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Report: Russia Building Spy Base in Nicaragua

By Cathy Burke

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The Russian government is building a spy base in Nicaragua in a startling Cold War-like buildup of both its military and intelligence presence in the West, The Washington Free Beacon reports.

Beacon writer Bill Gertz, citing unnamed defense officials, reports a recent deal between Moscow and Managua also involved the costly sale of 50 T-72 Russian Tanks. Nicaragua is still headed by the White House's onetime Cold War nemesis leftist Daniel Ortega.

Retired Navy Cdr. Daniel Dolan, writing in the blog USNI News, stated that the cost of the tanks, an estimated \$80 million, is \$9 million more than the entire Nicaraguan defense budget for 2015, Gertz writes.

Gertz writes no details could be learned of where the spy site will be located, but notes it "could be disguised as a Russian GLONASS satellite navigation tracking station" that's nearing completion — "the Russian version of the Global Positioning System network of satellites used for precision navigation and guidance."

Gertz notes some reports indicate the GLONASS station may be situated near Laguna de Najapa, north of the capital of Managua — or along the Caribbean coast.

"While any nation has the right to choose its international partners, we have been clear that now is not the time for business as usual with Russia," an unnamed State Department official tells Gertz.

Southern Command spokesman Lt. Col. David Olson tells Gertz the United States respects the right of nations to modernize their defenses.

"We're aware of Russian engagements in our hemisphere," he said. "The nature of Russia's engagements in our hemisphere isn't new and similar to engagements with other nations. We are confident that our partner nations understand our desire to be their security partner of choice, as well as our commitment to work side by side with them in support of our shared interests and democratic values."

News of the deal comes as three Americans, working for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, were expelled from Nicaragua without explanation, the Free Beacon and Daily Mail both report.

Former Pentagon policymaker Mark Schneider tells Gertz the tanks deal appears to be part of a Russian strategy to expand weapons sales to create opportunities for military bases — and to ramp up influence in the region.

"In general, Moscow openly covets new foreign bases in Latin America, the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Balkans, and the Middle East," Schneider tells Gertz.

"Russia is comfortable with Marxist states. Russia will sell arms to just about anyone and will

seek to achieve influence and military advantage. There is obviously no relationship between the sale of T-80 tanks reported by Jane's and drug smuggling."

Roger Noriega, a former State Department Latin Affairs policymaker, calls spending on tanks a poor use of resources for a very poor country.

"Apparently this is part of Ortega's 'cash-for-clunkers' program to seal political ties with Russia while engaging in purchases that allow both sides to bury pay-offs on both sides of the deal and have some hardware," Noriega tells Gertz.

He also took a shot at President Barack Obama, calling it "too bad" he "isn't the least bit interested in anything that is happening in Nicaragua — which is fortunate if you're in the drugs or dictatorship business."