

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 15WALL STREET JOURNAL  
23 August 1985

## Taking the Sandinistas at Their Word

MANAGUA, Nicaragua — In August 1979, only weeks after the Sandinistas took over Nicaragua, I was walking through the lobby of the Intercontinental Hotel at about 10 p.m. when I spotted Tomas Borge in an intense huddle with a group of important Latin American diplomats.

Stopping to overhear, I was amazed at what I was clearly hearing—and what the tough Mr. Borge, already minister of the interior, was making no effort to hide.

"Me," he was saying, "I would shoot all the Somocistas. But we won't because we

### The Americas

by Georgie Anne Geyer

do not want to turn the rest of the Latin American revolution against us. The fewer problems we have, the more Latin America will be attracted to us. The more problems we have, the less."

I stood there listening for two full hours, and the theme was as unmistakable as it was unadorned. It was that the Nicaraguan revolution was the beginning of "the Latin American revolution." Indeed, that was the phrase that was repeated over and over and over.

Yet more than six years later, the debate over the Sandinistas' intentions still goes on with incongruous intensity. Conservatives in America, led by President Reagan, insist that the Sandinistas are indeed spreading their revolution by subverting their neighbors. Liberals, most notably in Congress, discover that the Sandinistas apparently never actually did use the phrase *revolucion sin fronteras*, or a "revolution without frontiers," and point to that as proof that the Sandinista revolution is a self-contained if souring one-party state with yearnings to social democracy, if only we gave them the chance.

What is so remarkable about being in this tumultuous isthmus—with El Salvador's increasingly successful democratization and Nicaragua's increasingly Eastern European kind of national silence—is that virtually no one here questions the Sandinistas' efforts and impassioned intent to spread their revolution.

The other Central American leaders simply "know" that there is Sandinista support for their guerrilla movements. "No, there is no doubt that Nicaragua is exporting revolution," El Salvador's Christian Democrat President Jose Napoleon Duarte told me in an interview in May in the Casa Presidencial. "[Nicaraguan President Daniel] Ortega himself said when he took the presidency, 'I'd talk with Duarte, but I'll continue to support the guerrillas.'"

As early as December 1983, Costa Rican President Luis Alberto Monge, a consummate democrat, told me, "In 40 years of Somocismo, we never had the threat that we have in four years of Sandinismo."

Specifically, he was referring to the Sandinistas' internal moves—within the same Costa Rica whose support had been the crucial factor to the success of the Sandinista revolution—to reconstitute the moderate Costa Rica Communist Party as a radical party designed to overthrow the Costa Rican government. Since then, not only have the Sandinistas been attacking across the border, killing two Costa Rican police officers, but an ominous series of kidnappings and robberies in San Jose bear the stamp of the formative years of other kindred guerrilla movements, such as the Salvadoran Farabundo Marti Liberation Front in the early 1970s and the Uruguayan Tupamaros in the late 1960s.

The amount of "proof" as to Sandinista subversion—proof in terms of documents or confessions or intelligence—is massive. On April 18, the Salvadoran military captured several leading guerrillas as well as

highly important documents spelling out even more intimate contacts with Nicaragua, Cuba and Eastern Europe than they believed existed. The intelligence on the numbers of international guerrillas and terrorists living in Managua (groups like the lethal Colombian M-19 have virtual compounds here and even groups as obscure as Indian Sikh militants mysteriously but regularly pass through) is substantial.

But these kinds of "proof" are not, to many Americans, really proof. It is difficult, nay impossible, to photograph intent in its historic moment. It is hard for Americans to grasp the inner whispers of social process, usually so apparently motionless. Conspiracy is something compartmentalized in "Casablanca," not in a place as unlikely sounding as Tegucigalpa.

The struggle to figure out what actually is happening in this once-simple isthmus—which now resembles the Balkans prior to World War I more than anything else—includes an interview with Nicaraguan Vice President Sergio Ramirez, who earnestly said to me: "This is a democracy." When—if one only studies the structure and the process that have been set up—one sees clearly that it is a totalitarian Marxist structure with all "rights" awarded from above instead of being innate in man, one sees that the process clearly does, and must, move across borders.

The Sandinistas are serious men and women. They have the right to create the kind of state they want; and they have the right to spread revolution, if that is their belief. In the last analysis, one can argue that one should show them the respect of taking them at their word and at their deed—it is somehow patronizing to deny their seriousness.

*Ms. Geyer, a former Latin American correspondent, is a columnist for Universal Press Syndicate and author of "Buying the Night Flight" (Delacorte Press).*