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The US and Nicaragua

April 1982

Background: Toward the end of the Nicaraguan civil war, the OAS passed a resolution in June 1979 calling for "immediate and definitive replacement of the Somoza regime"; "guarantee of the respect for human rights of all Nicaraguans without exception"; and "the holding of free elections as soon as possible, that will lead to the establishment of a truly democratic government that guarantees peace, freedom and justice." In a letter to the OAS in July 1979, before assuming power, the Provisional Government of National Reconstruction promised to "install a regime of democracy, justice and social progress in which there is full guarantee for the right of all Nicaraguans to political participation and universal suffrage"; "guarantee the full exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms"; and organize "a mixed economy."

The Sandinista leaders have reneged on these promises. They have ignored a basic tenet of the inter-American system--nonintervention in the affairs of other states--by providing materiel and other support for subversion in El Salvador and elsewhere. Nicaragua also is engaged in a rapid arms buildup which threatens the security of its neighbors. Rather than strengthening democracy, the Sandinistas have concentrated on consolidating political power, imposing heavy constraints on opposition activity and postponing elections. This trend led Eden Pastora, a founder and popular hero of the Sandinista movement, to break publicly with them in April 1982, accusing them of betraying their promises of freedom and progress. The economy has done poorly despite more than \$125 million in US aid and several hundred million from other Western donors. Production is well below prerevolutionary levels. Largely because of the regime's hostility, private internal and external investment is almost nonexistent.

Intervention in El Salvador: Nicaragua is the support and command base for the Salvadoran guerrillas. Arms and supplies are received in Nicaragua and transshipped by land, air, and sea to El Salvador. The guerrillas' Unified Revolutionary Directorate has its headquarters near Managua; with the help of Cuban and Nicaraguan officers, it coordinates logistical support, including food, medicine, clothing, money, and munitions, and selects targets to be attacked. Salvadoran guerrillas move through Nicaragua to Cuba and elsewhere for training; some training is conducted in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas also provide support for leftist extremists in Guatemala, Honduras, and Costa Rica.

Military buildup: Nicaragua, with a population of 2.7 million, has expanded its active duty forces to 20,000-25,000--at least twice the size of Somoza's National Guard; reservists and militia exceed 50,000. To accommodate this force, the Sandinistas have built 36 new Cuban-designed military garrisons, in addition to 13 garrisons inherited from the National Guard. In contrast, Costa Rica has no standing army, and Honduras, with 1 million more people than Nicaragua, has total forces of about 17,500. Some 2,000 Cuban military and internal security advisers are in Nicaragua, and several hundred Nicaraguan military are

training in Cuba. Sophisticated weapons, including Soviet-made T-55 tanks, amphibious ferries, and transport aircraft, have been added to Nicaragua's arsenal. Airfields have been lengthened to handle MiG aircraft; Nicaraguan pilots are training in Eastern Europe. Recently, Nicaragua also has purchased rocket-launchers, helicopters, and patrol boats from France.

Attacks on pluralism: It is increasingly clear that the country is controlled by the Sandinistas' nine-member Directorate--all Marxists--and not by the government's official structures, the Coordinating Junta or Cabinet. The trend is toward a one-party state.

- Elections have been postponed until at least 1985.
- The respected, independent newspaper La Prensa, for years the voice of opposition to the Somozas, has been closed down repeatedly for carrying unwelcome news; La Prensa and independent radio news services are now heavily censored.
- Archbishop Obando y Bravo was banned from performing mass on television, and the Catholic Church's radio was temporarily closed.
- Independent political parties are harassed and denied permission to hold public rallies; their headquarters have been attacked by Sandinista-orchestrated mobs, and their leaders refused permission to travel abroad.
- In October 1981, five leaders of COSEP, the umbrella private sector organization, were arrested and some jailed for 4 months, because they issued a statement criticizing official policy.
- Cuban-style block committees have been set up to monitor political activities at the community level.
- Three years after the Sandinistas took power, there are still some 4,200 political prisoners; allegations of political arrests and disappearances have increased.
- Tightly controlled Sandinista labor and peasant organizations have been established.
- The Sandinistas have engaged in a systematic destruction of the way of life of the isolated Miskito Indian tribe. At least 26 of their villages are now deserted--most burned to the ground. Some 10,000 Miskitos have been detained in "relocation" centers, and as many as 12,000 have fled into Honduras.

US policy: While the US had shared the hopes for a pluralistic, nonaligned Nicaragua, we have been increasingly concerned with the deteriorating conditions and have repeatedly called our concerns to the Sandinistas' attention. Assistant Secretary of State Enders went to Managua in August 1981 to meet with Nicaraguan leaders. Against the background of increasing restrictions on domestic dissent, the discussions focused on the regional security problems caused by Nicaragua's military buildup and arms supply to Salvadoran guerrillas. In exchange for Nicaraguan action on our concerns, the US offered resumption of economic aid and cultural/technical exchanges and assurances we would not aid groups seeking to overthrow the Nicaraguan Government. In March 1982, although the Sandinistas had demonstrated no willingness to address our concerns, Secretary Haig reaffirmed US willingness to discuss outstanding issues, and in April our Ambassador presented specific proposals to the Nicaraguan Government. The new eight-point US plan includes a proposed regional arrangement for arms limitations and international verification. We would welcome cooperation with a pluralistic Nicaragua committed to peace and friendship with its neighbors.