

## Tropical Chekists: The Secret Police Legacy in Nicaragua

**A**s a revolutionary regime, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) that overthrew Nicaraguan strongman Anastasio Somoza in 1979 swept away all vestiges of the old order. Virtually every single government structure, including the constitution, judiciary, legislature, and all instruments of security and force, was demolished and replaced with an entirely new system. There were no efforts at “reform.” Instead, there was a total break with the previous regime and all its components.

The FSLN led the revolutionary Government of National Reconstruction in a broad coalition with leaders of the anti-Somoza democratic opposition. That government, headed by a junta that scrapped the old laws and ruled by decree, enjoyed strong support from Europe, the United States and Canada, and much of the rest of the world. Although the United States and Western Europe quickly pledged and delivered large-scale support, the Sandinistas, while maintaining a democratic, pluralistic facade, immediately prepared to move against members of its coalition who did not share the FSLN’s Marxist-Leninist ideology. Their ultimate goal was the establishment of a one-party state.<sup>1</sup>

Upon assuming power, one of the FSLN’s first objectives was the creation of instruments of force under strict party control. The Front began to implement this policy within days of the coup against Somoza under the guidance—or, more accurately, under the direction—of Cuban and East German advisers. This was done while the FSLN enjoyed broad popular support and international goodwill. Non-FSLN members, although welcomed in many government posts where the FSLN lacked its own qualified cadres, were deliberately isolated from the so-called “power ministries”—the ministries of interior and defense. An exception was the first Sandinista defense minister, Bernardino Larios. A former colonel in Somoza’s national guard who had defected to the Sandinistas during the revolution, Larios was instrumental to the FSLN, which lacked the necessary military and administrative experience to convert their patchwork guerrilla force (comprised of both hardened guerrillas and ill-trained, poorly disciplined volunteers) into a new, professional standing army—the Sandinista People’s Army (EPS). Larios received materiel and trainers from sympathetic, anti-American regimes, such as that of Colonel Omar Torrijos in Panama.

Less than one hundred days after taking power, the FSLN finalized a plan to purge the government of non-Sandinistas through a combination of co-optation

and isolation. The FSLN plan included undermining and marginalizing the private sector and independent labor unions, strengthening the economic sector, and gradually building its single-party Marxist-Leninist regime.<sup>2</sup> The FSLN also formally took total control of the military; two months after seizing power, FSLN leader and government junta chief Daniel Ortega announced in Havana, Cuba, the creation of both the Sandinista People's Army and the Committees in Defense of Sandinism (CDS). The latter were party-controlled block committees designed to enforce party rule and run domestic spying operations at the local levels<sup>3</sup> and were modeled after the Cuban Committees for Defense of the Revolution.

Nicaragua's new revolutionary army, a ragtag force under Defense Minister Larios, had not yet been indoctrinated. Early recruitment had been easy, with thousands of eager young volunteers seeking to join, but these troops lacked the proper ideological indoctrination. Consequently, a September 1979 FSLN blueprint, aimed at creating the region's largest standing army and an even larger militia, called for a "purge [of] the army at all levels, eliminating those elements who are incompatible with revolutionary measures," followed by a massive military buildup, conscription, and mobilization under strict party control.<sup>4</sup> It must be emphasized that, with the old national guard completely destroyed—its officers and men either co-opted by the revolutionary government, in revolutionary prisons, summarily executed, on the run, or in exile—the only army to purge was that of the Sandinistas themselves.

### **Creation of the Sandinista Security Organs**

Larios himself was one of the incompatible elements. He was cashiered and would spend the next three years in prison. The FSLN directorate replaced him with Humberto Ortega, a hardened FSLN leader and brother of the junta chief, who had been the FSLN's military strategist during their terrorist and guerrilla years.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the Sandinista People's Army and the Sandinista Defense Committees, new government structures included the following instruments of force:

- A national, centrally controlled police (where the Nicaraguan police had previously been under local control)
- Paramilitary units, militias, and border forces
- A prison system (as well as a clandestine prison system)
- Special operations units and a secret political police
- Revolutionary tribunals to hold show trials of "public enemies"
- A bureaucratic and judicial system that would reinforce and consolidate FSLN power

These instruments of force were planned well ahead of any substantial internal or external opposition.<sup>6</sup> As the FSLN noted in its "72 Hours Document" from September 1979, "The defeated National Guard . . . cannot possibly organize an attack on us for the time being . . . at present there is no clear indication that an armed counterrevolution by Somoquist forces beyond our borders is going to take place and jeopardize our stability." Nicaragua saw, within months of the 1979 revolution, the emergence of a system of internal party controls: the FSLN National

Directorate, which served as a revolutionary politburo to run the party and the state; the Ministry of Defense and its politicized Sandinista People's Army; the Ministry of the Interior, also highly politicized; and the judiciary system, including the revolutionary tribunals.

*Ministry of the Interior (MINT).* Internal security was the domain of the new Ministry of the Interior (MINT), which was responsible for national police functions, internal investigations, paramilitary and border troops, prisons, special operations units, foreign intelligence, political indoctrination, media controls, and the General Directorate of State Security (DGSE). The MINT also ran internal spy networks, employed the *turbas divinas* ("divine mobs") for mass action against FSLN opponents, conducted torture, assassinated internal opponents and defectors, and trained and supported international revolutionary terrorist and guerrilla organizations.

Tomás Borge, a hardened guerrilla and the last surviving founder of the FSLN, became interior minister. Borge was already known to the Soviet bloc security and intelligence services through training programs in Cuba in which he and other FSLN members had participated. MINT personnel grew to an estimated six thousand members, and military intelligence constituted an estimated fifteen thousand. Sandinista propaganda bragged that the party had one-hundred thousand secret informers—in an agrarian country of 3 million—among its Committees in Defense of Sandinism, with billboards proclaiming, "Counterrevolutionary: 200,000 eyes are watching you."<sup>7</sup>

The MINT was not an indigenous force. Rather, it was modeled after the East German Ministry for State Security (MfS). Organizing and operating such a large apparatus in a short period of time required officers and advisers from the MfS, Soviet KGB, the Cuban DGI, and other Soviet bloc internal security services. These apparatchiks not only acted as advisers, but actually staffed the MINT and ran several of its day-to-day operations.<sup>8</sup> Cuban officers aided MINT operational work, and East German personnel provided technical support.<sup>9</sup> Cuban personnel operated at all levels of the defense and interior ministries, from the general staff to the battalion and, in some cases, to the company levels.<sup>10</sup> Some foreign advisers, such as Cuban Interior Ministry Colonel Renan Montero, who ran Sandinista foreign intelligence, were given citizenship so they could function as Nicaraguans.<sup>11</sup> Practically all instruments of intelligence, counterintelligence, law enforcement, incarceration, political repression, and force, apart from the army, were under Borge's personal control. Under him, the DGSE carried out day-to-day political repression.

*The General Directorate for State Security (DGSE).* Nicaragua's KGB, the DGSE, was headed by Lenin Cerna. As his name would suggest, Cerna is the son of a Communist family; his brother's name is Engels and his sister, Krupskaja, is named after Lenin's wife. At age fourteen, Cerna joined the Sandinista urban terrorist campaigns as a bomber, and at age fifteen joined the FSLN. Like many of his comrades, he was hardened by seven years in prison (1968 to 1975), receiving sanctuary in Cuba after his release. Cerna described himself as a dedicated Communist. To him, directing the DGSE was not a service to the country, but "a duty to the party."<sup>12</sup>

The DGSE was the FSLN's principal organ for repressing internal opposition. Created, in Cerna's words, "immediately after our victory in mid-July 1979,"<sup>13</sup> it unleashed repression not only against its opposition on the political right but—as in other Marxist-Leninist revolutions—against left-communists and Trotskyites as well.<sup>14</sup>

During its formative period, the DGSE was heavily molded by the involvement of the East German Ministry for State Security (MfS, or Stasi). As the FSLN was poised to take power in Managua, East German State Security Minister Erich Mielke pondered how the Stasi might assist in consolidating control. Despite debates within the MfS about involvement in Nicaragua, Mielke dismissed all objections out of hand, and within days of Somoza's fall, a Stasi station was established in the Nicaraguan capital. The purpose: "to systematically construct a Nicaraguan General Directorate of State Security (DGSE) that was identical in structure and operational doctrine to the Stasi."<sup>15</sup> East German Foreign Minister Oskar Fischer subsequently visited Managua personally that September to establish diplomatic relations with the FSLN regime.<sup>16</sup>

Ostensibly a state institution, the DGSE was, in Cerna's words, "a political organization . . . a body formed on the basis of political selection, of comrades who want to be part of it."<sup>17</sup> As one of its functions, the DGSE established political controls within the armed forces. A DGSE political officer was assigned to every unit of twenty-five to thirty men within the Sandinista People's Army (EPS), which, like the DGSE, was outwardly a national force but in reality an armed detachment of the ruling party. These political officers were responsible for drawing up lists of people singled out to be captured or killed in countryside military operations—usually local peasant leaders with no connections to the outside world. The DGSE would be responsible for the Sandinistas' worst crimes, carrying out most of the FSLN's disappearances and killings.<sup>18</sup> The DGSE also ran Sandinista intelligence operations abroad.<sup>19</sup>

Eight months after taking power, Interior Minister Borge visited the Soviet bloc to seek added support. In the USSR, the KGB accorded him high-level treatment.<sup>20</sup> He also visited Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria for consultations with secret police and Interior Ministry officials; the result was a Bulgarian agreement to train forty Nicaraguan security officials. In early April 1980, Borge, State Security Deputy Hugo Torres, and MINT Political Commissar Marcos Somarriba also traveled to East Berlin to meet with Mielke and other security and intelligence officials. Mielke assigned Stasi Lt. Col. Horst Scheel to coordinate cooperation between the Stasi and MINT.<sup>21</sup>

Stasi documents show that Borge pleaded for weapons, uniforms, communications and surveillance equipment, and other supplies for the MINT, complaining specifically about political opposition from the center-left Social Christian Party and Leonel Gonzalez, president of the Nicaraguan Human Rights Commission (CPDH). In response, Mielke emphasized the need for "strengthening and solidifying the organs of power, particularly the security organs" in Nicaragua along the East German model. Mielke's thrust, according to Stasi specialist John Koehler, was that

if the Sandinistas were unable to come to grips with the opposition by lacing it with informers, stern repressive measures would be required. In that regard, Mielke and his ministry was prepared to train a specially selected secret police cadre in East Germany. He said he would order an immediate study regarding the supply of weapons and other equipment. This meeting set in motion one of the most massive Stasi efforts in support of the establishment of a communist police state in the Third World.<sup>22</sup>

Dissatisfied with the slow pace of support for the FSLN among other Soviet bloc countries, Mielke told Soviet KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov that he wanted to call a meeting in East Berlin to coordinate bloc support for the Sandinista secret police. Andropov agreed, and the Stasi conducted the two-day conclave starting on May 12, 1980. Participants included generals and high-ranking officials from the East German Stasi, the People's Police, the Soviet KGB, the Czechoslovakian Interior Ministry, Bulgarian foreign intelligence, and secret police officials from Cuba, who were flown to the event aboard a Stasi aircraft.

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Mielke’s priority was to keep the fragile and fractured FSLN united and in power. Under the division of labor established by the Soviets, Cuba, and East Germany were to provide the majority of security assistance for the FSLN, with the main burden of support for the Sandinistas falling on Cuba. It was imperative for the effort to be collective. According to a Soviet KGB representative identified as Medyanik: “We all have the obligation to do our share for strengthening and securing the revolution in Nicaragua. The United States will not acquiesce to the revolutionary changes in her own sphere of influence. She will attempt to destabilize the revolution and mobilize all opposing forces. Therefore our consultations are of the highest significance.” Curiously, the Soviet delegation did not agree to an official protocol concerning discussions with Borge and his group, apparently out of concern that the Sandinistas had not yet proven their ability to consolidate control into a one-party Leninist state.<sup>23</sup>

Stasi documents unearthed by Koehler show the Sandinistas’ dedication to repressing their opponents. Ruiz emphasized the urgency of liquidating “enemies” and constructing a new prison, as well as training personnel to interrogate, indoctrinate, or otherwise process the more than seven thousand political prisoners in custody. Most had not stood trial, and many had not even been interrogated because of lack of personnel.<sup>24</sup> The Stasi documents corroborate contemporary Nicaraguan human rights reports from that period concerning the treatment of political prisoners.

Stasi chief Mielke concluded the May 1980 meeting by criticizing Soviet heavy-handedness in the third world and calling for bloc unity in Nicaragua:

“The appearance of our representatives working as a unit is of prime importance. Mutual agreement on all matters will be the requirement for transforming Chekist principles, created by [Bolshevik political police founder Feliks] Dzerzhinsky, into reality in Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan comrades must feel that the Communists are on their side.”<sup>25</sup>

### **The Rise of Opposition to the Sandinistas**

After a brief consolidation period characterized by virtually unchallenged political popularity and a tactical alliance with moderate and center-left politicians (coupled with the simultaneous repression of former officers, men, and family members of the National Guard), the MINT set about attacking opponents of the revolutionary junta. One of the principal targets during this early period was the Catholic Church, which had played a major role in both facilitating the flight of Somoza from Nicaragua and ensuring safe passage for Sandinista leaders. As a moral force, the Church led the resistance to the FSLN's consolidation of Marxist-Leninist power. At first, the Sandinistas' criticism of the Church was mild: “The bishops are too conservative, too fearful of opening themselves up to collaboration with Marxism.” Gradually, however, the opposition began to mount vicious attacks: “The bishops are the voices of the bourgeoisie, have fallen into the hands of Reagan's policies, are vain, authoritarian, and counterrevolutionaries: enemies of the people.”<sup>26</sup> The MINT led operations physically assaulting clergy and lay people, disrupting religious services, fabricating evidence against priests to destroy their reputations, and other activities designed to undermine the Catholic Church and evangelical Christian churches.<sup>27</sup> Simultaneously, the MINT—in an effort to control the religious faithful in Nicaragua and to confuse world opinion—supervised the creation of a parallel “popular church” under political control. It also carried out the Sandinista party's official policy of anti-Semitism, even though there were very few Jews in the country.<sup>28</sup>

As disenchantment with the Sandinista party's political, economic, and cultural policies grew, voluntary recruitment in the armed forces dwindled and armed opposition increased. Military conscription, planned in 1979, was the FSLN's remedy by 1983. The regime established forcible recruitment in schools and workplaces, and employed the Committees in Defense of Sandinism to force people into the army, reserves, and militia, later resorting to mass conscription as well.<sup>29</sup> This military buildup was designed two years prior to the emergence of any significant armed opposition to the Sandinistas. Paradoxically, it was precisely this broad conscription, which had never existed under the Somozas, which prompted many peasants to take up arms against the revolutionary regime.<sup>30</sup>

From the beginning, the FSLN had anticipated armed opposition to its plans for Nicaragua. It quickly attempted to disarm the population with strict gun control—what one sympathetic academic termed a “campaign to reduce the number of arms in private hands”<sup>31</sup>—and placed the control of gun possession in the hands of Borge's MINT. By 1982, U.S. concern with Nicaragua's

embrace of the Soviet bloc prompted the Reagan administration to initiate covert support for the armed opposition.

### Prison System

One of the earliest Sandinista public works projects was the construction of a centrally-controlled national prison system. Aided by Cuban, East German, and Soviet advisers, the Ministry of Interior built a system designed not only to incarcerate criminals and to punish opponents, but to break the will of the entire population to resist FSLN policies of mass ideological indoctrination, property seizure, conscription, and repression of market activities, political beliefs, and religious practices. The ousted Somoza regime had only had one central prison, the Carcel Modelo; upon seizing power, the Sandinistas quadrupled its size and built another twenty-two prisons, plus an estimated twenty clandestine jails.<sup>32</sup> The numbers of political prisoners multiplied. At his worst, Somoza had kept about six hundred political prisoners, including those convicted of violent political crimes. In contrast, by the mid-1980s, the Sandinistas held about sixty-five hundred political prisoners, in addition to two thousand former members of the National Guard—the largest number of political prisoners in any country in the hemisphere except Cuba.<sup>33</sup>

The Sistema Penitenciario ran the so called criminal prisons, and the DGSE ran the “operations prisons.” The distinction was almost immaterial, as political prisoners were regularly held on criminal charges in the former and were exclusively the inmates in the latter.

The DGSE operated its own prison system, with facilities designed by Cuban and Soviet prison architects. Existing cells with classic bar-type doors were replaced with Soviet-style solid steel. DGSE cells contained small concrete slabs for beds, walls of coarse stone (to keep prisoners from writing or leaning on them), and solid steel doors with a slit opened from the outside. A small hole in the corner served as a toilet.<sup>34</sup> DGSE installations across the country contained nearly airtight cubicles, about a meter high by a half-meter long and wide, into which a prisoner was placed between interrogations. Fittingly, the DGSE’s most infamous prison was El Chipote, the former secret police headquarters of the Somoza regime.

### Torture and Executions

Torture<sup>36</sup> of prisoners was routine and widely practiced. Prisoners were forced into cells so small that they could neither stand nor sit, they were locked in steel hot boxes outside in the sun, and they were subjected to psychological torture that included sexual assaults on the prisoners’ daughters or wives.<sup>37</sup> Prisoners were occasionally mutilated and skinned alive before being executed, the latter practice attributed almost solely to the DGSE. One practice in the countryside was the *corte de cruz*, a drawing-and-quartering technique in which the prisoner’s limbs were severed from the body and the individual was left to bleed to death. Such killings were time-consuming and inefficient and the exception to the rule. It appears that they were designed to be carried out on selected targets so that the human remains would be left in a way calculated to sow terror among Sandinista opponents.<sup>38</sup>

### **Criminal Activity within the Security Forces**

Unfettered by civil controls and led by Sandinista cadres that included former convicts and bank robbers, the Interior Ministry was a thoroughly corrupt organization. It was one of the main FSLN armed detachments used to apply force in a wholesale theft of private property for the Sandinista leadership's political and personal gain. DGSE Director Lenin Cerna, for example, lived in a large private home stolen from a naturalized American citizen.<sup>39</sup> Interior Minister Tomas Borge headed a conglomerate of his own companies using MINT resources and personnel. He and other senior MINT officials assisted Colombian drug traffickers, providing them and their illegal cargoes of cocaine with landing and refueling sites, sanctuary, security, and other means of support.<sup>40</sup> The MINT and DGSE employed common criminals to break into the homes and automobiles of political opponents to plant narcotics or other criminal "evidence," which the authorities would then "discover" during a search or raid.<sup>41</sup>

Within the Penal Directorate, ex-Sandinista officials complained of "renting prisoners out to labor for the profit of the prison staff, selling for profit products produced by prisoners, coercing sexual favors from wives of inmates, and appropriating packages sent by the Red Cross and religious organizations."<sup>42</sup>

Later, when the Sandinistas would lose power in 1990, the security services would be part of the "piñata"—the wholesale pillaging of the Nicaraguan government's physical assets and resources for its staff's personal benefit. Out of power, the Sandinistas used their gains and their continued influence. Colombian authorities accused Sandinista military and police leaders, including former Interior Minister Borge, ex-DGSE chief Cerna, army chief of staff Joaquín Cuadra, the Ortega brothers, and others of running an operation called "Steel Cell" in 1996 to smuggle weapons to Marxist narco-guerrillas in Colombia.<sup>43</sup>

### **Checks and Balances**

The FSLN National Directorate, like a Communist Party politburo, was the sole entity governing both the instruments of coercion and the judicial system. No checks and balances against the security organs existed. The "legislative" branch was essentially a rubber-stamp analogue to a state supreme council, such as that of East Germany, which allowed token opposition during the years of totalitarian rule. The judiciary was designed to enforce the decrees of the FSLN National Directorate and the "laws" of the "legislature." When Sandinista Vice Minister of Justice Alberto Gamez Ortega (no relation to the brothers in the FSLN National Directorate) resigned in protest in November 1982, he was arrested and imprisoned at El Chipote.<sup>44</sup>

Press censorship was widespread, varying only in degrees and lessening only in response to international pressure. Of Nicaragua's three daily papers, two were seized outright by the FSLN, and the third, *La Prensa*, was allowed to operate only in censored form. The newspaper was notable for its vocal opposition to the Somoza regime and its support for the revolution that ousted it; publisher Violeta Chamorro herself had served in the first junta. Television and radio media were similarly under total FSLN/MINT control. Radio Católica,

the station of the Archdiocese of Managua, was shut down, while the opposition was forced to broadcast from neighboring Honduras and Costa Rica, and later from the United States, into Nicaragua. Much of Nicaragua's non-FSLN media survived in part thanks to covert support from the United States and other countries. However, repression of press outlets became part of the Sandinistas' campaign against "CIA subversion." Amnesty International found the DGSE "largely unrestricted by the judiciary or any other civil authority."<sup>45</sup>

### **The Democratic Transition**

In the end, the revolutionary regime was never able to become fully consolidated. Not only was it too close geographically to the United States, which under President Ronald Reagan would not permit a repeat of the Cuban revolution on its southern border, but the FSLN's socialist and collectivist policies ravaged the Nicaraguan economy, driving out most businesses and destroying the country's agriculture. Huge public works projects, from prisons and Soviet-style parade reviewing stands to housing, schooling, and health programs, combined with a massive military buildup far in excess of the country's legitimate defense needs at the time, were far too ambitious for the poor, undeveloped country to afford. As such, the FSLN relied as much on Canadian and European economic aid as it did on Soviet bloc military and security aid. This dual reliance on mutually incompatible patrons left the FSLN unable politically and diplomatically to impose the rigid, Cuban- or East German-style ideological orthodoxy it had planned. The FSLN was caught in a dilemma of running a police state while allowing at least the appearance of pluralism to continue attracting Canadian and European support. As it tightened military ties with the Soviet Union and its satellites, and as mass internal opposition against the regime grew, the FSLN created an opportunity for the United States to exploit the Sandinistas' internal contradictions and covertly support both the internal civic opposition (through clandestine support for labor unions, political and social organizations, news media, and so forth) and the opposition in exile, as well as the growing armed resistance, which had begun as an indigenous and disorganized peasant revolt. With substantial U.S. support, the Nicaraguan resistance grew to become one of the largest and broadest-based armed peasant rebellions in Latin American history.<sup>46</sup>

Washington's backing of the civic and armed opposition to the FSLN was instrumental in forcing the Sandinista regime to liberalize and meet the demands of the armed resistance to hold free elections. At the same time, political liberalization in the Soviet Union and a growing realization that Moscow could no longer support its military adventures abroad—also brought about in large part by covert American support for anti-Soviet and democratic resistance movements on four continents—caused the Kremlin to curtail and ultimately eliminate its military and security aid keeping the FSLN in power.

Faced with these realities and confident of their ability to remain in control, the FSLN agreed to hold competitive elections, which took place in February 1990. Violeta Chamorro, the former revolutionary junta member and publisher of *La Prensa*, won handily, becoming Central America's first female president. The

electoral loss shocked the FSLN, which scrambled to keep control over the state bureaucracy, much of the economy, and instruments of subversion and force. Fearing retribution against and destruction of the DGSE apparatus, the FSLN took steps to ensure that the secret police would remain firmly in friendly hands. In the two months between the election and Chamorro's inauguration, the FSLN transferred the DGSE from the Interior Ministry to the Sandinista People's Army and cut a deal with Chamorro to keep the army—and thus the DGSE—in Sandinista control.<sup>47</sup> This combination of strategic planning and commitment to keeping power on the part of the FSLN, coupled with the timidity of the co-opted democratic successor government, led to the preservation of the secret police and

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an inability of democratic leaders to keep the security organs and their networks in check that continues to this day.

Incoming President Chamorro had two major vulnerabilities that the FSLN skillfully exploited: In addition to her own chronic indecisiveness and unwillingness to confront the Sandinistas, she placed

complete confidence in her son-in-law, Antonio Lacayo, even though throughout the civil war he maintained substantial business relationships with FSLN leaders. Following her victory, she named Lacayo her presidential chief of staff and placed day-to-day control of the government in his hands.

Even before it assumed power, the Chamorro government had surrendered any claim to control over the police, Interior Ministry, secret police, or army. It negotiated an infamous Protocol of Transition that encapsulated two main points: property confiscated or stolen by the Sandinistas would not be returned to the rightful owners, and the military and state security forces would be immune from government control—states within a state. As Carlos Hurtado, a social democratic politician who served as President Chamorro's first interior minister and national police chief, recalls: “This was the hardest part of the transition.”<sup>48</sup>

Why did Chamorro pursue this self-destructive policy? Still in a state of virtual civil war, Nicaragua had two standing armies when Chamorro took office: the Sandinista People's Army (EPS) and the Nicaraguan Resistance Army (ERN). Both the Sandinista regulars and the resistance guerrillas survived the transition intact. The peace accords that led to the 1990 elections that rejected Sandinista rule provided amnesty for government and opposition forces for their actions during the 1982–89 civil war. Although the elected government could have appealed to the Organization of American States or the United States for outside support to disarm both armies, as Hurtado noted, it felt it had to choose sides, and President Chamorro chose the Sandinistas. The contras would be disarmed and the Sandinista army would remain. It was a major betrayal of the forces that had fought for the elections

that brought Chamorro to power<sup>49</sup> and a harbinger of things to come for the diverse political coalition backing Chamorro and her successors.

Chamorro's incoming team was very small and fractured, punctuated by infighting for position and power. The internal opposition was ready to take control, but the Nicaraguan Resistance was not. The Sandinista party and security organs, meanwhile, were already well ensconced. "We needed to open a road for the government to take power," Hurtado remembers. "Other socialist countries didn't have an armed resistance." But the Sandinistas, not the contras, now threatened armed resistance to the new democratic government. To ensure their political and military survival and to prevent confiscation of their ill-gotten property, the Sandinistas handed out hundreds of thousands of automatic weapons, grenades, and other military arms to supporters across the country.

The weapons distribution came in two waves. The first occurred just before the February 1990 election, following the American invasion of nearby Panama in December 1989, which toppled the military regime of Manuel Antonio Noriega. Fearing (or at least using the pretext) that the Panama operation was a dress rehearsal for the destruction of the Sandinista regime, the FSLN handed out the first tranches of weapons. The second arms distribution took place after the Sandinistas' electoral loss to Chamorro. The Sandinistas had stored most of the weapons for the Marxist-Leninist FMLN guerrillas of El Salvador.<sup>50</sup> At first, the Sandinistas tried to make it look like the Resistance was refusing to put down its arms.<sup>51</sup>

Meanwhile, the army and security organs set about ensuring their own survival under a post-Sandinista government. DGSE personnel that the army could not effectively absorb went into the national police, which, though a Sandinista creation, was not very politicized and generally concerned itself with combating common crime. DGSE officers were placed in charge of local police forces in cities and towns across the country. Chamorro named former Sandinista Deputy Interior Minister Rene Vivas to head the national police. Vivas, in turn, immediately set about politicizing them.<sup>52</sup> In the army, DGSE Director Lenin Cerna assumed the rank of colonel and refashioned the DGSE to be the army's Directorate for Defense Information (*Dirección de Información para la Defensa*, or DID).<sup>53</sup> The Chamorro government thus became the head of a law enforcement nightmare. Carlos Hurtado, the first post-Sandinista interior minister, recalls, "I was left with DGSE officers who became police chiefs."<sup>54</sup>

The new civilian government was totally denied access to DGSE records. Between Chamorro's election and inauguration, the Interior Ministry sent part of the DGSE archives to Cuba to keep them out of the democratic government's hands.<sup>55</sup> These archives allegedly contained details of the DGSE's creation, as well as very specific and highly documented manifests of the DGSE's own torture and murder campaigns and compromising material that allowed the Sandinistas to squeeze extra concessions from President Chamorro. One of those concessions was a guarantee that General Humberto Ortega would remain chief of the Sandinista People's Army. Ortega supervised a reduction in the army's force from 96,000 to 15,250 men, all the while ensuring that the resistance was reduced from an estimated 30,000 to 0.<sup>56</sup>

Instead of trying to break Sandinista threats to its integrity, the new government's first priority was to recover the stolen property from the *piñata*. In their last days of power, the Sandinistas and the FSLN-controlled legislature passed a law to institutionalize the *piñata*, going far beyond the generous terms set under the Protocol of Transition. The incoming government, instead of rupturing the old legal system that had favored the one-party regime—and despite the fact that Chamorro herself had supported the instant elimination of the *somocista* legal system when she was part of the Sandinista junta in 1979—abided by it and sought to reform it legislatively. This also held true with an attempt to reverse the *piñata* law. In response to the action, the FSLN launched huge demonstrations across the country for the next three weeks aimed at disrupting the economy and threatening the new government. Thousands of the demonstrators had military training, but few had jobs or near-term prospects of employment. This had a “tremendous effect” in intimidating the new government, Hurtado recounts.

The reformers had only a general agenda and no real gameplan. According to Hurtado, President Chamorro, despite wanting to fire Defense Minister Humberto Ortega and State Security Chief Lenin Cerna, was politically unable to do so, since that would have required ordering their arrest and detention. Although these were powers that had been granted to her under the Sandinista constitution and the laws she had accepted, her reconciliation agenda completely ruled out such a move. “I had to support letting them stay,” Hurtado recalls. In exchange, Humberto Ortega promised to control the Sandinistas, as well as the Resistance elements he accused of wanting to topple the government. Simultaneously, he set about seducing the man who ran the Chamorro government's day-to-day affairs: presidential son-in-law and chief of staff, Antonio Lacayo.

This was the key to ensuring that Chamorro would preserve the Sandinista repressive machinery. Lacayo was long rumored to have been a business partner of Sandinista figures during the war, and he was one of the few non-Sandinistas to retain and even expand his fortune under their rule. As Hurtado saw it, the Sandinista military chief had a Rasputin-like hold over Lacayo. And although Chamorro did not believe the democratic Resistance wanted to oust her, Lacayo apparently did.<sup>57</sup> The army and state security viewed the Nicaraguan Resistance and the anti-Sandinista political parties as the enemy, and portrayed themselves as the defenders of the Chamorro government, law and order, and democracy.

Consequently these policies, part of Chamorro's overall failure to challenge the FSLN, deeply alienated her own political coalition. “The Sandinistas are the only support the [Chamorro] government has,” said Interior Minister Hurtado shortly before Chamorro fired him in mid-1992. “Sandinista power is intact,” he asserted, “Absolutely intact.”<sup>58</sup> When the National Assembly tried to pass laws to return property stolen by the Sandinistas, the Sandinistas provoked riots and forced the legislature to back down. Hurtado attempted to quell the riots, but the police, the army, and Chamorro would not back him.<sup>59</sup> Hurtado also tried to fire Sandinista police chief Rene Vivas and put the national police under civilian control, but Chamorro, acting on her son-in-law's advice, countermanded his order and allowed the Sandinista chief to remain.<sup>60</sup> In the meantime, citizens filed complaints

with the human rights commission, stating that the police had become politicized and that DGSE officers who had abused them had become local police chiefs.<sup>61</sup>

The Sandinistas then moved against former Resistance leaders, especially the more influential or charismatic ones with a substantial political following in the countryside and the Managua slums. These Resistance commanders had laid down their arms and disbanded their military command structure to take part in the political process under the peace accords. Resistance founder Enrique Bermudez, for example, moved from his exile in Miami and Honduras to establish a peasant-based political party. Commander 380, as he was known, enjoyed a significant national following among the poor. However, once the Resistance turned over their weapons to United Nations forces, the Sandinistas systematically murdered a majority of the most effective former contra leaders.<sup>62</sup> A week after three-fourths of the former commanders of the Resistance signed a letter endorsing Bermudez as their official representative to the Nicaraguan government to negotiate on their behalf, Bermudez was lured to the Inter-Continental Hotel, adjacent to Sandinista Army headquarters in Managua, and shot to death.

The Bermudez killing was Nicaragua's most high-profile political assassination since the Sandinistas' 1980 murder of coffee growers' union leader Jorge Salazar.<sup>63</sup> The Sandinistas assassinated approximately 120 former Resistance leaders between the February 1990 elections and August 1992; about 215 ex-fighters in all.<sup>64</sup> An Organization of American States human rights investigator observed that "if there is a plan, whoever is carrying it out is certainly doing a good job. They have selected all the right people, some of the most charismatic leaders the resistance has."<sup>65</sup>

Although Chamorro was never reluctant to keep her hand out for foreign money and reconstruction aid, she desperately tried to hide the fact that her government had no control over the Sandinista instruments of force, and went to unusual lengths to protect them. According to a 1993 report, "The Chamorro government, managing an economy almost totally dependent on foreign aid, is loath to admit any sign that the Sandinistas are not fully subject to its authority."<sup>66</sup> In reality, Chamorro had no influence over the army and security forces at all. She was told the notorious El Chipote prison had been closed but, months into her administration, found that the prison was not only still open, but people were still being tortured there. The DGSE-run police had turned El Chipote into a processing and operations center.<sup>67</sup> When human rights chief Lino Hernandez told Interior Minister Hurtado that El Chipote was still operating, Hurtado insisted it was closed and that President Chamorro had decreed it would be turned into a park. "That's when I realized there was no control," Hernandez recalls.<sup>68</sup>

### **Civilian Police Powerless Against Secret Services**

Western governments, led by Spain, helped Nicaragua's new democratic government build a new National Civilian Police to replace the old uniformed Sandinista force. However, the new police lack any effective power against the Sandinista secret police or army. It has been powerless to act against Sandinista agents who murdered former resistance commanders after the 1989 peace process.

By the late 1990s, Nicaragua maintained a sophisticated electronic spy network, which had been built and equipped by Cuban, East German, and Soviet intelligence agents. The Soviet-built communications intercept facilities, the construction of which began in 1982,<sup>69</sup> remained in Sandinista hands. Among its abuses are instances of eavesdropping on the private meetings and telephone conversations of political opponents, including elected officials, and the publication of these conversations in Sandinista-linked newspapers. In one notable instance, Cuban-American Foundation leader Jorge Mas Canosa called the Nicaraguan Foreign Ministry from Miami and later saw the transcript in a Managua newspaper. Another bugged conversation, between a lawmaker and a former Resistance commander, Humberto Castilla, was also made public.<sup>70</sup> Still another, a recorded conversation of an Inter-American Institute of Human Rights official, appeared in Sandinista-controlled newspapers and was covered on Sandinista radio.<sup>71</sup>

Invasions of privacy were not limited to wiretaps and eavesdropping. Speaking in 1993, three years after the ouster of the FSLN, Permanent Commission on Human Rights Director Lino Hernandez, a longtime Sandinista critic, confirmed that "All our principal mail arrives with signs of having been opened."<sup>72</sup>

### **Democratic Government Unwilling to Challenge Sandinista Forces**

President Chamorro was horrified by the Bermudez murder but resisted repeated appeals to suspend Sandinista officials alleged to be involved. She either ignored or rejected calls from all fourteen political parties in her UNO coalition to fire General Ortega. And although U.S. President George H. W. Bush would take a personal interest in solving the assassination, saying, "It is critical that the perpetrators of this heinous crime be found and tried—for the sake of justice and for true national reconciliation in Nicaragua," and personally offering FBI assistance, Chamorro demurred.<sup>73</sup> Secretary of State James Baker likened the assassination to the 1989 killings of six Jesuit priests and their housekeepers by army units in El Salvador. Chamorro paid a secret visit to the home of Bermudez's widow in Miami to express her condolences where, in front of witnesses, Mrs. Bermudez asked President Chamorro to place Sandinista army leaders Humberto Ortega and Joaquín Cuadra, National Police Chief Rene Vivas, and state security leaders Ricardo Wheelock and Lenin Cerna, on administrative leave pending an outside FBI investigation. Witnesses say Chamorro was non-committal at the time and subsequently never took action.<sup>74</sup> She later ignored written pleas by dozens of U.S. congressmen. (By contrast, President Alfredo Cristiani of El Salvador welcomed help from the FBI in probing the Jesuit murders.) Chamorro's son-in-law and chief-of-staff, Lacayo, was defiant, declaring that General Ortega would remain in power "indefinitely," adding, "Whether or not the United States likes Ortega as head of the army is their problem."<sup>75</sup>

Chamorro also resisted calls from her political allies to empower an independent commission that would apply even rudimentary forms of checks and balances against the army and security forces. Under heavy public pressure in the wake of the Bermudez assassination, she appointed a five-man special investigative commission headed by a personal representative of the archbishop of Managua, Miguel

Cardinal Obando y Bravo, but would not grant the commission any independent investigative or subpoena powers.<sup>76</sup> Lacking any real power, the commission was little more than a fig leaf in response to domestic and international pressure.

The United States could have helped uproot the Sandinista security apparatus then and there. In the case of the Jesuit murders in El Salvador, the U.S. Congress was quick to tie aid to a full investigation of the killings, in which several Salvadoran officers—including the leader of the military academy—were implicated. As a result, several were convicted and imprisoned, and the FBI's rapid investigative assistance and strong, sustained political pressure from Washington forced a shake-up in the Salvadoran armed forces and linked U.S. aid to an aggressive pursuit of any additional perpetrators.

Washington, however, was unwilling to apply the same pressure to Nicaragua. The unofficial excuse was fear of undermining Chamorro's fragile government.<sup>77</sup> As a result, Chamorro found herself increasingly relying on the Sandinistas and their secret police apparatus as the core of her political support. One of her

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***“This attitude of impunity—and lack of sustained external pressure supporting democratic forces—kept Nicaragua a haven for international terrorists and lawlessness . . .”***

main allies, center-left National Assembly president and former contra political figure Alfredo Cesar, lamented that “she is trying to govern without a party, so she is being forced to rely on the weapons of the Sandinistas. She is not relying on the Sandinista party, but the Ortega brothers.”<sup>78</sup> When the U.S. Senate held up more than \$100 million in aid to pressure the removal of top Sandinista security officials, Nicaragua—a beggar state if there ever was one—called the senators’ bluff, declaring that police chief Rene Vivas would not be relieved “until after the aid is released.”<sup>79</sup> Though holding all the cards, the United States capitulated.

Even where individual Sandinista officers were identified by international investigators, the army harbored the alleged murderers. The *Miami Herald* reported in 1993 that army chief Humberto Ortega

made it clear that he will not submit his men to the kind of justice that other Nicaraguans must face. When an international panel blamed 12 police officers and 10 active duty or retired soldiers in connection with the murders of 10 former contra rebels [after the peace accords and therefore not subject to amnesty], the civilian-ruled National Police department moved quickly to punish the officers. Yet the army declared that there were no grounds to move against any of the military men, and Gen. Ortega displayed his defiance in a meeting with a foreign diplomat from the Organization of American States who sat on the investigating panel. “Humberto told me,” the OAS diplomat recalled, “He said, ‘F—you people. We don’t care.’”<sup>80</sup>

Meanwhile, the prime suspects were promoted. Former DGSE chief Cerna was elevated from army inspector general to adviser of the Political, Defense, and Security Command.<sup>81</sup> Loyal to the extreme, he branded even critics within his

own party as “enemies.” He applied the epithet to the stepdaughter of Sandinista party chief Daniel Ortega, with Ortega’s approval, because she had accused the Sandinista leader of having sexually molested and raped her since she was a small girl.<sup>82</sup>

This attitude of impunity—and lack of sustained external pressure supporting democratic forces—kept Nicaragua a haven for international terrorists and lawlessness, ranging from a multinational leftist guerrilla ring that kidnapped businessmen in Brazil and Mexico, Basque ETA terrorists that murdered Spanish officials, and members of the Italian Red Brigades, the German Red Army Faction, the M-19 and FARC narcoguerrillas of Colombia, the FMLN of El Salvador, and the MIR of Chile. There was even a Nicaraguan link to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing in New York; one of the terrorist suspects arrested by the FBI carried five legitimate, but fraudulent, Nicaraguan passports.<sup>83</sup> Someone within the Nicaraguan foreign ministry had issued them.

That same year, a large explosion in Managua revealed an underground arsenal of weapons, blank passports, and kidnapping targets from Mexico to Brazil. The weapons were owned by the FMLN guerrillas of neighboring El Salvador.<sup>84</sup> The Clinton administration was convinced that top Sandinista military and intelligence officials knew about the cache, and then-United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali issued an official statement of “serious concern” that the clandestine arms depot violated the UN peace accords for Central America, saying “the peace process itself could be placed in jeopardy.”<sup>85</sup>

Former Sandinista military and secret police leaders still enjoy such impunity that they continue to threaten Nicaraguans who raise questions about them. When President Arnaldo Aleman considered naming human rights chief Lino Hernandez to a government-sponsored post as human rights procurator in early 1999, army chief Joaquín Cuadra threatened retaliation.<sup>86</sup> When former DGSE chief Lenin Cerna retired from the army in April 1999, local journalists suggested he stand trial before an international tribunal for murder, torture, and other crimes committed while in office. FSLN leader Daniel Ortega threatened against such talk and challenged, “Colonel Cerna comes from the Sandinista fight and was an essential part of the government that I presided over. If there is something you want to charge him with, you are charging me as well. I will respond to any charge that is introduced against him. Be aware that if anyone gets involved in this, they will be playing with fire.” The *La Prensa* newspaper itself termed Ortega’s comments to be a “threat.”<sup>87</sup>

Human rights commissioner Lino Hernandez was asked if he had a case against Cerna. Hernandez replied that his organization had fourteen thousand such cases: “If people came to us, we would help them and even give evidence to the International War Crimes Tribunal.” But practical conditions to force them to stand trial, he argued, were not right; the Sandinistas still control the military and much of the political and economic systems. Yet, “it’s a criminal case; he is a criminal and we have the documents.”

The FSLN has also stridently opposed the creation of a Truth Commission modeled after those of Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, South Africa, and other

countries to document human rights abuses and to identify those responsible.<sup>88</sup> There was also no analogue to the Gauck Commission of former East Germany to allow citizens to view their government files. Hernandez fears that informant and other secret files will remain in Sandinista hands and that his files documenting Sandinista crimes will be destroyed.

Hinting at mob action if he is held accountable, Cerna has stated that “the people” will defend him. Referring specifically to human rights chief Hernandez, Cerna told a Sandinista newspaper, “The thing is, they always underestimate our ability to respond.”<sup>89</sup> He has also repeatedly justified mob violence against the government.<sup>90</sup>

### **Second Chance: The Aleman Government Fights by Attrition**

President Arnaldo Aleman, elected in October 1996, devised a far-reaching strategy to isolate the Sandinista power structures in the government and reduce them through attrition. By that time, all local police chiefs and the entire national Council of Police Commanders were FSLN cadre members. Unable to confront them directly, he took office vowing to change the leadership of the national police and the army “through the retirement of the principal, Sandinista leaders and through changes in the laws that govern both institutions”—the basic laws relating to the national police and the military code, both of which could be changed by the simple majority Aleman commanded in the national legislature. By 1996, half the sixty-eight-hundred-man national police was made up of young officers who had never belonged to the FSLN. These officers, according to Aleman’s plan, would be promoted as senior FSLN officers retired.<sup>91</sup> Aleman also built a parallel intelligence service, answerable directly to the office of the president, and completely outside FSLN control “to counteract the intelligence organization controlled by Sandinista military leaders.” The previous Chamorro administration had created the service on paper in 1993 but never developed it. To build the organization, Aleman solicited the help of Israeli and Spanish advisers. In the words of one Nicaraguan political analyst,

This will be a daily, inch-by-inch confrontation in which [President Aleman] will take over ground from his adversaries, little by little. In military combat that means positional warfare. It will be war like a chess match in which no one hopes for a checkmate in three months. Rather, the match will be won piece by piece, in a war of attrition, and not by an immediate checkmate. His two key actions will involve gaining control over existing, Sandinista organizations and activating his own intelligence organization.<sup>92</sup>

Aleman also sought to establish a truth commission presided over by a universally respected figure like Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, archbishop of Managua, or raise the accountability and human rights questions internationally through the Inter-American Human Rights Committee.<sup>93</sup>

For its part, the United States did almost nothing to encourage Nicaragua to do away with the Sandinista instruments of repression and force. The administration of President George H.W. Bush tried to wash its hands of Nicaragua when it took power in 1989, showing only a flicker of interest after the Bermudez

assassination.<sup>94</sup> After the February 1990 elections rejecting the Sandinistas, former President Jimmy Carter “rushed to Violeta Chamorro’s house in Managua to urge her, in the name of ‘national reconciliation,’ to retain for the Sandinistas a measure of power in the new government.”<sup>95</sup> Carter’s action, and active disinterest from the first Bush administration, simply reinforced Chamorro’s predilection to do so. Washington remained virtually disinterested. The post of U.S. ambassador to Managua was vacant in the last year of the Bush administration and most of the first year of the Clinton presidency. Congressional figures with passing interest in Central America warned in mid-1993 that Managua risked a complete cutoff in U.S. assistance unless it diminished the Sandinista presence in government. Even Senator Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), who spent most of the 1980s undermining the Sandinistas’ armed opponents, “voiced concern that Sandinista impunity for human rights violations and continuing influence over Chamorro’s government could revive the country’s contra war.”<sup>96</sup> The Chamorro government lobbied fervently to stop Congress from following through.<sup>97</sup> But Senate action was reduced to a meaningless non-binding resolution, a broken vow to legislate a cutoff, and a State Department deferral of the matter.<sup>98</sup>

### Return of the Old Guard

For their part, the FSLN had planned during the 1996 presidential campaign to place Lenin Cerna in charge of Nicaragua’s entire internal security apparatus as Minister of Government, where, according to a Sandinista “Shadow Plan” document, “members of the historical FSLN National Directorate must guarantee their class and ideological interests.”<sup>99</sup> The Ministry of Government’s “control team” would be comprised of Cerna, two former chiefs of the MINT’s Fifth Department, and former Sandinista Police Chief Rene Vivas.<sup>100</sup>

As the FSLN prepared in 1999 for the municipal elections of 2000 and the presidential campaign of 2001, it brought<sup>101</sup> Lenin Cerna with his state security expertise back into the party leadership. He began by threatening members of his own party who objected to the continued leadership of Daniel Ortega (in the midst of his incest scandal) and by backing Ortega’s threats of armed force against the government.<sup>102</sup> “I’m going to work within the structures to make sure the FSLN wins the elections,” said Cerna, adding that he would seek out former DGSE personnel to assist him in the campaign.<sup>103</sup>

The strategy of attrition and parallel new structures under President Aleman worked to a large extent, and many of the more senior Sandinista officers retired to go into politics or become successful businessmen. Yet Aleman squandered his presidency and damaged many of his countrymen’s faith in the democratic process by looting the impoverished country of sums reaching nine figures. To many Nicaraguans, Aleman showed that the Sandinistas’ opponents were as corrupt as the Sandinistas themselves. Yet instead of returning the Sandinistas to power, Nicaraguans voted for a member of Aleman’s party, Enrique Bolaños, as their president in 2001. The elderly and endearing Bolaños, a businessman, had been a leader of the civic opposition to Sandinista rule in the 1980s. Pledging to throw corrupt leaders of the previous government in prison, he found himself up

against both the Sandinistas and his own party. He prosecuted Aleman, who was convicted and imprisoned. Although not lacking in willpower, he was unable to prosecute senior Sandinista figures for crimes including the postwar assassinations and has lacked the political strength to challenge the Sandinistas' infiltration of government institutions or their extra-governmental militias and mobs. Those covert cadres remain to fight another battle.

### Conclusion

Any attempt to dismantle the Sandinista secret police system was doomed from the start when President Violetta Chamorro defeated Daniel Ortega in the 1990 election because the incoming president feared her political opponents and feared showing her own weakness by asking for or accepting help. Despite the strong domestic support and international goodwill she enjoyed, Chamorro could not bring herself to move against the Sandinistas for fear of disrupting her reconciliation plan. She did nothing as Sandinista security forces assassinated more than two hundred resistance commanders who had accepted the terms of the United Nations-brokered peace accords and had laid down their arms to join the democratic process. She rebuffed offers from the President of the United States for FBI assistance in apprehending the killers of the resistance leader principally responsible for making her election possible.

With the FSLN left to dominate much of the economy and the country's instruments of force, Nicaragua stagnated both politically and economically under the Chamorro presidency. It was challenged only when Chamorro's successor, Arnaldo Aleman, successfully stood up to the FSLN and gradually purged the security and police—with substantial help from abroad. Even so, more than a decade after losing power, the former head of the Sandinista secret police remains a major political figure. The country is far from reconciled over its brief experiment with totalitarianism.

### NOTES

1. Douglas Payne, *The Democratic Mask: The Consolidation of the Sandinista Revolution* (New York: Freedom House, 1985) and Joshua Muravchik, *Nicaragua's Slow March to Communism* (Washington, DC: Cuban-American National Foundation, 1986).

2. Frente Sandinista para la Liberación Nacional, "72 Hours Document," Managua, September 21–23, 1979, in *The Central American Crisis Reader*, trans. and ed., Robert S. Leiken and Barry Rubin, 218–26, (New York: Summit, 1987). For a careful discussion of the FSLN ideology and the three strains of Marxism-Leninism in its national directorate, see David Nolan, *FSLN: The Ideology of the Sandinistas and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Institute of Interamerican Studies, 1984).

3. Daniel Ortega, "Nothing Will Hold Back Our Struggle for Liberation" (speech, Non-Aligned Conference, Havana, Cuba, September 1979) in Leiken and Rubin, *Central American*, 210.

4. Frente Sandinista, "72 Hours Document," in Leiken and Rubin, *Central American*, 225.

5. Humberto Ortega was one of the earliest members of the FSLN's urban terrorist campaigns in the late 1960s. He was shot during street fighting in December 1969 and was released in October 1970 when fellow FSLN fighters hijacked a civilian airliner to demand

his freedom. He fled to Cuba and embraced a Ho Chi Minh-style “prolonged people’s war” guerrilla strategy. In 1975 he developed the *Tercerista*, or “third way,” of the FSLN, adhering to the Front’s 1969 Marxist-Leninist platform but developing more sophisticated tactics and strategies for the seizure of political power, defining when and where it should take place and who should provide the social base. The *Terceristas* saw themselves as a third phase of “sandinism,” moving toward revolutionary civil war. The Ortega faction dominated the FSLN National Directorate of 1977–79. Its view of the petite bourgeoisie, as opposed to the peasants or proletariat, as the FSLN social base led many Western journalists and politicians to confuse the Sandinistas with social democrats, who saw themselves as the “third way” between capitalism and Marxism. See Nolan, *FSLN*, 60–66.

6. Frente Sandinista, “72 Hours Document,” in Leiken and Rubin, *Central American*, 220. The U.S. administration of President Jimmy Carter at the time was actively helping the Nicaraguan government, including military support, though it was concerned about the direction the FSLN was leading the country.

7. Tim Johnson, “Critics say the Sandinistas Still Run State’s Spy Network,” *Miami Herald*, July 6, 1993.

8. Humberto Belli, *Breaking Faith: The Sandinista Revolution and Its Effect on Freedom and Christian Faith in Nicaragua* (New York: Puebla Institute/Crossway Books, 1985), 20–21; Nolan, *FSLN*, 82, n40.

9. Lino Hernandez, director, Comité Permanente de Derechos Humanos, interview with author, Managua, Nicaragua, June 4, 1999.

10. U.S. Department of Defense and Department of State, *The Sandinista Military Build-Up: An Update* (Washington, DC: 1987), 16.

11. Tim Johnson, “3 Years after Defeat of Sandinistas, Nicaragua Remains Terrorist Haven,” *Miami Herald*, July 5, 1993.

12. Lenin Cerna, interview in *L’Humanite* (Paris), December 21, 1983, 13, trans. in FBIS, January 5, 1984, P13, P16.

13. *Ibid.*

14. John A. Booth, *The End and the Beginning: The Nicaraguan Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1982), 192–93.

15. John O. Koehler, *Stasi: The Untold Story of the East German Secret Police* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1999), 297–98.

16. *Ibid.*, 298.

17. Cerna, interview in *L’Humanite*.

18. Hernandez, interview with author.

19. Cerna, interview in *L’Humanite*.

20. Oleg D. Kalugin, *The First Directorate: My 32 Years in Intelligence and Espionage against the West* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1994); and Kalugin, in interviews with the author.

21. Koehler, *Stasi*, 298–99.

22. *Ibid.*, 300.

23. *Ibid.*, 301–2.

24. *Ibid.*, 302.

25. *Ibid.*, 303.

26. Humberto Belli, *Christians Under Fire* (San Jose, Costa Rica: Instituto Puebla, 1984), 40.

27. “La Ofensiva Sandinista Contra la Iglesia,” *La Nacion* (San Jose, Costa Rica), January 26, 1986; Miguel Cardinal Obando y Bravo, “Nicaragua: The Sandinistas Have ‘Gagged and Bound’ Us,” *Washington Post*, May 12, 1986, A15; Miguel Bolaños, “The Subversion of the Church in Nicaragua,” *Catholicism in Crisis*, January 1984; “Por Grave Persecución Aumenta La Agitación Religiosa en Nicaragua,” *La Republica* (San Jose, Costa Rica), November 2, 1983; “Confirma Obando y Bravo la clausura de Radio Católica,” Agence France Presse, January 2, 1985.

28. Joshua Muravchik, Susan Alberts, and Antony Korenstein, “Sandinista Anti-Semitism and Its Apologists,” *Commentary*, September 1986.

29. U.S. Departments of Defense and State, *Sandinista Military Build-Up*, 14–15.
30. Author's interviews and conversations with peasant members of the Nicaraguan ARDE resistance in Costa Rica, 1983, and with the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN) resistance in Honduras and northern Nicaragua, 1984–89.
31. Booth, *The End*, 197.
32. See U.S. reconnaissance photo of the Carcel Modelo in U.S. Department of State, *Sandinista Prisons: A Tool of Intimidation*, Publication 9492, August 1996, 9.
33. U.S. Department of State, *Sandinista Prisons*, 1. Political prisoner figure provided by the Nicaraguan Permanent Commission on Human Rights (CPDH).
34. Hernandez, interview with author.
35. Wesley Smith, "The Sandinista Prison System: A Nation Confined," March 1986.
36. U.S. Department of State, *Sandinista Prisons*, 7.
37. The Sandinistas employed sexual abuse on a wide scale, even outside the MINT system and within the FSLN's own mass organizations. Teenage girls from middle-class families conscripted into party "volunteer" service in the countryside were pressured to lose their virginity to peasant men among the FSLN's rural cadres and, subsequently, to have sexual relations with various male FSLN members. This practice was not a punishment, but a means of breaking girls' traditional morals and of disgracing and splintering their families. It was also an inexpensive way of rewarding rural male FSLN cadres.
38. Some of the most sensational mutilation-murders of opponents were the torture-murders of Pablo Emilio Salazar and other former National Guard officers. These were DGSE/MINT operations and not attributed to the Sandinista Army, according to Hernandez.
39. *La Prensa*, April 25, 1998, 1; and August 2, 1998, 3.
40. See the debriefing of former MINT official Alvaro Baldizon Aviles, in *Inside the Sandinista Regime: A Special Investigator's Perspective* (Washington, DC: Department of State Publication 9466, 1986).
41. U.S. Department of State, *Sandinista Prisons*, 4.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Inravision Television Cadena 1, "24 Hours" newscast, November 6, 1996, Bogota Colombia, trans. FBIS drlat219\_o\_96022. Nicaraguan National Police sources later corroborated the Colombian reports, in *La Prensa*, internet edition, March 17, 1999.
44. The author interviewed Alberto Gamez Ortega in 1985. See also U.S. Department of State, *Sandinista Prisons*, 3.
45. Amnesty International, report on Nicaragua, in Leiken and Rubin, *Central American*, 314–16.
46. The various armed opposition groups fighting the Sandinistas, dubbed "contra-revolucionarios" or "contras" by the FSLN, caricatured in the press and by their critics abroad, are poorly understood. They were neither creations of the CIA nor elements that wanted a return to somocism. Practically all were indigenous guerrilla forces but were divided among themselves, largely unprofessional, and often poorly disciplined. The United States, using the CIA as its instrument, helped unify, organize, train, and discipline the various "contra" armies, but it did not create them. What resulted was the largest mass-based peasant insurrection in Latin American history. The best study of the "contras," based almost entirely on primary source material, is Glenn Garvin, *Everybody Had His Own Gringo* (McLean, VA: Brassey's, 1992). An even-handed study of U.S. support for the Nicaraguan resistance in the context of a larger global strategy against the USSR and its satellites and surrogates is by Mark P. Lagon, *The Reagan Doctrine: Sources of American Conduct in the Cold War's Last Chapter* (London: Praeger, 1994).
47. Hernandez and Carlos Hurtado, President Chamorro's first interior minister (Ministro de Gobernación), interviews with author, Managua, Nicaragua, June 4, 1999. Johnson, "Critics."
48. Hurtado, interview with author.

49. It had long been the policy of the largest and most powerful resistance army, the Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN), to stop fighting once free and fair elections were held and to respect the results of the elections. Unlike the FSLN, which fought for total political control of Nicaragua, the FDN (renamed Nicaraguan Resistance Army, or ERN, after uniting with other factions in 1988) fought for elections—without even running its own candidate. See Enrique Bermudez, “The Nicaraguan Resistance at a Crossroads,” *Strategic Review*, Winter 1989. This author trained nearly one hundred FDN/ERN and YATAMA Miskito Indian commanders and subcommanders in political organization at guerrilla base camps in Honduras in 1989 to hold “town meetings” to mobilize their supporters to register and vote in the February 1990 elections.

50. Hurtado, interview with author.

51. Hernandez, interview with author.

52. *Ibid.*

53. Hernandez and Hurtado, interviews with author.

54. Hurtado, interview with author.

55. Hernandez and Godoy, interviews with author. Hernandez wants the documents back, hoping to set up a commission like the Gauck Commission that controlled the East German Stasi documents.

56. Johnson, “Critics.”

57. Hurtado had a close working relationship with Lacayo. Lacayo was Chamorro’s campaign manager; Hurtado was his deputy.

58. Tom Carter, “Chamorro Failed to Curb Opposition, Former Aide Says,” *Washington Times*, June 3, 1992.

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*

61. Hernandez, interview with author.

62. “Human rights workers and former Contra commanders say radical groups backed by the Sandinista-run police force and army are assassinating Contra leaders to wipe out political opposition. ‘The Sandinistas are simply cutting off the head of the resistance,’ said Mateo Guerrero, executive director of the Nicaraguan Association for Human Rights. ‘No one is being punished. The law does not exist. . . .’ [Resistance leaders] say the only way to stop the killings is to remove the military and police from Sandinista control, but they concede this would be hard for Mrs. Chamorro to do.” About 120 former Nicaraguan Resistance leaders were killed between February 1990 and August 1992; 215 former Resistance members in all. The killings made the Resistance’s integration into the political process difficult: Oscar Sabalvarro, aka Comandante Ruben, told AP that there were no plans to retaliate, “but that the killings make it difficult for former Contras to organize an effective political party for the 1996 presidential elections. ‘The government does not want to get in the middle of this,’ Mr. Sabalvarro lamented.” “Contras said to rearm against Sandinista murder squads,” Associated Press, August 27, 1992.

63. Samuel T. Dickens, “Murder in Managua,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1991; J. Michael Waller, “Did Sandinistas Murder Bermudez?” *Human Events*, April 13, 1991.

64. Associated Press, August 27, 1992.

65. Associated Press, “Contras said to Rearm.”

66. Johnson, “3 Years after.”

67. Hernandez, interview with author.

68. *Ibid.*

69. “Soviet Bloc Military Equipment Supplied to Nicaragua (July 1979–September 1987)” (unpublished report, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs, October 15, 1987).

70. Johnson, “Critics.”

71. Hernandez, interview with author.

72. Johnson, “Critics.”

73. Godoy, interview with author.

74. Elsa Bermudez, widow of Enrique Bermudez, interview with author and author's interviews with other members of the Bermudez family who witnessed the encounter with Chamorro.

75. Waller, "Did Sandinistas Murder Bermudez?" 17.

76. *Ibid.*

77. Curiously, the U.S. government was similarly unwilling to tie aid to Russia on the uprooting of the former KGB, for fear of "undermining Yeltsin."

78. Douglas Farah, "As Chamorro Courts Sandinistas, Vice President Remains Isolated," *Washington Post*, August 1992.

79. *Ibid.*

80. Johnson, "3 Years after."

81. "Cuadra Anuncia Cambios en la Estructura de las Fuerzas Armadas," *El Nuevo Diario*, May 30, 1995, 1.

82. Lenin Cerna to Eduardo Marengo, "Si me piden ser candidato a diputado, lo aceptaria," interview, *La Prensa*, May 10, 1999.

83. Johnson, "3 Years after."

84. Douglas Farah, "Managua Blasts Rip Lid Off Secrets: Salvadoran Rebel Cache, Leftist Kidnap Data Exposed; Sandinistas Implicated," *Washington Post*, July 14, 1993.

85. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, letter to D. Juan Antonio Yanez-Barnuevo, President of the Security Council, United Nations, June 8, 1993.

86. Hernandez, interview with author.

87. "Ortega Amenaza en Defensa de Lenin," *La Prensa*, March 17, 1999.

88. Hernandez, interview with author.

89. Danilo Aguirre y Ernesto Aburto, "Es Posible un Juicio a Lenin Cerna?" *El Nuevo Diario*, Managua, April 22, 1999.

90. Lenin Cerna to Eduardo Marengo, "Si me piden ser candidato a diputado, lo aceptaria," interview, *La Prensa*, May 10, 1999.

91. Entrevista con Oscar Rene Vargas, analista política, por Eduardo Marengo, *El Semanario*, Managua, November 8–14, 1996, 10–11.

92. *Ibid.*

93. *Ibid.*

94. The author, based in Nicaragua at the time, witnessed firsthand the Bush administration's efforts to distance itself from the problem.

95. Mark Falcoff, "Why We Were in Central America," *Commentary*, May 1998, 48.

96. Christopher Marquis, "Would-be Nicaraguan Envoy Warns of Sandinista Threat," *Miami Herald*, July 22, 1998, 19A.

97. Confidential Nicaraguan government source to author, in 1993.

98. Marquis, "Would-be Nicaraguan Envoy," 19A.

99. "FSLN's 'Shadow' Plan Outlined," *La Prensa*, October 9, 1996, 2, trans. in FBIS, article drlat201\_i\_96001.

100. *Ibid.*

101. "Lenin Cerna Vuelve al Frente Sandinista," *El Nuevo Diario*, April 12, 1999.

102. "Ortega Amenaza Lucha Armada," *La Prensa*, April 12, 1999; "Cazabrujas," *La Prensa*, May 10, 1999; Lenin Cerna, "Si me piden ser candidato a diputado, lo aceptaría," interview with Eduardo Marengo, *La Prensa*, May 10, 1999.

103. Cerna, "Si me piden ser candidato," interview with Marengo.