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Remarks #19: FYI.

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Executive Secretary

16 Oct 84

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3637 (10-81)

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

5 OCT 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. ROBERT M. KIMMITT
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

SUBJECT: White House Digest: "What the Central American Bishops Say About Central America"

Attached is a copy of the subject Digest, annotated with Department change recommendations. The changes in numbers reflect the upper limit of the most recent DIA information.

R. J. Affourtit
Executive Secretary

Attachment

cc: Mr. Charles Hill
Executive Secretary
Department of State

[redacted] STAT
Executive Secretary
Central Intelligence Agency

C-387

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VIA LDX

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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

October 2, 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. CHARLES HILL
Executive Secretary
Department of State

COL R.J. AFFOURTIT
Executive Secretary
Department of Defense

STAT

Executive Secretary
Central Intelligence Agency

SUBJECT: White House Digest: "What the Central Americans Bishops Say About Central America"

The attached White House Digest has been reviewed/cleared by your agency. It incorporates changes suggested by your agency. Please provide final comments for review/clearance by October 9, 1984.

Robert M. Kimmitt
Executive Secretary

Attachment:

White House Digest

WHAT CENTRAL AMERICAN BISHOPS SAY ABOUT CENTRAL AMERICA

We want to state clearly that this government is totalitarian. ... We are dealing with a government that is an enemy of the Church.

Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo
Managua, Nicaragua
11 July 1984[1]

There were still in the world men and women of good will who did not believe a totalitarian regime had enthroned itself in Nicaragua. Now those people know the truth.

Archbishop Roman Arrieta
San Jose, Costa Rica
11 July 1984[2]

If the Salvadoran guerrillas had popular support, they would already have won by now.

Archbishop Arturo Rivas y Damas
Archbishop of San Salvador
March 22, 1983[3]

Critics of Administration policies in Central America often cloak their criticisms by trying to wrap them in the mantle of the Catholic Church. The authority of the Church lends credibility to their arguments and makes them seem less partisan and more constructive.

However, the impression that the Church hierarchy in Central America is totally opposed to U.S. policy is incorrect. In fact, Nicaraguan and Salvadoran Bishops have become increasingly critical of the Sandinista regime and the Salvadoran guerrillas.

As anyone familiar with the area realizes, the position of the Catholic Church in all of Latin America has undergone profound changes in the last twenty years. One aspect of Church teaching that has not changed, however, is the fundamental concern for the human rights of the people.

It is for this reason that extremes of both the right and the left have been opposed by the Bishops of El Salvador and Nicarac y in El

Salvador, while condemning the abuses of both right and left wing death squads. They have deplored the movement towards Marxism-Leninism in Nicaragua.

Nicaragua

Casual observers of the Sandinista Revolution are confused by the initial support for the Revolution by Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo, since he is now opposed to the Sandinista dictatorship. Obando y Bravo had always been in the forefront of opposition to Somoza. As early as 1974, he and his brother Bishops condemned the Somoza regime, saying in an important Pastoral Letter:

> "The 'social order' cannot therefore consist of a rigid and worn out mechanism, which denies, represses or monopolizes the exercise of the rights of a dominating faction. And more, even when an ideological group or system might be preferred or chosen among others, this choice, and prevalence, does not give it the right to abolish or exclude other possible options and the search for new expressions of the personal aspirations of a group of people."

Obando y Bravo also mediated two hostage seizures by the Sandinistas, in 1974 and 1978. Somoza's memoirs are filled with invective against the Archbishop, whom he once called "Comandante Obando." Now the Sandinistas are trying to link him with the deposed dictator.

The dedication of the Archbishop to human rights has not changed. In 1979, Obando y Bravo shared the hopes of many of his countrymen that the Somoza dictatorship would be replaced by a democratic regime. Like the U.S., the Archbishop tried his best to move the regime in that direction. In fact, one of the first public events of the Sandinista era was a victory Mass celebrated by Obando y Bravo.

After five years, however, these high hopes have soured. The Sandinistas have failed to live up to the promises they made to the Organization of American States and instead have suspended most human rights, including freedom of religion. Therefore, consistent in his concern for the human rights of the people of Nicaragua, the Archbishop condemns Sandinista violations.

Many North Americans, however, have yet to realize the changes that have taken place in Nicaragua since 1979. Because they do not realize the totalitarian direction of the Sandinistas, there are even some Catholic Bishops in the U.S. who are still supportive of the Nicaraguan junta.

Bishop Obando was recently asked how the North American Catholic Church could help him. He replied:

> "The first thing that the North American Church needs is good information. They receive a lot of information from the Popular Church and the Sandinistas -- which is the same

thing. The government here manipulates all the groups that come. And any letter we send to the Bishops never arrives there."[5]

The Catholic Church has traditionally rejected Marxism because it is a man-centered ideology. The April 1984 Easter Sunday Pastoral Letter on Reconciliation reiterated this rejection:

> "Materialistic concepts of mankind distort the person and teachings of Christ, reduce man to merely physical terms without taking account of his spiritual nature, so he remains subject to physical forces called the 'dialectics of history.' And man, alienated from God and himself, becomes disoriented, without moral and religious reference points, without a higher nature, insecure and violent."[6]

Based on this general discomfort with Marxist regimes, the hierarchy has rejected the Marxism-Leninism of the Sandinista government. Bishop Antonio Vega, President of the Nicaraguan Bishops' Conference, commented on Sandinismo in March 1983:

> "The Sandinista government through its ideology and method is a Marxist-Leninist government.... In its daily praxis the government does not act in an exclusively totalitarian manner, but [there is] total domination of the people."[7]

A source of confusion to observers familiar with the poor relations between the Sandinistas and the Catholic Church is the presence of five Roman Catholic priests on the ruling junta. They had been permitted to continue in these posts on a provisional basis, but the Vatican recently arrived at a final decision on their case and required the priests to resign their political positions.

The Vatican press office released a statement concerning priests who hold political positions on August 10. It cited Canon 285,3 of the new Code of Canon Law, which reads:

> "It is prohibited for clergymen to assume public offices which entail participation in the exercising of civil government."[8]

The statement from the Holy See continued with this comment on the circumstances in Nicaragua:

> "The Canon cited enunciates as a law of the Church the categorical prohibition, according to which clerics cannot accept nor retain the stated public offices, and this supersedes any situation or any judgement which may have already existed."[9]

The Catholic hierarchy cited this "categorical prohibition" against priests holding public office. Monsignor Antonio Vega added a condemnation of the Sandinista government itself:

> "The priests have been called to end their association with the government, and if they do not accept this, they

end their association with Jesus. This government is anti-Christian. It is a system of Marxist-Leninist materialism and has nothing to do with religion."[10]

The priests who now participate in the Sandinista dictatorship are: Miguel D'Escoto, a Maryknoll priest and Sandinista Foreign Minister; Ernesto Cardenal, a Trappist monk who is Minister of Culture; his cousin Fernando Cardenal, a Jesuit priest who was named Nicaraguan minister of education on July 13; and Father Edgard Parrales.[11]

Bishop Vega continued his attacks upon totalitarianism in a Mass held on May 1, 1984 at the request of an anti-Sandinista labor organization. His sermon attacked governments run "by a few individuals who want to dominate and enslave the rest."[12]

One of the methods of extending totalitarianism that particularly concerns the Bishops is government intrusion into Catholic education. Specifically, Catholics are concerned about atheistic Marxist indoctrination becoming part of the curriculum. The Easter Pastoral Letter states, under the heading of "A Belligerent Situation":

> "A materialistic and atheistic educational system is undermining the consciences of our children."

Bishop Vega has also highlighted the link between totalitarianism and lack of respect for human rights. He said:

> "[There is submission to] a totalitarian and materialistic state which at the same time does not respect human rights."[13]

At the same time that the Bishops condemn human rights abuses by the Sandinistas, they reject the excuse that outside intervention, in the form of alleged U.S. support for the armed opponents of the regime, known as the Freedom Fighters, justifies harsh methods. The Easter Pastoral Letter points out:

> "It is dishonest to constantly blame internal aggression and violence on foreign aggression. It is useless to blame the evil past for everything without recognizing the problems of the present."

The Easter Pastoral also made veiled reference to the superpower conflict as it effects the people of Nicaragua. In a passage which does not name either the U.S. or the Soviet Union, the letter said the following:

> "Foreign powers take advantage of our situation to encourage economic and ideological exploration. They see us as support for their power, without respect for our persons, our history, our culture, and our right to decide our own destiny."

Some observers see in this a reference to criticism by individual church leaders of the Sandinistas' ties to Communist

countries, especially Cuba.[14] This is a logical assumption, since there are about ~~7,500 to 9,500~~ 10,000 Cubans in the country.

The Catholic Church hierarchy has serious doubts about the ~~exercise~~ election scheduled for this November, ~~which the Sandinistas are calling an election~~. Bishop Vega commented soon after the "electoral process" got under way:

> "One cannot talk about free and popular elections when one does not say how these will take place. ... In order to speak of free elections, it is necessary that the citizens have full knowledge of what they are choosing. ... The climate in which to conduct free elections does not exist, because the government controls the means of communication."[15]

A bitter Church-State controversy appeared last year when the Sandinistas were drafting the current universal military conscription law, without a provision for conscientious objection. The Bishops issued a Pastoral Letter on August 29, 1983 giving their general considerations on military service. They said:

> "The proposed [military conscription] law is strongly politicized in its fundamental points, it has a partisan character and it follows the general lines of all totalitarian legislation. ...
>
> "The Military Service does not only 'promote the learning of the most advanced military techniques' (Consideration VII), but also 'will form in our youth the sense of revolutionary discipline and morality.' That is, the Army is converted into an obligatory center of political indoctrination in favor of the Sandinista Party. ...
>
> "To force the citizens to join an 'Army-Political Party' without being in agreement with the ideology of said political party, is an act against the liberty of thought, of opinion, and of association. (Ref. Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, arts. 18, 19 and 20.)
>
> "Consequently, no one can be obligated to take arms to defend a particular ideology with which they do not agree, nor to perform military service for the benefit of a political party."[16]

Finally, the Easter Pastoral letter makes some suggestions about how to solve the ~~problems~~ conflicts that are causing so many Nicaraguans to lose their lives. The answer, say the Bishops, is in dialogue:

> "The road to social peace is possible through dialogue, sincere dialogue that seeks truth and goodness. ... [This includes dialogue with] Nicaraguans who have taken up arms against the government. ... The dialogue of which we speak is not a tactical truce to strengthen positions for further struggle but a sincere effort to seek appropriate solutions to the anguish, pain, exhaustion, and fatigue of the many, many people who long for peace."[17]

A recent Church-State controversy has surrounded the activities of Father Amando Pena. He is being held under house arrest and investigated by the Sandinistas for alleged involvement with the anti-Sandinista forces threatening the regime.

On July 9, 1984 Tomas Borge, the head of the Sandinista secret police, demanded that Archbishop Obando remove Father Pena from his parish. The archbishop refused, but agreed to limit the priest's appearances in the neighborhood. That same night, the "turbas," or "divine mobs," became involved. These are groups of pro-government demonstrators who have threatened and attacked priests and Christians. Archbishop Obando describes their actions:

> "I was still on my pastoral visit and they sent me a message on the radio that the turbas were in Father Pena's parish and were burning tires and molesting the people there. The police told the people to get out of the church, but outside the turbas were waiting to beat the people up. The turbas climbed to the top of the church and began to rip off the roof."[18]

Obando y Bravo said the church considered the allegations against Pena:

> "a setup by the government to hurt the Catholic Church.... I believe the government, with these accusations against our priests, intends to eliminate the Catholic Church to implant the so-called Popular Church."[19]

The accusations against Father Pena, and the subsequent expulsion of ten priests after a procession in support of Father Pena, led the Archbishop, who knew from the Somoza days what a dictatorship looked like, to draw the following conclusion:

> "We want to state clearly that this government is totalitarian. I don't think that we can deceive ourselves today; we are dealing with a government that is an enemy of the Church -- especially those who are orthodox. ...These actions are also hurting the entire country."[20]

This episode has prompted Catholic leaders from throughout the area to condemn the Sandinista government. Bishop Roman Arrieta of San Jose, Costa Rica, concelebrated a Mass with seven of the ten expelled priests. In his homily, the Bishop told worshippers:

> "There were still in the world men and women of good will who did not believe a totalitarian regime had enthroned itself in Nicaragua. Now those people know the truth."[21]

Genero Alamilla, the auxiliary Bishop of Mexico, reacted to the expulsion by saying:

> "The Government Junta is openly provoking the Catholic Church in Nicaragua; this is how Sandinismo is seeking to justify repression. ... It is a contradiction for Commander Daniel Ortega to declare that he does not want

7 efforts to achieve regional understanding by the "Contadora" group of countries

confrontations with the Catholic Church and to conduct a campaign of persecution against priests, nuns, bishops and the clergy in Nicaragua."[22]

The Episcopal Conference of Panama also condemned the action and exhorted the Sandinistas to reconsider and reverse their decision. A communique sent to the ruling junta expressed the Bishops' hope that the spirit of the Contadora Group:

> "will serve to cease the persecution of the religious sectors who are exercising their right to criticize ... and that [the Sandinistas] will listen to the call for dialogue and reconciliation that the Nicaraguan Bishops have offered."[23]

El Salvador

In neighboring El Salvador, the Catholic Church has had a long tradition of standing up to those who would threaten the fledgling democracy for which the people of El Salvador are fighting and dying. At times, this has meant danger for the Bishops. The murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero by unknown assassins is powerful testimony to the ruthlessness of democracy's enemies.

Despite this danger, the Bishops have continued to speak out against human rights abuses and terrorist violence. They have also commented with some frequency on the need for U.S. military assistance. Critics of the Reagan Administration have claimed that the Church in El Salvador opposes such aid.

This is not true. The position of the Church is that military aid by itself is not a sufficient solution. It is, however, an important part of any solution. Bishop Pedro Aparicio, former secretary of the Episcopal Conference, said while on a visit to this country in August, 1981:

> "The Church in El Salvador does not want military aid from the United States if all Soviet aid to the guerrillas stops. While Russia is supplying the guerrillas with arms we need the United States to help to strengthen our own army."[24]

Archbishop Arturo Rivas y Damas preceded Bishop Aparicio to the U.S. and made an even stronger statement about the proper U.S. role in the conflicts in Central America:

> "[I]nstead of sending arms, you could help put a cordon around our country to impede the arrival of arms from the Soviet bloc."[25]

This support for U.S. aid to counter what the terrorist elements receive from Nicaragua and Cuba has continued. In May 1983, the San Salvador diocesan weekly, Orientacion, included the following sentiment in an editorial:

> "Without a doubt this country would be reaching the limits of its admirable resistance had it not been for the

military and economic assistance of [North] America."[26]

More recently, Bishop Marco Revelo, the current head of the Episcopal Conference, called for continued U.S. aid at present levels, with neither a large increase in the amount of U.S. aid nor a unilateral withdrawl.[27] He confirmed the legality and the necessity of this aid when he said:

> "Military aid is necessary because the Government - and it is a Government that is legitimately constituted - needs to protect itself from violence."[28]

Finally, Archbishop Rivera [on] once again expressed his concern about the flow of arms into his country from all sources:

> "I am against all arms flows into Central America and especially to El Salvador. My words, however, should not be interpreted to be a unilateral condemnation in only one sense."[29]

There is no doubt that the Bishops want peace, but they are not willing to accept it on the guerrillas' terms. Well before the start of the Salvadoran guerrillas' "final offensive" in January 1981, Archbishop Rivera y Damas said in his Sunday homily [that] the Church wants peace, "but not a peace won by weapons."[30]

Recourse to force is sometimes justified in the eyes of the Catholic Church. It is useful to recall that the Nicaraguan Bishops' 1978 pastoral letter proclaimed that the Somoza regime had become intolerable and that Nicaraguans could in good conscience raise arms against it.

But the situation in El Salvador, according to its Episcopal Conference, is different. The necessary conditions for justifiable rebellion did not exist when the guerrillas launched their 1981 offensive and they have become more remote since then. Rivera y Damas laid out the conditions in a January 1981 homily:

> "Insurrection is justified when four requirements are satisfied: there is serious abuse of political power by those in power, all peaceful alternatives have failed, the ills that accompany an insurrection would not be greater than the present difficulties, and the people must truly believe that the insurrection shall win."[31]

The Archbishop of San Salvador and his colleagues [had] ~~have~~ serious doubts about all but the first of these conditions. They were not at all sure that a Communist victory would bring improvements to the lives of the people. In fact, they [were] ~~are~~ almost certain it would not.

In the same homily, Rivera y Damas asserted that the leftist guerrillas were inclined toward Communism and that the Salvadoran people: "are not certain that the installation of a Socialist regime in El Salvador is preferable to a continuation of the present one."[32]

The regime that the prelate mentioned, it must be remembered, was the civilian/military junta that took power from the oligarchy in 1979. Since that homily, El Salvador has held three elections and the legitimacy of the central government has increased accordingly. Now a democratic one

In March 1982 the people of El Salvador turned out in large numbers to vote for a Constituent Assembly, despite the threat of violence from the guerrillas. Similar large turnouts in March and May 1984 have confirmed the people's rejection of the guerrillas[] and led to the election of President Duarte, who has advanced the democratic process.

Rivera y Damas recently closed the book on the notion that the Salvadoran insurgency had either the support of the Church or the support of the people with the following statement last year in San Jose, Costa Rica:

> "[I]f the Salvadoran guerrillas had popular support, they would already have won by now."[33]

According to the Bishops, one of the reasons the Salvadoran people do not support the guerrillas is their commitment to foreign ideologies. Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez, the Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador, commented on Marxism in a homily on September 23, 1984:

> "The Church cannot accept that the Marxist line be adopted in order to defend the poor as this would lead to the acceptance of class struggle and even the use of violence. Experience has demonstrated that when this path is followed, in the end, the poor are submitted to new types of slavery while also being deprived of the treasure of religious faith."[34]

El Salvador's Bishops have rejected the claims of the guerrillas that there actions are on behalf of "the people." A particularly harsh rebuke was given by Bishop Rosa Chavez:

> "No matter how often they [the guerrillas] attempt to justify their actions of sabotage with arguments that they fight against the government, against oppression and what they call the oligarchy, it is the people who ultimately pay the price. ... If they continue along that path, as they increase in military strength, the weaker they will be politically and will have even less space in the heart of the people. Therefore, I ask myself, in whose favor are they really fighting?"[35]

The guerrillas also have trouble garnering popular support, according to the Bishops, because of their brutal methods. Rivera y Damas said in March 1984:

> "In order to triumph militarily the guerrillas need the support of the people, but this support is denied not only because of repression or the fear of it, but because the destruction and the violent methods have affected the people, who continue to suffer in all ways."[36]

Bishop Rosa Chavez seemed to wonder if the guerrillas were really interested in popular support. He said in January 1984:

> "It seems more important to the guerrillas to glorify themselves ... than to consider the anguish of all those farmworkers who have now lost their livelihoods. ...[The guerrillas] place a greater premium on international plaudits and propagandistic coverage they receive in other countries than on the damage and deaths of innocents."[37]

In his homily of August 12, 1984, the Archbishop ordered the priests in his See to sever their ties with the guerrillas, saying:

> "The Salvadoran and foreign priests who are politically committed to the leftist guerrilla cause should arrange their situation, which is in contradiction with those who prescribe the canon law. ... They have posts which are incompatible with their duties as priests."[38]

The hierarchy is not silent on abuses by right wing paramilitary bands. But unlike some North Americans who condemn only one side for human rights abuses, the Catholic hierarchy sees both as impediments to the establishment of a people's democratic regime.

Rivera y Damas again:

> "When we speak of violence, we cannot use a double standard. ... The violence is equally condemnable when it comes from those who kidnap, ambush armed forces patrols, dynamite installations that provide jobs, and provoke electricity stoppages that affect entire zones: or when the violence comes from security forces and paramilitary bands as they kidnap persons of the civilian population late at night, and have them disappear or kill them."[39]

Sources of Confusion

Many partisans from different sides have claimed to have the Church on their side in the Salvadoran struggle. This is because some groups who claim to speak on behalf of the Church (usually in support of the Communists) do so falsely. Some North Americans, ignorant of the workings of the Salvadoran Church, confuse these sources with official Church organs.

The best example of this is the credibility attributed to Soccoro Juridico, the legal aid office of the Archbishopric of San Salvador. To those who wish to accuse the government of most (if not all) the deaths of the civil war, this source is very useful. But it has not spoken on behalf of the Archbishopric since May 1982 when Rivera y Damas deprived it of that role.

He did this because Soccoro Juridico reported only one side and attributed every violent death to the right or to the government itself. According to Archbishop Rivera y Damas: "they give

evidence only of the victims of the security forces," and "they have yet to attribute a victim to the guerrilla forces though the guerrillas claim some deaths themselves."[40]

As in Nicaragua, the pro Marxist-Leninists have formed a parallel church, which they call the "People's Church." This organization, which claims the allegiance of some 15 of El Salvador's 200 native priests, also tries to wear the mantle of the official Church, usually for fund-raising purposes.[41]

According to Bishop Aparicio: "They have used Bishop Rivera y Damas' name without permission and have forged his signature on several pamphlets to convince people in several countries that the Church in El Salvador was requesting their help."[42]

The pamphlets he refers to were used to raise money in Venezuela, Mexico, Central America and Europe for the People's Church. Again, they are aided by the lack of in-depth familiarity with the Salvadoran Church on the part of Catholics in other countries.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church in Nicaragua and El Salvador, like the Catholic Church in other parts of the world, is not concerned with the fortunes of particular political factions, except insofar as these fortunes may effect the lives of the people. For this reason, the hierarchy of the Church is rightly perceived as a non-partisan advocate of the people's rights.

The message of peace and reconciliation which the Bishops of Nicaragua and El Salvador are delivering is entirely consistent with the goals of the U.S. The message is that the Catholic Bishops and their flocks reject Marxism-Leninism, reject violence of both the left and the right, support free elections, support the right of the people to defend themselves from tyranny, and declare their unshakable commitment to human rights.

The confidence of the Roman Catholic Bishops, even in the face of the current difficulties, is reflected by the statement by Nicaraguan Archbishop Obando y Bravo:

> "We believe the Church will continue to exist, and history, which is the mother of life, teaches us that the Church has always witnessed the burial of those who persecute her."[43]

ENDNOTES

1. "Dialogue," National Catholic Register 29 July 1984 pp. 1, 6

2. "Pope Condemns Nicaragua for expelling priests," The Washington Times 12 July, 1984 p. 7A

3. La Nacion Internacional, San Jose, Costa Rica, Central American edition of 22-28 September 1983

4. Nicaraguan Bishops Pastoral Letter, August 1974. Paragraph 8.

5. "Dialogue," op. cit. p. 6

6. Pastoral Letter on Reconciliation from the Nicaraguan Bishops 22 April 1984 (Easter Sunday), Part I

7. "Nicaraguan Bishop doubts voting can be free under Sandinistas," Catholic Standard and Times 15 March 1984. The Bishop's comments were quoted from the Italian National Catholic newspaper Avvemire.

8. "Comunicado relativo a los sacerdotes nicaraguenses con cargos de gobierno," 10 August 1984. Full text printed in L'Osserrvatore Romano (Weekly Spanish edition) 19 August, 1984 p. 4

9. Ibid.

10. Chris Hedges, "Nicaraguan priests say they'll leave offices in November." National Catholic Reporter, 31 August, 1984 p. 33

11. "Priests in Nicaraguan Cabinet Break Rules, Vatican Insists," Washington Post, 11 August, 1984 p. A19

12. John Lantigua, "Bishops Become Critical of Sandinistas," Washington Post, 22 May 1984 pp. A1, A11.

13. "Bishop doubts voting.." op. cit.

14. Lantigua, op. cit.

15. "Bishop doubts voting.." op. cit.

16. "General Considerations of the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua concerning Military Service," Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua, 29 August 1983.

17. Pastoral Letter on Reconciliation, op. cit.

18. "Dialogue," op cit.

19. "Prelate Charges Sandinistas seek to Oust Catholic Church," Washington Post, 23 June 1984

20. "Dialogue," op. cit.

21. Washington Times, 12 July, 1984 op. cit.

22. Mexico City Excelsior 20 July 1984 p. 14-A

23. Diario las Americas, 28 July 1984

24. National Catholic Register 14 June, 1981 (quoted in Kerry Ptacek, "Misconceptions About the Role of the Church," in Crisis and Continuity, U.S. Policy in Central America and the Caribbean, Mark Falcoff and Robert Royal, eds. Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington, D.C., 1984 pp. 263-278

25. Diario las Americas, Miami 7 April, 1981

26. Washington Post 9 May, 1983

27. Address to the Central America Outreach Meeting, 21 March 1984

28. National Catholic Reporter, 30 March, 1984

29. Archbishop Arturo Rivas y Damas, Homily of 12 August, 1984, San Salvador

30. El Diario de Hoy, San Salvador, El Salvador, 8 September 1980.

31. Agence France Presse, 18 January 1981

32. Ibid.

33. La Nacion Internacional, Costa Rica op. cit.

34. Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez, Homily of 23 September, 1984

35. Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez, Homily 1 July 1984

36. Archbishop Rivera y Damas, Homily of 11 March 1984

37. Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez, Homily of 29 January, 1984

38. "El Salvador priests told to quit leftists," The Washington Times 14 August 1984

39. Ptacek, op cit.

40. Catholic Standard, 2 April 1981

41. Ptacek, op. cit. p. 268

42. National Catholic Register 14 June 1981

43. "Dialogue," National Catholic Register 29 July, 1984 p. 6

CIA ER 84-6073/3

Central Intelligence Agency

Washington D.C. 20505

3 October 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: Robert M. Kimmitt
Executive Secretary
National Security Council

SUBJECT : White House Digest: "What the Central American Bishops Say About Central America"

We have only one comment:

Page 6, last paragraph: Genaro Alamilla, the auxiliary Bishop of Mexico City . . . .

STAT

Executive Secretary

cc: Charles Hill
Executive Secretary
Department of State

Col. R. J. Affourtit
Executive Secretary
Department of Defense

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Remarks

Please provide ES with comments or "no comments" by 1200, 9 Oct 84. Comments should pertain to Intelligence only

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2 Oct 84

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3637 (10-81)

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October 2, 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. CHARLES HILL
Executive Secretary
Department of State

COL R.J. AFFOURTIT
Executive Secretary
Department of Defense

STAT

Executive Secretary
Central Intelligence Agency

SUBJECT: White House Digest: "What the Central Americans Bishops Say About Central America"

The attached White House Digest has been reviewed/cleared by your agency. It incorporates changes suggested by your agency. Please provide final comments for review/clearance by October 9, 1984.

Robert M. Kimmitt

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Executive Secretary

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DCI EXEC REG

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TAB

A

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> Managua, Nicaragua
> 11 July 1984[1]

> There were still in the world men and women of good will who did not believe a totalitarian regime had enthroned itself in Nicaragua. Now those people know the truth.
>
> Archbishop Roman Arrieta
> San Jose, Costa Rica
> 11 July 1984[2]

> If the Salvadoran guerrillas had popular support, they would already have won by now.
>
> Archbishop Arturo Rivas y Damas
> Archbishop of San Salvador
> March 22, 1983[3]

Critics of Administration policies in Central America often cloak their criticisms by trying to wrap them in the mantle of the Catholic Church. The authority of the Church lends credibility to their arguments and makes them seem less partisan and more constructive.

However, the impression that the Church hierarchy in Central America is totally opposed to U.S. policy is incorrect. In fact, Nicaraguan and Salvadoran Bishops are becoming increasingly critical of the Sandinista regime and the Salvadoran guerrillas.

As anyone familiar with the area realizes, the position of the Catholic Church in all of Latin America has undergone profound changes in the last twenty years. One aspect of Church teaching that has not changed, however, is the fundamental concern for the human rights of the people.

It is for this reason that extremes of both the right and the left have been opposed by the Bishops of El Salvador and Nicaragua. They have praised the movement toward democracy in El

Salvador, while condemning the abuses of both right and left wing death squads. They have deplored the movement towards Marxism-Leninism in Nicaragua.

Nicaragua

Casual observers of the Sandinista Revolution are confused by the initial support for the Revolution by Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo, since he is now opposed to the Sandinista dictatorship. Obando y Bravo had always been in the forefront of opposition to Somoza. As early as 1974, he and his brother Bishops condemned the Somoza regime, saying in an important Pastoral Letter:

> "The 'social order' cannot therefore consist of a rigid and worn out mechanism, which denies represses or monopolizes the exercise of the rights of a dominating faction. And more, even when an ideological group of system might be preferred or chosen among others, this choice, and prevalence, does not give it the right to abolish or exclude other possible options and the search for new expressions of the personal aspirations of a group of people."

Obando y Bravo also mediated two hostage seizures by the Sandinistas, in 1974 and 1978. Somoza's memoirs are filled with invective against the Archbishop, whom he once called "Comandante Obando." Now the Sandinistas are trying to link him with the deposed dictator.

The dedication of the Archbishop to human rights has not changed. In 1979, Obando y Bravo shared the hopes of many of his countrymen that the Somoza dictatorship would be replaced by a democratic regime. Like the U.S., the Archbishop tried his best to move the regime in that direction. In fact, one of the first public events of the Sandinista era was a victory Mass celebrated by Obando y Bravo.

After five years, however, these high hopes have soured. The Sandinistas have failed to live up to the promises they made to the Organization of American States and instead have suspended most human rights, including freedom of religion. Therefore, consistent in his concern for the human rights of the people of Nicaragua, the Archbishop condemns Sandinista violations.

Many North Americans, however, have yet to realize the changes that have taken place in Nicaragua since 1979. Because they do not realize the totalitarian direction of the Sandinistas, there are even some Catholic Bishops in the U.S. who are still supportive of the Nicaraguan junta.

Bishop Obando was recently asked how the North American Catholic Church could help him. He replied:

> "The first thing that the North American Church needs is good information. They receive a lot of information from the Popular Church and the Sandinistas -- which is the same

thing. The government here manipulates all the groups that come. And any letter we send to the Bishops never arrives there."[5]

The Catholic Church has traditionally rejected Marxism because it is a man-centered ideology. The April 1984 Easter Sunday Pastoral Letter on Reconciliation reiterated this rejection:

> "Materialistic concepts of mankind distort the person and teachings of Christ, reduce man to merely physical terms without taking account of his spiritual nature, so he remains subject to physical forces called the 'dialectics of history.' And man, alienated from God and himself, becomes disoriented, without moral and religious reference points, without a higher nature, insecure and violent."[6]

Based on this general discomfort with Marxist regimes, the hierarchy has rejected the Marxism-Leninism of the Sandinista government. Bishop Antonio Vega, President of the Nicaraguan Bishops' Conference, commented on Sandinismo in March 1983:

> "The Sandinista government through its ideology and method is a Marxist-Leninist government.... In its daily praxis the government does not act in an exclusively totalitarian manner, but [there is] total domination of the people."[7]

A source of confusion to observers familiar with the poor relations between the Sandinistas and the Catholic Church is the presence of five Roman Catholic priests on the ruling junta. They had been permitted to continue in these posts on a provisional basis, but the Vatican recently arrived at a final decision on their case and required the priests to resign their political positions.

The Vatican press office released a statement concerning priests who hold political positions on August 10. It cited Canon 285,3 of the new Code of Canon Law, which reads:

> "It is prohibited for clergymen to assume public offices which entail participation in the exercising of civil government."[8]

The statement from the Holy See continued with this comment on the circumstances in Nicaragua:

> "The Canon cited enunciates as a law of the Church the categorical prohibition, according to which clerics cannot accept nor retain the stated public offices, and this supersedes any situation or any judgement which may have already existed."[9]

The Catholic hierarchy cited this "categorical prohibition" against priests holding public office. Monsignor Antonio Vega added a condemnation of the Sandinista government itself:

> "The priests have been called to end their association with the government, and if they do not accept this, they

end their association with Jesus. This government is anti-Christian. It is a system of Marxist-Leninist materialism and has nothing to do with religion."[10]

The priests who now participate in the Sandinista dictatorship are: Miguel D'Escoto, a Maryknoll priest and Sandinista Foreign Minister; Ernesto Cardenal, a Trappist monk who is Minister of Culture; his cousin Fernando Cardenal, a Jesuit priest who was named Nicaraguan minister of education on July 13; and Father Edgard Parrales.[11]

Bishop Vega continued his attacks upon totalitarianism in a Mass held on May 1, 1984 at the request of an anti-Sandinista labor organization. His sermon attacked governments run "by a few individuals who want to dominate and enslave the rest."[12]

One of the methods of extending totalitarianism that particularly concerns the Bishops is government intrusion into Catholic education. Specifically, Catholics are concerned about atheistic Marxist indoctrination becoming part of the curriculum. The Easter Pastoral Letter states, under the heading of "A Belligerent Situation":

> "A materialistic and atheistic educational system is undermining the consciences of our children."

Bishop Vega has also highlighted the link between totalitarianism and lack of respect for human rights. He said:

> "[There is submission to] a totalitarian and materialistic state which at the same time does not respect human rights."[13]

At the same time that the Bishops condemn human rights abuses by the Sandinistas, they reject the excuse that outside intervention, in the form of alleged U.S. support for the armed opponents of the regime, known as the Freedom Fighters, justifies harsh methods. The Easter Pastoral Letter points out:

> "It is dishonest to constantly blame internal aggression and violence on foreign aggression. It is useless to blame the evil past for everything without recognizing the problems of the present."

The Easter Pastoral also made veiled reference to the superpower conflict as it effects the people of Nicaragua. In a passage which does not name either the U.S. or the Soviet Union, the letter said the following:

> "Foreign powers take advantage of our situation to encourage economic and ideological exploration. They see us as support for their power, without respect for our persons, our history, our culture, and our right to decide our own destiny."

Some observers see in this a reference to criticism by individual church leaders of the Sandinistas' ties to Communist

countries, especially Cuba.[14] This is a logical assumption, since there are about 7,500 to 9,500 Cubans in the country.

The Catholic Church hierarchy has serious doubts about the exercise scheduled for this November which the Sandinistas are calling an election. Bishop Vega commented soon after the "electoral process" got under way:

> "One cannot talk about free and popular elections when one does not say how these will take place. ... In order to speak of free elections, it is necessary that the citizens have full knowledge of what they are choosing. ... The climate in which to conduct free elections does not exist, because the government controls the means of communication."[15]

A bitter Church-State controversy appeared last year when the Sandinistas were drafting the current universal military conscription law, without a provision for conscientious objection. The Bishops issued a Pastoral Letter on August 20, 1983 giving their general considerations on military service. They said:

> "The proposed [military conscription] law is strongly politicized in its fundamental points, it has a partisan character and it follows the general lines of all totalitarian legislation. ...
>
> "The Military Service does not only 'promote the learning of the most advanced military techniques' (Consideration VII), but also 'will form in our youth the sense of revolutionary discipline and morality.' That is, the Army is converted into an obligatory center of political indoctrination in favor of the Sandinista Party. ...
>
> "To force the citizens to join an 'Army-Political Party' without being in agreement with the ideology of said political party, is an act against the liberty of thought, of opinion, and of association. (Ref. Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, arts. 18, 19 and 20.)
>
> "Consequently, no one can be obligated to take arms to defend a particular ideology with which they do not agree, nor to perform military service for the benefit of a political party."[16]

Finally, the Easter Pastoral letter makes some suggestions about how to solve the problems that are causing so many Nicaraguans to lose their lives. The answer, say the Bishops, is in dialogue:

> "The road to social peace is possible through dialogue, sincere dialogue that seeks truth and goodness. ... [This includes dialogue with] Nicaraguans who have taken up arms against the government. ... The dialogue of which we speak is not a tactical truce to strengthen positions for further struggle but a sincere effort to seek appropriate solutions to the anguish, pain, exhaustion, and fatigue of the many, many people who long for peace."[17]

A recent Church-State controversy has surrounded the activities of Father Amando Pena. He is being held under house arrest and investigated by the Sandinistas for alleged involvement with the anti-Sandinista forces threatening the regime.

On July 9, 1984 Tomas Borge, the head of the Sandinista secret police, demanded that Archbishop Obando remove Father Pena from his parish. The archbishop refused, but agreed to limit the priest's appearances in the neighborhood. That same night, the "turbas," or "divine mobs," became involved. These are groups of pro-government demonstrators who have threatened and attacked priests and Christians. Archbishop Obando describes their actions:

> "I was still on my pastoral visit and they sent me a message on the radio that the turbas were in Father Pena's parish and were burning tires and molesting the people there. The police told the people to get out of the church, but outside the turbas were waiting to beat the people up. The turbas climbed to the top of the church and began to rip off the roof."[18]

Obando y Bravo said the church considered the allegations against Pena:

> "a setup by the government to hurt the Catholic Church.... I believe the government, with these accusations against our priests, intends to eliminate the Catholic Church to implant the so-called Popular Church."[19]

The accusations against Father Pena, and the subsequent expulsion of ten priests after a procession in support of Father Pena, led the Archbishop, who knew from the Somoza days what a dictatorship looked like, to draw the following conclusion:

> "We want to state clearly that this government is totalitarian. I don't think that we can deceive ourselves today; we are dealing with a government that is an enemy of the Church -- especially those who are orthodox. ... These actions are also hurting the entire country."[20]

This episode has prompted Catholic leaders from throughout the area to condemn the Sandinista government. Bishop Roman Arrieta of San Jose, Costa Rica, concelebrated a Mass with seven of the ten expelled priests. In his homily, the Bishop told worshippers:

> "There were still in the world men and women of good will who did not believe a totalitarian regime had enthroned itself in Nicaragua. Now those people know the truth."[21]

Genero Alamilla, the auxiliary Bishop of Mexico, reacted to the expulsion by saying:

> "The Government Junta is openly provoking the Catholic Church in Nicaragua; this is how Sandinismo is seeking to justify repression. ... It is a contradiction for Commander Daniel Ortega to declare that he does not want

confrontations with the Catholic Church and to conduct a campaign of persecution against priests, nuns, bishops and the clergy in Nicaragua."[22]

The Episcopal Conference of Panama also condemned the action and exhorted the Sandinistas to reconsider and reverse their decision. A communique sent to the ruling junta expressed the Bishops' hope that the spirit of the Contadora Group:

> "will serve to cease the persecution of the religious sectors who are exercising their right to criticize . . . and that [the Sandinistas] will listen to the call for dialogue and reconciliation that the Nicaraguan Bishops have offered."[23]

El Salvador

In neighboring El Salvador, the Catholic Church has had a long tradition of standing up to those who would threaten the fledgling democracy for which the people of El Salvador are fighting and dying. At times, this has meant danger for the Bishops. The murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero by unknown assassins is powerful testimony to the ruthlessness of democracy's enemies.

Despite this danger, the Bishops have continued to speak out against human rights abuses and terrorist violence. They have also commented with some frequency on the need for U.S. military assistance. Critics of the Reagan Administration have claimed that the Church in El Salvador opposes such aid.

This is not true. The position of the Church is that military aid by itself is not a sufficient solution. It is, however, an important part of any solution. Bishop Pedro Aparicio, former secretary of the Episcopal Conference, said while on a visit to this country in August, 1981:

> "The Church in El Salvador does not want military aid from the United States if all Soviet aid to the guerrillas stops. While Russia is supplying the guerrillas with arms we need the United States to help to strengthen our own army."[24]

Archbishop Arturo Rivas y Damas preceded Bishop Aparicio to the U.S. and made an even stronger statement about the proper U.S. role in the conflicts in Central America:

> "[I]nstead of sending arms, you could help put a cordon around our country to impede the arrival of arms from the Soviet bloc."[25]

This support for U.S. aid to counter what the terrorist elements receive from Nicaragua and Cuba has continued. In May 1983, the San Salvador diocesan weekly, Orientacion, included the following sentiment in an editorial:

> "Without a doubt this country would be reaching the limits of its admirable resistance had it not been for the

military and economic assistance of [North] America."[26]

More recently, Bishop Marco Revelo, the current head of the Episcopal Conference, called for continued U.S. aid at present levels, with neither a large increase in the amount of U.S. aid nor a unilateral withdrawl.[27] He confirmed the legality and the necessity of this aid when he said:

> "Military aid is necessary because the Government - and it is a Government that is legitimately constituted - needs to protect itself from violence."[28]

Finally, Archbishop Rivera on once again expressed his concern about the flow of arms into his country from all sources:

> "I am against all arms flows into Central America and especially to El Salvador. My words, however, should not be interpreted to be a unilateral condemnation in only one sense."[29]

There is no doubt that the Bishops want peace, but they are not willing to accept it on the guerrillas' terms. Well before the start of the Salvadoran guerrillas' "final offensive" in January 1981, Archbishop Rivera y Damas said in his Sunday homily: the Church wants peace, "but not a peace won by weapons."[30]

Recourse to force is sometimes justified in the eyes of the Catholic Church. It is useful to recall that the Nicaraguan Bishops' 1978 pastoral letter proclaimed that the Somoza regime had become intolerable and that Nicaraguans could in good conscience raise arms against it.

But the situation in El Salvador, according to its Episcopal Conference, is different. The necessary conditions for justifiable rebellion did not exist when the guerrillas launched their 1981 offensive and they have become more remote since then. Rivera y Damas laid out the conditions in a January 1981 homily:

> "Insurrection is justified when four requirements are satisfied: there is serious abuse of political power by those in power, all peaceful alternatives have failed, the ills that accompany an insurrection would not be greater than the present difficulties, and the people must truly believe that the insurrection shall win."[31]

The Archbishop of San Salvador and his colleagues have serious doubts about all but the first of these conditions. They were not at all sure that a Communist victory would bring improvements to the lives of the people. In fact, they are almost certain it would not.

In the same homily, Rivera y Damas asserted that the leftist guerrillas were inclined toward Communism and that the Salvadoran people: "are not certain that the installation of a Socialist regime in El Salvador is preferable to a continuation of the present one."[32]

The regime that the prelate mentioned, it must be remembered, was the civilian/military junta that took power from the oligarchy in 1979. Since that homily, El Salvador has held three elections and the legitimacy of the central government has increased accordingly.

In March 1982 the people of El Salvador turned out in large numbers to vote for a Constituent Assembly, despite the threat of violence from the guerrillas. Similar large turnouts in March and May 1984 have confirmed the people's rejection of the guerrillas.

Rivera y Damas recently closed the book on the notion that the Salvadoran insurgency had either the support of the Church or the support of the people with the following statement last year in San Jose, Costa Rica:

> "[I]f the Salvadoran guerrillas had popular support, they would already have won by now."[33]

According to the Bishops, one of the reasons the Salvadoran people do not support the guerrillas is their commitment to foreign ideologies. Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez, the Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador, commented on Marxism in a homily on September 23, 1984:

> "The Church cannot accept that the Marxist line be adopted in order to defend the poor as this would lead to the acceptance of class struggle and even the use of violence. Experience has demonstrated that when this path is followed, in the end, the poor are submitted to new types of slavery while also being deprived of the treasure of religious faith."[34]

El Salvador's Bishops have rejected the claims of the guerrillas that there actions are on behalf of "the people." A particularly harsh rebuke was given by Bishop Rosa Chavez:

> "No matter how often they [the guerrillas] attempt to justify their actions of sabotage with arguments that they fight against the government, against oppression and what they call the oligarchy, it is the people who ultimately pay the price. ... If they continue along that path, as they increase in military strength, the weaker they will be politically and will have even less space in the heart of the people. Therefore, I ask myself, in whose favor are they really fighting?"[35]

The guerrillas also have trouble garnering popular support, according to the Bishops, because of their brutal methods. Rivera y Damas said in March 1984:

> "In order to triumph militarily the guerrillas need the support of the people, but this support is denied not only because of repression or the fear of it, but because the destruction and the violent methods have affected the people, who continue to suffer in all ways."[36]

Bishop Rosa Chavez seemed to wonder if the guerrillas were really interested in popular support. He said in January 1984:

> "It seems more important to the guerrillas to glorify themselves ... than to consider the anguish of all those farmworkers who have now lost their livelihoods. ...[The guerrillas] place a greater premium on international plaudits and propagandistic coverage they receive in other countries than on the damage and deaths of innocents."[37]

In his homily of August 12, 1984, the Archbishop ordered the priests in his See to sever their ties with the guerrillas, saying:

> "The Salvadoran and foreign priests who are politically committed to the leftist guerrilla cause should arrange their situation, which is in contradiction with those who prescribe the canon law. ... They have posts which are incompatible with their duties as priests."[38]

The hierarchy is not silent on abuses by right wing paramilitary bands. But unlike some North Americans who condemn only one side for human rights abuses, the Catholic hierarchy sees both as impediments to the establishment of a people's democratic regime.

Rivera y Damas again:

> "When we speak of violence, we cannot use a double standard. ... The violence is equally condemnable when it comes from those who kidnap, ambush armed forces patrols, dynamite installations that provide jobs, and provoke electricity stoppages that affect entire zones: or when the violence comes from security forces and paramilitary bands as they kidnap persons of the civilian population late at night, and have them disappear or kill them."[39]

Sources of Confusion

Many partisans from different sides have claimed to have the Church on their side in the Salvadoran struggle. This is because some groups who claim to speak on behalf of the Church (usually in support of the Communists) do so falsely. Some North Americans, ignorant of the workings of the Salvadoran Church, confuse these sources with official Church organs.

The best example of this is the credibility attributed to Soccoro Juridico, the legal aid office of the Archbishopric of San Salvador. To those who wish to accuse the government of most (if not all) the deaths of the civil war, this source is very useful. But it has not spoken on behalf of the Archbishopric since May 1982 when Rivera y Damas deprived it of that role.

He did this because Soccoro Juridico reported only one side and attributed every violent death to the right or to the government itself. According to Archbishop Rivera y Damas: "they give

evidence only of the victims of the security forces," and "they have yet to attribute a victim to the guerrilla forces though the guerrillas claim some deaths themselves."[40]

As in Nicaragua, the pro Marxist-Leninists have formed a parallel church, which they call the "People's Church." This organization, which claims the allegiance of some 15 of El Salvador's 200 native priests, also tries to wear the mantle of the official Church, usually for fund-raising purposes.[41]

According to Bishop Aparicio: "They have used Bishop Rivera y Damas' name without permission and have forged his signature on several pamphlets to convince people in several countries that the Church in El Salvador was requesting their help."[42]

The pamphlets he refers to were used to raise money in Venezuela, Mexico, Central America and Europe for the People's Church. Again, they are aided by the lack of in-depth familiarity with the Salvadoran Church on the part of Catholics in other countries.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church in Nicaragua and El Salvador, like the Catholic Church in other parts of the world, is not concerned with the fortunes of particular political factions, except insofar as these fortunes may effect the lives of the people. For this reason, the hierarchy of the Church is rightly perceived as a non-partisan advocate of the people's rights.

The message of peace and reconciliation which the Bishops of Nicaragua and El Salvador are delivering is entirely consistent with the goals of the U.S. The message is that the Catholic Bishops and their flocks reject Marxism-Leninism, reject violence of both the left and the right, support free elections, support the right of the people to defend themselves from tyranny, and declare their unshakable commitment to human rights.

The confidence of the Roman Catholic Bishops, even in the face of the current difficulties, is reflected by the statement by Nicaraguan Archbishop Obando y Bravo:

> "We believe the Church will continue to exist, and history, which is the mother of life, teaches us that the Church has always witnessed the burial of those who persecute her."[43]

ENDNOTES

1. "Dialogue," National Catholic Register 29 July 1984 pp. 1, 6

2. "Pope Condemns Nicaragua for expelling priests," The Washington Times 12 July, 1984 p. 7A

3. La Nacion Internacional, San Jose, Costa Rica, Central American edition of 22-28 September 1983

4. Nicaraguan Bishops Pastoral Letter, August 1974. Paragraph 8.

5. "Dialogue," op. cit. p. 6

6. Pastoral Letter on Reconciliation from the Nicaraguan Bishops 22 April 1984 (Easter Sunday), Part I

7. "Nicaraguan Bishop doubts voting can be free under Sandinistas," Catholic Standard and Times 15 March 1984. The Bishop's comments were quoted from the Italian National Catholic newspaper Avvemire.

8. "Comunicado relativo a los sacerdotes nicaraguenses con cargos de gobierno," 10 August 1984. Full text printed in L'Osserrvatore Romano (Weekly Spanish edition) 19 August, 1984 p. 4

9. Ibid.

10. Chris Hedges, "Nicaraguan priests say they'll leave offices in November." National Catholic Reporter, 31 August, 1984 p. 33

11. "Priests in Nicaraguan Cabinet Break Rules, Vatican Insists," Washington Post, 11 August, 1984 p. A19

12. John Lantigua, "Bishops Become Critical of Sandinistas," Washington Post, 22 May 1984 pp. A1, A11.

13. "Bishop doubts voting.." op. cit.

14. Lantigua, op. cit.

15. "Bishop doubts voting.." op. cit.

16. "General Considerations of the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua concerning Military Service," Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua, 29 August 1983.

17. Pastoral Letter on Reconciliation, op. cit.

18. "Dialogue," op cit.

19. "Prelate Charges Sandinistas seek to Oust Catholic Church," Washington Post, 23 June 1984

20. "Dialogue," op. cit.

21. Washington Times, 12 July, 1984 op. cit.

22. Mexico City Excelsior 20 July 1984 p. 14-A

23. Diario las Americas, 28 July 1984

24. National Catholic Register 14 June, 1981 (quoted in Kerry Ptacek, "Misconceptions About the Role of the Church" in Crisis and Continuity, U.S. Policy in Central America and the Caribbean, Mark Falcoff and Robert Royal, eds. Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington, D.C., 1984 pp. 263-278

25. Diario las Americas, Miami 7 April, 1981

26. Washington Post 9 May, 1983

27. Address to the Central America Outreach Meeting, 21 March 1984

28. National Catholic Reporter, 30 March, 1984

29. Archbishop Arturo Rivas y Damas, Homily of 12 August, 1984, San Salvador

30. El Diario de Hoy, San Salvador, El Salvador, 8 September 1980.

31. Agence France Presse, 18 January 1981

32. Ibid.

33. La Nacion Internacional, Costa Rica op. cit.

34. Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez, Homily of 23 September, 1984

35. Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez, Homily 1 July 1984

36. Archbishop Rivera y Damas, Homily of 11 March 1984

37. Auxiliary Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chavez, Homily of 29 January, 1984

38. "El Salvador priests told to quit leftists," The Washington Times 14 August 1984

39. Ptacek, op cit.

40. Catholic Standard, 2 April 1981

41. Ptacek, op. cit. p. 268

42. National Catholic Register 14 June 1981

43. "Dialogue," National Catholic Register 29 July 1984 p. 6

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21 August 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Robert M. Kimmitt
Executive Secretary, National Security Council

SUBJECT: White House Digest: "What the Central American Bishops Say About Central America"

REFERENCE: Your Memorandum of 15 August 1984, Same Subject

We have only a few comments on the article.

1. On page 3, the paragraph beginning "At the same time . . ." should refer not to "the Freedom Fighters" but to "the armed opposition to the regime."

2. On page 7, the date in the next to last paragraph should be May 1982.

3. On page 8, the first paragraph should read: "pro-Marxists have formed a parallel church... ."

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Executive Secretary

cc: Mr. Charles Hill
Executive Secretary
Department of State

Col. R. J. Affourtit
Executive Secretary
Department of Defense

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Central Intelligence Agency

ER 84-6074/1

Washington, D.C. 20505

21 August 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Robert M. Kimmitt
Executive Secretary, National Security Council

SUBJECT: White House Digest: "The 1984 Elections in Sandinista Nicaragua"

REFERENCE: Your Memorandum of 15 August 1984
Same Subject

1. As a general comment, the Digest article is significantly out of date. It does not take into account the return of Cruz to Nicaragua as the main opposition candidate or several concessions by the Sandinistas since then.

2. More specifically, on page 7 paragraph 3, the sentence should read: . . .the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE), which is the highest authority . . . ." In the next paragraph, the campaign now has a "13" not a "12 week limit." Various sentences in this section need to have the tense changed from future to past.

3. On page 8, the second paragraph should read "13 week campaign" with "30 minutes of television air time" and "less than 100 hours of air time." The third paragraph should read "Only 45 minutes per day" of radio time ..."is available on the state radio system."

4. On page 9, the third paragraph should begin, "The major opposition parties." The rest of this section needs to be greatly updated. On page 10, the second paragraph should read "Catholic Monsignor Bismark Carballo, ..."

STAT

Executive Secretary

cc: Mr. Charles Hill
Executive Secretary
Department of State

Col. R. J. Affourtit
Executive Secretary
Department of Defense

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Remarks

Please do the usual (intelligence only) and provide the ES with comments or "no comments" by 1200 21 August.

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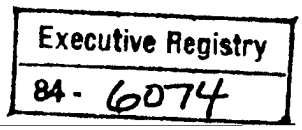
August 15, 1984



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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. CHARLES HILL
Executive Secretary
Department of State

COL R.J. AFFOURTIT
Executive Secretary
Department of Defense

STAT

Executive Secretary
Central Intelligence Agency

SUBJECT: White House Digest: "The 1984 Elections in Sandinista Nicaragua

The NSC requests review and clearance of the attached White House Digest by August 22, 1984.

Robert M. Kimmitt
Executive Secretary

Attachment

White House Digest

C387

THE 1984 ELECTIONS IN SANDINISTA NICARAGUA

"The reality of political liberty consists in the details and the substance of actual institutions."
Reflections on Government
Ernest Barker

"We have not promised the elections that they think we are going to promote, and we are never going to discuss power."
Humberto Ortega
Sandinista Defense Minister
August 25, 1981

On February 21, 1984, the Sandinistas, Nicaragua's unelected ruling party, announced that elections will be held on November 4, 1984. In so doing, the Communist-led regime is trying to convince foreign observers that it is moving toward keeping promises made in 1979.

It was the Sandinista promises of a mixed economy, respect for individual rights, and the institution of democracy, including the "first truly free elections in our country in this century," that led many people both in and out of Nicaragua to support Sandinismo enthusiastically.

The Sandinistas hope to garner world attention and, one assumes, international approval, for submitting themselves to the test of elections.

The current laws governing elections and the operations of political parties are unlikely to produce the kind of open political process the people of El Salvador enjoy, to say nothing of that enjoyed by the people of the United States or the Western democracies. The rules of the game are clearly stacked in favor of the ruling Sandinista party. (Frente Sandinista por la Liberacion de Nicaragua, or FSLN)

Why Elections?

The Sandinistas have much to gain by holding elections, especially if they can cleverly rig the process to insure a Sandinista victory.

Victory in elections would convey to the ruling junta a level of international legitimacy hitherto unachievable. Those friendly to the regime will become even more supportive and critics will feel pressure to concede the Sandinistas' right to govern.

To accomplish these goals, however, the electoral process itself and the hoped-for Sandinista victory that follows must be perceived as truly democratic. Anything less will cost the Sandinistas the legitimacy they desire and invite comparisons with the staged elections of the Somoza era.

The Sandinista View of Elections

Close examination of the Political Parties Law and the Electoral Law reveals how the Sandinistas plan to stack the deck. One has to wonder about the degree of scrutiny the electoral process developed by the Sandinistas will receive. Will their elections, and the process leading up to them, be as carefully watched as the 1984 Salvadoran elections, or the elections recently held in Guatemala?

It is remarkable that although the Sandinistas published their political parties decree in the September 13, 1983 issue of their official legal journal, La Gaceta, there has been virtually no discussion or analysis of the details of legal regulations that will govern the existence and activities of political parties in Nicaragua.

Careful reading and reporting of these decrees is vital considering both the statements of dissatisfaction from opposition elements and, more importantly, the host of statements from prominent Sandinistas indicating disdain, almost contempt, for free elections as a measure of the people's will.

Humberto Ortega was quoted in 1981 as saying: "Keep firmly in your mind that these elections are to consolidate revolutionary power, not to place it at stake."[1] He reiterated this view in 1983 when he said the Nicaraguan people already had had their revolution and had chosen the FSLN.[2]

Daniel Ortega, the coordinator of the junta, has a similar attitude. In July 1983, on the fourth anniversary of the Sandinista takeover, he declared: "Neither bullets nor ballots" would defeat the FSLN." This raises the question of whether the Sandinistas see elections as a real contest for power.

Other disquieting statements exist: "with their blood and with their guns in their hands the people have cast their votes,"[3] or "we have not promised the elections that they [the bourgeoisie] think we are going to promote, and we are never going to discuss power, as we have already said on other occasions through the National Directorate, because this power was taken by the people with arms, and here the power of the people will never be questioned."[4]

This last statement reveals not only an unwillingness to give the people a genuine opportunity to choose their leaders, but is also an admission that deception is part of the process. What the Sandinistas tell the bourgeoisie they are going to

promote and what they are really promoting are, in their own words, two different things.

One of the most recent examples of this can be found in a statement by Sergio Ramirez who said: "The Nicaraguan people will have to choose and vote one candidate. That candidate is the revolution. This is very important."[5] His position has apparently changed little since 1980, when he said: "The election that took place with the rifles in Nicaragua were the most authentic in all Latin America."[6]

THE RECORD SO FAR: CAUSE FOR SKEPTICISM

If the only candidate is going to be "the revolution," it is very important to know with some precision and clarity what defines and informs Nicaragua's revolution.

Probably the most definitive statement regarding this matter can be found in a speech delivered by Humberto Ortega, Sandinista Minister of Defense, to the elite corps of the Sandinista Army on August 25, 1981. He said:

> "...Marxism-Leninism is the scientific doctrine which guides our revolution, the instrument of analysis of our vanguard to understand the historical process and to create the revolution; Sandinismo is the concrete expression of the historical development of the struggle in Nicaragua, without Sandinismo we cannot be Marxist-Leninists and Sandinismo without Marxism-Leninism cannot be revolutionary, and because of that our moral strength is Sandinismo, or political strength is Sandinismo, and our doctrine is that of Marxism-Leninism."[7]

The revolution is Marxist-Leninist; the only candidate is the Revolution; neither "bullets or ballots" will defeat the Sandinistas. What expectations should reasonable people have about elections in this context? Will elections be free and fair and competitive? Will opposition parties have a genuine opportunity to contest power?

Will the people of Nicaragua be participating in a process that reflects their legitimate and longstanding desire for genuine democracy? Or will they once again be deceived, as they and countless others have been, so many times, by the Sandinistas?

THE POLITICAL PARTIES DECREE

The decree which governs political parties is a discouraging signal that the Sandinistas have no intention of giving up power and that they are not willing to incur the risk of losing power in fair, free and competitive democratic elections.

The political parties decree as currently written is a fail-safe formula for a victory of the FSLN. When examined in

detail it reveals that while political parties may exist and have rights, they also have certain duties, compliance with which determines the ability of parties to exist, to be suspended or cancelled. The Council with the authority to make these determinations will be controlled by the Sandinistas.[8]

The ANPP and the CNPP.

To oversee matters relating to political parties two councils are established, the National Assembly of Political Parties (ANPP) and the National Council of Political Parties (CNPP). The ANPP is a consultative body which meets twice a year to make recommendations to the CNPP. It is possible that the opposition parties will be able to dominate this body since its membership is composed of one representative from each political party and one member named by the Sandinista junta.[9]

The second organization, the CNPP, clearly will be dominated by the Sandinistas and will have actual day-to-day authority over a number of important operations significant to the fair and free functioning of parties. The CNPP is a deliberative body which meets every fifteen days to administer laws, to resolve all questions related to political parties, to suspend and cancel parties and to implement resolutions.

The membership of the CNPP will consist of four members named by the consultative ANPP, three members named by the Sandinista controlled Council of State, and a Presiding Officer named by the Sandinista junta. The duties of the Presiding Officer are: to preside over both the ANPP and the CNPP, which he represents legally, to convoke meetings of the CNPP, to enforce CNPP resolutions, and in case of a tie in CNPP deliberations to vote twice.[10]

The arithmetic is quite simple: total membership equals eight, with nine possible votes. The Sandinistas are assured of five votes, more if any of the ANPP representatives are Sandinistas or affiliated with the Sandinistas. Sandinista control is certain, and they submit their control to no risk.

Political Parties

Parties are described as "groups of Nicaraguan citizens supporting a similar ideology" that "seek .. political power for the purpose of carrying out a program that responds to the needs of national development."[11] Parties may organize freely without any ideological restrictions although a return to Somocismo is prohibited.

The decree states further that only those groups recognized as political parties will enjoy rights and guarantees spelled out in the law. Parties can be ruled by their own principles and aims with the following caveats: they must respect the laws which replaced Nicaragua's Constitution when the Sandinistas came

to power in July 1979, as well as the fundamental principles of the Sandinista people's revolution, such as "anti-imperialism and its deeply popular and democratic character."[12]

These caveats are all vague and open to wide interpretation. The requirement to defend the principles of the Sandinista revolution is one such provision. If the Sandinista principles are those ostensibly supported by the FSLN when they came to power in 1979, then the ruling party should be immediately disqualified.

Parties enjoy a full range of rights, such as disseminating ideological principles, conducting propaganda aimed at enlisting members, and holding private and public meetings. They will be allowed to criticize the public administration and propose solutions, to form alliances with other parties, to raise funds, own assets, to maintain party offices, to participate in elections, to request representation in the Council of State and accredit representatives to the ANPP.

Access to media during elections -- no mention of access to media when elections are not underway -- is assured "in accordance with the legislation in effect at the time."[13] This is most likely a reminder that the current State of Emergency and the consequent limitation of rights may influence the ability of parties to have access to the media. This clause could also refer to the regulations placed on parties by the Sandinista CNPP. There are earlier laws as well that restrict freedom for campaigning.

RIGHTS AND DUTIES, SUSPENSION AND CANCELLATION

Tying rights to duties fully illuminates the coercive control that the Sandinistas will have over the opposition political parties. Tomas Borge, Sandinista Minister of the Interior, explained the relations between duties and rights in a discussion of media access during elections.

> "As every right entails duties, the parties must be responsible for their use of this right. This means they will not be able to denigrate or slander the revolutionary process under the protection of this provision. In other words, they will not be able to use it as a trench from which to wage destruction or to try to make the irreversible wheel of history go back."[14]

This statement makes clear the intent of the Sandinistas that any activity deemed to be "outside the revolution," will either not be permitted or a huge cost -- the right to exist as a party -- will be paid. The revolution from which they are not allowed to stray is a Marxist-Leninist revolution. This is abundantly clear.

In the political parties decree, a whole host of "duties" are listed, including:

-- to comply with the country's laws
-- to comply with resolutions passed by the CNPP
-- to promote and endorse the patriotic unity
-- to contribute to the consolidation of the political, social and economic conquests achieved by our people."
-- to defend the revolution against internal/external attempts to establish a regime characterized by the oppression and exploitation of the Nicaraguan revolution
-- to fight to preserve the country's freedom and independence and to defend national sovereignty and the right of self-determination
-- to sponsor and promote human rights
-- to answer for activities carried out individually as parties, or in alliance with other parties
-- to accredit a permanent representative to the Council of State.[15]

In the event the CNPP determines that a political party has not fulfilled the legal duties as listed in the decree, the CNPP has the authority to suspend (prohibit operation) of the party for a specific period of time. Repeated noncompliance with the duties can result in cancellation, which the decree describes as the dissolution of the party.

Interestingly enough, but coming as no real surprise, parties can also be cancelled for participating in "activities which harm the public order and the stability of the institutions of the Government of National Reconstruction."[16]

The list of citizens and organizations that have been repressed in Nicaragua because the Sandinistas decided an action "harmed public order" is legion. For example, four members of the Nicaraguan private sector umbrella organization, COSEP, were jailed in October 1981 for merely writing a letter to the Sandinistas protesting unfair confiscations and the Marxist-Leninist trend of the regime.

If the demonstrable record of the Sandinistas gives any clue, the insertion of this restriction in the decree once again indicates that the Sandinistas -- the arbitors of what is harmful to the public order -- are assured total coercive control over the parties.

FINAL RECOURSE TO THE SUPREME COURT OF JUSTICE

In the event there is disagreement regarding resolutions passed by the CNPP, a party may appeal to the Supreme Court of Justice for revision. But this offers no real recourse or protection. Although the Supreme Court has exhibited a marginal degree of independence since July 1979, it too was "reorganized" after the Triumph.

It is sobering and dismaying to note the following statements made by two Sandinista Supreme Court magistrates, Dr.

Roberto Arguello Hurtado and Dr. Hernado Zuniga, after an eight day visit to the Soviet Union in October 1982 to "exchange experiences with Soviet officials." According to Radio Sandino,

> "Dr. Arguello said that the Soviet legal system is one of the most advanced and best organized systems in the world. He said one of the most impressive aspects is that of human rights in health and education, two of the most advanced human rights guarantees in the Soviet Union."[17]

Dr. Zuniga stated that: "We had many opportunities to gain legal experiences in the Soviet Union. We visited a number of State organizations charged with administering justice and we were able to observe the advanced level of laws, the respect for the law and the administration of justice."[18]

THE ELECTORAL LAW

The attitude of the Supreme Court of Justice is important not only because they are the final arbitors of disputes under the Political Parties Law, but also because this body chose the members of the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE), which will be the highest authority in electoral matters.[19]

The authority of the Council is broad and their resolutions are not subject to any ordinary or special appeal.[20] This non-elected, non-accountable body appoints the members of local and regional councils, set a 12 week limit to campaigning, and will oversee the registration of candidates and of citizens. Most importantly, this Sandinista-dominated body will carry out the national vote count.[21]

Inspectors of political parties can be present during the registration of electors and during the vote count but, if they refuse to sign the voting record, perhpas because they are not satisfied with the accuracy of the count, this refusal does not invalidate it.[22]

The Council also has the right to demarcate electoral districts. They therefore have the opportunity to gerrymander the lines to insure pro-Sandinista majorities. These decisions are made by administrative resolution, requiring only a majority vote.[23]

Registration of voters is done under Council auspices. All Nicaraguan citizens are required to register between July 27 and July 30. This is a week before the campaign officially starts on August 8. Opposition parties argue that this does not allow citizens to hear their message before going to register and that registration would be carried out more effectively during the campaign.[24]

The Media

Probably the most debilitating limitation on opposition political parties is the restricted access to mass media. The people of Nicaragua have had their information completely censored for two years. During that time, all T.V. and most radio stations have been government controlled and the sole remaining opposition newspaper has been frequently muzzled.

During the 12 week campaign, opposition parties will have to divide 15 minutes of television air time per day on both channels of the Sandinista Television Network.[25] This means that opposition parties will have to divide less than 48 hours of air time, after years of uninterrupted Sandinista propaganda.

The situation on radio is not much better. One of the only independent radio stations left is run by the Archdiocese of Managua. Under the Electoral Law, religious radio stations may not participate in political campaigning or accept contracts for that purpose. Only 30 minutes per day, again to be divided among the parties, is available on other stations.[26]

Public demonstrations must be cleared through the Supreme Electoral Council. They are forbidden during the current State of Emergency, as is the distribution of leaflets, the posting of campaign literature and the purchase of a newspaper, radio, or television ad. Barricada editor Carlos Chamorro summed up the official attitude toward media pluralism in 1983 when he said: "In Nicaragua there is no essential need to hear the other point of view."[27]

The chances for opposition parties to make real gains run into Sandinista-mandated obstacles at every turn. The ruling party, apparently having grown accustomed to an utter lack if opposition, is so uncomfortable with the idea that another point of view will be heard that they are taking extraordinary steps to muffle it.

It is, of course, interesting that the Sandinistas, who profess such confidence on their ability to stay in power through the electoral process, find it necessary to legally protect the "stability of the institutions" of the regime they have constructed since July 1979. It could be that they have not forgotten the results of a poll taken by La Prensa in late 1981 (before it was so heavily censored) conducted in Nicaragua's major urban areas.

Even in areas presumed to be Sandinista strongholds, the poll indicated that only 8% of those polled considered themselves Marxist-Leninists, 30.5% felt better than before the revolution, 22.3% felt worse and 41.8% felt the same. This is an indication that two and a half years after the Triumph, when the poll was taken, only thirty or so percent had felt an improvement in their lives.

Sandinista repression has been intense since 1981 -- brutal attacks on the Church, mocking the Pope, severe repression of the Miskito Indians, free trade unions, the independent press, political parties, private enterprise, to name just a few examples. It is certain that if a freely conducted poll in Nicaragua were possible today, it would show even more serious disaffection with the Sandinistas.

Opposition parties have found little of great merit in the Sandinista proposal. Enrique Bolanos, head of COSEP, was quoted recently as saying: "They [the FSLN] are doing this just to put up a front and fool the world."[28]

Some government opponents, discounting the possibility of free elections, have called for a boycott. They fear that opposition participation in a foregone conclusion will be interpreted as a legitimization of Sandinismo.

Augustin Jarquin, head of the Social Christian Party, said recently: "In the present situation, we do not have the conditions for participating."[29]

Veterans of the struggle for democracy against the Somoza regime recall that he too, used to stage elections to give his regime the outward appearance of democracy. Even some former officials of the Sandinista government have been critical of the Sandinistas' electoral decisions. Says Alfredo Cesar, who served in the Sandinista government as the head of the Central Bank until May 1982:

> "More than four months have passed since elections were announced, and we are only six months away from election day. Yet the participation of the opposition is not yet guaranteed. The electoral council, already named, contains only members of the Sandinista front. Press censorship is in full effect. I experienced it personally when reports on my trip to Managua were censored. Finally, and most important, an emergency law prohibited political activities remains in force."[30]

Arturo Cruz, who also worked inside the Sandinista government to try and hold it to its promise to the OAS, stated recently:

> "A constituent assembly could have been elected as early as 1982, with a view to having a constitution ready before the 1985 elections. That did not happen, however, and now the Sandinistas are putting the cart before the horse, scheduling presidential and legislative elections although we have no Constitution. ... The Sandinista front has not given any assurances that it is willing to surrender power if it happens to lose. ... Under these constaining conditions, ... I expect that large numbers of people will stay away from the polls."[31]

Opposition parties, as well as individuals, have expressed doubts about the electoral process. The Social Democratic Party issued a proclamation on January 28, 1984 which reads in part:

> "We believe that political pluralism, much less electoral activity, cannot exist if a genuine system of liberty of expression and dissemination of thought is not implemented and if use of and access [to media] is not available to each and every party on an equal basis."[32]

Perhaps the most significant statement regarding the elections and how they are likely to be received by the people of Nicaragua was made by Catholic Bishop Bismark Carballo, who was once dragged naked in front of Sandinista T.V. cameras. He said:

> "Anyone who thinks that the Church will not voice an opinion on the elections is mistaken"[33]

CONCLUSION

In short, the political parties law is still a long way from allowing the kind of electoral freedom that the people of El Salvador receive from their government or that is embodied in the Constitution of the United States.

One measure of how far a regime has progressed toward the goal of democracy is the willingness of the ruling party to admit to the possibility of being replaced peacefully, through elections. Such a transition took place in El Salvador in 1982, and again on June 1st of this year.

The Sandinistas are making every attempt to make sure that there is no transfer of power after the elections, regardless of the will of the people. The balloting, if it cannot be used to confirm the power of those who seized power in 1979, may not occur at all. It is an indication of the insecurity of the Sandinistas that they feel the need to include so many safeguards to insure their own victory.

ENDNOTES

1. Henri Weber, Nicaragua: the Sandinist Revolution (London, U.K.: Verso Editions, 1981) p. 75

2. Barricada, 11 July 1980

3. The Economist 10 May 1980 p. 22

4. Humberto Ortega, speech to the Sandinista military, 25 August 1981.

5. Managua Domestic Service 14 January 1984 (Foreign Broadcast Information Service, herinafter FBIS, 16 January, 1984 p. P20)

6. Diario Las Americas 16 December, 1980.

7. Speech to the Sandinista Military, quoted by Branko Lazitch in Est et Ouest (Paris) 25 August 1981

8. The Political Parties Decree was published in Barricada, the official Sandinista newspaper, on 15 September 1983. A translation appears in FBIS 22 September, 1983 pp. P13-21.

9. Political Parties Law, Article 10.

10. Ibid. Article 15

11. Ibid. Article 2

12. Ibid. Article 5

13. Ibid. Article 6

14. FBIS 11 May 1983 p. P13

15. Poltical Parties Law, Article 7

16. Ibid. Article 28

17. Managua, Radio Sandino, 25 October, 1984. FBIS, 27 October 1982 pp. P10-11

18. Ibid.

19. The Electoral Law was published in La Gaceta on 28 March 1984 and in Barricada the same day. The English translation appears in FBIS 6 April 1984 pp. 22-45. Passage cited is in Arts. 3-4.

20. Ibid. Art. 9

21. Ibid. Art. 7

22. Ibid. Art. 22

23. Ibid. Arts. 26 & 64

24. "Nicaraguan Council Announces Timetable for Election Campaign," Washington Post 25 May, 1984 p. A40

25. Electoral Law Art. 37

26. Ibid.

27. The New Republic 24 October, 1984 p. 10

28. Edward Cody, "Sandinista Foes Doubt Pledges on Elections," Washington Post 17 January 1984 p. A11

29. Ibid.

30. Alfredo Cesar, "Nicaragua Must seek Firm Independence," New York Times 23 April 1984

31. Arturo Jose Cruz, "Sandinista Democracy Unlikely," New York Times 27 January 1984

32. "Social Democratic Message to the People of Nicaragua," 28 January 1984

33. "Sandinistas Hit on Media Law," Washington Post 16 January 1984

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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

August 15, 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. CHARLES HILL
Executive Secretary
Department of State

COL R.J. AFFOURTIT
Executive Secretary
Department of Defense

[redacted] STAT
Executive Secretary
Central Intelligence Agency

SUBJECT: White House Digest: "What the Central Americans Bishops Say About Central America"

The NSC requests review and clearance of the attached White House Digest by August 22, 1984.

Paul B. Thompson for
Robert M. Kimmitt
Executive Secretary

Attachment

White House Digest

THE VIEW FROM THE PULPIT:

WHAT THE CENTRAL AMERICAN BISHOPS SAY ABOUT CENTRAL AMERICA

> We want to state clearly that this government is totalitarian. ... We are dealing with a government that is an enemy of the Church.
>
> Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo
> Managua, Nicaragua
> 11 July 1984[1]

> There were still in the world men and women of good will who did not believe a totalitarian regime had enthroned itself in Nicaragua. Now those people know the truth.
>
> Archbishop Roman Arrieta
> San Jose, Costa Rica
> 11 July 1984[2]

> If the Salvadoran guerrillas had popular support, they would already have won by now.
>
> Archbishop Arturo Rivas y Damas
> Archbishop of San Salvador
> March 22, 1983[3]

Critics of Administration policies in Central America often cloak their criticisms by trying to wrap them in the mantle of the Catholic Church. The authority of the Church lends credibility to their arguments and makes them seem less partisan and more constructive. But the impression that the Church hierarchy in Central America is opposed to the President's initiatives is incorrect.

As anyone familiar with the area realizes, the position of the Catholic Church in all of Latin America has undergone profound changes in the last twenty years. One aspect of Church teaching that has not changed, however, is the fundamental concern for the human rights of the people.

It is for this reason that extremes of both the right and the left have been opposed by the Bishops of El Salvador and Nicaragua. They have praised the movement toward democracy in El Salvador, while condemning the abuses of both right and left wing

death squads. They have deplored the movement towards Marxism-Leninism in Nicaragua.

Nicaragua

Casual observers of the Sandinista Revolution are confused by the initial support for the Revolution by Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo, since he is now opposed to the Sandinista dictatorship.

There is no contradiction here. In 1979, Obando y Bravo shared the hopes of many of his countrymen that the Somoza dictatorship would be replaced by a democratic regime. Like the U.S., the Archbishop tried his best to move the regime in that direction. In fact, one of the first public events of the Sandinista era was a victory Mass celebrated by Obando y Bravo.

After five years, however, these high hopes have soured. The Sandinistas have failed to live up to the promises they made to the Organization of America States and instead have suspended most human rights, including freedom of religion. Therefore, consistent in his concern for the human rights of the people of Nicaragua, the Archbishop condemns Sandinista violations.

The Catholic Church has traditionally rejected Marxism because it is a man-centered ideology. The Easter Sunday Pastoral Letter on Reconciliation reiterated this rejection:

> "Materialistic concepts of mankind distort the person and teachings of Christ, reduce man to merely physical terms without taking account of his spiritual nature, so he remains subject to physical forces called the 'dialectics of history.' And man, alienated from God and himself, becomes disoriented, without moral and religious reference points, without a higher nature, insecure and violent."[4]

Based on this general discomfort with Marxist regimes, the hierarchy has rejected the Marxist-Leninist tendencies of the Sandinista government. Bishop Antonio Vega, President of the Nicaraguan Bishops' Conference, commented on Sandinismo in March 1983:

> "The Sandinista government through its ideology and method is a Marxist-Leninist government.... In its daily praxis the government does not act in an exclusively totalitarian manner, but [there is] total domination of the people."[5]

Bishop Vega continued his attacks upon totalitarianism in a Mass held on May 1, 1984 at the request of an anti-Sandinista labor organization. His sermon attacked governments run "by a few individuals who want to dominate and enslave the rest."[6]

One of the methods of extending totalitarianism that particularly concerns the Bishops is government intrusion into

Catholic education. Specifically, Catholics are concerned about atheistic Marxist indoctrination becoming part of the curriculum. The Easter Pastoral Letter states, under the heading of "A Belligerent Situation":

> "A materialistic and atheistic educational system is undermining the consciences of our children."

Bishop Vega has also highlighted the link between totalitarianism and lack of respect for human rights. He said:

> "[There is submission to] a totalitarian and materialistic state which at the same time does not respect human rights."[7]

At the same time that the Bishops condemn human rights abuses by the Sandinistas, they reject the excuse that outside intervention, in the form of alleged U.S. support for the Freedom Fighters, justifies harsh methods. The Easter Pastoral Letter points out:

> "It is dishonest to constantly blame internal aggression and violence on foreign aggression. It is useless to blame the evil past for everything without recognizing the problems of the present."

The Easter Pastoral also made veiled reference to the superpower conflict as it effects the people of Nicaragua. In a passage which does not name either the U.S. or the Soviet Union, the letter said the following:

> "Foreign powers take advantage of our situation to encourage economic and ideological exploration. They see us as support for their power, without respect for our persons, our history, our culture, and our right to decide our own destiny."

Some observers see in this a reference to criticism by individual church leaders of the Sandinistas' ties to Communist countries, especially Cuba.[8] This is a logical assumption, since there are about 11,000 Cubans in the country.

The Catholic Church hierarchy has serious doubts about the exercise scheduled for this November which the Sandinistas are calling an election. Bishop Vega commented soon after the "electoral process" got under way:

> "'One cannot talk about free and popular elections,' he said, when one does not say how these will take place. 'In order to speak of free elections,' he added, it is necessary that the citizens have full knowledge of what they are choosing. 'The climate in which to conduct free elections does not exist,' because the government controls the means of communication, he said."[9]

Finally, the Easter Pastoral makes some suggestions about how to solve the problems that are causing so many Nicaraguans to lose their lives. The answer, say the Bishops, is in dialogue.

"The road to social peace is possible through dialogue, sincere dialogue that seeks truth and goodness." This includes dialogue with "Nicaraguans who have taken up arms against the government. ... The dialogue of which we speak is not a tactical truce to strengthen positions for further struggle but a sincere effort to seek appropriate solutions to the anguish, pain, exhaustion, and fatigue of the many, many people who long for peace."[10]

One of the most recent Church-State controverseies has surrounded the activities of Father Amando Pena. He is being held under house arrest and investigated by the Sandinistas for alleged involvement with the anti-Sandinista forces threatening the regime.

Tomas Borge, the head of the Sandinista secret police, demanded that Archbishop Obando remove Father Pena from his parish. The archbishop refused, but agreed to limit the priest's appearances in the neighborhood. That same night, the "turbas," or "divine mobs," became involved. These are groups of pro-government demonstrators who have threatened and attacked priests and Christians. Archbishop Obando describes their actions:

"I was still on my pastoral visit and they sent me a message on the radio that the turbas were in Father Pena's parish and were burning tires and molesting the people there. The police told the people to get out of the church, but outside the turbas were waiting to beat the people up. The turbas climbed to the top of the church and began to rip off the roof."[11]

Obando y Bravo said the church considered the allegations against Pena:

"a setup by the government to hurt the Catholic Church.... I believe the government, with these accusations against our priests, intends to eliminate the Catholic Church to implant the so-called Popular Church."[12]

The accusations against Father Pena, and the heavy-handed treatment of the Church in July led the Archbishop, who knew from the Somoza days what a dictatorship looked like, to draw the following conclusion:

"We want to state clearly that this government is totalitarian. I don't think that we can deceive ourselves today; we are dealing with a government that is an enemy of the Church -- especially those who are orthodox. ...These actions are also hurting the entire country."[13]

El Salvador

In neighboring El Salvador, the Catholic Church has had a long tradition of standing up to those who would threaten the fledgling democracy for which the people of El Salvador are fighting and dying. At times, this has meant danger for the Bishops. The murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero by unknown assassins is powerful testimony to the ruthlessness of democracy's enemies.

Despite this danger, the Bishops have continued to speak out against human rights abuses and terrorist violence. They have also commented with some frequency on the need for U.S. military assistance. Critics of the Reagan Administration have claimed that the Church in El Salvador opposes such aid.

This is not true. The position of the Church is that military aid by itself is not a sufficient solution. It is, however, an important part of any solution. Bishop Pedro Aparicio, former secretary of the Episcopal Conference, said while on a visit to this country in August, 1981:

> "The Church in El Salvador does not want military aid from the United States if all Soviet aid to the guerrillas stops. While Russia is supplying the guerrillas with arms we need the United States to help to strengthen our own army."[14]

Archbishop Arturo Rivas y Damas preceded Archbishop Aparicio to the U.S. and made an even stronger statement about the proper U.S. role in the conflicts in Central America:

> "[I]nstead of sending arms, you could help put a cordon around our country to impede the arrival of arms from the Soviet bloc."[15]

This support for U.S. aid to counter what the terrorist elements receive from Nicaragua and Cuba has continued to the present day. In May 1983, the official Church magazine, Orientacion, included the following sentiment in an editorial:

> "Without a doubt this country would be reaching the limits of its admirable resistance had it not been for the military and economic assistance of [North] America."[16]

Most recently, Bishop Marco Revelo, the current head of the Episcopal Conference, called for continued U.S. aid at present levels, with neither a large increase in the amount of U.S. aid or a unilateral withdrawl.[17] He confirmed the legality and the necessity of this aid when he said:

> "Military aid is necessary because the Government - and it is a Government that is legitimately constituted - needs to protect itself from violence."[18]

There is no doubt that the Bishops want peace, but they are not willing to accept it on the guerrillas' terms. Well before the start of the Salvadoran guerrillas' "final offensive" in January 1981, Archbishop Rivera y Damas said in his Sunday homily: the Church wants peace, "but not a peace won by weapons."[19]

Recourse to force is sometimes justified in the eyes of the Catholic Church. Indeed, pacifism, or the absolute refusal to take up arms for any reason, has been rejected by the Church throughout the centuries. The Nicaraguan Bishops' 1978 pastoral letter proclaimed that the Somoza regime had become intolerable and that Nicaraguans could in good conscience raise arms against it.

But the situation in El Salvador, according to its Episcopal Conference, is different. The necessary conditions for justifiable rebellion did not exist when the guerrillas launched their 1981 offensive and they have become more remote since then. Rivera y Damas laid out the conditions in a January 1981 homily:

> "Insurrection is justified when four requirements are satisfied: there is serious abuse of political power by those in power, all peaceful alternatives have failed, the ills that accompany an insurrection would not be greater than the present difficulties, and the people must truly believe that the insurrection shall win."[20]

The Archbishop of San Salvador and his colleagues has serious doubts about all but the first of these conditions. They were not at all sure that a Communist victory would bring improvements to the lives of the people. In fact, they are almost certain it would not.

In the same homily, Rivera y Damas asserted that the leftist guerrillas were inclined toward Communism and that the Salvadoran people: "are not certain that the installation of a Socialist regime in El Salvador is preferable to a continuation of the present one."[21]

The present regime that the prelate mentions, it must be remembered, was the civilian/military junta that took power from the oligarchy in 1979. It had not yet submitted itself to elections. In spite of this, the Catholic hierarchy found it preferable to a guerrilla victory.

Since that homily, El Salvador has held three elections and the legitimacy of the central government has increased accordingly. If the people of El Salvador were not certain they wanted a Socialist victory in 1981, they became certain by March 1982 when they turned out in large numbers to vote for a Constituent Assembly, despite the threat of violence from the guerrillas. Similar large turnouts in March and May 1984 confirmed the people's rejection of the guerrillas.

According to the Bishops, one of the reasons the Salvadoran people do not support the guerrillas is their connection to outside totalitarian forces. It is absurd, says Rivera y Damas, to risk life and limb for "liberation" from the U.S. when the alternative is domination by "the Communist superpower."[22]

Finally, Rivera y Damas recently closed the book on the notion that the Salvadoran insurgency had either the support of the Church or the support of the people when he said last year in San Jose, Costa Rica:

> "[I]f the Salvadoran guerrillas had popular support, they would already have won by now."[23]

This does not mean that the hierarchy is silent on abuses by right wing paramilitary bands. But unlike some North Americans who condemn only one side for human rights abuses, the Catholic hierarchy equates them and sees both as impediments to the establishment of a people's democratic regime.

Rivera y Damas again:

> "When we speak of violence, we cannot use a double standard. ... The violence is equally condemnable when it comes from those who kidnap, ambush armed forces patrols, dynamite installations that provide jobs, and provoke electricity stoppages that affect entire zones: or when the violence comes from security forces and paramilitary bands as they kidnap persons of the civilian population late at night, and have them disappear or kill them."[24]

Sources of Confusion

Many partisans from different sides have claimed to have the Church on their side in the Salvadoran struggle. This is because some groups who claim to speak on behalf of the Church (usually in support of the Communists) do so falsely. Some North Americans, ignorant of the workings of the Salvadoran Church, confuse these sources with official Church organs.

The best example of this is the credibility attributed to Soccoro Juridico, the legal aid office of the Archbishopric of San Salvador. To those who wish to accuse the government of most (if not all) the deaths of the civil war, this source is very useful. But it has not spoken on behalf of the Archbishopric since May, 1981 when Rivera y Damas deprived it of that right.

He did this because Soccoro Juridico reported only one side and attributed every violent death to the right or to the government itself. According to Archbishop Rivera y Damas: "they give evidence only of the victims of the security forces," and "they have yet to attribute a victim to the guerrilla forces though the guerrillas claim some deaths themselves."[25]

As in Nicaragua, the Communists have formed a parallel church, which they call the "People's Church." This organization, which claims the allegiance of some 15 of El Salvador's 200 native priests, also tries to wear the mantle of the official Church, usually for fund-raising purposes.[26]

According to Bishop Aparicio: "They have used Bishop Rivera y Damas' name without permission and have forged his signature on several pamphlets to convince people in several countries that the Church in El Salvador was requesting their help."[27]

The pamphlets he refers to were used to raise money in Venezuela, Mexico, Central America and Europe for the People's Church. Again, they are aided by the lack of in-depth familiarity with the Salvadoran Church on the part of Catholics in other countries.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church in Central America, like the Catholic Church in other parts of the world, is not concerned with the fortunes of particular political factions, except insofar as these fortunes may effect the lives of the people. For this reason, the hierarchy of the Church is rightly perceived as a non-partisan advocate of the people's rights.

The message of peace and reconciliation which the Bishops of Nicaragua and El Salvador are delivering is entirely consistent with the goals of the U.S. The message is that the Catholic Bishops and their flocks reject Marxism-Leninism, reject violence of both the left and the right, support free elections, support the right of the people to defend themselves from tyranny, and declare their unshakable commitment to human rights.

The confidence of the Roman Catholic Bishops, even in the face of the current difficulties, is reflected by the statement by Nicaraguan Archbishop Obando y Bravo:

> "We believe the Church will continue to exist, and history, which is the mother of life, teaches us that the Church has always witnessed the burial of those who persecute her.[28]

ENDNOTES

1. National Catholic Register 29 July 1984 pp. 1, 6

2. "Pope Condemns Nicaragua for expelling priests," The Washington Times 12 July, 1984 p. 7A

3. La Nacion Internacional, San Jose, Costa Rica, Central American edition of 22-28 September 1983

4. Pastoral Letter on Reconciliation from the Nicaraguan Bishops 22 April 1984 (Easter Sunday), Part I

5. "Nicaraguan Bishop doubts voting can be free under Sandinistas," Catholic Standard and Times 15 March 1984. The Bishop's comments were quoted from the Italian National Catholic newspaper Avvemire.

6. John Lantigua, "Bishops Become Critical of Sandinistas," Washington Post, 22 May 1984 pp. A1, A11.

7. "Bishop doubts voting.." op. cit.

8. Lantigua, op. cit.

9. "Bishop doubts voting.." op. cit.

10. Pastoral Letter on Reconciliation, op. cit.

11. National Catholic Register, op cit.

12. "Prelate Charges Sandinistas seek to Oust Catholic Church, Washington Post, 23 June 1984

13. National Catholic Register op. cit.

14. National Catholic Register 14 June, 1981 (quoted in Kerry Ptacek, "Misconceptions About the Role of the Church," in Crisis and Continuity, U.S. Policy in Central America and the Caribbean, Mark Falcoff and Robert Royal, eds. Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington, D.C., 1984 pp. 263-278

15. Diario de las Americas, Miami 7 April, 1981

16. Washington Post 9 May, 1983

17. Address to the Central America Outreach Meeting, 21 March 1984

18. National Catholic Reporter, 30 March, 1984

19. El Diario de Hoy, San Salvador, El Salvador, 8 September 1980.

20. Agence France Presse, 18 January 1981

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. La Nacion Internacional, op. cit.

24. Ptacek, op cit.

25. Catholic Standard, 2 April 1981

26. Ptacek, op. cit. p. 268

27. National Catholic Register 14 June 1981

28. National Catholic Register 29 July, 1984 p. 6

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