

June 25, 1979

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ (entire text)

TO: ARA - Viron P. Vaky

FROM: ARA - George Lister ✓

SUBJECT: Father d'Escoto, Provisional Government
"Ambassador"

Set forth below are a few relevant facts regarding the life and career of Father Miguel d'Escoto, the unofficial "Ambassador" of Nicaragua's Provisional Government. Also included are some personal thoughts and recommendations as to our present and future relations with him.

Father d'Escoto was born in Los Angeles in 1933. He grew up in Nicaragua but returned here as a teenager. He attended St. Mary's College in California and Manhattan College in NYC, and then received an M.A. from Columbia. He subsequently became a close personal friend and ally of Eduardo Frei. He was named head of the National Institute for Country Action and Research (INAP). Most of his brothers, sisters, nephews and neices are U.S. citizens. Miguel's base in this country continues to be the Maryknoll center at Ossining, N.Y.

Miguel has long been dedicated to the removal of the Somoza dictatorship. That had become a full time job for him even before the formation of "The Twelve". He has been inside Nicaragua clandestinely, lived and prayed with the guerrillas, etc. We have been good friends for more than a dozen years. I have found him to be warm hearted, quick spoken and outspoken, ready to listen and debate, refreshingly unassuming and modest, often relaxed and witty, and a man who frequently thinks and talks of God (as a life time agnostic, I am in no way influenced by the good Father's religious beliefs). He has guts and lots of energy.

Miguel is highly critical of our Nicaraguan policy in past years, but welcomes anything he considers

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to be an improvement. He supports the "Carter" human rights policy, even though he feels it does not go far and fast enough. He often finds it hard to understand our Latin American policies and tactics, but of course that is true of many people. Miguel says that at least some in the FSLN do not think he is far enough to the left and sufficiently critical of the USG, and I believe that influences his public statements to some extent, both consciously and otherwise. I find Miguel sometimes overstates his case, but after a few minutes of candid, vigorous debate he is usually willing to modify his position and temper his criticism. I did not think he was effective enough on the recent MacNeil/Lehrer Show and I told him so. After some thought he agreed.

If the Provisional Government comes to power Miguel is currently slated to be the Foreign Minister. As you know, over at the OAS on Friday and Saturday I was very worried that we would not hold an adequate, substantive conversation with him, thereby compounding his resentment, suspicion and misconceptions regarding our objectives and playing into the hands of our enemies in Nicaragua and elsewhere. I do not agree that Miguel is excessively "emotional" (in light of the circumstances and his role), or that he is "irresponsible" and "represents nothing". It is true that we know many things that he does not, especially about our own objectives and tactics, but then Miguel knows many other important things we do not, such as Sandinista thinking and plans. He is now in a position to help us or hurt us greatly in the current dangerous, sensitive situation in Nicaragua, regardless of whether the Provisional Government prevails. He also has a wide following in the U.S. Human Rights Movement, far beyond the wildly exulting crowd of local anti-Somoza Nicaraguans who mobbed him with cheers and kisses as he emerged after the OAS vote. On the Hill he was operating out of Harkin's office. Obviously he has more credibility than the Department with many of these people and his criticism of our failure to talk with him would have created many unnecessary problems for us at home. I would rate Miguel as the equal of many Latin American and U.S. Ambassadors I have known (a brother of his was in the Nicaraguan diplomatic service for some time). Considering some of the people who could have been chosen to come to the OAS for the Provisional Government I suspect we were pretty lucky to get Miguel. I am certain that many of the top Sandinista leaders are as abysmally ignorant of us as we are of them.

having Miguel meet with Larry Pezzullo at length. And that was done without adding to the "legitimacy" of the Provisional Government to any significant degree.

The conversation went fairly well, and I suppose the most important result was that Miguel came away genuinely pleased. He was enormously relieved when Larry assured him that we were not going to press the "Peacekeeping Force" idea. At one point during that meeting I asked Miguel bluntly whether he did not suspect there were some FSLN leaders who think of him as a useful idiot, who can be sent up to the U.S. to fool the gringos and then be quickly discarded if the Sandinistas attain power. At the time I did not feel Miguel really faced up to that question. Yesterday (Sunday) I spent most of the morning with him in his hotel room, and we chatted and debated while he was not responding to innumerable phone calls. I pushed him hard on the "useful idiot" question. Miguel finally conceded that there might be some in the FSLN who harbored such thoughts but he added that if it came to a Communist dictatorship he would leave without being asked. I also pressed Miguel on the question of democratic elections if the Provisional Government were to come to power. It seemed to me he was not adequately responsive on that subject, despite all his protestations that considerable time would be needed to restore order. Among other things he warned that if elections were held soon after an FSLN takeover the unfortunate result might well be to elect currently popular but unprepared, unqualified leaders such as Commander Zero.

At one point yesterday Miguel remarked that he felt Larry had made a bad mistake in his confirmation hearing testimony by referring to the Sandinistas as "terrorists". Miguel said that statement had made a very poor impression in top FSLN circles. I replied that I had been unaware of such a statement.

During yesterday's hotel conversation, as I had in the Saturday talk with Larry, I brought up some of the people mentioned in Managua's cable 2758 of June 22 (attached), as well as other names. Miguel is very close to Sergio Ramirez, whom he admires greatly, and Edmundo Jarquin is also an old friend. Miguel expects Carlos Tunnerman to be Minister of Education. He predicted Eduardo Chamorro Coronel would be Press Secretary, not Javier Chamorro Coronel. Rafael Cordova Rivas is supposed to get the Supreme Court. Bernadino

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Larrios, a National Guard expert, is to be Defense Minister. Arturo Cruz, not Julio Vega, would be head of the Central Bank. Juan Ignacio Gutierrez would be Minister of Health. Miguel ridiculed the idea that Sanchez Salgado, also known as "Chaguitillo", would get anything, since he is completely discredited and widely known as a Moscow-lining Communist.

On Saturday afternoon, shortly after the OAS vote, Miguel confided that as the ballot ended his first feeling was elation over the victory, followed immediately by a premonition that he was going to be murdered. He mentioned that fear again on Sunday.

cc: ARA/CEN - Mr. Hemenway

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