbouring El Salvador, the Guatemalan government, fearing the fate of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, stepped up its atrocities not only against the guerrillas and their suspected peasant sympathizers, both Indian and ladino (of mixed European and Indian descent), but also against centrists and even moderate conservatives as well as labour union activists. ( 6 ) This unleashed brutality of the Guatemalan military was greatly encouraged by the Reagan administration's hard-line anti-communist policy.

The assassination of well-known centrist leaders of the Social Democratic Party, Alberto Fuentes Mohr and Manuel Colom Argueta, in 1979, by the government's security forces marked the destruction of the feeble political centre and further polarized the social, political and ideological life of the country. Moreover, it eliminated all hopes for a political solution and lent credence to armed solution. By early 1982 the organizations opposing the government represented a broad cross-section of Guatemalan society.

To carry out this armed struggle, the existing four guerrilla groups, the EGP, the Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA), the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR) and the



Labour Party (PGT), the PGT-Nucleo, (but itself anti-Soviet), formed the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG) in March 1982 to facilitate a more cohesive armed struggle. In January 1982 they published a declaration of unity and detailed the principal points which would characterize a revolutionary government. ( 7 ) Though unable to overcome completely the complex ideological and personal differences which fragmented the Guatemalan revolutionary movement, the initiative towards military co-ordination reflected the lessons of the Sandinista victory and the recent unification of the Salvadoran revolutionary forces. The Ché Guevara *foco* strategy was replaced by a "prolonged popular war" strategy, the gradual process of patiently building up support in town and rural areas, and laying the lines of contact and supply that are necessary for the setting up of full scale guerrilla fronts.

Following this call for unity on the part of the guerrilla forces, in February 1982, the Democratic Front Against Repression, itself a coalition of over 170 organizations, together with the Popular Front of 31 January (a group composed of the CUC, settlers' committees, and labour unions) formed the Guatemalan Committee of Patriotic Unity (GCUP) modelled on the Salvadoran FDR. They agreed with the points expressed by the guerrilla organizations. ( 8 ) The unity of all of the country's revolutionary forces into an "anti-imperialist" and anti-oligarchic front became an urgent matter for the guerrilla groups and thus they were working towards forging an alliance with these non-Marxist mass organizations, as did their Salvadoran counterparts.

The military was ruthless in its response to the increasing challenge from the revolutionary forces. The killings of the right-wing para-military death squads, whose activities could directly be traced to the office of President Garcia, had intensified. ( 9 ) Commenting on the general escalation of violence, the president alleged that it was the work of 'communists who are being directed, financed and initiated by the Cuban government'. ( 10 ) These accusations by the government were politically expedient and in tune with that of the new Reagan administration. A foreign banker said that

in tune with that of the new Reagan administration. A foreign banker said that Guatemala's military rulers: 'are following in El Salvador's footsteps, perhaps one year behind. They still think the opposition is the work of a few Communists who can be wiped out'. ( 11 )

The pro-Soviet PGT had only 750 estimated members. At the time the party had not even recovered from the losses that were inflicted upon its directorate in 1966 and 1972, which considerably damaged the PGT's organizational and leadership capabilities. ( 12 ) In addition, factionalism between those who sought to regain legal status and those who advocated the primacy of armed struggle had seriously undermined the party's internal cohesion.

In the 1960s the FAR - then a military commission of the PGT - went independent. Later, the "Leadership Nucleus" (PGT Nucleo de Direccion Nacional) and the PGT Military Commission had also broken away. ( 13 ) These dissident factions protested against the party's platform of the early 1980s which supported elections and sought to unify the anti-dictatorship movement. ( 14 ) Speaking at the Communist conference in Havana in 1982, a PGT delegate deplored the fact that although the PGT had officially endorsed the strategy at its fourth party congress in 1969, the party had so far been unable to translate this into practical action. ( 15 )

The main body of the Guatemalan Communist party, or *camarilla*, did not seem to have been influenced by Soviet endorsement of armed struggle in Guatemala. N. S. Leonov clearly stated that 'The Guatemalan people had no other choice but armed struggle for their freedom and rights'. ( 16 ) Furthermore, he was predicting that the Guatemalan upheaval would result in a bigger social turmoil, and would have a greater impact on the region.

However, the lack of Soviet influence over the Guatemalan communists was not surprising since they, like their other Central American counterparts, and Latin American respectively, had become independent from Moscow in terms of strategy and tactics. (17) Thus, they were more reluctant to follow Soviet advice about strategic shifts which at times proved to be contrary to their own interests.

The argument encountered in the literature that the USSR helped the Guatemalan and Salvadoran guerrilla movements to overcome their differences and made them integrate is not supported by any evidence. ( 18 ) The Guatemalan insurgents like their Central American counterparts had been very nationalistic, and so unwilling to take advice from outside parties.

Although there was an increase in insurgency activities since the guerrillas achieved unity, they had not been able to carry out an effective coordination of military operations against the Guatemalan military forces on a scale of that of their Salvadoran counterparts. There were two major reasons for that: firstly, the guerrillas, as Leonel Giraldo pointed out: 'lacked the true unity and coordination, ( 19 ) secondly, the Guatemalan military, no doubt, proved to be stronger and better trained, and perhaps more brutal, than the Salvadoran forces, thanks to extensive US military assistance in the 1960, and 1970s until it was suspended in 1977 by the Carter administration in respect of human rights violation. ( 20 ) The Guatemalan leaders chose, for the time being, to seek aid elsewhere rather than be answerable to the United States. They turned to Israel, Argentina and other anti-communist allies. However, the Reagan administration resumed the military aid at the beginning of 1983, worth £4 million, ( 21 ) on the grounds that the human rights situation has improved in Guatemala since General Ríos Montt acceded to power. At the time, according to Amnesty International, Guatemala had the worst record of human rights abuses in the region.

General Montt who was brought to power in a military coup shortly after the fraudulent elections of March 1982, continued to pursue the brutal counter-insurgency campaign initiated by Benedicto Lucas, President's García brother and the then defence minister, with a ferocity. To deprive the guerrillas of shelter and support, the military occupied villages throughout the highlands and went on a killing spree against all peasants suspected of "subversive" tendencies. The second stage that followed this "scorched earth" operation, was to win the hearts and minds of the remaining Indian peasants by organizing food for work programmes, setting up civil defence patrols under the army command, and strategic hamlets to control the movement of the rural population. ( 22 ) As a result, the army successfully managed to pacify the highland Guatemala of suspected communists. Tens of thousands of their Indian inhabitants were killed and hundreds of their villages burnt; many of the survivors were forced to move to "model villages" and join the civil patrols. Thus, the Guatemalan military succeeded in driving the guerrillas from most of their strongholds.

Devoid of Indian support, the guerrillas forces of the Guatemalan Revolutionary Union were seriously weakened and they had not been able to recover the strength that they had enjoyed in the early 1980s (numbering then approximately 12.000). ( 23 ) Furthermore, the election of the civilian president, Vinicio Cerezo in January 1985, who promised to democratize the Guatemalan society by ending human rights abuses, granting full freedom to political and labour movements, ridding off the death squads and to improve living standards of workers and Indian peasants had further eroded the guerrillas' support, both in the countryside and the in the city. By 1987 the guerrilla forces numbered only some 2000 men. ( 24 )

Moreover, apart from these main reasons which prevented the insurgents from sustaining a major attack against the government forces, their failure can also be attributed to the fact that the Guatemalan guerrillas had not received as much international support and attention as their Salvadoran counterparts, be it from Cuba and

its allies or the Socialist International; though, the Guatemalan government and the Reagan administration claimed otherwise to justify their policies. For example, President Lucas Garcia charged that 'there is an international plot, abetted by Cuban guerrillas, to establish "a communist regime" in Guatemala'. ( 25 )

There has been no evidence suggesting Soviet military supplies or any significant involvement with the Guatemalan guerrillas apart from moral support expressed in media commentaries and academic writings. Even the infamous White Paper published by the Reagan administration, discussed at length in the preceding chapter, did not make any explicit reference to USSR's military deliveries to the URNG.

It seems that, in spring 1982, the first URNG delegation visited the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe ( 26 ), most probably to seek military assistance. According to Fernando Lopez-Alvez, Moscow did not fulfil its promises of military aid to Guatemalan guerrillas. ( 27 ) Apparently, such promises in the past were not met either. For example, in January 1966, a Soviet delegate to the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America publicly stated that the Soviet Union was about to render assistance to guerrilla forces in Venezuela, Peru, Columbia and Guatemala. But two years passed by and it was still not forthcoming. ( 28 ) The USSR was apparently known for its unreliability as a donor among the Latin American revolutionaries which made the Central American guerrillas sceptical about the real significance of Soviet endorsement of armed struggle in the region and its interest in the liberation struggle. ( 29 )

This was indeed confirmed when, for example, the Soviet Union expressed willingness to establish diplomatic relations with the new Guatemalan government of Cerezo in the light of continued military and political repressions against the left. Since 1986 Moscow had maintained official contacts with the Guatemalan government, which caused surprise and concern among the leadership of the Guatemalan guerrillas. ( 30 ) The cordial reception of Guatemalan parliamentary delegation in the Kremlin in 1987

was not well received either. The restoration of diplomatic relations with all the Central American governments and cooperation towards peace in the region was higher on the Soviet agenda of the late 1980s than the promotion of armed struggle.

The USSR viewed positively the URNG's first peace talks with the Guatemalan government that took place in Madrid (October 1987). ( 31 ) The Soviet government publicly pledged its support for ending hostilities in Guatemala. Speaking for the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ian Burliai, deputy chief of the Directorate of Latin American Affairs, said that the guerrilla leaders and President Vinicio Cerezo appeared to be ready to 'search for mutually acceptable agreements', and that 'the Soviet Union welcomes these intentions'. ( 32 ) Shortly after, the outcome of a meeting in Oslo between the opposing sides was praised by Burliai as steps in the direction of eventually ending Guatemala's civil war:

One would like to hope that the spirit of democratic changes, which is becoming established in Central America, and the examples of the Nicaraguans, in holding democratic and free elections and entering into the process of handing over power to the opposition, will have the appropriate influence on the opposing sides in Guatemala and will spur them on to engage more actively in seeking political methods of resolving the problems of their country. ( 33 )

The foreign ministers of both countries worked together consistently to improve state-to-state relations that were broken off thirty seven years ago, when President Arbenz was ousted from power. On 3 January 1991, the Guatemalan Foreign Ministry announced the reestablishment of full diplomatic relations with the USSR.

The lack of Soviet interest in the Guatemalan revolutionary movement was not matched by Castro who had maintained the links with the guerrillas since the 1960s. However, the allegation by some western scholars, ( 34 ) that the pattern of his aid to the URNG had resembled the course followed in Nicaragua and El Salvador is grossly overestimated.

Although it is difficult to determine the extent of Cuba's actual involvement in the Guatemalan civil war, there seems to be a general agreement that Castro was instrumental in bringing together these deeply divided Guatemalan insurgent groups to forge a unity, and also had provided them with some military training and advice. ( 35 ) Also, Cuba might have assisted the guerrillas with obtaining arms on the international market, but there is no solid evidence of Cuba's direct military supplies to the guerrillas, except for the speculation by some American academics. However, if there was any, that would have been of insignificant amount and perhaps channelled through the Salvadoran guerrillas. The Guatemalan revolutionary forces had been a less likely candidate for Cuban aid than their Salvadoran counterparts. The reason for this was that they had been more divided politically, less organized, and enjoyed far less popular support than the FMLN, not to mention the solid popular support the Sandinistas enjoyed in the last months before the victory. So, had the Cubans been following the pattern established in Nicaragua and El Salvador (before the final offensive of 1981), they would have withheld arms deliveries until Havana determined that the time was right for the revolution in Guatemala. The guerrillas' setback of the late 1982 and early 1983 confirmed the concern about Guatemala's readiness.

In summary, as in El Salvador, the Soviets did not pay much attention to the guerrilla struggle in Guatemala, except for the initial euphoria among the academics. This too faded away after the successful counterinsurgency operation in late 1982 carried out by the Guatemalan military. There has been no evidence suggesting any direct or indirect Soviet military deliveries. If on the other hand Cuba or Nicaragua made any deliveries,

then this probably would have been on their own initiative, and most likely to have been transferred through the Salvadoran guerrillas.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Chapter 1, pp. 17-21; also Stephen Shlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, London, 1982.
2. According to Edelberto Torres-Rivas - the "estado de excepcion" is 'a variation of a military dictatorship, emerging in response to a particular kind of political and economic crisis and characterized by its continuous difficulty in maintaining order by legal means', (Edelberto Torres-Rivas, 'Problems of Democracy and Counterrevolution in Guatemala', in Wolf Grabendorff, Heinrich-W. Krumwiede and Jorg Todt (eds.), *Political Change in Central America - Regimes and Regime Transformation*, Westview Press, 1984, p. 117.)
3. The Guatemalan guerrilla movement began to take shape during the early 1960s, and it took roots in rural zones in the country's north-east between 1965-66. It was temporarily crushed between 1966-1970.
4. James Painter, *Guatemala - False Hope, False Freedom*, Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1987, p. xvi; see also *The New York Times*, 28 January 1980, and *The Guardian*, 29 April 1981.
5. The Guatemalan Indians having been oppressed, exploited and discriminated for centuries had been eventually awoken politically through the work of priests, nuns, missionaries and guerrillas.

*The New York Times*, 24 August 1980; see also T.V. Goncharova, 'Latinoamerikanskije Marksisty o Putiakh Natsional'nogo Formirovaniia', *Latinskaia Amerika*, September, 1985, pp. 8 & 10.

6. *New York Times*, 20 March 1980.

From August to May 1981 about seventy seven Christian Democrat Party officials were killed. The union and the peasant leaders suffered the biggest casualties. In 1980 alone, 110 union leaders were killed along with 300 peasant leaders. In the words of former Guatemalan Vice-President, Villagran Kramer; 'Death or exile is the fate of those who fight for justice in Guatemala'. (Gordon L. Bowen, 'Guatemala; The Origins and Development of State Terrorism' in Donald E. Schulz and D.H. Graham (eds.), *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Central America and the Caribbean*, Westview Press, 1984, p.288.)

7. See Jan L. Flora and Edelberto Torres-Rivas (eds.), *Sociology of Developing Societies - Central America*, 1989, p. 122; also see *Pravda*, 12 February 1982, p.1. and Leonel Giraldo, *Centro America - Entre Dos Fuegos*, Editorial Norma, Bogota, 1984, pp.144-45.
8. Giraldo, op. cit., pp. 122-23; see also *The Financial Times*, 19 February 1982.
9. *International Herald Tribune*, 11 February 1982.

10. Cited in Daniel L. Premo, 'Guatemala', in Robert Wesson (ed.), *Communism in Central America and the Caribbean*, Hoover Institution Press, 1982, pp. 83-84.
11. Cited in *The New York Times*, 20 March 1980.
12. Premo, op. cit., p. 82.
13. Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davis, Case study, 'Guatemala', in Ernesto Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, Manchester University Press, 1985, p. 235.
14. *Ibid.*, p.83.
15. See in the September issue of *Latinskaia Amerika*, 'Vstrechi: Interv'iu - Gvatemala: Otnositel'noe Ravnovesie Sil - Beseda s Predstaviteliami Natsional'nogo Revoliutsionnogo Edinstva Gvatemaly - Andrea Ramires i Rosoi Arenas', September 1982, pp. 57-61.
16. N.S. Leonov, 'Trevogi i Nadezhdy Gvatemaly', *Latinskaia Amerika*, July 1982, p. 43.
17. See Fernando Lopez-Alves, 'Soviets and Insurgents in Latin America: A Third World View', in Augusto Varas (ed.), *Soviet - Latin American Relations in the 1980s*, Westview Press, 1985, p. 95.
18. See, for instance, Robert S. Leiken, 'Soviet and Cuban Policy in the Caribbean Basin' in Shulz and Graham (eds.), op. cit., p. 461 and Wesson (ed.), op. cit., p.84.

This alleged Cuban-Soviet complicity was also the official position of the Guatemalan and U.S. governments.

19. Giraldo, op. cit., p. 146.
20. To assist Guatemala in its counterinsurgency operations in the 1960s, the U.S. military aid averaged to \$2 million annually between 1962 and 1969. The evaluation of the effectiveness of this aid written in 1977 stated:  
'Over the past twenty years, U.S. military aid to Guatemala, even in its comparatively small scope, has contributed to institutional improvements in the Guatemalan armed forces. These forces are now better organized, equipped, trained, and staffed; they are more capable of fulfilling their military function'.  
(Ernest Evans, 'Revolutionary Movements in Central America: The Development of a New Strategy', in Howard J. Wiarda, *Rift and Revolution-The Central American Imbroglia*, American Enterprise Institute, 1984, p. 180.)
21. *The Financial Times*, 8 January 1983.
22. See Flora and Rivas (eds.), op.cit., pp. 124-28.

23. *The Financial Times*, 4 July 1990.
24. *The Guardian*, 7 October 1987.
25. Premo, op. cit., p. 85.
26. Henrik Bishof, 'The Socialist Countries and Central American Revolutions' in Grabendorff, Krumwiede and Todt (eds.), op. cit., p. 242.
27. Fernando Lopez-Alvez, op. cit., p. 95.
28. Ibid.
29. See ibid.
30. Iuri Pavlov, *Soviet-Cuban Alliance 1959-1991*, Transaction Publishers, 1994, p. 148.
31. B. N. Grishin, 'Gvatemala v Ozhidanii Peremen', *Latinskaia Amerika*, January 1988, p. 34.
32. *TASS*, 27 February 1990.
33. *TASS*, 3 April 1990.
34. See, for example, Leiken, op. cit., p.461.
35. See, for example, Giraldo, op. cit., p. 145; also Raul Sohr, *Centroamérica en Guerra*, Alianza Editorial Mexicana, 1988.

## CHAPTER 8

**CONCLUSION**

The examination of the Soviet policy towards Central America in the preceding chapters leads one to a conclusion that the Soviet Union did not intend to establish socialism in Nicaragua or a second "Cuba", nor to promote a social revolutionary change in El Salvador and Guatemala, but merely to cause problems for the United States.

Indeed, by the time the Nicaraguan revolution had taken place the Soviet view of the Third World and its liberation struggle was beginning to change. This stemmed from both internal and external factors, the declining impact of ideology on the Soviet perception of the Third World and the need to reverse the economic decline in the Soviet Union.

The prospects for transition to "real socialism" among the "socialist oriented" and "revolutionary democratic" states and the Soviet capacity to aid such a transition were questioned by many theoreticians. It was recognised that the economic, social and political underdevelopment of most of the radical states seriously impeded the advance along the progressive path. Furthermore, the close ties of those countries with the capitalist markets and the economic costs to disrupt them in order to form an alternative economic order, which was the socialist international division of labour, were fully acknowledged. Even the most progressive of these states, the "revolutionary democracies" with "vanguard parties" did not display a firm desire to implement far-reaching social transformation and had vacillated in their foreign policies. ( 1 )

The viewpoint that the USSR should develop ties with those countries of the Third World that chose the capitalist path of development but wishing to develop non-

dependent or "nationalist" type of capitalism seemed to have been gaining a prominence. Some of these countries had developed successful economies, like the newly industrialised countries or NICs - Soviet economic cooperation with them was more beneficial and less risky than a policy of confrontation with the West. ( 2 ) Indeed, those views had begun to have some influence on the Brezhnev leadership.

Thus, towards the end of his rule Brezhnev began to pay more attention to the states that were not "socialist oriented". He, for example, had voiced the 'important place that India occupied in the USSR's relations with liberated countries, and he promised that interaction with peace loving independent India would remain an important area of Soviet foreign policy'. ( 3 )

The adoption of this line clearly demonstrates that ideology was losing its importance in favour of pragmatism in Soviet Third World policy.

The Brezhnev leadership was very cautious and slow in responding to the opportunity that was unfolding in Central America with the victory of the Sandinista revolution, though it was greeted with great enthusiasm by the Kremlin's ideologues. ( 4 )

Although the Soviet Union gradually expanded its presence in Nicaragua in both military and economic spheres, at no time was there an indication that Moscow wanted to shoulder another "socialist" burden in the Third World in an area of little strategic importance. ( 5 ) In 1982 and 1983 successive visits by the Nicaraguan leaders to Moscow were not very productive in terms of concrete economic assistance. When in November 1982 Daniel Ortega and other top ranking Sandinista leaders attended Brezhnev's funeral, they realized that neither his successor, Andropov, nor any other Soviet leader was interested in increasing aid substantially.

It is interesting to note that by 1983, about one half of Nicaragua's economic assistance came from Western Europe and Latin America, and only 20% from Communist countries including Cuba. ( 6 ) However, in the spirit of international solidarity and in maintaining its own prestige, Moscow was obliged to provide some economic and military assistance to ensure that the Sandinista revolutionary government had the minimum necessary means to defend its revolution in the face of growing hostilities both, internally and externally, i.e., the counter-revolutionary forces and the United States respectively.

Moscow, of course, did not want to appear as abandoning a country struggling for the survival of a revolutionary process. But Cuba, its close ally, on one occasion thought otherwise. Chernenko's refusal to authorize a Soviet naval flotilla to approach Nicaraguan waters after a Soviet oil vessel was damaged by a mine while entering the Pacific harbour, Puerto Sandino, annoyed Castro. He, therefore, urged Moscow to have the flotilla proceed to Nicaragua as a sign of the Soviet military and political backing for the FSLN government. However, his request was turned down. ( 7 )

This incident, undoubtedly, exemplifies the dilemma faced by the Soviet leadership in the formulation of its policy towards the country with a geopolitical location such as Nicaragua, i.e. between granting assistance to enable the survival of the revolution and the possibility of risking confrontation with the United States.

The Soviet leadership made clear to the Sandinistas that in the event of US invasion, it would not commit its own combat troops to the preservation of their regime, except for political and moral support. For example, a senior official of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, Iurii Fonkin, at a Press Conference in Managua (3rd August 1983), when asked a question about a Soviet response to United States invasion, replied: "We will support Nicaragua politically in every way". ( 8 ) A similar response was given by Moscow's

ambassador to Nicaragua; and one of the Soviet officials put it even more bluntly: "If the Americans invaded Nicaragua, what would we do? What could we do? Nothing". ( 9 )

After the invasion of Grenada in November 1983, to calm the Sandinista fear of not being adequately equipped if they were the next target, the Soviet arms shipments increased substantially. However, no MiG fighter aircraft was ever provided in spite of repeated FSLN requests.

The view that the expansion of Soviet-Nicaraguan ties was directly linked to the bellicose attitude of the Reagan administration, is shared by some Western analysts and confirmed by some Soviet specialists, is valid. According to Kiva Maidanik, the Soviet leadership's interpretation was that the Reagan policy in 'Central America and everywhere else was precisely world-scale oriented and aimed to challenge the USSR through third parties', and thus Kremlin acted accordingly. ( 10 )

It cannot be denied that this limited Soviet investment in a remote and strategically unimportant place like Nicaragua served some usefulness in the realm of political tactics. At the beginning of the 1980s Moscow was faced with difficult problems in its immediate sphere of influence, such as Afghanistan and Poland. The political developments in Afghanistan following the military coup of April 1978 eventually led to the Soviet invasion in December 1979, which in turn led to the end of detente with the West. Meanwhile the eruption of the Polish crisis in summer 1980 threatened political stability across socialist Eastern Europe. Thus, the opportunity to project the Soviet power in the US "strategic backyard" in order to divert American attention and resources from the area of high strategic importance to the USSR could not have come at the better time. So, as the United States tried to get Moscow bogged down by the steady increase of military aid to the Afghan "freedom fighters" or *Mojaheddins* and giving some support to the Solidarity movement in Poland, the Soviets in turn wanted to tie down the US in

Central America and to ensure that any U.S. intervention in Nicaragua would be a long and bloody affair rather than a repeat of Grenada.

However, the ideas promoted by Gorbachev's policy of "new thinking" about the interdependence of the world and the need to settle international disputes by peaceful means had important consequences for Soviet policy towards Central America.

Thus, by the end of 1988 Moscow ceased its military deliveries to Nicaragua and cooperated with the United States and other regional powers to bring an end to the crisis. Furthermore, pressure was put on Castro and the Sandinistas not to deliver arms to any party in the region. However, Moscow was not successful in this respect. It turned out that both countries prior to the important superpower summit related to regional conflicts in Malta (December 1989), were involved in supplying weapons to the Salvadoran guerrillas for their second major offensive launched in November 1989. This behaviour was a further proof that Cuba was not acting at the behest of the Soviet Union in Central America, contrary to what has often been emphasised.

With regard to Central America and the Caribbean, it is clear that Cuba had acted independently and as a kind of revolutionary tour guide and mentor for the USSR. In both Nicaragua and Grenada, it was Cuba rather than the Soviets who took the lead but it was the latter who provided the money, arms and the overall oversight.

The extent of Soviet involvement in Central America has been overestimated by many western commentators. However, the instability, civil war and revolution in the isthmus were not caused by Soviet interference, but once a revolutionary government assumed power then Moscow provided the military means to help ensure its physical survival. It was this assistance which ultimately led to the possibility of increased political influence and leverage for the Soviet Union. Even then, this was limited and tentative.

For the USSR the region had always been of marginal importance in economic, political and geostrategic terms. Thus, the mounting civil war in El Salvador and the turbulence in Guatemala in the early 1980s, remained low on the list of Soviet priorities. The revolutionaries of the respective countries did not get more than moral and political support. The Kremlin exercised caution in dealing with the area that lies within the sphere of US vital interests. Moreover, they could have become immensely dependent and costly clients like Cuba. Leaders from Brezhnev to Gorbachev were well aware of this. So, rather reluctantly and without the enthusiasm and the military engagement of the 1960s, the Soviet Union became involved in Nicaragua. However, their considerable military and economic assistance as well as diplomatic support were given without any ideological shift on their part.

Overall, Soviet policy towards the region from the beginning of the 1980s was wholly dominated by the relationship with the United States and not by ideological considerations.

FOOTNOTES

1. David E. Albright, 'The USSR and the Third World in the 1980's', *Problems of Communism*, March-June 1989, p. 54.
2. Ibid., pp. 54-56.
3. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 57.
4. Such as Andrei Kirilenko and Boris Ponomarev, who viewed this developments in Central America as the increasing weakness of imperialism.
5. From the strategic point of view, Cuba provided whatever benefits Moscow wanted to have in the Caribbean Basin in terms of the facilities for serving Soviet submarine operations in Western Atlantic.
6. C.G. Jacobsen, 'Soviet Attitudes Towards, Aid to and Contacts with Central American Revolutionaries', in Bruce D. Larkin (ed.), *Vital Interests - The Soviet Issue in U.S. Central American Policy*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1988, p. 317.
7. *International Herald Tribune*, 25 March 1985.
8. Cited in Jacobsen, *op. cit.*, p. 300.
9. Cited in Jonathan Steele, *The Limits of Soviet Power - The Kremlin's Foreign Policy - Brezhnev to Chernenko*, Penguin Books, 1984. p. 220.
10. Kiva Maidanik, 'The Ideological Aspects of Soviet Relations with Latin America' in Edme Dominguez R. (ed.) *The Soviet Union's Latin American Policy*, Center for Russian and East European Studies - Goteborgs Universitet, 1995, p. 31.

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