STUDY PROJECT

THE CONTRAS AS A U.S. POLITICAL INSTRUMENT AND THEIR IMPACT ON CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOSE N. LARA A.

11 APRIL 1990

U.S. ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE BARRACKS, PA 17013-5050

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM

1. REPORT NUMBER
2. GOVT ACCESSION NO.
3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER

4. TITLE (and Subtitle)
The Contras as a US Political Instrument and their Impact on Central American Countries

5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED
Study Project

6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER

7. AUTHOR(s)
Jose N. Lara, LTC

8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)

9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS
U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050

10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS

11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS
Same

12. REPORT DATE
11 April 1990

13. NUMBER OF PAGES
40

14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS(if different from Controlling Office)

15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report)
Unclassified

15a. DECLASSIFICATION DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE

16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report)
Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)

18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)

20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)
In Nicaragua, after the Sandinista overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship, a Marxist-Leninist government was established. The new government became a threat not only to the neighboring countries but also to the United States national interests of keeping the peace and promoting democracy in the area and stopping the Soviet ideological expansionism in the region. The United States decided to use the Contras (Nicaraguan Resistance) as a political instrument in order to overthrow the regime or compel it to come back to a democracy. The purpose of this study is to examine the dimensions of this strategy and its impact

on Central American countries.

USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

THE CONTRAS AS A U.S. POLITICAL INSTRUMENT AND THEIR IMPACT ON CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Lieutenant Colonel Jose N. Lara A.

Colonel John N. Sloan
Project Adviser

U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013
11 April 1990

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Jose N. Lara A., LTC, Honduras

TITLE: The Contras as a U.S. Political Instrument and Their Impact on Central American Countries

FORMAT: Individual Study Project

DATE: 11 April 1990 PAGES: 40 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

In Nicaragua, after the Sandinista overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship, a Marxist-Leninist government was established. The new government became a threat not only to the neighboring countries but also to the United States national interests of keeping the peace and promoting democracy in the area and stopping the Soviet ideological expansionism in the region. The United States decided to use the Contras (Nicaraguan Resistance) as a political instrument in order to overthrow the regime or compel it to come back to a democracy. The purpose of this study is to examine the dimensions of this strategy and its impact on Central American countries.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE CONTRAS AS A U.S. POLITICAL INSTRUMENT AND THEIR IMPACT ON CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONTRAS

In Nicaragua, the President General Anastasio Somoza Debayle, a dictator who ruled the country for 43 years, was overthrown in 1979 and replaced by a government controlled by Sandinista leftists.

United States policy following the revolution was to encourage the new government to keep its promise of political and economic pluralism. However, the new regime declared that Marxism-Leninism was the guide of the Nicaraguan revolution and became increasingly anti-American and autocratic; began to support the subversion in El Salvador; and turned toward Cuba and the Soviet Union for political, military, and economic assistance.

The main logistic support for the subversion in El Salvador came from the communist bloc, through Cuba and Nicaragua. Captured guerrilla documents show Nicaragua functioning as a main logistic base supporting the subversion with 90 percent of weapons and ammunition required to support its operations.[1] They were practicing the characteristic internationalism of the Marxist faith, by assisting other Marxist groups.

> By May 1981, U.S. officials in Washington had concluded that the ties between Salvadoran guerrilla leaders were as strong as ever. Indeed, Salvadoran guerrilla leaders were making public appearances in Managua, which was the headquarters of their high command. Among other Salvadoran guerrilla undertakings in Nicaragua was the tower and operations center for their clandestine radio station, on the side of the Cosiguina Volcano, just across the Gulf of Fonseca from El Salvador.[2]

At the beginning of 1981 the Nicaraguan government secretly received about thirty T55, soviet built tanks from Algeria, which was the beginning of the most powerful tank force buildup in the Central American region.

Tomas Borge, in a speech about Nicaragua's arms buildup in mid-1981 said:

> Whatever the brand might be, from whatever part of the world, we don't have to explain to anyone where those arms, those rifles, those cannons come from. They are going to defend the revolution and the people.[3]

By 1980, after the split, the National Guardsmen (La Guardia Nacional) led by Enrique Bermudez, made some connections in Argentina and, using their old name, Fifteenth of September Legion (Legion 15 de Septiembre), sent a group of ex-guardsmen to this country for training and advice. In the meantime, Jose Francisco Cardenal and a group of civilians came up with an organization called the Nicaraguan Democratic Union (Union Democratica Nicaraguence), which in late 1980 wrote the statutes of the organization and created a military arm called the Nicaraguan Revolutionary Armed Forces (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Nicaraguences). This was the beginning of the Contras as a fighting force against the Sandinista regime.

In early 1981, the Contras started to fight. Their military actions were concentrated in Jinotega, along the Honduras border. In spite of the little impact on the Sandinista Government from those on the outside conspiring against them, the Contras were operating on the theory that their activities would help as a support to the people in the eventual internal uprising, and when that happened the political and economic support needed to overthrow the Sandinist Government would come from the outside.

THE U.S. CONGRESS FUNDING DECISIONS

The Sandinista government became a threat to the United States national interests of keeping the peace and promoting democracy in the area and stopping the Soviet ideological expansionism in the region. Therefore the United States decided to use the Contras as a political instrument in order to overthrow the regime or compel it to establish a democracy.

By December 1981, the United States had begun supporting the Nicaraguan Contras. According to presidential decisions, and with funds appropriated by Congress, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was the government agency responsible for feeding, clothing, arming and supervising the Contras.

In spite of the assistance provided by the United States government, the Contras were unable to win any popular support or military victories within Nicaragua. The Sandinista Government did not look like the Contras were causing it any kind of problems. It complained about the attacks conducted by the Contras only when this served as apolitical benefit; otherwise they pointed these attacks out as "insignificant inconvenience."[4]

According to the opinion polls in the United States, the majority of the American public was not supportive of the Contra policy. The opponents of the Reagan Administration policy feared that the involvement of the United States in overthrowing the Sandinista government could easily lead to a Latin American version of Vietnam. Karl Grossman, at the conclusion of his book, Nicaragua: America's New Vietnam? pointed out:

> What the United States is up to in Nicaragua is illegal immoral and impractical. And if it escalates, and the Reagan administration seems to have a compulsive desire to have it escalate, a Vietnam-style war is what would be ahead.[5]

On the other hand, supporters of the Reagan administration policy feared that without the United States support, the Contras would fail, yielding to the Soviets a dangerous toehold in Central America. In September 1983, President Reagan's Under Secretary of State said:

> We want to prevent the expansion of totalitarian regimes particularly Leninist ones, since they will import Stalinist police systems and bring in Soviet bases. There are two more reasons why Leninist regimes are particularly dangerous: once entrenched, they tend to become irreversible and they usually seek to export totalitarism to other nations . . . we must prevent the consolidation of a Sandinista regime in Nicaragua . . . if we cannot

> prevent that, we have to anticipate the partition of Central America. . . . On the other hand, if we signal that we are afraid of victory over the forces of violence, if we signal that we have opted for protracted failure, we will only encourage the Soviets to redouble their effort. . . .[6]

By FY 1983 Congress prohibited Contra aid for the purpose of overthrowing the Sandinista government, and all the aid to the Contras in FY 1984 was reduced to $24 million.

The Amendments supported by the House Intelligence Committee Chairman to limit funding for the Contras were known as "Boland Amendments" and the first two of them stated:

> Boland 1: No funds can be used by the Defense Department or the CIA to furnish military equipment, military training or advice . . . for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua or provoking a military exchange between Nicaragua and Honduras.
>
> Boland 2: Granted $24 million for use by Defense, the CIA or other Intelligence agencies for supporting, directly or indirectly, military or paramilitary operations in Nicaragua.[7]

The Reagan administration kept exerting pressure on the Nicaraguan government and on April 6, 1984, the President authorized the mining of Nicaraguan harbors, an action carried out by a CIA unit and without adequate notification to Congress, bringing up as a result public criticism and the subsequent loss of the support of the Administration's Contra policy within Congress. These negative feelings toward supporting the Contras and the execution of covert operations in Central America built up pressure within Congress which exercising its constitutional power over appropriations, on October 3, 1984, passed the third Boland amendment, cutting off all funds for the Contras' military and paramilitary operations. It stated:

> Boland 3: During FY 1985, no funds available to the CIA, DoD, or any other agency or entity of the U.S. involved in intelligence activities may be obligated or expended for the purpose or which would have the effect of supporting directly or indirectly, military or paramilitary operations in Nicaragua by any nation, group, organization, movement, or individual.[8]

On August 8, and December 5, 1985, the Congress passed the fourth and fifth Boland amendments, respectively appropriating $27 million for humanitarian assistance to the Contras via the State Department and authorizing secret direct military and paramilitary aid to the Contras. It annulled the prohibition on indirect military or paramilitary aid.

On June 26, 1986, a $100 million aid to the Contras was approved. Seventy million was for military aid, and $30 million was for humanitarian aid. In November, 1986, the Iran-Contra scandal came up, signaling the beginning of the end of the Contras' full support.

ENDNOTES

1. Galileo Conde, El Salvador: A Communist Objective, Carlisle Barracks, U.S. Army War College, 1986, p. 9.

2. Shirley Christian, Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family, New York, Vintage, 1986, p. 227.

3. Ibid., p. 228.

4. Ibid., p. 230.

5. Karl Grossman, Nicaragua: America's New Vietnam?, New York, The Permanent Press, Sag Harbor, N.Y., 1984, p. 195.

6. Robert S. Leiken and Barry Rubin, The Central American Crisis Reader, New York, Summit Books, 1987, p. 556.

7. NCS Case Study: Iran-Contra Affair, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989, p. 128.

8. Ibid.

CHAPTER II

IRAN-CONTRA AFFAIR

After the Congress cut off all funds for the Contras, and the order expressed by the President to his staff, specifically to his National Security Adviser, Admiral John Poindexter, to find the way to keep the Contras "body and soul together," the NSC found covert ways of getting funds to the Contras. The officer in charge of this operation was Lieutenant Colonel Oliver L. North.

> Denied funding by Congress, the President turned to third countries and private sources. Between June 1984 and the beginning of 1986, the President, his National Security Adviser, and the NSC staff secretly raised $34 million for the Contras from other countries. An additional $2.7 million was provided for the Contras during 1985 and 1986 from private contributors. . . . Although the CIA and other agencies involved in intelligence activities knew that the Boland Amendment barred their involvement in covert support for the Contras, North's Contra support operation received logistical and tactical support from various personnel in the CIA and other agencies.[1]

The government of Israel proposed, in 1985, the sale of missiles to Iran, as a means to get the release of the American hostages held in Lebanon. The President, in spite of the opposition of the Secretaries of State and Defense, authorized Israel to proceed with the sales. Oliver North found in the arms sales to Iran an attractive funds generating source for the Contras. Even when North did not believe that the arms sales would lead to getting the hostages back, he was for their continuation.

In November 1986, when the scandal came up, the possibility for the Contras to obtain a significant amount of military aid started dying and with it the ability of conducting any significant military operation. This year, (February-November 1986) was their most active period and they were not able to execute more than a couple of significant operations, seizing a few bases

inside Nicaragua, but lacking the ability of holding those bases even for a short period of time.

ENDNOTES

1. NCS Case Study: Iran-Contra Affair, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barrack, PA., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989, p. 128.

CHAPTER III

PEACE AGREEMENTS, IMPACT

CONTADORA

The Sandinistas did not want to make any diplomatic negotiation with the Organization of American States (OAS), because they believed that the OAS members were controlled by the United States. So, there was a diplomatic vacuum which was filled by Contadora.

In late 1983, the Foreign Ministers of Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama, came together and constituted the Contadora Group, whose main goal was the achievement of peace, security and stability in Central America.

Contadora concluded that the cause for the crisis in the area had nothing to do with the East-West conflict. It rather was the economic and social problems in these countries. It called for dialogue and negotiations and reaffirmed the principle of nonintervention and self-determination.

At first, there were some problems among these four countries (Contadora) in getting consensus among themselves in regard to some issues. For instance, the civil war in El Salvador could not be included in the discussions since Venezuela favored the Salvadoran President and the Christian Democrats while Mexico supported the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front) and the FDR (Democratic Revolutionary Front).

In September 1983, Contadora came up with a 21 points document, calling for democracy and national reconciliation, control of the regional arms race, end of support for paramilitary forces across borders, reduction of foreign military advisers and troops, and the prohibition of foreign military bases in the area.

The United States Congress was pleased with the Contadora entry into the diplomatic negotiations in Central America. To the Reagan administration, on the other hand, it meant another actor with which to deal.

In September 1984, the group tabled their Contadora Act for Peace and Cooperation in Central America. Surprisingly, the Sandinistas accepted the plan. They did it because there was not a single concrete, clear cut restriction on any Nicaraguan action. The goals stated were vague, and it did not include any kind of provisions for verification. On the other hand, by signing the Sandinista government would give the impression of good will in reaching a negotiated peaceful solution, while the United States government would appear as the one pressuring by force for unilateral concessions.

> The provisions for democratization and internal reconciliation were hortatory and unenforceable as drafted. They would have allowed the Sandinistas to claim that the Nicaraguan elections scheduled for November 1984 were in compliance with the Acta despite charges by the democratic opposition led by Arturo Cruz, that the electoral process was rigged. Nicaragua accepted the Acta as a final document, not a draft for discussion, because it asked a little of Nicaragua immediately and left no possibility for Nicaragua to be pressured in post signature negotiations. Accepting the Acta also improved Nicaragua's image internationally, just as the United States Congress was to vote on aid for the Contras and Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega was to address the United Nations General Assembly.[1]

In October 1984, Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica got together and came up with the Acta of Tegucigalpa, which was a substitute draft trying to correct the main problems that the United States and these three counties found in the Acta of September 1984.

The new Acta made provisions for the verification and the enforcement of the process, and provided for a more simultaneous action process on the disarmament and demilitarization.

The Sandinistas refused the Acta of Tegucigalpa and clearly expressed that they would not accept any kind of substantive changes to the Acta of Contadora. In April 1985, they seemed to be willing to reach an agreement involving concessions by both parties; but again, the negotiation failed because Nicaragua tried to avoid those issues related to democratization and the internal reconciliation. They said they

> will not deal with the Contras and Nicaragua is already democratic.[2]

> Contadora has succeeded in influencing the U.S. Congressional debate over foreign policy in Central America. This is especially evident in the controversy in the House of Representatives over U.S. aid to the Contras. In 1985, one of the compromise bills presented by the House democrats in an attempt to block the President's request for $14 million for the Contras proposed that the same monies be allocated to the Contadora group instead. By 1986, Contadora had become the only viable congressional alternative to administration policy in Central America. . . . In late 1985, four Latin American countries - Peru, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay - formed a 'support group' for their original counterparts, giving the multilateral peace effort a badly needed shot in the arm. For the first these eight countries took a tough public stand: they explicitly stated their opposition to U.S. aid to the Contras, asked the administration to set aside its militaristic emphasis, and called for the resumption of bilateral talks between Nicaragua and the Unite States.[3]

In June 1986, the Foreign Ministers of Contadora and the Support Group presented an amended draft agreement to the Central American countries,and all of them expressed support for the Contadora peace effort, but made some observations about it and the draft presented was not signed. After this meeting Contadora made no significant progress in the process, even when they tried to keep it alive as a diplomatic option.

THE WRIGHT-REAGAN PEACE PLAN

On 5 August 1987, President Reagan, and Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Jim Wright presented a peace plan that set out the "basic elements that need to be included" in any regional peace accord. The six-point proposal call for an immediate cease-fire, a simultaneous suspension of U.S. aid to the Contras and Soviet Bloc assistance to the Sandinistas, the withdrawal of the foreign military advisers from Nicaragua, and national reconciliation, democratization, and respect for basic human and political rights in Nicaragua.[4]

The Wright-Reagan Peace Plan was a diplomatic initiative developed to make the Central American Presidents aware of the United States views on certain basic elements that needed to be included, in the issues of the upcoming Central American Presidents' discussions about the possible solution to the problems in the area. The Presidents of the Central American countries rejected this proposal because they considered it was an ultimatum to Nicaragua.

THE GUATEMALAN PEACE AGREEMENT

On August 6 and 7, 1987, the five Central American Presidents gathered together in Guatemala City, to discuss the Plan Arias, presented by the government of Costa Rica, which was signed by all of them including Daniel Ortega, who, according to declarations of President Arias, decided to sign the plan when he realized that all the other presidents would do so, and not signing would politically isolate Nicaragua from Central and South America.

The Arias Plan called for national reconciliation, cease-fire, democratization, free elections, cutoff of aid to the Contras and other insurgents, non use of territory for armed groups' attacks, resumption of

Contadora negotiations, refugee support and resettlement, economic development, verification, and a calendar for implementation. On August 8, President Reagan declared,

> I hope it will lead to peace in Central America and democracy in Nicaragua. . . . The U.S. will be as helpful as possible consistent with our interests and the interest of the Nicaraguan resistance, who have already stated their readiness to take part in genuine negotiations for peace and democracy in Nicaragua. . . .[5]

In February 1988, the military aid to the Contras was stopped by the U.S. Congress as a demonstration of support to the Plan Arias and by the time President Reagan left the presidency, the negotiations for solving the crisis in the area, were depending directly upon the Central American countries.

THE TELA AGREEMENT

The Presidents of the five Central American countries came together on August 5, 1989, in Tela, Honduras, to discuss the Central American situation. At the summit, the five presidents voted to demobilize the Nicaraguan resistance. The presidents' decision amazed its own and foreign political observers. The unavoidable question was brought to mind: why the Central American presidents made that kind of decision which seems to be against their own interest? One might look for the answer in the field of speculation, since the approach followed by the presidents, in their efforts to arrive at a peaceful solution to the crisis, seems to be out of the normal negotiation process. Most of the political observers agree that one of the reasons, and it's my belief that it is the most important single reason, why all the peace agreements made by the Central American countries, as well as the Contadora and the supporting group, have failed in achieving the peace and setting a decent negotiation for all the parties involved, is the absence of the required power, within the signatories, for enforcement. So, given the

absence of this power, and accepting that the Contras were the only instrument limiting the Nicaraguan aggression in the region, why is it that the presidents are serving Daniel Ortega the Contras on a golden platter? . . . what are they going to receive back besides the traditional and false promises of democratization and national reconciliation?

Why am I talking about "traditional and false promises?" . . . let's just take a look at the negotiations, the talks, agreements, accords, etc., etc., made by the Central American Presidents, and other organizations and Nicaragua, and it will be very easy to see the lack of honesty on Nicaragua's part. (See Appendix 1)

ENDNOTES

1. Susan Kaufman Purcell, "Demystifying Contadora," in Contadora and the Diplomacy of Peace in Central America, Vol. 1: The United States, Central America, and Contadora, ed. by Bruce M. Bagley, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1987, p. 162.

2. Ibid., p. 163.

3. Karl Terry, "Mexico, Venezuela, and the Contadora Initiative," Confronting Revolution, ed. by Morris J. Blachman, William M. Leogrande, and Kennet Sharpe, Pantheon Books, New York, 1986, pp. 287-288.

4. U.S. Department of State, Negotiations in Central America, Washington, D.C., 1987, p. 13.

5. U.S. Department of State, "Guatemalan Agreement for Peace in Central America," Bulletin, Vol. 87, Washington, D.C., 1987, p. 56.

CHAPTER IV

SUCCESS/FAILURE OF THE CONTRAS AS A POLITICAL INSTRUMENT

Defining the outcome of the use of the Contras as a political instrument, within the timeframe of this work, is not that easy. It will depend upon the way one is viewing the whole process in the Central American crisis. If it is seen in terms of objective (end) pursued, which was either overthrow the Sandinista Regime or forcing it to roll back into democracy, one could say that it was an absolute failure, since the objective was not achieved at all. The Sandinistas are still in power and Nicaragua has not been democratized yet.

If we see the Contras as a political instrument in the global context we will be able to identify some relative success. For instance, there are some costs for the USSR to be involved in Central America. One of the costs was imposed by the Contras on the Sandinistas, forcing them to pay for the sustaining of the war, and for a large military establishment. Sixty percent of the Nicaraguan budget is spent on defense. In some way the Contras contributed to convincing the Soviets to pull back from their revolutionary activities in the Third World.

Another aspect in which the Contras have succeeded is that one regarding the consolidation of the Sandinista regime as a communist government. By exerting a constant pressure, the Contras slowed down the consolidation of the Nicaraguan government. Moreover, the Contras have been the counterbalance to the power projection of the Sandinistas into the other Central American countries. As long as we have a Sandinista government, we will have a FMLN in El Salvador and a security threat to Honduras and Costa Rica.

The Contras as a military force failed not only because they were not receiving the adequate support, (in two years, 1987-1989, the Sandinistas

received almost $1 billion in military equipment from the Soviet Bloc, an amount four times greater than total U.S. military aid for the Contras in eight years) but also because they never did a good job in projecting a good image of themselves within Nicaragua and in the U.S. Congress. In other words, they failed in the social-psychological aspect of their fight. Besides, they never developed an internal political front in Nicaragua, to complement their military activities.

By February 1988, the military aid for the Contras was cut off and by August 1989, the Central American Presidents voted to demobilize the Nicaraguan Resistance. In a speech by the Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, right after returning from Tela, Honduras, at Sandino International Airport, said:

> Good evening, Nicaraguan brothers:
>
> This afternoon, we concluded a historic event in Honduras. Today, right there in Honduras, in the territory and the country where the United States organized and developed the counterrevolution, the Central American presidents signed what we can describe as the death sentence of the counterrevolution as an aggressive terrorist force. We are thus giving an opportunity to all Nicaraguans who became involved in these activities; we are giving them a chance to join our national life . . . we approved a plan to pull the Contras out. This is the so-called demobilization plan. . . .[1]

ENDNOTES

1. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Report, Latin America, Washington, D.C., 8 August 1989, p. 30.

CHAPTER V

IMPACT OF THE CONTRAS ON CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES

The Contras have been an instrument not only for the projection of the U.S. policy in the Central American area, but also an instrument that the Central American countries took into account in the political arena, finding this instrument a very useful one and taking the advantage of it on the negotiations table. Most of the time it was the only single pressuring element in making possible the Sandinistas presence for negotiations.

The impact of the use of the Contras in the area was different for every Central American country, depending upon the geographical situation of the country and the level of political influence received from Nicaragua.

Guatemala.

Since this country does not have any border with Nicaragua and the Sandinista regime does not exert a significant influence on the Guatemalan problem (guerrilla war), it does not worry about the Contras. Guatemala does not perceive any threat to her own nation, so it adopted a position of neutrality, called Active Neutrality, (neutralidad activa). Guatemala has been involving itself in the peace initiatives and agreements made in the area because the isolationism would not be any good.

Honduras.

In my own opinion, this is the country which was affected the most. The use of the Contras from their bases in Honduras and the use of this country by the United States to execute military operations, impacted very deeply on the Honduran nation.

From the same beginning of the Contras story, the Honduras government lost credibility, due to the fact that it was a U.S. covert operation. The

Honduras government denied the Contra presence in the country. The media broke the stories of the Contra bases in Honduras, embarrassing its government.

In so many times the Honduran leaders felt that the relationship between Honduras, which was fully supporting the Reagan administration policy in the area, and the United States was not treated fairly by their U.S. counterparts. For instance while the Honduras government was denying the Contra bases existence, the United States officials when returning from the country were giving to the public through the media all the information about the bases with no consideration at all of the impact on the country.

The presence of the Contra bases affected this country in many aspects. One of those aspects is that concerning the country sovereignty. Since the Contras were not able to do as it was planned; that is, set up permanent bases in Nicaragua and conducting the war from there; rather they were crossing the border between both countries back and forth, causing the Sandinistas to come after them inside the Honduran territory, causing the clashes and the general tension along the border. One other aspect Honduras was affected in is that regarding the loss of esteem of the country before the international community as a result of the international press criticism on Honduras "housing and fully supporting" the Contras. In other words, the willingness of allowing the Resistance to use its territory as a base against the Nicaraguan regime hurt Honduras.

The presence of about 60,000 persons (10,000 Contras and 50,000 family members, approximately) brought to the country a problematical social situation, due to the fact that these people were walking around and competing with the Hondurans for the scarce opportunity of jobs. So, this increased the level of unemployment and the street crime.

El Salvador.

This country is fighting a war against a guerrilla force fully supported by the Sandinistas. El Salvador has survived so far because the decisive U.S. support (economic and military assistance). Since the Sandinistas are the main source of support for the FMLN,[1] which existence as an effective fighting force, depend upon the first one; for El Salvador the use of the Contras to overthrow the Sandinista government meant the solution to its problem, because by cutting off the Nicaraguan support the FMLN would be easily defeated by the Salvadoran government.

Why President Cristiani signed the Tela accords if this would make it easier for the Sandinistas to keep on supporting the FMLN? Maybe he was afraid of being isolated and besides there is a hope that the Sandinistas in return of the Contra demobilization will support the FMLN demobilization as well. In public declarations made by President Cristiani, on 7 August 989, he stated: "During the summit, held in Tela, the presidents agreed, among other things, on the demobilization of the Nicaraguan contras and urged the Salvadoran guerillas to agree to a dialogue." Meanwhile, the FMLN, on Radio Verceremos, commented:

> The results of today's summit in Tela, are a triumph for Nicaragua and the Salvadoran rebels . . . there are no similarities between the Contras and the FMLN; this has been reiterated by the Central American presidents . . . the only ones who will be demobilized here are the counterrevolutionary armed forces, the mercenary death squads.[2]

Costa Rica.

This is a country which does not have an armed forces and they think there is no need to have one since they have survived without it, preserving a solid and oldest democracy in Central America. It is assumed that in case of an invasion or any kind of military intervention coming from any other country,

its allies, and especially United States, will work the problem out. The impact of the use of the Contras on Costa Rica was materialized in that kind of relief, at least temporary, from the threat represented in having a communist government as a neighbor, since the Sandinistas were spending a lot of its energies taking care of the Resistance which was restricting the regime ability of projecting its power and exporting its "revolution."

Costa Rica played a very active role in all peace initiatives, accords, agreements, and in every single effort to solve the crisis in the area. In fact, its President, Oscar Arias, was the architect of the 1987 Peace Plan, the so-called "Plan Arias," which made him be honored with the Nobel Peace Prize.

When returning from the summit in Tela, Arias declared in San Jose, Costa Rica:

> . . . For the first time, we, the five Presidents have met, although one of us was not one of the signers of the Costa Rican Peace Plan of two years ago. Yet, because of the dynamics we have created, each meeting of presidents produces very positive things. . . . On this occasion, we arrived at the summit after the Sandinist government had signed an agreement with the Nicaraguan political opposition and after things had occurred which we have not been able to achieve in two years. . . .[3]

Nicaragua.

Since the same beginning that the Sandinistas took power in the country, they started building themselves up as the strongest military power in the area and of course, the corresponding exportation of the revolution began. The use of the Contras against the Marxist-Leninist regime already installed was as a pain is in the neck, since the cost of sustaining such a campaign was hurting so bad the already luxurious defense budget, (60 percent of the Nicaraguan GNP is spent in defense). The Sandinistas was deeply worried about the use of the Contras not only as a political instrument of the United States

to exert pressure on the government for the democratization of the country, but also as a very useful instrument in the regional negotiations. Fortunately for the Sandinistas when their situation was more difficult, when they needed the most, the relief came over, the United States cut off the Contras aid and the Central American presidents came up with the Tela summit signing the death sentence for the Resistance which will be demobilized the next year in February (February 1990).

ENDNOTES

1. Lawrence L. Tracy, What Now in Central America? The Question: Who's the Bully?, Selected Readings, Regional Strategic Appraisal: Americas, U.S. Army War College, 20 February 1990, p. 176.

2. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, p. 29.

3. Ibid., p. 28.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Defining the success or failure of using the Contras as a U.S. political instrument, to overthrow the communist government of Nicaragua, is a very subjective task, since it will depend upon the kind of "thermometer" used in measuring the outcome. Given that the final objective was, at the beginning, to overthrow the Sandinistas or to force them to roll back into a democratic system; and the Sandinistas are still in power and the government is still communist, at first glance one can say this strategy was a failure.

However, the last word has not been said, and despite the ongoing demobilization of the Contras, the resistance is still alive. As long as we have a Sandinista government we will have a resistance. Besides, if we think about the meaning of the existence of the Contras for the Sandinistas, and what would they be capable of doing to its neighbors if the Contras had not been just in the middle of the way, one can say they were a success.

With regard to the impact the use of the Contras had on the Central American countries, as it was described before, the level of effect was different for every country. Because the United States is not dependable, (given the difficulty for a true democracy to be consistent in its foreign policy), the Central American presidents are doing the best they can to find the way out, and trying to get the best arrangement for their countries. They hope that taking away the threat of the Nicaraguan revolution, the Sandinistas will pay back with a good will actions in benefit of a peaceful solution to the crisis. Besides, they hope the disastrous economic situation that Nicaragua is living in, will force the Sandinistas to democratize the country, and buildup a better relationship with its neighbors. There are some difficulties in the agreements signed by the Presidents in the region: First,

there is not capacity within the agreements for enforcement, and the product of the agreements depend upon the good will and honesty of the signatories. Second, the United States as the main external player has the power to enforce, but it is not a signatory of the agreements, and these call for "no intervention." This is ironic as it has been proven the constant Nicaraguan intervention in the internal affairs of the other Central American countries, especially in El Salvador, and there was no mechanism to punish such intervention.

The future of the Central American crisis will be in a close relationship with the outcome of the oncoming elections in Nicaragua the next February, and all the players of this game are very interested in, not only in the results of the elections, but also in the "kind of elections," in other words, the legitimacy of the electoral process.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Christian, Shirley. Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family. New York, Vintage, 1986, pp. 227-228, 230.

2. Conde, Galileo. El Salvador: A Communist Objective. Carlisle Barracks, U.S. Army War College, 1986, p. 9.

3. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, p. 29.

4. Foreign Broadcast Information Service. Daily Report. Latin America, Washington, D.C., 8 August 1989, p. 30.

5. Grossman, Karl. Nicaragua: America's New Vietnam? New York, The Permanent Press, Sag Harbor, N.Y., 1984, p. 195.

6. Leiken, Robert S. and Rubin, Barry. The Central American Crisis Reader. New York, Summit Books, 1987, p. 556.

7. NCS Case Study: Iran-Contra Affair. U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1989, p. 128.

8. Purcell, Susan Kaufman. "Demystifying Contadora." Contadora and the Diplomacy of Peace in Central America. Vol. 1: The United States, Central America, and Contadora, ed. by Bruce M. Bagley, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1987, p. 162.

9. Terry, Karl. "Mexico, Venezuela, and the Contadora Initiative." Confronting Revolution. Ed. by Morris J. Blachman, William M. Leogrande, and Kennet Sharpe. Pantheon Books, New York, 1986, pp. 287-288.

10. Tracy, Lawrence L. What Now in Central America? The Question: Who's the Bully?. Selected Readings, Regional Strategic Appraisal: Americas, U.S. Army War College, 20 February 1990, p. 176.

11. U.S. Department of State. "Guatemalan Agreement for Peace in Central America." Bulletin, Vol. 87, Washington, D.C., 1987, p. 56.

12. U.S. Department of State. Negotiations in Central America. Washington, D.C., 1987, p. 13.

APPENDIX 1

NEGOTIATIONS IN

CENTRAL AMERICA

(REVISED EDITION)

CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS 1981-1987

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20520

Negotiations in Central America A Chronology 1981–1987

SUMMARY

The United States has continuously supported the search for peace in Central America. Since 1981, the U.S. has sought to resolve the regional conflict through bilateral negotiations with the Sandinista regime as well as by backing the Contadora process and other regional efforts.

U.S. efforts to reach agreement with the ruling *comandantes* predate those of the other countries of Latin America, including Contadora. Initial diplomatic overtures offered U.S. nonaggression toward Nicaragua and renewed economic assistance in exchange for an end to Sandinista support to the Communist guerrillas of El Salvador and a halt to Nicaragua's military buildup. The Sandinistas now say that they would accept these conditions in a regional peace process.

Even though the Sandinistas were not receptive to U.S. initiatives in 1981, the U.S. continued bilateral diplomatic efforts to resolve the regional impasse. Those initiatives were:

- On October 4, 1982, the U.S. joined six Latin American and Caribbean countries in the "Declaration of San Jose" setting out principles for a regional peace settlement.
- On June 1, 1984, Secretary of State Shultz visited Managua to consult with Sandinista President Daniel Ortega and Foreign Minister Miguel d'Escoto, setting the stage for bilateral discussions between the U.S. and Nicaragua.
- On June 25–26, 1984, the first of the bilateral talks were held in the Mexican city of Manzanillo. They were ended in December 1984 because of Sandinista intransigence.
- On October 29–31, 1985, Special Envoy Harry W. Shlaudeman met with Nicaraguan Ambassador Carlos Tunnermann in Washington, D.C., and proposed that the U.S. would renew bilateral talks with Nicaragua if the Sandinistas would accept the Nicaraguan Resistance's call for a Church-mediated dialogue. The Sandinista government refused to accept this proposal.
- On February 10, 1986, Secretary Shultz met with the Foreign Ministers of the Contadora countries and offered to renew bilateral talks with the Sandinistas if they began a dialogue with the democratic resistance.
- Between June 1985 and April 1987, Special Envoys Shlaudeman and Philip C. Habib traveled to the region on at least 15 occasions to consult with Central American and South American officials in an effort to support the peace process.

In a new bipartisan effort to support the peace process, President Reagan and Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Jim Wright announced on August 5, 1987, a set of "basic elements that need to be included" in any agreement that might bring a "peaceful solution to the problems in Central America." Two days later, at a summit held in the capital of Guatemala, the five Central American presidents agreed to a regional framework for peace that emphasizes democratization in Nicaragua and the restoration of civil liberties for the Nicaraguan people.

The following is a chronology of the history of Central American negotiations, the texts of the Wright/Reagan Peace Plan, the Central American Peace Agreement, and the Contadora Document of Objectives.

CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS 1981-1987

1981

August-October — United States initiates diplomatic exchanges with Nicaragua. U.S. offers bilateral nonaggression agreement and renewed economic assistance if Nicaragua stops aid to Salvadoran guerrillas and limits its military buildup. Nicaragua labels U.S. offer "sterile."

Comment: Writing in the summer 1983 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, Arturo Cruz, then Nicaragua's Ambassador to the United States, revealed that "In August of 1981...[Enders] met with my superiors in Managua, at the highest level. His message was clear: in exchange for non-exportation of insurrection and a reduction in Nicaragua's armed forces, the United States pledged to support Nicaragua through mutual regional security arrangements as well as continuing economic aid. His government did not intend to interfere in our internal affairs. When the conversations concluded, I had the feeling that the U.S. proposal had not been received by the Sandinistas as an imperialist diktat [dictate]." In October, the Sandinistas rejected this proposal as "sterile."

1982

March 15 — Honduras proposes Central American peace plan at the Organization of American States to reduce arms and foreign military advisers, to respect nonintervention, and to provide for international verification of commitments.

April 9 — U.S. offers eight-point proposal to Nicaragua. Nicaragua demands high-level meeting in Mexico.

October 4 — At San Jose conference, the U.S., Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Belize, and Jamaica issue Declaration of San Jose outlining principles for a regional peace settlement that calls for democracy, pluralism, arms reduction, respect for human rights, and national reconciliation. Nicaragua subsequently refuses to receive Costa Rican Foreign Minister Volio as emissary of group.

1983

January 8-9 — Foreign ministers of Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, and Panama meet on Contadora Island and issue Declaration commending dialogue and negotiation as instruments for peaceful settlement.

January-April — Nicaragua resists meeting in multilateral setting and opposes idea of comprehensive agreement dealing with all interrelated issues.

Nine foreign ministers of Central America and Contadora Group meet for first time in Panama	April 20–21
Declaration of Cancun by the presidents of the Contadora Group calls for renewed efforts to continue peace process. Declaration sent to President Reagan, Central American Chiefs of State, and Fidel Castro.	July 17
Sandinistas issue six-point plan, calling for end of all outside assistance to "the two sides" in El Salvador, end of all external support to paramilitary forces in region, prohibition of foreign military bases and exercises, Nicaraguan/Honduran nonaggression pact, noninterference in internal affairs, and end to economic discrimination.	July 19
Comment: Proposal accepted multilateral talks but did not address such key issues as foreign advisers, arms limitations and reductions, or democratization and national reconciliation. Plan equated Salvadoran Government with guerrillas and, if implemented, would have cut off all U.S. military assistance to El Salvador.	
Foreign ministers of Guatemala, Costa Rica, Honduras, and El Salvador propose eight-point peace plan drawing on Honduras plan of March 1982 and emphasizing contribution that democratization could make to restoring peace and stability to region.	July 21
President Reagan expresses support for Contadora objectives in letter to Contadora Group presidents.	July 23
Document of Objectives adopted by foreign ministers of the nine Contadora participating governments. Document includes strong formulation of objectives relating to democratization and national reconciliation.	September 9
Attempts to translate Document of Objectives directly into treaty falter.	October–December

1984

"Norms of Implementation" declaration that was adopted in Panama by nine Contadora foreign ministers establishes three working commissions in security, political, and socioeconomic matters to recommend by April 30 specific measures to implement Document of Objectives	January 8
Five Central American foreign ministers request Contadora Group to integrate recommendations into single negotiating text.	April 30
Secretary of State Shultz visits Managua to launch bilateral talks in support of reaching a comprehensive Contadora agreement.	June 1
Contadora Group presents "Contadora Act for Peace and Cooperation in Central America" to Central American governments and requests comments by mid-July.	June 8–9
First of nine rounds of bilateral talks between U.S. and Nicaragua held at Manzanillo, Mexico. U.S. throughout seeks informal understandings to facilitate Contadora agreement. Nicaragua seeks formal bilateral accords in lieu of Contadora; excludes discussion of democratization and national reconciliation.	June 25–26
Technical Group (vice-ministerial level) of Contadora process meets in Panama to consider oral and written comments on the June 8 draft Act. Nicaragua refuses to accept any feature of the Contadora June draft to which it had not previously agreed.	August 25–27

September 7	Contadora Group submits revised draft Contadora agreement for Central American leaders comment by mid-October. *Comment:* The draft agreement achieved Nicaragua's two principal objectives (end of support to democratic resistance and prohibition of maneuvers) upon signature while leaving arms reductions and withdrawal of advisers for later negotiation. Verification provisions were weak.
September 21	Nicaragua states it is willing to sign the September 7 draft provided that it is not changed; calls on U.S. to sign and ratify its Additional Protocol. *Comment:* Portrayed as a step toward peace, Nicaragua's acceptance was, in the U.S. view, an attempt to freeze the negotiating process at a moment of advantage. Issues of concern to neighbors, such as the Nicaraguan arms and troop buildup and commitments relating to national reconciliation and democratization, were left to negotiations and implementation *following* entry into force of the commitments in which the Sandinistas were interested.
September 25–26	At sixth round of Manzanillo talks, Nicaragua adopts Contadora draft agreement as its negotiating position. U.S. suggests the two sides focus on text of draft agreement, but Nicaragua rejects any discussion of possibly modifying the draft.
September 29	European Community and Central American foreign ministers, meeting in Costa Rica, call draft agreement "fundamental stage in negotiating process" but refrain from endorsing any text not agreed upon by all participating governments.
October 15	Comments submitted to the Contadora Group by Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Honduras identify verification and need for simultaneous implementation of commitments as areas for modification.
October 19–20	Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Costa Rica (Nicaragua is invited but does not attend) meet in Tegucigalpa to consider the September 7 draft agreement and drafted proposed modifications. Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica endorse and forward modifications to the Contadora Group and Nicaragua.
November 12–16	Extensive private consultations among the Contadora participants are held on the margins of the OAS General Assembly in Brasilia.
December 10–11	Ninth round of Manzanillo talks. Nicaragua definitively rejects U.S. approach to reach agreement on basis of September draft; reverts to initial position of bilateral accords in lieu of Contadora.

1985

January 18	U.S. informs Nicaragua that it is not scheduling further meetings at Manzanillo, pending further evolution of the Contadora process.
February 14	Contadora meeting canceled over asylum dispute between Nicaragua and Costa Rica.
April 11–12	Contadora meeting of plenipotentiaries agrees in principle on revised procedure of verification.
May 14–16	Second meeting of Contadora plenipotentiaries, with inconclusive discussion of security issues.

Sandinista border incursions into Costa Rica kill two Costa Rican Civil Guardsmen.	May 31
OAS Permanent Council appoints investigative commission consisting of Contadora Group and OAS Secretary General to report on the May 31 and other related border incidents.	June 7
Nicaragua's refusal to discuss agreed agenda results in abrupt ending of Contadora meeting of plenipotentiaries and 4-month hiatus in Contadora negotiations.	June 17–19
Ambassador Shlaudeman visits Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Venezuela for consultations on Contadora; reviews conditions under which the U.S. might resume bilateral talks with Nicaragua.	June 24–28
Ambassador Shlaudeman continues consultations during visits to Mexico and Panama.	June 30–July 2
Ambassador Shlaudeman concludes consultations with visit to Honduras.	July 17
Contadora Group governments publicly call on U.S. to resume bilateral talks with Nicaragua. Communique also announces intentions to hold bilateral meetings with individual Central American governments in lieu of resuming talks.	July 22
In Mexico City, Secretary Shultz states willingness of U.S. to resume bilateral talks if that would promote a Church-mediated dialogue in Nicaragua and reaffirms strong U.S. support for the Contadora process.	July 26
Following consultations with the Contadora Group, the governments of Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay form the "Contadora Support Group."	July 28
Costa Rica, Honduras, and El Salvador in joint statement welcome the visit of Contadora ministers but propose resumption of Contadora negotiations.	August 1
Contadora Group vice ministers visit the five Central American states to consult on outstanding Contadora issues.	August 3–8
The Contadora Group and Support Group, meeting in Cartagena, Colombia, issue communique stating intent to consult regularly on Contadora matters.	August 23–25
U.S. welcomes formation of Support Group.	August 26
Costa Rica, Honduras, and El Salvador formally reiterate proposal to resume Contadora negotiations.	September 4
Costa Rica, Honduras, and El Salvador jointly request a meeting with the Support Group governments on the margins of the September 12–13 meeting of Contadora foreign ministers in Panama. The request is denied on the ground that it might interfere with the scheduled meetings.	September 8
Ambassador Shlaudeman consults with Support Group governments in visits to Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and Peru. He explains U.S. view that Support Group could help by working toward a Sandinista dialogue with armed resistance (United Nicaraguan Opposition) and urges Support Group to consult with all the Central American states.	September 9–13
The Contadora Group tables a third draft of a Contadora agreement. The Central American foreign ministers agree to convene multilateral negotiations on October 7, with the aim of reaching final agreement within 45 days. The agenda for these negotiations is defined narrowly. It is also agreed that events and developments within the region will not interfere with Contadora talks.	September 12–13

October 7–11	The first round of talks is held on Contadora Island, Panama. Costa Rica states it is willing to sign the September 12 draft. El Salvador and Honduras express general support while identifying issues that require further negotiation. Guatemala maintains neutrality on content of draft while pointing to constitutional difficulty of current government to commit Guatemala in view of upcoming elections. Nicaragua states it is not ready to declare its view.
October 17–19	Second round of plenipotentiary negotiations held on Contadora Island. Nicaragua presents extensive objections to September 12 draft.
October 24	President Reagan addresses the U.N. General Assembly, presenting an initiative on regional conflicts. President states that U.S. support of struggling democratic forces "must and shall continue" until there is progress in negotiations between the parties to internal conflicts.
October 29–31	Ambassador Shlaudeman and Nicaraguan Ambassador Tunnermann meet in Washington. Shlaudeman says U.S. will resume bilateral talks if Sandinistas accept March 1985 proposal of the Nicaraguan Resistance for Church-mediated dialogue, cease-fire, and suspension of the State of Emergency. Tunnermann reports Nicaraguan Government rejection of this offer.
November 11	Nicaragua publishes letter to Contadora Group and Support Group presidents detailing objections to the Contadora Group's September 12, 1985, draft of a final agreement. Nicaragua's position, in essence, is to insist on an accommodation with the U.S. prior to a Contadora agreement.
November 11–12	Foreign ministers of the nine Central American and Contadora Group governments meet in Luxembourg with the foreign ministers of the European Community, Spain, and Portugal. European Community/Central American economic agreement is signed, political communique supports Contadora and stresses democratic pluralism and civil liberties.
November 19–21	Third round of negotiations among Contadora plenipotentiaries held in Panama. Some progress is achieved on verification and related issues. All delegations recommend extending 45-day deadline for final agreement.
November 22	U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vernon Walters addresses the General Assembly on continued U.S. support of the Contadora process.
December 1	Nicaragua announces that it will not take part in the Contadora meetings to be held on the margins of the OAS General Assembly meeting in Cartagena, Colombia, December 2–5.
December 2	Secretary of State Shultz meets with Contadora Group foreign ministers at the OAS General Assembly in Cartagena.
December 3	Nicaragua submits formal request for suspension of Contadora peace negotiations until May 1986.
December 6	Contadora Group submits report to OAS Secretary General expressing hope that negotiations will continue.
December 7	Nicaragua reiterates its request for suspension of Contadora talks at a SELA (Latin American Economic System) meeting in Caracas, Venezuela.
December 10	Venezuelan officials publicly oppose suspension of talks.

OAS General Assembly Resolution, opposed only by Nicaragua, urges continuation of Contadora talks.	December 11
Contadora Group governments consult informally in Montevideo	December 17–18

1986

Nicaragua publishes letter from President Ortega to the presidents of the Contadora Group and the Support Group proposing a scaled-down treaty of general principles (in lieu of a comprehensive Contadora treaty) and a series of bilateral talks, including U.S.-Nicaraguan talks.	January 8
The eight foreign ministers of the Contadora Group and Support Group governments, meeting in Caraballeda, Venezuela, issue the "Message of Caraballeda." It reiterates basic Contadora principles; urges actions to create climate for negotiations, including resumption of Contadora talks; and offers Contadora's help to "promote new steps of national reconciliation" and renewal of U.S.-Nicaraguan bilateral talks.	January 11–12
Vice President George Bush leads U.S. delegation to inauguration of Guatemalan President Vinicio Cerezo.	January 14
Foreign ministers of the five Central American states sign the "Declaration of Guatemala," endorsing the "Message of Caraballeda."	January 15
Central American presidents agree to hold summit in Esquipulas, Guatemala, in May.	
Central American presidents issue statement expressing satisfaction that their foreign ministers have endorsed the "Message of Caraballeda."	January 16
Nicaragua publicly reaffirms its position on Contadora, as set forth in its November 11 statement, and describes actions called for in the "Message of Caraballeda" as prerequisites to Contadora talks.	
Secretary Shultz receives the "Message of Caraballeda" from Washington ambassadors of the Contadora Group and Support Group governments and promises to give it careful study.	
U.S. statement on "Message of Caraballeda" announces visit of Ambassador Shlaudeman to Central American and Contadora Group countries to explore possibilities in the Message.	January 17
President-elect Jose Azcona of Honduras visits Washington for consultations. At National Press Club, Azcona opposes resumption of U.S.-Nicaraguan bilateral talks as detracting from Contadora.	
Ambassador Shlaudeman visits Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Colombia, and Venezuela to consult with regional leaders.	January 19–23
Secretary of State Shultz invites foreign ministers of the Contadora Group and Support Group governments to Washington for February 10 consultations.	January 25
Vice President Bush leads U.S. delegation to inauguration of Honduran President Azcona, meets with several Contadora and Central American presidents and foreign ministers.	January 26–27

January 30	Six Nicaraguan opposition parties propose cease-fire, effective amnesty, agreement on a new national electoral process, and lifting State of Emergency. UNO endorses proposal.
February 4	Nicaraguan President Ortega leads FSLN delegation to Third Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in Havana, gives speech to the Congress.
February 6	Nicaraguan Foreign Minister d'Escoto writes open letter to Contadora Group and Support Group foreign ministers calling on ministers to press for renewal of U.S.-Nicaraguan talks but cautioning that the U.S. would have to abandon the idea that such talks could be used as an "instrument to force Nicaragua into an immoral dialogue with terrorist forces."
February 10	Secretary Shultz meets with eight Contadora foreign ministers in Washington. He proposes simultaneous U.S.-Nicaraguan/Nicaraguan-UNO talks and policy adjustments in response to Nicaraguan movement on U.S. areas of concern.
February 14–15	Meeting of Contadora and Central American negotiators in Panama. Nicaragua refuses to negotiate on a Contadora treaty.
February 18–26	Ambassador Shlaudeman meets with presidents of Mexico, Panama, Colombia, Uruguay, Argentina, Peru, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.
February 24	Costa Rica and Nicaragua reach preliminary agreement on commission for border supervision.
February 27–28	Contadora Group and Support Group ministers meet at Punta del Este, Uruguay.
March 4	Salvadoran President Jose Napoleon Duarte proposes simultaneous dialogues to end the internal wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador.
March 7	President Reagan appoints Philip C. Habib to replace Harry W. Shlaudeman as Special Envoy for Central America.
March 12–14	Ambassador Habib visits El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Habib endorses Duarte initiative, reiterates U.S. willingness to renew bilateral talks with Nicaragua if Sandinistas open talks with armed democratic opposition.
March 14–15	Meeting of plenipotentiaries in Panama, but no discussion of Contadora treaty; inconclusive discussion of how to implement the "Message of Caraballeda."
March 17	Presidents of Guatemala and Honduras join President-elect Oscar Arias of Costa Rica in endorsing Duarte initiative.
March 20	U.S. House of Representatives defeats Administration's proposal for assistance to the Nicaraguan Resistance.
March 31	Legislative authorization for humanitarian assistance to Nicaraguan Resistance expires.
April 5–7	Nicaragua's d'Escoto refuses to sign joint communique outlining negotiating goals at meeting of 13 Contadora, Support Group, and Central American foreign ministers in Panama. Costa Rica, Honduras, and El Salvador propose schedule of intensive negotiations to reach agreement by end of May 1986. Eight Contadora and Support Group ministers issue invitation to renew talks; reach agreement by June 6.
April 11	Ambassador Habib reiterates U.S. position that U.S. will abide by a Contadora agreement that implements September 1983 Document of Objectives in a comprehensive, verifiable, and simultaneous manner.

Nicaragua agrees to renew talks and conditions final agreement on resolving outstanding issues and on ending all "U S aggression" by date of signature Central American democracies all accept renewal of talks and urge they begin immediately	
Ambassador Habib consults with presidents and foreign ministers of the Central American democracies, Contadora, and Support Group countries	April 18–28
President Ortega, in public statement, calls Ambassador Habib a "demagogic liar," raising the issue of Sandinista interest in constructive negotiations	April 19
Vice President Bush heads U S delegation to inauguration of President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica. Bush reiterates U.S. willingness to respect comprehensive, verifiable, and simultaneous treaty.	May 8
Contadora talks held in Panama to consider Contadora Group proposals on arms and military maneuvers. Nicaragua rejects Honduran proposal. Four democracies reject Nicaraguan proposal. Costa Rica and Guatemala jointly present compromise proposal El Salvador and Honduras support compromise proposal	May 16–18
• Proposal prohibits maneuvers within 5 kilometers of border, prohibits use of artillery capable of reaching neighboring countries, and regulates maneuvers within 30 kilometers	
• Proposal fixes overall ceiling on arms and troops prior to signature; ceiling expressed in "units of value," with each security component (e.g , a tank) assigned an agreed value.	
Five Central American presidents meet at Esquipulas, Guatemala. Communique notes "frankness" of exchanges and profound differences between Nicaragua and its neighbors over meaning of democracy Presidents reiterate commitment to reach Contadora agreement, omitting June 6 as target date, agree to create Central American Parliament.	May 24–25
President Ortega presents a list of "14 Points" calling for a reduction of armament levels and other military-related matters.	May 26
President Azcona of Honduras makes working visit to Washington, supports aid for the Nicaraguan democratic resistance.	May 26–29
Contadora meeting in Panama. Nicaragua tables its "14 Points," which, if adopted, would have virtually no effect on strength and size of Sandinista arsenal but would have serious impact on the security capabilities of the other Central American countries. Nicaragua also refuses to negotiate limits on "defensive" weapons Meeting inconclusive.	May 27–28
Ambassador Habib visits Costa Rica, Guatemala, and El Salvador for consultations.	May 31–June 3
Contadora and Support Group foreign ministers meet in Panama, present Central Americans with amended draft agreement.	June 6–7
Central American countries respond to June 7 draft. All countries express support for the Contadora process but make various points about the draft.	June–August
Costa Rica:	
• Peace is not valid unless based on democracy; Costa Rica cannot accept half-measures that do not fully address the complete democratization of all of Central America.	
• Calendar of continuous verification must be presented with the agreement.	
• All negotiations must be concluded before signing, including those concerning arms limits and troop levels.	

- Criteria used in establishing maximum limits of military development are susceptible to subjective interpretation and must be clarified prior to signature

El Salvador:

- Draft does not contain the conditions or requirements agreed on for its adoption and formalization in accordance with the 1983 Document of Objectives—especially in areas of arms limits and troop levels; simultaneous and integrated treatment of all aspects of the Document of Objectives is essential.
- Verification of all obligations is essential.
- Draft must contain sufficient guarantees that Nicaragua will accept serious negotiations in arms issues (including verification and control) and must demonstrate a willingness to observe the Document of Objectives in its entirety
- There is a need to continue and complete negotiations.

Guatemala:

- Commitments in armament, military forces, evaluation, verification, and control should be clearly stated to constitute a guarantee that agreed results and objectives are achieved.

Honduras:

- Draft does not establish reasonable and sufficient obligations to guarantee its security.
- Obligations regarding disarmament must be established rigorously and clearly in the treaty and not deferred to a later date.
- Draft raises subjective criteria of dubious multilateral significance that would make eventual agreement on limitation, reduction, and control of arms and troops impossible

Nicaragua:

- Indicates that it could accept draft, but only on the condition that future arms talks be conducted on the basis of its May "14 Points" proposal (which the four democracies had rejected).

June 26 — Contadora Group foreign ministers meet with U.N. Secretary General Perez de Cuellar and OAS Secretary General Baena Soares to present the June 7 draft.

July 2 — U.N. Secretary General de Cuellar issues report on the situation in Central America commending Contadora's effort but citing fundamental preconditions for peace, which focus on pluralistic democracy and nonintervention by outside forces.

July 10–12 — Ambassador Habib travels to the Central American democracies

August 7 — Secretary Shultz heads the U.S. delegation to inauguration of President Barco in Colombia Meets with presidents and foreign ministers of the Central American democracies

September 7–11 — Ambassador Habib travels to Central America.

September 22–October 1 — Contadora and Support Group foreign ministers meet in New York on margins of the U.N. General Assembly. On October 1, they issue a declaration warning of the dangerous situation in Central America and reiterating their willingness to continue their efforts to find a negotiated settlement.

Contadora and Support Group deputy foreign ministers meet in Mexico City. Discussion focuses on possibility of institutionalizing Contadora and expanding its scope to include other regional issues such as debt	October 30–31
OAS General Assembly meets in Guatemala At the initiative of Nicaragua and Mexico, foreign ministers from Contadora and Support Groups introduce a controversial draft resolution that, among other things, calls for preventing an alleged imminent U S aggression as the key issue in Central America. Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Honduras oppose resolution. Other Latin countries announce their opposition to the draft resolution and OASGA ultimately adopts new consensus resolution that supports Contadora effort. Secretary Shultz meets with foreign ministers of Central American democracies while attending OASGA.	November 10–15
U.N General Assembly adopts consensus resolution on Central America.	November 18
U N Secretary General de Cuellar and OAS Secretary General Soares issue "menu of services" available from their organizations to complement Contadora establishing border patrols; monitoring reduction of armed forces or dissolution of irregular forces; verifying international maneuvers or withdrawal of military advisers, verifying human rights complaints; and coordinating economic assistance.	
Ambassador Habib travels to Central America, Mexico, and Colombia for consultations with regional leaders.	November 19–21
Government of Costa Rica responds to U.N -OAS joint initiative. Commends efforts but reiterates Costa Rica's belief that an effective regional accord must be multilateral, comprehensive, binding, and verifiable.	December 3
Government of Nicaragua responds to U.N.-OAS joint initiative. Expresses deep satisfaction with the document	December 4
Contadora and Support Group foreign ministers meet in Rio de Janeiro. Announce they would visit Central America in January accompanied by U.N. and OAS secretaries general Also announce intentions to strengthen and systematize the political agreement of their governments through a process of regular consultations, beginning the following April in Argentina.	December 17–18

1987

Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams and Ambassador Habib meet in Miami with Costa Rican Foreign Minister Madrigal to discuss President Arias' plan for regional peace, a plan predicated on national reconciliation and democratization within Nicaragua.	January 7
President Ortega signs into law Nicaragua's new "democratic" constitution Within hours of its promulgation, Ortega issues new emergency decree suspending the rights and liberties of the Nicaraguan people provided for in the new charter, including freedom of speech, press, assembly, right to organize, right to privacy, and others.	January 9
Ambassador Habib travels to Panama, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and Venezuela to consult with Latin American leaders.	January 12–16
Ambassador Habib travels to Belgium, West Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom, and France to consult on the negotiating process.	January 18–25

January 18–21	Contadora and Support Group foreign ministers, accompanied by the U N and OAS secretaries general, travel to Central America seeking to revive the negotiating process They issue communique in Mexico City on January 21 expressing Contadora's continued hope for peace in Central America but offering no new proposals.
February 6	Seven civic opposition parties in Nicaragua issue a "9 Point" peace proposal calling for, among other things, a national dialogue, a National Commission for Peace, a cease-fire, and a general amnesty. The Sandinista government does not respond to this latest call for peace by opposition parties who are committed to a civic struggle for democracy in Nicaragua.
February 9–10	Central American, Contadora Group, and European Community foreign ministers meet in Guatemala (San Jose III) and endorse negotiating efforts.
February 15	At San Jose, the presidents of the four Central American democracies launch a new peace initiative and endorse draft proposal by President Arias of Costa Rica as the basis for discussion at a subsequent summit of all five Central American presidents, including Nicaragua's Ortega, at Esquipulas, Guatemala.
February 22–24	Ambassador Habib visits Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, and Mexico.
March 6	Ambassador Habib visits Guatemala for talks with President Cerezo and other officials.
March 22–31	Ambassador Habib travels to the Central American democracies and the Contadora Group countries for ongoing consultations.
March 29	Guatemalan President Cerezo visits Nicaragua and meets with President Ortega and members of the civic opposition.
April 6	Salvadoran President Duarte visits Guatemala for a private meeting with President Cerezo.

Three-member Costa Rican delegation visits Nicaragua to discuss peace initiative with Sandinista government and civic opposition.	April 7
Contadora and Support Group foreign ministers meet in Argentina to discuss Central America situation; issue a communique expressing support for the peace initiative of the Central American democracies. They then discuss other issues (debt, etc.) as "Group of Eight."	April 13–16
Ambassador Habib visits Guatemala, Costa Rica, Honduras, and El Salvador.	April 27–28
President Reagan and Speaker of the U S. House of Representatives Jim Wright agree on a peace plan that sets out the "basic elements that need to be included" in any regional peace accord. The six-point proposal calls for an immediate cease-fire, a simultaneous suspension of U S aid to the democratic resistance and Soviet-bloc assistance to the Sandinistas, the withdrawal of foreign military advisers from Nicaragua, and national reconciliation, democratization, and respect for basic human and political rights in Nicaragua.	August 5
The presidents of the five Central American countries of Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua meet in Guatemala City and sign the "Central American Peace Agreement." The agreement calls for, among other points, a cease-fire, national reconciliation, amnesty, democratization, an end to aid to insurgent movements, and free elections. In an August 8 statement, President Reagan declares that he "welcomes this commitment to peace and democracy," but notes that the "agreement makes clear that there is much work to be done by the parties involved." The President pledges that the United States will be "as helpful as possible consistent with our interests and the interests of the Nicaraguan Resistance...."	August 6–7
Several meetings of Central American foreign ministers to work out the details for the implementation of the Central American Peace Agreement.	August–September
Career diplomat Morris Busby named Special Negotiator for Central America.	September