

A Chronology of U.S. Efforts to Overthrow the Nicaraguan Government

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When Reagan finally decided to invade Grenada, many of us had already forgotten that CIA plots to overthrow the Grenadian government had been revealed months earlier in major U.S. news media. Should the U.S. government, or its military clients operating out of Honduras, invade Nicaragua, we have little excuse for surprise or shock. Since the Sandinistas came to power in July 1979, actions have been taken by the U.S. almost every month to destabilize, terrorize, intimidate, isolate, and overthrow the government of this sovereign nation. Following is a partial chronology of these efforts—a stark reminder to all of us that Ronald Reagan is not one to hesitate in embarking on dangerous, militarist adventures.

1979-80

The \$8.9 million credit allocated to Somoza by the Import-Export Bank is reduced to \$40,000. The Bank suspends guarantees for financing Nicaraguan imports, especially affecting the purchase of spare parts.

February 1981

The U.S. State Department releases a "white paper" depicting Nicaragua as the epicenter for arms traffic to Salvadoran insurgents.

The payment of \$15 million as part of a \$75 million credit is suspended by the U.S.

March 1981

Parade magazine discloses that ex-Somoza Guardsmen are being trained in the U.S. for paramilitary attacks on Nicaragua.

\$10 million credit for wheat purchases within the PL 480 program is suspended.

April 1981

Indefinite suspension of all future bilateral assistance is announced due to supposed arms traffic to El Salvador; \$11.4 million credit for rural development and educational and health care programs is suspended.

June 1981

In apparent response to widespread rejection of U.S. charges against Nicaragua contained in February "white paper," Secretary of State Haig raises new charge that Nicaragua has received Soviet tanks. Press criticism of "white paper" allegations stops.

August 1981

Honduras grants permission to the U.S. to build a military base in the Gulf of Fonseca, a body of water shared by Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador.

September 1981

Joint U.S.-Honduran military maneuvers are held.

October 1981

U.S. naval maneuvers off coast of Nicaragua.

November 1981

Reagan administration intensifies charges and threats against Nicaragua. Secretary of State Haig tells members of Congress that Nicaragua is becoming a powerful totalitarian state which threatens U.S. interests; refuses to rule out military action against Nicaragua.

Regular Honduran troops attack the Nicaraguan border post at Guasaule on two separate occasions, using machine guns and mortars.

December 1981

President Reagan authorizes a \$19 million CIA-directed plan for paramilitary and terrorist operations against Nicaragua. In apparent initial implementation of this plan, terrorist attacks, code-named "Red Christmas," are launched in Nicaragua's remote northeast border area. Other immediate targets of attack are Nicaragua's only oil refinery and cement plant.

U.S. representative to the World Bank vetoes a \$500,000 project proposal for the development of agricultural cooperatives.

Bomb explodes on AeroNica plane.

1982

U.S. threatens to cut meat imports from Nicaragua if it buys Cuban purebred studs.

January 1982

After meetings with U.S. Under Secretary of State James Buckley in San José, Costa Rica, the foreign ministers of Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Honduras announce the "surprise" formation of the "Central American Democratic Community." Nicaragua and Panama, among others, are excluded from the meeting.

CIA plot to blow up a Nicaraguan refinery and a cement factory and to assassinate Comandante Leticia Herrera is revealed.

February 1982

U.S. pressure on WorldBank leads it to take unilateral actions against

Nicaragua, suspending the credit program and requesting an economic stabilization program.

Increased intelligence activity by planes and ships against Nicaragua; Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger secretly negotiates with Honduras and Colombia to establish U.S. bases.

Steadman Fagoth, leader of Miskito Indians, goes to Washington, D.C., for the State Department; blames Sandinistas for massacre of Indians using photos that in fact date from 1978 while Somoza was still in power and were taken by the Red Cross.

Terrorist bombing at Managua Airport.

March 1982

The U.S. government launches a major public relations effort to demonstrate the threat posed by Nicaragua. The effort fails to demonstrate that Nicaraguan military dispositions are anything more than defensive.

U.S. announces presence of 72 U.S. military personnel in Honduras and Honduran General Gustavo Alvarez authorizes the transit of U.S. troops through Honduran territory.

March-June 1982

106 *contra* attacks in Nicaragua, including sabotage of bridges, warehouses, and crops; sniper fire against Sandinista soldiers.

May 1982

U.S. press reports reveal that CIA-backed counterrevolutionaries in Honduras are being directed by U.S. Ambassador to Honduras John Negroponte.

July 1982

Paramilitary attacks on Nicaragua increase dramatically.

Joint U.S.-Honduran military maneuvers are held near Nicaragua's remote northeast border. U.S. planes move equipment and a battalion of Honduran troops to a new permanent base in the border area.

September 1982

Lt. Col. John Buchanan, USMC (Ret.), briefs a House subcommittee on the critical border tension between Honduras and Nicaragua. In a detailed analysis of Nicaragua's military capability, Buchanan describes Nicaragua's "military buildup" as defensive in nature. He also warns of a possible Honduran invasion of Nicaragua in December. Buchanan states that his assessment of Nicaraguan military leads him to conclude that the capabilities of the Sandinistas have been deliberately exaggerated by the Reagan administration. "One can only conclude that the Reagan administration is distorting the facts in order to justify covert operations aimed at overthrowing the Sandinistas and an unprecedented military buildup in Honduras," says Buchanan.

October 1982

Standard Fruit Company reneges on its commitment to market Nicaragua's banana exports.

November 1982

Newsweek magazine reveals extensive details of the U.S. paramilitary war on Nicaragua. U.S. officials confirm that the operation is intended to "keep Managua off balance and apply pressure."

December 1982

U.S. President Reagan designs his Latin American trip to include visits with the leaders of all three countries neighboring Nicaragua. Nicaraguan leader Sergio Ramírez points out that U.S. diplomats continue to refuse to see high-level Sandinista officials. The U.S. has still not responded to Nicaragua's last diplomatic note of August 1982 urging peace talks. The U.S. also continues to oppose peace talks between Nicaragua and Honduras.

Boland amendment passes House 411-0. This forbids the use of "military equipment, military training or advice, or other support for military activities . . . for the purpose of overthrowing the Government of Nicaragua or provoking a military exchange between Nicaragua and Honduras."

January 1983

Terrorist attacks against Nicaraguan civilian population increase; on January 16, 60 ex-Guardsmen armed with rifles, mortars, and grenade launchers attack 200 coffee pickers at Namasli, 24 kilometers from Honduras.

Two days before initiation of Big Pine maneuvers, 120 ex-Guardsmen launch amphibious attack on Bismuna, only 6 miles from Honduran border, and near the site of planned U.S.-Honduras parachute drop.

February 1983

1,600 U.S. troops and 4,000 Honduran troops participate in Big Pine maneuvers. C-130 transports move \$5.2 million worth of equipment to Mocoron, 25 miles from Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast border. U.S. press reports subsequently reveal that these arms were transferred by Honduran Army to ex-Guardsmen.

Ex-Guardsmen ambush and kill 17 members of Sandinista Youth Militia contingent, who are protecting coffee pickers near Matagalpa; 50,000 Nicaraguans attend memorial service in Managua two days later.

March 1983

Major invasion of Nicaragua begins by 1,200 ex-Guardsmen who have infiltrated from Honduras in "Task Forces" of 200-300 men. Initial press reports quote exaggerated claims from counterrevolutionary Radio September 15. Heavy casualties suffered by invaders as Sandinista Army disperses their forces. A French physician studying mountain leprosy (cutaneous leishmaniasis) is killed when scattered Guardsmen attack Rancho Grande. Minister of Defense Humberto Ortega says that ex-Guardsmen are not a serious threat, but that the real danger is the attempt to provoke war with Honduras. Nicaragua reports several episodes of artillery fire by Honduran Army against border posts.

Nicaragua denounces invasion as U.S.-supported in U.N. Security Council.

U.S. Representative Jeane Kirkpatrick says that fighting is an internal Nicaraguan problem; 55 nations support Nicaragua's position; only El Salvador and Honduras side with the U.S.

April 1983

An April 6 *New York Times* article discusses leaked National Security Planning Group document from April 1982 detailing Central America policy projections. Provisions include: efforts to counteract Social Democratic and Mexican opposition to U.S. policy; progaganda and economic pressures against Cuba; continuation of covert activities against Nicaragua; attempts to stir "factional strife" among Salvadoran Left; and avoidance of congressionally mandated negotiations.

In the wake of the March invasion, U.S. major media expose in detail U.S. role in covert war. April 4 *Time* magazine places top direction of operation with CIA and U.S. Army in Panama, who relay instructions to Honduran high command via U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte. They in turn direct FDN general staff composed of former National Guard officers. According to April 18 *Time*, U.S. aid to FDN includes "supplying training, arms and intelligence on troop movements in Nicaragua's northern provinces gathered by spy plane."

Jack Anderson reveals U.S.-Israeli development plan along Costa Rica's northern border with Nicaragua, which includes road building and the establishment of new settlements. Costa Rican opposition alleges that project is part of plan to destabilize Nicaragua.

House Intelligence Committee calls for end to covert aid to ex-National Guardsmen. Numerous congressmen declare that covert aid is in clear violation of Boland amendment.

President Reagan addresses joint session of Congress; he declares that "The national security of the Americas is at stake in Central America." Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Soviet Union are accused of exporting revolution. President denies U.S. is attempting to overthrow the Sandinistas and draws standing ovation for saying, "There is no thought for sending U.S. combat troops to Central America."

In Democratic rebuttal of Reagan's speech, Senator Dodd states, "The Administration fundamentally misunderstands the causes of the conflict in Central America . . . this Administration has turned to massive military buildups . . . its policy is ever-increasing military assistance . . . it only leads to a dark tunnel of endless intervention."

Ex-Guardsmen launch new attack from Honduras two days after speech, killing in cold blood 13 civilians, including two nurses and a West German physician, at a roadblock. West German internationalists in Nicaragua occupy their embassy, asking that their government protest U.S. support of ex-Guardsmen.

May 1983

April 29 Harris poll released, showing U.S. public to be against

U.S. policy by two to one. Harris describes the results as "a solid rejection" of a policy which is perceived as militarist and lacking any possibility of success.

U.S. reduces quota of sugar bought from Nicaragua by 90%.

House subcommittee votes 9-5 to prohibit covert aid against Nicaragua; simultaneously approves \$80 million in overt aid to "friendly countries" for arms interdiction. Senate votes to continue covert aid until October 1983, with provision requesting Presidential consultation.

Armed attacks from Costa Rica are begun. Eden Pastora's group ARDE murders 11 *campesinos* near San Carlos; other families are threatened with death if they refuse to join or assist ARDE. A ferry boat donated by West Germany is destroyed in the Rio San Juan. Three West Germans traveling on river to photograph ruined boat are attacked; one is killed and two are kidnapped. ARDE announces capture of two "East German military advisers."

Administration announces plans to send 100 Green Berets to Honduras to train 2,000 Salvadoran troops. U.S. will also man new radar station near Tegucigalpa.

Lt. General Wallace Nutting, head of U.S. Southern Command in Panama, says that an open-ended increase in U.S. involvement is needed to "stop Marxist expansion."

June 1983

Three U.S. diplomats are implicated in plan to assassinate Nicaraguan Foreign Affairs Minister Fr. Miguel d'Escoto.

July 1983

U.S. sends 19 ships with 16,456 troops and dozens of fighter jets to the coasts of Nicaragua; also sends 4,000 U.S. ground troops for Honduras--operation is called Big Pine II.

Reagan appoints Henry Kissinger to head a Commission on Central America.

House of Representatives votes down covert aid by passing the Boland-Zablocki bill.

September 1983

The International Airport in Managua is bombed, as is the home of Foreign Minister Miguel d'Escoto.

The port of Benjamín Zeledón on the Atlantic Coast is bombed, destroying 400,000 gallons of diesel fuel as well as the oil supply for the Department of Zelaya.

Oil unloading facilities at Puerto Sandino are destroyed in a CIA-directed *contra* attack.

Destruction of public buildings, homes, and trucks at El Espino.

A border post near Honduras is destroyed by mortar shells fired by

Honduran army which was providing cover for *contra* forces.

200 *contras* attack Nicaraguan customs installation at Peñas Blancas on the Costa Rican border after bombing a Nicaraguan army post nearby; Costa Rican authorities pull back leaving area clear for the mercenaries.

October 1983

Attack on port of Corinto destroys 3.2 million gallons of gasoline and oil, and hundreds of tons of food and medicine.

Attack on oil pipelines at Puerto Sandino, which leads to ESSO refusing to ship oil to Nicaragua.

Daniel Ortega, Coordinator of the Government of National Reconstruction of Nicaragua, declares a state of emergency.

Attack by ex-National Guardsmen on town of Pantasma, killing 47 people and causing \$2 million in damages.

House again votes down covert aid; vote now passes to the Senate.

The administrator of the Nicaraguan Medical Supply Center denounces that the presence of North American naval ships off the coasts of Nicaragua is stopping the arrival of medicine to the country. As a result of the refusal to grant loans to Nicaragua by international lending organizations, the Ministry of Health has a deficit of \$10 million for medical equipment and supplies.

November 1983

U.S. invades Grenada with 6,000 troops and occupies the country.

Over 50 incursions by Honduran planes into Nicaraguan airspace to provoke anti-aircraft reaction.

Nicaraguan fishing boat burned; crew kidnapped.

Propaganda intensifies in Honduras about Nicaraguan invasion of Honduras.

Many stories circulate about impending invasion, troop buildup on Honduran border of *contras*, troop buildup of Hondurans and Guatemalans on Salvadoran border.

Senate approves covert aid; sent to Conference Committee, composed of members of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees.

5,000 U.S. troops begin amphibious landing exercises in Honduras.

The Central American Defense Council studies legality of joint military action against Nicaragua and recommends direct U.S. participation in case of an "extreme crisis."

Edén Pastora travels to U.S. to appeal for more aid for the *contras*.

U.S. denies visa to Tomás Borge.

Damages caused by U.S.-financed attacks against Nicaragua amount to \$2 billion; 300 rural schools are forced to close; 53 teachers killed; 12 health stations destroyed.

Through November 1983, the counterrevolution claims lives of nearly 800 Nicaraguans; 715 more wounded, 37 disappeared, 433 kidnapped.

Nicaraguan government holds meetings with hierarchy of Catholic Church in effort to reduce their opposition.

U.S. under secretary of Defense meets with military leaders of CONDECA nations.

CIA admits *contras* will not be able to defeat the Sandinista government.

Reagan pocket vetoes certification process of human rights in El Salvador.

December 1983

U.S. and Honduras announce Big Pine III maneuvers to take place in 1984; current maneuvers end in March 1984.

Kissinger Commission visits Mexico and Venezuela; debate reported among commission members over conditioning aid to El Salvador upon an end to right-wing death squad violence.

Nicaragua offers amnesty to people who left the country and to Miskito Indians arrested with the *contras*.

Bishop Salvador Schläefer joins group of Miskito Indians going to Honduras, resulting in another media event for the propaganda war against Nicaragua.

January 1984

Kissinger Commission releases report calling for \$8 billion in aid to Central America, and for continued aid to the *contras*; leaves open the possibility of direct U.S. intervention in Nicaragua. Fails, however, to build bipartisan consensus, and debate continues over military aid and U.S. policy. Reagan requests additional \$250 million in military aid to El Salvador for 1984; seeks \$350 million for 1985.

Nicaraguan government announces plans for elections that are scheduled for 1985.

Contra attacks continue by air and sea against agricultural areas, main ports, and fishing boats.

U.S. helicopter violates Nicaraguan airspace and is shot down; pilot is killed; according to *Time* magazine (1/23/84), the helicopter crew was assigned to enlarge a *contra* air base in Honduras, a staging area for *contra* air raids into Nicaragua.

Sources:

Nicaraguan Perspectives 3 (Winter 1982), 5 (Winter 1983), 6 (Summer 1983); *CounterSpy* 6, 3, (May/June 1982); *Central America Alert* 3, 5, and 6; *Barricada International* (June 6, 1983); *La Voz de Nicaragua* (November, December 1983)

The Economic Strangulation of Nicaragua

This is the transcript (translated from Spanish and edited) of a briefing given by officials of the Ministry of Foreign Trade to a delegation organized by U.S. Out of Central America (USOCA) in June 1983. This briefing explains Nicaragua's traditional dependence on trade with the U.S., and the general situation of unequal exchange between Nicaragua and the advanced industrial countries. These factors are the background for the current economic vise being applied against Nicaragua by the United States through acts of economic aggression (cutting off the sugar quota, forcing Nicaragua to divert precious foreign exchange earnings to defense, etc.), also detailed here.

During the period of Somoza's rule, Nicaragua's economy was fundamentally one that fit into the international division of labor by means of its exported goods—chiefly cotton, coffee, bananas, and such minerals as gold and silver. In the case of the mineral products, the transnational corporations were directly involved, basically those representing North American capital. The Somoza group, having political hegemony, also took advantage of the country's natural wealth, appropriating for itself the profits from those exports.

Within this process, certain financial groups consolidated, assuming their place in the chain of intermediaries, both internal and external, in this productive process. So what we have is the formation of a structure, an economic group that appropriated for itself the profits generated by Nicaragua's exports.

Besides the Somoza group, there were two other groups—one which revolved around the Banco de América, and the other associated with the Banco Nicaragüense. It is important to note the existence of these three groups. Before the triumph of the revolution, there was a lot said about the contradictions among the bourgeoisie, and in the last phase of the war, in the two or three years preceding the triumph, the contradictions among those groups had become quite considerable, given the fact that Somoza's group wanted to assure itself the major part of the profits from surplus produced by the country, including the profits from export surplus. These economic groups, with the Somoza group in hegemony, secured for themselves the benefits of the country's role in the international