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THE MARXIST THREAT TO NICARAGUA

INTRODUCTION

The bloody conflict in the Central American nation of Nicaragua appears to have shattered President Carter's confident hopes that the U.S. Senate ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties last year would pave the way for an era of peaceful and harmonious relations between the United States and its Hispanic neighbors.

The current fighting in Nicaragua raises a broad range of questions concerning not only U.S. Latin American policy, but also U.S.-Soviet relations. One needs to examine carefully such things as the part that Panama is reportedly playing in the Nicaraguan conflict and whether it violates the Neutrality Treaty ratified by the U.S. Senate last year.

Does Cuba's reported involvement in Nicaragua, in partnership with Panama, raise the clear implication of a sub rosa role of the Soviets?

Does such a Soviet-Cuban role portend the repetition of their successful military-political alliance in Africa, and thus represent a clear challenge to the Carter Administration on its own doorstep?

What would be the strategic consequences of a Marxist Nicaragua - both for the United States and for the entire Central American region - and the future of the U.S. use of the Panama Canal for transit of its trade and oil?

What part did the Carter Administration's human rights campaign play in fueling the bloody fighting in Nicaragua?

Will Nicaragua suffer the same fate as did Iran and South Vietnam? What might be the fate of the supporters of Nicaraguan President Anastasio Somoza if the Sandinista guerrillas ultimately win a military victory?

Torrijos' Decade

Since seizing power in a military coup and ousting the constitutionally elected Panamanian government in October 1968, General Omar Torrijos has been described by his supporters as a Hispanic nationalist and by his critics as a committed Marxist with a passionate hatred for the United States.

Shortly after the 1968 coup, Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson described Torrijos in a November 19, 1968, syndicated column as holding pro-Marxist sympathies since his student days, and sharing a belief in socialism with some of his fellow officers and members of his immediate family. However, New York Times correspondent Henry Ginger wrote in a published dispatch of December 8, 1968, that the U.S. State Department investigated such allegations and, while maintaining reservations, recommended that the Administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson extend diplomatic recognition to the Torrijos military dictatorship.

During a decade in power, Torrijos gained acceptance (from Third World countries in the United Nations) of his demands for the United States to turn over the Panama Canal. Not until James C. Tanner's report for the Wall Street Journal of June 17, 1971, did the U.S. public have any clear indication of Torrijos' drift toward Marxism when, according to Tanner, he began installing ministers with Marxist sympathies in his government. An April 25, 1971, New York Times report described Torrijos' cabinet as having taken on a leftist slant. U.S. congressional critics maintained that he met secretly with Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin at Antilla, Cuba, on November 1, 1971, along with Fidel Castro, in an effort to gain Soviet material support for his campaign to wrest control of the Panama Canal from the United States. This meeting was followed by an "anti-imperialist" campaign launched by Torrijos in January, 1972, climaxing in his seizure of property owned by Boise Cascade, which the U.S. State Department later pressured the company to sell to the Panamanian government. A March 5, 1973, report of the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee condemned the U.S. State Department role as outright appeasement. Ten days after the House Committee report was published, Torrijos expressed his solidarity with Castro's Cuba for the first time in public. However, it was not until January 10, 1976 that Torrijos paid an official state visit to Havana. The Washington Post reported on January 17, 1976, that the Panamanian military leader returned with various cultural and economic agreements. In March 1976, several members of Congress maintained that Cuba was shipping military arms to the

Panamanians. In June of 1976, a Soviet delegation arrived in Panama and concluded major economic agreements. Congressman Eldon Rudd (R-Ariz.) told the House of Representatives that the U.S. State Department confirmed for him that they were aware of the agreements.

President Carter's Canal Treaties

When newly-elected President Carter made public the twin Panama Canal Treaties in 1977, critics of Torrijos in the Congress maintained, without any hard information, that the Panamanian dictator was an unreliable partner who would do with the vital U.S.-built waterway what Egypt's Nasser did with the Suez Canal after he seized it in 1956: use it as a weapon to the strategic disadvantage of the United States and for the benefit of the Soviet Union and its Socialist allies. However, it was not until June 6, 1979, that authoritative testimony emerged in public to support this claim.

In testimony before the House Subcommittee on the Panama Canal, Lt. General Gordon Sumner, Jr., Chairman of the Inter-American Defense Board until his retirement in May of 1978, reported on a two-hour personal meeting with Torrijos in November 1977, prior to the U.S. Senate debate on ratification of the Panama Canal treaties. The Panamanian leader told him that he planned to support violent insurrection and rebellion in the Central American region despite the fact that he had initialed the Neutrality Treaty pledging Panama would not interfere in the affairs of other nations. General Sumner also revealed in his House testimony that Torrijos defended the Marxist Sandinistas seeking to overthrow a fellow member of the Inter-American Defense Board, President Anastasio Somoza of Nicaragua. The former high-ranking U.S. officer forwarded a memo containing the substance of his discussion with Torrijos and later discussed it in person with General George Brown, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and responsible officials in both the State and Defense Departments. The substance of General Sumner's information was never revealed during the Senate debate on the Panama Canal in 1978.

The day after General Sumner's revelation, officials of the U.S. State Department were unable or unwilling to answer questions put to them by members of the House Subcommittee concerning indictments in Miami, Florida, in May 1979 of Panamanian nationals and members of Torrijos' intelligence staff, charged with smuggling arms and ammunition to the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. U.S. officials were quoted by the Associated Press on June 7, 1979, as admitting that a gun shipment from the United States did end up in Nicaragua via Panama, but the State Department said it had no evidence Panama was arming the revolution in Nicaragua. On June 27, 1979, the Chicago Tribune published what it claimed were excerpts from a confidential State Department paper of May 2,

1979, asserting that there was hard evidence that the Cubans were shipping arms to the Sandinistas on Panamanian air force planes. The Associated Press and the United Press International reported on June 28, 1979, that the U.S. State Department confirmed existence of the memo, but insisted it was not a State Department report but a CIA intelligence document. On June 30, 1979, the secretary to President Somoza, Max Kelly, charged in an interview with the Associated Press in Managua, Nicaragua, that the Carter Administration has known about the Cuban and Panamanian involvement for some time, but had suppressed the information from the news media and members of Congress fearing it would effect House passage of enabling legislation for the Panama Canal Treaties.

State Department spokesman Hodding Carter was quoted by the Reuters news service, published in the November 29, 1978 edition of the New York Times, that State had taken up reports with Cuba and other Latin governments that such countries were helping to provide material military support to the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. However, on June 7, 1979, the same Hodding Carter told reporters that the fate of the Panama Canal treaties should not be linked to fighting in Nicaragua because the situation in that Central American nation stood on its own two feet. At the same time, the State Department released a 16-page report of alleged violations of human rights in Nicaragua. The State Department, however, ignored a May 1, 1979, Manifesto by the Panamanian Agrarian Labor Party pointing out that despite General Torrijos' pledge to re-establish human rights and democracy if the treaties were approved, he had failed to honor that pledge.

Lt. General Dennis P. MacAuliffe, Commander in Chief of the Army's Southern Command based in Panama, told the same subcommittee that heard General Sumner that the Torrijos government had permitted formation of a brigade of Panamanians to fight in Nicaragua with the Sandinistas, but their involvement appeared directed more against the Somoza regime than advancement of the Sandinista cause. MacAuliffe also told the subcommittee, according to the Associated Press of June 7, 1979, that Panamanians were supplying weapons to the Sandinistas, but he refused to implicate the Panamanian government. On June 26, 1979, New York Times correspondent Warren Hoge wrote from the Sandinistas' side in southern Nicaragua that many Panamanians were fighting with the guerrillas and quoted one Panamanian as saying that of his guerrilla training class of 124, 56 were Panamanians.

Cuba-Central American Connection

Cuban designs on Panama and Nicaragua date back to the first few months after Castro seized power in January 1959, according to the former U.S. Ambassador to Panama, Joseph Farland. Farland resigned his post in late 1963 and told a newspaper interviewer in the wake of the Castro-inspired Panamanian riots in January 1964 that his superiors at the U.S. State Department were told of

Castro's plans to wrest the Panama Canal away from the United States. Castro, according to Farland, had helped train and equip the ill-fated guerrilla groups sent against Nicaragua and Panama in the spring of 1959. The Secretary of State at the time of the Panamanian riots, Dean Rusk, told ABC-TV's "Issues & Answers" program on January 12, 1964, that Castro agents played a significant part in the Canal disorders.

Later, at a January 15, 1964, press conference, then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance stated that Castro agents trained in Cuba were responsible for increasing the violence. Both Rusk and Vance played important roles in the negotiations that led to turning the Canal over to the Panamanian dictator Omar Torrijos.

Dr. Roger Fontaine, Director of Latin American Studies at Georgetown University's Center for Stategic Studies, maintained in an interview for Mutual Broadcasting on June 5, 1979 that Castro has provided support to the Sandinista guerrillas for almost two decades, both with training and weapons. The Sandinistas deny this, insisting that they have not received Castro's help since 1974. The Nicaraguans maintain that ever since they agreed to allow the United States to use their country as a staging area for training Cuban exiles to launch the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in April 1961, Castro has maintained both a personal and an ideological-strategic reason to seek the overthrow of the staunchly anti-Marxist Nicaraguan regime.

The Chairman of the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, Representative John Murphy (D-N.Y.), maintains that Castro has always been the base of support for the Sandinistas. With the advent of the Carter Administration in 1977, U.S. policy changed in Latin America, favoring left wing and Marxist regimes in an effort to court the Third World nations that look with favor and admiration on Castro.

When the May 1979 Sandinista "final offensive" was launched, Murphy spoke at a symposium on Central America in Washington, insisting that Castro had sent 200 Cubans to Panama in a Russian-built transport. They later made their way to Costa Rica to join Panamanians and other Latin nationals to fight with the Sandinistas, although the allegation was denied by the Sandinistas.

However, in a complete reversal, the Carter Administration is quoted by the New York Times on June 23, 1979, that Cuba was, as Murphy insisted, engaged in supplying arms and training instructors to the Sandinistas. The Times quoted officials as saying that Castro's involvement represented the most active role Cuba has played in Latin America in 15 years. On June 24, 1979, Defense Secretary Harold Brown said on "Issues & Answers" that the Administration possessed strong evidence of Cuban military support. A day earlier the Times quoted one high-ranking Administration official as saying that there was even some evidence to suggest that Cuban units, numbering a dozen, were actively taking part in the fighting with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

In fact, President Carter, on his return from the Vienna Summit-SALT II signing with the Soviets, told a joint session of Congress and the American people watching on nationwide television:

> I made it clear to President Brezhnev that Cuban military activities in Africa, supported by the Soviet Union, and the growing Cuban involvement in the problems of Central America and the Caribbean, can only have a negative impact on U.S. Soviet relations.

While the president's point may be debated, a Central Intelligence Agency report of May 2, 1979 clearly suggests Cuban involvement, however low in profile, not only in Nicaragua, but throughout Central America. The Cubans obviously possess a clear understanding of the strategic gains to be achieved in toppling the Somoza regime. The report, which the State Department acknowledged it had read, but refused to discuss, also reveals that Castro counseled the Sandinistas to hide their Marxist beliefs in order to gain the cooperation of non-Marxist groups opposed to Somoza. However, during the period prior to the May-June 1979 Sandinista offensive, the U.S. news media were quoting leaders of the Sandinistas as insisting that they were not receiving help from Cuba, nor were they Marxist, and that the charges were a scare tactic of conservatives in the U.S. Congress.

The Soviets and Sandinistas in Costa Rica

Ray Holton of the Phildelphia Inquirer wrote from San Jose, Costa Rica on June 26, 1979, that the Sandinistas would not have been able to challenge the Somoza regime militarily without the use of neighboring Costa Rica, squeezed between Panama in the South and Nicaragua to the North, as a sanctuary from which to launch raids into Nicaragua. Holton quoted an unnamed Costa Rican official as saying that while his country had not aided the Sandinistas, his people favor the overthrow of the Somoza regime. In late 1978 the Costa Rican government broke diplomatic relations after Nicaraguan troops violated its air space and territory in hot pursuit of the Sandinistas. However, the fiction of Costa Rican neutrality ended when, following the lead of Panama, it recognized a provisional government declared by the Sandinistas on June 24, 1979. Five days later, New York Times correspondent Warren Hoge stated flatly that Costa Rica was actively aiding the Sandinistas and was just as active in seeking to hide its involvement in the campaign to overthrow Somoza. The President of Nicaragua maintained in a Reporter's Roundup News interview with the Mutual Network on July 1, 1979, that when Mrs. Rosalynn Carter visited Costa Rica in early 1977, Robert Pastor on the National Security Council staff told Costa Rican officials that the U.S. planned to try and overthrow him.

Costa Rica's part in helping to fuel the bloody fighting in Nicaragua began slowly after the Soviet Union scored a major

breakthrough in Central America when it was allowed to establish an Embassy in San Jose in 1972, two years before the first active campaign of terrorism in Nicaragua by the Sandinistas.

Since 1972 the Soviet presence has grown to almost 300 diplomatic personnel, out of proportion to the commercial business the Russians might conduct with Costa Rica, whose main crop is coffee. The Russian diplomatic mission consists of a large embassy residence, a five-story "trade center" with sophisticated electronic antennas on its roof and a cultural center that even Costa Rican officials worry is used to recruit and process radical Costa Rican students sent off to the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries for training.

Luis Pallais, editor and publisher of Managua's daily newspaper Novedades, maintained at a symposium sponsored by the Council on Inter-American Security last May, that the Soviet Embassy in Costa Rica has been ignored by both the U.S. news media and the U.S. State Department,although it is an important component in the Soviet offensive against the soft underbelly of the United States: that is, Central America. The national editor of the respected Costa Rican daily La Nacion, Eduardo Ulibarri, reluctantly agreed with Pallais on the danger of the Soviet diplomatic mission in his country, insisting at the same time that he favored the ouster of Somoza and the replacement of the regime with a democratic non-communist alternative. Ulibarri stated, however, that he was aware of the danger that, should the Sandinistas suceed in installing a Marxist dictatorship in Nicaragua, it would destablize the entire region.

The second vice president of Costa Rica, Jose Miquel Alfaro, said in an interview with Mutual Broadcasting on September 20, 1978, that the Soviet diplomatic mission has meddled in the internal political affairs of his country and that his government and a majority of the Costa Rican people deeply resent both the interference and the presence of the Soviets, inherited from a previous and more left-leaning government. President Somoza, in a Mutual Broadcasting interview on January 22, 1978, insisted that the Soviet Embassy is a command post for the Soviets to co-ordinate the penetration, subversion and takeover of all Central American countries from Panama in the South to Guatemala in the North.

Costa Rica, which does not maintain a substantial defense force, has, since Torrijos seized power in Panama, come under increasing pressure from this pro-Marxist dictatorship to its South. This, combined with the considerable Soviet presence in Costa Rica, may explain why San Jose has looked the other way and allowed its country to be used as a staging area for the growing Sandinista guerrilla campaign.

Barbara Koeppel of the Christian Science Monitor, writing from San Jose (July 3, 1979), reports that everyone but the

government acknowledges that officials look the other way when troops and arms are sent into Nicaragua. She also reveals that the Costa Rican government has spent $3.5 million to treat the Sandinista wounded in Costa Rican hospitals, and to provide food, clothing, and medical care for refugees fleeing the fighting.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the Soviet diplomatic mission in San Jose is the total lack of attention given to it by the U.S. news media, and the fact it was completely ignored during the 1978 Senate debates on the Panama Canal. Costa Rica provided the Soviets the opportunity for easy access to Panama and every other Central American nation within a matter of hours. A Marxist or anti-American Nicaragua would assure both Panama and the Soviets it would not be challenged by a hostile nation north of the Panama Canal while at the same time denying the United States a strategic option for the construction of a second international waterway or a trans-Nicaraguan oil pipeline to handle U.S. crude oil from Alaska. Nicaragua was the nation originally designated by U.S. Army engineers for the construction of a trans-oceanic canal, later built in Panama. During the final negotiations for the transfer of the Panama Canal, the Torrijos regime was especially insistent that the treaties include an a prohibition against any third country building another canal. The Nicaraguans maintain that Torrijos is obsessed with the fear that the U.S. might try to build another canal in another Central American nation like Nicaragua, almost 500 miles closer to U.S. ports.

Dr. Roger Fontaine maintained in his June 5, 1979, Mutual interview that Panamanian cooperation with the Sandinistas to overthrow Somoza in Nicaragua casts doubt on the faith placed in Torrijos by the Carter Administration. One critical issue is whether the Panama Canal would be run efficiently and kept open to world commerce as it was when it was operated by the United States under the 1903 treaty. The Latin American scholar said he foresaw real short-term operational problems and predicted the U.S. faces a very serious crisis with Panamanian operation of the Canal under the treaties signed by President Carter.

A Soviet-Cuban-Panamanian alliance against Nicaragua, therefore, conforms to the little-discussed grand global design of the Soviets to dominate the waterways of the world as a way to deny the United States access to vital trade routes. In fact, in the immediate aftermath of the January 1964 riots in Panama that paved the way for negotiations to give up the waterway, the then military affairs editor of the New York Times, Hanson Baldwin, wrote that Soviet strategic policy has always been keyed to control of both the sea and waterways of the world. Baldwin maintained that the Soviets in 1964 had embarked on a rigorous expansion of their merchant and naval fleets, outstripping the United States in this area over the last 15 years. As far back as the 1919 Paris Peace Conference at the end of World War I, Lenin had instructed his Soviet representatives at the conference

to demand that Western Powers agree to neutralization of the waterways, including the Suez and Panama Canals.

Strategy to Overthrow Nicaragua

The military overthrow of President Salvador Allende produced a series of extensive congressional investigations into the clandestine operations of the Central Intelligence Agency in Chile, alleging abuses of its powers while President Richard M. Nixon was in office. Such investigations, combined with the Watergate Affair, provided the 1976 presidential campaign with a powerful set of issues for then candidate Jimmy Carter. However, the investigations, according to William Colby, former CIA director, severely damaged the ability of the CIA to conduct future operations, as illustrated by the intelligence failure of the CIA in Iran during 1978.

However, no similar congressional investigations have been launched that would determine the strategic consequences of the application of a one-sided human rights policy, which General Sumner and others maintain produced the current bloody fighting in Nicaragua. The extensive evidence might be summarized as follows:

* In its first 12 months, the Carter Administration successfully moved to cut off all U.S. economic and military aid to Nicaragua while advancing a program of better relations with Cuba and urged the Congress to approve turning over to General Torrijos the vital inter-oceanic waterway that the Soviets have always regarded as a strategic prize. Dr. Roger Fontaine asserted in a September 3, 1978 Mutual Broadcasting interview that the Carter Administration's ignoring of human rights violations under the Torrijos and Castro dictatorship is the result of a bias against anti-Marxist regimes in the human rights section of the State Department.

* The allegations of human rights violations by Nicaragua have turned out, on close investigation, to be the result of clashes between the Nicaraguan National Guard and the Sandinista guerillas. The same problem was faced by the United States in Vietnam - the celebrated Mylai massacre in which a young U.S. Army officer was confronted with guerrilla groups using the civilian population as part of their strategy to overthrow an existing government. The Carter Administration, liberal members of Congress and radical Catholic groups alleging human rights violations have consistently placed the blame on the Nicaraguan government, while ignoring the part played by terrorists in the killing of innocent civilians caught between guerrillas and government forces.

* The cutoff of U.S. economic and military aid to Nicaragua weakened that nation's ability to resist the kind of Marxist terrorist activity that the Carter Administration has consistently

claimed it opposes. (A similar step was taken in 1958 against the pro-U.S. Batista regime in Cuba, leading to Castro's seizure of power.) The end of aid, according to General Sumner and other strategic thinkers, encouraged the Sandinistas to launch an offensive of substantial size in August and September of 1978. During this period, when seven Nicaraguan cities suffered severe damage because of fighting, the U.S., according to Congressmen Murphy and Charles Wilson (D-Tex.), went out of its way to undermine the Nicaraguan government by holding up a sizable loan Nicaragua was entitled to from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

* Insisting in public that it was seeking a peaceful solution to the September 1978 crisis, the Carter State Department privately pressured President Somoza to resign, citing his government, not the Sandinistas, as the cause of the violence and bloodshed. As subsequent events in the current crisis have shown, the Carter Administration appears to have adopted a policy early in 1977 of seeking to destablize Nicaragua, thus forcing President Somoza's ouster on much the same grounds that forced out the Shah of Iran. In a Mutual Broadcasting interview on October 1, 1978, President Somoza charged openly that Panama, Costa Rica, Mexico and Venezuela plotted in a meeting with President Carter, who was in Panama to sign the Panama Canal Treaties, to bring down his constitutionally elected government. Therefore, in a unprecedented charge by one head of state against another, President Somoza implied that the President of the United States may have been a part of this strategy. The Somoza charge was to be given substantial credibility when Secretary of State Cyrus Vance openly demanded at a meeting of the Organization of American States in Washington on June 21, 1979, that President Somoza resign and be replaced by a coalition government of national reconciliation that would include the Marxist-dominated Sandinistas.

* The Vance-Carter action was rationalized on the grounds that President Somoza's resignation would forestall the possibility of Castro turning Nicaragua into another Cuba. Somoza's removal was mandatory, according to the Carter Administration, because of his record on human rights. At another OAS meeting in Washington, four days after his return from Panama in June 1978, President Carter gave an impassioned plea for human rights, pledging that his Administration would not be deterred from pursuing violations of human rights. Yet, on the following day, according to the United Press International of June 22, 1978, Secretary of State Vance ordered the U.S. Ambassador at the OAS to back away from support of a OAS resolution calling for investigation of human rights violations in Cuba.

One of the most famous of the thousands of political prisoners held by Castro is his former fighting comrade, non-communist Huber Matos, who has been in solitary confinement for almost 19 years. Senator Daniel Moynihan (D-NY) joined with 40 members of

the U.S. Senate in April 1979, asking the Carter Administration to seek Matos' release. Moynihan, in a speech on the Senate floor on June 18, 1979, said that after two months the Carter Administration has failed to make a public statement demanding that Castro release Matos. This was three days before Secretary Vance demanded in the OAS that President Somoza resign and pave the way for the very kind of coalition government that was subverted by Castro in 1959. Since 1959, many Cuban democrats who joined in overthrowing Batista have fled Cuba for their lives or have had the misfortune to spend almost two decades in one of Castro's prisons.

Nicaraguans: The New Boat People?

In the last twenty years, Cubans have fled by the thousands in small boats, much as Vietnamese are today fleeing in boats only to find no Asian nation will accept their large numbers. However, the Vietnamese are more fortunate than the almost one million Cambodians who were murdered in an unprecedented genocide after the communists took over in that Southeast Asian nation. In Cuba, Vietnam and Cambodia the fate of these countries was clearly forecast when the United States withdrew its support and refused to resist Marxist terrorist guerrilla groups.

Do these three grim and bloody examples suggest that the thousands who support the Somoza regime may become the new wave of refugees of this hemisphere? The conduct of the Sandinistas over the last few years suggests an answer.

The American-born Bishop of Bluefields for the Eastern Nicaraguan province of Zelaya is Reverend Salvadore Schlaefer, head of the American branch of the Capuchin Catholic missionary order in Nicaragua, which has been the source of almost all of the allegations of human rights violations by the Nicaraguan government transmitted to both the press and various human rights commissions. He conceded in a Mututal Broadcasting interview on September 21, 1977, that on two occasions the Sandinistas shot Nicaraguan peasants who had informed the Nicaraguan army of their hideouts. The Nicaraguan government has insisted, moreover, that such killings have been standard practice, adding that the Sandinistas often stole army uniforms and then murdered innocent civilians, blaming the killings on Somoza's army. It was such incidents that Capuchin missionaries in Nicaragua used as testimony to indict the Somoza regime as brutal, sadistic and repressive.

Most of the international news media refused to believe the Nicaraguan government. However, a series of incidents provide support of this assertion. For example, when the Sandinistas seized the National Palace in Managua in August 1978, the guerrillas first gained entrance to the government offices dressed in Nicaraguan National Guard uniforms. During the holding of some 1,500 hostages, the rooms where the hostages were being held were

rigged with explosives ready to explode in the event of any rescue attempt. During the follow-up Sandinista seizure of part of seven Nicaraguan cities in September of 1978, reports began circulating that National Guardsmen had committed atrocities against young Nicaraguans in cities like Leon. The charges were widely circulated in a series of stories written by Washington Post correspondent Karen DeYoung. However, in a Mutual Broadcasting interview on September 20, 1978, retired Nicaraguan National Guard General Roger Bermudez said that his farm outside Managua had been burglarized and the only things that were taken were a truck, hunting rifles and his old uniforms. Similar reports had been circulating during the September 1978 Sandinista siege, told by guard reserve officers and enlisted men.

It was not until American textile manufacturer Lester Lesavoy told his story from a Miami hospital bed that an eye witness account of the Sandinistas' use of Guard uniforms could be documented. According to Lesavoy, in an interview in the Miami Herald of September 14, 1978, he was in Managua on business when, during the fighting in the city, he pulled up behind a another car halted by what he first thought were government Guardsmen. Instead, they turned out to be Sandinistas wearing red and black masks to hide their faces. According to the American businessman, the Sandinistas not only fired indiscriminately into houses and firebombed others, but they fired into the car ahead of him. Seizing him from his auto, the Sandinistas told Lesavoy to run and then riddled his legs with automatic weapons fire. Lesavoy maintains that had not the real Nicaraguan National Guard appeared as the Sandinistas were prepared to shoot him in the back of the head, he would not be alive to tell this story.

At roughly the same time that Lesavoy was severely wounded by the Sandinistas in Managua, Washington Post reporter Karen DeYoung wrote a series of articles of how the Guard had, in Leon, seized 14 young men and murdered them in cold blood. The Nicaraguan Catholic Church denounced the alleged atrocities while the U.S. State Department issued a statement on September 21, 1978, quoted by the United Press International, calling for President Somoza to discipline his forces. DeYoung quotes the families of the young victims as insisting they were killed by Nicaraguan Guardsmen. Residents of Leon, however, interviewed by Mutual Broadcasting on September 23, 1978, offered a significant piece of information, which while it does not prove that Sandinistas dressed in Guard uniforms murdered the young residents of Leon, does cast doubt on the accuracy of DeYoung's widely-circulated atrocity stories. Leon residents said that what enraged them more than anything else was how hardcore Marxist guerillas who initially seized Leon pulled out and left the Sandinistas' young supporters at the peak of the conflict to face a heavily armed Guard. Mutual Broadcasting interviews in San Jose, Costa Rica, five days earlier revealed that the real strategy of the Sandinistas in September of 1978 was not to overthrow Somoza; this they knew was impossible at the time. The major goal of the September

1978 offensive was to cause destruction and discredit the Nicaraguan National Guard with the people. Significantly, the stories that Somoza forces were committing atrocities had first surfaced in the Costa Rican Communist Party press prior to the publication of DeYoung's account.

What went totally unreported by the U.S. news media was what the Sandinistas did to the northern Nicaraguan farming community of Esteli ten days prior to the alleged atrocity stories reported by DeYoung. The news media reported only that Esteli suffered severe damage after 11 days of fighting, implying that the Guard had to destroy the town to take it back. However, in a Mutual Broadcasting interview on September 24, 1978, the Chief of Staff of the Nicaraguan National Guard, General Armando Fernandez (who took part in the 11 days of savage fighting for the town of 30,000), insisted that the Sandinistas attacked Esteli in full strength on September 10, 1979 at 4:30 Sunday morning in three groups, the first attacked the local garrison, a second firebombed the central marketplace and downtown business sector and a third, with a pre-selected list of names, machine-gunned their victims in their beds. General Fernadez, a seasoned military officer, said that the brutality of the killing shocked even him.

Neither Karen DeYoung of the Washington Post, the Nicaraguan Catholic Church nor the U.S. State Department expressed any concern about what the Sandinistas did to Esteli. However, President Somoza, in a Mutual Broadcasting interview on October 1, 1978, insisted that the strategy of the Sandanistas was to make an example of Esteli as a warning to the rest of the country what would happen if they resisted "liberation." Yet, when an Organization of American States team visited Nicaragua in mid-October, its report placed all the blame for the destruction, bloodshed and death on the Nicaraguan government. On October 15, 1978, the Archbishop of Managua, a long time political foe of Somoza, pleaded for the OAS team to stay in the country to prevent a Somoza bloodbath. Five days after that statement, the Mexican Daily newspaper Excelsior published a communique from the Sandinistas admitting what they had done in Esteli, including the terror murders that General Fernandez had earlier alleged.

When ABC-TV newsman Bill Stewart was murdered by a National Guardsman in Managua during the savage street fighting in June, 1979, the news media, the Carter Administration and the State Department were properly outraged at this brutal act. Stewart's death was used as an illustration of the brutality of Somoza's soldiers. However, Novedades editor Luis Pallais pointed out in an interview on May 31, 1979, 10 days prior to Stewart's landing in Nicaragua, that two of his reporters had been murdered by the Sandinistas. The U.S. news media, the Carter Administration and the Nicaraguan Catholic Church expressed no moral outrage.

Similarly, when the Reuters News Service reported on June 25, 1979, that the Sandinistas had executed six men by firing

squad because they were supporters of the government, no outcry arose. This was roughly during the time when the Costa Rican and Panamanian governments recognized the Sandinistas' provisional government and after the U.S. openly called for President Somoza to resign. Four days after this unprecedented move, the United Press International reported that Sandinistas had admitted executing 130 of Somoza's supporters in Matagalpa, a city north of the capital. The New York Times and Washington Post, responsible for a steady stream of critical articles of the Somoza government over a two-year period, did not choose to share the information with their readers. Nor did either newspaper bother to publish a June 28, 1979 pair of Associated Press and United Press International stories confirming the existence of a secret CIA Intelligence report that Cuban arms were flown to Liberia, Costa Rica on Panamanian air force planes for use by the Sandinistas.

However, the Washington Post of July 1, 1979, did report that, under State Department pressure, Israel had suspended arms shipments to Nicaragua. The Israelis had been supplying military hardware to the Somoza government because of the help and support Nicaragua gave Israel during the Jewish state's struggles in the 1940s. This aid included letters of credit, use of Nicaragua's diplomatic network to purchase arms, and support for Israel in the United Nations since 1948.

Consequences of a Marxist Nicaragua

The Carter Administration has rejected President Somoza's calls for honoring the mutual defense treaty with the United States and also rejected his offer to resign if the Carter Administration will provide economic reconstruction aid and offer solid guarantees that it will not permit the Cuban-trained and supplied Sandinistas to establish a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship. This inflexible unwillingness, combined with an encouragement of policies that have helped produce the current bloodshed and instability in Central America, is in rude contrast to the Carter Administration's persistent desire for settling disputes by peaceful means, its longstanding policy of dialogue with the Soviets and anti-American Third World nations, and its stated opposition to terrorism as an instrument for effecting change throughout the globe. Therefore, maintaining such an inflexible posture in Nicaragua may have as far reaching consequences for this hemisphere as Administration miscalculations have already had in the Persian Gulf, the Middle East and Africa. Such consequences may be summarized as follows.

U.S. aid in forcing out President Somoza most certainly means that no non-Marxist nation will, particularly after the American failure in Iran, ever again trust the United States or the agreements and treaties it signs with non-Marxist states. Nor is it likely that any nation in this hemisphere or elsewhere will ever maintain opposition to Marxism on the scale of the

Nicaraguans. In all probabilty, nations within and without the hemisphere will choose to accommodate to what they perceive as the inevitable rise of the Soviets as a world power and the decline of the U.S. if the U.S. is unwilling to directly meet a challenge to its strategic interests on its own doorstep.

Success in ousting Somoza by a combination of U.S. pressure and Marxist military support, transparently hidden behind a smokescreen of human rights violations by radical religious and a secular political organization allied with Marxist terrorists, and accepted uncritically by an international news media, provides a formula for use against other anti-Marxist nations.

The ouster of President Somoza without U.S. guarantees that it will not permit a Marxist takeover in Nicaragua means that the 13,000-man National Guard will be leaderless and unable to resist the military campaign waged by the Marxists with Panamanian, Cuban, and, in a sub rosa fashion, Soviet help. The Sandinistas have already said publicly and have demonstrated by their actions over the last few years that the establishment of a People's Army will also mean the execution of many of President Somoza's supporters. In a Reporter's Roundup interview on Mutual Broadcasting of July 1, 1979, President Somoza insisted that if the Sandinistas took over he expects 50,000 Nicaraguans to be murdered in a bloodbath that would make Iran look like a Sunday picnic.

The U.S. will face a strategic peril to its soft Central American underbelly with a pro-Marxist government in Panama, threatening the transit of trade and oil. The current military dictatorship has already demonstrated it will not keep its word and, if the U.S. Congress should agree to finalize transfer of the Canal, there are no assurances that the Panamanians will not seek to engage in blackmail, threatening to close the waterway if the U.S. seeks to act to protect its vital interests in the hemisphere at a future date.

A Marxist Nicaragua to the north of democratic and free Costa Rica and a pro-Marxist Panama to the south, offers little hope that the tiny Central American nation would maintain its long-standing independence, particularly in view of the Soviet presence. The subversion and takeover in other Central American nations would mean a Marxist Central America from Panama in the south to Guatemala in the north. Mexico, therefore, would come under Marxist pressure to deny its vast oil reserves to the U.S. in much the same way pressure is being applied by the Soviets on Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich states in the Persian Gulf.

CONCLUSION

Nicaragua and U.S. policy toward that former friend and ally might be viewed as the Czechoslovakia of our time. It is now

forgotten that British Prime Minister Chamberlain sought to appease Hitler not because Chamberlain was evil and cowardly, but because Britain had allowed its strategic position, politically, economically and militarily, to decline during the great global depression of the 1930s. In short, the British under Chamberlain refused to tell their own people the truth that it did not have the moral will and physical resources to keep its commitments.

A similar situation now confronts the United States and helps explain why the last three Administrations have adopted what can only be termed a New Appeasement policy toward Soviet global challenges. This is starkly revealed not just in terms of nuclear strategic forces, but in terms of the decline of U.S. naval and conventional power while the Soviets have substantially increased nuclear, naval and conventional forces to U.S. disadvantage. Rather than candidly tell the American people the truth, that the U.S. no longer has the military capability to match the Soviets, a confession that would contradict past assurances and doubtless cause a widespread public storm of anger and indignation, Washington political leaders have pursued a policy of detente with the Russians over the last decade that is in reality the acceptance of Soviet-inflicted defeat without the benefit of a war.

Winston Churchill, after Chamberlain's return from Munich in 1939, rose in the House of Commons and stated the real consequences of what the British Prime Minister had done. His assessment fits our current position:

> We have suffered a great defeat without a war, the consequences of which will travel far with us....And do not suppose that this is the end. This is only the beginning of the reckoning.

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