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PATRICK BUCHANAN

Will the Contras be our next betrayal?

We are now coming up on the 10th anniversary of the fall of Saigon. Well before the grim day of remembrance, however, a vote will be taken in Congress that should tell the world exactly what lessons the Americans took home from that disaster.

Before April, the decision will be made on whether or not to cut off the military assistance vital to another ally in the field, whether to abandon Nicaraguans encouraged, equipped, and armed by the United States, and sent back to their country to recapture the revolution that had been hijacked by Communists.

The betting here is that the United States will ditch the Contras the way

we did the Kurds, the Vietnamese, the Cambodians, etc.

All the unmistakable signs are appearing. There are more and more stories of alleged Contra atrocities; there are more and more impassioned invocations of international law; there are angry commentaries asking how the United States could allow itself to be besmirched by association with such thuggery.

Whenever the left becomes especially strident in its appeal to "human rights," you may rely upon it, some beleaguered friend of the United States is about to be thrown to the wolves.

The Peace Movement would hail such a vote as a "voice of sanity" in the capital, a vote of confidence in "negotiation, rather than confrontation." Serious men, however, will not be put off with such piffle.

The Sandinistas are not simply some run-of-the-mine local fascists and anti-Americans, hell-bent on ruining their economy with their own particular Marxist economic texts.

They are aligned with and are part of the Soviet Empire. They are reaching out for assistance to every malodorous anti-American regime on earth, not excluding Qaddafi's Libya or the Ayatollah's Iran. They are not going to be bought off with American aid — we have tried that already — and they are not going to be bluffed out of their revolutionary ambitions by SR-71 overflights or battleships steaming up and down their coasts.

There is no longer any doubt, if

ever there was, about who these people are. Arturo Cruz — foe of Somoza, former junta member, and ambassador to the United States — has fled Nicaragua and come out for civil war.

What the war for Nicaragua has become, then, is a battle between the anti-Communists and democrats in the hills, who are supported by the United States, and a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary regime in Managua, supported by the Soviet Union, Cuba, Libya, East Germany, and Iran.

In some ways, the audacity of the Soviet Union has to be admired. Post-Grenada, surely some foreign

policy specialists must have warned the Politburo that there was nothing Moscow could do, at such a distance, to prevent America's liquidation of the beachhead in North America; that it was probably unwise to invest Soviet prestige; that a Soviet arms

buildup would only give Washington an excuse; that the Sandinistas should probably cut a deal.

But Moscow gambled. Directly in the wake of the Reagan landslide, they rushed into Corinto helicopter gunships which could tip the balance decisively against the guerril-

las supported by the United States. Moscow had seen the American investment, and carefully raised the bet. Not only has Washington not responded, Congress is ready to throw in the American hand.

If the Contras are abandoned, Honduras will become host to a deserted, embittered army of some 15,000 and Honduras will move to the top of the enemies list of a victorious Managua anxious to settle accounts with the neighbor that gave sanctuary to its enemies. As for Costa Rica, democratic and disarmed, sandwiched between Nicaragua and Panama, the governing elite should watch the vote carefully, and if it goes as expected, begin checking out the real estate in Miami.

Already, a hopeful new strategy of wooing Nicaragua is being chatted up. Since America is so wealthy and

near, it is argued, and the Soviet Union so backward and distant, eventually Managua's rulers will see that their only hope of progress lies in association with the United States. So it was said of Cuba.

What this cynical argument — everybody has his price — overlooks is the character of the True Believer. The Ortegas and Tomas Borge are dedicated revolutionaries; they are no more going to sell out their revolutionary dreams and ambitions for American money than Barry Goldwater or Ronald Reagan would sell out their conservative ones.

If the Contras are abandoned, Mr. Reagan will be left with this stark choice: either adjust to the permanent existence of a Russian military beachhead and revolutionary base camp on the North American continent — or send in the Marines.

Patrick Buchanan is a nationally syndicated columnist.