

January 20, 1987

NICARAGUA: A BLUEPRINT FOR DEMOCRACY

INTRODUCTION

The democratic aspirations of Nicaraguans have been suppressed by dictatorships of both left and right for most of their nation's history. Yet the chances for democracy's emergence in Nicaragua seem better now than ever before. Just this week, the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO) and the Southern Opposition Bloc (BOS) issued a manifesto, which is a democratic alternative to the Sandinista political program. When the Marxist Sandinista regime is finally overthrown by these nationalist democratic forces, Nicaraguans will need the support and cooperation of the Western democracies in developing a truly pluralist system of government and rebuilding their nation's economy. With the tide in Latin America now running strongly in favor of democracy, Nicaragua could follow the example of Argentina, Ecuador, Uruguay, and other nations that have experienced a transition from military dictatorship to democratic rule.

To do so, however, Nicaragua will need a blueprint for building democracy, once the current Marxist-Leninist Sandinista regime collapses. Such a plan for pluralism should include:

- o Drafting a timetable for truly free and fair national elections, beginning with the election of a constituent assembly and ending with concurrent elections for a president, a legislative assembly, and mayoralties/municipal councils;
- o Assuring Nicaragua's Indian, Creole, and other minorities that they will be free to follow their unique cultural and religious practices in perpetuity;

o Revitalizing the Nicaraguan economy through sweeping structural economic reforms: legal guarantee of private property rights; streamlining the government bureaucracy; and privatization of state-owned holdings.

The allies of a free Nicaragua among the Western democracies, including the U.S., figure prominently in a blueprint for a democratic Nicaragua. These nations must be willing to assist political and economic regeneration through financial, educational, security, and technical assistance. Nicaragua's democratic Latin American neighbors, meanwhile, can serve as models for a peaceful transition to pluralism.

A blueprint for Nicaraguan democracy is realistic, but only if the U.S. continues to give the democratic liberation movement, popularly known as the "contras," the economic and military aid it requires. The Sandinista dictatorship is propped up by Soviet arms; democracy can triumph against such an enemy only if the Nicaraguan people are given the material means to free themselves.

NICARAGUA'S HISTORICAL ASPIRATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY

One of the five former Spanish colonial provinces¹ that jointly declared independence on July 1, 1823, as the United Provinces of Central America, Nicaragua was ready to embark on a revolutionary experiment in democracy. From 1823 to 1825, Nicaraguans and other Central Americans met in a constituent assembly to draft a constitution for a new nation to be called the Central American Federation. The Constitution of 1824 established a federal government modeled on the United States. But because the federal government was too weak to sustain itself, the Central American Federation eventually dissolved into separate nations ruled by a succession of military and civilian strong men. In Nicaragua, the last of the noncommunist dictators was Anastasio Somoza Debayle, whose family ruled from 1936 until 1979.

During the final years of the Somoza regime, a democratic alternative to despotism of the right or the left emerged in Nicaragua. It was the Democratic Union of Liberation (UDEL), led by Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal, who, until his assassination on January 1, 1978, was editor of La Prensa, a paper known internationally as a champion for Nicaraguan freedom. UDEL was a broad pluralist movement of conservatives, liberal democrats, Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and even Nicaragua's tiny "official" communist party, the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN). Many

1. The others were Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica.

U.S. experts viewed Chamorro as the most likely popular choice to lead Nicaragua in the post-Somoza era. As such, the U.S. began developing close relations with him and his followers, particularly when the Ford Administration named James Theberge (a leading Latin American scholar, later Ambassador to Chile) as Ambassador to Nicaragua in 1975.²

The Roman Catholic Church also was actively promoting democracy. In late 1977, Archbishop (now Cardinal) Miguel Obando y Bravo formed the Committee of National Dialogue for the purpose of persuading Somoza to guarantee free elections before the expiration of his presidential term in 1981. The Committee included Pedro Joaquin Chamorro and Alfonso Robelo Callejas, president of the Superior Council of Private Initiative (COSIP), the umbrella organization for Nicaragua's businessmen.

The Role of the Private Business Sector

COSIP also played a prominent role in the struggle for democracy in Nicaragua. After Chamorro's murder, Alfonso Robelo and other business and labor leaders organized a massive strike to force Somoza's resignation by what they termed "a joint strategy in our final encounter against the tottering dictatorship."³ While initially successful, the strike petered out as Somoza held onto power, and COSIP leaders hoped that the U.S. would intervene to arbitrate the political turmoil before full-scale civil war erupted. But the Carter Administration decided against both political reorganization of the government and military intervention.⁴ This prompted many democratic opponents of Somoza to seek an alliance with the Sandinista (FSLN) forces then engaged in sporadic and largely ineffectual guerrilla warfare. In July 1978, Nicaraguan moderates united with FSLN and other radical opposition elements to form a coalition called the Broad Opposition Front (FAO).

The Sandinistas

There were two revolutions in Nicaragua in 1979. The first was broadly based, aiming at establishing a Western-style democracy; the second was narrowly based, seeking a Marxist-Leninist state. This followed Vladimir I. Lenin's now classic "two-stage" revolutionary strategy: a nationalist-bourgeois coup d'etat followed by communist usurpation of power.

2. Shirley Christian, Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family (New York: Random House, 1985), p. 44.

3. La Prensa, January 19, 1978, p. 1.

4. Ibid., p. 49.

After the Sandinistas took power in Managua on July 19, 1979, a Junta was formed ostensibly to rule the country until free elections could be held. The Sandinistas solemnly promised the Organization of American States (OAS) that these elections would be held. Communist FSLN leaders invited such Nicaraguan democrats as Alfonso Robelo and Violetta Chamorro (widow of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro) to join the Junta. As the Sandinistas themselves stated in a secret document outlining their Marxist-Leninist strategy, a "facade of pluralism" was created and an "alliance of convenience" made with moderates due to "the expectation of financial help from the Western bloc" to help rebuild Nicaragua's shattered economy and "to thwart Yankee imperialism."⁵

The Sandinistas' facade of pluralism began to crumble within months, leading to what is now recognized as a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship. In April 1980, Robelo and Chamorro resigned from the Junta, denouncing the FSLN's "totalitarian scheme."⁶ The following month, Jose Francisco Cardenal, Vice-President of the Council of State, resigned from his post and asked for political asylum in the U.S., denouncing what he called the "Marxist traitors" in the government.⁷ On May 11, Robelo in a speech warned that the Nicaraguan Revolution was in danger of falling to "Soviet imperialism." Pointing to the growing Soviet presence in his country, Robelo asserted his opposition "to the grasp of the Russian KGB that threatens Nicaragua."⁸

Today, Alfonso Robelo, Arturo Cruz, Adolfo Calero, and more than 20,000 other Nicaraguans are waging "a second revolutionary war" against the communist Sandinistas to install pluralism and economic freedom in their nation.⁹ When the final national uprising against the oppressive FSLN takes place and the Sandinistas leave Managua, the

5. U.S. Department of State Airgram, December 26, 1979, from American Embassy Managua; subject: "The 72-hour Document: An FSLN Blueprint"; Reference # Managua 6189, pp. 1-4.

6. "Unmasking of the Bourgeoisie," NACLA Report, May/June 1980, p. 9.

7. Ibid., p. 16.

8. Speech by Alfonso Robelo, Matiguas, Nicaragua, May 11, 1980.

9. Three Nicaraguans on the Betrayal of Their Revolution, Heritage Lecture No. 41, Washington, D.C., October 11, 1984.

victorious national resistance forces should have a blueprint prepared for the construction of a modern Nicaraguan democracy.¹⁰

Specifically, this blueprint should consist of the following:

THE POLITICAL AGENDA

o Transitional Government: By the time the Sandinista regime collapses, a provisional democratic government will be established in the eastern half of Nicaragua, probably in the port city of Bluefields or Puerto Cabezas. In coordination with the leaders of the Sandinista military, this government should be transferred to Managua and then dissolved. It should be replaced by a council of prominent Nicaraguans recognized as opponents of both the Somoza and the Sandinista dictatorships. The council should be composed of members of the contras' main political organization, the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO), the Roman Catholic Church, the private sector organization COSEP (Superior Council of Private Enterprise); such traditional political parties as the Social Christian Party (PSCN), the Social Democratic Party (PSD), and the Independent Liberal Party (PLI); independent trade unions; and representatives of the Atlantic Coast Indian and Creole communities. The nationalist elements of the Sandinista regime who are not Marxist-Leninists also should be represented on the council, as should the commander of the military. The council should be given extraordinary powers as an interim governing body and, to reflect its character, could be called the provisional Government of National Unity (GNU).

o Elections Timetable: The GNU should, within one year of taking power, hold internationally supervised elections for a constituent assembly. As the elected representative of the Nicaraguan people, the constituent assembly should name a provisional government headed by an interim president. The assembly also should draw up a new constitution based on the democratic and pluralist values articulated in the original constitution of the 1823 Central American Federation--all of which are reflected in the charter of the

10. The Sandinista government probably will collapse as a result of combined action by military forces under the command of the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO), a popular uprising, and a power struggle between factions of the FSLN. One scenario envisions a coup d'etat by hardline Marxist-Leninist forces lead by Interior Minister Thomas Borge against a faction seeking a possible accommodation with democratic liberation forces. Such a coup would probably generate a countercoup by combat units of the Sandinista Army (EPS) that are more nationalist than communist. A likely leader of such a countercoup is Borge's rival, Major General Joaquin Cuadra Lacayo, chief of the EPS General Staff. San Jose, Rumbo, September 19-25, 1986, p. 24; FBIS Latin America, September 25, 1986, p. P6.

democratic resistance, which document recognizes equality for all before the law, calls for an autonomous electoral system to guarantee pluralism, and views private property as "a natural and social right."¹¹

Within two years after the constituent assembly has taken its seats, elections should be held concurrently for a new Nicaraguan president, for a legislative assembly, and for mayoralties/municipal councils. The election should be supervised directly by the Organization of American States and observers from democratic nations. To ensure pluralism, participation in the election must be open to all contenders, including the deposed FSLN. Marxism-Leninism will be thoroughly and finally repudiated when the disillusioned people of Nicaragua are allowed to choose between communism and pluralism. The remnants of Grenada's communist New Jewel Movement received only 5 per cent of the vote in the island's December 1984 elections.¹² The Communist Party of Venezuela won 2 percent of the vote in the 1982 elections.

STRENGTHENING THE MEDIATING INSTITUTIONS

Because of years of first Somoza and then Sandinista repression, propaganda, and Marxist-Leninist indoctrination, much work will be needed to create a lasting democracy in Nicaragua. The U.S. and other international actors might assist with the following:

o Assistance from U.S. Organizations: U.S.-based private voluntary organizations, such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), should devote their resources to democratic political groups and trade unions. Nicaraguans could be brought to the U.S. on special programs to expose them to the American political system and to labor unions. Media training and equipment could be provided to political and union organizations in Nicaragua, allowing them to carry out campaigns and free elections.

o Help from International Organizations: Global bodies such as the Socialist International (which already has granted observer status to the democratic resistance group Opposition Bloc of the South, or BOS), the International Democratic Union (IDU), and International Christian Democrats also should continue their work of supporting

11. Hamburg DPA, November 25, 1986; FBIS, Latin America, December 2, 1986, p. P3.

12. Timothy Ashby, The Grenada Elections of 1984, Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 27, 1984.

allied Nicaraguan political parties via financial and technical assistance.

o Aid from Regional Groups: Regional organizations like the European Democratic Union (EDU) and the OAS also should demonstrate their interest in resuscitating pluralist structures in Nicaragua through educational exchanges and other forms of aid.

All of the above organizations should provide observers for free Nicaragua's elections to assure all participants, including the defeated Sandinistas, that they will be treated according to the rule of law.

ECONOMIC REBIRTH

Nicaragua's economy has been in a steady decline since the Sandinistas took power. The Marxist-Leninist drive for total state control of the economy has disrupted traditional commercial channels and weakened Nicaragua's class of entrepreneurs. The incentive to produce has been strangled by collectivist and confiscatory policies; as a result, Nicaragua has become an importer of foodstuffs after being a net exporter for years. The Nicaraguan economy should be revitalized by:

o Structural Reforms: The new Nicaraguan government will have to make basic reforms in macroeconomic policy to revitalize the nation's economy. Private property rights must be restored to give investors confidence that their businesses and assets will not be confiscated by the state, as has been done by the Sandinistas to thousands of entrepreneurs. The government bureaucracy, a swollen haven for inept government cronies for more than a century, should be streamlined. The confiscatory Sandinista tax system should be replaced by a new, simplified code providing incentives for economic growth. All nonessential state-owned assets, including the vast holdings expropriated from the Somoza family, gradually must be divested through public stock offerings. No restrictions should be placed on foreign ownership of land or existing enterprises, as the shortage of domestic capital would render a privatization scheme limited to Nicaraguan nationals impracticable. Nicaragua will need large infusions of private foreign capital to revive its economy.

o U.S. Development Assistance: A free Nicaragua would be eligible to become a beneficiary of the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) and could become a major player in this important regional development program. The U.S. Government, through its Agency for International Development (AID) and Departments of State, Commerce, and the Treasury, would oversee development assistance and encourage Americans to invest in Nicaragua. The U.S. Overseas Private Investment

Corporation (OPIC) could provide political risk insurance for investors.

o Unleashing the Private Sector: Nicaragua could become a testing ground for a genuine economic revolution based on a free market economic strategy that could become a model for other Latin American and Caribbean nations. The new government should give the businessmen's group COSEP a major role in crafting new economic policy. COSEP also should help create a jobs training program. The U.S. and other democracies could help free Nicaragua by orienting aid toward short-term technical studies related to specific development and job market needs. Distribution of an audio-visual program to demonstrate the economic and social benefits of free market development policies in other areas of the developing world could teach Nicaraguans the alternatives to the Sandinistas' centrally planned economy. Popular support for a supply-side development strategy should come easily given the Nicaraguan peoples' disillusionment with Marxism.

SOCIOCULTURAL DIMENSIONS

Nicaragua's torn social and cultural fabric must be carefully mended following policies that respect the nation's unique institutions. These could include:

o Autonomy for the Miskito Coast: The Miskito, Creole, and other peoples of the Caribbean coastal region must be allowed a large degree of autonomy in free Nicaragua. Association with the central government in Managua must be voluntary, and the unique culture of these ethnic groups must be respected. The GNU must make no attempt to "Hispanize" the Miskito Coast people or interfere with their largely Protestant religious practices.

o Education: The Roman Catholic Church has been a champion of freedom in Nicaragua for years and will play a key role in restoring social and cultural stability. Church leaders such as Cardinal Obando y Bravo, Bishop Pablo Vega, and Father Amado Pena are Nicaraguan patriots; they should exercise major influence in a new Ministry of Culture and new Ministry of Education. These government ministries should not be dissolved; the years of Marxist cultural and educational indoctrination can be neutralized only by programs to teach Nicaraguans the truth about Western culture and values.

The Sandinistas and their Soviet bloc allies devoted considerable resources to training and indoctrinating Nicaraguans. Nicaragua's educational system under the Sandinistas was designed to equate Western-style democracy and capitalist economic systems with evil U.S. "imperialism" while portraying Soviet-style Marxism-Leninism as the benefactor of mankind. The Sandinista Ministry of Education, for

example, made it mandatory for all high school students to study Marx's theory of dialectical materialism, which is officially regarded as the "basis of all scientific endeavor." The Sandinistas stated that one of the main objectives of their "new education" was "to form new generations in the values and principles of the Sandinista people's revolution."¹³ At least 8,000 Nicaraguan students have been educated in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe since 1980, and more than twice that number received similar training in Cuba.

o Restoring Nicaraguan Cultural Institutions: The Sandinistas gave traditional Nicaraguan culture--a rich blend of folklore, art, dance, music, architecture, and literature--their own "revolutionary" interpretation by changing it to reflect the imperialist cultural influence of Moscow and Havana.

Nicaragua's new democratic leaders will have to counter communist educational efforts with an extensive program telling the truth about representative democracy and a free market economic system. The U.S. and other democratic nations should provide special funds to persuade exiled, pro-democratic Nicaraguan teachers to return to their native land. The Organization of American States (OAS) should recruit Spanish-speaking educators willing to work in Nicaragua until Nicaraguans can be trained to replace the Cubans, East Germans, and other Marxist-Leninist "internationalists" who now staff many of the country's schools. Scholarships should be granted to poorer Nicaraguan students for study in the U.S. and other Western nations, as the poor have been particularly susceptible to Soviet bloc educational offers and indoctrination.

MILITARY-SECURITY DIMENSIONS

o A New National Defense Force: Because the Sandinista military, the EPS, is the armed wing of the FSLN party rather than a national defense force, it must be disbanded to be rid of Marxist political elements. A new apolitical military force, no more than 10,000 strong--adequate for Nicaragua's defense needs--must be staffed with a leadership cadre dedicated to liberty and political pluralism. Because they are not professional armies but largely a collection of patriotic men and women who would prefer to return to civilian life in a free Nicaragua, the FDN and other democratic liberation forces also should be gradually disbanded, with members given the option of applying for membership in the new national defense force.

13. Humberto Belli, Breaking Faith (Garden City, Michigan: The Puebla Institute, 1985), p. 204.

Constructing the new armed forces will take time, thereby creating the potential for a security vacuum that could be exploited by remnants of the communist regime or other anti-democratic forces. To prevent this, an OAS peacekeeping force should defend Nicaragua until nationalist, noncommunist officers and men can be identified and retrained. The OAS peacekeeping force should be strong enough to repel any attempt by Cuba to destabilize the new government, and should maintain counterinsurgency forces capable of combatting diehard communist guerrillas.

o Restructure the Police: Because the civilian police forces of Nicaragua have been so heavily politicized, these also must be disbanded totally. A national police force could be reconstituted by members of such forces from Costa Rica, Ecuador, and other Latin American countries with an exemplary human rights record. Members of the Interior Ministry's Sandinista General Directorate of State Security (DGSE) and other members of the former Sandinista government who have been accused of human rights violations must be tried for their crimes. Other members of the FSLN regime should be reintegrated into a pluralist society.

CONCLUSION: HOW THE U.S. CAN HELP NICARAGUA BUILD ITS NEW DEMOCRACY

The U.S. must play a major part in bringing democracy to Nicaragua. This process can be accelerated by:

o Continuing U.S. Support for the Democratic Resistance. The U.S. must maintain unambiguous commitment to military, economic, and political support for the Nicaraguan democratic liberation forces, including: derecognition of Sandinistas; and recognition of the provisional government.

o Greater attention by the U.S. to gaining diplomatic support from other Western democracies. This is important not only for the Nicaraguan freedom fighters but for the still dynamic internal democratic opposition. Keeping alive the embers of democracy in Nicaragua will make the eventual transition to pluralism easier.

o Diplomatic Support for U.S. Policy. The U.S. should encourage the OAS to reconvene the 17th Consultative Meeting of Foreign Ministers to consider the failure of the Sandinistas to live up to their promise, made to the OAS in June 1979, to ensure political pluralism in Nicaragua. Because of its early recognition of the revolutionary government in Nicaragua, the OAS bears some responsibility for bringing the Sandinistas to power. In this regard, it should be remembered that the OAS also adopted a June 1979

resolution reserving for itself the right to reopen the question of Nicaragua's future.¹⁴

o Additional U.S. Resources to Public Diplomacy Efforts. The Reagan Administration should do more to tell the American people, as well as the people of other Western democracies, about the Nicaraguan democratic resistance's goals of pluralism and respect for human rights.

o Assistance from U.S. Organizations. Private voluntary organizations should devote their efforts and resources to Nicaraguan political groups and trade unions.

o U.S. Development Assistance. Nicaragua should be included as a beneficiary of the Caribbean Basin Initiative. The Agency for International Development and other government agencies should encourage Americans to invest in Nicaragua.

o Scholarships. U.S. government and private scholarships for study in American universities should be granted to Nicaraguan students.

Timothy Ashby, Ph.D.
Policy Analyst

14. Christian, op. cit., pp. 284-285.

