

LOS ANGELES TIMES  
19 March 1986

DATE APPEARED  
PAGE 5 (Part II).

# There Is No Light at the End of the President's Tunnel Vision

## We Can Quarantine Nicaragua With Talk, Not Bloodshed

By STEPHEN J. SOLARZ

Far more than President Reagan's reputation as the "Great Communicator" will be at stake in Thursday's congressional vote on additional aid to the Nicaraguan *contras*.

In fact, a handful of swing votes could determine whether the United States throws its clout behind the forces of regional peace or weighs in on the side of a further militarization of the current conflict in Central America.

The President's request for \$100 million in assistance for the *contras* is simply the latest wrinkle in a four-year effort to topple the Nicaraguan government. The Administration has already provided the *contras* with \$100 million worth of supplies. It has imposed economic sanctions against the Sandinista regime. It has conducted massive military maneuvers in neighboring countries and adjacent waters. It has mined Nicaragua's harbors. It has thumbed its nose at international law and turned its back on the World Court. It has even written an assassination manual for the *contras*.

None of this has worked. More to the point, nothing of this sort holds any promise of working. Our own intelligence agencies agree that the *contras* have no chance of overturning the government in Managua; they have yet to hold even a single town in Nicaragua.

This is not to say that U.S. policy has had no effect. Unfortunately, it has had the wrong effects. Instead of facilitating real democracy, it has led to greater repression. Rather than inducing the Sandinistas to adopt a policy of genuine nonalignment, it has driven Nicaragua more firmly into the Soviet-Cuban embrace.

Most Americans deplore the fact that the Sandinistas have betrayed the democratic promises of their revolution. Most Americans agree that the present Sandinista regime daily tramples on the liberties of the Nicaraguan people. All Americans hope for a restoration of political pluralism and human rights in Nicaragua. And all Americans rightly insist that

Nicaragua allow its neighbors the same freedom from outside interference that it claims for itself.

But funding a "secret army" in Central America to oppose the Sandinistas will not return political freedom to Nicaragua or protect Nicaragua's neighbors or wean Managua from Cuban influence.

It will, however, inflame historic Latin fears about "U.S. meddling." It will tie the United States to a force that has shown the same disdain for basic human decency that we rightly condemn in the Sandinistas. And if it fails, as it surely will, it may lead to the subsequent introduction of American combat forces.

The President disclaims—sincerely, I believe—any desire to send American troops to Nicaragua. But his policies are inexorably carrying us toward the point where we will have to choose between dispatching the Marines and putting up with the Sandinistas, humiliating as that might be.

Nicaragua presents the United States with two sets of problems. We have legitimate security concerns there, in the presence of Cuban advisers, the possibility of Soviet bases and Nicaragua's continuing interference in the affairs of its neighbors. We also have political concerns, in the denial of democracy and the abuse of human rights in Nicaragua.

The Sandinistas have indicated that, in exchange for U.S. promises not to destabilize their regime or invade their nation, they would declare Nicaragua off-limits to foreign bases and troops and accept verifiable arrangements guaranteeing Nicaragua's non-interference in the affairs of its neighbors.

Perhaps no agreement along these lines would work, but we should at least test Managua's sincerity. If a regional agreement subsequently broke down, we would then have a sounder basis for mobilizing our Latin American allies against the Sandinista regime.

By insisting, however, that the Sandinistas also agree to the establishment of a

genuine democracy, which could lead to their removal from power, the Administration is attempting to achieve the impossible. Whatever else the Sandinistas may be willing to do, they clearly are not prepared to commit political suicide.

Consequently, by imposing unrealistic demands as a condition for a negotiated settlement, we will be not only unavailing in our efforts to promote political democracy in Nicaragua but also unsuccessful in containing Sandinista adventurism.

By obtaining an agreement on the security issues and reducing regional tensions, we have a far better chance of promoting our democratic values.

Our Latin American allies, many of whom have even more at stake in the region than we do, have begged us not to militarize the conflict further. The Contadora countries of Mexico, Colombia, Panama and Venezuela have publicly asked us to give their diplomatic efforts more time to bear fruit before we heat up the region with additional military aid. So, too, have almost all the other democracies in Latin America, ranging from mighty Argentina, at the far end of the hemisphere, to tiny Costa Rica, just across the Nicaraguan border.

Beneath all the inflated rhetoric about Sandinista armies rampaging as far north as Texas lie two choices. We can work with our friends in the region to promote an end to the fighting and a situation in which neighbors can live together in peace and without fear of outside intervention. Or we can follow a go-it-alone policy that, to be successful, will ultimately require the U.S. Marines.

The American people do not want any more Cubas in Central America, but neither do they want another Vietnam. It remains essential that we give diplomacy a chance. Our friends in the region ask this of us. Our own interests require it. Most of all, our ideals demand it.

*Stephen J. Solarz (D-N.Y.) is a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.*