

The Kremlin connection

Roger Miranda Bengoechea is a man who knows many interesting secrets. This week, he finally began to talk and what he has so far revealed is sending shock waves through Washington and Managua.

Miranda was a senior aide to Nicaragua's defence minister, Humberto Ortega, the man many consider to be the real power behind the Marxist Sandinista regime. In October, Miranda defected to the U.S., taking with him quantities of documents and detailed information on Nicaragua's close links to Cuba and the Soviet Union. Among his revelations:

- Nicaraguan, Cuban and Soviet officials have long worked together drawing up long-term plans for Nicaragua's armed forces.

- Moscow is readying large shipments of arms for Nicaragua in open violation of the recent Central American peace accord to which the Sandinistas have subscribed.

- Soviet and Cuban defence planners aim to maintain a steady buildup of Nicaragua's already large armed forces for the next six years. This includes new arms, financing and training. Miranda also claims the Soviets will supply MiG-21 jet interceptors to Managua.

- The Soviets will help expand the Nicaraguan army from 69,000 to 80,000 men. At the same time, the well-armed militia will grow to 420,000 troops—the largest armed forces in Latin America after Cuba and Brazil.

- Nicaragua is actively supporting Marxist rebels in El Salvador, Guatemala and even Costa Rica.

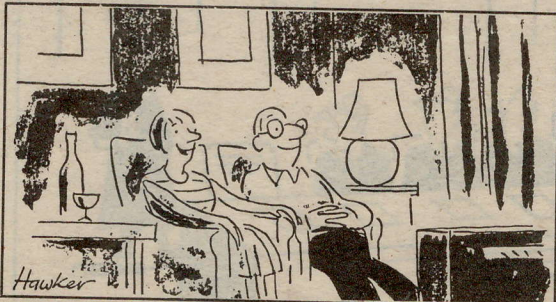
- According to Miranda, the number of Soviet and Cuban advisers in Nicaragua are smaller than U.S. estimates: 12 and 500 respectively.

- "What we (meaning the Sandinistas) have been fighting all these years," said Miranda, "is a peasant insurrection." How interesting it is to hear the anti-communist Contras described by a senior Sandinista as peasant guerrillas—contrast this to the way they are routinely dismissed as "former Somoza National Guardsmen" or "U.S. mercenaries" by the North American media.

- The Sandinistas are committed to building a communist regime in Nicaragua.

Just before Miranda went public, his former boss, Ortega, held a press conference in which he tried to lessen the damage caused by Miranda by stealing his thunder.

Punch



"How nice to be able to just sit and watch other people using their free time constructively."

ERIC MARGOLIS



The Nicaraguan defence minister confirmed many of Miranda's charges and admitted that "hundreds" of Nicaraguans were undergoing military training in the USSR. He went on to say that Nicaragua's armed forces would be expanded to 600,000 by 1995, 100,000 more than even Miranda claimed.

A few days later, a flustered and obviously embarrassed Daniel Ortega, Nicaragua's president, tried to undo the damage caused by his brother's remarks. Humberto was mistaken, said brother Daniel. Plans to build Latin America's second largest armed forces were only a "proposal."

No good—the cat was out of the bag.

What are we to make of this fascinating episode? First, U.S. claims that Marxist Nicaragua is planning to dominate Central America by Soviet-supplied and financed military power seem correct. Nicaragua is not the oppressed little democratic republic of farmers and happy social workers—as depicted by much of our media—but a budding Marxist Prussia that is a mortal danger to all its neighbors.

Miranda has undone years of patient Sandinista public relations. He has also thrown some badly needed cold water over those still reeling in giddy passion from last week's Washington summit.

Miranda reminds us that we are not yet at the edge of an international love-in. Certainly not while the Soviets, for all their glasnost and perestroika, are still loading T-55 tanks and BM-21 rocket artillery on ships bound from their Black Sea ports to Nicaragua.

Second, that Miranda's evidence, which sounds pretty reliable, won't convince those feeble thinkers who persist in believing, against all evidence, that the Sandinistas are nice boys being picked on by evil Ronnie Reagan and the National Rifle Association.

Exhibit A: House Speaker Jim Wright called Humberto Ortega's confirmation that the Nicaraguan army would grow to 600,000 men "preposterous." Well, if Texas Jim does not even believe Nicaragua's minister of defence, who does he believe?

Wright, who had just stuck his nose into the recent Central American peace pact, was left looking foolish and a patsy. So, too, were the legions of Sandinista supporters in North America who suddenly found their cherished "agrarian reformers" ready to promote land reform by using Soviet tanks instead of plows.

And what about Miranda's claim that the rural poor were actually backing the Contras against the urban Sandinista Marxists? Holy Marx, how embarrassing!