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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20508

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March 12, 1987

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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. MELVYN LEVITSKY  
Executive Secretary  
Department of State

COLONEL JAMES F. LEMON  
Executive Secretary  
Department of Defense

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Executive Secretary  
Central Intelligence Agency

CAPTAIN JOSEPH C. STRASSER  
Executive Assistant to the Chairman  
Joint Chiefs of Staff

SUBJECT: PRG Meeting on Nicaragua, February 27, 1987

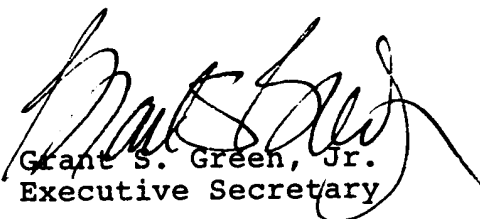
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The February 27, 1987 PRG on Nicaragua reviewed the existing U.S. goals and objectives for Nicaragua and decided that a draft paper should be prepared outlining a clearer and more sharply focused goal emphasizing the need for full democratization in Nicaragua. The draft paper also would discuss the relative advantages of the goal of democracy over the alternative policy of containment of the Sandinistas.

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The attached draft responds to that PRG decision. Please provide comments and suggestions by March 18, 1987.

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Grant S. Green, Jr.  
Executive Secretary

Attachment  
Tab A - PRG Draft Paper

cc: Donald Gregg  
Office of The Vice President

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U.S. Objectives in Nicaragua

American objectives in Nicaragua should meet the following criteria:

- (1) Advance U.S. security and political interests.
- (2) Be compatible with the security and political interests of our regional allies.
- (3) Be easily understood by the American people and congruent with our traditional values and principles.
- (4) Receive bipartisan Congressional support.
- (5) Foster the well-being of the Nicaraguan people.
- (6) Place U.S. adversaries at a disadvantage in public and diplomatic discourse.

The only objective that fully meets the preceding criteria is the establishment of democracy in Nicaragua.

The promotion of democracy in Nicaragua is obviously compatible with traditional American values. Indeed, recent U.S. foreign policy initiatives (Philippines, Haiti), together with the welcome return of democracy in three out of four Central American countries and elsewhere in Latin America, suggests that support for democratic institutions is becoming a new basis for bipartisan foreign policy. A policy that promotes democracy generally and in Nicaragua specifically is, in principle, capable of attracting strong public and Congressional support. We have already moved in this direction. In fact, one of the objectives of Public Law 99-500 (\$100 million for contras) is precisely the

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promotion of ". . . regularly scheduled, free and fair elections and the establishment of democratic institutions" in Nicaragua.

The goal of democracy in Nicaragua is also supported by Contadora; by the neighboring democratic presidents; by the Arias peace initiative; and even by the Sandinistas themselves. In 1979 the Sandinistas pledged to the OAS to "call Nicaraguans to the first free elections" that Nicaragua would have in this century. They subsequently accepted Contadora's twenty-one objectives, one of which stipulates the adoption of ". . . measures conducive to the establishment and, where appropriate, improvement of democratic, representative and pluralistic systems that will guarantee effective popular participation in the decision-making process. . ." Because democracy is in the mutual interest of our hemisphere, in this respect our effort is no more than to insist upon what the Sandinistas themselves have proclaimed to be their ideal.

President Arias has recently focused his own initiative on the need for Nicaraguan democratization and called for "free, pluralistic and honest elections" in Nicaragua. Finally, in a variety of public statements the leaders of the neighboring democracies have unambiguously called for democracy in Nicaragua. These Central American leaders know that in the absence of democracy throughout the region their own democratic gains are at risk and the security of their respective countries becomes highly vulnerable. Without democracy in Nicaragua, they see subversion and war in Central America for the foreseeable future.

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Recent public opinion polls show that the people of Central America overwhelmingly share these fears.

There is, therefore, a strong basis -- political, diplomatic, international and in the public opinion of neighboring nations -- for sharply defining U.S. goals in Nicaragua as the establishment of full, and popularly elected, legitimate democratic rule of the same genus that now happily prevails in neighboring countries. What the U.S. seeks in Nicaragua is the simple principle of self-determination for the Nicaraguan people, i.e. their ability to select their own leaders in free, fair, contested and periodic elections.

If democracy does not win out, the alternative to this objective would be the consolidation of the anti-democratic Sandinista regime and the inevitable acceptance of the establishment of yet another totalitarian Soviet surrogate in the Western Hemisphere. Such a devastating setback would ultimately demand the development of some type of containment policy to isolate the Sandinistas and minimize their potential for destabilizing neighboring countries including Panama and Mexico.

As a policy alternative, however, containment would be extremely costly in political, economic and military resources while being unable to meet U.S. political and security requirements.

Moreover, containment would be extremely difficult to effectively implement since it will have to overcome the close cultural and historical links between the peoples of Central America as well as the porosity of the area's national borders. American military assistance and presence in the region would

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sharply increase. The local military forces would regain their preeminence in national politics displacing the newly emerging civilian leadership. Even Costa Rica would be hard-pressed to maintain its tradition of doing without armed forces. Resurgent local guerrillas covertly supported by the Sandinistas will destabilize the neighboring governments and contribute to further economic deterioration. Perhaps most tellingly, by their very nature, containment is a policy democracies find difficult to sustain over the long haul. The cycle of subversion, violence, disruption, polarization and economic decline will accelerate as soon as our immediate interest wanes. But inevitably the U.S. would be faced once again with the necessity to decide how to respond to Soviet encroachment on our southern border, except this time the magnitude of the problem and the seriousness of the threat will be incomparably greater.

To summarize, the choice before the U.S. today is either democracy or containment in Nicaragua. Only the former is compatible with American traditions and the most effective U.S. foreign policy while simultaneously securing our political and security interests in the region. Containment, on the other hand, only postpones the day of reckoning and ensures that conditions will be more unfavorable when -- inevitably -- the problem surfaces again as it surely will if only because the United States simply cannot acquiesce in the Soviet Union becoming the dominant power in Central America.

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