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A New Freedom  
Fighter Aid Strategy

*By Rep. Jack Davis*



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# A NEW FREEDOM FIGHTER AID STRATEGY

by Representative Jack Davis

Is it fair to expect our friends the Contras to defeat our enemies the Sandinistas with only one-tenth the arms and equipment?

Is it fair to expect our friends the UNITA in Angola to defeat the communist government army with \$1 billion in Soviet aid and 25,000 Cuban troops on hand?

Is it fair to expect the Afghan Mujahadeen to defeat the Soviet Red Army with 1903 Enrights and pack mules?

The Contras have received no more than \$200 million in outside aid, while the Sandinista junta has received some \$2.8 billion in arms and aid from the Soviet bloc.

When the Sandinistas came to power in 1979, the Nicaraguan Army had only three battle tanks--count 'em, three. Today the Sandinista army has 150 Soviet main battle tanks, along with 220 armored personnel carriers to move troops into combat.

**Largest Army in Central America.** In the first four months of this year, the Sandinistas received more arms deliveries than the Contras have had in the last six years.

The Sandinistas now have 56 helicopters, including a dozen MI-24 Hind Ds, the most heavily armed helicopter gunship in the world, with 20 more of these "flying tanks" on order from the Soviet Union.

The Sandinista army is now the largest in Central America, with more than 100,000 troops.

The Sandinistas have installed 400 anti-aircraft guns and 300 surface-to-air SAM anti-aircraft missiles.

Today there are more than 75 Soviet advisors in Nicaragua, 7,500 Cuban advisers, and the usual collection of East Germans, North Koreans, and Romanians to run the secret police, the torture chambers, and the political prisons.

How can anyone expect the Contras to defeat an enemy six times their size with only 5 percent of the enemy's weapons and materiel?

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**Changing the Debate.** The debate in Congress over Contra aid has been fundamentally changed by the revelations of the Iranscam investigations. Since 1982, when President Reagan began aid to the Contras, Congress has insisted on a two-track strategy: aid the Contras, and push for a negotiated settlement. In the wake of Iranscam, liberals in Congress have shifted the debate from negotiations for aid to no aid at all because "the Contras can't win."

Perhaps we conservatives should thank our opponents in Congress for changing the terms of the debate, for now we can raise two telling questions that go straight to the heart of the issue:

- 1) Can the Contras win?
- 2) If not, why not?

There are two important groups who think the Contras can win: the Contras and the Sandinistas.

Ten thousand Nicaraguans are not in armed rebellion for the pleasures of camping out. They obviously believe they can make substantial changes in Nicaragua by taking up arms against Sandinista oppression. They are in rebellion because they think they can win.

It is, in fact, the sacrifice of the rebels of their own lives and the suffering of their countrymen that provide the overriding moral imperative for U.S. support of the Contras.

**A List of Grievances.** Charles Krauthammer wrote a very useful essay on the morality of guerrilla war in the September 8, 1986, New Republic. "We believe in freedom," Krauthammer wrote. "And when indigenous rebels, claiming their right to freedom, rebel against oppression and call for American support, it is hard to see what morally proscribes us from responding."

You do not have to equate Adolfo Calero with Thomas Jefferson to see that the Contras have compiled an impressive list of grievances, the redress of which is morally superior to continuing to acquiesce to Sandinista oppression.

What about popular support? Liberals in Congress are laboring mightily to pooh-pooh any claims of popular support for the rebellion. But what better barometer of public support is there than that a quarter million Nicaraguans have chosen exile over continued acquiescence in Sandinista oppression?

The resistance, itself, decentralized and fought on many fronts, represents what Arturo Cruz called a "revolt of Nicaraguans against the oppression of other Nicaraguans."

**Oppression and Harassment.** Some of the Contra support is armed, some unarmed. Cardinal Obando y Bravo and La Prensa editor Pedro Joaquin Chamorro

are both clearly in open support of the resistance and paying the price in Sandinista oppression and harassment.

Are the Contras a majority? Nobody knows. Despotisms do not permit such facts to be ascertained. What counts is that large sectors of the nation are in resistance. One out of ten Nicaraguans has simply left the country since the Sandinista coup.

True, there is not yet much action in the cities. But it is supremely difficult to move against an efficient secret police, such as that headed by Sandinista Interior Minister Tomas Borge. Borge has admitted to holding 5,000 political prisoners. Other observers put the number closer to 7,000. Suffice it to say, the Sandinistas have built four new prisons.

But is the Nicaraguan resistance any less popular than the Sandinista resistance was in its sixth year before it came to power? Or the Sandinista dictatorship today?

**Widespread Opposition.** You can pick up any edition of the daily Foreign Broadcast Reports for Latin America and find a news item from Nicaragua that would suggest the opposition to the regime is both common and widespread. In early April, the FBIS reported a flurry of opposition from Nicaragua:

Arsonists were reported by the Managua domestic service April 7 to have destroyed 65 sugar cane manzanas ready for harvesting bringing to 760 the number of manzanas destroyed during 200 days of harvest.

Another April 7 item reports a UNO [United Nicaraguan Opposition] communique claiming the downing of two Soviet-built MI-24 helicopter gunships and serious damage to a third.

April 8, we see a copy of a Sandinista Foreign Ministry protest note to the U.S. complaining of mercenary agents destroying electric cables.

An April 9 item, dateline San Jose, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, son of the martyred editor of Managua's LA PRENSA and a new member of the UNO directorate, says "80 percent of our fighting force is inside Nicaragua."

Also on April 9, we see that BARRICADA, the Sandinista PRAVDA, has attacked the "Yankee ultraright organization...the infamous Heritage Foundation" for a "furious attack" on the constitutional progress of the Sandinista regime.

Contra sabotage of power lines was reported on three separate occasions in the first two weeks of April.

**Impressive Victories.** Altogether, the Foreign Broadcast Reports are a daily journal of the struggle of a substantial number of Nicaraguans against the Sandinista regime.

Inside Nicaragua, the Contras have recently scored impressive guerrilla victories. They have brought down seven Soviet helicopter gunships this year, according to the authoritative Jane's Defense Weekly. In recent weeks, the Contras have bombed targets on the Rama River, deep inside Nicaragua, and won a major firefight at Jinotega, a mere 75 miles from Managua.

The fact that Contra units can penetrate so deeply into Nicaragua without being betrayed by farmers and villagers speaks volumes about the public support for the Contras. Today the Contras control an area of Nicaragua larger than El Salvador.

Who else believes the Contras can win? The Sandinista junta. The junta has asked for 20 more Soviet helicopter gunships, an obvious response to the improved firepower of Contra units since U.S. aid began to flow, again, last October.

The Sandinistas have also launched raids across the Honduran border, again, aimed at knocking out Contra bases. Jane's reports a strong offensive April 24 by the Sandinista People's Army in the Bocay valley aiming to drive an estimated 600 to 800 Contras back across the border.

**The Cork in the Bottle.** This raises the question of the nature of the Contra military strategy. Are they a guerrilla insurgency? Or only a cross-border raiding force, as General Paul Gorman, the ex-chief of the U.S. Southern Command in Panama, said recently?

From the point of view of purely American self-interest, it hardly matters. As a cross-border raiding force, the Contras are the cork in the bottle. The Contras are what keeps the Sandinista army from the throats of Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Belize, and Mexico.

A Sandinista break-out is not a pleasant picture to contemplate. President Reagan was not kidding a year ago when he said the Sandinistas could be in South Texas in a matter of days.

It is not completely clear that a Sandinista army would not be welcomed on Chapultepec Boulevard in Mexico City by major elements of the Mexican government and political apparatus.

The threat to the U.S. comes first in more subtle ways. The operation of America's second largest national news wire service, United Press International, is now under the control of some of the most radical and cynical elements in Mexico. Control of UPI now rests with the Echeverria family, the wonderful people who brought you the U.N.'s famous Third World Information Order, the final insult that drove the U.S. out of UNESCO.

**Political Soap Operas and Liberation News.** Spanish language television in the U.S. has long been under the control of Mexican left-wing political forces. Illegal control, as it turns out. The Federal Communications Commission last year stripped the Mexicans of five major market TV stations because of illegal foreign ownership. Mexican television has been little more than political soap operas and "liberation"

news. The Azcarraga clan has yet to comply with FCC divestment orders, and a movement is under way in Congress to compel divestiture by the Mexicans. Fortunately, there are a couple of Hispanic-American groups standing by to take up the Mexican operations in the U.S.

But not everyone is sure the Contras can win. They see the Soviet arms build-up in Nicaragua reaching overwhelming proportions in short order. The tanks, troop carriers, aircraft, and helicopters continue to flood into Nicaragua at the rate of 2,000 tons per month.

The Sandinista Army lacks only air superiority capability of their own. But the building of three new air fields means Soviet MiG fighters can be moved from Cuba to Nicaraguan bases in a matter of hours.

**Piddling U.S. Assistance.** Soviet main battle tanks cannot be defeated by M-16s. Molotov cocktails are a lot more glamorous than effective. Ask the Hungarian Freedom Fighters or the Czech veterans of the Prague Spring. Hind gunships do not submit to rifle fire. Ask the Afghan Mujahadeen rebels.

In fact, U.S. aid to the Contras has been truly piddling. Averaging only \$33.3 million a year over the past six years, Contra aid compares unfavorably with security assistance granted to other governments in the region:

- ◆◆ Jamaica, \$51.3 million requested for FY 88;
- ◆◆ Haiti, \$34.6 million;
- ◆◆ Dominican Republic, \$38.0 million.

Maybe the State Department is expecting an invasion from the Caribbean islands.

U.S. security assistance to the three frontline states in Central America looks like this:

- ◆◆ Costa Rica, \$92.4 million requested for FY 1988;
- ◆◆ El Salvador, \$319 million;
- ◆◆ Honduras, \$181 million.

For a total of \$493.8 million requested for FY 1988. Contra aid is only 7 percent of the security assistance to the front line Central American states. The argument might be made that our aid priorities are somewhat out of whack in Latin America.

**Getting it Backwards.** Counterinsurgency and guerrilla war experts estimate that to be successful the level of support for the Contras has to be at least 75 percent of the Soviet bloc support to the Sandinistas, or a sum close to \$2 billion.



Is the U.S. Congress going to vote \$2 billion for the Contras? This year? Over the next five years? Will it be four times the current level next year? Twelve times the five-year average next year? Don't count on it.

Current thinking on Capitol Hill seems to be that some kind of "humanitarian" assistance will be continued in the wake of the Iranscam revelations. But direct military assistance will once again be cut off.

But Congress has got it backwards. Iranscam is not something the Contras did to us. It is what the U.S., in effect, did to the Contras. Yet liberals in Congress want to cut off aid to the Contras because of screw-ups in the White House. More fair that Congress should enforce the "Son of Sam" law against the ill-gotten gains of Mr. Donald T. Regan.

**Foul-ups, Bleeps and Blunders.** The Select Committee and the national news media have created a monster that might be called "Contra, Incorporated," and are trying to make the Nicaraguan rebels take the fall for the foul-ups, bleeps, and blunders in the West Wing, at the NSC, at State, Defense, and the CIA, not to mention in the Vice President's office.

After all, you can buy the book that laid out many of the operations strategies employed by Colonel Oliver North at the Government Printing Office for \$4.25. It is a mystery only to the Select Committee and the press what Colonel North was up to.

As a member of the Special Operations panel of the House Armed Services Committee, I have taken an interest in the use of special operations to achieve policy and geopolitical goals. The ham-handed manner in which the Contra aid scheme was handled will put a sharp brake on the development of a useful and appropriate national strategy.

And the Contras will pay the price.

**A Strategy for the Long Haul.** So the real friends of freedom, the honest anti-communists, the true supporters of the Reagan Doctrine are going to have to come up with another strategy. A strategy for the long haul. A strategy to be in place when the crunch comes next time. A strategy to go into effect when the Sandinistas finally launch their break-out.

There are two situations that would provoke U.S. public support for U.S. military measures against the Sandinistas according to opinion polls: introduction of MiG fighters into Nicaragua and the installation of offensive missiles.

The new Contra aid strategy has three elements to it:

- ◆◆ Cancel U.S. diplomatic recognition of the Sandinista junta.
- ◆◆ Recognize a Nicaraguan government-in-exile.



◆◆ Award the government-in-exile standing to negotiate security assistance agreements directly with the U.S., including access to Lend Lease provisions.

**Recognizing a Government in Exile.** Revoking diplomatic recognition of the Sandinista junta is the easy part. It can be done by executive order as well as by legislation. I have joined a dozen of my colleagues both in submitting legislation and in writing to the White House to ask that diplomatic recognition of the Sandinista dictatorship be dropped.

My amendment to the Defense Authorization bill was, in fact, the first time the question of diplomatic recognition of the Sandinista regime has been voted on by Congress.

There is more than ample precedent for U.S. recognition of a Nicaraguan government-in-exile. France, for instance, broke with tradition by recognizing the United States during our Revolutionary War. Washington was the home of the Philippine government during World War II. Governments-in-exile were recognized for France, Holland, Greece, Norway, Poland, Belgium, Yugoslavia, and Luxembourg as well.

The Nicaraguan rebels can, in fact, lay claim to the three criteria usually observed for recognition of a government-in-exile:

- ◆◆ hostile occupation of a nation's territory;
- ◆◆ efforts under way to gain effective control of the country; and
- ◆◆ public support.

**Police State Tactics.** The occupation of Nicaragua by a Soviet-sponsored military dictatorship must surely be considered hostile to the peace and freedom of the Nicaraguan people. The deployment of some 15,000 armed rebels inside Nicaragua is ample evidence of an attempt to regain control of the country by the Nicaraguan opposition.

Even in the face of eight years of vigorous police state tactics, it is still possible to detect signs of public support for the Nicaraguan rebels.

The tricky part of a new Contra aid strategy is to get the Contras access to regular U.S. security assistance programs such as foreign military sales, military sales credit financing, and lend-lease arrangements. The precedent, of course, is the famous Lend Lease program of World War II that made the U.S. the arsenal of Democracy and turned the tide against the Nazi Third Reich and the East Asian Co-Prosperty Zone.

As in the Lend Lease of World War II, the emphasis of a new Lend Lease strategy is on the movement of material assistance, weapons, supplies, transportation, and equipment to our allies. The support levels of World War II were not measured in dollars, but in ships, aircraft and tanks delivered. We got rid of what President Roosevelt called the "silly, foolish old dollar sign."

**A New Lend Lease.** Lend Lease was backed by Congress in 1941 for the same reasons it should be backed in 1987: To help our allies defeat aggression and oppression and at the same time keep America out of the conflict. The Lend Lease program proclaimed a tacit, nonshooting alliance with Britain, the historian Thomas Baily wrote, and other nations whose resistance to aggression merited American support.

The isolationists of an earlier day denounced Lend Lease as a "blank check, dictator war, bankruptcy bill." Senator Bob Taft scoffed that "Lending war equipment is a good deal like lending chewing gum. You don't want it back."

Winston Churchill called Lend Lease "the most unsordid act in the history of any nation."

The central feature of the new Lend Lease is a simple equivalence requirement. It works like this: When the Sandinistas receive a shipment of Soviet arms, the Contras would receive from the U.S. an equivalent amount of similar equipment or defense equipment to counter the weapons received by the Sandinistas.

When the Sandinistas get another dozen Soviet "Flying Tanks," the Contras should get one hundred Stinger or Redeye anti-aircraft missiles.

When the Sandinistas receive another boatload of Soviet battle tanks, the Contras get a shipment of TOW and AT-4 anti-tank missiles. And so forth.

**Parity for the Contras.** But first, the U.S. has to bring the Contras up to some kind of parity with the \$2.8 billion in arms already received by the Sandinistas. According to Defense Department figures, the Sandinistas have 150 tanks, 200 armored personnel carriers, 43 airplanes, and 56 helicopters. To counter those weapons, the new Lend Lease would ship sufficient anti-aircraft missiles to the Contras. A similar formula would apply to anti-tank weapons.

The new Lend Lease has a number of advantages.

- ◆◆ The Contras are not a White House "pet project" any more.
- ◆◆ Congress retains control.
- ◆◆ It does not break the bank.

Under regular security assistance status the Nicaraguan government-in-exile would negotiate for the equipment, supplies, training, and weapons they think they need, instead of what dollar figure the White House thinks it can slide through Congress.

Congress would have all the veto power they now exercise over security assistance, arms export controls, and all the rest, just as they do for Saudi AWACS sales and Honduran F-5 fighter aircraft sales.

**An Idea Whose Time Has Come.** By emphasizing equivalency, parity, and countervailing force, the new Lend Lease provides security assistance at bargain basement prices. One \$10,000 Stinger antiaircraft missile can bring down one \$15 million helicopter gunship, for instance.

The House vote on dropping diplomatic relations with the Sandinista junta and extending recognition to a Nicaraguan government-in-exile was only the first of a number of opportunities to present a new Freedom Fighter aid strategy in the 100th Congress.

The need is no less today than it was in 1941 to support the enemies of oppression with U.S. industrial might.

The new Lend Lease is an idea whose time has come again.

