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## Central America and U.S. Security

*President Reagan's address  
to the nation of  
March 16, 1986.\**

My fellow Americans, I must speak to you tonight about a mounting danger in Central America that threatens the security of the United States. This danger will not go away; it will grow worse, much worse, if we fail to take action now. I am speaking of Nicaragua, a Soviet ally on the American mainland only 2 hours flying time from our own borders. With over a billion dollars in Soviet-bloc aid, the communist Government of Nicaragua has launched a campaign to subvert and topple its democratic neighbors.

Using Nicaragua as a base, the Soviets and Cubans can become the dominant power in the crucial corridor between North and South America. Established there, they will be in a position to threaten the Panama Canal, interdict our vital Caribbean sealanes, and, ultimately, move against Mexico. Should that happen, desperate Latin peoples by the millions would begin fleeing north into the cities of the southern United States or to wherever some hope of freedom remained.

The U.S. Congress has before it a proposal to help stop this threat. The legislation is an aid package of \$100 mil-

lion for the more than 20,000 freedom fighters struggling to bring democracy to their country and eliminate this communist menace at its source. But this \$100 million is not an additional \$100 million. We are not asking for a single dime in new money. We are asking only to be permitted to switch a small part of our present defense budget—to the defense of our own southern frontier.

Gathered in Nicaragua already are thousands of Cuban military advisers, contingents of Soviets and East Germans, and all the elements of international terror—from the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] to Italy's Red Brigades. Why are they there? Because, as Colonel Qadhafi has publicly exulted: "Nicaragua means a great thing, it means fighting America near its borders—fighting America at its doorstep."

For our own security, the United States must deny the Soviet Union a beachhead in North America. But let me make one thing plain. I am not talking about American troops. They are not needed; they have not been requested. The democratic resistance fighting in

Nicaragua is only asking America for the supplies and support to save their own country from communism.

The question the Congress of the United States will now answer is a simple one: will we give the Nicaraguan democratic resistance the means to recapture their betrayed revolution, or will we turn our backs and ignore the malignancy in Managua until it spreads and becomes a mortal threat to the entire New World? Will we permit the Soviet Union to put a second Cuba, a second Libya, right on the doorstep of the United States?

### **The Nicaraguan Threat**

How can such a small country pose such a great threat? Well, it is not Nicaragua alone that threatens us, but those using Nicaragua as a privileged sanctuary for their struggle against the United States.

Their first target is Nicaragua's neighbors. With an army and militia of 120,000 men, backed by more than 3,000 Cuban military advisers, Nicaragua's Armed Forces are the largest Central America has ever seen. The Nicaraguan military machine is more powerful than all its neighbors combined.

This map [appears on TV screen] represents much of the Western Hemisphere. Now let me show you the countries in Central America where weapons supplied by Nicaraguan communists have been found: Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala. Radicals from Panama to the south have been trained in Nicaragua. But the Sandinista revolutionary reach extends well beyond their immediate neighbors. In South America and the Caribbean, the Nicaraguan communists have provided support in the form of military training safe haven, communications, false documents, safe transit, and sometimes

weapons to radicals from the following countries: Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and the Dominican Republic. Even that is not all, for there was an old communist slogan that the Sandinistas have made clear they honor: the road to victory goes through Mexico.

If maps, statistics, and facts aren't persuasive enough, we have the words of the Sandinistas and Soviets themselves. One of the highest level Sandinista leaders was asked by an American magazine whether their communist revolution will—and I quote—"be exported to El Salvador, then Guatemala, then Honduras, and then Mexico?" He responded, "That is one historical prophecy of Ronald Reagan that is absolutely true."

Well, the Soviets have been no less candid. A few years ago, then Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko noted that Central America was "boiling like a cauldron" and ripe for revolution. In a Moscow meeting in 1983, Soviet Chief of Staff Marshal Ogarkov declared: "Over two decades there was only Cuba in Latin America. Today there are Nicaragua, Grenada, and a serious battle is going on in El Salvador."

But we don't need their quotes; the American forces who liberated Grenada captured thousands of documents that demonstrated Soviet intent to bring communist revolution home to the Western Hemisphere.

### **The Nature of the Sandinista Regime**

So, we're clear on the intentions of the Sandinistas and those who back them. Let us be equally clear about the nature of their regime. To begin with, the Sandinistas have revoked the civil liberties of the Nicaraguan people, depriving

them of any legal right to speak, to publish, to assemble, or to worship freely. Independent newspapers have been shut down. There is no longer any independent labor movement in Nicaragua or any right to strike. As AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] leader Lane Kirkland has said, "Nicaragua's headlong rush into the totalitarian camp can not be denied—by anyone who has eyes to see."

Well, like communist governments everywhere, the Sandinistas have launched assaults against ethnic and religious groups. The capital's only synagogue was desecrated and firebombed—the entire Jewish community forced to flee Nicaragua. Protestant Bible meetings have been broken up by raids, by mob violence, by machineguns. The Catholic Church has been singled out—priests have been expelled from the country, Catholics beaten in the streets after attending Mass. The Catholic primate of Nicaragua. Cardinal Ohando y Bravo, has put the matter forth rightly. "We want to state clearly," he says, "that this government is totalitarian. We are dealing with an enemy of the Church."

Evangelical pastor Prudencio Baltodano found out he was on a Sandinista hit list when an army patrol asked his name. "You don't know what we do to the evangelical pastors. We don't believe in God," they told him. Pastor Baltodano was tied to a tree, struck in the forehead with a rifle butt, stabbed in the neck with a bayonet—finally, his ears were cut off, and he was left for dead. "See if your God will save you," they mocked. Well, God did have other plans for Pastor Baltodaro. He lived to tell the world his story—to tell it, among other places, right here in the White House.

I could go on about this nightmare—the blacklists, the secret prisons, the Sandinista-directed mob violence. But, as if all this brutality at home were not enough, the Sandinistas are transforming their nation into a safe house, a command post for international terror.

The Sandinistas not only sponsor terror in El Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Honduras—terror that led last summer to the murder of four U.S. marines in a cafe in San Salvador—they provide a sanctuary for terror. Italy has charged Nicaragua with harboring their worst terrorists, the Red Brigades.

The Sandinistas have even involved themselves in the international drug trade. I know every American parent concerned about the drug problem will be outraged to learn that top Nicaraguan Government officials are deeply involved in drug trafficking. This picture [see below], secretly taken at a military airfield outside Managua, shows Frederico Vaughn, a top aide to one of the nine comandantes who rule Nicaragua, loading an aircraft with illegal narcotics bound for the United States. No, there seems to be no crime to which the Sandinistaw will not stoop—this is an outlaw regime.

#### **U.S. Security Interests and the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance**

If we return for a moment to our map [see above], it becomes clear why having this regime in Central America imperils our vital security interests.

Through this crucial part of the Western Hemisphere passes almost half our foreign trade, more than half our imports of crude oil, and a significant portion of the military supplies we would have to send to the NATO alliance in the event of a crisis. These are the

chokepoints where the sealanes could be closed.

Central America is strategic to our Western alliance, a fact always understood by foreign enemies. In World War II, only a few German U-boats, operating from bases 4,000 miles away in Germany and occupied Europe, inflicted crippling losses on U.S. shipping right off our southern coast.

Today, Warsaw Pact engineers are building a deep water port on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast, similar to the naval base in Cuba for Soviet-built submarines. They are also constructing, outside Managua, the largest military airfield in Central America—similar to those in Cuba, from which Russian Bear bombers patrol the U.S. east coast from Maine to Florida.

How did this menace to the peace and security of our Latin neighbors and, ultimately, ourselves suddenly emerge? Let me give you a brief history.

In 1979, the people of Nicaragua rose up and overthrew a corrupt dictatorship. At first, the revolutionary leaders promised free elections and respect for human rights. But among them was an organization called the Sandinistas. Theirs was a communist organization, and their support of the revolutionary goals was sheer deceit. Quickly and ruthlessly, they took complete control.

Two months after the revolution, the Sandinista leadership met in secret and, in what came to be known as the "72-Hour Document," described themselves as the "vanguard" of a revolution that would sweep Central America, Latin America, and, finally, the world. Their true enemy, they declared: the United States.

Rather than make this document public, they followed the advice of Fidel Castro, who told them to put on a facade

of democracy. While Castro viewed the democratic elements in

Nicaragua with contempt, he urged his Nicaraguan friends to keep some of them in their coalition, in minor posts, as window dressing to deceive the West. And that way, Castro said, you can have your revolution, and the Americans will pay for it.

And we did pay for it. More aid flowed to Nicaragua from the United States in the first 18 months under the Sandinistas than from any other country. Only when the mask fell, and the face of totalitarianism became visible to the world, did the aid stop.

Confronted with this emerging threat, early in our Administration I went to Congress and, with bipartisan support, managed to get help for the nations surrounding Nicaragua. Some of you may remember the inspiring scene when the people of El Salvador braved the threats and gunfire of the communist guerrillas—guerrillas directed and supplied from Nicaragua—and went to the polls to vote decisively for democracy. For the communists in El Salvador it was a humiliating defeat.

But there was another factor the communists never counted on, a factor that now promises to give freedom a second chance—the freedom fighters of Nicaragua.

You see, when the Sandinistas betrayed the revolution, many who had fought the old Somoza dictatorship literally took to the hills and, like the French Resistance that fought the Nazis, began fighting the Soviet-bloc communists and their Nicaraguan collaborators. These few have now been joined by thousands.

With their blood and courage, the freedom fighters of Nicaragua have pinned down the Sandinista army and

bought the people of Central America precious time. We Americans owe them a debt of gratitude. In helping to thwart the Sandinistas and their Soviet mentors, the resistance has contributed directly to the security of the United States.

Since its inception in 1982, the democratic resistance has grown dramatically in strength. Today, it numbers more than 20,000 volunteers, and more come every day. But now the freedom fighters' supplies are running short, and they are virtually defenseless against the helicopter gunships Moscow has sent to Managua.

### **A Crucial Test**

Now comes the crucial test for the Congress of the United States. Will they provide the assistance the freedom fighters need to deal with Russian tanks and gunships, or will they abandon the democratic resistance to its communist enemy?

In answering that question, I hope Congress will reflect deeply upon what it is the resistance is fighting against in Nicaragua. Ask yourselves, what in the world are Soviets, East Germans, Bulgarians, North Koreans, Cubans, and terrorists from the PLO and the Red Brigades doing in our hemisphere, camped on our own doorstep? Is that for peace?

Why have the Soviets invested \$600 million to build Nicaragua into an armed force almost the size of Mexico's—a country 15 times as large and 25 times as populous. Is that for peace?

Why did Nicaragua's dictator, Daniel Ortega, go to the Communist Party Congress in Havana and endorse Castro's call for the worldwide triumph of communism? Was that for peace?

Some Members of Congress ask me, why not negotiate? That's a good question, and let me answer it directly. We have sought, and still seek, a negotiated peace and a democratic future in a free Nicaragua. Ten times we have met and tried to reason with the Sandinistas. Ten times we were rebuffed. Last year, we endorsed church-mediated negotiations between the regime and the resistance. The Soviets and the Sandinistas responded with a rapid arms buildup of mortars, tanks, artillery, and helicopter gunships.

Clearly, the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact have grasped the great stakes involved, the strategic importance of Nicaragua. The Soviets have made their decision—to support the communists. Fidel Castro has made his decision—to support the communists. Arafat, Qadhafi, and the Ayatollah Khomeini have made their decision—to support the communists. Now, we must make our decision. With Congress' help, we can prevent an outcome deeply injurious to the national security of the United States. If we fail, there will be no evading responsibility—history will hold us accountable. This is not some narrow partisan issue; it's a national security issue, an issue on which we must act not as Republicans, not as Democrats, but as Americans.

Forty years ago, Republicans and Democrats joined together behind the Truman Doctrine. It must be our policy, Harry Truman declared, to support peoples struggling to preserve their freedom. Under that doctrine, Congress sent aid to Greece just in time to save that country from the closing grip of a communist tyranny. We saved freedom in Greece then—and with that same bipartisan spirit, we can save freedom in Nicaragua today.

Over the coming days, I will continue the dialogue with Members of Congress, talking to them, listening to them, hearing out their concerns. Senator Scoop Jackson, who led the fight on Capitol Hill for an awareness of the danger in Central America, said it best: on matters of national security, the best politics is no politics.

You know, recently one of our most distinguished Americans, Clare Boothe Luce, had this to say about the coming vote. "In considering this crisis," Mrs. Luce said, "my mind goes back to a similar moment in our history—back to the first years after Cuba had fallen to Fidel. One day during those years, I had lunch at the White House with a man I had known since he was a boy—John F. Kennedy. 'Mr. President,' I said, 'no matter how exalted or great a man may be, history will have time to give him no more than one sentence. George Washington—he founded our country. Abraham Lincoln—he freed the slaves and preserved the Union. Winston Churchill—he saved Europe.' 'And what, Clare,' John Kennedy said, 'did you believe—or do you believe my sentence will be?' 'Mr. President,' she answered, 'your sentence will be that you stopped the communists—or that you did not.' "

Well, tragically, John Kennedy never had the chance to decide which that would be. Now, leaders of our own time must do so. My fellow Americans, you know where I stand. The Soviets and Sandinistas must not be permitted to crush freedom in Central America and threaten our own security on our own doorstep.

Now the Congress must decide where it stands. Mrs. Luce ended by

saying: "Only this is certain. Through all time to come, this, the 99th Congress of the United States, will be remembered as that body of men and women that either stopped the communists before it was too late—or did not."

So tonight I ask you to do what you've done so often in the past. Get in touch with your Representative and Senators and urge them to vote yes; tell them to help the freedom fighters—help us prevent a communist takeover of Central America.

I have only 3 years left to serve my country, 3 years to carry out the responsibilities you entrusted to me, 3 years to work for peace. Could there be any greater tragedy than for us to sit back and permit this cancer to spread, leaving my successor to face far more agonizing decisions in the years ahead? The freedom fighters seek a political solution. They are willing to lay down their arms and negotiate to restore the original goals of the revolution, a democracy in which the people of Nicaragua choose their own government. That is our goal also, but it can only come about if the democratic resistance is able to bring pressure to bear on those who have seized power.

We still have time to do what must be done so history will say of us, we had the vision, the courage, and good sense to come together and act—Republicans and Democrats—when the price was not high and the risks were not great. We left America safe, we left America secure, we left America free—still a beacon of hope to mankind, still a light unto the nations.

"Text from Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents of Mar. 24, 1986.



Current  
Policy  
No. 850

## Why Democracy Matters in Central America

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United States Department of State  
Bureau of Public Affairs  
Washington, B.C.

*Following is President Reagan's address to the nation from the White House, Washington, D.C., June 24, 1986.*

My fellow citizens, the matter that brings me before you today is a grave one and concerns my most solemn duty as President. It is the cause of freedom in Central America and the national security of the United States. Tomorrow, the House of Representatives will debate and vote on this issue. I had hoped to speak directly and at this very hour to Members of the House of Representatives on this subject but was unable to do so. Because I feel so strongly about what I have to say, I've asked for this time to share with you—and Members of the House—the message I would have otherwise given.

Nearly 40 years ago a Democratic President, Harry Truman, went before the Congress to warn of another danger to democracy, a civil war in a faraway country in which many Americans could perceive no national security interest.

Some of you can remember the world then. Europe lay devastated. One by one, the nations of Eastern Europe

had fallen into Stalin's grip. The democratic Government of Czechoslovakia would soon be overthrown. Turkey was threatened, and in Greece, the home of democracy, communist guerrillas, backed by the Soviet Union, battled democratic forces to decide the nation's fate.

Most Americans did not perceive this distant danger, so the opinion polls reflected little of the concern that brought Harry Truman to the well of the House that day. But go he did. And it is worth a moment to reflect on what he said.

In a hushed chamber, Mr. Truman said that we had come to a time in history when every nation would have to choose between two opposing ways of life. One way was based on the will of the majority—on free institutions and human rights. "The second way of life," he said, "is based upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority. It relies upon terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections and the suppression of personal freedoms. I believe," President Truman said, that it must be the policy

of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures."

When Harry Truman spoke, Congress was controlled by the Republican Party. But that Congress put America's interest first and supported Truman's request for military aid to Greece and Turkey—just as 4 years ago Congress put America's interest first by supporting my request for military aid to defend democracy in El Salvador.

### **The Threat to Democracy**

I speak today in that same spirit of bipartisanship. My fellow Americans and Members of the House, I need your help. I ask first for your help in remembering—remembering our history in Central America so we can learn from the mistakes of the past. Too often in the past the United States failed to identify with the aspirations of the people of Central America for freedom and a better life. Too often our government appeared indifferent when democratic values were at risk. So we took the path of least resistance and did nothing.

Today, however, with American support, the tide is turning in Central America. In El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica—and now in Guatemala—freely elected governments offer their people the chance for a better future, a future the United States must support.

But there's one tragic, glaring exception to that democratic tide—the communist Sandinista government in Nicaragua. It is tragic because the United States extended a generous hand of friendship to the new revolutionary government when it came to power in 1979. Congress voted \$75 million in economic aid. The United States helped renegotiate Nicaragua's foreign debt.

America offered teachers, doctors, and Peace Corps volunteers to help rebuild the country. But the Sandinistas had a different agenda.

From the very first day, a small clique of communists worked steadily to consolidate power and squeeze out their democratic allies. The democratic trade unionists who had fought Somoza's National Guard in the streets were now told by the Sandinistas that the right to strike was illegal and that their revolutionary duty was to produce more for the state.

The newspaper *La Prensa*, whose courage and determination had inspired so much of the Nicaraguan revolution, found its pages censored and suppressed. Violeta Chamorro, widow of the assassinated editor, soon quit the revolutionary government to take up the struggle for democracy again in the pages of her newspaper.

The leader of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, Archbishop—now Cardinal—Obando y Bravo, who had negotiated the release of the Sandinista leaders from prison during the revolution, was now vilified as a traitor by the very men he helped to free.

Soviet arms and bloc personnel began arriving in Nicaragua. With Cuban, East German, and Bulgarian advisers at their side, the Sandinistas began to build the largest standing army in Central American history and to erect all the odious apparatus of the modern police state.

Under the Somoza dictatorship, a single facility held all political prisoners. Today, there are eleven—11 prisons in place of one.

The Sandinistas claim to defend Nicaraguan independence. But you and I know the truth. The proud people of Nicaragua did not rise up against

Somoza—and struggle, fight, and die—to have Cubans, Russians, Bulgarians, East Germans and North Koreans running their prisons, organizing their army, censoring their newspapers, and suppressing their religious faith. One Nicaraguan nationalist, who fought in the revolution, says: "We are an occupied country today."

I could go on, but I know that even the Administration's harshest critics in Congress hold no brief for Sandinista repression. Indeed, the final verdict has already been written by Cardinal Obando himself in the *Washington Post*. Listen carefully to the Cardinal's words. He says: that the Sandinista regime "is a democratic government, legitimately constituted, which seeks the welfare and peace of the people and enjoys the support of the overwhelming majority" is not true. To accept this as true, the Cardinal says, "is to ignore the mass exodus of the Miskito Indians, the departure of tens of thousands of Nicaraguan men and women of every age, profession, economic status, and political persuasion. It is to ignore the most terrible violation of freedom of the press and of speech in the history of our country, the expulsion of priests and the mass exodus of young people eligible for military service." As for the Catholic Church in Nicaragua, we have been 'gagged and bound,' the Cardinal says.

Many brave Nicaraguans have stayed in their country despite mounting repression—defying the security police, defying the Sandinista mobs that attack and deface their homes. Thousands—peasants, Indians, devout Christians, draftees from the Sandinista army—have concluded that they must take up arms again to fight for the freedom they thought they had won in 1979.

The young men and women of the democratic resistance fight inside Nicaragua today in grueling mountain and jungle warfare. They confront a Soviet-equipped army, trained and led by Cuban officers. They face murderous helicopter gunships without any means of defense. And still they volunteer. And still their numbers grow.

Who among us would tell these brave young men and women: "Your dream is dead; your democratic revolution is over; you will never live in the free Nicaragua you fought so hard to build?"

The Sandinistas call these freedom fighters *contras*—for "counterrevolutionaries." But the real counterrevolutionaries are the Sandinista *comandantes*, who betrayed the hopes of the Nicaraguan revolution and sold out their country to the Soviet empire.

The *comandantes* even betrayed the memory of the Nicaraguan rebel leader Sandino, whose legacy they falsely claim. For the real Sandino—because he was a genuine nationalist—was opposed to communism. In fact, Sandino broke with the Salvadoran communist leader, Farabundo Marti, over this very issue.

The true Nicaraguan nationalists are the leaders of the United Nicaraguan Opposition: Arturo Cruz—jailed by Somoza, a former member of the Sandinista government; Adolfo Calero—who helped organize a strike of businessmen to bring Somoza down; and Alfonso Robelo—a social democrat and once a leader of the revolutionary government.

These good men refused to make any accommodation with the Somoza dictatorship. Who among us can doubt their commitment to bring democracy to Nicaragua?

### **U.S. Vital Interests**

So, the Nicaraguan people have chosen to fight for their freedom. Now we Americans must also choose. For you and I and every American have a stake in this struggle.

Central America is vital to our own national security, and the Soviet Union knows it. The Soviets take the long view, but their strategy is clear: to dominate the strategic sealanes and vital chokepoints around the world.

Half of America's imports and exports, including oil, travels through the area today. In a crisis, over half of NATO's supplies would pass through this region. And Nicaragua, just 277 miles from the Panama Canal, offers the Soviet Union ports on both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

The Soviet Union already uses Cuba as an air and submarine base in the Caribbean. It hopes to turn Nicaragua into the first Soviet base on the mainland of North America. If you doubt it, ask yourself: why have the last four Soviet leaders—with a mounting economic crisis at home—already invested over \$1 billion and dispatched thousands of Soviet-bloc advisers into a tiny country in Central America?

I know that no one in Congress wants to see Nicaragua become a Soviet military base. My friends, I must tell you in all seriousness, Nicaragua is becoming a Soviet base every day that we debate and debate and debate—and do nothing.

In the 3 months since I last asked for the House to aid the democratic resistance, four military cargo ships have arrived at Nicaraguan ports, this time directly from the Soviet Union. Recently we have learned that Russian pilots are flying a Soviet AN-30 reconnaissance plane for the Sandinistas.

Now, the Sandinistas claim this is just for making civilian maps. Well, our intelligence services believe this could be the first time Soviet personnel have taken a direct role in support of military operations on the mainland of North America.

Think again how Cuba became a Soviet air and naval base. You'll see what Nicaragua will look like if we continue to do nothing. Cuba became a Soviet base gradually over many years. There was no single dramatic event—once the missile crisis passed—that captured the nation's attention. And so it will be with Nicaragua.

The Sandinistas will widen and deepen another port while we debate: is it for commercial vessels or Soviet submarines? The Sandinistas will complete another airstrip while we argue: is it for 707s or Backfire bombers? A Soviet training brigade will come to Nicaragua; half will leave and half will stay. And we will debate: are they soldiers or engineers?

Eventually, we Americans have to stop arguing among ourselves. We will have to confront the reality of a Soviet military beachhead inside our defense perimeters—about 500 miles from Mexico. A future President and Congress will then face nothing but bad choices, followed by worse choices.

My friends in the House, for over 200 years the security of the United States has depended on the safety of unthreatened borders, north and south. Do we want to be the first elected leaders in U.S. history to put our borders at risk?

Some of you may say, well, this is fearmongering. Such a danger to our security will never come to pass. Well, perhaps it won't. But in making your decisions on my request for aid tomorrow, consider this: what are the conse-

quences for our country if you're wrong?

### **The Democratic Resistance: Popular Support and the Need for U.S. Aid**

I know some Members of Congress who share my concern about Nicaragua have honest questions about my request for aid to the democratic resistance. Let me try to address them. Do the freedom fighters have the support of the Nicaraguan people? I urge Members of the House to ask their colleague, the Chairman [Les Aspin] of the House Armed Services Committee, who recently visited a town in Nicaragua that was a Sandinista stronghold during the revolution. He heard peasants, trade unionists, farmers, workers, students, and shopkeepers all call on the United States to aid the armed resistance.

Or listen to the report from *Time* magazine of Central American scholar Robert Leiken, who once had hopes for the Sandinista revolution. He says, "I have gone to a number of towns in Nicaragua where I have found that the youth are simply not there. I ask the parents where they've gone, and they say, they've gone off to join the *contras*." In Managua, Leiken reports 250 Nicaraguans stood on a breadline for 3 hours. "Who is responsible for this?" he asked. "The Sandinistas are responsible. The Sandinistas." That's what the people said. "The Sandinistas," Leiken concluded, "have not only lost support, I think they are detested by the population."

Can the democratic forces win? Consider there are 20 times as many Nicaraguans fighting the Sandinista dictatorship today as there were Sandinista fighters a year before Somoza fell. This is the largest peasant army raised in Latin America in more than 50 years.

And thousands more are waiting to volunteer if American support comes through.

Some Members of Congress—and I know some of you—fear that military aid to the democratic resistance will be only the first step down the slippery slope toward another Vietnam. Now, I know those fears are honest. But think where we heard them before. Just a few years ago, some argued in Congress that U.S. military aid to El Salvador would lead inevitably to the involvement of U.S. combat troops. But the opposite turned out to be true.

Had the United States failed to provide aid then, we might well be facing the final communist takeover of El Salvador and mounting pressures to intervene. Instead, with our aid, the Government of El Salvador is winning the war, and there is no prospect whatever of American military involvement.

El Salvador still faces serious problems that require our attention. But democracy there is stronger, and both the communist guerrillas and the right-wing death squads are weaker. And Congress shares credit for that accomplishment. American aid and training are helping the Salvadoran Army become a professional fighting force, more respectful of human rights. With our aid we can help the Nicaraguan resistance accomplish the same goal.

I stress this point because I know many Members of Congress and many Americans are deeply troubled by allegations of abuses by elements of the armed resistance. I share your concerns. Even though some of those charges are Sandinista propaganda, I believe such abuses have occurred in the past, and they are intolerable.

As President, I repeat to you the commitments I made to Senator Sam Nunn. As a condition of our aid, I will insist on civilian control over all military forces; that no human rights abuses are tolerated; that any financial corruption be rooted out; that American aid go only to those committed to democratic principles. The United States will not permit this democratic revolution to be betrayed nor allow a return to the hated repression of the Somoza dictatorship.

The leadership of the United Nicaraguan Opposition shares these commitments, and I welcome the appointment of a bipartisan congressional commission to help us see that they are carried out.

### **U.S. Policy Goals**

Some ask: what are the goals of our policy toward Nicaragua? They are the goals the Nicaraguan people set for themselves in 1979: democracy, a free economy, and national self-determination. Clearly the best way to achieve these goals is through a negotiated settlement. No humane person wants to see suffering and war.

The leaders of the internal opposition and the Catholic Church have asked for dialogue with the Sandinistas. The leaders of the armed resistance have called for a cease-fire and negotiations at any time, in any place. We urge the Sandinistas to heed the pleas of the Nicaraguan people for a peaceful settlement.

The United States will support any negotiated settlement or Contadora treaty that will bring real democracy to Nicaragua. What we will not support is a paper agreement that sells out the Nicaraguan people's right to be free. That kind of agreement would be unworthy of us as a people. And it

would be a false bargain. For internal freedom in Nicaragua and the security of Central America are indivisible. A free and democratic Nicaragua will pose no threat to its neighbors or to the United States. A communist Nicaragua, allied with the Soviet Union, is a permanent threat to us all.

President Azcona of Honduras emphasized this point in a recent nationwide address:

As long as there is a totalitarian regime in Central America that has expansionist ambitions and is supported by an enormous military apparatus... the neighboring countries sharing common borders with the country that is the source of the problem will be under constant threat.

If you doubt his warning, consider this: the Sandinistas have already sent two groups of communist guerrillas into Honduras. Costa Rican revolutionaries are already fighting alongside Sandinista troops.

My friends in the Congress, with democracy still a fragile root in Central America—with Mexico undergoing an economic crisis—can we responsibly ignore the long-term danger to American interests posed by a communist Nicaragua, backed by the Soviet Union, and dedicated—in the words of its own leaders—to a “revolution without borders”?

### **Keeping Faith With a Commitment to Freedom**

My friends, the only way to bring true peace and security to Central America is to bring democracy to Nicaragua. And the only way to get the Sandinistas to negotiate seriously about democracy is to give them no other alternative. Seven

years of broken pledges, betrayals, and lies have taught us that.

And that's why the measure the House will consider tomorrow—offered, I know, in good faith—which prohibits military aid for at least another 3 months, and perhaps forever, would be a tragic mistake. It would not bring the Sandinistas to the bargaining table—just the opposite.

The bill, unless amended, would give the Sandinistas and the Soviet Union what they seek most—time: time to crush the democratic resistance, time to consolidate power. And it would send a demoralizing message to the democratic resistance: that the United States is too divided and paralyzed to come to their aid in time.

Recently, I read the words of a leader of the internal democratic opposition. What he said made me feel ashamed. This man has been jailed, his property confiscated, and his life threatened by the security police. Still he continues to fight. And he said:

You Americans have the strength, the opportunity, but not the will. We want to struggle, but it is dangerous to have friends like you—to be left stranded on the landing beaches of the Bay of Pigs. Either help us or leave us alone.

My friends in the House of Representatives, I urge you to send a message tomorrow to this brave Nicaraguan and thousands like him. Tell them it is not dangerous to have friends like us. Tell them America stands with those who stand in defense of freedom.

When the Senate voted earlier this year for military aid, Republicans were joined by many Democratic leaders: Bill Bradley of New Jersey, Sam Nunn of Georgia, David Boren of Oklahoma,

Howell Heflin of Alabama, Lloyd Bentsen of Texas, Bennett Johnston and Russell Long of Louisiana, Fritz Hollings of South Carolina, John Stennis of Mississippi, and Alan Dixon of Illinois.

Today, I ask the House for that kind of bipartisan support for the amendment to be offered tomorrow by Democrats Ike Skelton of Missouri and Richard Ray of Georgia and Republicans Mickey Edwards of Oklahoma and Rod Chandler of Washington. This bipartisan amendment will provide the freedom fighters with what they need—now.

With that amendment, you also send another message to Central America. For democracy there faces many enemies: poverty, illiteracy, hunger, and despair. And the United States must also stand with the people of Central America against these enemies of democracy.

And that's why—just as Harry Truman followed his request for military aid to Greece and Turkey with the Marshall Plan—I urge Congress to support \$300 million in new economic aid to the Central American democracies.

The question before the House is not only about the freedom of Nicaragua and the security of the United States but who we are as a people. President Kennedy wrote on the day of his death that history had called this generation of Americans to be "watchmen on the walls of world freedom." A Republican President, Abraham Lincoln, said much the same thing on the way to his inauguration in 1861. Stopping in Philadelphia, Lincoln spoke in Independence Hall, where our Declaration of Independence had been signed. He said far more had been achieved in that hall than just American independence from Britain. Something permanent—

something unalterable—had happened. He called it: "Hope to the world for all future time."

Hope to the world for all future time—in some way, every man, woman, and child in our world is tied to those events at Independence Hall, to the universal claim to dignity, to the belief that all human beings are created equal, that all people have a right to be free.

We Americans have not forgotten our revolutionary heritage. But, sometimes it takes others to remind us of what we ourselves believe. Recently, I read the words of a Nicaraguan bishop, Pablo Vega, who visited Washington a few weeks ago. Somoza called Pablo Vega the "communist bishop." Now, the Sandinistas revile him as "the *contra* bishop." But Pablo Vega is really a humble man of God. "I am saddened," the good bishop said, "that so many North Americans have a vision of democracy that has only to do with materialism." The Sandinistas "speak of human rights as if they were talking of the rights of a child—the right to receive from the bountifulness of the

state—but even the humblest *campesino* knows what it means to have the right to act. We are defending," Pablo Vega said, "the right of man to be."

Well, Reverend Father, we hear you. For we Americans believe with you that even the humblest *campesino* has the right to be free. My fellow citizens, Members of the House, let us not take the path of least resistance in Central America again. Let us keep faith with these brave people struggling for their freedom. Give them, give me, your support; and together, let us send this message to the world: that America is still a beacon of hope, still a light unto the nations. A light that casts its glow across the land and our continent and even back across the centuries—keeping faith with a dream of long ago. •

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Published by the United States Department of State • Bureau of Public Affairs Office of Public Communication • Editorial Division • Washington, D.C. • July 1986 Editor: Colleen Sussman • This material is in the public domain and may be reproduced without permission; citation of this source is appreciated.

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## Peace and Democracy for Nicaragua

*President Reagan's address to the nation on February 2, 1988*

I want to begin tonight by telling a story, a true story of courage and hope. It concerns a small nation to our south—El Salvador—and the struggle of its people to throw off years of violence and oppression and live in freedom.

### **The El Salvador Example**

Nearly 4 years ago, I addressed you as I do tonight and asked for your help in our efforts to support those brave people against a communist insurgency. That was one of the hardest-fought political battles of this Administration. The people of El Salvador, we heard, were not ready for democracy; the only choice was between the left-wing guerrillas and the violent right, and many insisted that it was the guerrillas who truly had the backing of the people.

But with your support, we were able to send help in time. Our package of military aid for El Salvador passed Congress by only four votes—but it passed. Some of you may remember

those stirring scenes as the people of El Salvador braved communist gunfire to turn out in record numbers at the polls and vote emphatically for democracy.

Observers told of one woman, wounded in a communist attack, who refused to leave the line at the polls to have her wounds treated until after she had voted. They told of another woman who defiantly answered communist death threats saying, "You can kill me, you can kill my family, you can kill my neighbors, but you can't kill us all." That is the voice of a people determined to be free. That is the voice of the people of Central America.

In these last several years, there have been many such times when your support for assistance saved the day for democracy. The story of what has happened in that region is one of the most inspiring in the history of freedom. Today El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, as well as Costa Rica, choose their governments in free and open democratic elections. Independent courts protect their human rights, and their people can hope for a better life for themselves

and their children. It is a record of success that should make us proud. But the record is as yet incomplete.

### **Sandinista Threat to Regional Peace**

This is a map of Central America. As I said, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Costa Rica are all friendly and democratic. In their midst, however, lies a threat that could reverse the democratic tide and plunge the region into a cycle of chaos and subversion. That is the communist regime in Nicaragua called the Sandinistas—a regime whose allies range from communist dictator Fidel Castro of Cuba to terrorist-supporter Qadhafi of Libya. But their most important ally is the Soviet Union.

With Cuban and Soviet-bloc aid, Nicaragua is being transformed into a beachhead for aggression against the United States; it is the first step in a strategy to dominate the entire region of Central America and threaten Mexico and the Panama Canal. That is why the cause of freedom in Central America is united with our national security. That is why the safety of democracy to our south so directly affects the safety of our own nation.

But the people of Nicaragua love freedom just as much as those in El Salvador. You see, when it became clear the direction the Sandinistas were taking, many who had fought against the old dictatorship literally took to the hills and, like the French Resistance that fought the Nazis in World War II they have been fighting the communist Sandinistas ever since.

### **Contra Struggle and Peace Negotiations**

These are the forces of the democratic resistance—the communist government

named them *contras*, but the truth is they are freedom fighters. Their tenacious struggle has helped buy the surrounding democracies precious time and, with their heroic efforts, they are helping give freedom a chance in Nicaragua. A year-and-a-half ago, Congress first approved significant military aid for the freedom fighters. Since then they've been winning major victories in the field and doing what many at first thought impossible—bringing the communist Sandinistas to the negotiating table and forcing them to negotiate seriously.

From the beginning, the United States has made every effort to negotiate a peace settlement—bilaterally, multilaterally, in other diplomatic settings. My envoys have traveled to the region on at least 40 different occasions. But until this last year, these negotiations dragged on fruitlessly because the Sandinistas had no incentive to change. Last August, however, with mounting pressure from the freedom fighters, the Sandinistas signed the Guatemala peace plan.

This time, the leaders of the four Central American democracies refused to let the peace negotiations become an empty exercise. When Nicaragua missed the second deadline for compliance the democratic leaders courageously stood as one to insist that the Sandinistas live up to their signed commitments to democratic reform. Their failure to do so, said the democratic leaders, was the biggest obstacle to peace in the region. The Sandinistas are clearly feeling the pressure and are beginning to take limited steps.

### **U.S. Support Package**

Yet at this crucial moment, there are those who want to cut off assistance to

the freedom fighters and take the pressure off. Tomorrow the House of Representatives will be voting on a \$36-million bill—a support package to the freedom fighters. Ninety percent is for nonlethal support such as food, clothing, and medicine and the means to deliver it. Ten percent is for ammunition. That amount will be suspended until March 31st to determine whether the Sandinistas are taking irreversible steps toward democracy. I am hopeful this will occur. However, if there is no progress toward a negotiated cease-fire, I will make a decision to release these additional supplies—but only after weighing carefully and thoroughly the advice from Congress and the democratic presidents of Central America.

Over the past several days, I have met with many Members of Congress—Republicans and Democrats—concerning my proposal. In the spirit of bipartisanship, I will tomorrow send a letter to the congressional leadership taking a further step. At the appropriate time, I will invite Congress to act by what is called a sense-of-Congress resolution on the question of whether the Government of Nicaragua is in compliance with the San Jose declaration. If Congress adopts such a resolution within 10 days containing this finding, then I will honor this action and withhold deliveries of ammunition in this package. One thing is clear; those brave freedom fighters cannot be left unarmed against communist tyranny.

Some say that military supplies are not necessary, that humanitarian aid is enough. But there is nothing humanitarian about asking people to go up against Soviet helicopter gunships with nothing more than boots and bandages. There is no vote scheduled tomorrow in

the Soviet Union on continued assistance to the Sandinistas; that assistance will continue, and it will not be just humanitarian.

Our policy of negotiations, backed by the freedom fighters, is working. Like the brave freedom fighters in Afghanistan who have faced down the Soviet Army and convinced the Soviet Union that it must negotiate its withdrawal from their country, the freedom fighters in Nicaragua can win the day for democracy in Central America. But our support is needed now; tomorrow will be too late. If we cut them off, the freedom fighters will soon begin to wither as an effective force. Then, with the pressure lifted, the Sandinistas will be free to continue the consolidation of their totalitarian regime, the military buildup inside Nicaragua, and communist subversion of their neighbors. Even today, with the spotlight of world opinion focused on the peace process, the Sandinistas openly boast that they are arming and training Salvadoran guerrillas.

We know that the Sandinistas, who talk of a revolution without borders reaching to Mexico, have already infiltrated guerrillas into neighboring countries. Imagine what they will do if the pressure is lifted. What will be our response as the ranks of the guerrillas in El Salvador, Guatemala, even Honduras and unarmed Costa Rica, begin to swell and those fragile democracies are ripped apart by the strain? By then the freedom fighters will be disbanded, refugees, or worse—they will not be able to come back.

### **Concerns for U.S. National Security**

Let me explain why this should be and would be such a tragedy, such a danger to our national security. If we return to

the map for a moment, we can see the strategic location of Nicaragua. Close to our southern border, within striking distance of the Panama Canal, domination of Central America would be an unprecedented strategic victory for the Soviet Union and its allies. And they're willing to pay for it. Cubans are now in Nicaragua constructing military facilities, flying combat missions, and helping run the secret police. The Soviet Union and Soviet-bloc countries have sent over \$4 billion in arms and military aid and economic aid—20 times the amount that the United States has provided the democratic freedom fighters. If Congress votes tomorrow against aid, our assistance will very quickly come to an end—but Soviet deliveries will not.

We must ask ourselves why the Soviet Union, beset by an economic crisis at home, is spending billions of dollars to subsidize the military buildup in Nicaragua. Backed by some 2,000 Cuban and Soviet-bloc advisers, the Sandinista military is the largest Central America has ever seen. Warsaw Pact engineers are completing a deep-water port on the Caribbean coast—similar to the naval base in Cuba for Soviet submarines—and the recently expanded airfields outside Managua can handle any aircraft in the Soviet arsenal, including the Bear bomber, whose 5,200 mile range covers most of the continental United States.

#### **Sandinista Military "5-Year Plan"**

But this is only the beginning. Last October a high-ranking Sandinista officer, Roger Miranda, defected to this country, bringing with him a series of 5-year plans—drawn up among the Sandinistas, Soviets, and Cubans—for a massive military buildup in Nicaragua

extending through 1995. These plans, which Major Miranda makes clear are to be put into effect whether the freedom fighters receive aid or not, call for quadrupling the Sandinista armed forces—to 600,000, or one out of every five men, women, and children in the country.

As I speak to you tonight, several thousand Nicaraguans are taking courses in the Soviet Union and Cuba to learn to operate new high-tech missiles, artillery, and other advanced weapons systems. Of grave concern is the fact that the Soviets have scheduled delivery of Soviet MiG aircraft to Nicaragua. If these were just the claims of one defector, no matter how highly placed and credible, some might still find reason to doubt. But even before Major Miranda's revelations were made public, his old boss, Defense Minister Humberto Ortega, confirmed them in a public speech—adding that if Nicaragua chose to acquire MiGs, it was none of our business.

The introduction of MiGs into Nicaragua would be so serious an escalation that members of both parties in the Congress have said the United States simply cannot tolerate it.

#### **Sandinista "Promises"**

The Miranda revelations cannot help but make us skeptical of the recent Sandinista promises to abide by the Guatemala peace accord. The argument is made that the freedom fighters are unnecessary, that we can trust the Sandinistas to keep their word. Can we? It is important to remember that we already have a negotiated settlement with the Sandinistas—the settlement of 1979 that helped bring them to power, in which they promised—in

writing—democracy, human rights, and a nonaligned foreign policy.

Of course, they haven't kept a single one of those promises, and we now know that they never intended to. Barely 2 months after assuming power, the Sandinista leadership drafted a secret report, called the "72-hour document," outlining their plans to establish a communist dictatorship in Nicaragua and spread subversion throughout Central America. This is the document in which they detailed their deception. It is now part of the public record, available for all to see.

One day after that 72-hour meeting, President Carter, unaware of their secret plans, received Daniel Ortega here in the White House and offered his new government our friendship and help, sending over \$100 million aid, more than any other country at the time, and arranging for millions more in loans. The Sandinistas say it was U.S. belligerence that drove them into the hands of the Soviets. Some belligerence.

A short while later, the Sandinista *comandantes* made their first official trip to Moscow and signed a communique expressing support for the foreign policy goals of the Soviet Union. But that, one might say, was only the paperwork. Already Soviet military planners were in Nicaragua, and the Sandinista subversion of El Salvador had begun—all while our hand was extended in friendship.

This is not a record that gives one much faith in Sandinista promises. Recently Daniel Ortega was up in Washington again, this time talking to Members of Congress, giving them assurances of his commitment to the Guatemala peace process. But we now know that at the same time, back in

Managua, the Sandinistas were drawing up plans for a massive military escalation in Nicaragua and aggression against their neighbors.

As the Sandinistas see the vote on aid to the freedom fighters nearing, they are making more promises. Forgive my skepticism, but I kind of feel that every time they start making promises, like that fellow in the Isuzu commercial, there should be subtitles under them telling the real story.

One may hope they're sincere this time, but it hardly seems wise to stake the future of Central America and the national security of the United States on it. The freedom fighters are our insurance policy in case the Sandinistas once again go back on their word. The Sandinistas themselves admit that the limited steps they have taken to comply with the peace accords were promised in order to influence the vote in Congress. Was there ever a better argument for aid?

Even now, with the entire world watching, the Sandinistas have harassed and beaten human rights activists and arrested several leaders of the peaceful democratic opposition, including the editor of *La Prensa*. Before being interrogated, some were sealed for over an hour in metal lockers, 3 feet square on the floor and 7 feet high. Said one *comandante* of the opposition, they are "scorpions. They should return to their holes, or we will crush them."

Just a short while ago, the Sandinistas made their true intentions clear. Even if they were forced to hold elections and lost, they said they would never give up power. Responding to the estimate that the Sandinistas have no more than 15% popular support, another *comandante* responded by saying, "That's all right. We can hold on to

power with only 5%." These are not the words, they are not the actions of democratic reformers.

Those who want to cut off the freedom fighters must explain why we should believe the promises the Sandinista communists make trying to influence Congress but not the threats they make at home. They must explain why we should listen to them when they promise peace and not when they talk of turning all Central America into one "revolutionary fire" and boast of carrying their fight to Latin America and Mexico.

If we cut off aid to the freedom fighters, then the Sandinistas can go back to their old ways. Then the negotiations can become, once again, what they were before—high-blown words and promises and convenient cover while the Sandinista communists continue the consolidation of their dictatorial regime and the subversion of Central America.

### ***Contra Successes***

During the last vote in Congress, many who voted for aid to the freedom fighters set conditions on further assistance. They said the freedom fighters must show that they are a viable fighting force and win support from the people. The latest victory in the Las Minas area proved that. For several weeks nearly 7,000 freedom fighters maneuvered in secret throughout the country—something they could only have done with support of the population. In one of the largest military operations in Nicaraguan history, they overran enemy headquarters, routed army barracks, and blew up ammunition dumps, petroleum tanks, and other military targets. At one point, they captured a warehouse where grain was being

hoarded for the army. The freedom fighters opened the doors and invited the hungry people of the area to take what they needed.

The freedom fighters are inside Nicaragua today because we made a commitment to them. They have done what Congress asked; they have proven their effectiveness. Can we, as a moral people, a moral nation, withdraw that commitment now and leave them at the mercy of the Sandinista regime? Or turn them forever into refugees—refugees from the country for which they are making such a heroic sacrifice? What message will that send to the world, to our allies and friends in freedom? What message will it send to our adversaries? That America is a fair-weather friend, an unreliable ally? Don't count on us, because we may not be there to back you up when the going gets a little rough.

By fighting to win back their country, the freedom fighters are preventing the permanent consolidation of a Soviet: military presence on the American mainland; by fighting for their freedom they are helping to protect our national security. We owe them our thanks, not abandonment.

Some talk of "containment," but we must not repeat the mistake we made in Cuba. If "containment" did not work for that island nation, how much less effective will it be for an expansionist Soviet ally on the American mainland I will tell you truthfully tonight, there will be no second chances tomorrow. If Congress votes down aid, the freedom fighters may soon be gone and, with them, all effective pressure on the Sandinistas.

Our goal in Nicaragua is simple—peace and democracy. Our policy has consistently supported the efforts of

those who seek democracy throughout Central America and who recognize that the freedom fighters are essential to that process.

### **Conclusion**

My fellow Americans, there can be no mistake about this vote: It is up or down for Central America; it is win or loose for Peace and freedom; it is yes or no to America's national security.

My friends, I have often expressed my belief that the Almighty had a reason for placing this great and good land, the "New World," here between two vast oceans. Protected by the seas, we have enjoyed the blessings of peace—free for almost two centuries now from the tragedy of foreign aggression on our mainland. Help us to keep

that precious gift secure. Help us to win support for those who struggle for the same freedoms we hold dear. In doing so, we will not just be helping them; we will be helping ourselves, our children, and all the peoples of the world. We will be demonstrating that America is still a beacon of hope, still a light unto the nations. Yes, a great opportunity awaits us, an opportunity to show that hope still burns bright in this land and over our continent, casting a glow across the centuries, still guiding missions—to a future of peace and freedom.

"Text from Weekly Compilation of  
Presidential Documents of Feb. 8, 1988. I  
April 1988