NICARAGUA–UNITED STATES RELATIONS WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE CONTRA ISSUE IN THE UNITED NATIONS, 1981–85.

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This Dissertation entitled "Nicaragua-United States Relations With Special Emphasis On The Contra Issue In The United Nations, 1981-85" submitted by K.S. Dakshina Murthy for the Degree of Master of Philosophy is bonafide to the best of our knowledge. It has not previously been submitted for any other Degree of this or any other University.

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PREFACE

The deposition of Anastasio Somoza Debayle in 1979 marked the end of four decades of dictatorship in Nicaragua. A revolutionary process of change in Nicaragua was ushered in by organised groups such as the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN), the communists the Christian Democrats and a section of the Catholic Church.

In 1981, the FSLN consolidated political power for itself in Nicaragua. Concurrently, there emerged armed opposition groups with the objective of replacing the FSLN. These groups which operated from the borders of Nicaragua in the north and south are popularly referred to as contras, an acronym in Spanish for counter-revolutionaries -- a term originally coined by the Sandinistas.

Contras were broadly divided into two main coalitions -- the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN), based in Honduras, and the Democratic Revolutionary Alliance (ARDE), based in Costa Rica. The Miskito Indians living on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, and those of whom opposed the FSLN formed two organisations: Unity of the Miskito Sumo and Rama (MISURA), which joined the FDN, and Unity of the Miskito Sumo Rama and Sandinista (MISURASATA), which joined the ARDE.

The period, 1981 to 1985, under study spans the first term of Reagan administration. Historically, the United States has regarded Central America, of which Nicaragua is part, as belonging to its sphere of influence. The US has also favoured a status quo in that region, as it is to its

advantage. Thus, the replacement of Somoza by the FSLN meant a shift in the existing situation. The contras who advocated a return to the status quo and, in a sense, amenable to US proddings were thus actively encouraged by the US.

The United Nations as an arbiter of international disputes was utilised by the Nicaraguan government to the maximum to bring its plight to the notice of the world. It also served as a platform for the contending parties to air their views.

Against this background, the study surveys US-Nicaraguan relations, especially during the Carter and Reagan administrations.

The core of the study is an attempt to inquire into the origins of the contras, and the context of its functioning. The debate in the United Nations Security Council has also been examined at some length in an attempt to throw light on viewpoints of Nicaragua and the United States in the context of the contra war.

Chapter I sketches Nicaraguan-US relations spanning the period between the independence of the Central American Republic to the present. This includes, as separate sections, the relationship between the US and the Somoza dynasty and the response of the Carter administration to the revolution in 1979, and to its immediate aftermath.

The contra factor and the Nicaraguan revolution entered a crucial phase in 1981 with the consolidation of the FSLN government and simultaneously the taking over of Ronald Reagan as president of the US. Chapter II describes the manner in

which the FSLN consolidated itself in Nicaragua and Reagan's response to it.

The contras were part of a larger strategy of the US to dislodge the FSLN government in Nicaragua. In this context, Chapter III attempts to trace the origins and constituents of the contras, their activities and US involvement in them. In the last section, an attempt is made to bring into perspective the low-intensity conflict waged by the US and the role of the contras in it.

Chapter IV examines the UN Security Council debates in the period under study with a view to throw light on the viewpoints of Nicaragua and the US, and that of other countries.

Chapter V summarises the dissertation in an attempt to analyse what has already been said.

I take this opportunity to put on record an overwhelming feeling of gratitude towards my supervisor, Dr. R. Narayanan, who was not only generous with his ideas but also took a lot of care and interest in seeing the dissertation through.

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CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW OF NICARAGUA - US RELATIONS

For over four long decades since 1930s, the Somoza dictatorship was fairly entrenched in Nicaragua, which a revolution in 1979 not only dislodged but began assiduously building a new system. The 43-year Somoza family rule was made possible by the nature of its relationship with successive US administrations through the decades which, in turn, was governed by traditional Nicaragua-United States relations since the independence of the Central American Republic. The response of the Carter administration initially to the revolution, and later, to the post-revolutionary Nicaragua reaffirmed the unchanging nature of the relations between the two countries. It is on these considerations an attempt is made in this introductory Chapter to sketch the evolving relations between Nicaragua and the United States since its independence.

Section 1 offers a summary of Nicaragua's early history and the role US had played almost in determining the course of Nicaraguan politics. Section 2 briefly describes circumstances leading to the consolidation of power by the Somoza family and the intransigent efforts of the US in the country. Section 3 examines at some length US responses under the Carter administration to events in Nicaragua during the crucial phase between 1976 and 1979, and later, to the post-revolutionary Sandinista regime.

ANTECEDANTS

Nicaragua achieved independence in 1821 from the Spanish-Mexican empire of Agustin de Iturbide. After a brief period as part of the Central American Federation, it finally emerged as de facto sovereign state in 1938. For most of the period since 1821 there was continuous warfare between the two political groups that then solely dominated Central American politics -- the liberals and the conservatives. The main preoccupation of the two groups was to battle with each other in order to determine who should run the country. Each had a capital--Leon for liberals and Granada for conservatives.[1]

Meanwhile, the discovery of gold in California in 1848 renewed United States interest in Nicaragua as the latter was the most logical site for a trans-oceanic canal which would cut through the narrow strip of land between Lake Nicaragua and the Pacific Ocean, and following the San Juan River between the Lake and the Atlantic Ocean. Also, the discovery of gold and Nicaragua's potential caused the US and Britain to compete for control in the area.

During the decade of 1850, the liberals invited an American soldier-of-fortune, William Walker to help defeat the conservatives. Succeeding in his efforts, Walker soon

1. Hubert Herring, A History of Latin America: From the Beginnings to the Present (New York, 1955), p. 445.

pushed aside his liberal allies and proclaimed himself as president. This discredited the liberals, and the conservatives returned to power.[2]

From then on, till the turn of the Century there was relative political calm under a series of conservative presidents. In 1893, a liberal uprising ended conservative rule, and Jose Santos Zelaya, a liberal, took over presidency for the next 17 years.

Under his leadership Zelaya sought to reduce US influence on Nicaragua by rejecting a canal treaty proposed by the former. In Zelaya's view such a treaty was potentially injurious to Nicaraguan sovereignty. This stand, however, caused his downfall. For, the US following its war with Spain in 1898 resented Zelaya's stance. At the same time Zelaya was negotiating with other foreign powers to build a canal across Nicaragua which would compete with the US canal in Panama. Therefore, when the conservatives rebelled in 1909, US sent a military force to Nicaragua and helped overthrow Zelaya.

A man sympathetic to US interests, Adolfo Diaz, was placed in power. In a short time, Diaz went into debts to US bankers and had sold most of Nicaragua to them. When a liberal-led rebellion broke out in 1912, US troops numbering 2,600 were required to put it down. A US garrison remained in Nicaragua even after the ending of hostilities. In fact,

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2. Ibid., pp. 445-46.

except for a brief one year, US maintained its military presence in Nicaragua from 1912 to 1933.

Between 1912 and 1925, a series of conservative presidents ruled Nicaragua. During this period the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty was signed which gave the US exclusive rights to lands necessary for the construction of a canal through Nicaragua; a 99-year lease on Nicaragua's Corn Islands in the Caribbean; and a payment of three million dollars by the US to Nicaragua to help reduce the foreign debt.[3]

In 1925, following the elections of 1924 in which Carlos Solorzano, a conservative and Dr. Juan Sacasa, a liberal became president and vice-president respectively, the US marines returned home. Within a few months of the withdrawal, fighting broke out once again between the liberals and the conservatives, and in late 1926, the marines returned to Nicaragua and installed Adolfo Diaz back in power.

The US urged Diaz to negotiate with a rebel liberal leader, Moncada, a rival of Sacasa. Moncada signed a truce with the hope of getting elected in the 1928 elections. All his generals laid down their arms except one -- Augusto Cesar Sandino.

As the 1928 elections approached, the US wanted to maintain order in Nicaragua and at the same time withdraw its marines. The idea then grew of creating a native

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3. Ibid., p.448.

Nicaraguan force trained and initially commanded by members of the US army. This force, to be called the National Guard, was to remain outside politics and to concern itself only with maintaining order and ensuring fair elections.

Meanwhile, the defiant Sandino was waging a guerrilla war against what he termed the "Yankee occupation" of Nicaragua. Sandino declared that Moncada and the other generals who signed the truce were traitors. When Moncada won the 1928 polls, Sandino still refused to surrender, stating that he would not end the guerrilla campaign until the US marines had left the country. In 1929, after Herbert Hoover took over as US President, there began a phased withdrawal of the marines, gradually turning over administrative control to the National Guard.

By 1932, with the next polls marking the re-entry of Juan Sacasa as Nicaraguan president, the US marines finally withdrew. Sandino too gave up his struggle in 1933, after initially fighting the National Guard. During this period, the power of the National Guard and its commander, Anastasio Somoza Garcia was on the rise. Somoza viewed Sandino as a threat to his political ambitions, particularly after the latter's request to president Sacasa to reconstitute the National Guard, and replace Somoza as its chief.[4]

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4. Sangeetha Goyal, "Life And Ideas of Augusto Cesar Sandino" (M.Phil Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, School of International Studies, New Delhi, 1986), p. 77.

In 1934, Sandino was assassinated. Whether the US or Somoza himself had a hand in the murder is unclear.

Two years after the assassination, Somoza became president and he reorganised the political system so that his own power could be perpetuated until his death and could be transmitted thereafter to his sons. Interestingly enough the US made no moves to prevent these developments.

SOMOZAS AND UNITED STATES, 1936-79

By 1936, the year Somoza Garcia took over as president, the US was no longer interested in encouraging local democratic governments in Central America to ensure stability. It was more bothered about protecting US interests and the exclusion of other foreign influences. Therefore, it followed the policy of backing a person who was strong enough to maintain order and remain loyal to the US.[5] In the case of Nicaragua, that person happened to be Somoza. With the outbreak of Second World War, Somoza Garcia consolidated his ties with the US by firmly declaring Nicaragua on the side of Allies. In 1956, Somoza Garcia was assassinated. After this, Somoza's sons, Luis Somoza Debayle and Anastasio Somoza Debayle took over. Luis was president from 1956 to 1963, when he died of heart attack. From 1963 to 1967 the Somoza family ruled through puppet presidents

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5. James Chace, Endless War; How We Got Involved And What Can Be Done (New York, 1984), p. 50.

until 1967, when Somoza Debayle had declared himself the "elected" president for a term, till 1971. However, once in office he amended the constitution to allow for another year in office, and then stepped down for two years, while a puppet government engineered another constitution which allowed him to be re-elected in 1974 for another term scheduled to have lasted till 1981.

A major tactic of the Somozas was the careful cultivation of the US. They remained faithfully "pro-American". It meant treating the enemies of the US as automatically their enemies. During the Second World War, the enemies were Axis powers, and later, the communists. Nicaraguan territory was used by the US as military bases during the Second World War and for the training of the CIA surrogate invasion force for Guatemala in 1954 and Cuba in 1961. Nicaragua also offered its forces to the US during the Vietnam and Korean conflicts. In return, particularly in the 1960s and the 1970s, US aid — economic and military was extended to Nicaragua, and more members of Somoza's National Guard received training in the US or at US bases in Panama than any other Latin American country.[6]

In 1961, US president John F.Kennedy launched the Alliance for Progress programme to forestall violent revolution in Latin America. But this did not in any way

6. Shirley Christian, Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family (New York, 1986), p. 5.

distance the US from the Somozas. Under this programme, Nicaragua formed part of the Central American Defence Council (CONDECA) to aid the region's collective security.

In the early 1970s, Somoza rule showed signs of disintegration. Nicaraguans of all sections became increasingly alienated by Somoza's growing greed and brutality. By the middle of the decade, Somoza's policies had generated opposition from such widely diverse groups as labour, the Church hierarchy, and a large segment of the commercial and industrial elite. In addition, the dictator's blatant disregard for human rights made him notorious internationally. With the election of 'Jimmy' Carter as US president in 1976, Somoza's relationship with the US too showed strains.

Nicaragua was one of the first targets of the Carter administration's efforts to promote human rights abroad. This was because by 1975, as opposition to Somoza grew, the reign of terror of the National Guard "attracted substantial international criticism and made Somoza the chief nemesis of the human rights advocates in the US Congress."[7]

In Nicaragua, the US administration sought a quick success on human rights that would defuse conservative scepticism over the feasibility of Carter's idealistic policy (dealt with in greater detail in the next Section).

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7. William M. Leogrande, "The United States and the Revolution", in Thomas W. Walker, ed., Nicaragua in Revolution (New York, 1982), p. 63.

In mid-1977, the US administration stated that it would withhold the military credits meant for Nicaragua, and that it would suspend the $ 12 million aid until Somoza desisted from human rights violations.[8] Though the economic and the military impact of suspending aid to Nicaragua was insignificant, it had a symbolic effect. For Nicaragua's moderates, Somoza had always seemed unassailable as he had the power of the US behind him. Therefore, the Carter administration's admonition of Somoza was a boost to his opponents who now felt that Somoza's power base was no longer secure.

In October 1977, the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN) launched a series of well-coordinated attacks on National Guard garrisons around the country. Los Doce, a group of 12 prominent Nicaraguan intellectuals endorsed the FSLN action and managed to bring together Somoza's radical and moderate opponents. This was a significant stage in the struggle against Somoza. The US remained uninvolved.

On 10 January 1978, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, editor of La Prensa, a leading newspaper and leader of the moderate opposition was killed in Managua. His murder sparked off two weeks of spontaneous rioting in Managua, followed by a general strike organised by businessmen. The National Guard tried to restore order with its characteristic brutality.

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8. Ibid., p. 64.

In the US, policy-makers were deeply divided over how to proceed in Nicaragua. One camp argued for greater pressure to force Somoza's resignation because of his abysmal human rights record and his departure was the only way to engineer a moderate succession. Others took the view that the human rights policy was largely responsible for Somoza's difficulties and that the US should reassert support for him, both because he was a loyal ally and because he constituted the most reliable factor against the FSLN.[9]

On 22 August 1978 the FSLN seized the National Palace, taking some 1,500 captives -- including almost the entire Congress. In September, the FSLN launched small-scale attacks on National Guard garrisons in several cities like the previous October. However, this time they also received support from people, cutting across various sections, and five cities came under FSLN control. It took three weeks of battle by the National Guard to regain control, during which time the cities were bombed and shelled intensively reducing them to a rubble. The Guard also systematically massacred a lot of young men.

Reports of National Guard atrocities moved the US to demand an investigation by the Organisation of American States (OAS), though it did not take any unilateral action against Somoza. The US asked all parties to the war to make compromises to end the bloodshed, and discuss to bring about

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9. Ibid., p. 66.

a peaceful and democratic solution. This was the basis on which the US based its mediation efforts under the auspices of the OAS.

US officials by now came to the conclusion that Somoza would never be able to restore political stability. The goal of US policy was to form a post-Somoza government in which the FSLN would be reduced to insignificance if not totally isolated. Consequently, the OAS authorised the US, Guatemala and the Dominican Republic to arrange for a mediation between Somoza and the FAO (Broad Opposition Front or Frente Amplio Opositor), an umbrella group of the regime's moderate opponents.

The US proposed an interim government composed of the FAO and Somoza's National Liberal Party with the National Guard continuing to safeguard national security. The mediation did not succeed, as the FAO collapsed on the question of aligning with the National Guard.

The last traces of US hopes concerning the viability of the Somoza regime quickly vanished as the FSLN launched its final offensive in June 1979. Soon, it gained control of every major city outside Managua.

At the initiative of the US, another special OAS meeting was convened. For the first time, the US publicly called for Somoza's resignation. It called for an embargo on arms transfers to all sides, a ceasefire, an OAS peacekeeping force to enforce a ceasefire, and a "broadly-based" government, though without Somoza himself. This was

also abandoned as nobody accepted it including the opposition Government of National Reconstruction (JGRN). The JGRN's contention was it was already "broad-based". The final US effort to influence the outcome of the Nicaraguan insurrection began just two weeks before the collapse of the Somoza dynasty. It contacted the JGRN in Costa Rica, and offered that in exchange of Somoza's resignation it would desire an addition of two more moderates to the five-member junta of the GRN, and a guarantee to the continued existence of Somoza's National Liberal Party and the National Guard.

The junta flatly rejected the US offer, except guaranteeing the lives of Somocistas and the Guardsmen. As the FSLN moved closer to military victory, the US was forced to accept the minimum concession. On 17 July 1979, Somoza went into exile in the US, and on 19 July the JGRN took over power in Managua.

CARTER YEARS

As we have seen in the previous Section, historically the United States had a say in the formation and deposition of governments in Nicaragua. Still, in 1979, its foremost ally in the region, Anastasio Somoza Debayle and the system he had presided over, was overthrown in a revolution led by the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN) despite the best efforts of the concerned US administration under Jimmy Carter to prevent such an occurence. How and why did this happen is the major focus of this Section.

In 1977, the Carter administration announced that US arms to Nicaragua would be halted because of human rights violations, and followed this with statements in June and October that economic aid would be withheld.

The administration based this decision on its assessments of the situation in Nicaragua. Among them were its view that there would be negligible resistance in the US to Carter's stance on "human rights" in Nicaragua; and, Somoza's repression had eliminated all opposition within that country. On the economic front, the Somoza family had so successfully monopolised the most profitable sectors of the national economy that US businessmen could find few investment opportunities.

Thus, it appeared to the Carter administration in 1977 that pressurising Somoza would not have serious consequences. Even alienating Somoza would pose no threat to either US national security or its economic interests. However, later on it turned out that this assessment proved faulty mainly on one count. The opposition to Somoza had been temporarily stemmed, but not eliminated. The FSLN, among the opposition was active enough to provide an outlet for the growing popular revulsion to the Somoza regime.

Consequently, Carter's policies had the effect of boosting Nicaragua's opposition, including the FSLN, while its intention had been only to browbeat Somoza into a more moderate policy, suited to US interests.

As instability in Nicaragua led to insurrection, the Carter administration found itself in a dilemma on whether to continue with its above-stated policy towards Somoza or subordinate it to the traditional concerns of national security. While it confronted this dilemma, it was being buffetted by lobbies in the Congress, representing both sides on the issue. It resulted in inaction during the critical months of 1978, and eventually when it was decided to salvage Somoza, the situation had gone out of hand, and it proved impossible.

Essentially, the United States adopted a neutral position. The Carter administration urged Somoza to enter into a dialogue with the moderate opposition. But neither were in any mood for compromise.

During the first eight months of 1978, Nicaraguan politics underwent a realignment in terms of political forces. While the moderate opposition waited for the US to help them wrest power from Somoza, the FSLN was organising the rural villages and urban slums. As would become known later, there was a crucial shift, at this stage, of the political initiative from the moderates to the radicals. It went unnoticed, especially by the Carter administration.[10] On the contrary, the surface calm following the violence was wrongly interpreted as return to normalcy.

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10. Leogrande, n. 7, p. 66.

By September 1978, the turmoil in Nicaragua set off a controversy in the US over Carter's policies.[11] While some in the Congress, cutting across party lines, demanded a total cut in aid to Somoza, the others demanded total backing to Somoza. The Carter administration moved midway in an effort to bring about a compromise.

The Carter administration's central objective was to devise a formula for peaceful transition to a new moderate government thereby excluding the FSLN or make its participation minimal.[12]

But the moderate opposition in Nicaragua was fragmented and demoralised, and could only assume a subsidiary role in the future course of events.

In 1979, before the final assault on the Somoza regime, there was a period of calm. The Carter administration again misread the situation. Somoza seemed to be in control than at any time the previous year. The moderate opponents were fragmented and in disarray. The FSLN was relatively inactive, while the National Guard had been rearmed and reinforced. It appeared that the National Guard would confidently beat back any FSLN assault. At this point, the Carter administration veered round to the view that only Somoza could prevent the radicals from occupying power.

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11. Ibid., p. 67.
12. Ibid., p. 68.

When the FSLN launched its final offensive in early June, the regime started to crumble. Soon, the FSLN was in control of every major city outside the capital. The Carter administration attempted a mediated settlement. At the end of June, it formulated a five-point plan to settle the situation in Nicaragua. According to this plan, Somoza would resign in favour of a constitutional successor. The successor would appoint a council of prominent non-Somocista Nicaraguans and then resign after turning the government over to the council. The council would then mediate between Somoza's forces and the opposition to create an interim government composed of both. Finally, this government would prepare for elections in 1981. This plan too did not really deviate from the earlier plans. It still visualised some of Somoza's men, if not himself, and keeping intact of the National Guard. At the same time, the US was still trying to minimise the role of the FSLN though in reality it was spearheading the insurrection. Consequently, within a week the plan which had had not been publicised, was abandoned as there were no takers including Somoza who resolved to fight to the end.

Less than two weeks before the fall of the Somoza regime, the Carter administration made a final attempt to mediate and influence the outcome of the insurrection.[13] The effort was in vain. On 17 July 1979, Somoza went into

13. See previous section, p. 11.

exile in Miami. What the Carter administration feared had happened. The FSLN turned out to occupy an important position in the post-revolutionary Government of National Reconstruction (JGRN).

In the wake of Somoza's fall, US policy towards Nicaragua underwent a reappraisal, and the conclusion was that though the change was radical -- both socially and politically -- it would not necessarily imply hostility to the United States.[14] This in course became the guiding logic to Carter's policy to post-revolutionary Nicaragua. As James R.Cheek, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs said:"Since the overthrow of President Anastasio Somoza Debayle, Central America has entered a period in which new forces are facing changes in the old alliance of landed oligarchs and conservative militarymen."[15]

With the FSLN aware of the US effort to isolate it during the course of the insurrection, it gave rise to suspicion among the Sandinistas that Washington might still engineer a scheme wherein it would be replaced.

Nicaragua had been badly damaged by the insurrection. It needed assistance to rebuild its economy. The Carter administration on its part felt it was necessary to maintain cordial relations to avoid repeating the errors of 1959-60

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14. Leogrande, n. 17, p. 71.
15. New York Times, 15 September 1980.

when US hostility drove the Cuban revolution into the "arms of the Soviet Union."[16] A cordial relation would also increase the leverage of the US to influence Nicaraguan politics and aid in a possible resurgence of the moderates. The US preference for "pluralistic democratic political systems and mixed economies with a significant private sector" could be made relevant to the transition because the principles were supported by the moderates.[17] Thus the US felt that a moderate centrist force incorporating progressive elements of both the democratic left and right could be combined to govern with popular support.

In line with this strategy, the Carter administration in the immediate aftermath of the revolution provided $ 10-15 million in emergency relief to help feed and house the thousands of refugees produced by the war, followed in September 1979 by a $ 8.5 million in economic reconstruction assistance programme for 1979.

Top Carter aides affirmed that it was essential to maintain friendly relations with Nicaragua with a view to support moderate elements within the new government.[18] Some $ 75 million in aid was agreed upon for Nicaragua in August. It ran into a lot of opposition when it went to the Congress in November for approval. It was not until January

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16. Leogrande, n. 7, p. 71
17. New York Times, n. 25.
18. Leogrande, n. 7, p. 73.

that the Senate and the House of Representatives considered the aid proposal.

The proposal was passed in the Senate with minor changes, most of them being that 60 percent of the money was to be used to assist the Nicaraguan private sector. In the House of Representatives, a few conditions were attached to the aid. Among them one was that "only US goods could be purchased with the aid that went to the private sector; no part of the aid could be used to fund literacy projects in which Cubans were involved and; one percent of the funds had to be used to inform the Nicaraguans about the US aid program". Other conditions included that the aid would be terminated if (i) Nicaragua engaged in a consistent pattern of gross human rights violation; (ii) aided or abetted acts of violence in another country; (iii) allowed Cuban or Soviet combat troops to be stationed on its territory; and (iv) violated the rights of unions to organise, the rights of free speech and press.[19]

In the next two-and-a-half months the aid package bill was not passed. This period saw the first rupture in the JGRN between the FSLN and two non-FSLN members when in April Violeta Chamorro and Alfonso Robelo resigned from the JGRN.[20] Earlier in March, the Nicaraguans managed to get aid totalling $ 100 million from the Soviet Union and the East European countries. In May, the presence of Cuban

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19. Ibid., p. 74.

20. Dealt with in detail next Section.

military advisers in Nicaragua was officially acknowledged. Though these events went against the interests of the United States, the Carter administration persisted with passing the aid package, and finally saw it through in September 1980 -- over a year since the proposal was first mooted.

Events in Nicaragua had dealt a serious blow to United States' pre-eminence in the region. According to Jeane K.Kirkpatrick the "serious deterioration" of the US position was all on account of the Carter administration's failure to understand a variety of things, importantly, the "economics", the "politics", and the "relation between economics and politics" of the subcontinent.[21]

According to another view, "once Carter felt that the archaic Anastasio Somoza regime could not hold out, he discreetly let Israeli arms spill into Managua if only to provide succour to the beleagured National Guard of Nicaragua", which was a mistake, and went against the stated policies of Carter's Latin American policy, notably its intention to be detached from Latin America's "revolutionary processess."[22]

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21. R.Narayanan, "Latin America: Hegemonic Perceptions", World Focus (New Delhi), vol. 3, no. 2, February 1982, p. 14.

22. R.Narayanan, "Latin America: More Grenadas", World Focus, vol. 6, no. 1, January 1985, p. 24.

CHAPTER II

SANDINISTAS AND REAGAN ADMINISTRATION

When Ronald Reagan assumed office as president of the United States in January 1981, the FSLN had consolidated itself in power in Nicaragua. As far as the basic policy of the Reagan administration was concerned, it remained the same as that of Carter. Both the administrations intended to dislodge the FSLN from power or atleast prevent the FSLN from being legitimised. Though Carter and Reagan administrations had the same policy objective, their approach towards achieving this, however, differed. The difference could be attributed to the prevailing situation in Nicaragua.

In 1979, in the aftermath of the revolution, the ruling Nicaraguan junta (JGRN) had both FSLN and non-FSLN (moderate) members providing a basis for a pluralistic form of government with representation to all sections and multi-party elections. The break-up of popular support to the FSLN and non-FSLN parties though could not be gauged. Under these circumstances, the Carter administration attempted to back the moderate parties. Despite its embarrassment over the outcome of the conflict, the Carter administration decided that a US position of hostility would only tend to drive the Sandinista government further to the left perhaps even to the Soviet bloc. A policy of qualified generosity was seen as

providing the US with greater possibilities for influencing the course of the revolution. With elections in Nicaragua originally scheduled for 1981, Carter's idea was to ensure a victory for the moderates thereby dislodging the FSLN. So, it followed an apparently "conciliatory" approach in 1979-81.

In the post-revolutionary situation of flux, the FSLN consolidated itself by 1981 to the exclusion of the moderate sections. Elections were postponed. During the same period, sections of the dismantled National Guard had set up camps in exile in the US with a view to regroup and organise themselves in an attempt to militarily challenge the FSLN government. The Carter administration, incidentally, had not objected to these camps.

Given this situation when Reagan took over in 1981, his administration adopted a course different from that of Carter to achieve the same objective. It turned to covert war as an option and openly backed the exiled National Guard groups, in the process organising and arming the various contra camps.

Section 1 deals with the manner in which the FSLN consolidated itself and emerged as the single-most powerful group to rule Nicaragua. Section 2 sketches briefly the response of the US administration with Ronald Reagan assuming office as president in January 1981.

ADVENT OF SANDINISTAS IN 1981

Two factors conflicted and determined the course of events in post-Somoza Nicaragua. One, the claims of the FSLN to vanguard status, and thus to a leading role politically. Two, an important part of the struggle against Somoza was waged by a broad coalition of groups affiliated to ideologies in varying degrees from the left to the right, and consequently it was felt that the groups to lead the country had to be decided in the open, in an electoral process. At the basis of the conflict lay a long-term understanding of the nature and organisation of the state. The understanding in turn was determined by economic interests, long-standing political divisions, and international actors and forces.

In the circumstances surrounding the final stages of the revolution and the period just after that, the FSLN was jockeyed into a position of "vanguard" leadership. Prior to the takeover of the National Palace in August 1978, the FSLN was not a mass organisation. It had a following mainly among sections of the high school and university students. It did not necessarily command the loyalty of many of the Nicaraguans who opposed Somoza. But, with the mass uprisings of September 1978, led by the FSLN, the situation changed. It could be seen in end-1978 and early 1979 when large sections of the people came out spontaneously in response to the FSLN's call for insurrection, notwithstanding the fact that it was sparked

off by Chamorro's assassination. The willingness of the Sandinista guerrillas to engage in fixed-location warfare against the National Guard in defence of the popular classes, to protect them from the full force of National Guard reprisals, was a crucial factor in establishing the Sandinista leadership.[1]

In July 1979, when the five-member revolutionary junta was set up, the FSLN proclaimed through its actions its vanguard status. By 1981, it had firmly consolidated its hegemony among the ruling leadership. In this section an attempt is made to survey the series of events that made this possible. It will also be shown how, while avoiding being openly authoritarian, the FSLN managed to establish its control over the composition of the new government and dominate the policy-making process.

In early 1979, the three factions of the FSLN reunified, and with it established the Sandinista National Directorate (DNC).[2] The Directorate played an important role after the victory in July 1979. It formulated the structure of the new government, and its organisational units.

After taking over power, the DNC formed a five-member ministerial cabinet in which conservatives, moderates and

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1. S.M.Gorman, "Power And Consolidation in the Nicaraguan Revolution", Journal of Latin American Studies(London), vol. 13, May 1981 , p. 136.

2. Prolonged People's War (GPP), Proletarian Tendency(TP) and Terceristas

leftists were present.[3] The DNC tactfully prevented the conservatives and the moderates from taking the initiative by (a) retaining exclusive control of all military and police forces, (b) preventing them from using their position in government to put down the FSLN's leadership of popular organisations that came up during the time of the insurrection, and (c) forging an effective political alliance with small moderate groups included in the new regime.[4]

A JGRN member, Daniel Ortega (of the Terceristas within the FSLN) had been willing to form political alliances with any section including big businessmen during the anti-Somoza struggle. As a result of this he was projected as a moderate member. However, after the revolution, it turned out that these alliances had been purely tactical in nature, and Daniel Ortega proved to be fully committed to the radical reform programme of the DNC. Similarly, another "moderate" member Sergio Ramirez too turned out to support the DNC's programmes.

Thus in the JGRN, over a period of time the two "conservative" business representatives -- Violeta Chamorro and Alfonso Robelo -- felt isolated. In April 1980 they quit.[5]

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3. Violeta Chamorro and Alfonso Robelo (conservatives)
Daniel Ortega and Sergio Ramirez(moderates)
Moises Hassan (leftist)

4. Gorman, n. 1, p. 138.

5. Violeta left the junta on apparently health grounds, while Alfonso Robelo had differences with the FSLN, among them the matter of expanding the DNC and increasing the representation of the FSLN-led popular organisations in the Council of State.

A crisis was averted with the inclusion in May of two conservative members -- Arturo Cruz and Rafael Cordova Rivas. This also helped to preserve the impression of a private sector participation in the government.

The DNC continued to control the cabinet, though the latter was formally under the JGRN. The DNC announced its programmes through decrees, notwithstanding the fact that some key ministries were held by conservatives.[6] Thus, within a few months after Somoza's fall, the DNC had managed to (1) nationalise export, banking and exploitation of natural resources; (2) expropriate over 180 industrial and commercial companies, and nearly half of all arable land; and (3) initiate a number of social services designed to improve health and welfare.

By January 1980, the DNC tightened its hold over the ministry by placing two of its own members in control of two important portfolios originally held by two conservative businessmen : the Ministry of Agriculture and Economic Planning.[7] It also became clear that two of the original

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6. Ministry of Defence was held by former colonel of the National Guard, Bernardino Larios, while Economic Planning, Industry and Agriculture were given to private sector members -- Roberto Mayorga, Noel Rivas Gasteasoro and Manuel Jose Torres.

7. The portfolios of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform combined under Jaime Wheelock. Humberto Ortega replaced Larios as Minister of Defence. The latter was sentenced to imprisonment for having conspired to assassinate all the members of the DNC.

Los Doce members -- Miguel D' Escoto and Carlos Tunerman -- were backing the DNC totally. Thus, by February 1980, the political composition of the cabinet had changed considerably. Most of the conservatives had been removed, several moderates were backing the DNC totally, and at least nine important portfolios were with those who supported the DNC, five of these were, in fact with four members of the DNC.[8]

One of the important reasons why the conservative-moderate members of the original cabinet were unable to stem the course of events by presenting alternate policy positions were due to the DNC's deliberate delay in constituting the Council of State. It may be surmised here that had the Council of State been formed as envisaged in the Programme of Government of 1979, it would have provided those opposed to the DNC to present an alternative to DNC policies.[9] Also, even a small shift away from the DNC by certain constituent groups may have, in the FSLN point of view, resulted in a body dominated by conservative interests. Another reason for the

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8. Interior, Defence, Economic Planning, Agrarian Reform/ Agriculture, Social Welfare, Culture, Foreign Affairs and Education were the nine portfolios. The four members were Tomas Borge - Interior, H.Ortega - Defence, J.Wheelock - Agriculture/Agrarian Reform and Henry Ruiz - Economic Planning.

9. According to the Programme of Government (1979), issued by the DNC, the 33-member Council of State was to be divided among : (a) FSLN (b) the seven groups belonging to the leftist National Patriot Front (c) the seven groups in the business coalition (FAO) (d) the six-member Superior Council of Private Property (COSEP) (e) the Autonomous National University of Nicaragua (f) the National Association of Clergy.

helplessness of the non-FSLN members who were opposed to it but unable to do much was the fragmentation within their ranks. The fragmentation was mainly due to the opposition of sections within them to the moves of others to retain Somoza's Liberal Party and the National Guard, in the period preceding July 1979. While in contrast the FSLN closed its ranks, and was the only united group in the anti-Somoza coalition.

Finally, in May 1980, an expanded 47-member Council of State was instituted.[10] A majority of the seats went to popular organisations either controlled by or closely associated with the FSLN. A DNC member, Bayordo Arce, was made the presiding officer. Excepting for Alfonso Robelo who quit in protest against the expansion and composition, the other private sector members offered no resistance.

Along with this consolidation of political power, the FSLN also manoeuvred to keep the military under its control. To begin with, the National Guard was replaced by the Popular Sandinista Army (EPS). The DNC instituted its own sub-committees to manage the organisation of the armed forces, which also included police and the security forces.

The DNC thus managed to keep the armed forces under its control through various means. Among them were (i) by appointing a General Staff in July 1979, consisting exclusively of FSLN guerrillas veterans; (ii) the three DNC members on

10. The original plan envisaged 33 members.

the military sub-committee took over key positions in the military high command.[11] After an initial five-month period in which former National Guard members who accepted the change were taken into the EPS, Humberto Ortega took over as Minister of Defence from Larios, as we have mentioned earlier, and Luis Carrion took over as Vice-Minister of Defence.[12]

A close interrelationship existed between the army and the police at every level. For instance, while at the top both the Minister of Defence and Minister of Interior participated in the DNC and its military sub-committees, thereby resulting in a constant exchange of information and coordination of activities, at the lower levels, several important Sandinista veterans held posts in both ministries or in both the military command structure and the police command structure.[13] At the level of operations, EPS soldiers, Sandinista Police and the Sandinista Popular Militias (MPS) frequently took part in joint action, particularly during the first year of the new regime.

The FSLN did not stop at an organisational consolidation. In order to cement its hold, it established political and

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11. Tomas Borge became the Minister of Interior, H.Ortega the Commander in Chief of EPS, and Luis Carrion, the second in command of the EPS.

12. Both however retained their position in the EPS.

13. Two of the members of the General Staff, Eden Pastora and Hugo Torres, were vice-ministers of Interior and Chief of State Security respectively.

cultural sections in all units of the EPS and the Sandinista Police. Political indoctrination of the EPS was viewed as essential to "know whose interests it was protecting and who the enemies of those interests were".[14] According to the FSLN leadership, "...there is no apolitical army in the world. This is a sophism... there are no apolitical armies: every one serves some determinant political purpose. In the case of Nicaragua, the EPS is a popular and Sandinista Army. It is not by accident that we call it as such".[15] In fact, to limit "non-FSLN" influences in the military, US officers of training and assistance were refused during the first year.

In summing up, we may say that three main factors contributed to the FSLN success in consolidating control within the military -- (a) leadership positions were concentrated in the hands of a core group of Sandinista combat veterans to the total exclusion of other elements; (b) the new military was shielded from potentially "non-revolutionary" influences, and (c) the armed forces were indoctrinated by political and cultural activities sponsored by the FSLN, and the direct links the EPS had with the popular classes.[16]

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14. Gorman, n. 1, p. 144.

15. Ibid., p. 144.

16. Not only were offers of US military advisers turned down but also after February 1980, US Embassy officials were prohibited from communicating with EPS members without the prior approval of the Ministry of Defence. The formation and integration of MPS into the defence structure can be cited as an example of the direct links the EPS had with the popular classes.

The FSLN also channeled popular anti-Somoza sentiments and the need for change among the people into a support base for itself. After the revolution two dominant political coalitions existed, the National Patriotic Front (FPN) and the Broad Opposition Front (FAO). The FPN, formed in 1978 to provide political support to the FSLN consisted of seven groups -- the United Peoples' Movement (UPM), the Independent Liberal Party, Los Doce, the Popular Social Christian Party, the Nicaraguan Workers' Central, the Workers' Front, and the Syndicate of Radio Journalists. The FAO included the more traditional parties, and two conservative trade unions.

Though each Front was accorded representation in the new government, the FSLN attempted to organise the popular classes under its own leadership. This undermined the political purpose of the FPN, and it ceased to exist along with the major partner UPM, by end-1979.

The FSLN after the revolution quickly moved with the popular Nicaraguan sentiments prevailing at that time, that of "popular democracy". A Council of Popular Organisation was created to coordinate and support mass mobilisation under the control of the DNC.[17] Of all the popular organisations, the most important were the neighbourhood committees. Formed during the insurrection as civil defence committees, these organisations were converted to Sandinista Defence Committees, (CDS). In a matter of few months, they had spread out into

17. The DNC sub-committees consisted of Henry Ruiz, Carlos Nunez and Victor Torrado. Significantly, the latter two did not assume government position, and exclusively managed the popular mobilisation.

most of the country. The CDS performed several functions important among them being, to explicitly guard against "counter-revolutionary" activity and to keep a watch in their neighbourhoods and report "suspicious" acts. These also helped to enforce minor ordinances and assisted government officials to implement public welfare programmes.

Under the DNC which controlled the mass organisations was the Secretariat for Mass Organisations under which were the July 19 Sandinista Youth, Association of Nicaraguan Women, and Association of Rural Workers.

Thus, in place of an open, hegemonic Sandinista Party that would be in equal importance to the State, the FSLN opted for mass mobilisation directly under the government (or the DNC), thereby making the need for political parties (as intermediates) redundant. Also, by including private sector representative in government while at the same time making sure they did not acquire control of key political institutions, the DNC avoided a premature political polarisation between the conservative-moderates on the one hand and radical-moderates on the other, thereby legitimising the regime.

REAGAN'S RESPONSE

The Reagan administration essentially viewed Nicaragua as a target of Soviet interests in Central America with Cuba as intermediary, a "kind of regional terminal for subversive and revolutionary actions Moscow hopes to promote in

Central America.[18]

Such an evaluation resulted in anti-FSLN postures and actions--a $ 15 million aid approved by Congress under Carter was held back; the sale of US wheat to Nicaragua was prohibited, and Nicaragua was charged with being the principal conduit for the transfer and disposal of arms and ammunitions destined for anti-government rebels in El Salvador.

In June 1981, the official position of the Reagan administration was spelt out. According to this, Cuba was trying to outfit Nicaragua as an advanced base of operations with a large army as an established intelligence apparatus, supported by 600 to 800 Cuban advisers. Armoured personnel carriers, tanks and jet planes were being reportedly delivered to Nicaragua. Efforts continued to supply guerrillas in neighbouring countries with armaments, operational bases and training from Nicaragua.[19]

The Sandinistas had moved closer to Cuba, and there were in early 1981, an estimated 6,000 Cuban advisers in Nicaragua. Most of them worked in the health and education sector. But a section was said to be with the grassroot mass organisations, and in training the new Nicaraguan army which by 1981 had increased to 50,000 troops--the largest in Central America. The Cubans were also reportedly assisting Nicaragua in setting up the latter's intelligence network and internal

18. Luis Maria, "Reagan and Central America", in Martin Diskin, ed., Trouble In Our Backyard: Central America and the US in the 1980s (New York, 1983), p. 50.

19. Ibid., p. 53.

security apparatus.[20]

The objective of Reagan administration's policy in the light of these developments seemed unclear, in one sense. Alternately, it could be viewed as one which had more than one objective. Among the various aims possible were: (i) to destabilise Nicaragua to the point when the FSLN could be ousted by its internal opponents, (ii) to set the stage for direct US intervention, (iii) to intimidate the FSLN in the hope of leading it to alter policies the Reagan administration found objectionable, and (iv) to make a negative example of the Nicaraguan Revolution.[21]

As a consequence, there appeared to be some conflict of ideas within the Reagan administration on whether US national interests required that the FSLN be removed. Differences arose on the question of probable costs such an attempt would entail. An alternative, compromise approach to achieve the same end was resorted to, and the Reagan administration ultimately turned to covert action, resulting in the backing of the various contra groups.

The US administration allotted a special $ 19 million budget towards covert action against Nicaragua in 1981.[22]

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20. James Chace, Endless War: How We Got Involved and What Can Be Done (New York, 1984), p. 68.

21. William M. Leogrande, "US Policy Options in Central America" in Richard R.Fagen and Olga Pellicer, ed., The Future of Central America: Policy Choices for the US and Mexico (California, 1983), p. 106.

22. Maria, n. 18, p. 54.

The activities of former National Guard soldiers were closely coordinated with those of the regular soldiers of the Honduran army. Tensions increased along the Nicaraguan-Honduran border as a result of numerous incursions from Honduras into Nicaraguan territory. On his 1982 visit to Central America, president Reagan assured the Honduran president Roberto Suazo Cordova that US military aid would be intensified in necessary.[23]

In November 1981, the Reagan administration authorised the CIA to initially recruit and train 500 Nicaraguan exiles to harass the Nicaraguan government. The CIA operation, based in Honduras, soon became an open secret through newspaper, magazines and television accounts. By 1982, the "covert war" had turned into a full-scale war involving several thousand members of the various contra groups. By mid-1983, contra units were launching air and naval attacks that damaged major Nicaraguan oil storage facilities.

At the same time, the United States constructed a vast military structure in Honduras that could sustain US troops in a contingency. This included building new airfields and improving old ones totalling eight and also two radar stations in addition to an ammunition depot and an aeroplane hangar. Continuous US military exercises were staged in the region.[24]

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23. Ibid., p. 54.

24. Edward M.Kennedy, "Is the Reagan Administration Policy Towards Nicaragua Sound?", Congressional Digest, vol. 63, no. 11, November 1984, p. 269, 270.

There were various instances of direct US involvement in the hostilities. In early 1984, US personnel directed a sabotage raid against the Nicaraguan port of Corinto, destroying 3.2 million gallons of fuel and forcing the townspeople to evacuate. Soon after, in the case of mining of Nicaragua's harbours, US personnel operated a ship called "Mothership" in the Pacific Ocean from which the mining activities were supervised and directed. During the same period, US personnel directed two airstrikes against Nicaragua.

Concern in the US Congress mounted as fighting escalated. By 1984, Reagan came under increasing pressure to take a more open flexible view of the Nicaraguan situation. To assuage his detractors, the Reagan administration in July 1983 set up the 12-member National Bipartisan Commission on Central America headed by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and made up of leading members of the political, business and academic communities in the United States.

Though the Commission viewed Nicaragua as an extension of Soviet Union and Cuban power it did not rule out the possibility of negotiation with the FSLN to bring about peace in the region.[25]

The Commission placed at stake the "credibility" of the US as regards the possible outcome of its handling the Nicaraguan situation to its advantage. If the US were to ignore Nicaragua or left it to its own, then according to the

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25. Chace, no. 20, p. 81.

report, it would seem as if the US lacked the power to control its own sphere of influence. This, in a way, reflected Reagan's view when he said: "If we cannot defend ourselves there (in Central America), we cannot expect to prevail elsewhere. Our credibility would collapse, our alliance would crumble..."[26]

Generally the Commission endorsed the thrust of Reagan's policies, saying there was a "real and acute crisis" in Central America, and that the US should "act to meet it, and act boldly." It also indirectly backed Reagan's covert aid to the contras. Though the Commission did not recommend using US military forces to fight in Central America, it observed that the US should leave that option open against the Nicaraguan government as a "last resort" if it refused to stop supporting guerrilla movements in other countries.[27]

The Reagan administration was challenged constantly by the Congress on the matter of funding the contras. Initially, the Congress approved Reagan's request when the US backing of the contras was portrayed as a limited tactic to block Nicaragua's arms supplies to leftist guerrillas in El Salvador. When it was later revealed that the Reagan administration was using the contras to overthrow the FSLN, the Congress backed out from sanctioning further aid.

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26. Ibid., p. 81.

27. Editors of Congressional Quarterly, US Foreign Policy: The Reagan Imprint (Washington, D.C., 1986), p. 63.

From 1981 through to 1985, the Democrats in the House of Representatives opposed the president on fund appropriation for "covert" aid to the contras, while a majority in the Senate supported Reagan.

In 1982, the Democrats in the House moved the "Boland" amendment to a defence appropriations bill prohibiting CIA operations aimed specifically at overthrowing the FSLN government in Nicaragua. In mid-1983 the Democrats renewed their attack on the aid to the contras, saying that the administration was violating the Boland Amendment. Four attempts were made in vain by the Democrats in 1983 and 1984 to end aid to the contras.

In April 1983, addressing the Congress, Reagan said the US did not seek the overthrow of the FSLN government. "Our interest is to ensure that it does not infect its neighbours through the export of subversion and violence", and assured that "there was no thought of sending US combat troops to Central America, they are not needed."[28] The administration further argued that cutting off aid to the contras would reduce the chances of making "Nicaragua agree to a reciprocal and verifiable agreement to mutually end assistance to guerrilla forces in the region."

The US in an attempt to prevent a total ban on aid to the contras developed the concept of "symmetry" which said that the US would stop supporting the contras if the FSLN stopped aiding leftist guerrillas elsewhere in Central America,

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28. Ibid., p. 70.

particularly in El Salvador. But the amendment failed to pass the House.

With the Democrats continually attempting to block the moves of the Reagan administration, a compromise was reached for aid to the contras for 1984, according to which the administration would spend a maximum of $ 24 million for covert aid for that year, but the president would have to return to Congress for more funds if he wanted to continue the aid for 1985.

Meanwhile, however there had been no let-up in the fighting and the contras grew in strength and correspondingly the attacks on Nicaraguan territory increased. At this point it became clear that the United Stated administration had foreclosed three choices other than the policy of "covert" war it was following. The choices were (i) it could accept the Sandinista revolution, however unpleasant it might be and use strategies with a view to containing the revolution, (ii) it could isolate Nicaragua, or (iii) it could directly intervene and overthrow the regime.[29]

In early 1984, the president asked Congress for an additional $ 27 million aid for 1985. The news broke out about the CIA's direct involvement in the mining of Nicaragua's harbours.[30] For the first time, a significant section of the Republicans opposed the Reagan administration's policies, and Reagan's request was rejected both by the House and the Senate

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29. Viran P.Vaky, "Positive Containment in Nicaragua", Foreign Policy (Washington D.C.), no. 68, Fall 1987, p. 58.

30. Wall Street Journal, 6 April 1984.

in April 1985. Soon after, Daniel Ortega who had in the November 1984 polls been elected Nicaraguan president visited the Soviet Union for aid following this, the US House and Senate did a complete turnabout and sanctioned $ 27 million in non-military aid to the contras. The funds were made available through to March 1986. The Reagan administration's constant refrain to justify the covert war against the FSLN government was the argument that communism was making inroads into Central America through Nicaragua. It began at a feverish pitch in early 1981 with Secretary of State Alexander M.Haig making clear the administration's view of events in Nicaragua. The Secretary at this time authored a White Paper on Central America which sought to demonstrate the international flow of weapons into Central America at the behest of the Soviet Union and Cuba. In March, in a testimony before the Senate's foreign relations committee, he stated "the Soviets and Cuba had a 'hit list' for Central America -- Nicaragua being the first already accomplished, El Salvador the second, and in course of time, Honduras, Guatemala, and even Mexico."[31]

Those who, in general, opposed Reagan's postures towards Nicaragua and in particular, aid to the contras were portrayed by the administration as being "soft" on communism, and lacking in resolve to help the cause of democracy.[32]

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31. New York Times, 19 March 1981.
32. Quarterly, n. 27, p. 14.

As regards the covert war the administration never intended that the contras dislodge the FSLN in an open military confrontation. On the other hand, it intended to apply pressure on Nicaragua through a constant war-like situation. In such a situation, the resources of Nicaragua already low in the aftermath of the revolution would have to be diverted to meet the contra challenge. This in effect meant that Nicaragua's economy would be severely hit, and the FSLN government would be the butt of disaffection amongst the Nicaraguans. In a condition of severe internal economic crisis, this would reach a pitch enough to destabilise, if not, dislodge the FSLN government. Seizing the opportunity the US would attempt to promote the government it preferred.

To a significant extent, such a prognostication on the part of the Reagan administration remained on paper. The attacks and incursions into Nicaraguan territory by the contras which began by the end-1981 reached a peak by mid-1984, and until mid-1985 kept up the frequency of attacks when the Nicaraguan army militarily inflicted heavy defeats on the contras. Notwithstanding this, Reagan's strategy with regard to the contra war forced the FSLN government into conciliatory positions like the holding of elections in November 1984 and agreeing for peace talks with the contras, but as had been intended, could not dislodge the FSLN government.

CHAPTER III

EVOLUTION AND ACTIVITIES OF CONTRAS*

The evolution of the contras into organised groups was closely linked to US postures towards Nicaragua under Reagan administration. In the preceding Chapters attempt was made to show that there was hardly any departure or change in US policy between the Carter and the Reagan administrations. What perhaps underwent a change was the US strategy in respect of destabilising the Sandinista regime. As has been mentioned in the earlier Chapter the Republican administration gave a new twist to the developments in Nicaragua suggesting thereby that the increasing influence of Soviet Union and Cuba in that country posed security threat to the entire region of Central America and, that it was imperative for United States to stem the high tide "communist" expansionism before long. It is on this premise the US administration adopted a policy of supporting contras with military and economic assistance. An attempt is made in this Chapter to discuss at length the antecedants of the contras and analyse the contra war the US waged since 1982 against the Sandinistas.

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* The acronym "contra", meaning "counter-revolutionary" in Spanish was coined by the Sandinistas. Throughout this dissertation, however, the word contra is not used in the narrow sense but to identify all those Nicaraguans based outside the country who oppose the FSLN and seek to overthrow it through military means.

Section 1 of the Chapter will examine the origins and constituents of the various contra groups, while Section 2 will dwell in some detail on the manner of recruitment, training and acts of subversion undertaken by the contras and the role US played in these activities. The concluding Section 3 describes at some length the strategy behind the contra war.

ORIGINS AND CONSTITUENTS

In the aftermath of the Nicaraguan revolution in 1979, those sections that were close to the Somoza dynasty including ex-soldiers and officers of the National Guard went into exile. While some went to Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, the others sought shelter in Florida. During the time Carter was in power, that is till 1981 the Nicaraguans-in-exile had formed motley groups and plotted the overthrow of the Sandinistas without actually going about it in any organised manner. The exiles were initially drawn from former officers and troops of Somoza's National Guard and from pro-Somoza businessmen.

With the election of Ronald Reagan as US president the situation however changed. His policies and approach to the Nicaraguan revolution translated themselves into sympathy and support for the exiles, who were made part of Reagan's "covert war" strategy to restore Nicaragua to a pre-1979 position, at least with regard to the US.

Amongst the first groups that received the material and moral support from the US was the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN). The FDN began by bringing together different groups of National Guardsmen who had been dispersed in exile after the 1979 revolution. While some had been trying to carry on fighting on the Nicaraguan-Honduran border, others took odd jobs or worked as hired gunmen in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. A few others moved to Florida.[1]

A particular group of about 20 junior National Guard officers who had been part of a US-trained elite battalion met with a group of Cuban exiles where they took an oath of loyalty with blood rites, and proclaimed themselves bound by the "devotion to the cause of anti-communism and to overthrowing the Sandinistas."

Another group, the Revolutionary Nicaraguan Front (FRENICA), comprising about 45 officers under Fransisco Uraiyo Maliano was based in Guatemala. Maliano had succeeded Somoza as president of Nicaragua for 42 hours.

The defence attache of Nicaragua to the US in the last years of Somoza's rule, Col. Enrique Bermudez, began to organise this and other groups of guardsmen into the September 15 Legion, named after the date of Central America's independence from Spain in 1821.

The Legion's headquarters were moved from Florida to Guatemala. During this period, Bermudez struck a deal with

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1. R. S. Leiken, "The Battle for Nicaragua", New York Review of Books (New York, N.Y.), vol. 33, no. 4, 13 March 1986, p. 46.

the Argentine military dictatorship. A section of the Legion went to Argentina, and received training in the use of arms and techniques of interrogation. The Argentine government later sent its army officers to Honduras to train the Legion.

The consolidation of power by the Sandinistas also gave rise to another stream of dissidents who left the country to organise armed groups to overthrow the Sandinistas. One such group was the Nicaraguan Democratic Revolutionary Alliance (ADREN). Its founder was Jose Francisco Cardenal ("Chicano"). In 1978, Cardenal was a leader of the strike organised by businessmen against Somoza. After the Sandinistas expanded and reorganised the Council of State in May 1980, Cardenal who was its vice-president left Nicaragua, and formed the ADREN. For a short while, the ADREN allied with the Legion, the first in a series of attempts to amalgamate anti-Sandinista groups with the Legion.[2]

Another veteran anti-Somoza fighter, Fernando Chamorro 'El Negro', left Nicaragua in 1981 and established the Nicaraguan Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARN), which had some popular support in Managua and in the central departments of Chontales and Boaco.

In October 1980, the ADREN leadership expanded with the addition of Edgar Chamorro, Mariano Mendaza, and Mariano Martinez, and called itself the Nicaraguan Democratic Union(UDN).

A year later, in October 1981, a section of the UDN comprising 100 members and the Legion with 75 members united

2. Ibid., p. 47.

to form the FDN (Nicaraguan Democratic Force). In November 1981 the Reagan administration authorised Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) funding for the FDN.[3]

Soon, the FDN moved its base from Guatemala to Honduras. The CIA provided training in sabotage and supplies. By August 1983, the contras had become a major military force based in the Honduran camps. According to a Congressional report, 46 of the 48 positions in the FDN command structure were held by former Guardsmen.[4]

Personalist armies or more often pseudo-armies also mushroomed until 1985, with each self-appointed "leader" establishing his own "movement". Thus, a "Nicaraguan Liberation Movement" under Roberto Ponce Torres was proclaimed in Tegucigalpa in June 1984, claiming 2,500 fighters, a "Third Way Movement" (M-3), under self-styled "commander" Sebastian Gonzalez claimed to have started operations on 1 November 1983.[5]

The final consolidation of the FSLN in 1981 led to another wave of leaders who left Nicaragua. A significant aspect of this wave was that there were many among them who were Sandinista fighters and a few among them had also occupied top positions in the FSLN leadership. The most important of these was Eden Pastora. He went into exile in 1981 in protest against

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3. Ibid., p. 47.

4. William Robinson. I and Kent Norsworthy, "The Strategy of Counter-Revolution", Monthly Review (New York, NY), vol. 37, no. 7, December 1985, p. 12.

5. Michael S. Radu, "The Origins and Evolution of the Nicaraguan Insurgencies", Orbis (Philadelphia), vol. 29, no. 4, Winter 1986, p. 829.

what he called "cubanisation" of the Nicaraguan revolution. Pastora accused the Sandinista National Directorate (DNC) of treason, and denounced its "betrayal of the revolution" because of their "Marxist-Leninist" ideology and due to the permission given to Cuban and Soviet-bloc personnel to play a dominant role in the revolution.[6]

Pastora was famous for his leadership during the FSLN raid on the National Palace in 1978, and later for his command of the FSLN southern front in the revolution. Pastora left, along with his chief associates — Carlos Caronel and Leonel Poveda. It was a major break in FSLN unity, though later, Pastora's group attempted to negotiate with the FSLN on several occasions.

The third broad grouping amongst the contras were made up by the Indians on the Atlantic coast. The Indian groups were the MISURA (Unity of the Miskito Sumo and Rama) and MISURASATA (Unity of the Miskito Sumo Rama and Sandinista).

The Atlantic coast has been the traditional homeland of the Miskito, Suma and Rama Amerindians. It formed part of the British Protectorate in the 18th and 19th centuries. Later, the creoles and the negroes from Africa and the Caribbeans migrated to the region. Historically and culturally, the Atlantic coast population, about 1,60,000 a majority of them Miskito, and about 70,000 black creoles had been isolated from the rest of the country. They spoke

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6. Michael S. Radu, "The Nature of the Insurgency" in Mark Falcoff and others, The Continuing Crisis: US Policy in Central America And the Caribbean (Maryland, 1987), p. 421.

English and Indian languages rather than Spanish, were Protestant (mostly Moravian), rather than Catholic. The Atlantic region was also geographically isolated as well, with only one road linking the Pacific with the port of Bluefields, and economically oriented towards the Caribbean rather than toward the rest of the country.

In 1860, the British renounced claims to the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast. An autonomous, self-governing Miskito kingdom under Nicaraguan jurisdiction was established. Repeated attempts were made by the Nicaraguans to take over the Miskito kingdom, and finally in 1894, the Miskito king was deposed by General Rigoberto Cabezas. The Amerindians were forced to ally themselves with Nicaragua. Their kingdom was renamed Zelaya. However, the Amerindians' longing for freedom remained.[7]

The ALPROMISU (Alliance For Progress of the Miskito and Sumo People) was founded in 1973. With the revolution in 1979, the old directors of ALPROMISU went in exile, and it was taken over by a small group of Miskito students educated at the National University in Managua. In the political atmosphere prevailing in the days succeeding the revolution, several of the new Miskito leaders were temporarily arrested for fomenting a separatist movement. Soon after, the Sandinistas negotiated with the Indian leaders to dissolve the ALPROMISU, and formed the MISURASATA (the unity of the

7. Philippe Bourgois, "The Problematic of Nicaragua's Indigenous Minorities", in Thomas W. Walker, ed., Nicaragua in Revolution (New York, 1982), pp. 303 ff.

Miskito, Sumo, Rama and Sandinistas). The Ramas who had been formerly excluded from ALPROMISU were included in the new organisation. At this point MISURASATA was officially with the Sandinistas. It grew into the singlemost powerful force on the Atlantic Coast.[8]

The FSLN attempted to initiate radical change on the Atlantic coast. The traditional council of elders and various social and religious practices were undermined and community lands were nationalised. The Sandinista Defence Committees were formed, Cuban teachers came over as part of the literacy campaign and the local Moravian church was sought to be replaced by the Sandinista-backed popular church. In addition, the Popular Sandinista Army (EPS) maintained a significant presence in the region.

All this provoked opposition, and by October 1980 it turned sporadically violent. Earlier, in March 1980, the Indians who were opposed to FSLN's policies in the region moved into exile into Honduras. Among them were Fagoth Miller who had been arrested earlier and released. He formed the MISURA (MISURASATA, without the Sandinista tag to it). Another leader, Brooklyn Rivera went to Costa Rica, started his own faction of MISURASATA.[9]

The MISURA allied with FDN in Honduras, while the MISURASATA allied with Eden Pastora in Costa Rica. Subsequently, in August 1985, Fagoth whose brutality and abuse towards civilians embarrassed some of his own supporters,

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8. Ibid., p. 313.
9. Radu, n. 6, p. 421.

was expelled from MISURA.[10] The FDN engineered the formation of a new Miskito organisation called Kisan.

In September 1982, Robelo's Nicaraguan Democratic Movement (MDN), at that point an important non-marxist party within Nicaragua, Rivera's MISURASATA, Fernando Chamorro's Nicaraguan Democratic Union - Nicaraguan Revolutionary Armed Forces (UDN-FARN), and Pastora's Sandinista Revolutionary Front (FRS) proclaimed the formation of the Democratic Revolutionary Front (ARDE). The ARDE initially, sought to negotiate with the FSLN on restoring civil liberties, as dispensing with Cuban advisers, and following a non-aligned foreign policy.

In April 1983, Pastora's forces numbered more than a 1,000 men, including several hundred former Sandinista soldiers. A section of the FDN under Cardenal unsuccessfully sought out Pastora to form a united group of FDN, ARDE and UDN.

During 1982 and 1983, the Sandinistas' conflict with the Church, the trade unions, peasants and Indians, together with the resentment caused due to the compulsory army draft, increased the number of contra recruits steeply. The FDN benefited the most from Nicaragua's internal problems. With its well-equipped and organised camps in Honduras, it was able to absorb new recruits more effectively. The FDN grew from 600 in 1982 to between 4,000-5,000 in March 1983 to 12,000 in early 1985 (not including several thousand unequipped combatants).[11]

10. Leiken, n. 1, p. 46.
11. Ibid., p. 48.

Pastora's ARDE had 6,000 members in early 1984, many of them unarmed. However, at the end of 1984, a rift resulted in ARDE with Robelo and Fernando (FARN) joining the FDN, while Pastora established his own politico-military group, the Southern Opposition Bloc (BOS).

The constituents of BOS were: Unity of Nicaraguan Professionals in Exile, Association of Professionals in Exile, the Christian Workers' Solidarity and the Nicaraguan National Rescue and Conciliation Movement.[12]

By the end of 1985, with continuous EPS pressure on ARDE, Pastora's fighters numbered less than 1,000 and his field commanders actively cooperated with the FDN forces on the field. FDN was also recruiting entire ARDE units from the south.

SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES

At the outset, the Nicaraguan exiles who were scattered in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Florida were mainly National Guardsmen or small groups that directly benefited from Somoza's role.

In late 1980, when these groups were organising themselves, particularly of those in Florida, it was complemented by the setting up of training camps that was headed by Colonel Enrique Bermudez, an ex-Guardsmen.

Various factors helped in the recruitment moves. For one, many experienced economic and family hardships in new

12. Radu, n. 5, p. 834.

jobs, such as security personnel in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras; a few suffered from isolation; and others felt the desire to return home and regain their lost property and lifetime savings.[13]

A major section of the contras was recruited from among the peasantry of the north and north-west, in the departments of Nueva Segovia, Madriz, Estelia, Jinotega, Chinandega and Matagalpa.[14] The leadership of the contras was in the hands of former National Guard officers, elite anti-insurgency troops and some regular troops.

The precise categorisation of those who form the contra force and the method of recruitment are unclear. The Sandinistas claim that all contra insurgents are either hardcore "CIA mercenaries" and "Somocista criminals" or people who are part of a minority religious sect. According to them, the contras use different methods in recruitment, such as involving kidnapped peasants in their activities. They recruited teenaged children. However, the Sandinista leadership acknowledged that there were also elements who willingly helped the contras, particularly farmers who responded positively to "counter-revolutionary" propaganda.[15]

A section of the leadership was notorious for its atrocities, and for its attitude towards people who were

13. Radu, n. 5, p. 826.
14. Radu, n. 6, p. 412.
15. Ibid., p. 413.

uncooperative and sympathetic to the FSLN. Atleast three important leaders of the FDN -- Emilio Echaverry, Edgar Antonio Hernandez and Pedro Pablo Ortiz Centeno were shot for either atrocities against their own troops and civilians or for rebellion and theft. Amongst the contra cadres, while some reflected the attitude of the leadership there were others with motivation, and who received no monetary payment except support to their families. Women too formed a sizeable section of the cadre.

The character of the contras in the southern border was different. Most importantly, Pastora's ARDE was mainly formed by former anti-Somoza activists. Robelo's MDN included many students. The southern front was the direct result of the consolidation of the Sandinistas. Many of the cadres had joined Pastora echoing the reason given by him for forming an anti-Sandinista group. By end-1983, there were 500 fighters and in a year had grown to nearly 3,000.

The Indians from the Atlantic coast made up a large number of the contra cadre. Their recruitment was accomplished easily as a result of the unpopular policies of the FSLN like the forcible relocation of Indians, and the attempt at replacing the traditional structure of the Indian village hierarchy. Many among the Indians who went into exile joined the contra forces.

The US administration helped in training the September 15 Legion initially in camps in Florida, and later the FDN in Honduras. The US was helped in training by the Argentine armed forces until the breakout of the Falklands war in 1982.

Cuban exiles too had a hand in the training.

The FDN forces were mainly trained in Honduras. Once the Argentines withdrew, the Honduran army actively collaborated with the US army in training the contra forces. These were supplemented by a show of military might, like for instance the US-Honduran joint military and naval exercises including "Big Pine II" in late 1982, involving a total of 15,000 US troops including the navy and airforce and lasting seven months.

The United States too maintained a significant presence in Honduras, with aim of training the contra forces. There were in all, 15 camps in Honduras where the contras were trained.

According to the Nicaraguan government, a precise breakup of the US forces early 1984 which has not been denied by the latter were as follows:[16]

— 150 men of the Special Green Beret Forces Battalion in charge of training contras and classical infantry among Honduras and Salvadorans in a special military centre in Puerto Castillas.

— 150 men of the Tactical Air Command in charge of a Radar station.

— 100 men of the Special Combat Group from the Virgina naval base.

— 600 from the 96th Engineering Battalion from North Carolina and 900 men from 43 support groups to help prepare the Granadero-I manoeuvres.

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16. Provisional Verbatim Records of Security Council, (New York), S/PV No. 2525, 30 March 1984, pp. 8-9.

-- 50 men from the Rapid Deployment Force in control of the joint Honduran-US military exercises.

-- 480 men from the 101st Aviation Battalion to support Granadero-I manoeuvres

-- 134 agents from the CIA to advice and direct the contras

-- 300 men from the 224th Military Intelligence Battalion

In late 1983, the CIA-backed contras numbered an estimated 10,000 men. The Department of Defence extended assistance to the Honduran army, thereby making its airstrip the best in Central America. It also built additional airstrips and naval facilities to make it easier for the US to bring in its own forces. In August 1983 US army, marine and airforce units began to prepare for a six-month long training manoeuvre with Honduran forces, included 5,700 US combat troops, while two carrier task groups took up patrolling positions off Nicaragua's Atlantic and Pacific coast.[17]

In October 1983, a CIA manual "Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare" meant for the contras was made public. It instructed the contras on the methods of assassination. According to it: "It was possible to neutralise carefully selected and planned targets, such as court judges, police and state security officials".[18] It explicitly recommended the contras to "kidnap all officials of the FSLN Government and replace them".[19]

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17. Richard H.Ullman, "At War With Nicaragua", Foreign Affairs, (New York), vol. 62, no. 1, Fall 1983, p. 40.

18. Edward Boorstein, "Logic of Aggression in Nicaragua", Political Affairs (New York), December 1984, pp. 20-22

19. Aryeh Neier, "The US and the Contras", New York Review of Books, vol. 33, no. 6, 10 April 1986, p. 3.

It advised the contras to "extensively" explain "why it was necessary for the good of the people". Finally, the manual delineated the objectives of contra activities. It said: "When infiltration and internal subjective control have developed in a manner parallel to other guerrilla activities, a commandante of ours will literally be able shake up the Sandinista structure and replace it".[20]

The contras attacked sporadically. Hit and run tactics, ambushing army convoys and firing into villages were some of the ways of attack. The civilian toll was high and anyone linked to the government in any way automatically became a target.[21] The contras tried to disrupt economic activities like coffee-harvesting. Initially, the FDN conducted a number of attacks consisting mainly of sabotage operations, like, for instance the demolition of an aircraft and detonating a bomb at the international airport in Managua, and the demolition of two bridges on the Nicaraguan-Honduran border.

In end-1982, attempts were made to instal settlements in the Atlantic coast at Jinotega and Zelaya Norte. Most of the FDN forces were concentrated in the Honduran border along the Jalapa and Puerto Cabezas area.

In April 1983, there were 12 naval acts of aggression, two of them by US frigates -- FF-1072 "Blaquelly" and FF - 6 "Julius Furer" --, 17 armed incursions including 13 attacks on border posts where some 1,200 FDN men were estimated to

20. Boorstein, n. 18, p. 23.

21. Aryeh Neier, "Contra Contradictions", New York Review of Books, vol. 34, no. 6, 9 April 1987, p. 5.

have been involved in them.[22]

The fighting reached a peak in 1984, with the FDN and the ARDE complemented by the Indian force in the Atlantic making frequent attacks on Nicaraguan territory. This was the period when the contras had their best successes in the regions of Boaco, Chontales, Nueva Guinea and in South Zelaya. The Jorge Salazar command of the FDN estimated to have between 600-1,000 combatants was in fact said to be operating from within Nicaraguan territory for an extended period of time.[23]

In 1984, for the first time warplanes were used by the contras, in addition to US radio-electronic and surveillance aircrafts which were by this time making innumerable reconnoissance flights over Nicaragua from Honduras. In February two batches of warplanes attacked a military unit of the EPS and a civil command centre alongwith military installations in Chinandega.

This was complemented by an attack on Nicaragua's ports of La Tablaza and San Jose. In a series of attacks during this period, the contras sabotaged a local electric power station and the frontier posts in Chinandega and Sandinista army units in Somotillo. The use of T-28 aircraft and high-speed Pirana speedboat, as well as the mining of the harbour added to the advantage of the contras.

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22. Provisional Verbatim Records of Security Council, S/PV No. 2431, 9 May 1983, p. 11.

23. Neier, n. 21, p. 5.

The activities of the ARDE, after an initial attempt to supplement the FDN forays in the north did not take off in a similar fashion. Pastora's distrust of his subordinates as potential rivals for power made him break with all his associates including Rivera, Robelo and Caronel.[24]

Thus, between January 1983 and mid-1984, though Pastora received as much as $ 6,50,000 from the CIA, together with airdrops of arms and ammunition, the ARDE was unable to carry out effective attacks.

The contra force seemed to be succeeding in its objectives of disrupting the Nicaraguan economy, maintaining a war-like situation and providing the necessary conditions for a possible overthrow of the FSLN. At this point, the FDN was receiving constant military supplies other than the US, from Taiwan, Guatemala and El Salvador. The contras in general had grown in number -- there were 20,000 active armed insurgents, with the FDN making up 12,000 of these.

Though the contras were unable to hold any territory against the Sandinista artillery and aerial attacks, its units were able to move through Nicaragua's mountainous parts, particularly along the borders.

The situation did not continue for long. The revelation in April 1984 of the mining of Nicaragua's harbours, and the CIA involvement in it resulted in a cut-off in US aid to the contras. This caused serious supply and intelligence problems for the FDN. The Congressional pressure in the US continued

24. Leiken, n. 1, p. 48.

through the year compounding the problem for the contras to sustain the attacks. ARDE turned to Cuban exiles for aid.

Finally, in 1985, the military initiative swung in favour of the Nicaraguan government. The FSLN flew in troops to counter the contras. The EPS had by then altered its size, tactics, organisation and equipment significantly to repel the contras with increasing speed and force. The arrival of helicopter gunships and transport copters from the Soviet Union tipped the military balance overwhelmingly in favour of the Sandinistas. The FSLN used these copters to rapidly bring in troops drafted in other regions, and attacked the contras by air. The Nicaraguan government also converted a number of areas in the north and east into free-fire zones by removing existing habitation.

Simultaneously, the resources of the contras were dwindling, compounding their difficulty. Lacking air defence weapons as well as fuel, ammunition and air supply, the contras withdrew. The lack of sufficient training to transform the contras from an unprofessional medley into an effective fighting force let them down at a crucial juncture.

The November 1984 elections in Nicaragua also played an important role in reversing the contras' fortunes. The Sandinista government realising its mistaken policies towards the Indians on the Atlantic Coast backtracked and declared a general amnesty for the Indians who wished to return to Nicaragua from exile, as part of a move to grant autonomy to the Indians. This resulted in a severe depletion of contra forces on the Atlantic Coast as large section of

the Indians accepted the Sandinista offer.

There is a view that the CIA may never have believed that a contra victory was possible in the first place.[25] It may have only wanted to bleed Nicaragua as an object lesson to the Sandinistas. Both the contra leadership and their CIA sponsors in this view, may never have believed that the contras themselves would take over Nicaragua, but create conditions for US troops to move in.

According to General Paul S.Gorman, Chief of the US South Command in Panama, the contras had not undertaken the time-consuming and patient political effort that was a prerequisite to win solid civilian backing. The contras, according to him, lacked "the ability to move at will in the society", one of the reason for this being the method of killing suspected civilian informers, thereby gaining a reputation that made it all the more difficult for it to get the ability to move at will.[26]

CONTRA WAR STRATEGY

The two preceding sections made a brief sketch of the antecedents of the counter-revolutionary groups evolved over a period of time both inside Nicaragua and elsewhere, and the covert role US had played in galvanising the different units of the contras for the sake of mounting a concerted struggle against the Sandinistas. In this concluding Section

25. Neier, n. 21, p.6
26. Ibid., p. 6

of the Chapter an attempt is made to analyse the evolving strategy of the US in the deployment of the contras for its desired goals and objectives. In the immediate aftermath of the Sandinistas coming to power, the anti-Sandinistas and other related disaffected elements left the country as exiles or refugees. While there numbers were not large, the US provided for their asylum in either the neighbouring countries such as Honduras or Costa Rica or, in the US itself.

With Reagan administration's initial resolve to dislodge the FSLN government by means of a quick military victory, the strategy that was conceived by Washington was one of covert military intervention involving the contras as the vanguard--a strategy which in many respects was similar to the ones that were adopted in Guatemala in 1954 or in Cuba in 1961. Over time, such a limited and conventionally framed moves to halt and prevent the consolidation of the Sandinista government proved hopelessly inadequate and to some extent, even counter-productive. In fact, the very strategy of "drawing the line" against revolutionary forces in Nicaragua once became evident with the publication of the White Paper on Central America authored by then Secretary of State Alexander Haig, public opinion both in the US and abroad turned critical against the Reagan administration. At home, opposition groups from Church and human rights organisations was growing, crystallizing around such issues as possible involvement of US combat troops. Before long, Reagan became increasingly aware of the full scope and stakes of an international conflict arising out of his decision to militarily intervene in Nicaragua.

It was in these circumstances a full-scale review of policy goals brought a major shake-up of US officials in charge. The most important being the removal of the Secretary of State himself along with his deputy Thomas O. Enders in charge of Inter-American affairs. It is in the wake of these developments, a subtle but significant shift in strategy towards Nicaragua also came about. The shift obliged the Reagan administration to make major changes in the conduct of its war effort on ground. One of the most crucial was the decision to vastly expand the scope and duration of US military manoeuvres in and around Honduras permitting nearly a permanent US presence in the region. Earlier beginning in 1981 regularly scheduled routine manoeuvres had been held in the Caribbean region involving conventional naval exercises and simulated combat operations. But since 1983, there was a shift featuring co-operation between US and Honduran ground forces. Also, these manoeuvres were continuous and their scope broadened with US troops and National Guard units arriving in Honduras directly from US bases and the contra units on Honduran-Nicaraguan borders participating in the joint exercises. Alongside, permanent military facilities were constructed on the Nicaraguan border and large-scale humanitarian and civilian relief projects were launched. These were, in effect, efforts on the part of the US to provide additional arms and training to the contras. What was behind all these moves was as in the words of Majors Donald Morelli and Michael Ferguson of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command:

"Total preparation of the conflict area is the basis for the low-intensity campaign. The effort involves the employment of military assets...and employment of teams on...country-specific basis."[26]

The objective was one of causing the revolution to crumble internally through the combined pressure of the manoeuvres, the largely expanded contra war and the political and diplomatic siege. In other words, Washington's plan was not one of full-scale invasion but neutralising the Sandinistas through the flexible application of low-intensity conflict(LIC) elements which included assaults simultaneously at different levels -- economic, political, military and psychological and to meet the challenge created by any single offensive, the Sandinistas would have to divert their attention from another. If the offensive were to be simultaneous and combined, Nicaragua would have to resist on all fronts.

The overall goal was to make the Sandinistas believe that the "worst case of scenario" of war with US was also the most probable and plan their counter-strategy accordingly. The threat was one the Sandinistas could ill-afford to ignore. That, reacting to it might only wear them down more rapidly by diverting their limited resources to preparing for an invasion that did not happen.

The basic objective of the strategy was to gain advantage in three major areas -- in the economic sphere, it

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26. "Low Intensity Conflict: An Operational Perspective", Military Review (Washington D.C.), November 1984, p. 11.

would force Nicaragua to devote its resources increasingly to defence; in the military sphere, engage the Sandinistas in a conventional buildup of their armed forces, and in the political sphere, it would lock Nicaragua into a regional diplomatic framework controlled by the US.

By forcing Sandinistas to divert increasingly their resources into defence would, in turn, exacerbate social tensions, eroding popular support for the revolution. In the aftermath of the revolution given the high inflation and acute shortage of essentials, US wanted to exploit the consequences with contra campaigning and propaganda that the Sandinista revolution has nothing to offer except hunger and reduced wages. At the same time each of the promised efforts not fulfilled would only reflect the failure of the regime. In fact, the social and economic crisis following the advent of Sandinistas to power made it harder for the regime's grassroot political organisations grow and serve their communities. The programmes of these communities were further threatened by the war's unending drain on resources. Consequent domestic discontent had its reverberations abroad and cost Nicaragua valuable support in the international community.

Forcing Nicaragua to organise a large conventional army was intended to aggravate the economic offensive already underway with cut off of US trade and aid, blocking of multilateral development loans and direct CIA sabotage of economic targets. Purchasing sophisticated conventional defence systems against a possible invasion would have

limited resources for the simpler weapons that military needed to defend their villages against irregular attacks. The aim was not to seek military solution in Nicaragua through the defeat of the Sandinista Peoples' Army (EPS). Instead, US hoped to shape the nature of Nicaragua's defensive responses and then turn it into a weapon against the revolution. A general draft, the purchase of heavy weapons systems, it was hoped, will leave the Sandinistas unprepared to fight the contras with their most effective tool — small popularly-based militia. The more the EPS could be forced to behave like a conventional army, the LIC theory underlined, the more successful a contra insurgency could be on ground. Against an unconventional guerrilla force like the contras, heavy artilleries and tanks were worse than useless. The primary goal of the military manoeuvres then was less offensive preparation than a ploy to fix the EPS into an untenable posture. The secondary purpose was to raise the social and economic costs of Nicaragua's defensive measures. At the same time, as social conflict would grow out of economic hardships, the Nicaraguans would be obliged to call for an expanded military thereby further narrowing the space for the Sandinistas to fulfil their social programmes. And during these critical times a psychological campaign in the country-side with the message that the Sandinistas are "spending our national treasure on bullets instead of food" mounted by the contras would further accelerate the disenchantment with the revolutionary ruling

junta.[27]

The military manoeuvres through the contra war was also intended to gain diplomatic advantage over the Sandinistas. Reagan administration aimed to gain control of the Contadora regional peace initiative as part of an overall strategy seeking victory and not accomodation. With the backdrop of the military build-up, the Contadora process provided a political framework for fixing Nicaragua into one position of forcing all its energies to stopping an invasion that was never to materialise. Retd. Ltd. Gen Gordon Summer, special adviser to the Secretary of State explained this when he stated:

> I think Mr. Reagan's thrust on this is: we will take this process [Contadora] and shape it to what we want, not what they [Sandinistas] want, and we will keep pressure on them to force them to do this.[28]

In fact, as the Contadora peace process developed, it allowed the expansion of the low-intensity war and denied Nicaragua the right to an effective response. Under the Contadora process, while US offensive was not proscribed, Nicaraguan efforts at self-defence was undermined for, if the latter bought real weapons to fend off the threat, it was shown as violating the Contadora peace initiatives.

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27. See for details Ernest Evans, "Revolutionary Movements in Central America: The Development of a New Strategy" in Howard J. Wiarda, ed., Rift and Revolution: The Central American Imbroglio (Washington D C , 1984) and Sam C. Sarkesian, "Low Intensity Conflict: Concepts, Principles and Policy Guidelines", Air University Review (Washington D C), January-February 1985, pp. 4-10.

28. New York Times, 22 March 1985.

The upshot of all these manoeuvres was that the US never sought the contras to win a straightforward military victory over the Sandinistas. Apart from the fact that the contras themselves were an amorphous agglomeration of different factions among the disaffected Nicaraguans, their military victory was no guarantee to US in reestablishing its influence and pre-eminence in Nicaragua. On the other hand, the role of contras was one of being a tool in the hands of the US to achieve its basic objective of dislodging the Sandinistas. Given that the contras themselves were beset by power struggles from within, internal conflicts and lack of discipline they were intended as a force to destroy rather than to build. That in fact was what the Reagan administration hoped to accomplish through the contra war and thereby prevent the Sandinista revolution from becoming a successful model of independent development.

CHAPTER IV

CONTRA ISSUE IN SECURITY COUNCIL

Frequent contra incursions into the Nicaraguan territory and its attacks on installations within Nicaragua in 1982 had developed a war-like situation. It is in these critical circumstances Nicaragua turned to the United Nations for redress in the hope that world-wide attention and support for it in the international forum would atleast ease the situation. Over a period of four years, from 1982-85, Nicaragua moved the Security Council 12 times, and a vote on its resolutions was taken three times.[1]

To get the issue admitted into the Council for a debate, the Nicaraguans termed the contra war and the US backing as an infringment on its freedom of self-determination. The covert attempts, Nicaragua maintained, violated the basic principles of the United Nations of the fundamental right of nations to exist peacefully, and that the US-backed attacks amounted to aggression.

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1. The 15-member Security Council consisted of five permanent members -- United States, France, Peoples Republic of China, Soviet Union and United Kingdom, and 10 non-permanent members, which included during the period under study, Nicaragua, Poland, Zaire, Togo, Pakistan, Guyana, Zimbabwe, Jordan, Malta and the Netherlands. Normally, the Council directed complaints from Central America to the Organisation of American States (OAS). In this instance, the Council felt there was raison d'etre for a discussion under its auspices. Though the US took the stand that the OAS was the proper forum for Nicaragua to air its views, it did not lobby to block Nicaragua's request for a Security Council discussion. Of the 10 non-permanent members nine in the Council backed Nicaragua's request -- the minimum required for a discussion under its auspices.

In this Chapter, an attempt is made to examine the Security Council debates in the period under study, i.e., 1982-85 with a view to focus on the respective Nicaraguan and United States positions as also the stance taken by various other member-states.

INITIAL DEBATES

The debates began in 1982. They coincided with the increasing tension along Nicaragua's northern and southern borders which had assumed the proportions of a crisis.

In March of the year Nicaragua proposed a resolution restating the principles of the UN Charter prohibiting threats of force and intervention against another nation.[2] In particular, the resolution was intended to appeal to all the countries involved in the Nicaraguan conflict to refrain from direct, indirect, covert or overt use of force against any Central American or Caribbean country. It also appealed to all parties concerned to work for a peaceful solution to the problems in the region.

The Security Council met eight times between 25 March and 2 April to consider Nicaragua's resolution. On 2 April, the US vetoed the resolution. While Nicaragua said the veto confirmed its fears of US "military aggression" in the region, the US said a "proper forum" for the complaint was the OAS. While 12 nations voted in favour of the resolution, two others -- the United Kingdom and Zaire abstained.

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2. New York Times, 23 March 1982.

Nicaragua represented by the Coordinator of the ruling junta Daniel Ortega argued that the US had an history of backing "anti-popular" governments in his country.[3] The US had in recent years been training and arming "counter-revolutionary" forces in the US and Honduras. He charged the US of conducting espionage in Nicaraguan airspace, with the CIA participating in covert actions against Nicaraguan territory.

Ortega assured that Nicaragua was willing to improve relations with the US on the basis of "mutual respect and unconditional recognition of its right to self-determination" and was willing to begin talks with the US government with the aim to achieve definite results. It would reject out of hand any attempt to impose, what he called, humiliating restrictions on its inviolable and sovereign prerogatives regarding national defence.

Nicaragua also took the view that the US failed to take into account the fact that the fundamental problem in Central America did not lie in the "never-proven allegation that arms were reaching the Salvadoran revolutionaries via Nicaragua", while the US was supplying arms to the Salvadoran Army.

Though the US had expressed its willingness to negotiate with Nicaragua, it was not really encouraging "in view of the fact that the aggressive and destabilising actions against Nicaragua undertaken by the US had increased dramatically",

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3. Yearbook of the United Nations, 1982 (New York, NY), vol. 36, 1982, p. 365.

Ortega added.[4]

Ortega further said that the US had to give an explicit undertaking not to attack Nicaragua, and not to initiate any direct, indirect,or covert intervention in Central America.

Nicaragua said while it did not harbour any illusions regarding US acceptance of the Sandinista revolution, it believed that the US would accept, tolerate and eventually understand that the Nicaraguan revolution was not a threat to the US. This proved true for the Carter administration, it said, but Reagan had been elected as candidate for president by the Republican Party on a platform which had deplored the overthrow of Somoza, and had opposed Carter's aid programme to Nicaragua.

In her reply, Jeane K. Kirkpatrick, US representative in the UN emphatically declared that Nicaragua was guilty of the very charges it was accusing US of such actions as large scale intervention into the internal affairs of its neighbours, efforts to overthrow by force the governments of neighbouring states and aggressive actions which disrupted the normal conduct of international relations in the region.[5] The US representative went further and charged Nicaragua of serving as a conduit for an arms trafficking system, under which military supplies were transhipped from Cuba through Nicaragua and were smuggled into Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica and El Salvador with the avowed objective of destabilising the governments of these countries. Cuba and Nicaragua were

4. United Nations Chronicle (New York, NY), vol. 14, no. 5, May 1982, p. 12.

5. Ibid., pp. 11-18.

coordinating in the deployment of arms by guerrillas in El Salvador and elsewhere in Central America.

Regarding Nicaraguan charges of US aggression, Kirkpatrick assured that it was not the intention of her government to invade Nicaragua. She qualified Daniel Ortega's definition of the "problem" in Central America as one which obfuscated the real issue that was at stake there--the conflict between two concepts of organising society--the one democratic and the other totalitarian.

Referring to Cuba, the US representative pointed that it was attempting to "export aggression, subvert established governments and intervene in a most persistent and massive fashion in the internal affairs of more than one nation in that region which is evident by that nearly 2,000 security and military personnel of Cuba were based and maintained in Nicaragua."

Reiterating US support of the principles of national self-determination, national independence, strict respect for territorial integrity, and non-intervention in the affairs of other states, Kirkpatrick expressed US solidarity with the quest for change, democracy and development in Central America.

Among other members who took part in the debate Algeria and Nigeria stressed the need to enforce the principles of non-intervention, non-use of force, self-determination, and the inviolability of national sovereignty and territorial integrity with respect to Nicaragua and Central America in general, whereas Guyana, Costa Rica and Grenada stressed that the changes taking place in Central America were internal

and not the result of outside influences. Algeria and Cuba cited the deteriorating economic and social situation in Central America as a major factor in the region's problems.

Speaking for the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries(NAM), Cuba said the Council must unequivocally state its opposition to the threat or use of force against Nicaragua and other peoples of the region, and must call on all states to refrain from taking such steps and respect the right of peoples to determine their destiny.

Differing views were expressed as to whether the Security Council or OAS should deal with the Nicaraguan complaint. While Guayana, Laos, Yugoslavia, Cuba and France argued that it was proper for the Council to address the situation in the discharge of its primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Japan and Honduras said the situation had to be first discussed in a regional forum like the OAS rather than the UN.

DISCUSSIONS DURING 1983

With the Central American conflict intensifying further in March 1983 the Council at the request of Nicaragua discussed at length the Nicaraguan plea during the months of March, May and September of the year.[6]

6. Year Book of the United Nations, 1983 (New York, NY), 1983, p. 198.

By this time, ARDE had emerged after the breaking off of Eden Pastora from the FSLN, and sporadic attacks from the south too became quite frequent. In addition, the contras along the border with Honduras and the Indians among them along the Atlantic coast seemed to be consolidating their forces with a resulting increase in the frequency of attacks on Nicaraguan territory.

In March, the Nicaraguan discussion was procedural, one that involved no vote on a resolution. Between March 23 and 29, eight meetings were held to discuss the situation. Nicaragua requested the meetings to consider what it termed "a grave increase in aggressive acts against it, thereby endangering international peace". Some 41 countries were invited to participate in the deliberations. The debate focussed on "bilateral and multilateral tensions in Central America, the relations between Nicaragua and its neighbours, and the influence of other states on the regions conflicts.

Nicaragua after listing a series of charges against the contras, Honduras and the US explained its view by stating that Nicaragua did not regard either the "counter-revolutionary" forces that had already infiltrated the country or such a possibility in the future as a threat in themselves to the stability of the FSLN government.[7] The danger did not reside in the contra forces themselves as they were largely in the mountain area of Nicaragua, very close to the Honduran border, Nicaragua said. The danger lay, it reiterated, in the

7. Provisional Verbatim Records of the Security Council, S/PV No. 2420, 23 March 1983, pp. 2-25.

possibility of the contras being used as a diversionary measure to facilitate the delivery of a more strategic blow to the Nicaraguan revolution in other sensitive areas -- economically and politically, and militarily in the Pacific area of Nicaragua near the Honduran border. Nicaragua, at this point, expected the Honduran army and other forces in the region to be pressurised and encouraged to get more deeply and directly involved in the acts of aggression against it. It stressed that its fears of a possible internationalisation of the conflict in the region was valid.

The US said the Nicaraguan government was trying to claim "the right to repress its own people, referring to the FSLN treatment of Indians in the Atlantic coast," and the "rights to actively attempt to overthrow neighbouring governments and to direct revolutions from its own territory against its neighbours". Added to this, it interpreted the FSLN government initiating the Security Council meetings as an effort to seek the "support of the international community to protect it against the frustration and bitterness of its own people".[8]

The US dismissed as "myths" that (i) Nicaragua was a democratic revolution; (ii) was armed for the sole purpose of liberating the Nicaraguan people from the yoke of dictatorship; (iii) that Nicaragua wanted to live in peace with its neighbours; and (iv) that Nicaragua was about to be invaded by the US or Honduras or someone. It characterised

8. Ibid., pp. 38-40.

as an "obsession" Nicaragua's repeated assertion of US hostility towards it, and claimed that Nicaragua had repeatedly declined to participate in the efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in the area. The US asserted that Somocismo and Sandinismo were similar to each other. According to it, both were military dictatorships denying the Nicaraguan people their human rights and human freedom, their political rights and political freedom.

Honduras, while stressing it was not involved in a dispute with Nicaragua, said the problem was exclusively Nicaraguan and related to increasing internal tension between its government and opposition groups. It justified the Honduran mobilisation of troops "because of threatening declarations by Nicaragua and armaments currently in Nicaragua, which included the armoured divisions of Soviet origin. It maintained that there were no contra camps in Honduran territory, and said while Nicaragua wanted negotiations bilaterally, it believed that the problem was regional.[9]

Among the other countries, the USSR took the view that the facts demonstrated that armed intervention was being conducted against Nicaragua from Honduran territory and that the US was the prime mover behind the intervention. A year earlier the US had blocked a draft resolution in the council which according to it, would have condemned intervention in the internal affairs of Central America, and called for the renunciation of the threat or use of force.[10]

9. Yearbook, n. 6, pp. 200-01.
10. Ibid., p. 201.

While a number of countries including Colombia and Barbados expressed fear that the conflict might spread to other states in the region, others like China, Libya, Vietnam and Guatemala were of the view that the crisis could be traced to the interventionist policy of a super power (without naming the US).

Several countries like India and Pakistan held the view that the dispute was the result of process of change in developing countries.

Latin American countries like Panama, Bolivia, Cuba and Argentina supported the initiative of the Contadora group while others like Costa Rica and El Salvador urged discussion on a regional basis.[11]

The debate which lasted for four days was occasionally heated. At the conclusion, it appeared that the "US was virtually isolated in its attempts to portray the conflict as an internal Nicaraguan affair".[12]

Allies like Netherlands, Spain and Pakistan indicated they did not accept US assessments of events. They indirectly reproached the US for what they viewed as an US-backed effort to overthrow the Nicaraguan regime by supporting the contras. The criticism from members of the Soviet bloc, which supported Nicaragua, caused the US far less concern than the failure of such nations as Colombia and Ecuador to accept the US version of events.[13]

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11. Ibid., p. 202-03.
12. New York Times, 29 March 1983
13. Ibid.

On 5 May 1983, Nicaragua requested an urgent meeting of the Council in view of what it said was a new stage of the invasion by contra forces operating from Honduras and supported by the United States. This was taken up by the Council in seven meetings between 9 and 19 May.[14] The debate was similar to the discussion in March. But this time Nicaragua was seeking a vote on a resolution whereas none was proposed earlier.

The draft resolution called on Honduras and the US to confer separately with Nicaragua on an accord. The proposal also asked Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar "to use his good offices" to seek a solution aided by Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuala which urged both separate and regional talks.[15]

Speaking in support of its resolution the Nicaraguan representative characterised the Central American conflict as a war-like situation.[16] Nicaragua's representative Miguel D'Escoto said the declaration that the US was waging a war against Nicaragua "could not be taken as a figure of speech, much less as provocative rhetoric". The war the Reagan administration was waging against Nicaragua could not become less real just because it had not been officially declared or because the combatants were not the regular troops of the US Army, he said. He emphasised on the fact that the moment

14. Yearbook, n. 6, p. 204.
15. New York Times, 10 May 1983.
16. Provisional Verbatim Records of the Security Council, S/PV No. 2431, 9 May 1983, pp. 6-26.

the US government organised, in its words, "armed aggression against our country, training, financing, arming and directing the Somocist freedom fighters, this could not be considered as anything but a war by the US against our nation".

He further criticised the Reagan administration which it said, "fearing a total loss of credibility, had chosen to shield itself behind an alleged governmental practice of neither confirming nor denying the existence of covert actions against other states". He also characterised as "absurd" the Reagan administration's claims that the latter was not really trying to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. The US government, was using some nations in the region and de-neutralising a few others, and warned that this could lead to a regionalising of the war.

Calling into attention the primary responsibility of the Security Council, the Nicaraguan representative demanded that the Council should adopt "all necessary measures within the broad framework of its mandate "to halt the aggression", which was cruel and unjustifiable from every point of view. He called upon the Security Council to authorise the Secretary-General to initiate a dialogue between Nicaragua and Honduras, and between Nicaragua and the United States, in coordination with the Contadora countries.

The Nicaraguan government put forth a few fundamental conditions that according to it should precede any solution to the conflict -- (i) the unconditional withdrawal of the "genocidal forces" sent into Nicaragua by the US; (ii) an end to the border attacks from Honduran territory which the US

directed and financed; (iii) the permanent withdrawal of US warships from Nicaragua's territorial waters; and finally, (iv) an end to the participation of the CIA in the financing, organising and directing of overt or covert forces or plans against Nicaragua. Further, the Nicaraguan government said the US had to put an end to its "aggressive policies against Nicaragua". In this context, the US should "stop deciding on military measures. Instead, it should direct its power of influence towards negotiated political solution."

In reply, the US expressed surprise at Nicaragua's charges and in turn said Nicaragua was in fact fomenting a war-like situation, and forcing a militarisation of the region by a "ruthless, terrorist international".[17] The debate the US said, was on "whether the US should leave small countries powerless, small peoples helpless, without defence against conquest by violent minorities trained and armed by remote dictators". While conceding that there was fighting in Nicaragua and the existence of widespread unhappiness and misery, the US said the nature of the problem was not international. In its view, the cause of the problem was national. "Nicaragua's problem is with Nicaraguans. In Nicaragua today, Nicaraguans fight other Nicaraguans for the control of their country's destiny," the US representative said. The US government on its part had continually sought to establish "constructive relations" with the FSLN government, and had been working to achieve regional peace, the representative added.

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17. Ibid., pp. 51-62.

A number of countries supported the peace efforts of the Contadora group, including Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, India, Yugoslavia and Venezuela. Mexico was among those countries that urged the UN Secretary-General to use his good offices to achieve a solution.[18] Some including China, Cuba, Ethiopia, Grenada, Iran, the USSR and Vietnam referred to foreign interference in the region, and argued that such an interference was making a solution more difficult to achieve. While El Salvador, Panama and Poland discussed whether the Council should have a role at all to play in settling the crisis, the UK hoped that the Central American nations would be able to discuss their problems in multilateral talks.

On 19 May, the Security Council adopted an amended resolution. This resolution was a watered down version from the original draft to meet US views. Its key section simply urged Panama, Venezuala, Colombia and Mexico to renew their peacekeeping efforts. Three paragraphs of the original resolution were leftout. They related to (a) call to the Secretary-General to serve as mediator, (b) explicit support for direct and separate talks between Nicaragua, Honduras and the US and (c) language criticising "the aggression and threats of which Nicaragua is a victim on the part of a great power".[19]

Again in 12 September 1983, Nicaragua requested an urgent meeting of the Council to consider what it said was

18. Council Records, n. 6, pp. 205-06.
19. New York Times, 20 May 1983.

a new escalation of aggressive acts against it by contra forces. The Council met the next day and its president said it would remain seized of the matter.[20]

DELIBERATIONS IN 1984

By February 1984, the fighting reached a peak. New dimensions were added to the conflict, in addition to the normal incursions and attacks on Nicaraguan territory and government installations. The US and Honduras took part in Big Pine-II military exercises, and warplanes were used for the first time by the contras. The Agalta operation, another military exercise between Honduras and the US was in progress. The meeting of the Contadora countries to find a peaceful solution had been suspended on 21 December 1983. The US administration had also confirmed a certain amount of troop presence in Honduras.

At the Security Council meeting in February 1984, the Nicaraguan representative asserted that the stepping up of diplomatic and political manoeuvres by the US administration reinforced the former's belief that despite the few positive gains that the Contadora process had achieved, it could "evaporate" any moment.[21] Protesting US actions, the representative reiterated it was fully prepared to repel, "by force of arms and regardless of the source, any attack or act of aggression against our independence, sovereignty

20. Yearbook, n. 6, p. 208.

21. Provisional Verbatim Records of the Security Council, S/PV No.2513, 3 February 1984, pp. 3-15.

and territorial integrity". At the same time, it affirmed its right to self-defence and commitment to peace in Central America.

The US responded stating that the Council's dignity was abused time and again by Nicaragua's allegations of aggression by the US and neighbouring governments in Central America. The US had not engaged in aggression against Nicaragua and did not plan to.[22] Except the representative of Honduras, there were no other speakers at this meeting.

On 4 April 1984, the US vetoed a Security Council resolution sponsored by Nicaragua. The draft resolution condemned the mining of the Nicaraguan ports. The US called it unbalanced.[23] The draft said the mining of ports "has caused the loss of Nicaraguan lives" and "serious disruption to its economy".

During the debate that followed, 32 members addressed the Council. A few including El Salvador and Honduras defended US policy in Central America and accused Nicaragua of military expansionism. The majority were critical of US policy. In the voting, 13 members including US allies like France, the Netherlands and Pakistan cast affirmative votes. UK abstained.

Giving a detailed account of the contra bases in Honduras, the equipments used and the extent of US and Honduran involvement, and the character of the fighting, the

22. Yearbook of the United Nations, 1984 (New York, 1984), p. 204.

23. New York Times, 5 April 1984.

Nicaraguan government expressed its belief that the efforts at achieving agreement in the region with the involvement of only Central American countries, without taking into account the US would lead to a possible failure of the Contadora negotiations.[24]

According to it, peace in Central America required a clear and definite commitment of the US. It not only "pretended to be a mere spectator to the region's conflict", but also used political pressure to prevent a genuine and lasting solution. It further charged the US with stepping up its "undeclared" war against Nicaragua through the increased use of CIA mercenaries and by significantly increasing its military presence in the area.

Characterising the US administration's action as "state terrorism", and describing Reagan as an "international terrorist", the Nicaraguan government said it reserved the right to respond in whatever way it thought fit to "cooperate in justice" for the ongoing devastation and killings.

It made a forceful plea to the Security Council to intervene in the conflict, and stop the "war" in Central America.

Nicaragua said it was aware that the character of the Central American conflict was "multiple and complex", and hence the solution had to reflect a similar quality.[25] In September 1984 Nicaragua once again presented its position

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24. Provisional Verbatim Records of the Security Council, S/PV No. 2525, 30 March 1984, pp. 3-37.

25. Provisional Verbatim Records of the Security Council, S/PV No. 2529, 4 April 1984, pp. 94-105.

in the Security Council. By the time, two significant events had occured -- (i) the CIA involvement in the mining of Nicaragua's harbours had come to light; (b) the contras had successfully attacked the oil installation at Corinto port. The US involvement had become open and combined with the revelations on the mining of the harbour, the US Congress had blocked US aid to contras in any form, and had debarred the CIA from getting directly involved in the conflict.[26]

The Nicaraguan representative Chamorro Mora, after giving a detailed account of attacks on Nicaraguan territory by the contras and methods of US-backing, reaffirmed that the Nicaraguan government wanted peace, but not a peace that "could be imposed by war". He conceded that "Nicaragua might be destroyed in the war, but there would be no question of conquering the Sandinistas".

Nicaragua charged top officials of the Reagan administration, including Reagan himself of threatening the Sandinista revolution and the JGRN.[27] Characterising the statements of the US officials as due to "paranoid reflexes", Nicaragua said this attitude augured "destruction and death" (for Nicaraguans) in the near future. He further charged the Reagan administration with obstructing the revolution, and said the sole objective of the US administration was to isolate Nicaragua internationally and prepare grounds for an invasion.

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26. Provisional Verbatim Records of the Security Council, S/PV No. 2557, 7 September, 1984, pp. 2-23.

27. Secretary of State George Shultz and Ambassador to UN, Jeane K.Kirkpatrick.

According to the Nicaraguan Government, Central America was on the brink of a war whose consequences, costs and results would be difficult to predict. It placed the blame on such a situation solely on the US, which through its "aggressive and war-mongering policy, was preventing the achievement of a political solution to Central America's problems".

The US took the position that the Nicaraguan complaint had become familiar, though it had been put in various ways.[28] According to it, the details changed, but the substance of the complaint remained essentially the same -- that Nicaragua was the "peaceable, innocent victim of an aggression that was orchestrated by, if not carried out by the US". The US view was that Nicaragua had begun the process of militarisation and the introduction of foreign advisers in Central America. It also said Nicaragua was continuously expanding its army. It constantly received weapons from the Soviet bloc, supplementing an "already formidable arsenal of tanks, heavy artillery, armoured personnel carriers and multiple rocket launchers," the US charged. Giving the number of Cuban advisers in Nicaragua, the US argued that Nicaragua had begun the process of destabilising its neighbours in the hemisphere. Nicaragua's complaint was essentially interpreted by the US as an effort to prevent the former's neighbours from defending themselves against Nicaraguan-based efforts to subvert and overthrow the governments of neighbouring countries.

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28. Council Records, n. 24, pp. 24-31.

Referring to the Miskito refugees who were leaving Nicaragua, the US pointed out that the Nicaraguan government had apparently still not learned that those who "wield swords against their own people and their neighbours risk having it turned against them". Characterising the Nicaraguan government as "totalitarian", the US argued a feature of such a government was to define those who opposed it as non-people. Thus, the contras are Nicaraguans. They are Nicaraguans who at present, like in the past are seeking democratic solutions, the US said, adding that the contras were seeking democracy and freedom in their government, just as they sought democracy and freedom when they overthrew Somoza "only to see him replaced by new military dictators". The US representative reiterated that its sole objective in Central America was a democratic solution. It illustrated the setting up of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America as an example.

The US went further stating that FSLN regime, which had requested the Council to convene for the seventh time, was not using that forum to resolve the "most urgent problems of peace and security in the world", but instead was using it as a mere "instrument for its own propaganda".[29] The "all-too-familiar pattern of running to the Security Council" was interpreted by the US as a Sandinista tactic to deflect once more the attention from the FSLN's reluctance to negotiate in good faith and settle problems peacefully. Nicaragua's approaches to the Council have thus served to undermine the Contadora

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29. Council Records, n. 26, pp. 24-25.

process they profess to support, the US said.

The US government was "concerned" at the presence of Libyan personnel, together with Soviet bloc, PLO, Basque and other foreign military personnel in Nicaragua. Their apparent mission, the US said, was to build a FSLN - controlled political apparatus and to expand Nicaragua's military and security forces to unprecedented levels. The US also charged senior Nicaraguan government officials of aiding in international drug trafficking for purely mercenary reasons.

DISCUSSIONS SINCE END-1984

In November 1984, the Nicaraguan question was again on the Security Council's agenda. In the period between the earlier Security Council meeting on Nicaragua and the November meeting, it seemed that the conflict had begun to turn Nicaragua's way. The withdrawal of Congress aid to the contras, and the official pull-out of the CIA from the conflagaration were important factors. Pastora's ARDE also showed signs of breaking up due to rivalry within the organisation. The confession of the Sandinista government regarding the mistaken nature of its policy towards the Indians on the Atlantic coast, and the consequent rectification of its policy had begun to yield results. Many of the Indians who had gone on exile, and had joined the contras were returning to Nicaragua under the promise of a general amnesty for the Indians declared by the FSLN government.

Importantly, elections had also been held in Nicaragua, thus fulfilling a promise made by the FSLN government in 1981 to maintain the electoral process and political pluralism. Though many of Nicaragua's hardline critics including the Reagan administration dismissed the elections as fraudulent, its moderate critics seemed to have accepted the verdict, thereby raising the credibility and legitimacy of the FSLN government.

Nicaragua claiming that the US was on the verge of invading Nicaragua, had alerted its troops and had recalled members of the Sandinista Popular Militia to the borders from the coffee-fields where harvesting was due.[30]

A series of events including a 11-day US military exercise in the Gulf of Fonseca and sorties by US fighter-aircrafts over Nicaragua led the FSLN government to take the position that these were part of an overt policy of aggression being carried out by the US government against Nicaragua.

Expressing surprise about information originating from the US about Soviet MIGs being transported into Nicaragua by ships, the FSLN government claiming it to be false, said this was a part of the move by the US "to discredit the overwhelming success it had in the development of the democratic process in the November 1984 polls, which were characterised by broad and free popular participation".

Quoting an article from US newspaper the Nicaraguan representative said the Reagan administration never had any

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30. Provisional Verbatim Records of the Security Council, S/PV 2562, 9 November 1984, pp. 6-26.

intention with regard to Contadora, and consequently "never seriously entertained a negotiated political solution".[31] In fact, the US, had blocked the Contadora process so that it could find a military solution to the Central American problem, Nicaragua said.

The US questioned the basis for the "emergency" nature of the meeting and said no emergency existed at that moment, adding that the convening in such a way constituted a misuse of the process of the Council.[32] According to the US, even if such an emergency existed, the Security Council should have been the last resort for remedial action, after exhausting all "regional agencies", quoting the UN charter. In the case of Nicaragua, this meant it had to first approach the OAS.

The US said it was "ironic" that a government which had deliberately chosen to militarise the country, whose own military build-up constituted a "serious threat to its immediate neighbours in the region" should approach the Council with the "unfounded" claim that it considered itself military threatened.

On 10 May 1985, a resolution proposed by Nicaragua was unanimously adopted by the Security Council, albeit changes. The adoption of the resolution came after four meetings starting May following a request by Nicaragua to consider "the extremely serious situation which the Central American

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31. Washington Post, 6 November 1984.
32. Council Records, n. 30, pp. 26-30.

region [confronted] at the present time". The debate that took place centred on the subject of economic sanctions against Nicaragua announced by the United States on 1 May 1985.[33]

The US blocked parts of the draft resolution that called for an end to trade embargo. It invoked a rule calling for a paragraph-by-paragraph vote on the resolution. Such a move allowed the US to remove all mention of the embargo while going on record in support of peace initiatives by the Contadora nations.[34]

Among the portions deleted were (a) the call to end immediately "the recent trade embargo and other coercive economic measures against Nicaragua", (b) call on interested states "to refrain from any action or intention to destabilise or undermine other States or their institutions, including the imposition of trade embargo and other measures incompatible with the provisions of the United Nations Charter, and in violation of commitments contracted multilaterally or bilaterally" and (c) a paragraph expressing concern about the "increased tensions in the Central American region, recently aggravated by the trade embargo and other coercive economic measures" decreed against Nicaragua which endangered the region's stability and undermined the efforts of the Contadora Group "toward a political and negotiated solution".[35]

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33. United Nations Chronicle, vol. 22, n. 5, May 1985, p. 16.
34. New York Times, 11 May 1985.
35. Chronicle, n. 33, p. 16.

The amended resolution reaffirmed "the inalienable right of Nicaragua and the rest of the states to freely decide on their own political, economic and social systems" without outside interference and called on the US and Nicaragua to resume the dialogue they had been holding in Mexico. It also expressed firm support to the Contadora Group and urged it to intensify its peace efforts, which would prosper "only with genuine political support from all interested states". It called on all states "to refrain from carrying out, supporting or promoting political, economic or military actions of any kind against any state in the region which might impede the peace objectives of the Contadora Group".[36]

The Nicaraguan government explained what it felt were the methods used by the Reagan administration to achieve its objective in Central America.[37] It said the US administration had resorted to a "variety of arguments and pretexts that characterised the paranoic style of US policy". Under the pretext that Nicaragua was exporting its revolution to various Central American countries that had for decades endured poverty, misery and oppression, the FSLN representative Chamorro Mora said the US administration was refusing to accept an independent, democratic and non-aligned state in its "backyard".

The same pretext was used to "justify the creation through the CIA of a huge mercenary force, which had been amply financed

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36. Ibid., p. 16.

37. Provisional Verbatim Records of the Security Council, S/PV No. 2577, 8 May 1985, pp. 6-37.

by the US, and to construct a large permanent military infrastructure on Honduran territory". The pretext also served as justification for the presence of a large number of US troops on Honduran territory, and to establish permanent military manoeuvres with Honduras on land, sea and air," Nicaragua said.

Claiming that the US had conclusively failed to prove its charge that Nicaragua was exporting its revolution, the Reagan administration to justify its interventionist policy now accused the Nicaraguan government of being totalitarian and repressive. The real objective, Nicaragua said, of the above tactic was to make Nicaragua "cry uncle".

Dismissing Reagan's statement that "Nicaragua proved the greatest challenge to the security of the US", Nicaragua said it was actually the US which was posing a threat to Nicaragua's security. It charged that the Reagan administration had violated the "fundamental norms governing political and economic relations and cooperation between states", and had violated the principle of self-determination of nations and the principle that no state could interfere in the international affairs of another state. Moreover, the Reagan administration continued to resort to force and pressure "of all kinds" to sort out its differences with Nicaragua.

The Nicaraguan government questioned as to why, if as the US claimed, it had the law on its side and that its security was threatened, it did not approach the UN or use other means for a peaceful settlement of disputes as provided for in the UN Charter.

The FSLN government then proceeded to list a series of charters the US had violated in its attempts to enforce its policies on Nicaragua including that of the OAS and GATT. Seeing "dangerous" implications in the latest economic embargo on Nicaragua by the Reagan administration, the Nicaraguan government predicted that this would give way to more serious actions -- political, military or economic -- on it by the Reagan administration, until the Sandinista government was toppled.

The FSLN then referred to the note sent by the Reagan administration on 1 May 1985 to the Nicaraguan government, which said that if the latter did not take concrete steps to comply with the requirements set forth in that note, the prospects for a peaceful settlement in Central America would only diminish. The Nicaraguan government inferred from this that, "if Nicaragua did not bow to the will of the US, then Reagan would arrogate to himself the right to engage in military intervention in Nicaragua and to declare total war against it".

The US in its response recapitulated briefly what it felt were the main themes that had characterised the Nicaraguan debate in the previous nine meetings, and thereby to spell out its view on the conflict.[38] According to the US representative, on every occasion, the Nicaraguan government either sought to forestall the progress of the Contadora process or to interfere in the internal affairs of

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38. Provisional Verbatim Records of the Security Council, S/PV No. 2578, 9 May 1985, pp. 17-33.

the US "by seeking to influence our domestic political debate about Central America". In either case, Nicaragua deliberately misused the Council and converted it into a propaganda forum, the US charged.

The US said "despite its repeated denials the Nicaraguan government persistantly claimed the US was on the verge of an invasion". The US was not preparing to invade Nicaragua, it asserted. Extending the logic, the US government said there were many other predictions of the Nicaraguan government which too had proved to be groundless, and consequently the Sandinistas' "credibility had been hopelessly devalued".

The US government repeated its earlier assertion, and its position on the Nicaraguan conflict, mainly its belief that the people of Central America had democratic aspirations which, if not "arbitrarily repressed", would produce popularly elected governments even in the face of difficult economic, social and political obstacles. In 1981, the US had thought it "imprudent" to hope for just a minor relief of political conditions in the region. Referring to elections in Guatemala and El Salvador, the US said its faith in the region's democratic "impulse" had been vindicated. However, in the case of Nicaragua, "there were increasingly strong signals that the Sandinistas were not the idealistic democratic reformers they were commonly assumed to be."

The US explained how it had pointed out what it felt were "accumulating indications of the anti-democratic style, spirit and behaviour of the Sandinistas; their disregard for human and political rights, their denial of pluralism, their

contempt for elections and their reliance on violence and naked power to sustain their regime, and finally in the US view, the witnessing of the rebirth of traditional military dictatorship which we (the US) thought Nicaragua had transcended."

The US could no longer avoid recognising that the "FSLN was committed to Marxism-Leninism and intent on converting Nicaragua into another totalitarian satellite of the Soviet Union." In the period 1981-85, the US said it had often stated that the FSLN was bent on intimidation, destabilisation and subversion of their neighbours. In less than six years the FSLN had developed a military machine with fire-power and mobility unmatched in the region, the US said.

According to US government estimates, in 1985, the total strength of the Sandinista army was 62,000, and the total strength which included all regular, reserve, militia and security forces exceeded 119,000 which did not include thousands of Cubans and Soviet bloc military and security advisers already in Nicaragua. According to its estimates there were atleast 340 tanks and armoured vehicles, more than 70 long-range howitzers and rocket launchers, and 30 helicopters, including half-a-dozen fast well-armed attack helicopters.

The US inferred that since all these military forces and equipment were disproportionate to the country's population, economy and legitimate defence needs, their real purpose could only be to intimidate and coerce Nicaragua's neighbours. In fact, the US said, the policies and actions

of the Nicaraguan government had not moderated but had become increasingly aggressive, thereby increasing the threat to neighbouring countries.

The US summed up its view saying that the Reagan administration's version of the political, military and diplomatic developments in the region was conclusive in its general thrust and in the evidence that could be brought to bear in its support. On the other hand, he claimed that the FSLN's allegation regarding US intentions to overthrow the regime lacked tangible evidence.

The US justified its total economic embargo on Nicaragua saying "common sense suggested and international practice confirmed, that in general, a State was free to choose its own trading partners, particularly when it concerned a matter of national security".

Among the other nations, India which introduced the resolution said it "supported the Contadora Group's efforts as well as the Nicaraguans' efforts to build a new society on the basis of their revolution, free from all foreign interference or pressure". Peru was concerned at the failure to abide by the procedures provided for in the United States - Nicaraguan Friendship, Commerce and Navigation Treaty. The USSR said it was US fault that the US-Nicaraguan talks had been broken off and that the Contadora Group's peace efforts had been "thwarted under contrived pretexts". Lastly, the Contadora Group country Mexico said the "harmonisation of political agreements" between the parties involved was the

only appropriate way to settle the conflicts in Central America.[39]

Nicaragua for the last time in 1985 convened a meeting in December. Among the developments that prompted this meeting was the conclusive evidence that the US was supplying SAM-7 surface-to-air missiles to the contras which had shot down a Nicaraguan transport plane killing 14 EPS soldiers aboard. This had been preceded by the approval of a $ 27 million aid by the Congress to the contras in May.

The Nicaraguan representative Victor Hugo Tinoco claimed that the supply of SAM-7 to the contras was "unprecedented in the history of the continent". According to Nicaragua, it indicated an escalation in the "crisis and conflict in Central America". Further, it claimed that it was for the first time in the American continent a "terrorist and mercenary group" fighting against an established government had received that type of weapons. The contras had received 30 such missiles, Nicaragua said. In conclusion, the Nicaraguan government with reference to the SAM-7 supplies referred to the US as the "horseman of the Apocalypse threatening Central America and Latin America", and urged the "international community to unseat the horseman".[40]

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39. Chronicle, n. 33, pp. 18, 19, 20.

40. United Nations Chronicle, vol. 23, no. 2, February 1986, pp. 58-61.

The US at the meeting said the Sandinistas had sought to crush all forms of "domestic armed resistance as a reactionary mercenary force organised by the US". The Nicaraguan government's insistence on "perpetuating this fantasy" had been the most serious obstacle to peace in the region.[41]

The contras had grown to 20,000 men and women. The US said the Sandinistas would never succeed in portraying thousands of Nicaraguans who had taken up arms "to resist the perversion of the revolution as paid mercenaries of a foreign power." The "disparate groups of the resistance" had come together "in a struggle for liberty against Sandinista repression".

On Nicaragua's complaint about the supply of SAM-7 missiles to the contras, the US said it was ironic as Nicaragua had introduced a "frightening new dimension to warfare in Central America" by acquiring the Soviet-made MI-24 -- one of the world's most sophisticated attack helicopters. None of the neighbours had this weapon. The MI-24 was only the latest addition to what had been a massive military build-up in Nicaragua, the US said.

The Sandinistas had "hopelessly upset" the military equilibrium in Central America, it said, creating a major security problem for the region. On top of this, the FSLN

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41. Ibid.

regime had opened its borders to the "most notorious terrorist groups" in the world. It had provided logistical, material and moral support to Latin American "terrorists" groups, and were involved in Salvadoran "guerrilla terrorism".

The US concluded saying that the FSLN bore the full consequences of their aggression against the Nicaraguan people and their neighbours.

Nicaragua approached the Council 12 times in the period 1981-85 under study. Given the limitations of the Council, in which the US could use its veto power to block any resolution against it, and even otherwise, the poor facilities of the UN to implement a resolution passed by the Council, Nicaragua's frequent approaches raised questions. The Nicaraguan response to this was because, according to it, the Security Council was "the highest organ in the entire legal order, charged with the defence of international peace and security", and because Nicaragua believed that in situations like the one presently obtaining in Central America, it was obligatory on part of the Security Council to take appropriate measures to guarantee its Charter and purpose.[42]

The United States, on the other hand, interpreted the Nicaraguan government approaches to the Security Council as a tactic to deflect attention from the FSLN's reluctance to negotiate in good faith and settle problems peacefully. According to it, it served to undermine the Contadora process the Nicaraguans professed to support.

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42. Council Records, n. 30, p. 26.

Nicaragua approached the Council each time with essentially the same complaint -- a threat of imminent invasion from the US, and invariably justified its complaint by increasing evidence of military buildup by the contras and Honduras with the backing of the US. It also listed out in detail the attacks that had taken place and extent of damages incurred by Nicaragua.

The US, on the other hand, never denied Nicaragua's charges and instead concentrated on objecting to what it called a "totalitarian" form of government in Nicaragua. While referring to the contras as "freedom fighters", its point of contention was that the Nicaraguan government was being challenged by Nicaraguans themselves, who wanted "democracy" and "freedom" in their country.

While both affirmed their interest in peaceful negotiations and the Contadora process, as the conflict accentuated both their positions hardened. The Reagan administration said it would make Nicaragua "cry uncle", while the Sandinista government reiterated it would never surrender.

The US justified its involvement in the conflict by citing Nicaragua's alleged support for the leftist guerrillas in El Salvador, and the Soviet and Cuban aid that was being sent to Nicaragua. Nicaragua while not denying Soviet and Cuban help claimed its aid to El Salvador was not proven, and in turn questioned US aid to the El Salvador government.

Nicaragua conceded that the Reagan administration had an active role to play in the peace parleys, as without its involvement no agreement would make sense. The Sandinista

government said the motivations behind the Reagan administration policies was to overthrow their government, though the US repeatedly denied such a motivation.

With the US holding veto power, it was clear that the Security Council was bound by well-defined limitations in passing resolutions which went against the former, in which case, what could Nicaragua have hoped to achieve in terms of resolving the crisis by taking its issue to the Council. It was Nicaragua's view that getting resolutions passed were one thing while bringing its plight into global limelight through the debates were another, and more important. Nicaragua's Deputy Foreign Minister Victor Hugo Tinoco put it succintly when he said he expected little from the Security Council except a platform "to alert the international community about this situation and the danger it represents for peace in the region".[42]

In terms of global opinion, the debates helped in revealing the viewpoints of various countries. This proved embarrassing to the US when allies like the Netherlands, France and Pakistan refused to accept the US version of events in the region. Even a trusted and traditional ally like the United Kingdom was measured in its support for the US, and abstained during voting. Except for the support of a few countries involved in the conflict like Costa Rica and Honduras the US found itself isolated in face of world opinion on the conflict. For the Nicaraguans, the debates not only

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42. New York Times, 23 March 1983.

served to highlight their plight but also proved to be morally encouraging as almost all the countries rallied to its cause, which made it worth the debates.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The major objective of the dissertation has been to examine at some length the role of the contras in the unfolding events in Nicaragua since the Sandinista revolution of 1979. A related aspect which has also been dealt in the study was to evaluate the extent to which the contras were responsible for the heightening of tensions between Nicaragua and the US. A third aspect which has been the focus of the study was how the contra issue figured in the United Nations Security Council and with what results.

In this concluding Chapter, an attempt is made to summarise the major elements of the evolving relations of Nicaragua with the US focussing on the period 1981-85 which roughly coincides with the first seven years since the advent of the Sandinistas to power and also the first term of office of President Ronald Reagan in Washington.

Relations between Nicaragua and the US stretches back to the period when the Central American Republic achieved independence in 1821. Nicaragua evoked a particular interest amongst the US administrations at that time owing to the possibility of a canal through it connecting the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. The liberal-conservative rivalry within Nicaragua made it easy for the US to involve itself in Nicaragua's affairs. For, both the groups had a penchant for looking up to the US to resolve their internal problems. Over a period of time, US making use of this, shaped its relations

with Nicaragua politics. Except for a brief one year, US maintained a military presence in Nicaragua from 1912 to 1933.

The US when it finally withdrew its marines made sure it still controlled Nicaraguan affairs by propping a person loyal to it in the form of Anastasio Somoza Garcia, who went about his job of serving US interests with a great deal of zeal. After Somoza Garcia's assassination his two sons Luis and Anastasio Somoza Debayle took over power one after the other with total US backing. Such a state of affairs continued till 1979 when the revolution overthrew the dynasty.

During their rule the Somozas had built a system that catered entirely to the ruling family, and politically served as US "policeman" in Central America.

The revolution in 1979 rudely disturbed the status quo within Nicaragua and also its relations with the US. The Carter administration which was at the helm of affairs at that time made a vain attempt to instal the moderates or anyone in Nicaragua loyal to the US. For all its much-spouted "globalist" approach to foreign policy it resorted to the traditional US policy of making sure it installed a "friendly" government in Nicaragua.

By the time Ronald Reagan took over US presidency in 1981, the FSLN in Nicaragua had quietly consolidated power within its own ranks. Correspondingly the Reagan administration went on a diplomatic offensive to begin with, and laid grounds to justify its low-intensity conflict strategy. The contras were the nodal point of this conflict, and it was through

them that the strategy was intended to shape the future course of Nicaragua the way the US administration wanted.

The contras were a motley group, and could be divided into three broad streams. One was composed of ex-National Guardsmen. Another was made up of Indians from the Atlantic coast and the third grouping was that of the ex-Sandinista, Eden Pastora. The modus operandi of the contras was to make frequent incursions, attack select targets, mainly government installations and withdraw. The idea was to throw the Nicaraguan economy out of gear. The US, both overtly and covertly provided the contras liberally with financial aid and arms — in other words, the entire infrastructure to carry out an effective offensive against the Sandinista regime.

Nicaragua approached the Security Council for redress 12 times in the period 1981-85, particularly in 1983 and 1984 when the contra attacks reached a peak. With the US holding veto power it was obvious that the Security Council had limitations in passing anti-US and pro-Nicaragua resolutions, leave alone enforcing its decisions. Still, the debates served a purpose in that they helped turn worldwide attention to the situation in Nicaragua and harnessed global opinion in its behalf, leaving the US almost isolated in its interpretation of the events in the region.

In conclusion, one may say that the contra war strategy, as part of overall US policy, though new in its formulation was a continuation of traditional US policy towards Nicaragua in the former's attempts to browbeat the Central American

Republic into toeing its line. There was no break in such a policy, notwithstanding Carter's efforts to project a "different" image. From this point of view the Reagan administration was merely responding to the circumstances surrounding the Nicaraguan revolution when it came to power, and the result was the low-intensity conflict strategy. According to this, the contras were only a pawn in an overall plan of the US to bring Nicaragua into line or make it "cry uncle", as Reagan put it. The other aspects of the strategy included the virtual squeezing of the Nicaraguan economy and diplomatically obligating Nicaragua to go by decisions made by the Contadora countries. Though hamstrung economically and politically, the Sandinista government survived albeit conceding a few demands like holding peace talks with the contras and elections in 1984.

The intensity of the contra war in the post-1985 period did not sustain, atleast in the level of military attacks by the contras whose cohesion came apart resulting in their fragmentation. Economically, the US continues to apply pressure while on the diplomatic front the Sandinistas are being pressurised to drop their antagonistic postures and come to terms with US pre-eminence in the region.

APPENDIX

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS STUDY

ADREN	--	Nicaraguan Democratic Revolutionary Alliance
ALPROMISU	--	Alliance For Progress Of The Miskito And Sumo People
ARDE	--	Democratic Revolutionary Front
BOS	--	Southern Opposition Bloc
CDS	--	Sandinista Defence Committee
CIA	--	Central Intelligence Agency
CONDECA	--	Central American Defence Council
COSEP	--	Superior Council Of Private Property
DNC	--	Sandinista National Directorate
EPS	--	Popular Sandinista Army
FAO	--	Broad Opposition Front (Frente Amplio Opositor)
FARN	--	Nicaraguan Revolutionary Armed Forces
FDN	--	Nicaraguan Democratic Force
FPN	--	National Patriotic Front
FRENICA	--	Revolutionary Nicaraguan Front
FRS	--	Sandinista Revolutionary Front
FSLN	--	National Liberation Front Of The Sandinistas (Frente Sandinista De Liberacion Nacional)
GPP	--	Prolonged Peoples War
JGRN	--	Government Of National Reconstruction
M-3	--	Third Way Movement
MDN	--	Nicaraguan Democratic Movement
MISURA	--	Unity Of The Miskito Sumo Rama
MISURASATA	--	Unity Of The Miskito Sumo Rama And Sandinista

MPS	--	Sandinista Popular Militia
OAS	--	Organisation Of American States
TP	--	Proletarian Tendency
UDN	--	Nicaraguan Democratic Union
UPM	--	United Peoples Movement

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