

WASHINGTON POST
21 April 1985

FILE ONLY

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE K-8Michael D. Barnes

An Alternative That Puts Pressure on Both Sides

The objectives of U.S. policy toward Nicaragua should be to enhance the security and stability of Central America by achieving reciprocal and verifiable security arrangements with Nicaragua and by promoting political pluralism and the observance of human rights in Nicaragua.

There is now a consensus in Congress that current policies are not achieving—and hold no real prospect of achieving—these objectives. In recognition of that growing consensus, President Reagan has dropped his proposal that Congress release an additional \$14 million for military aid for the *contras*. This week, Congress will consider alternative approaches.

Along with my Democratic colleagues Lee H. Hamilton and James R. Jones, and my Republican colleagues Hamilton Fish Jr., Jim Leach, Ed Zschau and Willis D. Gradison Jr., I have prepared a bipartisan alternative that I believe can, and will, command broad support in Congress and among the American people. Our alternative is designed to support regional peace efforts and give diplomacy a chance to work, while at the same time maintaining pressure on the Sandinistas to change policies that we feel destabilize the region.

The policy set forth in our resolution is to seek peace in Nicaragua and Central America through the Contadora process, which provides an appropriate 21-point framework for achieving U.S. objectives. As part of a regional settlement, it should be U.S. policy to encourage a cease-fire and peace talks among the combatants in Nicaragua.

Our resolution points out that there are disturbing trends in Nicaragua's foreign and domestic policies, including restrictions on individual and press freedoms, the subordination of government functions to party control, close Soviet-Cuban ties and a military buildup, and efforts by the Sandinistas to export their influence and ideology. There are also serious human rights violations by both the Nicaraguan government and the *contras*.

We believe that Congress should monitor

events in Nicaragua carefully, and that progress in reversing these trends should be a key element in future congressional decisions with respect to Nicaragua and Central America as a whole. Actions by the Sandinista government and its opponents will weigh heavily in determining those decisions. If progress is made, the United States should consider improving ties with Nicaragua, including expanded trade relations and the provision of technical and economic assistance.

Our alternative continues in effect the existing prohibition on funding for military or paramilitary operations in Nicaragua until such time as Congress enacts a joint resolution repealing that prohibition. Meanwhile, our resolution provides \$10 million for humanitarian assistance for refugees who are outside of Nicaragua, regardless of whether or not they are associated with the *contras*. The assistance could not be used for provisioning combat units. To ensure that the assistance is not misused in that or any other way, we provide that it be channeled through one of the two recognized international relief agencies with experience in the area: the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees or the International Committee of the Red Cross. As a sign of our commitment to the Contadora process, we also provide that \$4 million will be available for the costs of implementing a Contadora agreement.

Our alternative requires the president to continue to report periodically to Congress on the situation in Nicaragua, and it gives the president another opportunity, after the beginning of the new fiscal year on Oct. 1, to request further action by Congress. The resolution would bind Congress to give any such request expedited consideration, just as it is now doing with respect to the president's request for \$14 million in military aid for the *contras*.

We believe that this alternative serves U.S. peace and security interests in several important ways. It gives a strong impetus to the Contadora process, which will make an agreement much more likely than if a plan is "made in the U.S.A." It puts pressure on both sides in

the Nicaraguan conflict to enter into a dialogue leading to reconciliation and an opening of the political system, because after Oct. 1 the president can force Congress to reconsider the situation, and neither side will want to be held responsible for lack of progress. The alternative offers incentives for those on both sides of the conflict who desire such a dialogue and reconciliation to get together. It criticizes both the Sandinistas and their opponents where criticism is due.

Our alternative makes eventual U.S. intervention in Nicaragua less likely. It combines restraint with the engagement of our diplomatic, political and economic resources squarely on behalf of our interests. Equally important, it provides a way out of our own domestic impasse, and the deep divisions that current policy toward Nicaragua have engendered.

The writer, a Democratic representative from Maryland, is chairman of the Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Western Hemisphere affairs.