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Sandinistas Go Global: Nicaragua and Western Europe, 1977-1990

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

I declare that my thesis consists of 95.911 words.

ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a global history of Nicaragua's revolutionary decade. Through the prism of Nicaraguan and Western European relations between 1977 and 1990, it traces the rationale and impact of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (Sandinista National Liberation Front, FSLN)'s revolutionary diplomacy in the final decades of the Cold War. In doing so, *Sandinistas Go Global* provides new insights into the international and transnational history of Central America in the late 1970s and 1980s, a period and region that historians have often treated as an afterthought in histories of the Cold War.

The victory of the left-wing Nicaraguan revolutionaries over the anti-communist dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza on 19 July 1979 captured the imaginations of people around the world and transformed the country into a theatre of global contestation. As a wide range of international actors travelled to Nicaragua to shape and participate in the country's revolutionary experiment, Nicaraguan diplomats went abroad in search of financial support and political legitimacy. Western Europe was an important target for the Sandinistas, who believed the Europeans could undermine the regional power of the United States, which sought to overthrow their revolutionary regime. To shape Western European and US foreign policies, the FSLN coordinated a transnational network of solidarity activists, who lobbied politicians and journalists to present the revolution in a positive light. The electoral loss of the FSLN on 25 February 1990 came as a great disappointment to these activists, for whom the Nicaraguan revolution had been a symbol of hope and progress in an increasingly neoliberal world order.

Ultimately, in tracing the global history of the Nicaraguan revolution, the thesis seeks to capture the opportunities and limitations that the global environment offered to a group of left-wing revolutionaries in Central America, a region traditionally seen as dominated by the United States. In particular, it analyses how the Sandinistas, by looking beyond the Western Hemisphere and towards Western Europe, attempted to alter the inter-American and dynamics that shaped their region's history, and create an international environment in which the Nicaraguan revolution could survive, and perhaps even thrive.

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For all the good things in my life and more, I want to thank my family and especially my parents, Christine Gutman and Gert van Ommen, and my siblings Emma, Floris, and David. It is impossible to describe how much each of you means to me, but I think you know. And finally, I am thankful to Joost Vogel for his love, patience, and sense of humour. You gave me the courage to start, dedication to continue, and strength to finish this project. Thank you for always being there, and for putting up with me.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA – *Auswärtiges Amt* (Foreign Office), Germany

ANN – *Agencia Nueva Nicaragüense* (Nicaraguan News Agency), Nicaragua

BZ – *Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the Netherlands

CAHR – Central American Human Rights Committee, UK

CDA – *Christendemocratische Appél* (Christin Democratic Appeal), the Netherlands

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency, US

CDU – *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands* (Christian Democratic Union Germany), Germany

CNDB – *Campaña Nicaragua Debe Sobrevivir* (Nicaragua Must Survive Campaign)

CONIPAZ – *Comité Nicaragüense por la Paz* (Nicaraguan Peace Committee), Nicaragua

DRI - *Departamento de Relaciones Internacionales* (Department of International Relations), Nicaragua

DN – *Dirección Nacional* (National Directorate), Nicaragua

EC – European Community

EPC – European Political Cooperation

EPS – *Ejército Popular Sandinista* (Sandinista People's Army), Nicaragua

FAO – *Frente Amplio Opositor* (Broad Opposition Front), Nicaragua

FRG – Federal Republic of Germany

FCO – Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK

FES – *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung* (Friedrich Ebert Foundation), Germany

FMLN – *Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional* (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front), El Salvador

FSLN – *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (Sandinista National Liberation Front), Nicaragua

GDR – German Democratic Republic

IHNCA – *Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica* (Institute of Nicaraguan and Central American History)

ICJ – International Court for Justice

IMF – International Monetary Fund

INW – *Informationsbüro Nicaragua* (Information Office Nicaragua), Germany

LSE – London School of Economics

MACD – Mexico and Caribbean Department, UK

MCAD – Mexico and Central America Department, UK

MDN - *Movimiento Democrático Nicaragüense* (Nicaraguan Democratic Movement), Nicaragua

MINEX – *Ministerio del Exterior* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Nicaragua

MINREX – *Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores* (Ministry of Foreign Relations), Cuba

MIR – *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Left Movement), Chile

NAM – Non-Aligned Movement

NIEO – New International Economic Order

NKN – *Nicaragua Komitee Nederland* (Dutch Nicaragua Committee), the Netherlands

NSC – Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, UK

OID – Overseas Information Department, UK

SPD – *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Social Democratic Party of Germany), Germany

PvdA – *Partij van de Arbeid* (Labour Party), the Netherlands

PLO – Palestine Liberation Organisation

RPS – *Revolución Popular Sandinista* (Sandinista People's Revolution)

SI – Socialist International

UN – United Nations

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation

VVD – *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy), the Netherlands

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INTRODUCTION

On 27 July 1997, in Nicaragua's capital, Managua, former diplomat Alejandro Bendaña reflected on the complex history of the *Revolución Popular Sandinista* (Sandinista People's Revolution, RPS). Bendaña had joined the Nicaraguan foreign service in 1979, after young guerrillas of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (Sandinista National Liberation Front, FSLN) toppled the anti-communist dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza, ushering in revolutionary change. Looking back on the late 1970s and 1980s, when the Sandinista victory transformed Central America into one of the principal battlefields in the global Cold War, he pointed out that the struggle over Nicaragua's revolutionary trajectory was principally fought out in the international arena, and particularly in Western Europe and the United States. 'Western public opinion was absolutely crucial to one small nation that was trying to defend its sovereignty, because we weren't going to win a major military conflict with the US and wanted to avert it', Bendaña reflected.[1] The 'real battle' for revolutionary Nicaragua, he argued, took place 'in public opinion and in Congress, and with the Europeans'.[2]

Like Bendaña, former participants in Nicaragua's revolutionary project often mention the global trends and transnational actors that transformed the country's history and revolutionary trajectory in the late 1970s and 1980s, as sympathisers from around the world flocked to Nicaragua to help the RPS fulfil its promise. They also speak of the international influence of the Sandinista triumph, describing how young and inexperienced revolutionaries, ministers, and diplomats from this small Central American country influenced popular debates, public imagination, and foreign policies around the world. But why did the RPS have such a massive global impact? And why did international trends, transnational networks, and foreign policy have such immediate consequences for how the revolution developed on the ground? None of this was inevitable, automatic, or perhaps even logical considering the country's lack of valuable resources, small size, and location in the United States' so-called 'backyard.'

This thesis argues that the answer to both these questions can be found in the Sandinistas' unique, ambitious, and constantly evolving revolutionary diplomacy, which resulted in a dense web of interactions and contacts between Nicaragua and the outside world. Moreover, it contends that Western European peoples and governments were central to this global outreach. Through the prism of Nicaraguan and Western European relations, *Sandinistas Go Global: Nicaragua and Western Europe, 1977-1990* explores the participation of the FSLN in the global battle for Nicaragua's

[1] Yale-UN Oral History Project, Interview by James S. Sutterlin with Alejandro Bendaña, 29 July 1997. Accessed online at: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/498540
[2] Ibid.

ideological future in the period 1977-1990. This struggle was fought by a wide range of state and non-state actors, including city councillors, diplomats, social democrats, artists, counterinsurgents, guerrillas, farmers, presidents, feminists, soldiers, solidarity activists, students, trade unionists, and priests. There were many battlefields, both real and metaphorical. At the same time as Nicaraguan soldiers fought against the US-backed anti-Sandinista counterinsurgents – also known as contras – in Nicaragua's northern coffee-growing regions, local politicians and students in Western European town halls engaged in heated debates about the legitimacy of Sandinista rule, the success of reconstruction and education programmes in Nicaraguan villages, and the disastrous effect of US foreign policy on Central America.

In the mid 1980s, the Nicaraguan revolutionaries also pushed the member states of the European Community towards launching an ambitious foreign policy initiative towards Central America, a region that Western European countries had virtually ignored in previous decades. European interest in Central American affairs started to grow in the late 1970s, when the Nicaraguan guerrillas and their allies called on EC governments to cut ties with the Somoza regime, and culminated in the mid-1980s, when the Sandinistas' conflict with its Central American neighbours, the Reagan administration, and the contras threatened to escalate into an costly regional war, with dangerous international consequences. By coordinating their foreign policies and launching a yearly ministerial-level dialogue with the five Central American governments, the EC member states hoped to contribute to the efforts of Latin American countries to bring peace to the region and stabilise the international system. In doing so, the EC countries challenged traditional US hegemony in Central America and, albeit implicitly, sided with the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, to the delight of the FSLN and the frustration of the Reagan administration.

Meanwhile, in Europe and the Americas, the FSLN's most trustworthy allies were solidarity activists: left-wing volunteers who wanted to feel part of and contribute to Nicaragua's revolutionary process. These activists sought to strengthen the Sandinistas' domestic and international position by publishing propaganda, raising funds, setting up twinning links with Nicaraguan towns, lobbying governments, and organising demonstrations in support of the revolution. Solidarity campaigns were often instigated and coordinated by Sandinista officials, who saw transnational activism as a crucial component of Nicaragua's revolutionary diplomacy. On the other side of the political spectrum, US president Ronald Reagan and his anti-communist companions worked hard to undermine the objectives of the FSLN in Western Europe, attempting to convince European audiences and governments that the Sandinistas were radical socialists, operating under the tutelage of Cuba and the Soviet Union, and therefore undeserving of Western financial and political support.

In tracing this history of the Nicaraguan revolution, we gain insight into the opportunities and limitations that the global environment – and more specifically the Cold War context – offered to a group of left-wing revolutionaries in Central America. In particular, this thesis analyses how the Sandinistas, by looking beyond the Western Hemisphere and towards Europe, attempted to alter the inter-American dynamics that shaped their region's history, and create an international environment in which the Nicaraguan revolution could survive, and perhaps even thrive. This was not an easy task, in particular because the international system and global civil society changed drastically in the final decade of the Cold War. As the 1980s progressed, revolutionary ideals of non-alignment, social justice, anti-imperialism, and Third World liberation lost much of their popular appeal in the West, while ideologies of neoliberalism, liberal democracy, and individual human rights were increasingly perceived as universal values. And these, in turn, proved problematic for the Sandinista revolutionaries to navigate, as they often contradicted the beliefs and policies of their government. In other words, there were more limitations and less opportunities for the FSLN revolutionaries in the late 1980s than they had encountered when they first seized power in 1979. As with any historical narrative, therefore, this thesis tells a story of change and evolution, tracing how the Sandinistas and their allies strategically adapted to shifts in the international playing field, while at the same time struggling to hold on to their core values and beliefs.

By analysing the revolution's international and transnational dimensions, this thesis provides fresh insights into the character and trajectory of the Nicaraguan revolution, as well as into the hopes, insecurities, strategies, and ideals of FSLN revolutionaries. Conversations between Nicaraguan representatives and international actors, such as European solidarity activists, US ambassadors, Cuban officials, EC ministers, and East German diplomats, shed light on how the FSLN wanted to be perceived by potential allies, supporters, and enemies. Crucially, comments and promises made by Sandinistas in Cuba and the East contrasted sharply with the picture Nicaraguan officials presented to Western journalists, politicians, and academics. In Western Europe, Nicaraguan diplomats – seeking financial support for the FSLN's ambitious domestic programme and political legitimacy to ward off foreign aggression – were careful to present the country as fundamentally different from other revolutionary states, most notably Fidel Castro's Cuba. They argued that the RPS was neither socialist nor hostile to the West, but simply sought to end the poverty, injustice, and exploitation that had characterised the US-backed Somoza regime. In the Eastern bloc, by contrast, Nicaraguan representatives admitted that efforts to present the RPS as moderate and democratic were mostly for show, as the FSLN could not yet afford to lose the support of the West, nor of Nicaragua's domestic elites. In the eyes of Cuban

and East German officials, then, the Sandinistas were not necessarily different from previous revolutionaries, but simply more tactical and conscious of the global environment's opportunities and restrictions.

So, what was the real nature of the Nicaraguan revolution? Until historians have access to the FSLN leadership's archives, this question is difficult to answer. However, that does not mean we should not try. By cross-referencing private papers, memoirs, interviews, and sources from more than twenty archival collections in six different countries, this thesis presents an original and comprehensive account of Nicaragua's revolutionary decade, demonstrating the interconnectedness between the Sandinistas' domestic agenda and international policies. Indeed, more than anything, a global perspective on the RPS reveals that international trends and foreign policy were at the heart of the Sandinista revolutionary enterprise. Not only did the FSLN rely upon revolutionary diplomacy to oust Somoza, it also needed the international community to achieve its domestic objectives and stay in power. After all, Nicaragua was a small, economically dependent, agrarian, and poor country of around 3 million people, emerging from a devastating revolutionary war in which more than 50,000 people had died. In this context, the FSLN was faced with the incredible challenge of following through with ambitious promises made during the guerrilla struggle: rebuilding an equal, free, and independent country, in which the Nicaraguan people would be educated, receive healthcare, and become agents of their own destiny. Without financial aid, material support, and expertise from abroad, the Sandinistas realised, this would be an impossible task, especially as they expected the US to adopt a hostile attitude to the revolution. That is to say, the FSLN's nationalist revolutionary project was never separate from international trends, foreign policy, and transnational networks.

These insights also help to answer the complex question of why the Nicaraguan government was able to survive the many attempts of its more powerful enemies, most notably the Reagan administration, to destroy the Sandinista government. Nicaraguan foreign policy towards Western Europe was specifically designed to weaken the resolve and limit the possibilities of the US government and its allies to undermine the RPS. So, by assessing the effectiveness of Nicaraguan diplomacy towards Western Europe, this thesis simultaneously reveals the FSLN's success in defending the revolution, at least until 1990. Indeed, a number of policies implemented by the Nicaraguan government, such as economic reforms, negotiations with the contras, and the organisation of elections, only make sense if we place them in a global context. Throughout the 1980s, Nicaraguan leaders often used domestic reforms and concessions to opponents as a means to obtain support and legitimacy from Western European and US politicians and activists. In particular, the decision to go along with the Central American peace process in 1987, which

eventually resulted in the FSLN's electoral loss in 1990, can only be understood in the context of the declining levels of international support for the RPS, which pushed the Sandinistas towards a making further concessions. An international lens, then, offers new insights into the revolution's victory, longevity, and eventual demise.

This is not to suggest that the Nicaraguan revolution can only be studied using international, transnational, or global lenses, about which more below. On the contrary, writing a global history of the *Revolución Popular Sandinista* requires a strong grasp of its local, regional, and national dimensions. Fortunately, due to the popularity of the Nicaraguan revolution in the 1980s, this thesis is able to draw extensively on a substantial body of literature covering multiple perspectives on the Nicaraguan revolution, including memoirs and studies of gender, student activism, race, politics, culture, the insurrection, and religion.[3] Margaret Randall's book on Nicaraguan women and the revolution, first published in 1981, for example, has been highly valuable, not only providing insight into the participation of women in the struggle against the Somoza regime, but also demonstrating the global appeal of the Sandinista feminist imagery and message.[4] The works of Salvador Martí i Puig and David Close, too, were crucial for obtaining an understanding of the internal dynamics of the FSLN as a political party, the functioning of the revolutionary state, and the intricacies of Nicaraguan political culture.[5] And to grasp why so many Christian groups in Europe and the Americas became directly involved with the Sandinista project, work done by religious studies scholars, who have analysed the relationship between religion, the Catholic Church, and the Nicaraguan revolution, proved invaluable.[6] Finally, memoirs of protagonists and contemporary observers of the RPS, such as former vice-president Sergio

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[3] See, for instance, Jeffrey Gould, *To Lead as Equals: Rural Protest and Political Consciousness in Chinandega, Nicaragua, 1912-1979* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 1990); José Luis Rocha, 'La década de los años 80: revolución en Nicaragua, revolución en la caficultura nicaragüense', *Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos* 29 (2003) 69-99; Baron L. Pineda, *Shipwrecked Identities: Navigating Race on Nicaragua's Mosquito Coast* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Stephen Henighan, *Sandino's Nation: Ernesto Cardenal and Sergio Ramírez, Writing Nicaragua, 1940-2012* (London and Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014); Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Margaret Randall, *Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005).

[4] Margaret Randall, *Sandino's Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle* (London: Zed Books, 1981). For more on gender, see also, Maxine Molyneux, 'Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua', *Feminist Studies* 11 (1985) 227-254; Lorraine Bayard De Volo, 'A Revolution in the Binary? Gender and the Oxymoron of Revolutionary War in Cuba and Nicaragua', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 37 (2012) 413-439; Friederike Apelt, 'Female Solidarity and Nicaraguan Revolutionary Feminism' in Jan Hansen, Christian Helm, and Frank Reichherzer eds., *Making Sense of the Americas: How Protest Related to America in the 1980s and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

[5] David Close, Salvador Martí I Puig, and Shelley A. McConnel eds., *The Sandinistas and Nicaragua since 1979* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2011); David Close, *Nicaragua: Navigating the Politics of Democracy* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2016); Salvador Martí I Puig, *La revolución enredada. Nicaragua 1977-1996* (Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata, 1997).

[6] Manzar Foroohar, *The Catholic Church and Social Change in Nicaragua* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1989); Roger N. Lancaster, *Thanks to God and the Revolution: Popular Religion and Class Consciousness in the New Nicaragua* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Rosario Montoya, 'Liberation Theology and the Socialist Utopia of a Nicaraguan Shoemaker', *Social History* 20 (1995) 23-43; Calvin L. Smith, *Revolution, Revival, and Religious Conflict in Sandinista Nicaragua* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

Ramírez, have provided essential insights into the beliefs, values, and legacies of the Sandinista revolutionaries and their allies.[7] While *Sandinistas Go Global* is a global history, it builds on the work of a wide range of academics, journalists, activists, and historians who have worked on the Sandinista project since the late 1970s.

To clarify, global history is not synonymous to the history of everything, or 'total' history as Sebastian Conrad calls it, and this thesis does not seek to be a definitive international account of Nicaragua's revolutionary decade.[8] Rather, acknowledging that local events are often shaped by a global context, this thesis adopts the global as the 'ultimate frame of reference' to understand the Nicaraguan revolution.[9] And by adopting such an approach, it hopes to inspire future research into the global history of the RPS. To avoid repetition, though, this thesis uses the terms global and international interchangeably to refer to Nicaragua's connections with the outside world in the period 1977-1990, including relations with governments, solidarity committees, politicians, and journalists in Western Europe and beyond. The term transnational refers specifically to networks and connections between non-state actors and the FSLN. It should be pointed out, however, that the FSLN did, in fact, become a state actor after the Sandinista revolutionaries overthrew Somoza. Indeed, due to the fact that the Sandinista leadership essentially controlled the Nicaraguan state after the revolution's triumph, the terms Sandinista, FSLN, and Nicaraguan government are also used interchangeably.

This thesis is guided by three main research questions and related sub-questions, that shed light on the RPS, but also on the international system and Western European society in the late 1970s and 1980s. Firstly, this thesis asks what a global lens reveals about the history of the Nicaraguan revolution. Related to this question, it asks what it tells us about the revolution's victory, survival, and demise. I also examine the extent to which the Sandinistas' ambitions and strategy changed from the late 1970s until 1990. How did changes in Western European civil society and the international system shape the revolution's trajectory? And in what ways did solidarity activism and transnational networks influence the RPS?

Second, this thesis seeks to gain insight into the international system in the period 1977-1990. It thus asks what motivated the FSLN leadership to seek economic and political assistance

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[7] Jaime Wheelock, *Frente Sandinista: Diciembre Victorioso* (Managua: Secretaria Nacional de Propaganda y Educación Política del Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, 1980); Salman Rushdie, *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* (London: Pan Books, 1987); Tomás Borge, *La paciente impaciencia* (Ciudad de México: Editorial Diana, 1989); Ernesto Cardenal, *La revolución perdida* (Madrid: Trotta Editorial, 2001); Gioconda Belli, *The Country under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003); Sergio Ramírez, *Adiós Muchachos: A Memoir of the Sandinista Revolution* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011); Fernando Cardenal, *Faith and Joy: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Priest* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015).
[8] Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2016) 13.
[9] Ibid., 10-11.

in Western Europe, rather than in Cuba and the Soviet Union. We explore why Western European countries launched a foreign policy initiative towards Central America. How did such a small and poor Central American country manage to attract global support and widespread interest? How was the transatlantic relationship affected by the Nicaraguan revolution and its aftermath?

Third and finally, this thesis asks what a global history of the RPS tells us about Western European societies in the late 1970s and 1980s. What did the revolution mean for Western European activists and for the FSLN, and did these visions align? Why did so many Western Europeans take up the Sandinista cause? Moreover, I ask what impact solidarity activism had on Western European foreign policy.

By answering these questions, the thesis aims to make significant contributions to four historiographical subfields, which are discussed in detail below. First, *Sandinistas Go Global* adds to the literature on the Nicaraguan Revolution's international history. Secondly, in doing so, it integrates global, international and transnational history approaches, which have all-too-often-been separated, and contributes to a new global history of solidarity activism. Thirdly, *Sandinistas Go Global* adds to our understanding of Europe's global role by contributing to literature on the history of European integration and foreign policy in the final decade of the Cold War, as well as the related field of transatlantic relations. Finally, it adds to the burgeoning scholarship on the Cold War in Latin America, examining how the conflict played out in Central America, and in doing so complicates existing interpretations and chronologies of the late 1970s and 1980s.

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By giving prominence to Nicaraguan voices, ideas, and agency, this thesis hopes to influence the trajectory of the emergent – but still rather fragmented – body of literature on the international history of the Nicaraguan revolution. In recent years, declassifications of documents and the opening of archives in Cuba, elsewhere in Latin America, the United States, Europe, the former Soviet bloc, and – albeit to a lesser extent – Nicaragua, have stimulated fresh interest in, and insights on, the revolution's international history. This research is a much-needed contribution to the existing literature on the origins and trajectory of the Nicaraguan revolution. Although previous work on its origins is invaluable, the many journalists and authors writing on the revolution in the 1980s could not escape the highly politicised Cold War landscape they were living in, while scholars in the 1990s simply did not have access to the archival materials that have only recently been released.[10] New sources and distance from events, then, have provided the context in which to ask new questions, rethink the revolution, and probe its significance.

[10] See, for instance, George Black, *Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua* (London: Zed Press, 1981); Roy Gutman, *Banana Diplomacy: The Making of American Policy in Nicaragua, 1981-1987* (New York: Simon &

Despite its promise, the historiography of the international history of the Nicaraguan revolution remains exceptionally patchy. While historians of 20th century Latin America have long since responded to Max Paul Friedman's call to retire 'the puppets' and recognise the agency and independence of Latin American actors, the history of the Nicaraguan revolution is still predominantly written from the perspective of US foreign policymakers.[11] Of course, histories of US policy towards Nicaragua, and Central America as a whole, are highly valuable. Decisions made in Washington with regards to financial assistance, diplomatic support, and military aid to Central American actors transformed the region's history, and consequently deserve scholarly attention.[12] William LeoGrande's extensive research into US foreign policy in Central America, in particular, which includes dedicated sections on Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, as well as an in-depth discussion of US domestic and Congressional debates, provides many useful insights into Ronald Reagan's unwavering desire to overthrow the Sandinista regime, even when his foreign policy objectives were widely condemned by public opinion, Congress, and the European allies.[13]

Historians William Michael Schmidli and David Johnson Lee, too, zoom in on the involvement of the Richard Nixon (1969-1974) and Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) administrations in Nicaragua's domestic affairs. In the aftermath of an earthquake that destroyed Managua in 1972, Lee demonstrates, US planners collaborated with the corrupt Somoza regime to rebuild the Nicaraguan capital in the image of a modern North American city. Instead of fostering economic efficiency and social stability, however, the involvement of US officials in Managua's reconstruction created an environment in which anti-Somoza opposition figures and revolutionaries could thrive, as it resulted in a 'collective rejection of the city, the dictator, and his alliance with the United States'.[14] Similarly, as Schmidli shows, Carter's foreign policy towards the Somoza regime had a contradictory and, from the US perspective, unwelcome impact on the country's growing social unrest. Rather than 'facilitating political reform' by pushing Somoza out, Carter's commitment to 'non-intervention' resulted in the radicalisation of the anti-Somoza alliance, thereby 'delegitimising' the 'moderate' opposition groups that valued democracy over

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Shuster, 1988); William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

[11] Max Paul Friedman, 'Retiring the Puppets, Bringing Latin America Back In: Recent Scholarship on United States–Latin American Relations', *Diplomatic History* 27 (2003) 621-636.

[12] See, Gutman, *Banana Diplomacy* (1988); John H. Coatsworth, *Central America and the United States: the Clients and the Colossus* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994); Robert Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power in Nicaragua*, 1977–1990 (New York: The Free Press, 1996); Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1993); Robert A. Pastor, *Not Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002).

[13] LeoGrande, *Our own backyard* (1998).

[14] David Johnson Lee, 'De-centring Managua: post-earthquake reconstruction and revolution in Nicaragua', *Urban History* 42 (2015) 663-685.

revolution.[15] In these narratives, then, US foreign policymakers were influential but not all-powerful, since they categorically failed to achieve their objectives in Nicaragua.

Yet, claims regarding the impact of US foreign policy on the origins of the Sandinista revolution using US sources alone ring rather hollow when they are not sufficiently backed up by Nicaraguan materials. For example, it is difficult – if not impossible – to know how people in Nicaragua responded to decisions made in Washington without analysing Nicaraguan sources, which shed light on how US policies were perceived and played out on the ground. Moreover, if we continue to study the *Revolución Popular Sandinista* predominantly from a North American perspective, we are at risk of writing a history in which Nicaraguans merely respond to decisions made in Washington, rather than being protagonists in their own history. Undoubtedly, one of the principal reasons for the relative absence of Nicaraguan perspectives in the historiography is the lack of archival material to provide insight into the objectives of the FSLN guerrillas, as this was often lost, hidden, or destroyed during the civil wars that ravaged the region in the 1980s.

Nevertheless, as a small group of historians demonstrate, in their absence, there are other sources to draw on, such as interviews, newspapers, private archives, and memoirs. Dirk Kruijt, for example, illustrates the value of oral history in his influential work *Guerrillas: War and Peace in Central America*. In this book, Kruijt analyses the ideas, dreams, and strategies of revolutionary leaders from El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, discussing what motivated a generation of young Central Americans to take up arms against their governments in the late 1970s and 1980s. Kruijt demonstrates that most of the guerrilla leaders came from middle-class families and were inspired by a range of ideas and ideologies, most notably liberation theology, nationalism, Marxism, and the Cuban revolution. He also deals with the important question of why the FSLN succeeded in overthrowing the Somoza regime, while their counterparts in El Salvador and Guatemala failed. The Nicaraguan revolution, Kruijt argues, succeeded due to the pragmatism of the Sandinistas, who were able to mobilise an international support base for their cause. Unfortunately, Kruijt does not go into much detail in this rather short book, so is not able to examine how exactly the international context shaped the struggle in Nicaragua.[16]

Mathilde Zimmermann, drawing on unpublished writings and private papers in Managua, arrives at similar conclusions as Kruijt in her biography of Carlos Fonseca, who founded the FSLN in 1961.[17] From Fonseca's point of view, Marxism and nationalism were two 'intertwined' ideologies, 'held together by the glue of anti-imperialism' and symbolised by famous

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[15] William Michael Schmidli, "The Most Sophisticated Intervention We Have Seen": The Carter Administration and the Nicaraguan Crisis, 1978–1979', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 23 (2012) 66-86.
[16] Dirk Kruijt, *Guerrillas: War and Peace in Central America* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2008).
[17] The other two founders were Silvio Mayorga and Tomás Borge.

revolutionaries Che Guevara and, crucially, Augusto César Sandino, a Nicaraguan who fought against the US occupation in the late 1920s and early 1930s.[18] With regards to the origins of the revolution, Zimmerman argues that historians have overestimated the influence of the 'non-Somocista bourgeoisie' on Somoza's fall, while they should have been looking at 'the FSLN and its relationship with the masses'.[19] This is a conclusion that can only be reached by reading Nicaraguan sources, as US foreign policymakers were generally more interested in what they saw as moderate and democratic opposition figures, dismissing the more radical Sandinistas.

While shedding light on the international and transnational influences on the RPS' origins, these works tell us little about the international context. They also do not engage with the question of how the Sandinistas used revolutionary diplomacy to strengthen the FSLN's position prior to and following 1979. To date, the doctoral thesis of Santiago Pozas Pardo remains the only scholarly work specifically dedicated to the FSLN's foreign policy. In his dissertation, Pozas Pardo discusses, albeit in a descriptive manner, the Nicaraguan revolutionaries' international strategy in 1979-1990, touching on the Sandinista relationship with the US, the Socialist International (SI), the Soviet bloc, Latin America, Western Europe, and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Unfortunately, in trying to cover every aspect of the Sandinistas' foreign relations, Pozas Pardo did not analyse his topics in much depth. In particular, the reader is left wondering how successful Sandinista foreign policy actually was.[20]

To write international history, then, historians need multiple perspectives. If not, we end up with one-sided narratives, which tell us much about the intentions of diplomats and revolutionaries, but little about their results. Although historians of Latin America, inspired by Tanya Harmer's influential study on Allende's Chile, have written several excellent international histories on the inter-American dimensions of the global Cold War, there are virtually no examples in which the Nicaraguan revolution is analysed from a multi-sided and multi-archival point of view.[21] To be sure, there are some notable exceptions, such as a recent article by Gerardo Sánchez Nateras, who studies the origins of the Nicaraguan revolution from an inter-American perspective, and another article by Mateo Cayetano Jarquín, who demonstrates convincingly that the origins of the 'Nicaraguan civil war' are rooted in domestic ethnic tensions, which were swept up by the

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[18] Matilde Zimmerman, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonesca and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000).
[19] Ibid.
[20] Víctor Santiago Pozas Pardo, *Nicaragua (1979-1990): actor singular de las relaciones internacionales en el final de la Guerra Fría. Valor e insuficiencias del pragmatismo y protagonismo de la revolución sandinista en la escena internacional* (University of the Basque Country, 2000).
[21] Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011).

global Cold War conflict.[22] A recent edited volume by Mario Vázquez Olivera and Fabián Campos Hernández, too, adds to the historiography by including the Mexican perspective into the international history of the revolution.[23] And finally, Dolores Ferrero Blanco, who had access to the private papers of the former Nicaraguan ambassador to the Soviet Union, provides valuable insights into the complex relationship between Sandinista president Daniel Ortega and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in the final five years of the Cold War.[24] Despite making crucial and exciting contributions to the historiography, however, these articles provide us with disconnected snapshots of Nicaragua's revolutionary period, rather than a comprehensive international account of this transformative decade in the country's history.

To capture the international history of the Nicaraguan revolution, moreover, it is not sufficient to look at foreign relations and state diplomacy alone. In their search for international legitimacy and support, the FSLN looked beyond the usual suspects (government officials and politicians) and coordinated a transnational network of non-state allies, known as solidarity activists, who were particularly active in Western Europe. Because they were an integral part of the Sandinistas' global strategy, the activities of West European solidarity activists should be understood in the wider framework of FSLN revolutionary diplomacy in the late 1970s and 1980s. The second historiographical field this thesis engages with, therefore, is the study of transnational networks, and particularly the associated subfield of solidarity activism.

Transnational history is a relatively new approach to history, in which scholars seek to understand historical processes using a different category of analysis than the nation-state, focusing primarily on non-state actors, international organisations, and networks. It is closely related to the field of global history, which similarly challenges the centrality of the nation-state in historical writing, focusing instead on global processes, economic interactions, and dependencies.[25] Interestingly, as Matthew Brown pointed out, Latin America has not featured prominently in global history to date. Historians interested in the process of globalisation have often dismissed Latin Americans as 'victims rather than as active participants' in global history, focusing instead

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[22] Gerardo Sánchez Nateras, 'The Sandinista revolution and the limits of the Cold War in Latin America: the dilemma of non-intervention during the Nicaraguan crisis, 1977–78', *Cold War History* 18 (2018) 111-129; Mateo Cayetano Jarquín, 'Red Christmases: the Sandinistas, indigenous rebellion, and the origins of the Nicaraguan civil war, 1981–82', *Cold War History* 18 (2018) 91-107.

[23] Mario Vázquez Olivera and Fabián Campos Hernández eds., *México ante el conflicto centroamericano. Testimonio de una época* (Ciudad de México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2016).

[24] María Dolores Ferrero Blanco, 'Daniel Ortega y Mijail Gorbachov. Nicaragua y la URSS en los últimos años de la guerra fría (1985-1990)', *Hispania Nova. Revista de Historia Contemporánea* 13 (2015) 26-53.

[25] See, for more on the transnational and global history, Conrad, *What is Global History?* (2016); C.A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol, Patricia Seed, 'AHR Conversation? On Transnational History', *The American Historical Review* 111 (2006) 1441-1464; Patrick O'Brien, 'Historiographical traditions and modern imperatives for the restoration of global history', *Journal of Global History* 1 (2006) 3-39; Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009).

on how actors outside of Latin America, most notably the US, became interested in the region's human rights and environmental crises.[26] Moreover, the region also does not fit neatly into the history of decolonisation and the so-called Third World, as the Latin American countries became independent during the late 18th and early 19th century.[27]

However, as this thesis demonstrates, Nicaraguans in the late 1970s and 1980s were not just recipients of Western solidarity, nor were they bystanders to, or helpless victims of global trends and developments. To the contrary, even though their vision eventually lost out, the FSLN actively shaped and altered the international order and global politics in the late 1970s and 1980s. And with regards to European and US activism, these were no spontaneous outbursts of solidarity that originated in the West, as the origins of solidarity networks can be traced to the revolutionary diplomacy of the Sandinista guerrillas. The history of the Nicaraguan revolution, then, is a perfect example of how Latin American history can add to the field of global history.

In the late 20th century, the growing consensus amongst historians that the perspective of the nation-state is not – necessarily – relevant to all historical writing gave rise to transnational history. Transnational approaches have much to offer to international and diplomatic historians, providing new insights, as well as complicating and nuancing traditional narratives. When it comes to the Cold War, as human rights historian Sarah Snyder argues, a transnational methodology helps to 'answer many critical questions'.[28] Since the Cold War was not just a bipolar power conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States, but also a global ideological struggle over competing visions of modernity, namely communism and capitalism in their different iterations, we cannot capture its history without including transnational and non-state perspectives.[29] After all, ideologies are not necessarily state-controlled; they are experienced, created, rejected, imported, and fought over by a range of individuals and organisations at an everyday level. Beyond the state, there were many participants in the Cold War, including exile communities, opposition politicians, human rights activists, trade unionists, feminists, and students, who cooperated and competed with each other over the shape their societies and the international system should take. In doing so, they shaped the global Cold War environment. By incorporating the narratives of these protagonists into the history of the Cold War and combining transnational and diplomatic history perspectives, therefore, a more complete and nuanced history of this period emerges.

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[26] Matthew Brown, 'The global history of Latin America', *Journal of Global History* 10 (2015) 365-386.
[27] Cuba, of course, only became independent in 1898.
[28] Sarah B. Snyder, 'Bringing the Transnational In: Writing Human Rights into the International History of the Cold War', *Diplomacy & Statecraft 24* (2013) 101.
[29] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Methodologies that combine transnational and international history approaches, in particular, have resulted in many excellent studies, which trace the influence of ideas, activism, non-state actors, and culture on historical change.[30] In particular, Matthew Connelly's trailblazing work on of the Algerian revolution, which argues that the battle for Algerian independence from France was decided in the international arena, has been an inspiration for this thesis. The independence fighters of the *Front de Libération Nationale* (National Liberation Front), Connelly shows convincingly, defeated the much more powerful French army by convincing the international community that the Algerians were on the right side of history, thereby isolating and weakening the French state.[31] Furthermore, Sarah Snyder's work on human rights activism in the aftermath of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which resulted in the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, is an excellent example of how transnational methodologies lead to a better understanding of historical change during the Cold War, in this case the collapse of the Soviet Union.[32] Finally, in his book on the British Caribbean, Jason Parker brings together transnational and international history approaches to demonstrate the influence of transnational networks, Cold War dynamics, and Caribbean activists on the decolonisation process.[33]

The historiography of the Sandinista revolution has also been shaped by the global turn that gave rise to the burgeoning field of transnational history. In particular, historians have recently highlighted the importance of recognising Nicaraguan agency to understand the functioning of the hundreds of pro-Sandinista solidarity committees that existed in Western Europe and North America in the late 1970s and 1980s. Rather than spontaneous outburst of Third World solidarity, this scholarship demonstrates, solidarity committees were part of a transnational network that received direct instructions and propaganda material from Sandinista revolutionaries in Managua.[34] Moreover, studies of solidarity activism contribute to the international history of the *Revolución*

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[30] See, for instance, Jeremy Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Lien-Hang Nguyen, 'Revolutionary Circuits: Toward Internationalizing America in the World', *Diplomatic History* 39 (2015) 411-422; Ryan M. Irwin, *Gordian Knot: Apartheid and the Unmaking of the Liberal Word Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Alan McPherson, *The Invaded: How Latin Americans and Their Allies Fought and ended US Occupations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[31] Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[32] Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[33] Jason Parker, *Brother's Keeper: The United States, Race, and Empire in the British Caribbean, 1938-1962* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2008).

[34] The work of Kim Christiaens has been crucial in this respect. See, Kim Christiaens, 'Between diplomacy and solidarity: Western European support networks for Sandinista Nicaragua', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 21 (2014) 617-634.

Popular Sandinista by embedding an international phenomenon into local contexts and grassroots experiences.[35] They analyse how the Sandinista message was interpreted and experienced by local activists and politicians, and ask why such a significant number of Western Europeans and Americans wanted to play a part in Nicaragua's revolutionary experiment. In doing so, transnational historians have given us insight into how the FSLN's revolutionary diplomacy played out at the grassroots level. In addition, they provide us with a window into Western European and US civil society in the final decade of the Cold War.[36]

Yet, it still remains to be seen how the history of solidarity activism fits into the broader narrative of Nicaragua's revolutionary diplomacy, both before and after the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship. As the new literature is predominantly based on the archives of solidarity organisations in Western Europe and the United States, the perspective and international strategy of the Sandinista government remain obscured. What did the Sandinistas hope to achieve by building and coordinating a transnational solidarity network? Did they accomplish their objectives by reaching out to non-state actors? How did the Nicaraguan government envisage the relation between state diplomacy and transnational activism? We also know little of the impact of pro-FSLN solidarity activism on the governments of the European Community (EC) and the US, or on domestic changes within revolutionary Nicaragua itself. Could the Sandinista revolutionaries, through solidarity activism, influence the foreign policies of Western states? Did solidarity activism shape the trajectory of the Nicaraguan revolution? To answer these and similar questions, this thesis draws on both transnational and international history perspectives, incorporating the views and experiences of West European, Nicaraguan, and US state and non-state actors.

To analyse the global significance of the revolution and assess the impact of Sandinista diplomacy, this thesis also zooms studies the foreign policies of Western European governments towards the Nicaraguan government. So, the third historiographical field it engages with is the history of European integration – specifically the coordination of EC foreign policy through the European Political Cooperation (EPC) mechanism – and transatlantic relations in the final decade of the Cold War. The history of Western European involvement in Central America not only

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[35] In his review of Erez Manela's *The Wilsonian Moment* (2007), Matthew Connelly argues that international history must be 'sufficiently grounded in local contexts'.

[36] See, for instance, Christian Helm, 'Booming solidarity: Sandinista Nicaragua and the West German Solidarity movement in the 1980s', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 21 (2014) 597-615; Christian Helm, *Botschafter der Revolution Das transnationale Kommunikationsnetzwerk zwischen der Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional und der bundesdeutschen Nicaragua-Solidarität 1977-1979* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018); Hansen, Helm, and Reichherzer eds., *Making Sense of the Americas* (2015); Roger Peace, *A Call to Conscience: The Anti-Contra War Campaign*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012); Eline van Ommen, 'The Sandinista Revolution in the Netherlands: The Dutch Solidarity Committees and Nicaragua (1977-1990)', *Naveg@mérica* 17 (2016); José Manuel Ágreda Portero and Christian Helm, 'Solidaridad con la Revolución Sandinista. Comparativa de redes transnacionales: los casos de la República Federal de Alemania y España', *Naveg@mérica* 17 (2016).

provides historians with a fresh perspective on the transatlantic relationship in the 1980s, it also challenges the traditional view that the European Community played a marginal role in international affairs in the late Cold War.[37] This was certainly not the understanding of the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, who actively encouraged EC involvement in Central American affairs and considered Western Europe a 'crucial counterweight' to Reagan's aggressive Cold War policies.[38] Indeed, building on the words of British politician and former European Commissioner Christopher Patten, who described Western European engagement with Central America in the 1980s as 'one of the most successful examples' of EC foreign policy towards 'any sub-region' in the world, the thesis sheds light on an understudied aspect of the Europe's global role.[39]

Arguing that the final decade of the Cold War – and particularly the collapse of the Soviet bloc – cannot be studied from the superpower perspective alone, historians such as Federico Romero argue that we should 're-visit and re-emphasise the place of Europe in the global Cold War'.[40] In the volume *Europe and the End of the Cold War*, too, the editors argue that emphasising the role of 'Europe in its multiple dimensions and incarnations' contributes to a better, and less simplistic, understanding of the Cold War's ending.[41] European actors, ideas, and processes, these historians assert, contributed significantly to the emancipation of Eastern European countries, the opening of the Soviet Union to the West, and the unification of Germany. Similarly, John W. Young argues that Western European resistance to the so-called 'Second Cold War' in the late 1970s, the process of European integration, and the democratisation of Southern Europe made possible the winding down of Cold War tensions, as these factors contributed to the 'long-term failure of Communism in the face of liberal capitalism'.[42]

As they discuss the 1980s, then, historians focus predominantly on events that took place within Europe, arguing that the Cold War 'inescapably ended there'.[43] The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the debate over Euromissiles, and the Polish crisis, amongst other things, are examined in great detail and with attention to the foreign policies and perceptions of European states.[44] In particular, historians are interested in the relation between détente and the

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[37] N. Piers Ludlow, 'More than just a Single Market: European integration, peace and security in the 1980s', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19 (2017) 48-62.
[38] Ramírez, *Adiós Muchachos* (2012) 94-95.
[39] Foreword by Christopher Patten in *Central American Integration: What's Next?* (CEPAL, 2004).
[40] Federico Romero, 'Cold War historiography at the crossroads', *Cold War History* 14 (204) 685-703.
[41] 'Introduction', in Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, N. Piers Ludlow, and Leopoldo Nuti, eds. *Europe and the End of the Cold War: A Reappraisal* (New York: Routledge, 2008) 3.
[42] John W. Young, 'Western Europe and the End of the Cold War, 1979-1989' in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 289.
[43] Bozo, Rey, Ludlow, and Nuti eds. *Europe and the End of the Cold War* (2008) 2.
[44] See for more examples, Frédéric Bozo, 'Mitterrand's France, the End of the Cold War, and German Unification: a Reappraisal' *Cold War History 7* (2007) 455–78; Kristina Spohr, 'Helmut Schmidt and the Shaping of Western Security in the Late 1970s: The Guadeloupe Summit of 1979' *The International History Review* 37 (2015) 167–92.

end of the Cold War. Angela Romano, for instance, explains that the superpowers saw détente as 'a means of guaranteeing the bipolar order', while Europeans interpreted the concept differently, perceiving it as a 'means to start a gradual transformation of European relations aimed at overcoming the Cold War divide'.[45] Scholars like Romano make a convincing case for the argument that cultural contacts and economic exchanges between Western Europe and the Soviet bloc, which developed as a result of European détente, contributed to the overcoming of the Cold War divide.[46] This narrative becomes somewhat problematic, however, when historians try to identify a more direct link between Western European foreign policy and the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Indeed, as Michael Cox admits in a historiographical essay, European détente policy did not directly cause the upheavals of 1989. Yet, Cox continues, 'it is difficult to imagine what finally happened without it'.[47] This rather vague statement demonstrates that, while the argument appears convincing, more research is necessary to capture the exact nature of Europe's impact on the end of the Cold War.

What is more, it has not been sufficiently recognised that EC leaders and citizens looked further than the Eastern bloc or the Western world in the late 1970s and 1980s. Europeans were not disconnected from international events such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, conflicts in the Middle East, the Central American civil wars, and the North-South dialogue. And while there are some notable exceptions, the topic of Western Europe's global engagement has not yet been investigated in much detail or depth.[48] For example, it remains to be seen if European détente policy was limited to the Eastern bloc, or if similar policies were also applied to socialist states in the Global South, like Fidel Castro's Cuba and Sandinista Nicaragua. Similarly, although there are some notable exceptions, the attempts of Western European politicians – mostly social democrats – to help resolve economic and social inequalities in the Global South have also not received the attention they deserve.[49]

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[45] Angela Romano, 'The EC Nine's Vision and Attempts at Ending the Cold War' in Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, N. Piers Ludlow, Bernd Rother eds., *Visions of the End of the Cold War in Europe, 1945-1990* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2012). For more on how US policymakers saw détente, see, Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2013).

[46] Ibid.

[47] Michael Cox, 'Who won the Cold War in Europe? A historiographical overview', in Bozo, Rey, Ludlow, and Nuti eds. *Europe and the End of the Cold War* (2008) 15.

[48] See, Giuliano Garavini, *After Empires: European Integration, Decolonization, and the Challenge from the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Daniel Möckli and Victor Mauer eds., *European-American Relations and the Middle East: From Suez to Iraq* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); Lorena Ruano ed., *The Europeanization of National Foreign Policies towards Latin America* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

[49] There has been some notable work done on the international engagement of the Socialist International. See, Bernd Rother 'Between East and West – social democracy as an alternative to communism and capitalism: Willy Brandt's strategy as president of the Socialist International' in Leopoldo Nuti ed., *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); Fernando Pedrosa, 'La Internacional Socialista y la Guerra de Malvinas', *Latin American Research Review* 49 (2014) 47-67.

By analysing Western European relations with revolutionary Nicaragua, then, this thesis sheds new light on European state and non-state actors' global role in the late 1970s and 1980s. Crucially, by including the Nicaraguan perspective, it gives insight into how European foreign policies were perceived, interpreted, and influenced by actors in Central America. And by assessing the European role in the Central American peace processes, which eventually brought an end to more than a decade of revolutionary wars and violent counterinsurgency campaigns, it reveals a new perspective on Western Europe's contribution to the termination of Cold War conflicts in the Global South.

When examining the history of European foreign policies, it is impossible to ignore the transatlantic relationship.[50] The US was the most powerful player in Central America and the closest Cold War ally of the Europeans, and Western European officials kept US perceptions and sensitivities in mind as they developed their own foreign policy initiative towards the region. Also, US officials desperately lobbied for Western European public and political backing for Reagan's anti-Sandinista crusade, as they realised that unilateral US military action in Central America was no longer a feasible option. After the trauma of the Vietnam War and the remaking of the international order in the 1970s, the 'era of hegemonic responsibility' for the United States had come to a close.[51] Since America was no longer a 'freestanding colossus' in the international arena, public opinion and government decisions made in Western Europe could either strengthen or weaken the US administration's foreign policy towards Nicaragua, a fact the FSLN and its allies were keenly aware of and responded to.[52]

Contemporary observers and international historians have certainly identified more 'downs' than 'ups' in the transatlantic relationship in the early 1980s.[53] Western European governments and organisations clashed with the US administration over several topics, such as the US boycott of the 1980 Olympics in Moscow, Reagan's controversial Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), and the European deal with the Soviet Union to construct a gas pipeline.[54] Crucially, Western European and the US officials differed in opinion over the right way of dealing with

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[50] For an overview of transatlantic relations, see, Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945: from 'empire' by invitation to transatlantic drift* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[51] Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) 299. For another perspective on US power and the 1970s, see, Barbara Zanchetta, *The Transformation of American International Power in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
[52] Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed* (2015) 4.
[53] Mark Gilbert, *Cold War Europe: The Politics of a Contested Continent* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015) 205.
[54] Kristina Spohr, 'Conflict and Cooperation in Intra-Alliance Nuclear Politics: Western Europe, the United States, and the Genesis of NATO's Dual-Track Decision, 1977–1979', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13 (2011) 39–89; Kiran Klaus Patel and Kenneth Weisbrode, eds. *European Integration and the Atlantic Community in the 1980s*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

national liberation movements in the Global South.[55] Most Europeans, as Mary Nolan writes, understood developments in the Global South as a logical response to an unequal division of economic resources and social inequality, and not as a part of an ideological battle between communism and capitalism, which tended to be the view of US foreign policymakers. For instance, Nolan explains, EC governments considered Reagan's military and political support for Central American anti-communists as dangerous 'unilateral military adventurism'. [56] Indeed, other historians conclude, 'Reagan's extended crusade against the government of Nicaraguan received no support in Europe'.[57]

Yet, in spite of these disagreements and divergent views, it is worth remembering that Western European and US officials generally operated on the assumption that, in the international arena, they were on the same side. They might have quarrelled over the right way of fighting the Cold War, but EC and US leaders were fundamentally united in their desire to prevent the spread of Soviet influence and communist ideology around the world. The FSLN revolutionaries realised this, too, as they sought to convince Western Europeans that the Nicaraguan revolution had nothing to do with communism, and everything with non-alignment and social justice.[58] Moreover, Piers Ludlow writes, the traditional view that the 1980s was a period of transatlantic discord might be too simplistic, as institutional cooperation between the US and Europe continued to run 'surprisingly smoothly' throughout the decade.[59] Indeed, he argues, Western Europeans had 'a greater voice' in America in the 1980s than in any previous post-1945 decade.[60] This thesis, by analysing the Nicaraguan revolution through the transatlantic lens, aims to add nuance and complexity to the story of transatlantic relations, demonstrating that although Europeans and US disagreed about the right way of dealing with the Sandinistas, their objectives in Central America were, in fact, not that different.

Fourth, the thesis builds on and engages with the historiography of the Cold War in Latin America. By writing a global history of the Nicaraguan revolution, it gives attention to an understudied topic and region, namely the international and transnational history of Central America in late 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, by integrating the Nicaraguan revolution into the

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[55] Jussi M. Hanhimäki, Benedikt Schoenborn, and Barbara Zanchetta, *Transatlantic Relations since 1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012) 100.
[56] Mary Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century: Europe and America, 1890–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 314.
[57] Norman A. Graebner, Richard Dean Burns, and Joseph M. Siracusa, *Reagan, Bush, Gorbachev: Revisiting the End of the Cold War* (London: Preager Security International, 2008) 80.
[58] Ramírez, *Adiós Muchachos* (2012) 94-95.
[59] N. Piers Ludlow, 'The Unnoticed Apogee of Atlanticism? US-Western European Relations during the Early Reagan Era' in Patel and Weisbrode, eds. *European Integration and the Atlantic Community* (2013) 19.
[60] Ibid., 34.

history of the Cold War, it responds to Tanya Harmer's call to break away from the 'historiographical Monroe doctrine' and look beyond the Western Hemisphere.[61] By adopting a global – rather than an inter-American – perspective, the thesis sheds particular light on how and when the Cold War ended in the region, and what this meant for Nicaraguan revolutionaries on the ground. Historians have been somewhat reluctant to make sense of this transformative period in Latin America. Indeed, in contrast to the lively debate about the Latin American origins of the Cold War, the discussion about the conflict's regional ending has been much less pronounced.

When it comes to the origins of the Cold War in Latin America, existing literature has been shaped by the idea that the conflict had its own unique regional, local, and inter-American dynamics.[62] Instead of treating Latin Americans as either collaborators or victims of either one of the two superpowers – mostly the United States since the Soviet Union had little influence – recent histories chronicle how Latin Americans perceived, shaped, and participated in the Cold War conflict.[63] This new and exciting scholarship has transformed our understanding of Latin America's Cold War, as it demonstrates that states such as Cuba, Mexico, Chile, Brazil, and Argentina were important and independent regional powers, often able to challenge and influence US foreign policy.[64] Meanwhile, historians such as Vania Markarian, Margaret Power, Eudald Cortina Orero, and Jessica Stites Mor have written about transnational networks and actors who actively participated in the Cold War by promoting human rights, fighting for revolution, struggling against communism, and calling for international solidarity.[65] Other important studies, zooming in on the 'internationalisation and politicisation of everyday life' that exemplified Latin America's Cold War experience, focus on the grassroots experiences of often-marginalised actors

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[61] Tanya Harmer, 'Review of The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War by Federico Finchelstein', *Cold War History* 15 (2015) 419.

[62] See, for a historiographical discussion of the Cold War in Latin America, Tanya Harmer, 'The Cold War in Latin America' in Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Craig Daigle, *The Routledge Handbook of the Cold War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

[63] To a significant extent, this new literature was a response to a call by Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Spenser to bring Latin America back into the history of the Cold War. See, Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser eds., *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008).

[64] See, Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011); Tanya Harmer and Alfredo Riquelme eds., *Chile y la Guerra Fría Global* (Santiago: RIL, 2014); Renata Keller, *Mexico's Cold War: Cuba, the United States, and the Legacy of the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2002).

[65] Jessica Stites Mor ed., *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2013); Vania Markarian, *Left in Transformation: Uruguayan Exiles and the Latin American Human Rights Networks, 1967-1984* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Margaret Power, 'Who but a Woman? The Transnational Diffusion of Anti-Communism among Conservative Women in Brazil, Chile and the United States during the Cold War', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 47 (2015) 93-119; Eudald Cortina Orero, 'Discursos en (r)evolución. Lucha ideológica y captación de solidaridad en el movimiento revolucionario salvadoreño', *Naveg@mérica* 17 (2016). See, Joseph and Spenser eds., *In from the Cold* (2008).

such as workers, women, indigenous activists, and students.[66] Moving beyond the conceptual framework of the Cold War as bipolar power struggle, therefore, historians have embraced the idea of a complex, multi-dimensional, and regional conflict, in which Latin Americans fought over competing visions of development and 'modernity'.[67]

The concept of a Latin American or inter-American Cold War has resulted in an interesting historiographical discussion about periodisation, chronology, and origins. If the conflict had its own unique Latin American dynamics, when did it start? As Paulo Drinot and Tanya Harmer point out, ideologies and praxis generally associated with the post-1945 period, such as anti-communism and Marxism, in fact predated the Cold War and were not solely the creation of US and Soviet propaganda.[68] Rather, as Drinot demonstrates by concentrating on the early 1930s in Peru, anti-communism had 'ostensibly local roots'.[69] Greg Grandin and Gilbert Joseph, too, highlight the importance of the early 20th century for understanding the revolutionary violence and political upheaval that illustrates Latin America's Cold War experience. According to the authors, the conceptual framework of a 'long Cold War', which started with Mexican Revolution of 1910 and ended with the Central American peace accords in the 1980s, serves as a useful tool to understand the region's 20th century political history, in which local political struggles intersected with the 'hegemonic presumption' of the US.[70] Some scholars, adopting a global perspective, have taken issue with the concept of a long Cold War. Vanni Pettinà, for example, writes that 'socialist option' was only able to compete with the ideology of a 'capitalist modernity' after the Soviet victory in the Second World War.[71] Moreover, Pettinà argues, the Cold War was more than an ideological conflict, as it was also characterised by the 'new international system' that came into being after 1945, in which two superpowers, namely the Soviet Union and the US, competed for global dominance.[72]

When it comes to the far less-well studied question of the conflict's ending, arguments about the Cold War's beginnings have had automatic implications. Pettinà, for instance, argues Cold War in Latin America ended when the 'socialist option' he describes as becoming viable after

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[66] Benjamin A. Cowan, *Securing Sex: Morality and Repression in the Making of Cold War Brazil* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2016); Valeria Manzano, 'Sex, Gender, and the Making of the 'Enemy Within' in Cold War Argentina', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 47 (2015) 1-29; Heather Vrana, *This City Belongs to You: A History of Student Activism in Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).
[67] Westad, *The Global Cold War* (2005) 1-2.
[68] Harmer, 'The Cold War in Latin America' (2014).
[69] Paulo Drinot, 'Creole Anti-Communism: Labor, the Peruvian Communist Party, and Apra, 1930–1934', *Hispanic American Historical Review* 92 (2012) 703.
[70] Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph eds., *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010); Gilbert M. Joseph, Border Crossings and the Remaking of Latin American Cold War Studies', *Cold War History* 19 (2019) 141-170.
[71] Vanni Pettinà, *Historia mínima de la guerra fría en América Latina* (Ciudad de México: El Colegio de México, 2018) 34.
[72] Ibid., 35-36.

1945 was no longer seen as a credible option, so after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the Soviet Union. And according to Grandin and Joseph, Latin America's 'century of revolution' came to an end in the late 1980s, when peace accords and the Sandinistas' electoral defeat ended the region's revolutionary experiments.[73] Meanwhile, Harmer concludes that 'there was no single date' that spelled the demise of the 'ideological struggle that had lasted seven decades'. In the Southern Cone, the left had already lost most of its credibility and political power under the dictatorships in the mid-1970s, and the movement was further marginalised in the 1980s, a period of democratic transition and neoliberal reforms. Central America, was 'the exception to the general trend' in Latin America due to the Sandinista triumph in Nicaragua and the extremely violent counterinsurgency campaigns by anti-communist forces, heavily supported by the Reagan administration.[74] Aldo Marchesi, who writes about Latin America's radical left, arrives at a similar conclusion, arguing that 'the dream of continental revolution was no longer a persuasive idea' in the early 1980s.[75]

Yet, we still know very little about the local, regional, and global dimensions of the transformations that occurred in the 1980s. While historians agree that this decade was a period of historic change, the crucial questions of when, where, why and how these changes occurred still need to be answered. There are, for instance, virtually no studies that look into the Central American peace accords.[76] In addition, it remains to be seen if and how we can marry the apparent absence of the Cold War in the Southern Cone with the intensity and global impact of the Central American conflicts. Duccio Basosi, for instance, argues that Cold War considerations had little influence on Reagan's response to the Latin American debt crisis, as the administration knew it enjoyed 'virtually unchallenged leadership' in Latin America.[77] Yet, at the same time, as Victor Figueroa Clark demonstrates, Reagan and his regional anti-communist allies continued to wage a violent and intense Cold War struggle against the Latin American left, most notably in Nicaragua.[78] Indeed, it appears somewhat contradictory that, in the literature, the Central American conflicts were, on the one hand, part of the most violent, transformative, and intense period of the Cold War in Latin America and, on the other hand, an exception to the general trend, in which the

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[73] Grandin and Joseph, *A Century of Revolution* (2010).
[74] Harmer, 'The Cold War in Latin America' (2014) 143; Colombia and Peru do not fit this narrative either, even though these ongoing conflicts cannot solely be understood through a Cold War framework.
[75] Aldo Marchesi, *Latin America's Radical Left: Rebellion and Cold War in the Global 1960s* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 188.
[76] A notable exception is James Dunkerley, *The Pacification of Central America: Political Change in the Isthmus* (London: Verso, 1994).
[77] Basosi, 'The 'missing Cold War' (2011).
[78] Victor Figueroa Clark, 'Nicaragua, Chile, and the end of the Cold War in Latin America' in Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Sergei Radchenko eds., *The End of the Cold War and the Third World: New perspectives on regional conflict* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

ideological conflict had already come to an end. This thesis does not claim to resolve all these issues and answer every one of these questions. Rather, by tracing how the Sandinistas revolutionaries responded to the changing historical conditions they encountered, it gives us insight into how the transformations of 1980s, such as the rise of neoliberalism and Western-style democracy, affected Nicaragua's revolutionary trajectory, and vice versa. And in doing so, it argues that when it comes to Nicaragua, the Cold War ended not with a bang on a definitive date. True, the FSLN's electoral loss in 1990 was a significant turning point. But more gradual changes in the Sandinista government's diplomacy, economic management, and global impact suggest that the country's transition out of the Cold War was, in fact, more complex and multi-dimensional.

Finally, this thesis argues that we need to adopt a global perspective to fully capture the Latin American Cold War experience. In the late 1970s and 1980s, Sandinista revolutionary diplomacy was truly global in scope and impact, as the FSLN built relationships with Europeans, Latin Americans, the Soviet Union, as well as countries in the Global South, such as Vietnam, Algeria, and Ghana. Moreover, the Sandinista revolutionaries understood and actively presented themselves to the international community as part of a global movement fighting against imperialism and economic inequality in the Third World. The internationalisation of Central America's revolutionary struggles in the 1980s, therefore, was not simply caused by the toppling of the Somoza regime, nor was it solely the result of the Reagan administration's aggressive foreign policy towards Central America. Rather, from the 1970s onwards, the Sandinistas and their allies consciously transformed Nicaragua into a theatre of global contestation, both in terms of the North-South and East-West conflict. In tracing this history, then, the thesis highlights how Latin Americans participated and influenced the dynamics of the international Cold War system. And by researching how the Sandinistas consciously aligned themselves with Third World projects such as the New International Economic Order (NIEO) and the Non-Aligned Movement, this thesis highlights the influence of ideas and policies from the Global South on the RPS. In doing so, it is influenced by a recent volume that 'rearticulates' Latin American history as Third World history.[79]

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By integrating all these perspectives and approaches, *Sandinistas Go Global* seeks to present readers with the first global history of the Nicaraguan revolution. Obviously, a study of this scope is an ambitious task, which comes with many methodological, intellectual, and practical difficulties. With regards to the late 1970s 1980s, sources and archival material on Sandinista revolutionary diplomacy are hard to come by. As far as I am aware, academics – myself included – have not been

[79] Thomas Field, Stella Krepp, and Vanni Pettinà, 'Introduction: Between Nationalism and Internationalism: Latin America in the Third World' in *Latin America and the Global Cold War* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, forthcoming 2020).

able to access the archives of Nicaragua's foreign ministry, nor have we succeeded in finding out where the documents of the FSLN's international department are stored. In Managua, some former revolutionaries told me that most of the documents were destroyed after the elections of 25 February 1990, while others speculated that it was more likely that everything was transferred to Cuba. Considering the intimate relationship between the Sandinista and Cuban revolutionaries, the latter is certainly not an unlikely scenario.

To solve this issue, I searched for alternatives. In Nicaragua and abroad, I interviewed more than twenty former revolutionaries, Sandinista diplomats, and solidarity activists, including former FSLN *comandante* Jaime Wheelock Román and vice-president Sergio Ramírez Mercado. Aside from providing me with personal insights, illuminating anecdotes, and valuable memories of the Nicaraguan revolution, some of these interviews resulted in exclusive access to private papers, letters, and secret documents from Nicaragua's foreign ministry. Specifically, Alejandro Bendaña personal papers are at the heart of this thesis' analysis and understanding of Nicaraguan foreign policy in the 1980s, while Ángel Barrajón's personal files helped me to get a sense of the FSLN's revolutionary diplomacy before 19 July 1979. This thesis also draws on private memoirs and the rich collections of the *Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica* (IHNCA) in Managua, which include political pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, and letters. The papers of Sergio Ramírez at Princeton University and the collections at the Hoover Institution, too, helped me put together the Nicaraguan side of this story. Finally, to get a better sense of the objectives and motivations of the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, I conducted research in the East German archives in Berlin and the Cuban foreign ministry archives in Havana. Despite the limitations of the Cuban archives, where historians can only access a number of recently declassified files, the documents in Havana – combined with interviews with Cuban ex-officials – were particularly useful to grasp how closely aligned the Sandinistas were to the Cuban revolution. So, like any historical study, this thesis is not built upon a perfect source base, and its narrative and arguments are shaped by the sources I was able to access. Even so, this unique combination of sources provides a much fuller picture of the international history of the Nicaraguan revolution than we have to date.

With regards to archival materials on the other side of the Atlantic, access was considerably easier. To trace the impact and praxis of Sandinista diplomacy in Western Europe and – albeit to a lesser extent – the United States, this thesis draws on archival collections in the Netherlands, the US, Britain, and Germany. The collections at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, in combination with the People's History Museum in Manchester, were particularly valuable for this thesis, as they demonstrated how the global and the local intersected in the transnational solidarity movement. Meanwhile, the government archives in Berlin, The Hague, and

London, as well as the Reagan Library in Simi Valley, helped me to understand how Western Europeans and Americans perceived the Nicaraguan revolution, and how the Central American wars affected the transatlantic alliance. Finally, I have extensively consulted online repositories of sources, including newspapers, interviews, CIA files, and parliamentary debates.

On scope, it is worth noting that this thesis zooms in on the government policies and grassroots experiences in three individual Western European countries, namely Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and the Netherlands. In addition to the practical factor of time, there are several reasons for this. Firstly, these three countries were at the heart of the European solidarity movement. The headquarters of the European network was based in the Dutch city of Utrecht, the West German solidarity movement was exceptionally large and influential, and the British Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) was the most important solidarity committee in the late 1980s, with a permanent office in Managua. Secondly, at the level of the state, these countries give us insight into the effectiveness of Nicaraguan diplomacy and Western European involvement in Central America. The West German foreign minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, was the driving force behind the EC initiative towards Central America. Throughout the 1980s, the Netherlands was the largest contributor of financial aid to the Sandinista government. And Britain, precisely because of Margaret Thatcher's close relationship with Ronald Reagan, was considered an important diplomatic and propaganda target by the FSLN, as its leaders believed the UK could most effectively influence US foreign policy.

This is not to say that the other European countries are not worth studying. In the period 1981-1983, for instance, the role of France is particularly interesting, as French socialists actively supported the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, openly dismissing Reagan's foreign policy objectives in Central America. Spain also pushed for an active European foreign policy towards the Central American region after it joined the EC in 1986, which is certainly worth looking into. These were, however, only short periods in the revolution's longer engagement with Western Europe. Moreover, even though its primary focus is on the FRG, the UK, and the Netherlands, this thesis does not ignore the involvement of other European countries in Central American affairs. For instance, by cross-referencing sources from the British, Dutch, and German archives, and by drawing on the – albeit patchy – body of secondary literature on the involvement of Spain and France in Central America, it engages with the roles of these countries, particularly when they pushed for a coordinated European response but its focus remains on previously understudied EC countries.[80]

[80] Jean Grugel, 'Spain's Socialist Government and Central American Dilemmas', *International Affairs* 63 (1987) 603-615; Celestino de Arenal, *Política exterior de España y relaciones con América Latina* (Fundación Carolina: Madrid, 2011);

The thesis that follows consists of six chapters, adopting a chronological approach, starting with the Sandinistas' international campaign to delegitimise the Somoza regime in chapter one, and ending with the road to the 1990 elections in chapter six. In chapter two, I trace the transition from revolutionary movement to governing party after 19 July 1979, as the Sandinistas attempted to create a revolutionary state, establish friendly relations around the globe, and implement radical social change. Chapter three, which deals with the period 1981-1982, analyses the Nicaraguan revolutionaries' response to the election of Reagan, who immediately made clear he did not tolerate the Sandinista regime, thereby causing concern amongst the European allies. Chapter four deals with the growing hostilities and military escalation in 1983-1984, which pushed the FSLN towards concessions and convinced the countries of the EC that they needed to get involved in Central American affairs. In chapter five, I examine how the Sandinistas found themselves in an increasingly precarious situation, as the international tide turned against them in 1985 and 1986, both in economic, military, and political sense. Finally, chapter six deals with the difficult and ambiguous final years of the Nicaraguan revolution, tracing how the Sandinistas, hoping to end the contra war and obtain international legitimacy, went along with the demands of the international community for new elections and international reforms. Were they successful? On the one hand, it appears they were, as the US and the contras could not overthrow the revolutionary regime. That the FSLN government lasted a whole decade despite the hostility of the world's most powerful superpower is testimony to its skill and resilience in offsetting difficult odds through and ambitious and astute international strategy. On the other hand, the FSLN lost power in the elections to an opposition coalition that was heavily funded by the US government. And, as we shall see, it was in many ways the West Europeans that pushed them into a position of holding the elections and accepting this outcome. Preventing this kind of ending, however, was not on the minds of the Sandinista revolutionaries over a decade earlier, when the FSLN's key objective was simply the overthrow of the Somoza regime.

Julius W. Friend, *Seven Years In France: Francois Mitterrand And The Unintended Revolution, 1981*-1988 (Abingdon: Routledge, 1989).

CHAPTER 1

ISOLATING SOMOZA, 1977-1979

On 30 October 1978, the Central America Human Rights Committee (CAHRC) hosted a public lecture at the London School of Economics (LSE).[1] Approximately two hundred people attended this event, the purpose of which was to raise awareness about the increasingly violent situation in Nicaragua, and to collect money for the left-wing revolutionaries of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*. Angel Barrajón, the representative of the FSLN in Western Europe, was one of the speakers. His speech, according to a critical observer from the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), 'consisted largely of revolutionary rhetoric and denunciations of North American imperialism'.[2] Apart from blaming the United States 'for all Nicaragua's present trouble', the civil servant noted that Barrajón called on the British people 'for moral, economic and material assistance to enable the Nicaraguan people to continue their armed struggle against the regime'.[3] Barrajón specifically underlined the importance of collecting money for weapons, stating that 'the victors in the conflict would be those who had the most and best arms'.[4]

This event in London is just one example of the massive international campaign the Nicaraguan Sandinistas and their supporters waged in the tumultuous period leading up to the fall of the Somoza dynasty on 19 July 1979. From 1977 onwards, the FSLN broadcasted its message of Third World revolution and national liberation to thousands of solidarity activists, trade unionists, human rights campaigners, priests, business leaders, politicians, students, and journalists in Europe and the Americas. In doing so, they successfully mobilised and coordinated an international support base that strengthened the FSLN's legitimacy inside and outside Nicaragua, and provided Sandinista guerrillas with crucial material and political support to overthrow the anti-communist regime of Anastasio Somoza. The transnational network of solidarity committees, in particular, functioned as a diplomatic counterweight to the Nicaraguan government's official embassies in Western Europe. The international campaign of the FSLN in the late 1970s, therefore, was an important asset for the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, who had fruitlessly tried to topple the Somoza dictatorship since the FSLN's foundation in the early 1960s.[5]

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[1] The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom (hereafter, TNA), FCO 99/187, Flyer, CAHRC, 27 October 1978.
[2] TNA, FCO 99/187, Minter to Perceval, 1 November 1978.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] For more on the early period of the FSLN, see, Zimmerman, *Sandinista* (2000) and Kruijt, *Guerrillas* (2008).

This chapter traces the origins of this international mobilisation in support of the Nicaraguan struggle against Somoza by analysing and assessing the efforts of the FSLN to build a transnational diplomatic network to shape public opinion and the foreign policies of Western European countries in the late 1970s. It argues that the key to the Sandinistas' successful targeting of Western European audiences and politicians in the two years leading up to the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution was their ideological flexibility and pragmatism, which fell on surprisingly fertile ground. Indeed, the 1977 decision to start working with individuals, governments, and organisations from all across the political spectrum proved remarkably effective, as it allowed the revolutionaries to create and coordinate an international anti-Somoza movement. In Western Europe, this led to the formation of a diverse transnational alliance in support of the Nicaraguan struggle against the Somoza dictatorship, in which the Socialist International (SI) and solidarity activists played a significant role.

Intimately related to the Sandinistas' revolutionary strategy was the new public image – or rather images – the FSLN adopted to mobilise supporters for its cause. Although Sandinista representatives consciously tailored their revolutionary message to fit their audiences' preferences and interests, there was a notable attempt to counter the idea that the FSLN was merely a group of Cuban-backed Marxist guerrillas. To challenge this portrayal of their movement, Sandinistas campaigning in Western Europe described the FSLN as the legitimate representative of a nationalist struggle for democracy and social justice, in which Nicaraguans from all political and social-economic backgrounds participated. By arguing that the revolutionary war could not be framed as a conflict between East and West, as well as by continuously stressing that the FSLN would adopt a non-aligned foreign policy once in power, the revolutionaries placed themselves outside of the Cold War context and inside the long tradition of Third World national liberation movements.[6]

In Western Europe, the FSLN encountered an unusually receptive audience. At a time when Europeans were increasingly dissatisfied with the American tendency to frame international affairs solely in Cold War terms, and social democrats started to develop an active interest in the Global South, the Sandinista message of non-alignment, pluralism, and social justice resonated in an important number of ways. Moreover, FSLN representatives in Western Europe were able to build on existing Latin American solidarity networks and capitalised on the tensions and frustrations that existed within these organisations. To grasp why the FSLN was able to mobilise

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[6] For more on national liberation movements and the Third World, see, Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007); Westad, *The Global Cold War* (2005); Matthew Connelly, 'Taking off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict During the Algerian War of Independence', *The American Historical Review* 105 (2000) 739-769.

such a diverse range of supporters for their revolutionary cause, this chapter demonstrates, we need to look deeper than their general international strategy and analyse how the FSLN's revolutionary diplomacy played out and was interpreted by Western European individuals and activist organisations on the ground.

By analysing the rationality and impact of the Sandinistas' revolutionary diplomacy in the years leading up to their triumph on 19 July 1979, this chapter adds a crucial layer to the historiography of the origins of the Nicaraguan revolution. Historians and political scientists have developed various answers to the question of why Sandinista revolutionaries, after years of infighting and isolation, were suddenly able to overthrow the US-backed Somoza dictatorship. Focusing on domestic causes, scholars have highlighted, amongst others, the impact of legendary guerrilla commander Carlos Fonseca, the role of anti-imperialist nationalist ideology, the extreme inequality in the countryside, and the revolutionaries' ability to create a broad opposition coalition with Nicaragua's business and church elites.[7] Regarding the international context, scholars have predominantly focused on the impact of US foreign policy, zeroing in on the impact of Carter's human rights policies on the Somoza regime.[8] More recent scholarship, moving away from the traditional centrality of the US, has focused on the inter-American origins of the Nicaraguan revolution, as historians have pointed out that the governments of Venezuela, Mexico, Panama, Costa Rica, and Cuba were instrumental for the Sandinistas' revolutionary victory, as they provided the FSLN with weapons and lobbied the Carter administration to push Somoza out.[9]

Yet, the involvement of Western European state actors is largely overlooked and consequently historians have not been able to capture the global dimensions of the Nicaraguan revolutionary war.[10] By demonstrating how Sandinista revolutionaries created a diplomatic network in Western Europe and, as a consequence, placed the Nicaraguan civil war on the European political agenda, this chapter contributes to our understanding of the revolution's global origins. This is not to suggest that the United States was a marginal actor in Central America during

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[7] Zimmerman, *Sandinista* (2000), Kruijt, *Guerrillas* (2008), Forrest D. Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994) 46.

[8] See, for instance, LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* (1998); Martha L. Cottam, 'The Carter Administration's Policy towards Nicaragua: Images, Goals, and Tactics', *Political Science Quarterly* 107 (1992) 123-146; Anthony Lake, *Somoza Falling: A Case Study of Washington at Work* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1989); Robert Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1987); Lawrence Pezzullo, *At the Fall of Somoza* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1993).

[9] See, Sánchez Nateras, 'The Sandinista revolution and the limits of the Cold War in Latin America', *Cold War History* 18 (2018) 111-129; Vázquez Olivera and Campos Hernández eds., *México ante el conflicto centroamericano (*2016).

[10] To be sure, regarding non-state actors, recent scholarship has looked as the impact of the FSLN on Western European solidarity activism. See for instance, Helm, *Botschafter der Revolution* (2018), Helm, 'Booming solidarity', *European Review of History* 21 (2014) 597-615, Ágreda Portero and Helm, 'Solidaridad con la Revolución Sandinista', Naveg@*merica* 17 (2017); VanOmmen, 'La Revolución Sandinista en los Países Bajos', *Naveg@merica* 17 (2016); Van Ommen, 'The Sandinista Revolution in the Netherlands', *Naveg@merica* 17 (2016).

the Cold War, nor that domestic factors or the policies of Latin American governments were inconsequential, but rather that to fully understand the Sandinistas' triumph, we need to adopt a more global approach and to do so squarely by focusing on the FSLN's international goals and strategy. Indeed, what makes the late 1970s such an intriguing period in Central American history is that, for the first time in decades, actors beyond the Western Hemisphere developed a proactive interest in the region. What is more, rather than being on the receiving end of outside interventions, this chapter shows that Nicaraguans themselves encouraged Western European involvement in Central American affairs, as they hoped European governments could pressure the Carter administration into breaking ties with the Somoza regime.

SANDINISTAS GO GLOBAL

The diplomatic campaign the FSLN launched in 1977 primarily targeted Latin America, Western Europe, and North America. In the years before the 1979 revolution, the international strategy of the FSLN was still rather unorganised and often lacked clear coordination. Nevertheless, Sandinistas around the globe had a solid idea about what their organisation needed: material and political support for the military struggle and the isolation of the regime of Anastasio Somoza. With this in mind, Sandinista supporters organised themselves and presented their arguments to trade unions, church groups, solidarity committees, governments, and political parties in their host countries. In particular, the FSLN's international strategy relied on the prestige and expertise of Nicaraguan intellectuals, such as the novelist Sergio Ramírez, the priest Miguel D'Escoto, and the liberation theologian Ernesto Cardenal.

The mobilisation of a broad support base for the struggle against Somoza was rooted in the revolutionary ideology of one of the three factions of the FSLN. This insurrectional faction, better known as the *tercerista* tendency, became the most powerful of the three Sandinista factions after its foundation in 1977. The *terceristas* opposed the traditional foco theory of Che Guevara; rather than exclusively favouring rural guerrilla warfare, they believed in urban uprisings and, crucially, a temporary alliance with the country's other opposition forces.[11] *Terceristas* disagreed with the proletarian faction, led by Jaime Wheelock Román, who argued that the key to a successful revolution was the recruitment and mobilisation of workers. They also clashed with Tomás Borge, one of the three founders of the FSLN, who headed the prolonged war faction. This faction believed that the struggle should take place in the mountains, not the cities, and that it would take a long time before a coalition of peasants and workers would be able to overthrow the Somoza regime.

[11] Close, *Nicaragua* (2016) 67.

Despite this public pledge for a multi-class and politically diverse alliance, the *terceristas* were, in fact, inspired by Marxist ideas, anti-imperialism, and the Cuban revolution.[12] Daniel Ortega, one of the FSLN leaders, clearly spelled out his faction's strategy in an interview in early 1979. *Terceristas*, according to Ortega, 'aim at joining together all the anti-Somoza sectors and mass organisations of the country, including sectors of the opposition bourgeoisie'.[13] In doing so, he continued, 'we seek to conserve the political hegemony of the FSLN and […] avoid the possibility of the bourgeoisie becoming the political leader of an anti-Somoza front'.[14] On 7 January 1979, in a secret letter to Sandinista militants, Daniel's brother Humberto Ortega made similar comments. The alliance with the 'bourgeoisie' is simply a means to an end, and not an end in itself, *comandante* Humberto Ortega explained. The FSLN, he continued, is not aiming to impose a 'social-democratic capitalist style of development' in Nicaragua. Nevertheless, to 'make a leap' towards popular power and the construction of a socialist revolutionary state, the bourgeoise's participation in the struggle against Somoza was, at least for the time being, simply necessary.[15]

In the late 1970s, the pragmatic *tercerista* strategy of looking beyond the radical left to build an anti-Somoza alliance was extended to the international arena. The FSLN looked for other donors than Fidel Castro's Cuba – which was of course limited in what it could offer – for financial aid, logistical support, and political backing. To achieve their goal, the FSLN employed several arguments and tactics. First, Sandinista representatives argued passionately against Somoza's claim that the only two options for Nicaragua were 'himself or the communists'.[16] To assuage fears that Nicaragua would become a second Cuba – isolated and dependent on the Soviet Union – Sandinistas tried to move beyond the ideological bipolarity of the Cold War. Instead of being aligned to either the Soviet Union or the United States, they presented the FSLN as a national liberation movement, which fought for democracy, social justice, and political pluralism. According to US sources, guerrilla commander Ortega, 'seemed to go out of his way to stress the moderate, democratic orientation of the Frente' in a meeting with US officials in Panama in June 1979.[17] In that same month, Tomás Arguello Chamorro, a Nicaraguan student who also functioned as spokesperson for the FSLN in Britain, emphasised to the FCO 'that it was quite

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[12] The FSLN was influenced by a variety of intellectual trends. As Donald Clark Hodges argued in his *Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), the leaders of the FSLN were part of the New Left that emerged in the long 1960s, but were also influenced by Augusto César Sandino's writing, liberation theology, and Marxism.
[13] Interview with Daniel Ortega by Pedro Miranda, *Latin American Perspectives* 6 (1979) 114-118.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua y Centroamérica, Managua, Nicaragua (hereafter, IHNCA), Folio 0049, Humberto Ortega Saavedra to Frente Norte 'Carlos Fonseca Amador', 7 January 1979.
[16] TNA, FCO 99/186, Washington to FCO, 14 September 1978.
[17] Foreign Relations of the United States (hereafter, FRUS), 1977-1980, Volume XV, Central America, eds. Nathan L. Smith and Adam M. Howard (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2017) Doc. 234.

untrue that the only alternative to Somoza or Somocismo was the extreme left and that it had been untrue for many years'.[18] It was completely false, Sandinistas proclaimed, to compare the FSLN with Latin America's radical armed left. One *tercerista* was quoted in the *Washington Post* pointing out that 'while other revolutionaries enter banks to assault them, we were just received in Ecuador by the president of the central bank'.[19] And the famous commander Edén Pastora, then known by his guerrilla name *Comandante Cero*, denied claims that Fidel Castro's Cuba was funding and influencing the FSLN. Describing a successful raid of Nicaragua's National Palace in August 1978, Pastora declared the Sandinistas 'did not need anyone' as 'we are intelligent, we are capable, and we are revolutionaries'.[20]

It needs to be noted that behind the scenes the Cubans continued to play a crucial role in the Nicaraguan struggle, especially with regards to military coordination, political planning, and international diplomacy. Most notably, Fidel Castro used his negotiating skills and prestige to ease the tension between the three competing FSLN factions, which contributed to their official unification in February 1979.[21] Moreover, Castro and Manuel Piñeiro Losada, the head of the Cuban Communist Party's prestigious *Departamento América,* responsible for Havana's relations with Latin American left-wing organisations, actively lobbied the governments of Costa Rica, Panama, and Venezuela on behalf of the Sandinistas, encouraging them to provide FSLN militants with arms, safe havens, and political support.[22] The Cuban *Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores* (Ministry of Foreign Relations, MINREX), too, developed a diplomatic strategy to support the struggle of the young revolutionaries against the Somoza dictatorship, which deputy foreign minister René Anillo Capote described as the most 'Made in the USA' regime in the world. From October 1977 onwards, therefore, MINREX officials denounced the crimes of Somoza in international organisations such as the United Nations (UN). They also contributed to the Sandinistas' international campaign by printing and spreading propaganda materials, such as posters and newsletters about the guerrilla struggle.[23] By doing so, the Cuban government helped the FSLN revolutionaries attract attention and contributed to the isolation of the Somoza regime.

While publicly playing down their connections with Cuba and international communism so as not to provoke opposition from anti-communists, the FSLN simultaneously highlighted the

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[18] TNA, FCO 99/350, Note of Meeting, Croll and Arguello Chamorro, 29 June 1979.
[19] *Washington Post*, 20 December 1978.
[20] *The Times*, 25 Augustus 1978.
[21] For more information on the FSLN's relationship with Cuba, see, Gary Prevost, 'Cuba and Nicaragua: A Special Relationship?' *Latin American Perspectives* 17 (1990) 120-139.
[22] Dirk Kruijt, *Cuba and Revolutionary Latin America: An Oral History* (London: Zed Books, 2017) 158-159.
[23] Centro de Gestión Documental del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Havana, Cuba (hereafter, MINREX), Nicaragua 1977, Ordinario, René Anillo to Isidoro Malmierca, 19 October 1977.

dependency of the Somoza regime on the United States.[24] When unidentified gunmen in Managua murdered the popular editor Pedro Joaquín Chamorro in July 1978, for instance, Ernesto Cardenal accused president Carter of trying to cover up Chamorro's murder, declaring publicly 'Somoza knows who killed Chamorro and if Somoza knows, Carter knows, and if he doesn't know he has not wanted to ask'.[25] Invoking memories of the early 20th century, when US marines had occupied Nicaragua for several years, the FSLN also repeatedly warned the international community of the possibility of another 'North American military intervention in Nicaragua' to prevent the FSLN from taking power.[26] In private meetings with US government officials, FSLN negotiators toned down their anti-imperialist rhetoric, and acknowledged Carter's efforts were 'being distorted by Somoza and the media'.[27] Indeed, Ramírez and D'Escoto told Richard Feinberg in 1978 'the Sandinistas were not anti-US' and pointed out that, in the recently released FSLN manifesto, 'one of the references to the US was favourable'.[28] They did, however, stress the US responsibility for Somoza's behaviour, stating 'the US could remove him if it wanted'.[29]

To bring across the message of democracy and non-alignment in a more convincing manner, the *terceristas* employed the support of a group of Nicaraguan intellectuals, known as the *Grupo de los Doce* (Group of Twelve). On 21 October 1977, citing the 'repressive apparatus' and 'irrational violence' of the Somoza regime, this respectable group of businessmen, politicians, priests, and academics publicly endorsed the Sandinistas' armed struggle in Nicaragua's main opposition newspaper, *La Prensa.*[30] In the two years leading up to the revolution, members of Group of Twelve skilfully used their prestige and international network to give the FSLN's revolutionary war momentum, legitimacy, and international press coverage. Sergio Ramírez, one of the founders of *Los Doce,* played a particularly important role.[31] Taking advantage of his contacts with famous Latin American writers such as Gabriel Garciá Marquez and Julio Cortázar, Ramírez was able to get in touch with several sympathetic Latin American leaders and convinced them of the 'moderate tendencies in the Sandinistas'.[32] Ramírez and the Group of Twelve also tried to

[24] National Archives and Records Administration, Department of State, Central Foreign Policy Files, Electronic Records (hereafter, DOS/CFP), Telegram, AmEmbassy Panama to SecState, 22 March 1978.
[25] Ibid.
[26] DOS/CFP, Electronic Telegram, AmEmbassy Santo Domingo to SecState, 24 November 1978.
[27] FRUS, 1977-1980, Volume XV, Central America, Doc. 85.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] TNA, FCO 99/44, Translation of Statement by "The Twelve" as published in La Prensa, on 21 October 1977.
[31] See, for more, Henighan, *Sandino's Nation* (2014).
[32] Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama in particular showed enthusiasm for the Sandinista cause and supported the Group of Twelve with money, material, and political backing. FRUS, 1977-1980, Volume XV, Central America, Doc. 98.

convince the US government the FSLN was not as radical as was generally believed. In 1978, for instance, he told Feinberg that the group's new manifesto was quite 'moderate'.[33]

The arguments FSLN representatives used to mobilise support, however, varied greatly depending on the audience and location. When talking to potential candidates in Western Europe, the Sandinista campaign strategy was to 'avoid political discussions' and instead 'look for common ground' with as many groups as possible.[34] For example, if an organisation or individual was unlikely to back the guerrillas' military struggle, but could perhaps be persuaded to denounce the human rights violations of the Somoza regime, the conversation's focus was on the latter. In meetings with Western European officials, the Sandinista leadership did not ask them to recognise the FSLN as the 'diplomatic representative of Nicaragua'. Instead, they focused on the crimes of the Somoza dynasty and asked Western European governments to officially 'break off diplomatic relations' with the regime.[35] During a visit to the West German capital Bonn, for instance, Cardenal called for 'a suspension of all German investment and credits' in Nicaragua, arguing all aid would end up in 'the pockets of the Somoza family'.[36]

To mobilise the public, Sandinista representatives consciously adapted the style of their campaigns to suit the domestic situation in the countries they targeted. For example, in 1978, Barrajón wrote in a letter to a comrade that, unlike the Spanish, British people had little 'sympathy for armed movements' and the radical Left.[37] Therefore, he recommended that campaigns in Britain, in order to raise money for the FSLN, should have a 'humanitarian' instead of a revolutionary and political character.[38] In letters to the Foreign Office and the Nicaraguan embassy, then, the abovementioned CAHRC focused on human rights violations. They accused Somoza – with good reason – of 'imprisoning, torturing, and killing' and denounced the 'atrocities perpetuated by the National Guard against ordinary people'.[39] On their flyers, the CAHRC wrote that any money they received at fundraising events would be used 'for immediate relief work' and 'items such as beds, blood, blankets, field hospitals etc'.[40] Most likely, however, this this was another example of tactical mobilisation of support and the money was probably used for military means.

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[33] FRUS, 1977-1980, Volume XV, Central America, Doc. 85.
[34] International Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (hereafter, IISG), Archive Informationsbüro Nicaragua Wuppertal (hereafter INW), not catalogued, Bericht und Ergebnisse des Europäische Treffens der Nicaragua Solidaritätskomitees, May 1979.
[35] Ibid.
[36] TNA, FCO 99/34, British Embassy San Jose to FCO, 5 December 1977.
[37] Angel Barrajón Private Papers, Managua, Nicaragua (hereafter, ABP) Letter, Barrajón to unknown, 1 December 1978.
[38] Ibid.
[39] TNA, FCO 99/187, CAHRC to David Owen, 8 November 1978.
[40] TNA, FCO 99/187, Flyer, CAHRC, date unknown.

The new strategy the Sandinistas launched in the late 1970s appeared to be remarkably effective. The FSLN was increasingly seen as the vanguard of the anti-Somoza movement and mobilised a range of people for its cause, managing to obtain financial support – although we lack exact numbers – and political support from new sources. Latin American governments, such as Costa Rica, Venezuela, Panama, and Mexico, financially and militarily assisted the struggle of the FSLN. And by repeatedly asking the Carter administration when the United States 'would be getting rid of Somoza', these governments contributed to Somoza's isolation.[41] Other Nicaraguan opposition groups, such as the *Frente Amplio Opositor* (Broad Opposition Front, FAO), which mostly represented the country's middle and upper classes, clearly worried about the growing popularity of the FSLN. In May 1979, for instance, one FAO representative reported to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the FAO was currently 'sandwiched' between Somoza's army on the one hand, and the increasingly powerful Sandinista guerrillas on the other.[42] Somoza too, noticed this trend, and complained to the US ambassador, Mauricio Solaun, about the 'new legitimization of the FSLN', adding that there was clearly 'a problem with the growing respectability of the Communists'.[43]

To understand why the FSLN's strategy was so successful in attracting international support and attention, however, it is important to analyse how Sandinista diplomacy played out on the ground in various Western European countries, cities, and networks. Individuals, political parties, and governments in Western Europe responded to the Sandinistas' diplomatic offensive in different ways. Solidarity activists, for example, were attracted to the revolutionary struggle in Nicaragua for a wide variety of reasons. The FSLN was also lucky to encounter an unusually receptive Socialist International, which had just started to develop an interest in Latin America. Also, clearly not all Western European governments were entirely convinced by the Sandinistas' apparent move towards the political centre, and they lobbied for Somoza's departure for much more pragmatic reasons than generally believed.

TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY ACTIVISM AND THE SANDINISTAS

A key aspect of the FSLN's revolutionary campaign was the coordination of a transnational network of solidarity committees. Solidarity activists in Latin America, Western Europe, and North America cooperated with the Sandinistas to collect money, spread information about the situation in Nicaragua, and pressure governments to break off relations with the Somoza regime. In the

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41 FRUS, 1977-1980, Volume XV, Central America, Doc. 95.
42 Archief Buitenlandse Zaken, The Hague, The Netherlands (hereafter, BZ), Inventarisnummer 11838, Memorandum, 17 May 1979.
43 FRUS, 1977-1980, Volume XV, Central America, Doc. 67.

years before the revolution, the network of Western European solidarity activists was still small, especially when compared to the 1980s, when hundreds of committees worked to 'defend' the Sandinista Revolution against the Reagan administration and the counterrevolutionaries.[44] Nevertheless, to understand the later functioning and importance of the solidarity movement, it is important to study how this network came into being and operated.

As seen above, Ernesto Cardenal visited Europe regularly to propagate the Sandinista message. The charismatic priest gave television interviews and was regularly quoted in newspapers.[45] Cardenal was a particularly well-known figure in Western European literary circles, and his books on liberation theology and Nicaraguan history were published in German, French, English, Italian, and Dutch.[46] His visits to Western Europe, however, had a purpose that went beyond mere publicity; he also travelled through the region to collect money for weapons, gave messages and instructions to exiled Nicaraguans, and encouraged Western European activists to set up solidarity committees. As a writer, priest, and activist, Cardenal established contacts with many grassroots organisations in Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), and the Netherlands. The flyer from the CAHRC, for example, called upon the people of Britain to raise funds for the Nicaraguan people and send them 'to the account of Father Ernesto Cardenal'.[47]

Due to the nature of his work, Cardenal was never in one place long enough to become the official FSLN representative in Europe. To oversee and coordinate the foundation of a Western European network of solidarity activists, then, the Sandinista leadership appointed two official representatives. One was Angel Barrajón, a Spanish ex-priest who had lived in Nicaragua since the 1960s but moved back to Spain because of his connection to the Sandinistas, which made it dangerous form him to stay in Managua. Barrajón, based in Madrid, was appointed in September 1978 to be responsible for the solidarity movement in Southern Europe and in Great Britain.[48] The other representative was a Nicaraguan of German descent named Enrique Schmidt Cuadra, who had worked for the FSLN but lived in exile in West Germany since 1977.[49] Schmidt Cuadra was responsible for the functioning of the solidarity movement in Northern and Central Europe. To instruct the solidarity committees and provide up-to-date information about the situation in

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[44] See, for an overview of the Western European solidarity movement's mobilisation for Nicaragua, Christiaens, 'Between diplomacy and solidarity', *European Review of History* 21 (2014) 617-634.
[45] Henighan, *Sandino's Nation* (2014) 129; Debra Sabia, *Contradiction and Conflict: The Popular Church in Nicaragua* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997) 60.
[46] See, Helm, 'Booming solidarity', *European Review of History* 4 (2014) 597-615, Hansen, Helm, and Reichherz eds., *Making Sense of the Americas* (2015).
[47] TNA, FCO 99/187, Flyer, CAHRC, date unknown.
[48] Author's interview with Angel Barrajón, 8 August 2016, Managua, Nicaragua.
[49] Between 1967 and 1974, Schmidt Cuadra had lived in West Germany, where he studied and supported the Chile solidarity movement.

Nicaragua to the press, Barrajón and Schmidt received monthly faxes from the International Department of the FSLN, which was based in Costa Rica. Additionally, on multiple occasions in 1978 and 1979, Barrajón and Schmidt travelled to Costa Rica and Nicaragua, carrying with them what Barrajón described decades later as suitcases filled with 'thousands of dollars', which the solidarity movement had collected for the Sandinista struggle.[50]

The primary task of the two Sandinista representatives in Western Europe was to encourage people to set up local solidarity committees, and to simultaneously incorporate all these individual committees into a functioning transnational structure. To achieve the latter, the FSLN organised two Western European solidarity conferences in 1978, in Madrid and Utrecht. At the conference in Utrecht, the activists decided that the solidarity movement needed national representatives as well as one central Western European secretariat. Throughout most of the 1970s and 1980s, this secretariat, initially headed by the Dutch professor Klaas Wellinga and the German author and activist Hermann Schulz, who was based in Wuppertal, coordinated campaigns on a Western European scale. The secretariat was also responsible for communication with Nicaragua, the FSLN's International Department, and the national coordinating committees. In the late 1970s, the office of *Nicaragua Komitee Nederland* (Dutch Nicaragua Committee, NKN) in Utrecht simultaneously functioned as the headquarters of the West European solidarity movement.[51]

By 1979, it was clear the Sandinista representatives had, to a large extent, succeeded in their task. In West Germany, dozens of solidarity committees campaigned for the Sandinista cause.[52] In most Dutch university cities, too, such as Groningen, Nijmegen, Utrecht, and Wageningen, local activists – most of them students – managed to set up active Nicaragua solidarity committees.[53] In Britain, Nicaragua groups operated in at least twenty cities, such as Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Bath, and Oxford.[54] Nevertheless, as the Foreign Office noted, 'despite two very disturbing television documentaries' about the violent situation in Nicaragua, 'the campaign…failed to capture much public interest' in the United Kingdom.[55] Solidarity activists such as John Bevan, a member of the British solidarity committee, and Angel Barrajón admitted the solidarity movement

[50] Interview, Barrajón, 8 August 2016.
[51] IISG, Archief Nicaragua Komitee Nederland (hereafter, NKN), Box 17, 'Concept Dutch Viewpoint for the 10th European Conference in Brussels', 23 November 1984.
[52] Such as, Munster, Berlin, Wuppertal, Göttingen, Frankfurt, München, Hamburg, Bremen, and Tübingen.
[53] Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (hereafter, SA), Archief Nicaragua Komitee Amsterdam (hereafter, NKA), Box 1, Annual Report, 1984.
[54] Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Office, London, United Kingdom (hereafter, NSC), not catalogued, Letter, George Black to Doris Tijerino, 30 October 1979.
[55] TNA, FCO 99/188, Memorandum, MACD to Keith Hamylton Jones, 22 November 1978.

in Britain had a slow start, but stressed the British network became increasingly skilled at raising money for the Sandinistas during the 1980s.[56]

Before the revolution, therefore, with regards to Western Europe, the FSLN predominantly relied on committees in the Netherlands and West Germany, where the Nicaragua solidarity groups were bigger and better organised.[57] In these countries, the movement succeeded in building an anti-Somoza alliance by establishing ties with human rights organisations, church groups, political parties, trade unions, and charities. The Dutch Nicaragua Committee, for instance, offered a petition to the Nicaraguan consul in Rotterdam, stressing the right to 'self-determination' of the Nicaraguan people. Political parties across the political spectrum had signed this petition; not only the *Partij van de Arbeid* (Labour Party, PvdA) and the Dutch Communist Party, but also the centre right *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, VVD) and the conservative *Christen-Democratisch Appél* (Christian Democratic Appeal, CDA).[58] In West Germany, committees also succeeded in creating a broad opposition front, as they had a good relationship with the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Social Democratic Party of Germany, SPD), and received support from politicians in the Green Party and the Communist Party, as well as from Christian groups inspired by the work of Sandinista liberation theologians, such as Ernesto Cardenal.[59] By contrast, the solidarity movement in Britain was not able to bridge the political divide in the country, and received only the support from the Labour Party, not the Conservatives.[60]

In some cases, the competition and distrust between members of the three Sandinista tendencies spilled over to Western Europe. In November 1978, a German solidarity committee, based in Göttingen, wrote a circular letter stating its members did not recognise the authority of Schmidt Cuadra, and refused to accept the solidarity committee in Wuppertal as their national representative.[61] One reason the Göttingen committee gave for refusing to accept Schmidt Cuadra's position was that he gave favourable treatment to his 'friends from the proletarian tendency' of the FSLN.[62] Overall, however, the FSLN succeeded in preventing Nicaraguan divisions from having a negative impact on the functioning of the transnational solidarity network. George Black, for instance, wrote to the FSLN that the British committee was 'pluralist' and had

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[56] Author's interview with John Bevan, London, 20 March 2017; Interview, Barrajón, 8 August 2016.
[57] Interview, Barrajón, 8 August 2016, IISG, INW, Bericht und Ergebnisse des Europäische Treffens der Nicaragua Solidaritätskomitees, May 1979.
[58] *Leeuwarder Courant*, 12 June 1979.
[59] See, Helm, 'Booming solidarity', *European Review of History* 4 (2014) 597-615.
[60] NSC, George Black to Doris Tijerino, 30 October 1979.
[61] ABP, Circular letter, Deutsche Solidaritätskomitees mit Nicaragua Göttingen, 20 November 1978.
[62] Ibid.

been able to 'avoid ideological conflict'.[63] At solidarity conferences, FSLN representatives spoke openly about the ideological differences that existed between the three tendencies but took care to stress that they now worked together to overthrow Somoza.[64] As Angel Barrajón wrote to Miguel Castañeda, another Sandinista, in February 1979: 'the struggle against the dictatorship is just more important than problems between the tendencies, particularly when this endangers the solidarity movement'.[65]

Undoubtedly, the solidarity activists' personal determination to avoid ideological disputes was inspired by their earlier experiences with the Chilean solidarity movement, which started to disintegrate in the late 1970s. Since the violent overthrow of the socialist Salvador Allende in 1973, Chilean exiles in Europe had worked hard to isolate and overthrow the military regime of the anti-communist Pinochet. The Chile movement, however, was split between the radical *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Left Movement, MIR), the Chilean Communist Party, and the Chilean Socialist Party. The inability of these parties to overcome their differences prevented them from working effectively for their cause. Furthermore, their movement was increasingly split between exiles and activists who continued to believe in the value of armed struggle and those who advocated the human rights narrative as a more effective strategy to overthrow Pinochet.[66] The internal divisions and debates within their network frustrated Chilean exiles and left many of their Western European and Latin American supporters confused and disenchanted.[67] Nicaraguan exiles, and particularly Schmidt Cuadra, who had participated in the Chile solidarity campaign in Germany, naturally did not want history to repeat itself and therefore structured the Nicaragua solidarity campaign as a broad and inclusive anti-Somoza alliance.[68]

Although not wanting to repeat the Chileans' divisions, one group the FSLN targeted successfully, was the radical flank of the Chile solidarity movement. When Sandinistas looked towards Western Europe for political and financial support, they encountered many frustrated left-wing activists with a strong interest in Latin America's radical left. In particular, as armed revolution in Chile seemed increasingly unlikely and many solidarity activists preferred human rights activism over guerrilla warfare, those Latin American exiles and solidarity activists

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[63] NSC, George Black to Doris Tijerino, 30 October 1979.
[64] IISG, INW, Bericht und Ergebnisse des Europäische Treffens der Nicaragua Solidaritätskomitees, May 1979.
[65] ABP, Barrajón to Casteñada, 28 February 1979.
[66] See, Tanya Harmer, 'The view from Havana: Chilean exiles in Cuba and early resistance to Chile's dictatorship, 1973-1977', *Hispanic American Historical Review* 96 (2016)109-146; Patrick William Kelly, '1973 Chilean Coup and the Origins of Transnational Human Rights Activism', *Journal of Global History*, 8 (2013) 165-186; Mariana Perry, 'With a Little Help from My Friends: The Dutch Solidarity Movement and the Chilean Struggle for Democracy', *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 101 (2016) 75-96.
[67] Author's interview with Klaas Wellinga and Hans Langenberg, 6 August 2014, Utrecht, The Netherlands.
[68] Hans Hübner, Ley Werner and others, eds, *Enrique Presente: Enrique Schmidt Cuadra – Ein Nicaraguaner Zwischen Köln und Managua* (Cologne: Schmidt von Schwind Verlag, 2004).

advocating armed struggle, such as the supporters of the MIR, ended up isolated and without financial resources.[69] In the late 1970s, these activists were the most likely to take up the Sandinista cause since, after many years of fruitless solidarity activism against the anti-communist dictatorships of the Southern Cone, they, to put it crudely, wanted a win. So, when the Sandinista guerrillas grew stronger and gained popularity and legitimacy, the situation in Nicaragua was interpreted as proof that guerrilla warfare was still a valuable and admirable strategy. Klaas Wellinga for example, was the Dutch representative of the MIR before he became a founding member of the Dutch Nicaragua Committee.[70] George Black and John Bevan, the leaders of British solidarity campaign for Nicaragua, also stressed that Chileans exiles from the MIR and other militant groups played a key role in the early British mobilisation for the armed struggle in Nicaragua.[71] The Sandinistas' revolutionary strategy, then, was flexible enough to mobilise both the radical left, as well as more moderate groups in Western Europe.

Not all solidarity activists were intrigued by armed struggle alone; many were drawn to Nicaragua due to a combination of cultural and political reasons. Here, too, the FSLN was able to build on earlier efforts. Indeed, since the 1970s, to encourage European interest in Latin American history and politics, Chile solidarity committees in Britain, the Netherlands, and West Germany organised many cultural events, such as concerts by Latin American singers, art exhibitions, film showings, and literary nights. In the Netherlands, the *Kultuur Kollectief Latijns Amerika* (Culture Collective Latin America), which had direct ties to the solidarity committees, translated and distributed literature, poetry, and music.[72] These cultural events had a strong political undertone. For example, most musicians who played at the solidarity concerts were part of the popular Latin American *Nueva Canción* (New Song) movement. Returning to a more traditional folkloric style, New Song musicians such as the Uruguayans Numa Morales and José Carbajal, addressed social tensions in their region and delivered political messages to their audiences.[73]

The Nicaragua solidarity campaign successfully continued the familiar strategy of linking political messages to cultural entertainment, thereby legitimising and popularising the Sandinistas' armed struggle.[74] They translated and distributed books by Ernesto Cardenal, organised art shows, and invited Central American artists to perform at concerts. The Nicaraguan singers Carlos and Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy were particularly popular. In their songs, the Godoy brothers talked

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[69] Interview, Wellinga and Langenberg, 6 August 2014.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Author's interview with George Black, 21 November 2017, Skype; Interview, John Bevan, 20 March 2017.
[72] SA, NKA, Box 1, Annual Report, 1984; Interview, Wellinga and Langenberg, 6 August 2014.
[73] Jan Fairley, 'La Nueva Canción Latinoamericana', *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 3 (1984) 107-108.
[74] For more on how culture and music helped the Sandinistas achieve their revolutionary objectives, see, Sophie Esch, *Modernity at Gunpoint: Firearms, Politics, and Culture in Mexico and Central America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018).

about social issues and romanticised guerrilla warfare. In 'Guitarra Armada', for instance, they explain how to make explosives, handle small arms, and disassemble and reassemble an M1 Carbine, a weapon commonly used by Somoza's National Guard. And in the song 'Venancia', Luis Enrique Godoy tells the story of a young female guerrilla from the mountains, whose brother was murdered by the army for joining a trade union. Next to records, Nicaragua solidarity committees also sold copies of the Costa Rican-made movie *Nicaragua: Patria Libre o Morir* (1979), which chronicled the FSLN's military struggle against Somoza.[75]

The high participation of women in the guerrilla struggle against Somoza also attracted the attention of Western European women and feminist activists.[76] Indeed, as historian Friederike Apelt writes, scholars have tended to overlook the fact that the FSLN actively engaged in constructing and spreading 'emancipatory gender images' all over the world, which mobilised women in the solidarity movement for the Sandinista cause.[77] Famously, in August 1978, the young guerrilla commander Dora Maria Téllez successfully occupied the National Palace in Managua and took hostage around 2,000 government officials, demanding the immediate release of imprisoned Sandinista fighters. Dora Maria Téllez' daring action became an international symbol of the FSLN's revolutionary feminism, creating a powerful image of Nicaraguan women putting down their 'kitchen pots' to take up arms against an oppressive regime, laying claim to power as wielded by the barrel of a gun.[78] Moreover, already in their 1969 'historic programme', the FSLN vowed to 'abolish the odious discrimination that women have been subjected to compared to men'.[79] Building on this rejection of gender discrimination, therefore, Sandinistas and their supporters in the late 1970s successfully presented the FSLN as a guerrilla movement promoting gender equality and female empowerment.

So, by building on existing networks of solidarity committees and smartly playing into the political agendas and interests of Western European activists, the FSLN was able to bring together a diverse range of supporters from the radical Left, Latin American exiles, student unions, trade unions, human rights organisations, women's groups, church organisations, and mainstream political parties. The creation of a transnational solidarity network in support of the revolutionary

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[75] NSC, George Black to Doris Tijerino, 30 October 1979.
[76] See, for more on the often-overlooked history of women's participation in revolutionary Nicaragua and the domestic and international struggle against Somoza, Friederike Apelt, 'Between Solidarity and Emancipation? Female Solidarity and Nicaraguan Revolutionary Feminism', in Hansen, Helm, Reichherzer eds., *Making Sense of the Americas* (2015); Karen Kampwirth, *Women and Guerrilla Movements, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas, Cuba* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002).
[77] Apelt, 'Between Solidarity and Emancipation?' in *Making Sense of the Americas* (2015) 175.
[78] Mary Louisa Cappelli, 'Women of the revolution: Gendered politics of resistance and agency in the cultural production of Margaret Randall', *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 4 (2017) 6.
[79] 'The Historic Programme of the FSLN', as published in Bruce Mars ed., *Sandinistas Speak* (Pathfinder Pres, New York, 1982).

struggle against the dictatorship shows the effectiveness of the Sandinista strategy. Through revolutionary diplomacy, the FSLN not only turned their small and relatively unknown Central American country into a topic of interest for Western European activist and journalists, it also succeeded in presenting the civil war as a struggle for national liberation against a violent dictatorship. This clearly frustrated Nicaraguan officials in Western Europe, as they tried to counter the Sandinistas' propaganda by writing angry letters to the media. Florencio Mendoza, the Nicaraguan ambassador in the FRG, for instance, accused the editors of left-wing magazine *Stern* of misrepresenting the situation in Nicaragua, as the Sandinistas were not freedom fighters but rather violent 'communists' who killed everyone who disagreed with them.[80] But, given the FSLN's successful diplomacy, such accusations did not stick. In addition to outwitting the Somoza regime's ambassadors, the Sandinistas' revolutionary diplomacy, as the section below further demonstrates, also brought them in contact with Western European social democrats.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATS AND THE FSLN

Sandinista leaders considered Western European politicians an important target for their diplomatic campaign, as they believed European government policy could pressure the United States into an agreement with the FSLN. Although historically not particularly involved in Central America, Western European politicians and activists slowly began to pay more heed to developments in Nicaragua in the late 1970s. Key in this context was the role and network of the Socialist International, through which the FSLN established contacts with prominent Western European social democrats, such as François Mitterrand (France), Joop den Uyl (The Netherlands), Olof Palme (Sweden), Mário Soares (Portugal), and Felipe González (Spain). Crucial for the success of the Sandinista campaign, however, was the influence and charismatic leadership of Willy Brandt, the leader of the SPD, who was elected leader of the Socialist International on a platform of human rights and North-South cooperation in 1976 and shifted the focus of the association towards Latin America.[81]

The Socialist International, founded in 1951, was an influential international organisation, bringing together West European socialist, labour, and social democratic parties. The SI aimed to challenge the bipolarity of the Cold War by presenting social democracy as a 'third way' – a suitable

[80] IHNCA, ASD 064, Carta de remisión de documentos a la Oficina de Seguridad Nacional de la Embajada de Nicaragua en Alemania, Mendoza to Stern, 20 October 1978.
[81] See, for more information on the SI and Latin America, Pedrosa, 'La Internacional Socialista y la Guerra de Malvinas', *Latin American Research Review* 2 (2014) 47-67; *La otra izquierda. La socialdemocracia en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2012); Garavini, *After Empires* (2012).

alternative to both Soviet communism and US capitalism.[82] In the 1960s and 1970s, the SI's principal focus had been on Southern Europe and the organisation played a particularly important role in the democratic transitions in Spain, Greece, and Portugal.[83] Under Willy Brandt's leadership, the SI rapidly grew in membership and in scope. Stressing the need for greater economic cooperation between the world's rich and poor countries, the organisation started to develop activities outside of Europe, and these initiatives were particularly well received in Latin America.[84] In the 1970s, prominent Latin American leaders became active and influential members of the SI, such as Carlos Andrés Pérez (Venezuela), José Francisco Peña Gomez (Dominican Republic), and Daniel Oduber (Costa Rica), while others, such as Omar Torrijos (Panama) and Leonel Brizola (Brazil) regularly attended SI meetings and conferences.[85]

The growing interest of the SI in Latin American developments was excellent news for the FSLN revolutionaries. As we have seen above, as a result of their international campaign, Sandinistas and members from the *Grupo de los Doce* had already managed to establish friendly and constructive relationships with, amongst others, Pérez, Torrijos, and Oduber.[86] These connections with Latin American socialists and social democrats, then, provided the FSLN with an excellent opportunity to put the Nicaraguan civil war on the SI's agenda and, consequently, to increase international pressure on Somoza and present the revolutionary struggle in a positive light. In 1978, for example, Ernesto Cardenal and several other Sandinista representatives were invited to speak at an SI conference in Vancouver, Canada, where they received a standing ovation.[87] In the final resolution of the conference, moreover, the SI called for international solidarity with the Nicaraguan struggle against the dictatorship and, implicitly referring to the United States, urged all governments 'which have so long maintained the Somoza regime in power' to end their support for the regime.[88] Furthermore, the SI adopted concrete plans to assist the Nicaraguan opposition with financial and material aid, medical assistance, and political training.[89]

What is more, because of the support of the SI for the Nicaraguan opposition, developments in Central America increasingly shaped political debates in Western Europe. Not

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[82] As quoted in Michele di Donato, 'The Cold War and Socialist Identity: the Socialist International and the Italian 'Communist Question' in the 1970s', *Contemporary European History* 24 (2015) 196.
[83] See, Anet Bleich, *De Stille Diplomaat: Max van der Stoel, 1924-2011* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2018).
[84] Garavini, *After Empires* (2012) 236.
[85] Pedrosa, 'La Internacional Socialista y la Guerra de Malvinas', *Latin American Research Review* 2 (2014) 47-67; Sánchez Nateras, 'The Sandinista revolution and the limits of the Cold War in Latin America', *Cold War History* 18 (2018) 111-129.
[86] Fernando Pedrosa, 'Redes transnacionales y partidos politicos: la Internacional Socialista en América Latina, 1951-1991', *Iberoamericana* 49 (2013) 37.
[87] Henighan, *Sandino's Nation* (2014) 129.
[88] DOS/CFP, Electronic telegram, AmConsul Vancouver to SecState, 4 November 1978; *NRC*, 6 November 1978.
[89] Ibid.

only did European left-wing politicians voice their concerns about the Somoza dictatorship in parliaments, urging governments to break ties with the US-backed regime, some also endorsed the FSLN as the legitimate representative of the Nicaraguan struggle for social and economic justice, democracy, and non-alignment.[90] On 20 December 1978, the British Labour Party passed a resolution in which they extended 'their warmest support to all the democratic opposition forces and particularly the Sandinista National Liberation Front'.[91] In the resolution, Labour firmly rejected 'the idea that the only alternative to Somoza is communist takeover in Nicaragua'.[92] The PvdA, too, promoted the cause of FSLN in the Netherlands, criticising the Somoza dictatorship, US foreign policy, and Israeli arms shipments to Nicaragua.[93] The Dutch Labour leader Joop den Uyl, for instance, emphasising the 'responsibility' of the Carter administration, urged his government to express 'sympathy' for the struggle in Nicaragua.[94] The PvdA also called on the public to financially support the FSLN, pointing out that 'you have to help the Frente, and not the dictator Somoza'.[95] Finally, in West Germany, the SPD and its associated political foundation the *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung* (FES) started to actively back the guerrilla struggle against the Somoza regime, providing the FSLN revolutionaries with money, training, and political support.[96]

Through its connections with left wing politicians, the FSLN could also lobby Western European governments more directly, and present officials with a politically acceptable picture of the revolutionaries' objectives. The Nicaraguan brothers Tomás and Humberto Arguello Chamorro, for instance, arranged a meeting with Louise Croll from the Foreign Office, which was set up 'through a British intermediary' from the Labour Party.[97] In this secret meeting on 29 June 1979, which took place outside Whitehall, the Chamorro brothers asked the British government to break relations with the Somoza regime and recognise the new *Junta de Gobierno de Reconstrucción Nacional* (Junta of National Reconstruction, JGRN), a provisional government that the FSLN, in cooperation with other opposition groups, had established to give the military struggle a civilian

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[90] At least nine Constituency Labour Parties wrote the British Secretary of State about the Situation in Nicaragua. See, TNA, FCO 99/346.
[91] TNA, FCO 99/346, Resolution, Labour Party, 20 December 1978.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Staten Generaal Digitaal, Handelingen Tweede Kamer, 20 November 1978. Online at: www.statengeneraaldigitaal.nl
[94] Staten Generaal Digitaal, Handelingen Tweede Kamer, 5 October 1978.
[95] IISG, INW, Klaas Wellinga to European Solidarity Committees, 15 June 1979.
[96] For more on the SPD's involvement in Central America, see, Eusebio Mujal-Leon, 'The West German Social Democratic Party and the Politics of Internationalism in Central America', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 29 (1988) 89-123, Bernd Rother and Klaus Larres eds., *Willy Brandt and International Relations: Europe, the USA, and Latin America, 1974-1992* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019). On de SPD's international engagement prior to Nicaragua, see, Antonio Muñoz Sánchez, 'A European answer to the Spanish Question: the SPD and the end of the Franco dictatorship', *Journal of European integration history* 15 (2009) 77-94.
[97] TNA, FCO 99/350, Shakespeare to Hall, 26 June 1979.

and moderate face.[98] The revolutionary junta, they stressed, represented 'a broad spectrum of opinion in Nicaragua' and was committed to 'restoring confidence in democracy' and creating 'a mixed economy'.[99] Smartly playing into what they perceived as the political ideology of Margaret Thatcher's new government, the Chamorro brothers also argued that 'private property would be respected' and that several members of the junta were 'businessmen and landowners'.[100]

Again, the international strategy of the Sandinista revolutionaries was effective. In less than two years, the FSLN was transformed from a marginalised group of guerrillas into an organisation with connections to a respectable and influential network of Latin American and Western European politicians. To be sure, the FSLN was lucky to encounter an unusually receptive Socialist International in 1978-1979, eager to be convinced by the Sandinistas' argument that their revolutionary project would transcend the bipolar Cold War order. Yet, as historian Bernd Rother points out, the FSLN's ability to attract the support of social democrats was unique: 'never before had the International taken the side of a revolutionary movement so unequivocally as in the case of the Sandinistas'.[101] Apart from giving the Sandinistas an international platform to voice their concerns, the growing support of Western European social democrats for the FSLN inevitably had an impact on government policy. In the late 1970s, the political left in Europe was particularly strong, making this a propitious time for the FSLN to obtain the movement's support. Left-wing parties were in power in Britain (until 1979) and West Germany (until 1982), and the PvdA – albeit in opposition – was the largest political party in the Netherlands. In Greece and France, too, the left would soon win power in elections. As the final section of this chapter demonstrates, then, Western European governments in the late 1970s were suddenly forced to engage with Nicaragua, a country where they historically had few direct economic or political interests.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND THE FSLN

As developments in Nicaragua captured the public's attention, Western European governments in the late 1970s became increasingly critical of Somoza. As we have seen above, the general sentiment in Europe was that Somoza's dictatorial behaviour was unacceptable, and that Nicaragua deserved democracy and social justice. On 29 June 1979, the foreign ministers of the nine member states of the European Community (EC) joined the public debate by issuing a statement declaring 'their very grave concern over the disturbing developments in Nicaragua and the steadily

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[98] TNA, FCO 99/350, Note of Meeting, Croll and Arguello Chamorro, 2 July 1979.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Bernd Rother, 'Between East and West – social democracy as an alternative to communism and capitalism: Willy Brandt's strategy as president of the Socialist International' in Nuti ed., *The Crisis of Détente in Europe* (2008) 221.

worsening sufferings being inflicted upon the Nicaraguan people'. The Nine therefore called for 'an immediate halt to the conflict' so that 'free elections can be held without delay'. [102]

This was the first time the Nine issued a joint statement on a Central American country, a region they considered of little political, economic, and strategic importance, as it was considered to be firmly within the US sphere of influence. Britain and the Netherlands did not have embassies in Managua and depended on their ambassadors in Costa Rica, Mexico, and Panama for relevant information on the revolutionary war in Nicaragua. Although this irritated the British ambassador in Costa Rica, who noted in September 1978 that 'under the inefficient system of non-resident representation we tend to be two jumps behind events in Nicaragua', the FCO did not feel the need to change these arrangements.[103] John Shakespeare, for example, the head of the British Mexico and Caribbean Department (MACD), stated in November 1978 that Central America was an area where Britain 'could close down all our missions without serious harm to the national interest'. [104] West Germany did have an embassy in Managua and, according to the British ambassador, 'relatively big commercial interests' in Nicaragua. [105] Nevertheless, the German *Auswärtiges Amt* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, AA) did not feel the need to become actively involved in the region. In fact, at an Anglo-German meeting to discuss European foreign policy in 1978, the German representative noted that West Germany 'had no active policy towards Latin America'.[106]

It is therefore remarkable to note that, a year later, despite the lack of direct interests, the Western European governments became openly opposed to the continuation of Somoza's regime and issued a joint statement.[107] What is more, the governments of West Germany, Britain, and the Netherlands urged the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to refuse the Nicaraguan government any new loans.[108] And although the EC countries could not do much to directly put pressure on Somoza, David Owen took the symbolic measure of not accrediting the new British ambassador in Costa Rica to Nicaragua.[109] Also, Owen urged the United States in February 1979 to 'pull the

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[102] Electronic Archive of European Integration (hereafter, AEI), Statement of the EEC Foreign Ministers, 29 June 1979. Online at: http://aei.pitt.edu/
[103] TNA, FCO 99/186, Hamylton Jones to MACD, 8 September 1978.
[104] TNA, FCO 99/112, Shakespeare to Unwin, November 1978.
[105] See, for instance, Thomas Schoonover, *Germany and Central America: Competitive Imperialism, 1821-1921* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995); TNA, FCO 99/43, Embassy San Jose to MACD, 5 December 1977.
[106] TNA, FCO 99/116, Record of conversation, 2 June 1978.
[107] Apart from the abovementioned joint statement, however, Western European governments did not coordinate their foreign policies towards Nicaragua in the 1970s.
[108] TNA, FCO 98/187, Brief for EPC Latin America Working Group meeting, 22 September 1978.
[109] TNA, FCO 99/346, David Owen to MACD, 27 February 1979.

props out from under Somoza', and even said that he was willing to take 'a lead in the EC in support of any US action against Somoza'.[110]

To a large extent, the rising levels of Western European governmental interest in Nicaragua are evidence of the impact of Sandinista revolutionary diplomacy on European foreign policy. Certainly, European diplomats were aware of the rising public interest in Nicaragua and took this into account when making foreign policy decisions regarding Central America.[111] For example, the British MACD recommended Owen make the US administration aware of the 'strong opposition to the Somoza regime within the Labour Party and amongst liberal and human rights groups in the UK'.[112] Surely, the memorandum continued, there 'would be some parliamentary and public criticism of the US if, in spite of Somoza's rejection of the mediation proposals, they were to continue to give him any support'.[113] Moreover, as parliamentarians and the public pressured governments into issuing a statement about Nicaragua or breaking off diplomatic relations with the Somoza regime, Western European officials simply could no longer remain neutral. Even if they disagreed with public opinion and disliked the Sandinista revolutionaries, the EC leaders had to come up with a response to justify this. For instance, AA officials had to write responses to letters by solidarity committees, church groups, and human rights activists, who asked foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher why the FRG was still supporting the 'feudalist-dictatorial' Somoza dictatorship.[114] The British Secretary of State, David Owen, too, received dozens of letters asking the British government to support the 'development of a democratic government in Nicaragua'.[115] These letters were sent by a range of organisations, including the British Council of Churches, constituency Labour Parties, War on Want, the Justice and Peace Group for Prisoners of Conscience, and several student unions.[116] In the late 1970s, therefore, although initially reluctant to get involved in the region at all, Western European governments had to rethink their approach to the upheavals in in Central America.

Nevertheless, to understand how European foreign policy towards Nicaragua was subsequently shaped, we need to take note of another – much more powerful – actor that pressured Western Europe to get involved in the Nicaraguan conflict. In June 1979, several

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[110] TNA, FCO 99/350, Brief for visit by David Owen to Washington, 31 January 1979.
[111] AA, Zwischenarchiv 111.158, PP Bonn to AA, 21 February 1978.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts, Berlin, Germany (hereafter, AA), Zwischenarchiv 111160, Gerta and Reinhard Kober to Genscher, 4 January 1978; Christliche Arbeiter-Jugend Diözesanverband Paderborn to Genscher, 10 April 1978; Amnesty International Deutschland to Botschaft der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in der Republik Nicaragua, 7 February 1978. For more letters, see, AA, Zwischenarchiv 111158.
[115] TNA, FCO 99/186, Council of Churches to David Owen, 20 September 1978.
[116] For these and more letters, see TNA files FCO 99/188 and FCO 99/186.

European governments, including Britain, the FRG, and the Netherlands, received a secret letter from the American president Jimmy Carter asking for European support for the United States' 'general objectives' in Central America, most notably 'a reduction of violence and the restoration of peace in Nicaragua'.[117] Specifically, Carter asked his European allies to embargo 'arms shipments to both sides in the Nicaragua conflict'.[118] The letter also reflected the US administration's fear of a Castroite takeover in Nicaragua, stating that 'Western democracies less directly involved in Central American than the United States may have special advantages in helping to develop and strengthen centrist political forces in these countries'.[119]

The initial European response to Carter's letter varied from passive to negative. Senior British diplomat Anthony Parsons, the UK Permanent Representative to the United Nations, summarised the situation as follows:

> The Americans have got rather a nerve. Since the 19th century they have treated the countries of Central America like a private estate and have resolutely discouraged any other powers from developing their interests on any significant scale there. Now the structure is coming apart and they are turning to us and presumably others for help.[120]

The Dutch were equally unimpressed and concluded that the Carter administration was now 'relatively powerless' since an 'old school intervention' was no longer politically acceptable. Also, the Dutch rejected Carter's suggestion that they could directly assist 'moderate political groups' in Nicaragua since they considered this a task for political parties, not governments.[121]

The reluctance of European governments to support Carter's objectives does not necessarily mean that they were entirely convinced by the FSLN's argument that the Nicaraguan revolutionary struggle had nothing to do with the Cold War. Although Western European officials wanted Somoza out as soon as possible, they certainly shared some of the American concern regarding the possibility of growing Cuban and Soviet influence in Central America. West German diplomat Andreas Meyer-Landrut, for instance, informed his government on 10 July 1979 about the 'increasingly active involvement' of the Cubans in the Nicaraguan civil war, warning that Fidel Castro's government supported the Sandinistas with arms and military training.[122] The British

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[117] TNA, FCO 99/266, Letter, Brewster to Carrington, 19 June 1979.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] TNA, FCO 99/266, Parsons to FCO, 28 June 1979.
[121] BZ, Inventarisnummer 11838, Memorandum, DWH/NC to DWH, 19 June 1979.
[122] Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (hereafter, AAPD), 1979, Document 207, Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirektors Meyer-Landrut, 10 July 1979.

ambassador in Costa Rica, too, noted that the Costa Rican security service had discovered Sandinista propaganda and arms in a house in San José 'not far from the Soviet Embassy'.[123] And, in November 1978, a representative from the Overseas Information Department (OID) attended the abovementioned Nicaragua solidarity event at the LSE. In a memorandum to the FCO, the OID compared Barrajón's speech to the language of the Cuban revolutionaries and concluded that it was 'not clear' whether the FSLN 'would follow Cuba's pro-Soviet party organisation'.[124] The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs also admitted that the American fears 'for escalation' and the 'increase of Cuban/Marxist influence' in Central America were justified.[125] Overall, then, Western European diplomats agreed with Carter that it was in the interest of the West to 'bolster the moderates" in Nicaragua in order to prevent 'a Castroite takeover'.[126]

The negative response in London, Bonn, and The Hague to Carter's letter therefore needs to be placed in the wider context of transatlantic relations and the heightening of Cold War tensions in the late 1970s.[127] To summarise, transatlantic relations were extremely tense during the Carter presidency; European leaders were irritated by Carter's foreign and trade policies towards the Middle East, the Soviet Union, and East Asia, which they saw as inconsistent, demonstrating a lack of concern for the transatlantic alliance, and inconsiderate of Western European Cold War concerns.[128] The German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, in particular, was known to disagree with Jimmy Carter on a wide variety of issues, most notably the correct response to the global economic crisis and nuclear arms control.[129] Additionally, as old Cold War tensions and rivalries heightened in 1978-1980 and relations between the United States and the Soviet Union crumbled once again, Western Europeans were reluctant to start this new phase of the Cold War and remained committed to the continuation of détente.[130]

The reaction to Carter's letter, therefore, is reflective of the increasing frustration of Western European governments with the Carter administration. With regards to Nicaragua, Carter's refusal to push the repressive dictator Somoza out of office, which contrasted sharply with his earlier focus on human rights in Nicaragua, only confirmed what many Western

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123 TNA, FCO 99/42, Hamylton Jones to FCO, 5 December 1977.
124 TNA, FCO 99/187, Memorandum, Overseas Information Department, 1 November 1978.
125 BZ, Inventarisnummer 11838, DWH/NC to DWH, 19 June 1979.
126 TNA, FCO 99/347, MACD Brief for Cabinet Meeting, 18 July 1979.
127 See, Matthias Schulz and Thomas A. Schwartz eds., *The Strained alliance: US-European relations from Nixon to Carter* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed* (2015).
128 See, Gilbert, *Cold War Europe* (2015) and Duccio Basosi, 'Principle or Power? Jimmy Carter's ambivalent endorsement of the European Monetary System, 1977-1979', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 8 (2010) 6-18.
129 See, Kristina Spohr, *The Global Chancellor: Helmut Schmidt and the Reshaping of the International Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
130 Young, 'Europe and the End of the Cold War, 1979-1989' in Leffler and Westad eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War (*2010).

Europeans leaders already believed, namely that Carter's foreign policies were vague, inconsistent, and contradictory. Indeed, when the Carter administration showed itself unable to integrate human rights and Cold War concerns into a coherent and effective foreign policy towards Nicaragua, Somoza, and the FSLN, it alienated its Western European allies.[131] Meyer-Landrut, for instance, concluded that the Carter's policy towards the Nicaraguan crisis was not 'credible' because it lacked a clear 'political conception' combining regional stability with a decline in support for Somoza.[132] The British ambassador in Costa Rica was even more disapproving, noting that 'the all-important United States are still obsessed with the fear of a second Cuba and have reluctantly concluded that Somoza is the only figure who can effectively subserve their desire to keep the region quiet'.[133] The British ambassador in Washington, too, aired his frustration with what he saw as the irrational underpinnings of Carter's foreign policy, lamenting that the United States was once again 'haunted by the memory of the Cuban Revolution'.[134]

Yet, despite these tensions, both sides of the Atlantic recognised that, in the global Cold War, they were on the same side. Indeed, Parsons concluded his memo by writing that there was 'no point in rubbing salt in the Americans' wound' since 'we all share the same objectives'.[135] The main point of disagreement between the United States and its European partners was on the right methods to achieving these goals in Central America. Western European officials believed that Carter's apparent refusal to push Somoza out only worsened the situation, as this would bolster the radicals in the FSLN. The nine EC member states, therefore, wanted Somoza to leave Nicaragua as soon as possible and were frustrated with Carter's hesitation to increase pressure on the dictator. This European perception was based on the calculation that 'the longer Somoza remains, the greater the chance of the extreme left wing controlling the next government of Nicaragua and of it coming under Cuban influence'.[136] The best strategy to keep Nicaragua away from Cuba and the Soviet Union, the Western Europeans argued, was to make sure the Sandinista revolutionaries would feel appreciated and welcomed by the West. [137]

However, the situation in Nicaragua soon outpaced the development of European foreign policies. On 19 July 1979, Sandinista guerrillas succeeded in overthrowing the Somoza regime and, together with opposition coalition they assembled, installed a new revolutionary government. How Western European involvement might have developed had this not happened is unclear. By 1979,

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[131] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* (1998); Westad, *The Global Cold War* (2005).
[132] AAPD, 1979, Document 207, Aufzeichnung des Ministerialdirektors Meyer-Landrut, 10 July 1979.
[133] TNA, FCO 99/186, Letter, Hamylton Jones to MACD, 28 February 1978.
[134] TNA, FCO 99/186, Telegram, British Embassy in Washington to FCO, 14 September 1978.
[135] TNA, FCO 99/266, Letter, Parsons to MACD, 28 June 1979.
[136] TNA, FCO 99/340, Memorandum, MACD, 22 June 1979.
[137] BZ, Inventarisnummer 11838, DWH/NC to DWH, July 1979.

one thing was clear: at the level of the state, the FSLN's international campaign, initiated two years earlier, combined with pressure from the Carter administration, put Nicaraguan developments on the European political agenda and, in doing so, forced Western European governments to look closely at a region they had since the early 20th century largely ignored. As they did, these governments agreed with the Sandinistas that Somoza's regime should be brought to an end. Although they were not entirely convinced of the FSLN's noble intentions, they were frustrated by the apparent complacency of the United States.

CONCLUSION

In tracing the Western European mobilisation for Nicaragua, this chapter placed the origins of the Sandinista revolution in a global context. It showed that the material, political, and financial support the Sandinistas received from their Western European state and non-state allies strengthened the FSLN's position, both in Nicaragua and in the international arena. By zooming in on the origins and functioning of a transnational network of pro-FSLN solidarity activists in particular, the chapter demonstrated how the Sandinistas set up a parallel diplomatic network in Western Europe, in which the headquarters of national solidarity committees functioned, in many ways, as counter-embassies to the Nicaraguan government's official diplomatic posts. Ironically, these unofficial Sandinista embassies were significantly more influential than Somoza's representatives, who failed to bring across their own message that the Sandinista revolutionaries were violent communists, attempting to overthrow a legitimate government.

What is more, this chapter was not just an international history of Sandinista revolutionary diplomacy. Apart from adding to our knowledge of the global origins of the Nicaraguan revolution, the history of the FSLN's campaign in Western Europe provides us with new windows into European civil society and the international system in the late 1970s. By analysing the impact of Sandinista diplomacy, the chapter approached the transatlantic relationship from a new perspective. The FSLN's astute attempt to transcend the bipolar Cold War narrative was well received by many Western Europeans, who were genuinely frustrated with what they saw as the Carter administration's indecisiveness and inability to move beyond Cold War concerns. Moreover, the FSLN's campaign resonated in Western Europe in a surprising number of ways, providing insight into the concerns, ambitions, and interests of Western European politicians, activists, feminists, and students in the late 1970s. At a time when many solidarity activists believed that Latin America's revolutionary left was essentially defeated by the anti-communist dictatorships in the Southern Cone, the growing strength and popularity of the young Sandinistas in the face of a corrupt and dictatorial regime offered hope for a better future.

Moreover, as the following chapters demonstrate, highlighting Sandinista connections to Western European state and non-state actors prior to Somoza's fall is crucial for our understanding of the further trajectory and global resonance of the RPS. First and foremost, the high levels of Western European interests in the Nicaraguan revolution, which continued throughout most of the 1980s, cannot be understood without taking into account the massive impact of Sandinista revolutionary diplomacy before 19 July 1979, which this chapter has discussed. Moreover, the tactical manoeuvres and ideological flexibility demonstrated by the FSLN to secure international and domestic support in the late 1970s created – often conflicting and utopian – expectations about Nicaragua's future. These expectations shaped the way Western European governments, politicians, and activists responded to the Sandinistas' policies after Somoza's fall. Indeed, soon after the revolution's triumph, the FSLN leadership was faced with the seemingly impossible task of marrying a number of contrasting images with the reality on the ground in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas' propaganda campaign in the late 1970s, therefore, set the stage for the tumultuous decade of the 1980s.

CHAPTER 2

TRIUMPH AND CONSOLIDATION, 1979-1980

On 19 July 1979, triumphant guerrilla troops of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* poured into the Nicaraguan capital of Managua. It was a transformative moment; for the first time since the 1959 Cuban Revolution, armed left-wing revolutionaries in Latin America had succeeded in toppling a US-backed anti-communist regime. Moreover, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the Sandinista *comandantes* did so with widespread domestic and international support. Journalists in Europe and the Americas reported on the 'liberation' of Nicaragua in jubilant terms, as they described how 'thousands of cheering people' welcomed the new revolutionary junta to Managua and expressed relief that Anastasio Somoza and his abusive National Guard were 'at last' defeated by the 'kind, courteous, and cordial' Sandinista guerrillas.[1] In Western European capitals, solidarity activists celebrated the victory by occupying Nicaraguan embassies in Bonn, Brussels, Madrid, and Paris, ensuring that Somoza's ambassadors were no longer in a position to represent the Nicaraguan government.[2]

The end of the Somoza dynasty, however, was only the beginning of the Nicaraguan revolution. After years of civil war, economic devastation, international isolation, state collapse, and a massive earthquake that virtually destroyed Managua in 1972, the daunting process of building a new and – hopefully – better Nicaragua had just begun. And it was this remarkable process of remaking the Nicaraguan state and society in the aftermath of 19 July 1979, rather than the successful insurrection against Somoza itself, that determined the nature, impact, and future of the Nicaraguan revolution. Indeed, as Forrest D. Colburn writes in his book *The Vogue of Revolutions in Poor Countries*, 'the violent replacement of governors [..] gives a birthday to the revolution, but it is in the ensuing revamping of society [..] that the character and the consequences of the revolution are defined'.[3] This was particularly true in the Nicaraguan case because, as this chapter demonstrates, the 1979 revolution took place at a specific juncture of the Cold War, when the US administration's view of the world moved away from détente and towards renewed confrontation with international communism and the Soviet Union. In this context, the political significance and impact of the revolutionaries' political statements, policy choices, and alliances, both at a domestic and international level, was severely heightened.

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[1] *The Guardian*, 20 July 1979; *De Volkskrant*, 19 July 1979; *New York Times*; 20 July 1979; *El País*, 20 July 1979.
[2] Author's interview with Eduardo Ramón Kühl, Selva Negra, Nicaragua, 1 August 2016; *The Economist*, 21 July 1979.
[3] Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolutions in Poor Countries* (1994) 6.

Even so, historians and political scientists have largely ignored this foundational period of the revolution's history, focusing instead on the trajectory of the Nicaraguan revolution during the Ronald Reagan presidency in 1981-1988, when the US government launched a secret campaign to overthrow the Sandinista government. Historians of US foreign relations, albeit with some exceptions, have predominantly focused on Reagan's foreign policy towards Central America, largely overlooking the Carter period.[4] Similarly, transnational historians writing about the Sandinista solidarity movement have paid attention to the early revolutionary years, giving prominence to American and Western European protests against the Reagan's Central America policies in the mid-1980s.[5] More recently, some historians – influenced by new trends in the scholarship on Latin America's Cold War experience – have started to challenge the use of this US-centred framework to study the Nicaraguan revolution.[6] By paying attention to the domestic and regional dynamics that shaped Nicaragua's revolutionary experience in the early 1980s, for example, Mateo Cayetano Jarquín demonstrates that the origins of the Nicaraguan civil war are more complex than scholars of US foreign policy have generally believed.[7] Overall, however, our knowledge of the early revolutionary period remains exceptionally patchy, and we still know little about the objectives of Nicaraguan foreign policy, the importance of transnational diplomacy, and Sandinista relations with the wider world.

This chapter, then, aims to shed light on the neglected history of Nicaragua's revolutionary trajectory in months following Somoza's fall on 19 July 1979. Through the prism of Nicaraguan and Western European relations, it demonstrates that FSLN officials used inter-state and transnational diplomacy to build a strong and internationally recognised revolutionary government. And by showing a degree of political pluralism and ideological flexibility to the outside world, the new Nicaraguan government succeeded in obtaining much-needed financial aid and material assistance from Western Europe. This image of Nicaragua as a democratic and pluralistic revolutionary state, however, was mostly for show. Behind the scenes, the Sandinista leaders slowly but surely consolidated their power over the country's institutions. Managua's

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[4] LeoGrande, for instance, in his book *Our Own Backyard* (1998) dedicates only five pages to the period July 1979-December 1980, but more than two hundred to the period 1981-1988. Gutman's book *Banana Diplomacy:* (1988) only covers the Reagan presidency. An exception is Robert Pastor's *Condemned to Repetition* (1987), which does deal with the post-revolutionary period and the Carter administration.

[5] See, Roger Craft Peace, *A Call to Conscience: The Anti/Contra War Campaign (*Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012); Héctor Perla Jr., *Sandinista Nicaragua's Resistance to US Coercion: Revolutionary Deterrence in Asymmetric Conflict* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Christiaens, 'Between diplomacy and solidarity', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 21 (2014) 617-634.

[6] María Dolores Ferrero Blanco, 'El diseño de las instituciones en el Estado Sandinista (1979-1982): la revolución como fuente de derecho', *Revista de Indias* 265 (2015) 805-850; Ariel C. Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America, 1977-1984* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1997).

[7] Jarquín, 'Red Christmases', *Cold War History* 18 (2018) 91-107.

foreign policy, for instance, was determined by a small group of prominent Sandinistas. To be sure, during the revolution's first year, the FSLN had widespread popular support and was largely successful in keeping together the broad coalition that it had forged to overthrow Somoza, incorporating different sectors of the population into a relatively pluralistic revolutionary process. Even though the Sandinista movement was in charge, Nicaragua was not a Soviet-style dictatorship.

Moreover, as this chapter demonstrates, in the months following the triumph, the *Revolución Popular Sandinista* captured the imaginations of thousands of activists, teachers, musicians, writers, social democrats, priests, and students in Western Europe. As Nicaraguan guerrillas enthusiastically embarked on the next phase of the FSLN's revolutionary project, their determination, youth, and idealism were vividly pictured in the European press. The Sandinistas were able to financially and politically capitalise on their popularity by encouraging a powerful and romantic sense that Western European activists could also be part of the Nicaraguan revolution. The National Literacy Campaign, in particular, an ambitious education project implemented in the countryside and poor urban areas between March and August 1980, provided the Sandinistas with a useful tool to connect Western European states and peoples to their revolutionary programme, while at the same time expanding FSLN influence at home.

Nevertheless, Western European support for the revolutionary junta should not solely be understood as the result of the Sandinistas' international popularity and diplomatic skills. Western policy was, to a significant extent, shaped by Cold War concerns, as European Community (EC) leaders were apprehensive about the possibility that Nicaragua would drift towards the Eastern bloc if it did not receive sufficient support from the West. While many European politicians adopted a genuinely friendly attitude towards the Nicaraguan revolution, concerns existed about the Sandinistas' intentions and ideological convictions, in particular regarding their promises to implement a democratic, non-aligned, and pluralist system. These anxieties increased in the months following the revolution's triumph, as a number of prominent social democratic and conservative leaders resigned from the revolutionary junta in April 1980. Moreover, EC leaders watched the changing attitude of US president Jimmy Carter with concern, as he accused the Nicaraguan government of providing weapons and logistical support to the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, FMLN), a guerrilla movement in neighbouring El Salvador.

Ironically, the revolutionary victory also created problems for the Sandinistas' relationship with the transnational solidarity movement. Now that the task of supporting the armed struggle against the Somoza regime was completed, Western European solidarity activists had to revaluate

the purpose and nature of their work. This turned out to be a difficult process, as the main priority of the Sandinistas in the months following the revolution was the creation of a functioning diplomatic service at the level of the state. Frustrated by the FSLN's lack of attention, activists accused the Nicaraguan *compañeros* of neglect. Indeed, from the perspective of solidarity activists, the Sandinistas did not sufficiently appreciate the crucial importance of transnational activism for the survival of the Nicaraguan revolution. So, in the period July 1979 until November 1980, it was European activists – convinced of their continued political and economic relevance to developments in a country thousands of miles away – who were the driving forces behind the transnational solidarity movement.

A New Foreign Policy

The first weeks following the victory of the Nicaraguan revolutionaries on 19 July 1979 were marked by chaos, optimism, and spontaneity. Sandinista *comandantes*, newly appointed cabinet ministers, diplomats, and junta members operated without central coordination, making decisions based on common sense, impromptu meetings, and promises made by FSLN guerrillas in pamphlets and speeches. Diplomacy was largely the result of judgement calls and improvisation, as communication with the outside world was difficult and, more importantly, a functioning foreign ministry did not yet exist. Nevertheless, the FSLN leadership, conscious that the international community would play a decisive role in determining the country's future, moved quickly to develop an international strategy, take control of the country's state institutions, and create an effective foreign policy apparatus.

For the FSLN, it was clear that Nicaragua's position on the international stage after 19 July 1979 had to be very different from the past, when Somoza , the 'most faithful ally' of the United States, had promoted a global 'system of dependency'.[8] In contrast, the Nicaraguan guerrillas saw their revolutionary triumph as part of a global struggle of third world national liberation movements against Western – and more specifically North American – imperialism. In its historic programme, the FSLN vowed to support the common fight of 'the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America' against 'Yankee imperialism' through a 'foreign policy of absolute national independence'.[9] Moreover, because of the 1974 Marxist revolution in Ethiopia, the 1975 defeat of US forces in Vietnam, the 1979 rise to power of Maurice Bishop's New Jewel Movement in Grenada, and the decision of the several African governments, such as Libya, to adopt Marxist-Leninism as an official state ideology, the nine FSLN *comandantes* operated under the – overly

[8] Interview with Alejandro Bendaña, *Revista Envío* 97 (1989).
[9] 'The Historic Programme of the FSLN', as published in Mars ed., *Sandinistas Speak* (1982).

optimistic – assumption that they were on the winning side of this global conflict.[10] Specifically, the Sandinistas and many contemporary observers shared this view - predicted that the FMLN guerrillas would soon succeed in overthrowing Carlos Humberto Romero's anti-communist government in El Salvador.[11]

Intimately related to the Sandinistas' identification with the Third World was the Nicaraguan government's decision to send a large delegation to the Sixth Conference of Heads of State of the Non-Aligned in Havana from 3 to 9 September 1979, which was presided over by Fidel Castro.[12] By aligning itself with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), as foreign ministry official Ernesto Alomá Sánchez wrote in September 1979, Nicaragua became part of a powerful movement, which held a majority in all major international institutions.[13] Nicaragua's future proposals in the United Nations, therefore, could count on the support of a 'solid majority' of 'brother countries'.[14] In addition, Alomá Sánchez underlined the non-aligned countries' ability to help the FSLN solve Nicaragua's troubling financial problems. Specifically, he pointed out, the Sandinistas had inherited an external debt of more than $1.5 billon, which was impossible to pay back since it far exceeded value of the country's yearly exports. As the 'standard bearer' for the New International Economic Order, which aimed to replace the 'global capitalist economic order' with a more fair and equal system, the NAM could back up the Nicaraguan claim that they could not be expected to pay back Somoza's debts. So, Alomá Sánchez concluded, through the solidarity of its brother countries in the NAM, the Sandinistas could strengthen the revolution and overcome future financial obstacles.[15] Interestingly, then, the Nicaraguan revolutionaries continued to attach importance and hope to the values of NAM and the NIEO at a time when – most historians now agree – these political and economic projects had already lost most of their momentum.[16]

Moreover, with regards to the international Cold War system, the Sandinista leaders sympathised more with the socialist bloc than with the Western world.[17] Indeed, prominent FSLN *comandante* Bayardo Arce explained in August 1979 at Managua's *Universidad Centroamericana* (Central

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[10] Prashad, *The Darker Nations* (2007) 209.
[11] For more on the civil war in El Salvador, see, Joaquín Mauricio Chávez, *Poets and Prophets of the Resistance: Intellectuals and the Origins of El Salvador's Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
[12] Political Declaration of the Sixth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries in Havana, Cuba, from 3 to 9 September 1979. Accessed online at: http://cns.miis.edu/nam/documents/Official_Document/6th_Summit_FD_Havana_Declaration_1979_Whole.pdf
[13] MINREX, Nicaragua 1979, Ordinario, Ernesto Alomá Sánchez, 'Nicaragua y el movimiento de paises no-alineados' (exact date unknown).
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] For more on the NIEO and the NAM, see, Nils Gilman, 'The New International Economic Order: A Reintroduction', *Humanity* 6 (2015) 1-15; Prashad, The Darker Nations (2007); Garavini, *After Empires* (2012).
[17] Interview, Alejandro Bendaña, *Revista Envío* 97 (1989).

American University), unlike the United States, the Soviet Union was simply not an 'imperialist' country, because 'imperialism' and 'capitalism' are two intertwined processes.[18] Alomá Sanchez made a similar point in September 1979, commenting in a foreign office memorandum that the socialist countries were significantly more supportive of Third World liberation movements than Western Europe and the United States. Indeed, he added, for their own economic benefit, the capitalist countries consistently obstructed the proposals and ambitions of the 'underdeveloped' world.[19] So, based on the Sandinistas' worldview and hopes for the future, it might be difficult to imagine that Nicaragua's new leaders planned to have good relations with the West.

Yet, the Nicaraguan revolutionaries were faced with the economic and political reality of having inherited a poor country that was almost entirely dependent on aid and trade with the much more powerful United States.[20] In addition, in the years leading up to the revolution's triumph, the Sandinistas had built fruitful alliances with governments and mainstream political forces in Western Europe and the Americas, such as the Socialist International and the governments of Panama, Venezuela, and Mexico. Changing tactics and adopting a hostile and confrontationalist attitude to the capitalist world immediately after victory, the Sandinista leaders calculated, would not only be counterproductive, undoing the positive results of the FSLN's revolutionary diplomacy in the late 1970s, but also destabilise the country's economy, which was already severely weakened after years of civil war. Based on the assumption that the US and its European allies – hoping that Nicaragua would stay in the Western camp – would be willing to provide the country's new government with much-needed financial aid and technical assistance, then, the FSLN leaders deemed it necessary for the revolution's survival to initially adopt a cautious and cooperative attitude to the West. Bayardo Arce explained the importance of a 'extremely careful' foreign policy at Managua's Central American University in August 1979, arguing that Sandinistas should make sure that, if the 'imperialist powers' ever decided to intervene against the Nicaraguan revolution, they could not convincingly argue that Nicaraguans had somehow 'provoked this aggression'.[21] If Nicaragua is attacked, Arce continued, the international community should be confronted with the truth, namely that Cuban exiles, US marines, and Somoza's former guardsmen were forced to 'drop their mask' to defend their 'imperialist economic interests'.[22]

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[18] Bayardo Arce Castaño, 'La intervención extranjera en Nicaragua y el proceso de autodeterminación Nicaragüense. Aspecto militar.; *Encuentro: Revista Académica de la Universidad Centroamericana* 15 (1980) 56-64. Accessed online at: http://repositorio.uca.edu.ni/1932/

[19] MINREX, Nicaragua 1979, Ordinario, Ernesto Alomá Sánchez, 'Nicaragua y el movimiento de paises no-alineados' (exact date unknown).

[20] Gary Prevost, in the article 'Cuba and Nicaragua: A Special Relationship', *Latin American Perspectives* 17 (1990) 120-137, writes that Nicaragua under Somoza was for nearly 90% dependent on US aid and trade.

[21] Arce, *Encuentro* (1980).

[22] Ibid.

Therefore, the Sandinistas decided to present the Nicaraguan revolution in a positive and nonthreatening way to the Western countries, as well as to potential critics at home. To assuage domestic, Western European, American fears about the radical nature of the revolution, Sandinista officials downplayed the extent of their power. The official face of the revolution, for example, was not the FSLN leadership, but the *Junta de Gobierno de Reconstrucción Nacional* (Government Junta of National Reconstruction, JGRN), a body that represented the ideological and political diversity of the anti-Somoza alliance. It had five members, and all of them had actively contributed to the fall of the Somoza dynasty. Violeta Chamorro, widow of the murdered *La Prensa* journalist Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, was the only woman on the junta. After Pedro Joaquín's assassination on 10 January 1978, Violeta Chamorro continued to run the opposition newspaper *La Prensa* and, as junta member, she represented the *Union Democrática de Liberación* (Democratic Liberation Union), an opposition coalition that had opposed Somoza since 1974. Alfonso Robelo was a businessman who founded the *Movimiento Democrático Nicaragüense* (Nicaraguan Democratic Movement, MDN), another anti-Somoza opposition party. Moisés Hassan, a guerrilla and politician of Palestinian heritage, represented the *Movimiento del Pueblo Unido* (United People's Movement), a grassroots organisation closely aligned to the FSLN. Sergio Ramírez represented a group of twelve anti-Somoza intellectuals, known as the *Grupo de los Doce* (Group of Twelve), which appeared moderate but, in fact, included many Sandinistas. The fifth and last member was Daniel Ortega, the only known Sandinista on the junta and one of the nine FSLN *Comandantes de la Revolución*. Similarly, the revolutionary cabinet was not dominated by Sandinista guerrillas. Most of the new ministers came from the *Grupo de los Doce*, including the new foreign minister Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, a Sandinista priest educated in the US.

Despite appearances and claims to the contrary, however, real power in Nicaragua lay with the Sandinista movement and, more specifically, with the nine *comandantes* – all former guerrilla leaders – of the FSLN's *Dirección Nacional* (National Directorate, DN).[23] Soon after the revolution, the other junta members found out that, apart from Daniel Ortega, Ramírez and Hassan, too, were Sandinista militants, meaning that three of the five junta members voted in favour of FSLN proposals. As Ramírez writes in his memoirs, the Sandinistas' *tercerista* tendency had previously kept his FSLN membership 'secret' because Ramírez' role 'as the head of the Group of Twelve demanded an illusion of independence'.[24] Since the FSLN held a firm majority on the junta, which ruled Nicaragua by decree, Sandinista leaders could push through their policy proposals with ease.

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[23] For more on the consolidation of Sandinista power over the Nicaraguan state, see, Ferrero Blanco, 'El diseño de las instituciones en el Estado Sandinista', *Revista de Indias* 265 (2015) 805-850 and Dirk Kruijt, 'Revolución y contrarrevolución: el gobierno sandinista y la guerra de la Contra en Nicaragua, 1980-1990', *Desafíos* 23 (2011) 53-81.
[24] Ramírez, *Adiós Muchachos* (2012) 73.

Aside from dominating the junta, Sandinista representatives also held the majority on the Council of State, which was presided over by *comandante* Carlos Nuñez. Within the FSLN party structure, key decisions were made by the nine *comandantes* who formed the *Dirección Nacional*, namely Daniel Ortega, Humberto Ortega, Tomás Borge, Bayardo Arce, Jaime Wheelock, Victor Tirado, Carlos Nuñez, Henry Ruiz, and Luis Carrión. The fact that these nine men essentially controlled Nicaragua after Somoza's downfall meant that, even though dictatorship had been destroyed, people in Nicaragua had still not escaped, in the words of Sergio Ramírez, 'their authoritarian faith'.[25]

The country's foreign policy, too, was determined by a small team of six or five Sandinistas, who had weekly meetings to analyse global politics, discuss problems, and make decisions. This foreign affairs commission consisted of three FSLN *comandantes*, namely Bayardo Arce, who also supervised the FSLN's *Departamento de Relaciones Internacionales* (Department of International Relations, DRI), junta member Daniel Ortega, and – if necessary – his brother Humberto Ortega, who presided over the newly established Sandinista army, the *Ejército Popular Sandinista* (EPS). The other three members of the group were Miguel d'Escoto, his vice-minister Victor Hugo Tinoco, and the head of the DRI, a position first held by ex-guerrilla Doris Tijerino, until Julio López Campos replaced her in September 1980. Two newly created institutions, namely the *Ministerio del Exterior* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MINEX), which was part of the government, and the DRI, which belonged to the FSLN, implemented the decisions and recommendations of the commission. According to Victor Hugo Tinoco, the members of this commission treated each other as equals, and decisions about the country's foreign policy were made as a collective.[26]

Nevertheless, in the first months following the overthrow of Somoza, Western European and US officials were not fully aware of these dynamics and, in meetings with Western diplomats, Nicaraguan leaders constantly underlined the moderate and democratic nature of the revolution, while at the same time making clear that future democratic development depended on the arrival of sufficient economic and technical aid to rebuild the country. On 21 July 1979, for instance, *comandante* Tomás Borge – who was known as a staunch communist – greeted US ambassador Lawrence Pezzullo at the airport. The decision of the revolutionary regime to send Borge, Pezzullo explained to the State Department, was a 'significant gesture' since the Sandinistas had clearly selected the individual 'most suspect to [the US] and had him carry the olive branch'.[27] Moreover, when Borge asked the US for technical and military aid, he told Pezzullo that the Nicaraguan

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[25] Ibid.
[26] Author's interview with Victor Hugo Tinoco, Managua, Nicaragua, 17 August 2016; Peace, *A Call to Conscience* (2012) 155.
[27] FRUS, 1977-1980, Volume XV, Central America, Doc. 298.

government 'shared the democratic principles valued by the US'.[28] In Western Europe, too, Eduardo (or Eddy) Kühl, who travelled through the region to represent the revolutionary government in July and August 1979, explained several times that 'all political orientations were represented in the junta'.[29] And to further assuage European concerns about the possibility of radicalisation, Kühl promised there would be 'no revenge on the Iranian pattern' and stressed that Nicaraguans would 'not seek to export their revolution' to their neighbouring countries, such as El Salvador and Guatemala.[30]

FSLN revolutionaries were also in no hurry to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. True, Leonid Brezhnev warmly welcomed the Sandinista victory in a celebratory speech on 20 July 1979, but the two states only established official relations on 19 October, three months after the revolution's triumph. Moreover, while all five members of the Nicaraguan junta visited the White House on 24 September 1979, the revolutionaries waited until March 1980 to send an official – and smaller – delegation to the Eastern bloc. In the highly polarised Cold War context, this was a cautious manoeuvre. The Sandinistas' attitude of distance towards the Soviet bloc, however, was more than a tactical move to avoid criticism and regional isolation. Financially, there was also little to gain in the Soviet Union, as Brezhnev was clearly reluctant to provide Nicaragua with large sums of aid. Indeed, as historian Danuta Paszyn argues, Moscow initially took a 'cautious approach towards revolutionary Nicaragua [since] one Cuba in Latin America was enough for the USSR'.[31]

The Sandinistas' strategy of presenting the revolution as moderate and democratic to the Western world was closely coordinated with the Cuban government, which influenced Nicaraguan foreign policy to a significant extent. For instance, the abovementioned Ernesto Alomá Sánchez, who pushed Nicaragua to join the NAM, was a Cuban national who had joined the Nicaraguan foreign ministry in July 1979. Moreover, on the advice of Fidel Castro, the FSLN appointed Bernardino Larios Montiel, a former officer in Somoza's National Guard, as the country's new defence minister. However, Raúl Castro explained to the Soviet ambassador in Cuba, Vitaly Vorotnikov, on 1 September 1979, Montiel's role was 'mostly for show' since 'all real power in this area' belonged to Sandinista *comandante* Humberto Ortega, and the Sandinista People's Army was 'being built without [Montiel's] knowledge'.[32] Moreover, as Raúl Castro told Vorotnikov, the

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[28] Ibid.
[29] TNA, FCO 99/350, Dublin to FCO, 25 July 1979.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Danuta Paszyn, *The Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change in Central America, 1979-90: Case-Studies on Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) 31.
[32] Wilson Center Digital Archive, Soviet Ambassador to Cuba Vorotnikov, Memorandum of conversation with Raul Castro, 1 September 1979. Online at: https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/

FSLN's National Directorate, following the advice of Fidel Castro, appointed several popular religious figures to Nicaragua's revolutionary cabinet, such as foreign minister Miguel d'Escoto – who Raúl described as one of the few 'red priests' in Latin America – and minister of culture Ernesto Cardenal, the liberation theologian who had travelled extensively through Western Europe prior to Somoza's fall.[33] The Cuban ambassador to Sweden, Quintin Pino Machado, too, according to Eduardo Kühl, urged the Sandinistas on 20 July 1979 to be extremely cautious while implementing their revolutionary plans, stressing the need to prevent foreign intervention and isolation, as had happened to Cuba.[34] By assisting the Sandinistas, then, Cuba's deputy foreign minister Pelegrín Torras told Bayardo Arce on 6 February 1980, the Cuban government hoped to prevent the FSLN from making 'the same mistakes' as they had made in the first years after Fidel Castro's triumph.[35]

Overall, then, how can we define Sandinista foreign policy after 19 July 1979? Essentially, the Nicaraguan revolutionaries followed two diplomatic tracks. On the one hand, the FLSN tried to maintain the image it had created for itself during the struggle against Somoza, hoping to obtain economic aid, win hearts and minds in the West, and not give potential enemies a reason to threaten the revolution, both inside and outside Nicaragua. On the other hand, Sandinista leaders clearly operated under the assumption that Third World national liberation movements were on the rise and that, in the long run, a conflict with the imperialists could simply not be avoided. We might have 'tranquillity' now, FSLN *comandante* Bayardo Arce commented in August 1979, but this situation could not 'last forever' because, at some point in the future, the 'sovereignty' of Nicaraguan people would certainly clash with the demands of the capitalist system.[36] Before such a clash could occur, however, the FSLN *comandantes* first needed to consolidate power and build an effective state. And for this purpose, the international community and its response to the revolutionary regime were deemed pivotal.

The Sandinista Victory in Western Europe

While Sandinista revolutionaries took control of the Nicaraguan state and its foreign relations, Eduardo Kühl travelled to Stockholm to attend a Socialist International conference. Kühl had left Costa Rica, where he was living as an exile, two days before the revolution's triumph to inform the SI party leaders about the latest details of the armed struggle in Nicaragua and to push for

[33] Ibid.
[34] Author's email correspondence with Eduardo Kühl, 8 December 2016.
[35] MINREX, Nicaragua 1980, Ordinario, Memorandum of Conversation, Bayardo Arce and Pelegrín Torras, 6 February 1980.
[36] Arce, *Encuentro* (1980).

international recognition of the junta. So, Kühl was only informed of the Sandinistas' victory upon his arrival in Sweden on the evening of 19 July 1979, when jubilant delegates such as Olof Palme and François Mitterrand greeted him with celebratory bottles of champagne.[37] In the following days, the fall of the Somoza regime and the victory of the Sandinista revolutionaries dominated the proceedings. Eddy Kühl remembers fondly, for instance, how all the SI delegates wanted to congratulate him and hear stories about the revolutionary victory.[38] Kühl's speech at the opening session was certainly the 'high point' of the conference, American diplomat Paul Canney reported back to the US State Department, describing how the 'special ambassador' of the revolutionary junta 'unfurled a Nicaraguan flag and was greeted by the warmest applause of the day'.[39]

It was by coincidence, then, that Eduardo Kühl became the first official face of the Nicaraguan revolution in Western Europe in the aftermath of Somoza's fall. In July and August 1979, to take control of the Nicaraguan embassies and drum up financial and political support for the new revolutionary government, Kühl travelled to Bonn, Brussels, Oslo, Paris, and Madrid. It is worth noting that, even though he had collaborated with the FSLN *comandantes* before the revolution, Kühl was not a Sandinista. A young upper-class Nicaraguan of German descent, Kühl was more closely aligned to Robelo's *Movimiento Democrático Nicaragüense*. 'I have always been a capitalist', he later commented in an interview with Nicaraguan newspaper *El Nuevo Diario*, 'but definitely one with a strong sense of social responsibility'.[40] Moreover, due to the chaotic situation in Nicaragua in July and August 1979, it was extremely difficult for the representative to communicate directly with Managua. To prepare for meetings and interviews, Kühl had to rely on the junta's revolutionary programme, the advice of Cuban ambassador Quintin Pino Machado, and, in some cases, his own creativity. According to Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant*, for instance, at the SI conference, Kühl proposed enthusiastically that each Western European country could build 'a little city' in Nicaragua, including churches, schools, and hospitals. These cities would then be named after their donors, the ambassador explained, so there would be towns called 'Sweden, Italy, and Holland' in Nicaragua.[41] While this was clearly not a seriously thought out proposal, it nevertheless indicated the welcome and open embrace that Nicaraguans extended to Western Europeans after the revolution triumphed, and their invitation – albeit not centrally directed – to play a role in their countries future.

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[37] *El Nuevo Diario*, 19 May 2013.
[38] Interview, Kühl, 1 August 2016.
[39] DOS/CFP, AmEmbassy Stockholm to SecState, 20 July 1979.
[40] *El Nuevo Diario*, 19 May 2013.
[41] *De Volkskrant*, 23 July 1979.

Kühl was a popular figure, as Western European students, diplomats, activists, politicians, and journalists were all in search for up to date information about the situation in Nicaragua. Government officials kept a close eye on him, as they were anxiously trying to figure out how to respond to the revolutionary change. True, Western European leaders welcomed the departure of Somoza, but they were concerned about the ideological path the revolutionaries wanted to follow. Due to the strong leftist orientation of many of guerrillas, Western European politicians and civil servants had little doubt that the Soviet bloc and Cuba saw the Sandinistas' triumph as an opportunity to expand their influence in Latin America and embarrass the United States. On 18 September 1979, for example, a representative of the *Auswärtiges Amt* of the Federal Republic of Germany, shared his view on the Nicaraguan revolution with his EC colleagues, noting that 'the prime objective of Cuba and the Eastern bloc is no doubt [..] to neutralise and discredit US influence in Central America'.[42] Moreover, on 24 and 25 July 1979 in Dublin, at a political directors' meeting of the European Community's foreign policy arm (European Political Cooperation, EPC) concerns about growing Soviet bloc influence in Central America formed the backdrop to the discussion about the correct way of dealing with Nicaragua's revolutionary junta. Dutch official Charles Rutten, for instance, noted that 'East European countries were moving to establish relations with the new Nicaraguan regime more quickly than the West'.[43] In that same meeting, British political director Julian Bullard expressed concerns about the future of the revolution, arguing that the congratulatory language used by Brezhnev with regards to the overthrow of Somoza 'was ominous'.[44] The main priority of Western European officials, then, was to make sure that Nicaragua would not drift towards Cuba and the Eastern bloc and cause instability to the international system.

In spite of these concerns, Eddy Kühl's comments and Sandinista assurances regarding the pluralist, democratic, and moderate nature of the revolutionary junta assured Western Europeans that the political situation in Nicaragua was, at the very least, still fluid. British diplomat Stephen Wall commented to the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, for instance, that the new government was 'a generally moderate, broad-based team with, so far, only one Sandinista member'.[45] Based on this assumption, a consensus soon emerged amongst Western European officials that, through friendly diplomatic relations and economic assistance, they could influence the trajectory of the revolution and keep Nicaragua out of the Eastern camp. Conscious of the popular argument that Fidel Castro's Cuba had only turned towards the Soviet Union after the

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[42] AA, Zwischenarchiv 113912, Bonn Coreu to Dublin Coreu, 18 September 1979.
[43] TNA, FCO 99/350, Dublin to FCO, 25 July 1979.
[44] Ibid.
[45] TNA, FCO 99/351, JS Wall to BG Cartledge, 26 July 1979.

West gave him the cold shoulder, Western European officials argued that, in the Nicaraguan case, they could prevent history from repeating itself.[46] Cuba, and readings of what had happened to it after 1959, thus provided a frame of reference both for the new Nicaraguan government and those it was wishing to court, inclining them to work together in the FSLN's favour.

The FRG, in particular, pushed its allies to give generous aid to the revolutionary junta. In a preparatory telegram for the EPC's Latin America Working Group in September 1979, the AA announced that 'Germany [was] convinced that the political development of Nicaragua [was] essentially dependent on the West providing swift and effective assistance'.[47] By contributing to the reconstruction effort of the Nicaraguan junta, the FRG argued, the West could 'strengthen the moderate forces in Nicaragua and increase the possibility of a more pragmatic and less ideological outlook among the forces tending towards the Left'.[48] The EPC Latin America Working Group largely adopted the position of the AA, as it recommended the European Commission and individual EC member states to provide Nicaragua with technical, humanitarian, and economic aid, because this would 'foster a political development as pluralist as possible and, in particular, less closely linked to Cuba and the Soviet Union'.[49]

In addition to Cold War concerns, another reason for Helmut Schmidt's government to have an active policy towards Nicaragua, FRG diplomat Herbert Limmer told American officials in Bonn, was that it was seen as uncontroversial within West Germany itself. There were simply 'no political groups in Germany opposing help to Nicaragua', Limmer explained, and therefore it was an 'easy decision for the politicians in the cabinet to make'.[50] Undoubtedly, the West German attitude towards the Nicaraguan revolution should be seen in the context of the FSLN's revolutionary diplomacy before Somoza's fall, which mobilised social democrats for the Sandinista cause. The Socialist International, for example, called on the United States and Western Europe to 'urgently' send aid to the new revolutionary junta, pointing out that Nicaragua was on the brink of a humanitarian disaster.[51] Indeed, Dutch PvdA chairman Max van den Berg announced, there was 'a massive lack of medication and food' in Nicaragua, most notably 'because Somoza destroyed the entire harvest'.[52]

To maintain friendly relations with the new Nicaraguan regime, the European Commission and EC member states moved quickly to make significant amounts of financial and material aid

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[46] DOS/CFP, Electronic Telegram, AmEmbassy Bonn to SecState, 4 September 1979.
[47] AA, Zwischenarchiv 113912, Bonn Coreu to Dublin Coreu, 18 September 1979.
[48] DOS/CFP, Electronic Telegram, AmEmbassy Bonn to SecState, 4 September 1979.
[49] TNA, FCO 99/350, Telegram, Dublin to FCO, 25 July 1979.
[50] Ibid.
[51] *El País*, 14 August 1979.
[52] *De Waarheid*, 10 August 1979.

available to the junta. Already on 25 July 1979, Wilhelm Haferkampf, the vice-president of the European Commission, warmly welcomed Eduardo Kühl to Brussels, expressed support for 'the economic and democratic reconstruction' of Nicaragua, and informed him of the Commission's decision to grant Nicaragua emergency aid of $270,000.[53] This was only the first of many Western European donations to the revolutionaries, as the Commission transferred around $9 million in reconstruction aid to Nicaragua in 1979, almost half of its budget for Latin America.[54] According to records of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), in the months following Somoza's fall, the FRG was the biggest Western European donor, as it provided the Nicaraguan junta with around $17 million in economic aid.[55] The Netherlands and Sweden, too, made significant contributions to the reconstruction effort, donating respectively $6.4 and $8.1 million to Nicaragua. The British government, due to 'cuts in the aid programme' under Margaret Thatcher's government, did not provide Nicaragua with bilateral aid, but contributed around $2.9 million through multilateral institutions, such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the European Economic Community (EEC).[56] In 1979 therefore, as UK diplomat Alan Payne proudly concluded on 7 February 1980, the aid of 'Western donors [to Nicaragua was] greater than that provided by the Eastern bloc', a claim that was later backed up by CIA officials.[57]

Solidarity in Western Europe

While politicians debated the correct way of dealing with the Nicaraguan junta, solidarity activists and Nicaraguan exiles in Western Europe celebrated the Sandinistas' victory by organising concerts, parties, and demonstrations marking 'the liberation of Nicaragua'.[58] On behalf of the Sandinistas, the Dutch Nicaragua Committee (*Nicaragua Komitee Nederland*, NKN) published several advertisements thanking the Dutch people for their financial assistance to the armed struggle of the FSLN.[59] Unsurprisingly, the victory was warmly welcomed by the solidarity activists and Nicaraguan exiles, who had been working with the FSLN to isolate and overthrow the Somoza

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[53] AEI, Bulletin of the European Communities: Commission 7/8 (1979); The Courier: Africa-Caribbean-Pacific-European Community 57 (1979).
[54] Hazel Smith, *European Union Foreign Policy and Central America* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995) 60-61.
[55] CIA Records Search Tool, (hereafter, CREST), Directorate of Intelligence, Office of European Analysis, Western Europe and Central America, April 1979. Online at: https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/collection/crest-25-year-program-archive
[56] People's History Museum, Manchester, United Kingdom (hereafter, PHM), The Judith Hart Papers, File 05/58, Neil Marten to Judith Hart, 30 January 1980.
[57] TNA, FCO 99/558, Letter AJ Payne to FCO, 7 February 1980; CREST, Soviet Bloc and Cuban Military and Economic Assistance to Nicaragua, 27 January 1988. In fact, according to the CIA graph, the Soviet Union provided no economic assistance to Nicaragua in 1979-1980. The rest of the Eastern bloc contributed $20 million in this period.
[58] *Het Parool*, 4 August 1979.
[59] *Trouw*, 21 July 1979.

regime for years. Excited to contribute to the revolution's success and consolidation, solidarity activists announced that 'their work was not yet finished'.[60] Immediately after Somoza's overthrow, local solidarity committees started calling on the international community to contribute financial and material aid for the reconstruction effort. For instance, activists Eve Hall and George Black – one of the founders of the British Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) – wrote a piece for *The Guardian* with the headline 'a bleak inheritance for the teenage guerrillas' in Nicaragua.[61] In the article, Hall and Black urged the US and Western European countries to be more forthcoming, announcing that 'the need for aid' in Nicaragua was desperate, but due to the reluctance of 'Western industrialised countries and international agencies' to send 'aid or even emergency supplies', it was 'slow in coming'.[62] Moreover, the activists decided to dedicate themselves to spreading positive information about the Sandinistas' revolution and, if necessary, to 'defend the revolution' from, amongst others, the US administration, Nicaraguan opposition groups, and critical mainstream media.[63]

In the months following Somoza's fall, the solidarity movement flourished. Now that the armed struggle in Nicaragua was over, political parties, newspapers, and humanitarian organisations no longer had to worry about the ethical implications of supporting a military movement. The number of solidarity committees grew exponentially, as many Western Europeans were inspired by the Sandinistas' victory and message of national liberation, non-alignment, and social justice.[64] What is more, Dutch Nicaragua solidarity committees, in cooperation with the Labour Party and the socialist television broadcaster VARA, collected approximately $350,000 with the purpose of 'rebuilding Nicaragua' in the months after the revolution.[65] Western European politicians and journalists also contributed to the popularity of the revolutionaries, describing the FSLN in romantic and positive terms. In the Netherlands, for example, newspapers published pictures of FSLN fighters hugging their children 'with tears of happiness' in their eyes and images of laughing Nicaraguans who were 'finally free to read other newspapers than Somoza's *Novedades*'.[66] Moreover, journalists and politicians highlighted the fact that Nicaragua was in desperate need of financial and material aid. West German news magazine *Der Spiegel* argued that the war against the dictatorship 'left such deep wounds' that the country could simply not recover

[60] IISG, INW, Letter, Klaas Wellinga, Hermann Schultz, and William Agudelo to Western European solidarity committees, 1 August 1979.
[61] *The Guardian*, 5 November 1979.
[62] Ibid.
[63] IISG, NKN, Box 17, Statement NKN for European Solidarity Conference in Vienna on 13-14-15 June 1980, date unknown.
[64] Helm, *Botschafter der Revolution* (2018) 149.
[65] IISG, NKN, Box 1, Record of Meeting, 17 September 1979.
[66] *De Waarheid*, 18 August 1979; *Leeuwarder Courant,* 23 July 1979,

'without outside help'.[67] The media, then, amplified the message of the solidarity committees, thereby contributing to the international popularity of the Nicaraguan junta and the FSLN leaders.

Yet, the revolutionary change in Nicaragua also signified a difficult period of reorientation, discussion, and frustration for the solidarity movement. Crucially, most Nicaraguan exiles and FSLN representatives in Western Europe returned to Nicaragua after Somoza's fall, including Enrique Schmidt Cuadra, his wife María Victoria Urquíjo Nuño, and Ángel Barrajón. Those who decided to stay behind often took up diplomatic posts for the new government and, as a consequence, had less time for solidarity work. For instance, the Sandinista representative in Britain, Tomás Arguello Chamorro, became the *chargé d'affaires* of the Nicaraguan embassy in London.[68] The departure of many Nicaraguan exiles, combined with the absence of direct lines of communication with Managua, meant that the solidarity movement existed 'in a vacuum' in the weeks following the revolution.[69] Indeed, as the coordinators of the Western European solidarity movement Klaas Wellinga, Hermann Schulz, and William Agudelo (a Colombian poet and friend of Ernesto Cardenal) wrote to the national committees on 1 August 1979, it was unclear what 'type of support' the Sandinistas needed at the moment, so Western European solidarity activists simply had to improvise and wait until their *compañeros* in Nicaragua provided them with more detailed information.[70]

Another issue that confronted the solidarity movement was the question of how the FSLN victory would change the nature of solidarity work. Overall, activist agreed that solidarity activism was much more 'political' than the work of developmental and human rights organisations, and therefore solidarity committees wanted to do more than simply help with the financial aspects of reconstruction.[71] In the FRG, Ernesto Medina, a Nicaraguan doctoral student based in Göttingen, stressed that solidarity activism was not about 'progressive forces' sending 'developmental aid' to an oppressed people. Rather, he argued, solidarity between West Germany and Nicaragua should be an equal 'partnership' with a 'common objective'.[72] It was, however, not always clear what this partnership should look like in practice, now that the Sandinistas were in power. Did this mean supporting the FSLN, the revolutionary junta, or the Nicaraguan people as a whole? Should solidarity committees start assisting guerrilla movements in neighbouring Central American

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[67] *Der Spiegel*, 23 July 1979.
[68] Author's interview with Tomás Arguello Chamorro, Managua, Nicaragua, 29 July 2016.
[69] IISG, INW, Letter, Klaas Wellinga, Hermann Schultz, and William Agudelo to Western European solidarity committees, 1 August 1979.
[70] Ibid.
[71] IISG, NKN, Box 1, Record of Meeting, 17 September 1979.
[72] IISG, INW, Zum Selbstverständnis der Nicaragua-Solidaritätskomitees nach dem Sturz Somozas, Diskussionspapier von Ernesto Medina, date unknown.

countries, such as El Salvador, or should they focus on changing the political situation in Western Europe, too?

Some committees wanted to focus on the latter, such as the Wageningen committee in the Netherlands, which believed that the priority of solidarity activists should be to raise 'political awareness' amongst the Dutch population. These activists from Wageningen, however, were a minority, heavily criticised for their 'lack of loyalty' to the Sandinistas.[73] In fact, most solidarity activists agreed with Ernesto Medina, who argued strongly in favour of a close relationship with the Sandinistas, noting that a 'large majority of the people' in Nicaragua 'support' and 'trust' the FSLN leaders. Solidarity with the Nicaraguan revolution, Medina pointed out, meant that solidarity committees should 'support and respect' the decisions and leadership of the Sandinista *comandantes*.[74] After some weeks of discussion, therefore, the West European solidarity movement decided that it would 'unconditionally' support the FSLN by, amongst other things, publishing propaganda, defending the revolution from bourgeois 'attacks', and fundraising for Sandinista reconstruction projects.[75]

Unfortunately for the Western European activists, it appeared the Sandinistas did not feel the same way. As Bayardo Arce told Langenberg during a visit to the Netherlands in March 1980, the FSLN was in a different position than previously. Now that they were in power, Arce explained, it was crucial for Sandinistas to build connections with Western European politicians and governments, and the collaboration between the solidarity movement and the Sandinistas could simply not continue 'on [an] equal footing'.[76] Solidarity activists disagreed and soon became irritated with what they perceived as the Sandinistas' lack of respect for and interest in their movement. The FSLN *comandantes*, Western European activists believed, did not fully understand how important the solidarity movement remained for the revolution's success and consolidation. In October 1979, for example, George Black wrote to Doris Tijerino, the head of the DRI, and told her that it was currently impossible for British committees to defend the revolution against the critical Western press. The solidarity magazine *Nicaragua Libre*, he explained, could only communicate the 'true facts' about the Sandinista revolution to the British people if the FSLN provided the committees with regular updates and Nicaraguan newspapers, such as the Sandinista journal *Barricada*.[77] Moreover, on 28 September 1979, at the first Western European solidarity

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[73] IISG, NKN, Box 1, Record of Meeting, 17 September 1979.
[74] Ibid.
[75] NSC, Informe preparado por George Black, John Bevan, Richard Furtado, 12 June 1980; IISG, NKN, Box 1, Standpunt van het Nicaragua-Komitee tav. het solidariteitswerk met Nicaragua.
[76] Hans Langenberg, 'Solidair vanaf het begin' in Erik-Jan Hertogs ed., *Nederlanders naast Nicaragua, 10 jaar revolutie beleeft* (Utrecht: Nicaragua Komitee Nederland, 1990) 20-25.
[77] NSC, Letter, George Black to Doris Tijerino, October 1979.

conference since the revolution's triumph, solidarity activists loudly criticised the FSLN's passive attitude towards the movement. For instance, the committees asked Sylvia McEwan and María Victoria Urquíjo, the two Sandinista representatives who had travelled from Managua to the German town of Herdecke for the conference, if the FSLN leaders even considered the solidarity movement to be 'important' for the revolution's future.[78]

In sum, the overthrow of Somoza opened up a new realm of possibilities for the FSLN in Western Europe. News of the Sandinista triumph turned Nicaragua into frontpage news, the Socialist International was keen to contribute to the success of the revolution, and Western European governments provided the new government with money, advice, and material aid. Ironically, this influx of international interest and support for Nicaragua also meant that Sandinista revolutionaries had less time for and interest in the transnational solidarity movement. Building and consolidating fruitful alliances with governments and political parties was deemed by the new government to be more important for the FSLN than providing solidarity committees with detailed information about Nicaragua's revolutionary process. This frustrated the solidarity activists, who remained convinced of their own political significance. Yet, at a time when the Nicaraguan government was in desperate need of financial aid to rebuild the country after years of revolutionary war, the Sandinistas' focus on state relations made sense; governments and international institutions could simply offer much more money.

The Literacy Crusade

Even though Nicaraguan revolutionaries were less interested in solidarity committees after 19 July 1979, Sandinista leaders certainly continued to appeal to the international community to make the revolution a success. In fact, less than one month after Somoza's fall, the Nicaraguan junta appointed Jesuit priest and liberation theologian Fernando Cardenal as the coordinator of the *Cruzada Nacional de Alfabetización* (National Literacy Crusade), a highly successful literacy campaign that, in addition to radically transforming the country's political and educational culture, mobilised a wide range of international actors for the Nicaraguan revolution, such as UNESCO, the transnational solidarity movement, the World Council of Churches, and various governments from the Americas and Europe. Echoing Cuba's own Literacy Crusade two decades before, between March and August 1980, between 60,000 and 100,000 Nicaraguan teenagers travelled to the countryside to teach around 400,000 Nicaraguans to read and to write in Spanish. These young

[78] NKN, Box 17, Statement NKN for European Solidarity Conference in Vienna on 13-14-15 June 1980, date unknown.

brigadistas, according to official estimations, reduced the illiteracy rate from 50.35% to 12.96%.[79] Meanwhile, in Western European countries, human rights organisations, political parties, church groups, schools, and solidarity committees all contributed to the literacy crusade's success, both actual and symbolically, as they raised funds, wrote articles, sold posters, made documentaries, and lobbied governments. The Sandinista government actively encouraged the international mobilisation for the literacy campaign, which not only resulted in sufficient money for the crusade, but also in the creation of a powerful sense that Western Europeans, too, could be part of Nicaragua's revolutionary project.

For the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, the literacy campaign was part of the process of national liberation. Already in 1969, when the FSLN's historic programme was first published, Sandinista guerrillas promised that the *Revolución Popular Sandinista* would 'push forward a massive campaign to immediately wipe out illiteracy'.[80] Teaching Nicaraguan people to read and write, campaign coordinator Fernando Cardenal writes in his memoirs, was in itself a revolutionary act, amongst others because under the Somoza regime 'literacy was subversive and communist' and therefore discouraged.[81] In revolutionary Nicaragua, by contrast, education would be part of a process that transformed people's lives, raised political consciousness, and encouraged *campesinos* to become active participants in the reconstruction of the country. Bayardo Arce described the crusade as 'a strategic task to consolidate our revolution'.[82] The aim of the literacy campaign, then, was not only to fight illiteracy, but also to teach Nicaraguan *campesinos* how to 'read their reality' and involve them in the revolutionary process.[83] Through education, Fernando Cardenal explains, the Nicaraguan people would lose their ignorance and understand that poverty was not 'produced by nature, but the actions of human beings, that is, those who have economic and political power'.[84]

The plan for a literacy campaign was not new. To a significant extent, the Sandinista literacy crusade was shaped by the ideas of Brazilian education scholar Paulo Freire, who wrote his famous *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* based on his own experiences teaching adults in Brazil.[85] According to Freire, rather than simply transferring 'knowledge' to marginalised communities, education should encourage oppressed people to become independent thinkers, 'critically conscious' of their environment, and therefore able to change the societal structures of oppression. In October 1979,

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[79] Ulrike Hanemann, *Nicaragua's Literacy Campaign* (UNESCO Institute for Education, 2005).
[80] 'The Historic Programme of the FSLN', as published in Mars ed. *Sandinistas Speak* (1982).
[81] Fernando Cardenal, *Faith and Joy: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Priest* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015) 132.
[82] Black, *Triumph of the People* (1981) 311.
[83] Cardenal, *Faith and Joy*, 136.
[84] Ibid.
[85] For more on the literacy campaign, see. John T. Deiner, 'The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade', *Journal of Reading* 25 (1981) 118-125.

at the invitation of Fernando Cardenal, Freire, who also worked as special advisor for the World Council of Churches, travelled to Nicaragua to assist the Sandinistas, and encouraged them to approach the nation-wide education project as a political event with pedagogical implications, rather than the other way around.[86] Moreover, the revolutionaries' resolve to wage a literacy crusade in Nicaragua was shaped by their impressions of by Fidel Castro's successful campaign of 1961, when hundred thousand young Cubans reduced the country's illiteracy rate to 3.9% and, as historian Lillian Guerra writes, 'lifted the prestige of the revolution to unprecedented levels'.[87] The Cuban literacy project, Fernando Cardenal remembers, 'struck great admiration and enthusiasm in me'.[88] In September 1979, therefore, to prepare for the Nicaraguan literacy campaign, the priest travelled to Havana, where he spoke to Cuban experts and researched the archives of the *Museo Nacional de la Alfabetización*. Moreover, at the request of Fernando Cardenal, several Cuban experts such as Raúl Ferrer, the Cuban vice minister of education went to Nicaragua to provide the campaign organisers with technical and strategic support.[89]

The National Literacy Crusade was an expensive and ambitious endeavour, even though most of the teachers were volunteers. Teaching brigades needed clothing, pens, backpacks, hammocks, medicine, books, food, transport, and training. In addition, the campaign coordinators needed money to cover administrative costs, arrange transportation, and set up an emergency response system. Overall, the organisers calculated that around $20 million was necessary to fund the entire literacy crusade. And to cover theses costs, in October 1979, the Nicaraguan government launched a fund-raising and publicity campaign that targeted both domestic and international audiences. In Nicaraguan cities and towns, Sandinista groups organised parades, debates, raffles, music festivals, and poster sales to generate interest and funding for the literacy crusade.[90] Outside Nicaragua, Sandinista diplomats, ministers, junta members, and *comandantes* travelled extensively around Europe and the Americas to raise funds and material contributions for the crusade, meeting with government officials, solidarity activists, unions, church groups, and journalists. Crucially, in February and March 1980, a Nicaraguan delegation consisting of Sandinista *comandante* Omar Cabezas, church representative Edwin Maradiaga, and literacy campaign vice coordinator Francisco Lacayo spent thirty days in in Europe to collect and lobby for funds. This publicity

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[86] For more on Paulo Freire and literacy, see, Andrew J. Kirkendall, *Paulo Freire and the Cold War Politics of Literacy* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2010).
[87] Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2012) 158.
[88] Cardenal, *Faith and Joy* (2015) 132.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Fernando Cardenal and Valerie Miller, 'Nicaragua: Literacy and Revolution', *The Crane Bag* 6 (1982) 64-70.

journey, Fernando Cardenal remembers, turned out 'to be key because they returned with enough money to cover the remaining expenses of the campaign'.[91]

To mobilise as many groups, institutions, and governments as possible for the literacy campaign, the Nicaraguan government and its allies employed a range of arguments and strategies. Most notably, Sandinista leaders played on Western European concerns that the Nicaraguan revolutionaries – like Fidel Castro's Cuba in the 1960s – would be forced to turn towards the Soviet bloc if the capitalist countries were not forthcoming with aid. In March 1980, for instance, the Nicaraguan government simultaneously sent representatives to both sides of the Iron Curtain to raise funds for the crusade. At the same time as Sergio Ramírez and Bayardo Arce visited Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, and the FRG, *comandante* Tomás Borge and junta member Moisés Hassan spoke to politicians in East Germany, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria. By so doing, the FSLN reinforced the Cold War rivalry that existed between East and West, creating a sense that both capitalist and socialist countries were able to influence to future course of the revolution through donations and assistance. Indeed, as a steering brief from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office noted in 1980, the Nicaraguans 'often remarked that if they could not find the necessary resources in the West, they would be forced to look to the East'.[92] Undoubtedly, this was a smart strategy, as one of the primary motivations for Western European governments to support the literacy crusade was to 'compete' with the Cubans and Soviets over influence in Nicaragua.[93] The European Community, for example, financed the participation of 200 Costa Rican teachers in the literacy crusade because this would contribute 'to the general desire not to leave the effort entirely to the Cubans'.[94]

By requesting financial and material aid from Cuba, the Soviet Union, the United States, Venezuela, Mexico, the Nordic countries, and the EC member states, the Sandinista government not only obtained significant amounts of financial support, but also strengthened its international image as a non-aligned state, whose revolution transcended the boundaries of the bipolar Cold War conflict. In speeches and interviews, the Nicaraguan revolutionaries pointed out that the literacy campaign received aid and support from governments from all across the political spectrum. Sergio Ramírez, for instance, during the celebratory closing ceremony of the literacy crusade in Managua on August 1980, highlighted that the campaign had been supported by a wide range of governments, including Mexico, the Netherlands, Cuba, Spain, the Soviet Union, the

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[91] Cardenal, *Faith and Joy* (2015) 171.
[92] TNA, FCO 99/424, Brief, Nicaragua Background: Foreign Policy, date unknown.
[93] AA, Zwischenarchiv 127452, Limmer to Staatssekretär, 25 March 1980.
[94] TNA, FCO 99/562, Brown to Payne, 9 February 1980.

Federal Republic of Germany, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR).[95] Educators and volunteers from all around the world, Ramírez stressed, had travelled to Nicaragua to reduce illiteracy, including from Canada, West Germany, Mexico, Peru, and Czechoslovakia.[96] The fact that Rodrigo Carazo, the Costa Rican president, was the guest of honour at the closing ceremony also served as a powerful demonstration that the Nicaraguan revolution had the support of its Central American neighbours.[97]

To make the literacy campaign appear attractive and uncontroversial to Western European peoples and governments, representatives of the Nicaraguan government generally presented the crusade as a humanitarian project that needed practical assistance. When Nicaraguan organisers realised that many older *campesinos* were unable to participate in the campaign due to visual impairments, for instance, they mobilised the transnational solidarity movement to organise collections for second-hand glasses.[98] The Nicaraguan embassy in London, too, published flyers and sent out letters asking for donations, noting that £2.50 would provide students with a classroom, £5.00 with a school desk, and £80 would 'finance a literacy teacher in the countryside'.[99] The 'ability to read and write, the flyers pointed out, is 'taken for granted in a developed Western country like Britain' but unfortunately it is 'a privilege of the few in Latin America'.[100] Similarly, on 26 February 1980, Tomás Arguello Chamorro and Edwin Maradiaga argued to British officials that, in addition to increasing literacy, the campaign would improve the country's healthcare and agricultural production. By contributing to the crusade, the Nicaraguan representatives stressed, Britain 'would be helping maintain and develop human rights in Nicaragua, as well as helping the country's social and economic reconstruction'.[101] Finally, in the Netherlands, Francisco Lacayo told reporters that, in addition to teaching the *campesinos* to read and write in Spanish, the young volunteer teachers - also known as brigadistas - would contribute to the fight against malaria in the countryside.[102]

What is more, the Sandinista effort to present the *Cruzada* as part of the larger reconstruction effort after Somoza's fall functioned as a counterweight to accusations that the campaign was used for the ideological indoctrination of Nicaraguan *campesinos*. On 10 December

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[95] Huso Assman ed., *Nicaragua triunfa en la alfabetización: documentos y testimonios de la Cruzada Nacional de Alfabetización* (Managua: Ministerio de Educación, 1981).
[96] Cardenal and Miller, 'Nicaragua: Literacy and Revolution', *The Crane Bag* 6 (1982) 64-70.
[97] Ramírez, *Adiós Muchachos* (2012) 101.
[98] IISG, NKN, Box 72, Lausanne Comité de Solidarité avec le Nicaragua, 'Alphabetisierung in Nicaragua', date unknown.
[99] IISG, NKN, Box 72, Flyer, Nicaraguan Embassy in London, date unknown.
[100] IISG, NKN, Box 72, Flyer, Nicaraguan Embassy in London; Letter, Tomás Arguello Chamorro to British Public, date unknown.
[101] TNA, FCO 99/562, Record of ODA Meeting, Maradiaga Lacayo and Arguello Chamorro, 26 February 1980.
[102] *De Waarheid*, 1 March 1980.

1979, the *Daily Telegraph* announced that Cuba was sending 'scores of intelligence agents and hundreds of Communist ideological cadres' to revolutionary Nicaragua. While the 'ostensible purpose is to help Nicaragua carry out a crash literacy drive', the British newspaper commented, it is clear 'that the teachers will be more concerned with political indoctrination'.[103] Some politicians and government officials in Western Europe, too, expressed concerns about the content of the teaching materials and the Cuban involvement in the crusade, noting for example that the literacy campaign's reader *El Amanecer del Pueblo* (Dawn of the People) focused too heavily on the revolution's heroes Augusto Sandino and Carlos Fonseca, the agrarian reform programme, and the FSLN's vanguard position. Nicaraguan representatives, however, fiercely denied these claims. Edwin Maradiaga told British officials in London that 'ideological indoctrination' was simply not the purpose of the crusade and that, 'reports in the *Daily Telegraph* to this effect were quite false'.[104] Fernando Cardenal, too, lamented that the 'enemies of the revolution' falsely accused the Cubans of 'brainwashing Nicaraguan children'.[105]

In this context, the literacy campaign mobilised a wide range of actors for the Sandinista project. On 29 March 1980, at the first British solidarity conference for Nicaragua, which focused on the *Cruzada Nacional de Alfabetización*, a number of organisations with diverging political orientations spoke out in support of the revolution, including the national Labour Party, War on Want, Oxfam, the World University Service, Christian Aid, and the Chile Solidarity Campaign. Several trade union councils and local political groups also sent delegates, such as the Chilean far left party, the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*, the Hackney Teachers' Association, and the Northampton Labour Party.[106] Indeed, Western European organisations from all across the political spectrum were jubilant about the literacy campaign. Christian Aid, for example, a developmental agency of around forty Irish and British churches that contributed £30,000, commented in its newsletters, that there 'was enormous enthusiasm for the crusade' to 'fight ignorance' in Nicaragua, noting that 'even the matchboxes and beer bottle tops carried words and letters for the people to learn!'.[107] Solidarity committees, too, dedicated themselves to the crusade by, for instance, encouraging Western Europeans to organise information nights and providing volunteers with movies, slides, and booklets on the literacy project.[108]

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[103] *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 December 1979.
[104] TNA, FCO 99/562, Record of ODA Meeting, Maradiaga Lacayo and Arguello Chamorro, 26 February 1980.
[105] Cardenal, *Faith and Joy* (2015) 140.
[106] Senate House Library, London, United Kingdom (hereafter, SHL), ER320/PAM2, Christian Aid, 'Nicaragua: Bienvenidos a Nicaragua libre', date unknown; ER320/PAM1, Report of First National Conference in Solidarity with the People of Nicaragua, London, 29 March 1980.
[107] SHL, ER320/PAM2, Christian Aid, 'Nicaragua: Bienvenidos a Nicaragua libre', date unknown
[108] IISG, NKN, Box 72, Lausanne Comité de Solidarité avec le Nicaragua, 'Alphabetisierung in Nicaragua', date unknown.

Yet, the Sandinistas' portrayal of the crusade as a humanitarian project does not fully explain why it succeeded in mobilising such a broad range of actors for the Nicaraguan revolution. Rather, the key to the success of the Sandinista literacy campaign amongst Western European solidarity activists and grassroots organisations was the fact that the campaign allowed for a variety of interpretations of the Nicaraguan revolution and its objectives. In particular, different organisations were able to frame and understand the crusade in such a way that it matched their own interests and ideologies. For example, solidarity committees and church groups had different political agendas, but both found convincing reasons to support the Sandinistas' educational project. Church organisations were more interested in the religious and social justice components of the literacy crusade and the Nicaraguan revolution. Christian Aid, for example, published a booklet on the contribution of the church to 'Nicaragua libre'. Instead of focusing on militancy, class struggle, and the FSLN leaders, it quotes Ernesto Cardenal as saying that the Nicaraguan revolution was a 'human revolution' that carried 'a deep sign of Christian love'. Church groups in Nicaragua, the Christian Aid booklet pointed out, 'are now in a position to make an important contribution to the transformation of society'.[109] Solidarity committees, on the other hand, focused mostly on the political context and 'military model' of the literacy campaign, analysing the many parallels between the FSLN guerrilla struggle against the Somoza regime in the past, and the work of 'literacy militias' in the 'war against ignorance' in the present.[110] The primary goal of the literacy crusade, in the eyes of the Western European allies of the FSLN, was to mobilise the *campesinos* for the Sandinista revolution, thereby strengthening the domestic position of the FSLN. In his 1981 book *Triumph of the People*, for instance, British NSC founder George Black argued that the literacy campaign helped to consolidate the revolution, as the FSLN revolutionaries successfully connected to both the brigadistas and the campesinos, giving them a clear understanding of the aims of the revolution.[111]

Overall, the Nicaraguan effort to raise money and support in Western Europe for the literacy campaign was a success. As Nicaraguan education minister Carlos Tünnerman announced in August 1980, a high percentage of the total costs of the literacy campaign was 'financed with donations' from 'the international community.'[112] Indeed, on 7 March, French European Commissioner Claude Cheysson assured Sergio Ramírez and Bayardo Arce that the European Community would contribute $2.6 million, to be used for teaching materials and food aid (rice and

[109] SHL, ER320/PAM2, Christian Aid, 'Nicaragua: Bienvenidos a Nicaragua libre', date unknown.
[110] NSC, *Nicaragua Today* 2 (1980).
[111] Black, *Triumph of the People* (1981) 311-315.
[112] Huso Assman ed., *Nicaragua triunfa en la alfabetización* (1981).

red beans).[113] And on 11 March 1980, at a manifestation in the Vredenburg music hall in Utrecht, representatives of the NKN presented Sergio Ramírez with a cheque for $250,000 to fund the literacy campaign.[114] Even the British government, despite massive cuts to the international development budget, contributed to the campaign by purchasing £20,000 worth of first aid kits for Nicaraguan schools.[115] The British public, however, was less keen to contribute to the literacy crusade. On 9 June 1980, Tomás Arguello Chamorro told FCO official Geoffrey Cowling that the UK campaign to raise money had 'produced only in £800' in the last three of four months, which was a 'fairly low' sum, especially 'when compared to the money raised by his counterparts in other part of Europe'.[116] While it is difficult to trace the exact reasons for this apparent lack of UK generosity, it is worth noting here that the British solidarity movement (until 1983) was significantly smaller and less centralised than the Dutch and German organisations, which might have limited the NSC's ability to raise money.

Cold War Polarisation

The literacy crusade succeeded in mobilising the Nicaraguan population and the international community for the revolution, but the FSLN could not keep together the broad and politically diverse coalition that had caused Somoza's departure indefinitely. In April 1980, Violeta Chamorro and Alfonso Robelo, the two junta members not aligned to the Sandinista Front, stepped down. While Chamorro cited health reasons for her resignation, Robelo openly accused FSLN leaders of violating their promises on democracy and argued that the Sandinistas were turning Nicaragua into a Marxist state. After his resignation, Robelo became a well-known spokesperson for the anti-Sandinista cause, travelling to Western European cities to speak about the 'Marxist-Leninist influence which came from the Sandinista Directorate'.[117] On 14 May 1980, Robelo told British official Geoffrey Cowling, who was visiting Managua, that the Sandinistas had turned Nicaragua into 'a battleground for superpower ideology'. Indeed, as Cowling reported back to the FCO, Robelo was 'depressed at the injection of class hatred into internal politics by the Directorate, something they had never had in Nicaragua, even in Somoza's time'.[118] Eddy Kühl also encouraged Western European officials to remind the FSLN that efforts to 'suppress other viewpoints would place in jeopardy the economic support which, for example, the European Community had

[113] TNA, FCO 99/562, PJL Scott to GS Cowling, 8 April 1980.
[114] *Trouw*, 29 March 1980.
[115] TNA, FCO 99/562, Brown to ODA, 15 January 1980.
[116] TNA, FCO 99/562, Brief, 14 January 1980.
[117] TNA, FCO 99/561, Note of Meeting, Robelo and Ridley, 8 September 1980.
[118] TNA, FCO 99/559, Cowling to Payne, 20 May 1980.

given'.[119] In addition, members of the clergy spoke out against the Sandinista movement, such as Catholic Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo, who accused the Sandinistas of waging 'a Marxist ideological campaign'.[120] Finally, the newspaper *La Prensa*, which had played a crucial role in the struggle against the Somoza regime, closed down for a couple days in April 1980, blaming 'government intimidation'.[121]

The revolutionaries' response to growing polarisation in Nicaragua had two somewhat contradictory components. On the one hand, FSLN *comandantes* and Sandinista newspaper *Barricada* spoke in harsh terms about Obando y Bravo and Robelo, describing opposition figures as *vendepatrias* (traitors) and US-backed counterrevolutionaries. Publicly, the FSLN linked Robelo and the MDN to Somoza, international capital, and US imperialism. The Nicaraguan ambassador in London, Gonzalo Murillo-Romero, for instance, described the MDN as a 'conservative party made up of privileged groups who had accrued wealth under Somoza'.[122] Western European activists, too, considered accusations against the Sandinistas as a predictable response of conservative and reactionary groups to the 'consolidation of the revolution' and the 'intensification of the class struggle' in Nicaragua.[123] In journals and pamphlets published by solidarity committees, opposition figures were portrayed as enemies of the revolution. In *Nicaragua Today*, for instance, the NSC accused opposition parties, such as the MDN, the Democratic Conservative Party (PCD) and the Social Christian Party (PSC), of undermining 'unity' in Nicaragua by using 'their influence in local right-wing media to slander the Sandinistas' and getting business supporters to 'block production and further undermine the country's economic recovery'.[124] Robelo's movement, the NSC added, had only 'recently been formed with US guidance and finance'.[125] What is more, together with development organisation NOVIB, the Dutch solidarity movement funded a Nicaraguan comic book on the popular struggle against US imperialism. In this comic – which was entitled 'The Militia in Action' – opposition figures carrying signs calling for elections were described as 'traitorous' and 'friends of international imperialism'.[126]

Yet, on the other hand, Sandinista *comandantes* showed a degree of willingness to cooperate with representatives from Nicaragua's business and religious sectors, as the FSLN needed their support for domestic stability, international legitimacy, and economic development. The National Directorate appointed two 'moderate' members to replace Robelo and Chamorro on the junta,

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[119] TNA, FCO 99/559, Brown to Trew, 9 April 1980.
[120] Cardenal, *Faith and Joy* (2015) 216.
[121] CREST, National Intelligence Daily, 24 April 1980.
[122] TNA, FCO 99/561, Record of Meeting, Gonzalo Murillo-Romero with FCO, 11 December 1980.
[123] NSC, Informe preparado por George Black, John Bevan, Richard Furtado, 12 June 1980.
[124] IISG, NKN, *Nicaragua Today* 4 (1981).
[125] NSC, *Nicaragua Today* 2 (1980).
[126] SHL, ER320 PAM/2, *Las Milicias en Acción*, 1982.

namely Arturo Cruz, the director of Nicaragua's Central Bank, and Rafael Córdova Rivas, a conservative lawyer. These appointments, the Nicaraguan embassy in the US announced, demonstrated the Sandinistas' commitment to 'political pluralism' and a 'policy of alliances' with a variety of 'political entities' as well as 'the private sector'.[127] Alfonso Robelo's resignation, Nicaraguan ambassador to the US Rafael Solís wrote, was purely 'motivated by his own political ambitions' and not by the lack of political freedom in Nicaragua. With regards to the composition of the Council of State, Solís continued, this 'reflects the minimal control exercised by the FSLN' as it only has a 51% majority, which is 'not a source of astonishment in Nicaragua since it is evident that the organization enjoys massive support'.[128]

Sandinista diplomats, then, tried to stop the growing domestic polarisation from spilling over to Western Europe and negatively impacting the financial and political support of EC member states for the revolution. In particular, they attempted to downplay Robelo's accusations that the FSLN was turning Nicaragua into a Cold War battleground by continuing to present the revolution as democratic and moderate. In August 1980, Nicaraguan foreign minister Miguel d'Escoto visited West Germany, where he met with FRG foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Bundespräsident Karl Carstens, and representatives of political foundations, such as Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Social Democratic Party, SPD), the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (Free Democratic Party, FDP), and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Christian Democratic Union, CDU).[129] The unique revolutionary ideology of *Sandinismo*, D'Escoto told Genscher on 28 August 1980, was not for sale on 'the international market of ideologies'.[130] Indeed, he added, unlike the 'dogmatism' of previous revolutions, the Sandinista revolution was 'pluralist, moderate, and pragmatic'. [131]

Nicaraguan diplomats also highlighted the importance of continued Western European involvement in Central America, warning there was a real danger that the struggle of Central American liberation movements for social justice and national self-determination would become swept up by the Cold War. Miguel d'Escoto, for example, warned Genscher about the possibility of a 'Vietnamisation' of Central America, if the US continued to 'intervene' in the region, most notably in El Salvador and Guatemala.[132] By providing aid and political advice, he added, the FRG could support the 'right for self-determination' and the quest for 'non-alignment' of states such as

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[127] TNA, FCO 99/559, Communiqué by Nicaraguan Embassy in Washington, 26 April 1980.
[128] Ibid.
[129] See, for more on this visit: AA, Zwischenarchiv 127450.
[130] AA, Zwischenarchiv 127450, Vermerk, Besuch des AM von Nicaragua Miguel d'Escoto, 28 August 1980.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.

Nicaragua, and prevent military escalation[133] By pushing for an active Western European role in Central America, then, the Sandinistas not only hoped to obtain economic and material aid, they also challenged the historic US domination of the region.

To be sure, accusations by Sandinista *comandantes* and solidarity activists that armed groups and foreign powers were trying to undermine the revolutionaries' hold on power were not wrong. Immediately after the revolution's triumph, anti-communist and conservative groups in the Americas and Europe had started to channel arms and funds to the anti-Sandinista opposition. For instance, as historian Ariel C. Armony demonstrates, Argentine and Israeli intelligence officers assisted former members of Somoza's National Guard with the creation of a counterrevolutionary force in Honduras, which would later be known as the contras.[134] In addition, on 19 July 1979, the Carter administration approved $750,000 in funding to finance and assist 'moderate' newspapers, political parties, and trade unions to resist attempts by 'Cuban-supported and other Marxist groups to consolidate their power' over Nicaragua.[135] Undoubtedly, these foreign threats to the revolution led to increasing polarisation and a hardening of positions within Nicaragua. In particular, the *comandantes* could not fathom that many Nicaraguans protesting against their regime were not 'puppets' of US imperialism. Indeed, on 26 April 1980, a US intelligence daily concluded that the FSLN National Directorate had become more 'intransigent' because 'armed groups opposed to their rule [were] becoming increasingly active'.[136]

Overall, Nicaraguan diplomats successfully convinced Western European governments that they could still push the Nicaraguan junta towards establishing a pluralist and non-aligned government. On 28 February 1980, ambassador Efrain Jonckheer, who was accredited to Nicaragua, wrote to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken*, BZ) about the growing Soviet influence in Nicaragua and the perceived decline in press freedom. While Jonckheer was not 'overly optimistic' about the future trajectory of the revolution, the ambassador nevertheless recommended BZ to provide the Nicaraguan junta with aid, noting that this could be used to 'carefully push' the revolutionaries towards a 'more pluralist and democratic' mode of governance.[137] West German officials, too, maintained there was 'a reasonably good chance to facilitate the emergence of a moderate, democratic government through German aid'. On 15 August 1980, therefore, the FRG cabinet approved an aid package of 35 million Deutsche Mark

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[133] Ibid.
[134] See, for more, Ariel C. Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America*, 1977-1984 (Ohio University Press, Athens, 1997).
[135] FRUS, 1977-1980, Volume XV, Central America, Document 325.
[136] CREST, National Intelligence Daily, 26 April 1980.
[137] BZ, Inventarisnummer 11839, Brief, San Jose to BZ, 28 February 1980.

(around $20 million) to the Nicaraguan government.[138] D'Escoto's visit to Bonn, in particular, had a positive impact on the West German position Indeed, after the meeting, on 4 September 1980, Genscher wrote to US Secretary of State Edmund Muskie about his conversations with the Nicaraguan foreign minister, which he said took place in a 'pleasant atmosphere'.[139] West Germany and the United States, Genscher argued, should support those forces in Nicaragua that are working for a 'non-aligned' foreign policy and, he added optimistically, 'Padre d'Escoto' is one of those people.[140]

Despite these efforts, the Nicaraguan government could not stop the growing domestic polarisation from affecting certain sections of Western European public opinion, as conservative officials, journalists, and politicians started to express concern at 'the slide towards one party dictatorship' in Nicaragua, as well as the growing Cuban and Soviet influence in the region.[141] On 24 April 1980, Dutch newspaper *Het Parool* responded to the departure of 'moderate' junta member Alfonso Robelo by publishing an article on the 'rapid Cubanisation' of Nicaragua.[142] In particular, Christian Democratic parties, who sympathised with Robelo and opposition newspaper *La Prensa*, started to use Cold War rhetoric to denounce the Nicaraguan revolutionaries. On 23 September 1980, Ottfried Hennig, a prominent West German politician from the *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands* (CDU) accused Genscher of 'uncritically accepting the antidemocratic and Marxist-revolutionary' of the Sandinista government.[143] Another example is the London celebration of the anniversary of the revolution on 19 July 1980, when the NSC organised a music and poetry event at Logan Hall, University of London, which was attended by around 2,000 people. Amongst others, the organisers had invited Tomás Arguello Chamorro, British trade unionist Arthur Scargill, Labour MP Stan Newens, representatives from Cuba, Grenada, Mexico, and Vietnam, and the poets Lynton Kwesi Johnson and Eduardo Embry.[144] FCO official Francis Trew, who attended the event, described the evening as 'frightening' and 'poisonous'. Indeed, Trew added, he was shocked by the 'revolutionary hysteria of the audience' and 'sincerely hoped the Security Service was covering the occasion'.[145]

Moreover, as a result of the lack of communication from the FSLN, Western European supporters of the FSLN found it difficult to explain Robelo's resignation to the media. In June

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[138] TNA, FCO 99/561, Note of Meeting, Robelo and Ridley, 8 September 1980.
[139] AA, Zwischenarchiv 127450, Genscher to Muskie, 4 September 1980.
[140] Ibid.
[141] TNA, FCO 99/559, Crabbie to FCO, 24 April 1980.
[142] *Het Parool*, 24 April 1980.
[143] AA, Zwischenarchiv 127450, Ottfried Hennig, 'Marxistische Revolutionäre als Muster der Demokratie: Genscher zeichnet falsches Bild von Nicaragua', 23 September 1980.
[144] NSC, Informe preparado por George Black, John Bevan, Richard Furtado, 12 June 1980.
[145] TNA, FCO 99/561, Trew to Payne, 22 July 1980.

1980, Dutch solidarity activists Ted van Hees and Hans Langenberg concluded that Robelo's resignation had diminished the support of Christian Democratic parties for the revolution. Moreover, they continued, when the NKN sent a telex to Nicaragua to ask for more information about the political crisis, they never received a response.[146] This was a concerning development, the Dutch activists warned, particularly since in the future, right-wing parties would certainly wage a more 'intensive campaign against the revolutionary process'. To defend Nicaragua from any new attacks, they repeated to the FSLN, the Nicaraguan revolutionaries should start paying more attention to the transnational solidarity movement.[147] The FSLN did not seem to attach much importance to these warnings from solidarity activists and continued to ignore their requests for more information and collaboration. Irritated by the Sandinistas' attitude, in March 1980, Klaas Wellinga and Hans Langenberg decided to travel to Nicaragua to convince the Sandinista Directorate of the necessity and importance of the solidarity movement. In Managua, Bayardo Arce promised to send them a definitive answer 'within two weeks' about the future role of solidarity activism. However, to the frustration of the Dutch solidarity activists – some of whom suggested they might as well 'stop with solidarity work altogether' – Wellinga and Langenberg never received an answer.[148] Moreover, even though Sandinista representative Erick Blandón was travelling through Switzerland in June 1980, the FSLN did not send any representative to attend the solidarity conference in Vienna, which took place that same month.[149]

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that, after coming to power on 19 July 1979, the nine Sandinista *comandantes* pursued dual-track diplomacy, setting out to change the world while at the same time adopting a pragmatic attitude international system as they found it. In the eyes of the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, their victory was part of an increasingly successful global struggle of the Third World against Western imperialism. At the same time, the FSLN knew that the global battle against imperialism was not yet won. The capitalist world may be in decline, the revolutionaries argued, but the FSLN was still faced with the reality of ruling a poor country in 'America's backyard'. To ensure the survival of the RPS, then, the Sandinistas implemented a strategic foreign policy in Western Europe, creating a powerful sense that EC governments, social democratic politicians,

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146 IISG, NKN, Box 1, Ted van Hees and Hans Langenberg, on behalf of the Dutch solidarity movement, to the Western European solidarity committees, 11 June 1980; Box 17, 'Verslag vergadering ter voorbereiding Europees congress in Wenen', 8 June 1980.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
149 IISG, NKN, Box 17-18, Informe Sobre el Encuentro a Nivel Europeo del Movimiento de Solidaridad con Nicaragua, 15 June 1980.

and activists could all participate in and positively influence the future trajectory of the Nicaraguan revolution. By smartly playing with North-South and East-West dynamics, the revolutionaries obtained significant amounts of financial aid and political support from Western Europe, thereby strengthening their position both inside and outside Nicaragua. Moreover, by bringing in West European actors, the Nicaraguan leaders challenged the traditional hegemony of the United States in the region, but not in a way that the US administration perceived as too threatening.

By analysing the diplomacy of the FSLN in the months following Somoza's fall, this chapter also challenges the traditional timeline that is used to make sense of the Nicaraguan revolution. Many (former) Sandinistas, solidarity activists, and historians describe the months following the revolution as a period of optimism and unconditional support from Western European governments for the Nicaraguan junta. It was only when Reagan came to power in January 1981, they argue, that problems started to arise. Yet, this chapter demonstrates that at the ideological and grassroots level the seeds for Cold War polarisation were already being sown in 1979-1980. Months before the US changed its position, Sandinistas and their opponents were already engaged in a global battle for hearts and minds, accusing their political opponents of being either communist hardliners or imperialist aggressors. To be sure, this was still largely a battle of words and the FSLN was definitely more successful in winning Western European public support than Robelo and his allies. Nevertheless, to understand the origins of the Cold War struggle for Nicaragua's future, historians need to pay much more attention to this transformative period. After all, at its core, the global battle for Nicaragua was defined by ideas about development, social justice, imperialism, socialism, and independence.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the effect of the Sandinista victory on the transnational solidarity movement. The success and global resonance of the literacy campaign clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of the Sandinistas' revolutionary diplomacy, which resulted in massive popular mobilisation in Nicaragua's favour. The difficulties Western European activists encountered in the months following Somoza's fall, too, make clear the crucial importance of Nicaraguan input and collaboration for the functioning and survival of the solidarity movement. Yet, the fact that solidarity committees survived this period – in spite of the growing frustrations amongst the activists – also highlights that the FSLN was not the only driving factor behind this network. Instead of giving up on the Sandinistas, Western European activists continued pushing for information and in some cases even travelled to Nicaragua to persuade Sandinista *comandantes* of the importance of solidarity activism for the revolution's survival. It appeared that these Western activists, driven by their own self-importance, desire for change, and ideological convictions, were more interested in directly participating in a left-wing revolutionary process than

in seriously listening to needs and priorities of the Nicaraguans themselves. Either way, it is unclear if the solidarity movement could have survived for much longer without the FSLN's support. In the end, they did not need to. As the next chapter demonstrates, Sandinista revolutionaries changed their minds about the importance of the solidarity movement after Republican presidential candidate Ronald Reagan won the US elections in November 1980.

CHAPTER 3

THE REVOLUTION UNDER ATTACK, 1981-1982

On 26 January 1981, hundreds of activists and politicians from Europe and the Americas arrived in Managua to attend the First International Conference in Solidarity with Nicaragua. For the delegates, it was an impressive conference; they were received with great extravagance by the nine Sandinista *comandantes*, who went out of their way to make the activists feel welcome, appreciated, and relevant.[1] This 'remarkable political event', British solidarity magazine *Nicaragua Today* reported, was of 'equal importance' to the first anniversary celebrations of the revolution's triumph.[2] The only other occasion where the entire FSLN National Directorate had come together to greet a foreign delegation, another *internacionalista* noted proudly, was when Fidel Castro visited Managua on 19 July 1980.[3] Raúl Guerra, the new Sandinista coordinator for the Western European solidarity movement, was quick to reject proposals of his predecessor Erick Blandón, who had wanted to transform solidarity committees into mere 'cultural groups'. From now on, Guerra promised, solidarity groups would be treated as if they were 'big political parties'.[4] More than a celebration of solidarity activism, the conference was also a call to arms. In their speeches, Sandinista officials called on activists to defend the Nicaraguan revolution against the growing threat of imperialist aggression. Because 'we are concerned about the new currents that are emerging in today's world', *comandante* Bayardo Arce Castaño warned, the meeting constituted 'a work session, a planning session for defence, a broad complex organisation for the defence of revolutions'.[5]

The solidarity conference in Managua in January 1981 marked the beginning of a more intense and violent phase in the global struggle for Nicaragua's future. In sharp contrast to what the Nicaraguan guerrillas had envisaged after the revolution's triumph on 19 July 1979, Third World countries' ambitions and aspirations to radically transform the international economic and political system lost their momentum, prestige, and persuasive power in the early 1980s.[6] Hopes

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[1] Interview, Wellinga and Langenberg, 6 August 2014.
[2] NSC, *Nicaragua Today* (1981).
[3] IISG, NKN, Box 17, Verslag Encuentro Managua, 26-31 January 1981.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Omali Yeshitela and Joseph Waller, 'The First Conference in Solidarity with Nicaragua', *The Black Scholar* 12 (1981) 25-35.
[6] See, Prashad, *The Darker Nations* (2007); Vanessa Ogle, 'State Rights against Private Capital: The 'New International Economic Order' and the Struggle over Aid, Trade, and Foreign Investment, 1962–1981', *Humanity* 5 (2014) 211–234; Gilman, 'The New International Economic Order', *Humanity* 6 (2015) 1-16.

for the implementation of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) disappeared almost entirely in August 1982, when the Mexican government, which had previously supported the Nicaraguan revolutionaries with generous financial and material aid, defaulted on its external debt obligations and Latin America descended into a decade-long financial crisis, also known as *La Década Perdida* (the Lost Decade).[7] Meanwhile, the rise to power of Cold War hardliner Ronald Reagan in the United States emboldened Latin America's anti-communist regimes and threatened the survival of left-wing governments and revolutionary movements, such as the Nicaraguan junta and the El Salvadoran guerrillas of the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, FMLN).[8] Determined to 'draw the line' against the spread of communism in the Western Hemisphere, the Reagan administration used military aid, financial assistance, and anti-communist propaganda to bolster the Salvadoran regime and undermine the Nicaraguan revolution.[9]

Not unrelated to these changes in the international environment was the increasingly tense, politicised, and violent situation on the ground in Nicaragua. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the FSLN had already lost the support of several prominent anti-Somoza opposition leaders in 1980, who criticised the Sandinista leadership for their alleged totalitarian tendencies to domestic audiences and the international community. In 1981, open conflict also erupted between the FSLN and a number of indigenous communities living on the country's Atlantic Coast, who rejected government programmes such as the literacy campaign (since there was no attention for indigenous languages, only Spanish) and the agrarian reform programme launched in July 1981 (which ignored indigenous land claims). In this context of racial prejudices, mutual misunderstanding, and growing distrust, there were 'at least 25 instances of armed combat' between Sandinista soldiers and Miskito Indian fighters between September 1981 and January 1982, as well as multiple cases of extreme violence against indigenous civilians.[10] In addition, Nicaraguan exiles based in Honduras and Miami (most of them former guardsmen of Somoza) also embarked on armed opposition against the FSLN, with the active backing of Honduras, Argentina, and the United States.[11] In the spring of 1982, these so-called contra insurgents

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[7] See, for more on the debt crisis in Latin America, Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
[8] See, Gutman, *Banana Diplomacy* (1988); Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America* (1997); LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* (1998); Julieta Carla Rostica, 'Una agenda de investigación pendiente: la política exterior de la dictadura militar argentina hacia Guatemala (1976-1983)', *Boletín de la Asociación para el Fomento de los Estudios Históricos en Centroamérica* 59 (2013) 1-26; Alan McPherson, 'Strange bedfellows at the end of the Cold War: the Letelier assassination, human rights, and state sovereignty', *Cold War History* (2019).
[9] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* (1998) 54.
[10] Jarquín, 'Red Christmases', *Cold War History* 18 (2018).
[11] See, Armony, *Argentina, the United States, and the Anti-Communist Crusade in Central America* (1997).

launched their first major military attack on Nicaraguan soil, blowing up several bridges near the Honduran border on 15 March 1982.[12]

In this precarious context of growing domestic tensions and foreign intervention, this chapter demonstrates, Sandinista leaders relied on a combination of diplomacy and transnational solidarity to strengthen the *Revolución Popular Sandinista*. Crucially, the FSLN renewed its interest in the solidarity committees after a period of relative neglect, calling on activists to build a transnational movement to defend the revolution against the threat of US intervention. This so-called anti-intervention movement was particularly powerful in Western Europe, as the FSLN and its allies capitalised on the anti-Reagan sentiment that existed amongst European audiences, most notably in the peace movement.[13] In addition, the Socialist International (SI) was also concerned about Reagan's anti-communist ambitions and set up a committee to protect the Nicaraguan government from external aggression. In the early 1980s, therefore, by presenting a convincing narrative of a small Central American country trying to defend its sovereignty against a powerful and aggressive US empire, Sandinistas successfully mobilised Western European audiences and politicians for the Nicaraguan revolution. Moreover, by foregrounding the Reagan administration's militaristic foreign policy, the Sandinistas distracted domestic and international audiences from the tensions and grassroots causes of the country's troubles.

What is more, at the level of the state, Nicaragua continued to receive financial aid from individual Western European governments, most notably the Netherlands and France, and the European Community. After Reagan assumed the presidency on 20 January 1981, however, the Western European consensus regarding the right approach to the Nicaraguan revolution broke down. While some EC leaders continued to adhere to the idea that foreign aid could keep the Sandinistas away from the Soviet bloc, others considered Nicaragua a lost cause and refused to provide the revolutionary government with extra aid. French and German attempts to solve these disagreements by proposing a regional foreign policy framework towards Central America also failed to have much of an impact, as individual EC member states disagreed on which Central America countries should profit from any regional aid package. In addition, Central America was certainly not on the top of the European Community's to-do-list in this period, as politicians juggled constructive responses to the Polish crisis, the deteriorating situation in the Middle East, and preparations for the upcoming follow-up Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe

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[12] *The New York Times,* 20 March 1982.

[13] Several historians have written about anti-intervention activism in the early 1980s. See for instance, Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Convictions of the Soul: Religion, Culture, and Agency in the Central America Solidarity Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Christian Smith, *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Craft Peace, *A Call to Conscience* (2012); Helm, *Botschafter der Revolution* (2018).

(CSCE) in Madrid.[14] So, while Western European governments were certainly concerned that the growing unrest in Central America would transform the region into a Cold War battlefield, they could – at least for the time being – not agree on a common foreign policy to decrease tensions, nor did they share the activists' sympathy for Central American revolutionaries.

CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES

The Sandinistas followed the 1980 presidential campaign in the United States with great interest, as it was clear that the outcome of the election would have an enormous impact on the future of the region.[15] In campaign speeches, Ronald Reagan argued passionately that the Nicaraguan revolution and the guerrilla struggles in El Salvador and Guatemala were examples of growing Soviet and Cuban influence in the Western Hemisphere and therefore a threat to US national security. While 'the Soviets and their friends are advancing' in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, Reagan told an audience of veterans on 18 August 1980, Jimmy Carter's administration remained 'totally oblivious' to the fact that American power was in rapid decline.[16] In order to stop the spread of communism in Central America, Republicans and their allies asserted, the US should immediately cancel all economic aid to Nicaragua, abandon Carter's human rights principles, and drastically increase military assistance to anti-communist regimes in El Salvador, Guatemala, Argentina, and Chile.[17]

Unsurprisingly, then, Reagan's electoral victory on 4 November 1980 alarmed the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, who believed the US president-elect was a dangerous Cold War radical, incapable of adopting a nuanced approach to their revolution. On 9 January 1981, political advisor Michael Clark (the nephew of Nicaraguan foreign minister Miguel d'Escoto) sent a long memorandum on Reagan's perception of Central American affairs to Rita Delia Casco, the Nicaraguan ambassador in Washington. Reagan and his neo-conservative friends, Clark asserted, believed the US was 'locked in an undeclared mortal combat' with the Soviet Union and its allies.[18] And unlike the Carter administration, these new policy-makers saw the Nicaraguan revolution as evidence of the growing 'power of the Soviet Union'.[19] Francisco d'Escoto, the FSLN'S *chargé*

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[14] See, Helene Sjursen, *The United States, Western Europe and the Polish Crisis: International Relations in the Second Cold War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003); Angela Romano, 'Re-designing Military Security in Europe: Cooperation and Competition between the European Community and NATO during the early 1980s', *European Review of History* (2017) 445-471; Patel and Weisbrode eds., *European Integration and the Atlantic Community in the 1980s* (2013); Mark Gilbert, *Cold War Europe* (2016).
[15] Author's interview with Luis Angel Caldera Aburto, Managua, Nicaragua, 24 August 2016.
[16] Reagan Library, Reagan's speech at the CFW Convention, 18 August 1980. Online at: https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sspeeches/major-speeches-1964-1989
[17] See, for instance, Jeane Kirkpatrick, 'Dictatorships and Double Standards', *Commentary* (1979) 34-45.
[18] Alejandro Bendaña Private Archive, Managua, Nicaragua (hereafter, ABPA), Political Section (Michael Clark) to Rita Delia Casco, 9 January 1981.
[19] Ibid.

d'affaires in Washington (and Miguel d'Escoto's brother), presented a similar analysis of Reagan's thinking to the Nicaraguan foreign ministry on 17 February 1981. Diplomacy and international relations were black-and-white issues to the new US administration, d'Escoto explained, and the neo-conservatives' primary foreign policy objective was to halt the global 'expansion of communism'.[20] The American president, in particular, based his foreign policy decisions on a simple slogan: 'if you are not with us, you are against us'.[21] As a result of this binary Cold War thinking, d'Escoto concluded, the new US administration perceived Nicaragua as 'a Soviet and Cuban satellite' and 'the communist spearhead in Central America'.[22] Reagan's worldview, which left no room for ideas of non-alignment and ideological pluralism, nor for the strategy of simultaneously appealing to both sides of the Iron Curtain, therefore had problematic implications for the FSLN's revolutionary diplomacy.

Sandinista diplomats also cautioned that Reagan's electoral victory was representative of a broader shift to the right in the inter-American system, threatening the Nicaraguan revolution. After participating in a session of the Organisation of American States (OAS) on 19-27 November 1980, Sandinista representatives Casimero Sotelo, Saúl Arana, and Ramón Meneses warned the *Ministerio del Exterior* that the 'present political conjuncture' in Latin America was highly 'unfavourable' for countries with progressive and socialist governments, most notably Nicaragua and Maurice Bishop's Grenada, concluding that '1981 will be a difficult year for our revolution'.[23] In particular, Nicaraguan officials observed, the electoral defeats of Jimmy Carter in the US and Michael Manley (a democratic socialist) in Jamaica 'have strengthened the reactionary positions' of 'fascist governments' in Latin America, such as the military regimes in Bolivia and Argentina.[24] Moreover, they continued, the growing confidence of anti-communists weakened the regional standing of 'progressive' countries that had previously adopted a friendly attitude towards the Nicaraguan revolution, such as Mexico, Ecuador and Panama.[25]

Yet, even though Nicaraguan officials were concerned about the impact of Reagan's election on the inter-American system, they also understood that details of US foreign policy were still being formulated and, consequently, could be influenced. Undoubtedly, Clark admitted on 9 January 1981, the new American president would refuse 'to supply any additional bilateral aid to Nicaragua'. Nevertheless, Nicaraguan officials were able to find a silver lining, and noted there was

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[20] ABPA, Francisco d'Escoto Brockmann to Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, 17 February 1981.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] ABPA, Casimero Sotelo, Saúl Arana, and Ramón Meneses to Miguel d'Escoto, Leonte Herdocia, Luis Vanegas, 27 November 1980.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

an important distinction to be made between 'active and passive' American hostility. Indeed, Clark continued, the Reagan administration's options ranged from 'a simple hands-off approach' to 'covert, and perhaps overt, support for group seeking to overthrow the Sandinista-led government'.[26] Nicaraguan diplomacy could steer the US administration towards the first option, he believed, as long as it ensured that 'no direct connection can be drawn between the foreign policy of the Soviet Union and that of Nicaragua'. Moreover, Reagan should be made aware that there would be a massive international and domestic 'backlash' against a direct US intervention in Central America.[27] Francisco d'Escoto adopted a similar position to Clark, encouraging the Nicaraguan government to propagate the revolution's message of mixed economy, democratic pluralism, and non-alignment more widely to 'seek the solidarity of the peoples of the world'.[28] Sotelo, Arana, and Meneses, too, argued for a more 'concrete' effort to build an international coalition in support of the revolution, stressing that this could 'block the interventionist and destabilising plans of imperialism and its allies'.[29]

Reagan's rise to power, therefore, prompted the Nicaraguan revolutionaries to renew their interest in solidarity activism. Reagan's hostile campaign rhetoric, in particular, Luis Caldera from the FSLN's *Departamento de Relaciones Internacionales* remembers, reminded Nicaraguan leaders that solidarity activists were 'important allies' of the *Revolución Popular Sandinista*, who could help derail the US administration's plans for Central America.[30] It was in this context, therefore, at the Managua conference in January 1981, that Sandinista leaders presented their new international strategy to the solidarity activists. The purpose of this meeting, Bayardo Arce proclaimed during the opening session, was to organise the defence of the endangered Nicaraguan revolution against the North American 'campaign of economic, military, and ideological aggression'.[31] To neutralise the imperialist threat, the Sandinista leaders called on solidarity committees to 'channel the maximum possible material assistance' to the Nicaraguan government so that reconstruction effort could continue. The FSLN also encouraged solidarity committees to 'publish widely the achievements and advances of the RPS to counteract the 'lies and falsehoods' spread by 'transnational press agencies and North American imperialism'.[32] Finally, and most importantly, the Sandinistas called for the establishment of a global anti-intervention movement to protest

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[26] ABPA, Memorandum, Political Section (Michael Clark) to Rita Delia Casco, 9 January 1981.
[27] Ibid.
[28] ABPA, Francisco d'Escoto Brockmann to Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, 17 February 1981.
[29] ABPA, Casimero Sotelo, Saúl Arana, and Ramón Meneses to Miguel d'Escoto, Leonte Herdocia, Luis Vanegas, 27 November 1980.
[30] Interview, Luis Angel Caldera Aburto, 24 August 2016.
[31] IISG, NKN, Box 17, Address by Commander Bayardo Arce Castaño, 26-31 January 1981.
[32] IISG, NKN, Box 17, Report by UK representatives of international solidarity conference in Managua, 1981; Address by Commander Bayardo Arce Castaño, 26-31 January 1981.

against Reagan's Central America policies. Solidarity committees would form the backbone of the anti-intervention front, but the objective was to build a broad and influential network of supporters. To this end, the FSLN encouraged solidarity committees to mobilise other progressive organisations for their cause, such as church groups, the peace movement, trade unions, left-wing political parties, and human rights organisations.[33]

The FSLN also set up several new initiatives to influence international public opinion in 1981. The Sandinista news agency *Agencia Nueva Nicaragua* (ANN), which was linked to the DRI, provided solidarity committees, politicians, and journalists with updates about the latest developments in Nicaragua.[34] Moreover, on 5 July 1981, the FSLN published the first issue of *Barricada Internacional*, a newspaper that specifically targeted solidarity committees in Europe and the Americas. The purpose of *Barricada Internacional*, the editors explained, was to provide solidarity committees with a new 'weapon' to defend the revolution against the US-coordinated 'campaign of misinformation and misrepresentation'.[35] Finally, the Jesuit *Instituto Histórico Centroaméricano* (Central American Historical Institute) in Managua, which targeted audiences in Europe and North America, published a monthly bulletin with in-depth analyses of the 'political, social, and economic situation' in Nicaragua.[36] These publications went a considerable way to addressing the lack of information solidarity groups had faced the previous year. However, despite these improvements, activists in Europe remained critical of the quality of the materials they received from Nicaragua. In November 1981, for instance, West German and Dutch activists told Luis Caldera that the – rather superficial and propagandistic – *Barricada* was of 'limited usefulness'. It certainly did not meet the 'requirements' for effective solidarity work, they added, as committees needed extensive and multi-sided information to mobilise Western European audiences. In addition to ANN and *Barricada Internacional*, therefore, activists demanded copies of *El Nuevo Diario*, which they believed had a more analytical approach to the revolutionary process, as well as opposition newspaper *La Prensa.*[37]

At the same time as criticising foreign intervention in Central America, Sandinista *comandantes* and solidarity activists used the Managua meeting in January 1981 to publicly align themselves with the armed struggle of the FMLN guerrillas in neighbouring El Salvador. Indeed, the official slogan of the conference was 'El Salvador Vencerá' [El Salvador shall be victorious].[38]

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[33] IISG, NKN, Box 72, Records of European solidarity conference, Paris, April 1981; Box 17, Report by UK representatives of international solidarity conference in Managua, 1981.
[34] IISG, NKN, Box 17-18, Records of European solidarity conference, Geneva, November 1981.
[35] *Barricada Internacional*, 5 July 1981.
[36] *Revista Envío*, June 1981.
[37] IISG, INW, Übersetzung der in den Arbeitskommissionen erreichten und in der Vollversammlung verabschiedeten Beschlüsse und Empfehlungen, date unknown.
[38] NSC, *Nicaragua Today* (1981).

In the conference's opening speech, Bayardo Arce emphasised the similarities between the struggles in Nicaragua and El Salvador. The people of these two Central American countries were fighting the same battle, the *comandante* argued, underlining that the only difference was that Nicaragua was at a more advanced stage of its revolutionary process.[39] In the conference's final resolution, all participants declared their 'unrestricted support and recognition of the just and heroic struggle being waged today by the people of El Salvador to win their freedom' and condemned the efforts of US imperialism to frustrate 'the legitimate aspirations of our Salvadoran brothers and sisters'.[40]

The focus on El Salvador during the solidarity conference is representative of the Sandinistas' conviction that, despite the importance of diplomacy and transnational activism for the revolution's survival, Nicaragua would be best served by a second revolutionary triumph in Central America. Indeed, Sandinista support for the FMLN went much further than declarations of solidarity. Even though FSLN leaders at the time denied that the Nicaraguan government was providing the Salvadoran guerrillas with arms and political support, historians now agree that the Sandinistas helped with the preparations for what was supposed to be the final battle against the anti-communist regime, which the FMLN launched on the eve of Reagan's inauguration on 10 January 1981. With that objective, between October 1980 and January 1981, weapons from Vietnam, Ethiopia, Angola, and the Eastern bloc were shipped clandestinely via Cuba and Nicaragua to the Salvadoran insurgents.[41]

In hindsight, the Sandinistas' clandestine support for the FMLN, which was hard to align with the anti-intervention rhetoric adopted with regards to the US, might seem like a miscalculation. Not only did the final offensive in January 1981 fail to bring about revolutionary change before the US administration started to channel massive amounts of military aid to the Salvadoran government, it also provided Reagan and his allies with a powerful excuse to launch a counterinsurgency campaign against the Nicaraguan government and cut off economic aid. Yet, at a time when regional anti-communists were growing more confident and powerful, this was a gamble the FSLN was willing to make. Sandinista *comandante* Jaime Wheelock, for example, told Western European solidarity activists in Managua that the position of the Nicaraguan revolution would be much stronger once the situation in El Salvador was 'resolved in favour of the

[39] IISG, NKN, Box 17, Address by Commander Bayardo Arce Castaño, Managua, 26-31 January 1981.
[40] IISG, NKN, Box 17, Text of final resolution Managua conference, 26-31 January 1981.
[41] See, for instance, Andrea Oñate-Madrazo, *Insurgent Diplomacy: El Salvador's Transnational Revolution, 1970-1992* (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2016) and Kruijt, *Guerrillas* (2008).

revolutionaries', predicting that El Salvador would become Nicaragua's most important regional partner.[42]

The FSLN also refused to keep its distance from Soviet Union, even though it knew close relations with the Eastern bloc would provide the new US administration with another reason to attack the Nicaraguan revolution. In part, the Sandinistas' decision to openly collaborate with socialist countries stemmed from a desire to demonstrate Nicaragua's independence from the United States. The US administration could 'no longer dictate' Nicaraguan foreign policy, MINEX official Alejandro Bendaña reflected in an interview with magazine *Revista Envío* in 1989, and it was 'an expression of our sovereignty' to establish diplomatic relations with the socialist bloc after the revolution's triumph.[43] During the Carter years, however, the relationship between Nicaragua and the Soviet Union had little substance besides friendly political declarations, and the Sandinista government received virtually no financial and military support from the socialist bloc.[44]

The rise to power of Ronald Reagan changed this, as it convinced Sandinista leaders that Nicaragua needed Soviet arms to defend itself against a forthcoming US military intervention. According to Luis Caldera, the FSLN perceived Reagan's campaign rhetoric as a prelude to a US-coordinated military campaign against the Nicaraguan revolution.[45] Former junta member Sergio Ramírez, too, remembers that Reagan's hostile language convinced the FSLN that 'we had to prepare for the worst' and 'preparing for the worst meant assuming risks in advance'.[46] Thus, despite the obvious risks attached to cooperating with the socialist bloc, the Nicaraguan government – realising that Western Europe was unlikely to satisfy its need for weaponry – saw no other option than to turn the Soviets and their allies for increased military assistance. And since Soviet leaders shared the Sandinistas' concern regarding the growing power of 'imperialist and other reactionary circles', as East German officials reported in 1981, they responded positively to the Nicaraguan request, agreeing 'to supply weapons and other military equipment to the armed forces of Nicaragua'.[47]

To prevent international isolation, Managua and Moscow were careful to hide the full extent of the Soviet Union's assistance to Nicaragua, making sure weapons were predominantly delivered by third countries.[48] In 1981, Algeria transported Soviet weaponry to Nicaragua,

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[42] IISG, NKN, Box 17, Verslag Encuentro Managua, 26-31 January 1981.
[43] Interview, Alejandro Bendaña, *Revista Envío* 97 (1989).
[44] CREST, Soviet Bloc and Cuban Military and Economic Assistance to Nicaragua, 27 January 1988
[45] Interview, Luis Angel Caldera Aburto, 24 August 2016.
[46] Ramírez, *Adiós Muchachos* (2012) 98.
[47] Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv, Berlin, Germany, (hereafter, SAPMO), DY30/69777, Vermerk über ein Gespräch im Staatlichen Komitee für wirtschafliche Zusammenarbeit der UdSSR zu Fragen spezieller Lieferungen nach Nikaragua, 25 January 1982.
[48] Ibid.

including tanks, ammunition, and rifles. For the Sandinistas' international image, obtaining military equipment from a non-aligned country like Algeria was much less controversial than receiving weapons directly from the Soviet Union.[49] Indeed, on 19 July 1981, Christopher Dickey from *The Washington Post* speculated that military aid from Arab states such as Algeria and Libya 'may help [Nicaragua] survive without aligning with either of the superpowers'.[50] Unfortunately for the FSLN, they lost this advantage in 1982 when the Algerian government, possibly due to US pressure, refused to ship any additional arms to Nicaragua and Moscow asked the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to take over this 'precarious task'.[51]

In sum, as the international environment grew more hostile in late 1980 and early 1981, Sandinista leaders tried to strike a balance between, on the one hand, not antagonising potential enemies and, on the other hand, pre-emptively strengthening the revolution. The obvious problem was, of course, that the steps that needed to be taken to defend the revolution, such as obtaining Soviet arms and supporting Salvadoran guerrillas, played right into the hands of the revolution's adversaries, who were looking for reasons to discredit the Nicaraguan regime.

To prevent regional anti-communists from using Nicaraguan ties to the FMLN and the Eastern bloc as an excuse to intervene, the FSLN therefore proposed the creation of a transnational anti-intervention movement. This network of solidarity activists, left-wing politicians, and progressive organisations, as the next section demonstrates, delegitimised US foreign policy towards Central America by presenting the revolutionary wars in Central America as a David and Goliath situation, in which young and idealistic Nicaraguan and Salvadoran guerrillas were fighting against a powerful and aggressive United States. In doing so, the FSLN altered the power balance between the two adversaries, strengthening the position of the Sandinista government in the face of an isolated Reagan administration.

Defending the Revolution

The solidarity conference in Managua on 26-31 January 1981 convinced Western European activists that the Sandinista revolution was under attack. Nicaragua was 'a country under siege, with a people committed to defend the gains of the revolution at all costs against foreign and domestic aggression', delegates from the London-based Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign reported.[52] In addition to citing hostile actions by the incoming Reagan administration, which immediately

[49] Klaus Storkmann, 'East German Military Aid to the Sandinista Government of Nicaragua, 1979–1990', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16 (2014) 64.
[50] *Washington Post*, 18 July 1981.
[51] Storkmann, 'East German Military Aid', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16 (2014) 64.
[52] IISG, NKN, Box 17, Report by UK representatives of international solidarity conference in Managua, 1981.

suspended the remaining $15 of Jimmy Carter's $75 million aid package to Nicaragua, British activists were shocked to notice that the number of 'border attacks' by former members of Somoza's National Guard had 'escalated frighteningly' since September 1980.[53] Dutch participants made similar observations, noting that Europeans had wrongly assumed that the Sandinista revolution 'was secured' because the US considered its existence 'a fait accompli'.[54] In Managua, the Dutch delegation wrote, we learned that the opposite was true; Nicaraguans were rightly worried about US hostility, specifically by the 'threat of a direct invasion' and the 'possibility of an economic boycott'.[55]

Inspired by the grandeur and political message of the Managua conference, Western European solidarity activist responded enthusiastically to the Sandinistas' call for a broad anti-intervention front. At the fifth West European solidarity conference, which took place in Paris in April 1981, representatives from national committees compared experiences and coordinated future campaign strategies with Raúl Guerra. The key objective of the anti-intervention movement, they agreed, should be to alert Western European audiences and governments to the danger of US military interference. This meant that the public narrative of the Nicaragua solidarity movement had to change. Instead of focusing on the revolution's accomplishments, such as literacy campaigns and health care reforms, solidarity committees would now primarily concentrate on the long and violent history of US interventions in Central America and the Caribbean, demonstrating that Reagan's foreign policy towards the Nicaraguan revolution should be understood in the context of US imperialism. To bring this message across in a convincing manner, the solidarity movement decided to collaborate more closely with El Salvador and Guatemala solidarity groups, aiming to unite all these individual Central America committees into a transnational anti-intervention network.[56]

Undoubtedly, the decision to join forces with El Salvador and Guatemala committees was partly motivated by Sandinista concerns about the growing strength of the El Salvador movement. Even though the FSLN and FMLN were allies in the Central American context, there was also an element of rivalry to their relationship since the two revolutionary organisations competed for public recognition and sympathy in the international arena. In particular, at a time when the Salvadoran civil war received extensive media coverage, the FSLN and its allies struggled to hold the attention of Western European audiences. In February 1982, for instance, West German

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[53] Ibid.
[54] IISG, NKN, Box 17, Verslag Encuentro Managua, 26-31 January 1981.
[55] Ibid.
[56] IISG, NKN, Box 17-18, Verslag van het vijfde congres van de Europese solidariteitsbeweging in Parijs, 18-20 April 1981.

solidarity activists noted with concern that the guerrilla war in El Salvador caused people to lose interest in the Nicaraguan revolution. It was simply more interesting and romantic, one activist concluded, to join a solidarity movement supporting 'people still fighting for their freedom' than to work for a committee that supports revolutionaries who are already in power, as was the case in Nicaragua.[57] A similar issue was discussed at a meeting of several Central America solidarity groups in London, when NSC representatives expressed concern that the Nicaraguan revolutionaries would be forgotten since the struggle in El Salvador was constantly 'in the headlines'.[58] At the Paris conference, Raúl Guerra, too, emphasised that activists should keep working for the Nicaraguan revolution alone, and not switch allegiance to 'other committees'.[59] The best way to assist national liberation movements in Central America, Guerra insisted, is by 'defending' and 'publishing information' about the Sandinista process.[60] By explicitly linking the survival of revolutionary Nicaragua to the struggle in El Salvador, therefore, the FSLN and solidarity activists were doing more than expressing genuine support; they were simultaneously making a move to harness the media attention on El Salvador for their own purposes.[61] Meanwhile, solidarity activists largely ignored the situation in Guatemala, where government forces and anti-communists death squads engaged in widescale repression and genocide against the country's indigenous population, which they accused of supporting the guerrillas.[62]

For the FSLN, the new campaign strategy worked remarkably well. In 1981-1982, Central America solidarity groups set up a wide range of anti-intervention events, such as concerts, lecture series, demonstrations, art shows, and charity runs. On 9 April 1981, more than seven hundred solidarity activists gathered in front of the US embassy in London to protest against the visit of US Secretary of State Alexander Haig.[63] And in the FRG, activists set up a successful campaign that called on West German people to boycott coffee produced by big 'transnational companies' in El Salvador and buy Nicaraguan coffee instead.[64] Solidarity committees also published monthly newsletters, translations of Sandinista speeches, and books on the history of US interventionism

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[57] IISG, INW, Report of meeting of Germany solidarity committees in Wolfsburg, 27-28 February 1982.
[58] PHM, Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Archive (hereafter, NSC), Box 77, Meeting to discuss coordination of Central America Work in Britain, 3 April 1981.
[59] IISG, NKN, Box 17-18, Verslag van het vijfde congres van de Europese solidariteitsbeweging in Parijs, 18-20 April 1981.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Interview, Luis Caldera, 24 August 2016.
[62] We still know little about the (lack of) solidarity with Guatemala in Western Europe. See, Joren Jansens, 'The quest for solidarity without victory: constraining the Guatemalan guerrilla (1979-1996)', Paper presented at *International solidarity movements in the Low Countries during the long twentieth century. New perspectives and themes*, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 25-27 May 2016.
[63] NSC, Summary of activities, February-April 1981.
[64] IISG, INW, Informe de la Coordinadora Nacional en la RFA 'Informationsbüro Nicaragua e.V. Wuppertal' sobre el trabajo de solidaridad realizado en la RFA entre abril e octubre 1981.

in Central America, such as the magazine *Nicaragua Aktuell* and a book entitled *Reagan, Haig, and the Destabilisation of Nicaragua*.[65] Moreover, at the initiative of Klaas Wellinga and Hans Langenberg from the *Nicaragua Komitee Nederland*, in the spring of 1982, a group of Sandinista officials, representatives of the Salvadoran and Guatemalan guerrilla movements, and the Nicaraguan band El Pancasán toured through thirteen Western European countries, visiting cities such as Utrecht, Paris, Rome, London, Frankfurt, Vienna, Copenhagen, and Madrid. In these cities, the revolutionary diplomats of the so-called 'anti-intervention caravan' were hosted by local solidarity activists, who were also tasked with organising a public programme of exhibitions, parades, and demonstrations.[66] The committees in Spain and Belgium had done a particularly good job, Wellinga reported, noting that at least seven thousand people participated in the demonstration in Bilbao and more than three hundred cars joined the anti-intervention caravan when it drove past parliament in Brussels.[67]

To be sure, Sandinistas and their Western European allies perceived domestic opponents of the FSLN, such as former junta member Alfonso Robelo and opposition newspaper *La Prensa*, to be accomplices of US imperialism. As Raúl Guerra explained to the West European activists in April 1981, it was 'no coincidence' that from the moment Reagan had assumed office, domestic opposition forces in Nicaragua had started to be more successful in their campaign to 'destabilise, boycott, and sabotage' the revolutionary process. The opposition strikes and manifestations were all examples of 'external' aggression, Guerra asserted, and the Nicaraguan people would not accept these – or any other – types of attacks against the Sandinista revolution.[68] Similar to US neo-conservatives' black and white understanding of international affairs, then, the FSLN and their allies presented West European audiences with a simplistic narrative in which you could either side with the RPS or with the Reagan administration, largely ignoring the complexities on the ground in Nicaragua.

From the Sandinista perspective, this was an excellent strategy, since few West Europeans wanted to be associated with the US president. To a significant extent, then, the success of the anti-intervention movement was due to the ability of the FSLN and its allies to capitalise on the strong anti-Reagan sentiment that existed in Western European countries at the time.[69] In the early 1980s, many Europeans saw Reagan as a reckless, hawkish, and arrogant president, willing to risk

[65] NSC, Summary of activities, February-April 1981; Summary of activities, May-October 1981.
[66] IISG, NKN, Box 53, Hans Langenberg, Informe sobre la caravana anti-intervencionista, date unknown.
[67] IISG, INW, Letter, Hans Langenberg to European solidarity committees, 15 December 1981.
[68] IISG, NKN, Box 17-18, Summary of Speech by Raúl Guerra, 18-20 Paris 1981.
[69] TNA, FCO 98/1127, London to Coreu, 30 October 1981.

a nuclear war and sacrifice global security for the purpose of defeating the Soviet Union.[70] The planned stationing of cruise and Pershing missiles in West European countries, in particular, was opposed by large numbers of activists, students, church groups, and politicians. Millions of these anti-nuclear groups united in a transnational peace movement, which demanded that Western European governments halt the deployment of new missiles, called for nuclear disarmament, and attacked the US administration for fanning the flames of the Cold War. Nicaragua solidarity activists smartly played on these sentiments by arguing that the militarisation of Western Europe and US foreign policy towards Central America were two sides of the same coin.[71]

Yet, depending on the country, the domestic context was not always favourable for anti-intervention activism. Britain, in particular, was considered a difficult place for solidarity work at the start of the 1980s. At the 1981 Paris conference, the NSC reported that the 'British population does not seem very interested in Latin America' and that, therefore, Nicaragua solidarity committees consisted predominantly of Latin Americans.[72] The visit of the anti-intervention caravan to Britain, too, was considered a disappointment, as the NSC had shifted all responsibility for the organisation to a local committee in Sheffield, which simply did not manage to attract large crowds or provide acceptable housing for the Central America representatives.[73] The NSC came up with several explanations for the lack of British interest in Central American solidarity activism, citing unemployment and financial crises, factionalism and splits within the Labour Party, as well as Margaret Thatcher's radical conservativism and alliance with the US.[74] One year later, however, the situation had improved. As one British diplomat noted on 1 April 1982, 'public interest here in Nicaragua continues to grow, although it remains overshadowed by the extensive media coverage given to bloodshed in El Salvador'.[75]

The relative weakness of the Labour Party, which underwent a period of intense rivalry and internal splits following Thatcher's election in 1979, might well have contributed to the difficulties of the British solidarity movement. Elsewhere, the strength of Western European social democrats and their support for the Nicaraguan revolution provided the FSLN with visibility, political backing, and legitimacy. In particular, the Socialist International, by founding the so-called International Committee for the Defence of the Nicaraguan Revolution, endorsed the Sandinista argument that the revolution was under siege. This committee was established at a SI congress in

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[70] Ludlow, 'The Unnoticed Apogee of Atlanticism?' in Patel and Weisbrode, eds., *European Integration and the Atlantic Community* (2013) 18-19.
[71] IISG, NKN, Box 17-18, Records of European solidarity conference, Geneva, November 1981.
[72] IISG, NKN, Box 72, Records of European solidarity conference in Paris, April 1981.
[73] IISG, INW, Box 53, Hans Langenberg, Informe sobre la caravana anti-intervencionista, date unknown.
[74] NSC, Summary of activities, May-October 1981.
[75] TNA, FCO 99/1265, FCO to Michael Brown, 1 April 1982.

November 1980, after European and Latin American social democrats expressed concern that Reagan's election would cause further instability, civil war, and polarisation in Central America. The goals of the new 'Nicaragua Solidarity Committee', the SI announced in a press release in December 1980, were 'to avert foreign intervention in Nicaragua's internal affairs' and 'to spread information about the country and its democratisation process'.[76] Its members were prominent socialists and social democrats from Europe and Latin America, such as Mario Soares (Portugal), Willy Brandt (FRG), Olof Palme (Sweden), Carlos Andres Perez (Venezuela), Joop den Uyl (the Netherlands), François Mitterrand (France), Bruno Kreisky (Austria), and Felipe González (Spain), the chairman.[77] Michael Foot, who was elected British Labour leader on 10 November 1980, also agreed to join the committee in March 1981, after meeting with Miguel d'Escoto in London.[78]

The Sandinistas greatly valued the support of the SI. Indeed, the headline of first issue of *Barricada Internacional* was: 'Internacional Socialista: Nicaragua; esperanza para América Latina' [Socialist International: Nicaragua; hope for Latin America].[79] The fact that the world's most prominent social democrats had created an official committee to defend the Sandinista revolution strengthened Nicaragua's image as a democratic and non-aligned country and, by extension, delegitimised the foreign policy objectives of the Reagan administration. On 6 December 1980, during a committee meeting in Washington, for example, Swedish politician Pierre Schori told Sandinista representatives Miguel d'Escoto and Julio López that the SI was trying to 'get the Americans to learn to live with revolutionaries and national liberation movements'.[80] Therefore, the SI publicly expressed its 'concern with the growing tensions' in Central America, which, the press release noted, were greatly intensified by 'North American declarations about a possible intervention'.[81] Moreover, when Reagan cut off aid to Nicaragua in January 1981, Bernt Carlsson, the Secretary-General of the Socialist International, described it as an act that 'illustrates the linkage of the new US administration with the extreme right-wing forces in Latin America'.[82] Finally, the Sandinistas knew, the support of the SI was important for the Nicaraguan economy, as Western

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[76] IISG, Socialist International Archive (SI), Nicaragua 1980, Press Release No. 21/80, 6 December 1980.
[77] Ibid.
[78] NSC, *Nicaragua Today* 4; For more on the SI, see Di Donato, 'The Cold War and Socialist Identity', *Contemporary European History* 24 (2015) 196 and Bern Rother's chapter 'Between East and West- social democracy as an alternative to communism and capitalism: Willy Brandt's strategy as president of the Socialist International' in Leopoldo Nuti ed., *The Crisis of Détente in Europe* (2009).
[79] *Barricada Internacional*, 5 July 1981.
[80] IISG, SI, Nicaragua 1980, Pierre Schori to the members of the International Committee for the Defence of the Nicaraguan Revolution, 18 December 1980.
[81] IISG, SI, Nicaragua 1981, Reunión Comité de Defensa de la Revolucion Nicaragüense de la IS, 27 November 1981.
[82] IISG, SI, Nicaragua 1981, Bernt Carlsson to Willy Brandt, February 1981.

European social democrats lobbied governments to provide the Nicaraguan junta with more financial and material aid.[83]

Behind the scenes, however, the alliance between Sandinistas and social democrats was not as harmonious as it appeared at the time. While the FSLN and the SI were both highly critical of the Reagan administration, the two organisations did not fully trust one another. On the one hand, Sandinista leaders, as Sergio Ramírez writes in his memoirs, always kept social democratic parties at a certain distance since they considered them to be part of the capitalist, and therefore US-dominated, system. At the end of the day, the FSLN believed, the SI would always align itself with the United States.[84] On the other hand, in the early 1980s, Western European social democrats grew increasingly suspicious of Sandinista claims that they were dedicated to democracy. Schori, for instance, told López and d'Escoto that he hoped that national liberation movements such as the FSLN would 'learn to live with an opposition'.[85] Willy Brandt, too, feared that the Sandinistas were using their relationship with the SI to publicly justify controversial domestic policies, such as the dismantling of political pluralism and the imprisoning of opposition figures. 'I believe it cannot be acceptable for our friends from Nicaragua to claim sanction by way of our association for everything which they deem to be appropriate in their country', Brandt wrote to González on 8 June 1981, urging his Spanish colleague to make clear that the SI's commitment was dependent on how 'the leadership of the FSLN in Nicaragua defines its continuing political direction'.[86]

Despite the growing distrust between social democrats and Sandinistas, the FSLN succeeded in mobilising its Western European allies for the defence of the revolution in the early 1980s, precisely because they were asking for defensive support rather than potentially more controversial backing for their revolutionary programme. The solidarity movement, in particular, took up the anti-intervention cause with great enthusiasm and success. Ironically, then, the electoral victory of Reagan gave the solidarity activists a new sense of purpose, infusing the movement with enthusiasm and energy. Indeed, Reagan's public image as a dangerous Cold War hawk provided pro-FSLN solidarity groups with a powerful argument in favour of the Nicaraguan revolution, namely that the unpopular US president was trying to destroy it.

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[83] Ibid.
[84] Ramírez, *Adiós Muchachos* (2012) 94-95.
[85] IISG, SI, Nicaragua 1980, Pierre Schori to the members of the International Committee for the Defence of the Nicaraguan Revolution, 18 December 1980.
[86] Wilson Center Digital Archive, Letter by the President of the Socialist International, Brandt, to the Chairman of the Committee of the SI for Defence of the Revolution in Nicaragua, González, 2 June 1981.

While it was relatively easy for the Sandinista *comandantes* to convince their Western European supporters of the necessity of an anti-intervention movement, they were still confronted with the more difficult task of influencing state policy. The position of Western European governments, Sandinistas believed, could be a 'crucial counterweight' to the US administration's dangerous plans for Central America.[87] In particular, they calculated that Reagan was unlikely to launch a military intervention against the Nicaraguan revolution without the support of his European allies. Ramírez, therefore, told Dutch journalists from *Het Vrije Volk* that the Reagan administration was virtually isolated, since it was 'obvious that Europe is pursuing an independent foreign policy with regards to Central American and the Caribbean'.[88] Moreover, Sandinista officials could use the fact that they maintained good relations with Western European governments as evidence of Nicaragua's non-alignment in the global Cold War, simultaneously demonstrating to the international community and, crucially, to US members of Congress, that Reagan's accusations regarding Nicaragua's links to the Soviet Union were wrong. In *Barricada Internacional*, for example, Sergio Ramírez' trip to Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria, and Spain in April and May 1982 was described as an example of 'the willingness of the Sandinista People's Revolution to maintain good relations with all those countries that respect our sovereignty and independence'.[89]

In 1981-1982, a key objective of the FSLN was to convince politicians and diplomats in Western Europe to pursue a foreign policy towards Central America that neutralised Reagan's anti-communist offensive in the region. To persuade Western European countries to intervene in Central American affairs, the FSLN strategically played on what they perceived as the ambition of EC leaders to be more present on the global stage and, more specifically, the desire of Western Europeans to move beyond the Cold War conflict and focus instead on the socio-economic causes of Central America's revolutionary upheaval. In meetings with Western European diplomats and politicians, Nicaraguan officials argued that the Europeans, due to their close relationship with the US, could prevent Central America from being swept up by Cold War dynamics.[90] Francisco d'Escoto, for instance, told British officials on 13 January 1982, that Reagan was driving regional instability, as he tried to 'weaken' the Nicaraguan government by 'restricting credit' and allowing 'hostile' anti-communist groups (also known as contras) to 'train on US soil'.[91] Due to its 'considerable influence' on US foreign policy, d'Escoto claimed, Britain could 'ensure there was

[87] Ramírez, *Adiós Muchachos* (2012) 95.
[88] *Het Vrije Volk*, 5 May 1982.
[89] Porfirio R. Solórzano ed., The Nirex Collection, Volume IV, Document 711; *Barricada Internacional,* 16 May 1982.
[90] *Amigoe*, 6 May 1982.
[91] TNA, FCO 99/1269, Call by Francisco d'Escoto on Day, 13 January 1982.

no aggression against Nicaragua'.[92] Miguel d'Escoto presented a similar narrative to the West German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher on 2 March 1981, contrasting the militaristic Central America policy of the US administration, which he described as a 'political fantasy', to the much more constructive and reasonable position of the West German government.[93]

In addition to flattering Western European leaders by telling them that the EC had the power, skills, and responsibility to restrain the Reagan administration in Central America – and at the same time as exploring the possibility of securing more assistance in military equipment from the Soviet bloc – Sandinista leaders continued to encourage the view that European political and financial support could keep the FSLN non-aligned and the Soviet Union at bay. During a visit to Paris in July 1982, for instance, Sandinista *comandante* Daniel Ortega argued that 'true non-alignment depended on the aid and support non-aligned countries could get from the West'.[94] Indeed, Francisco d'Escoto explained, it 'would be absurd' for Nicaragua rely on the Eastern bloc if they received 'financial credits' from the EC.[95] Moreover, on 13 May 1982, Nicaraguan labour minister Virgilio Godoy Reyes told FRG *Außenminister* Genscher that the growing 'pessimism' in Western Europe about the revolution was 'driving Nicaragua into the arms of communism'.[96] Godoy argued, for example, that when Chancellor Helmut Schmidt did not have time to meet with Sergio Ramírez in April 1982, it 'immediately rained invitations from the East'.[97] Western European visitors to Nicaragua, too, such as *Bundestag* representative Manfred Coppik (a member of the Green Party) in August 1981, left the country with the impression that the Sandinista government greatly valued European support, since it ensured that Nicaragua could remain independent from both of the Cold War superpowers.[98]

The Sandinistas achieved several diplomatic successes in Western Europe in the early 1980s, most notably in France and the Netherlands. In July 1982, Daniel Ortega visited Paris, where he was warmly welcomed by the new socialist president Mitterrand, who had assumed office on 5 May 1981, and his foreign minister Claude Cheysson. The worst error France could make, Cheysson reportedly said after the meeting, was to 'follow the policy adopted by the United States of trying to isolate Nicaragua'.[99] Crucially, in Paris, the Sandinistas entered into secret negotiations

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[92] TNA, FCO 99/1270, Call by Francisco d'Escoto on the Onslow, 29 June 1982.
[93] AA, Zwischenarchiv 127457, Vermerk: Arbeitsbesuch des AM von Nicaragua, Pater Miguel d'Escoto, 3 March 1982.
[94] TNA, FCO 99/1267, Duncan to FCO, 21 July 1982.
[95] TNA, FCO 99/768, Call by Francisco d'Escoto on Luce, 11 November 1981.
[96] AAPD, 1982, Document, 140, Gespräch des Bundesministers Genscher mit dem nicaraguanische Arbeitsminister Godoy, 13 May 1982.
[97] Ibid.
[98] AA, Zwischenarchiv 127453, Managua to AA, 24 August 1981.
[99] The Nirex Collection, Volume IV, Document 635, *Revista Envío*, 14 August 1982.

with Mitterrand's government about possible arm supplies to Nicaragua. When *Le Monde* broke the story in January 1982, the French government declared that its decision to provide Nicaragua with 'non-offensive' weapons was motivated by the desire to not let 'third-world countries become too exclusively dependent on the Soviet bloc'.[100] Moreover, in April 1982, the Dutch authorities gave a warm welcome to Sergio Ramírez and his delegation. In addition to being invited to dinner with Queen Beatrix, the Nicaraguan representatives had conversations with prime minister Dries van Agt, foreign minister Max van der Stoel, and labour politician Joop den Uyl.[101]

Despite these propaganda victories, Sandinistas quickly realised they were no longer the only ones actively trying to shape Western European public opinion and foreign policy towards Central America.[102] Immediately after assuming power, Reagan and his allies, frustrated with what they perceived as the misguided views of Western Europeans, had started to wage a similar battle for European hearts and minds, albeit on the opposite side. Like the Sandinistas, US officials calculated that the position of Western European governments and politicians could tilt the international balance in favour of either the Central American revolutionaries or the Reagan administration. This was not only the case due to the high levels of Western European financial support for Nicaragua, which allowed the FSLN to enact its domestic programme and stay in power, but also – at a political level – because European voices could provide the Reagan administration with the legitimacy and international support it needed to launch a military intervention, possibly even swaying Congressional votes. On 11 February 1981, therefore, at a National Security Council (NSC) meeting, Haig complained that 'few, especially in Europe' seemed to grasp the high levels of Cuban 'involvement' in revolutionary Nicaragua. Caspar Weinberger, the Secretary of Defense, agreed that this was problematic, arguing that 'we must get to the Europeans and especially the Germans'.[103]

To bring the European allies in line, on 16 February 1981, Reagan's special ambassador Lawrence Eagleburger departed on a mission to several Western European cities, including The Hague, London, Bonn, Paris, and Brussels.[104] In meetings with European officials, Eagleburger showed them 'evidence of high-level Nicaraguan involvement in the delivery of arms and other forms of support to guerrillas in El Salvador'.[105] These weapons, Eagleburger stressed, came from the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Vietnam, which implied that the revolutionary war in El Salvador was

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[100] TNA, FCO, 99/1267, Press Release, French Embassy in London, 12 January 1982.
[101] TNA, FCO 99/1275, Adams to FCO, 14 May 1982.
[102] ABPA, Francisco d'Escoto Brockmann to Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, 17 February 1981.
[103] Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA, USA (hereafter, Reagan Library), Executive Secretariat Meeting Files C1-10, National Security Council Meeting. Subject: Central America, 11 February 1981.
[104] AAPD, 1981, Document 49, Gespräch des Bundesministers Genscher mit dem designierter Abteilungsleiter im amerikanischen Außenministerium, Eagleburger, 20 February 1981.
[105] TNA, FCO 99/792, Records of meeting, Eagleburger and Gilmour, 19 February 1981.

not, as many Europeans believed, a struggle for social justice but rather a Cold War conflict, and consequently a threat to US security.[106] When British prime minister Margaret Thatcher visited the White House on 26 February 1981, Reagan made a similar point, noting that 'Central and South America had become part of the predominant international problem facing the West today' and that the Soviet Union - 'the villain in this area' - was responsible for this.[107] To fight Soviet and Cuban interventionism in Central America, the US administration specifically asked EC leaders to *publicly* align with Reagan's position. Indeed, Eagleburger asked the British government for 'public support for American efforts to back the Salvador Government', 'some public indication of UK disapproval of clandestine arms supplies to the insurgents, and 'public support for US endeavours to bring arms supply to a halt'.[108] In Bonn, too, Eagleburger requested from Genscher 'a public condemnation by the FRG of the weapon transfers to El Salvador', as well as an acknowledgement of the 'involvement' of the Eastern bloc in the region.[109]

While the prevention of a revolutionary victory in El Salvador was at the centre of Reagan's foreign policy agenda, US diplomacy also tried to prevent Nicaragua from receiving financial, political, and military support from Western European countries. Reagan's meetings with Mitterrand in March and June 1982, Haig noted with delight, resulted in 'a delay in French arms shipments to Nicaragua' that might – and did, as it later turned out – continue 'indefinitely'.[110] To convince EC leaders to cut off aid to Nicaragua, US diplomats portrayed the country as a Cuban-style dystopia. Nicaragua 'was getting more totalitarian all the time', Haig told British foreign secretary Peter Carrington on 21 September 1981, adding that 'arms were coming in at a level far beyond legitimate defence needs'.[111] US diplomats also accused the Nicaraguan regime of committing gross human rights violations, going as far as to describe the Sandinistas' forced resettlement of the indigenous populations on the Atlantic Coast as an 'example of genocide'.[112] George Shultz, too, who had replaced Haig as US Secretary of State, told Genscher on 7 December 1982, El Salvador 'clearly' had a much better human rights record than Nicaragua.[113]

As a result of Reagan's offensive, Nicaraguan officials in Western Europe increasingly found themselves on the defensive. Instead of discussing the danger of a US military intervention or the

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[106] Nationaal Archief, The Hague, The Netherlands (hereafter, NA), Inventarisnummer 2.02.05.02, Omslag 3232, Notulen MR, 20 February 1981.
[107] TNA, PREM 19/600, Record of meeting, Thatcher and Reagan, 26 February 1981.
[108] TNA, FCO 99/792, Records of meeting, Eagleburger and Gilmour, 19 February 1981.
[109] AAPD, 1981, Document 49, Gespräch des Bundesministers Genscher mit dem designierter Abteilungsleiter im amerikanischen Außenministerium, Eagleburger, 20 February 1981.
[110] Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC, RAC, Box 3, Haig to Reagan, 3 June 1982.
[111] TNA, FCO 99/769, Record of meeting, Carrington and Haig, 23 September 1981, FCO 99/769, NA.
[112] TNA, FCO 51/494, CIA Research Department, Human Rights in Nicaragua: The Case of the Miskito Indians, September 1982.
[113] AAPD, 1982, Document 332, Gespräch zwischen Genscher und Shultz, 7 December 1982.

possibility of receiving extra financial aid from EC countries, Sandinista officials had to respond to accusations that they were violating human rights, supporting the FMLN, and creating a one-party state. 'How can we export revolution, when we don't have the money, or the arms, or the men - even if we want to!', Nicaraguan ambassador to the United Nations (UN) Javier Chamorro exclaimed.[114] Nicaragua was not providing any military assistance to FMLN guerrillas, Daniel Ortega told his Spanish hosts in July 1982, even though the FSLN had a lot of 'sympathy' for the Salvadoran struggle.[115] Regarding the harsh treatment of the Miskito Indians, Sergio Ramírez pointed out that the photo of burning bodies that Jeane Kirckpatrick, the US ambassador to the United Nations, had presented as evidence, was in fact taken during Somoza's rule.[116] Nicaraguan diplomats also dismissed their alleged 'totalitarian' tendencies and dependency on Cuba, pointing out to Western European officials that Nicaragua simply had 'no democratic tradition' and that the number of Cuban advisors was much smaller than generally believed.[117] Nevertheless, as the next sections shows, Nicaraguan efforts to counter accusations against the RPS were not enough to alleviate the concerns of a number of Western European leaders, who started to consider the Sandinistas as a lost cause.

DISAGREEMENTS

As Nicaraguan and US diplomats competed with each other for Western European backing and a number of European government switched from left to right in terms of their domestic alignment, the consensus amongst EC leaders that financial and political support could keep the Sandinistas in the Western camp, or at the very least non-aligned, broke down. To be sure, the majority of Western European countries, particularly those with social democratic and socialist leaders, continued to side with the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, but the conservative and Christian Democratic governments of Britain and – albeit in a less extreme fashion – West Germany broke ranks and cut aid to the Nicaraguan state.

The Thatcher government was the first to decide that Nicaragua was a lost cause. Similar to the Reagan administration, British officials looked at the Sandinista revolution through a Cold War lens. Nicaragua followed 'the style of its Cuban mentor', the British ambassador in Costa Rica, Michael Brown, wrote to the Foreign Office on 9 January 1982, noting that its 'one-party state' engaged in 'repression at home and subversion abroad'. The only reason opposition parties were tolerated by the FSLN, Brown added, was to keep up the 'façade' of political pluralism to the

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[114] The Nirex Collection, Volume IV Document 554, *Nicaraguan Perspectives,* Fall 1981.
[115] TNA, FCO 99/1275, Croll to FCO, 21 July 1982.
[116] *Het Vrije Volk*, 3 May 1982.
[117] TNA, FCO 99/1269, Meeting with the Nicaraguan ambassador, Lic. Aldo Diaz Lacayo, 6 January 1982.

outside world.[118] Citing the 'military build-up' and the 'increasingly pro-Soviet stance being adopted' by the nine Sandinista *comandantes*, the British government not only refused to provide the Nicaraguan junta with economic aid but also resolved to 'oppose loans to Nicaragua from international financial institutions', such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), and the World Bank.[119] In the eyes of British officials, it was simply not worth antagonising the Reagan administration over the Nicaraguan revolution. Central America is 'a peripheral region' for Britain, the Foreign Office concluded, but it was of 'paramount importance and emotional content for the present US administration'.[120] The shift in the British position, though, was more of a political than an economic blow to the Sandinista government, as the UK never been among the larger Western European sources of aid.

The FRG, unlike Britain, continued to provide Nicaragua with some bilateral support, but the levels of West German aid declined from $13.3 and $14.1 million in 1980 and 1981 to $8.5 and $6.9 in 1982 and 1983.[121] Sandinistas blamed the decrease in West German aid on 'Reagan's new ally' in Western Europe, namely Helmut Kohl, a Christian Democrat who replaced Helmut Schmidt as chancellor on 1 October 1982. The views of Christian Democratic groups in the FRG, the Nicaraguan editors from *Revista Envío* wrote in 1982, did 'not benefit Nicaraguan or other struggling peoples of the area' since they, like the Reagan administration, used the 'framework of an East-West conflict' to understand Central America's problems.[122] While Kohl was undoubtedly more sceptical of the FSLN than Schmidt, a social democrat, the position of the FRG government had, in fact, already started to shift several months before Kohl took power. On 12 January 1982, West German officials, citing the Sandinistas' close relations with the Soviet bloc, agreed that financial aid to Nicaragua should be reduced. Clearly, the AA was no longer confident that future developments in revolutionary Nicaragua could be influenced through financial assistance. Genscher, for instance, despite several invitations from Sandinista diplomats, decided not to add Nicaragua to the itinerary of his forthcoming trip to Latin America after Volker Haak, the FRG ambassador in Managua, argued that such a visit would 'benefit the regime more than the opposition' and that the possibilities to 'influence' the Sandinistas were small.[123]

In contrast, the levels of Dutch and French development aid to Nicaragua increased significantly in the early 1980s. The Netherlands was the biggest West European donor; in 1981

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[118] TNA, FCO 99/1265, Annual review: Nicaragua, 9 January 1982.
[119] TNA, FCO 99/1281, Webb to Birrell, 9 September 1982.
[120] TNA, FCO 99/653, Report by John Ure on his visit to Central America, 27 November 1981.
[121] These numbers are based on data from the Instituto de Relaciones Europeo-Latinoamericanas and the CIA.
[122] *Revista Envío*, December 1982.
[123] AA, Zwischenarchiv 136670, Vermerk, Besprechung beim Bundesminister über Lateinamerika am 12.01.1982, 14 January 1982.

and 1982, the Sandinista government received $15.1 and $23.9 million in bilateral aid, respectively. And although the levels of French aid to Nicaragua were much lower, it was an important political gesture that Mitterrand's France, in open defiance of the Reagan administration's policy, increased the size of its Nicaragua aid programme from $1.4 million in 1981 to $8.5 in 1982. In addition, Western European countries outside the EC also made considerable financial contributions to Nicaragua's reconstruction process. Sweden and Austria, for example, both allocated around $9 million in to Nicaragua in 1982.[124] Unlike the FRG and Britain, therefore, these states continued to support the Sandinista government and held out hope that, through financial aid, Western Europe could encourage the creation of a 'democratic and pluralist' society in Nicaragua. Isolating and threatening the Sandinista leaders, French and Dutch officials believed, would only foster more polarisation, instability, and radicalisation in Central America.[125]

Notwithstanding disagreements about the character of the Nicaraguan revolution, Western European countries agreed that the US administration's approach to Central American affairs was dangerous. Reagan's violent anti-communist crusade against left-wing revolutionaries, EC leaders feared, threatened to damage the transatlantic alliance, created divisions within the European Community, and destabilised the international Cold War system.[126] British diplomat Geoffrey Cowling, for instance, warned that Reagan's desire to 'squash an irritating Nicaragua [..] could develop into a world issue with the major powers on opposite sides'.[127] Western European governments and peoples would almost unanimously reject a military intervention against the Sandinista regime, Cowling predicted, noting that 'Nicaragua has a significant sympathetic following', as the Germans, Greeks, Irish, and Belgians were generally 'critical of US action' and the Danes, French, and Dutch were in a very 'anti-US mood'.[128] Genscher, too, told Shultz on 7 December 1982 that the US would be wise to adopt a more cautious approach. Not only was there a lot of 'anti-Americanism' in West Germany as a result of US behaviour in Central America, Genscher warned, but there also existed the danger that the Soviet Union would try to use the region as a 'pressure point' in the global Cold War, which could threaten regional security in Western Europe.[129] Indeed, Genscher told his American colleague on another occasion, 'in the international game of chess, the Central American pawn must not be used against Europe'.[130]

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[124] Instituto de Relaciones Europeo-Latinoamericanas and the CIA.
[125] BZ, Inventarisnummer 25202, DWH, Memorandum, 19 May 1982.
[126] AA, Zwischenarchiv 136670, Vermerk, Hilfsaktion der EG und EG-Mitgliedstaaten für Mittelamerika, 16 February 1982.
[127] TNA, FCO 99/769, Cowling to Payne, 2 November 1981.
[128] Ibid.
[129] AAPD, 1982, Document 332, Gespräch zwischen Genscher und Shultz, 7 December 1982.
[130] AAPD, 1981, Document 265, Gespräch zwischen Genscher und Haig, 22 September 1981

The reluctance of Western European leaders to support Reagan's plans for Central America was not solely based on strategic concerns. It should also be placed in the context of the appalling human rights record of the Salvadoran regime, which many Europeans perceived as a US puppet state. Moreover, when four Dutch journalists were killed by the Salvadoran army on 17 March 1982, journalists and activists in the Netherlands were convinced that, behind the scenes, the Reagan administration was responsible for the murders. Protesters organised vigils, attacked the American consulate in Amsterdam, and destroyed a miniature of the White House in theme park Madurodam.[131] Dutch cabinet ministers agreed with the demonstrators that US foreign policy was, to a significant extent, responsible for the journalists' deaths, but they were unsure how to respond. After some deliberation, the Dutch government cancelled a visit of education minister Jos van Kemenade, who was to have celebrated two hundred years of American-Dutch relations in Washington, but decided that the Netherlands could not deliver a 'formal protest' to the US ambassador in The Hague, as it had no concrete evidence of direct US involvement.[132] Unsurprisingly, after this incident, Dutch leaders were even more disinclined to side with the Reagan administration, both publicly and privately.

Concerns about US foreign policy and the rising tension in Central America prompted EC leaders to work towards a coordinated Western European response to the region's crises, in spite of their ideological differences regarding the right approach to the Nicaraguan revolution. At an EPC meeting on 23 March 1982, Genscher, Cheysson, and Emilio Colombo, the Italian foreign minister, all agreed with Van der Stoel that – 'in spite of US sensitivities' – the question of increasing Community aid to 'assist stabilisation' in Central America should be discussed at the next European Council in Brussels on 29 and 30 March.[133] West Germany and France, in particular, pushed for a more active EC role in the region. By increasing the levels of economic aid to Central America, FRG diplomats argued on 16 February 1982, the EC could tackle the underlying causes of Central America's revolutionary upheaval, which were primarily socio-economic and not, as the Reagan administration believed, the result of Soviet and Cuban expansionism.[134] Jacques Dupont, a French diplomat, presented a similar analysis at a political committee meeting of the European Political Cooperation (EPC) on 19 January 1982. The EC member states and the Community should increase economic aid to Central America, Dupont argued, since 'this was an explosive region whose root problems were social and economic'.[135]

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131 *NRC*, 9 April 1984.
132 NA, Inventarisnummer 2.02.05.02, Omslag 3502, Notulen MR, 26 March 1982.
133 TNA, FCO 98/1425, Brussels to FCO, 23 March 1982.
134 AA, Zwischenarchiv 136670, Vermerk, Hilfsaktion der EG und EG-Mitgliedstaaten für Mittelamerika, 16 February 1982.
135 TNA, FCO 98/1142, Brussels to FCO, 20 January 1982.

In Brussels, EC leaders formally agreed that 'they could not remain indifferent' to the growing crisis in Central America but they quarrelled over the best way in which Western Europe should get involved. In particular, the Thatcher government, already loath to antagonise the Reagan administration, lobbied actively against the proposed increase in financial and material aid to the region. As a result, the financial components of the European Council conclusions on 30 March 1982 were cautiously phrased. Even though EC leaders openly dismissed Reagan's position that revolutionary upheaval should be framed Cold War terms, declaring that 'grave economic problems and social inequalities' caused 'the tensions and conflicts ravaging Central America', they decided that financial aid of EC countries should only be increased 'within the limits of their possibilities'.[136]

In the months following the Council's decision, Western European officials engaged in heated debates about how much money the Community should spend on the region and, crucially, which countries should be allowed to profit from the new aid package. France and West Germany were adamant that, for a regional foreign policy to be effective, no Central American country should be excluded, as this would only lead to more polarisation. Britain, the Netherlands, and Greece, and Denmark, on the other hand, argued that political and human rights considerations should be taken into account when allocating aid. To create a consensus, it was decided that each member state had a veto and 'no proposals would be made for any country on which reservations were entered'.[137] Unfortunately, this compromise also created a problem, as it resulted in the exclusion of exactly those countries that were suffering most from socio-economic inequality and civil war. While the Netherlands, Denmark, and Greece refused to provide El Salvador and Haiti with any money, Britain rejected Nicaragua and Guatemala (due to its border conflict with former British colony Belize, not because of anti-communist violence and genocide).[138]

Since British government was the only one to object to Nicaragua, it was under a lot of pressure to change its position. Dutch and French officials, in particular, lobbied actively in favour of Nicaragua's inclusion. The country 'fully meets the set criteria' of the special aid package and its exclusion would be a 'purely political decision', Kees van Dijk, the Dutch minister for development, noted in October 1982.[139] Meanwhile, French diplomats went even further, threatening to 'veto the whole programme' if Nicaragua was excluded.[140] Moreover, when journalists from *The Observer* disclosed to the public that Britain was preventing Nicaragua from

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[136] Christoper Hill and Karen E. Smith eds., *European Foreign Policy: Key Documents* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 429-430.
[137] TNA, FCO 98/1132, MCAD, 1 October 1982.
[138] Ibid.
[139] NA, Inventarisnummer 2.02.05.02, Omslag 3509, Notulen MR, 22 October 1982.
[140] TNA, FCO 99/1281, Note, European Community Department, 14 October 1982.

receiving aid, the Sandinistas and their allies launched a campaign to get the Foreign Office to reconsider its position. Sandinista diplomats, solidarity committees, human rights organisations, politicians, and church groups wrote letters accusing the British government of supporting the US administration's 'systematic programme of destabilisation' in Nicaragua, contrasting the British position to 'that of other European countries whose governments have praised the enormous achievements of the revolution'.[141] On 4 October 1982, in an official statement, the Nicaraguan embassy in London announced that Britain's decision 'to discriminate against Nicaragua' went 'against the spirit of the Community's special aid programme for Central America as a whole'.[142]

Unfortunately for the Sandinistas, the British government did not change its mind. At the Foreign Affairs Council on 22 November, the EC ministers decided that only Honduras, the Dominican Republic, and Costa Rica would be allowed to benefit from the new aid package of 30 mecu (around $28 million).[143] Nevertheless, while the Foreign Affairs Council's decision was undoubtedly damaging to the international reputation of the Sandinista revolution, the economic consequences for Nicaragua were small. True, Nicaragua could not profit from this specific aid package, but EC foreign ministers also agreed that the country could still receive an 'unspecified sum from existing aid funds'.[144] This worked in the Sandinistas' favour, as the European Commission used this loophole to put forward a several new aid projects for Nicaragua. The total value of these proposed projects, British officials noted with 'horror' in December 1982, was 16.5 mecu ($15 million), which was more than the 10 mecu ($9 million) that Costa Rica, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic would each receive under the special aid programme.[145] And since Britain could only object on 'technical grounds' and wanted to avoid 'any mention of political misgivings regarding aid to Nicaragua', there was little the Foreign Office could do to prevent the Nicaraguan junta from receiving this generous sum of EC aid.[146]

So, despite their shared frustration with Reagan's militaristic foreign policy, Western European governments were unable to overcome their ideological differences and develop a coordinated foreign policy towards Central America in 1981-1982. Even though the Sandinistas did not suffer major financial losses in Western Europe, the failure of EC leaders to agree on a common approach, which would potentially undermine Reagan's military support for the contras and the Salvadoran regime, was bad news. Not only could the FSLN leaders no longer claim that the EC was united in its support for the Nicaraguan revolution, a divided Western Europe also

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141 TNA, FCO 99/1281, War on Want to Pym, 8 October 1982.
142 TNA, FCO 99/1281, Nicaraguan Embassy to FCO, 4 October 1982.
143 TNA, FCO 99/1281, Holmes to Hunter, 1 December 1982.
144 TNA, FCO 99/1281, Brussels to FCO, 22 November 1982.
145 TNA, FCO 99/1281, Carberry to Crowe, 13 December 1982; Harrison to MCAD, 16 December 1982.
146 TNA, FCO 99/1281, MCAD, 23 November 1982.

meant that there was no powerful counterweight to Reagan's foreign policy in Central America. More broadly, the limited results of Sandinista diplomacy in Western Europe also highlight the difficulties – if not impossibilities – of pursuing a non-aligned foreign policy in world that was once again swept up by bipolar Cold War thinking. In this context, the FSLN's strategy of appealing to both the East and the West – while at the same time implementing a radical revolutionary programme at home – was not enough to appease Western Europe's conservative and Christian Democratic government leaders.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that the Sandinista leaders, concerned about the changing international environment and growing domestic discontent, redoubled their efforts to obtain foreign support, legitimacy, and popularity in the period 1981-1982. As the Nicaraguan government struggled to secure continued international aid, competing with Reagan's diplomats for the hearts and minds of Western European peoples in the process, the struggle to determine Nicaragua's future took on a distinctly global character. Two contrasting narratives were at play. On the one hand, Sandinistas and their allies presented audiences with a picture of a small and brave Central American country fighting for social justice, equality, and independence from the US empire. On the other hand, the US administration portrayed Nicaragua as a Cold War troublemaker, depicting the nine Sandinista *comandantes* as already having transformed the country into a dystopian and heavily armed Soviet satellite, threatening regional security and stability.

Of course, the FSLN was not wrong when they accused Reagan and the CIA of trying to destabilise the Sandinista government by secretly funding the contras and launching an international propaganda campaign. Yet, contrary to what the FSLN told Western European solidarity activists, not all international criticism and domestic opposition to the *Revolución Popular Sandinista* was somehow the result of external intervention or US pressure. Rather, the increasingly violent and tense situation on the ground in Nicaragua was the result of a complex interplay of factors, as grassroots grievances intersected with the dynamics of the global Cold War. By publicly focusing on defence and foreign intervention, however, the FSLN succeeded in distracting international audiences from these domestic troubles and miscalculations.

This chapter also highlighted the centrality of Western Europe in the global struggle for Nicaragua's future in the early 1980s. Both the Reagan administration and the Sandinistas worked hard to reach out to Western European governments and non-state audiences, believing that European public opinion and the foreign policies of EC countries could influence the future trajectory of the Nicaraguan revolution. Western European financial and material aid for revolutionary Nicaragua was considered particularly important, not just because the Sandinistas

needed money for their domestic programmes, but also because it validated the FSLN's claim that the country wanted to pursue a non-aligned foreign policy. Similarly, the US administration sought to change the public positions of EC governments, realising that a shift in Western Europe's attitude could lend credibility and legitimacy to Reagan's foreign policy towards the Sandinista government. Interestingly, then, the FSLN and the US both operated on the assumption that, with regards to Central American affairs, the voices and policies of Western European governments carried great political and symbolic value.

By the end of 1982, having successfully capitalised on the anti-Reagan sentiment that existed in Western Europe at the time, Sandinista revolutionaries and their allies clearly had the upper hand in this fight for European public opinion. Any overt attempts to destroy the Nicaraguan revolution, contemporary politicians knew, would result in a massive international public outcry, anti-intervention demonstrations, and heavy pressure on EC leaders to break with US foreign policy. At the level of the state, however, Western European leaders were no longer able to agree on a collective approach to the region. While social democrats continued to side with the FSLN revolutionaries, conservatives and an increasing number of Christian Democrats lost faith in the ability of the West to keep Nicaragua out of the Soviet camp. From 1982 onwards, therefore, notwithstanding efforts by Sandinistas and their allies to present the Nicaraguan revolution as democratic and non-aligned in the global Cold War, the international struggle for the country's future would increasingly be fought along ideological lines.

CHAPTER 4

LOOKING FOR LEGITIMACY, 1983-1984

In April 1983, the Nicaraguan state affiliated *Comité Nicaragüense por la Paz* (Nicaraguan Peace Committee, CONIPAZ) organised an international music festival in Managua, entitled the *Concierto por la paz en Centroamérica* (Central American Peace Concert). This concert, staged at the famous Plaza de la Revolución, was an enormous success for the FSLN and its allies; it attracted around 500,000 visitors from the Americas and Europe and, consequently, put the Sandinistas' revolutionary cause in the international spotlight, demonstrating to the world and the Nicaraguan people that the *Revolución Popular Sandinista* could still count on the solidarity of the international community. More than 150 artists travelled to Managua to perform at the festival, including famous folk singers and popular symbols of the Latin American left, such as Amparo Ochoa from Mexico, Daniel Viglietti from Uruguay, Mercedes Sosa from Argentina, Silvio Rodríguez from Cuba, and the Nicaraguan brothers Carlos and Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy. Western European solidarity activists played a prominent role in the concert's organisation, raising funds and ensuring that a selection of the best performances was made into a record, which was then sold to raise money for the FSLN.[147] Jan Kees de Rooy, one of the Dutch organisers of the *Concierto*, fondly remembers the festival as the 'Woodstock' of Central America.[148]

In 1983, as the chapter demonstrates, this kind of solidarity became increasingly important for the Sandinistas, as regional tensions and US hostility rose drastically. Anxious that a military escalation in Central America would result in the collapse of the Nicaraguan revolution, the FSLN intensified its efforts to mobilise Western European audiences for the Sandinista cause. Different from the early 1980s, when the focus was primarily on anti-intervention and US imperialism in Central America, solidarity activists and the FSLN now sought to present the international community with a positive and romantic image of the *Revolución Popular Sandinista*, organising peace festivals and giving activists the opportunity to visit Nicaragua and participate in the revolutionary process. The success of the Sandinistas' revolutionary diplomacy frustrated officials in the Reagan administration, who were unable to convince Western European audiences that they were being deceived by the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, despite launching a multimillion-dollar propaganda campaign to counter the Sandinista message.

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[147] Mike Gonzalez, 'April in Managua: The Central American Peace Concert', *Popular Music* 6 (1987) 247-249. To listen to the record, see, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qz0EOiQKNtA

[148] Author's interview with Jan Kees de Rooy, Managua, Nicaragua, 11 August 2016.

Despite winning the battle for Western European hearts and minds, however, the FSLN came to the conclusion that public sympathy alone was not enough to ensure the revolution's survival after the US invaded Grenada in October 1983. The invasion was a massive blow to the Sandinistas' sense of security, and fears that the US was planning something similar in Central America convinced the nine FSLN *comandantes* of the relevance of Western European and Latin American political support and involvement in regional affairs. The FSLN's plan of action in the aftermath of Grenada, therefore, included making significant concessions to appease domestic and international critics. For example, Sandinista leaders agreed to organise democratic elections, issued an amnesty decree, supported peace proposals, released political prisoners, relaxed press censorship, and embarked on a dialogue with opposition groups, such as the Catholic Church, the editors of *La Prensa*, and the *Coordinadora Democrática Nicaragüense* (Democratic Coordinating Committee, CDN). By widely publicising these reforms to governments and audiences in Europe and the Americas, the Sandinistas hoped to obtain eliminate the 'pretexts used by Washington' to justify its military campaign against the RPS.[149]

This chapter, then, argues that the US attack against Grenada in October 1983 was a turning point in the global history of the Nicaraguan revolution. Not only did the invasion put the Sandinistas on the defensive, the military might on display by US occupation forces in Grenada also resulted in a change in Western European foreign policies. Indeed, while the EC countries had previously failed to agree on a common foreign policy towards Central America, concerns about US-instigated military escalation in the region, which would undoubtedly have dangerous international consequences, convinced EC governments of the necessity of collective action towards Central America. And as Western European and Latin American governments collaborated to deescalate tensions in Central America, the Sandinistas were confronted with a new international context, which presented them with new opportunities and limitations.

Hostilities, Negotiations, and Peace Concerts

In early 1983, the Reagan administration intensified its military, economic, and political campaign against the Sandinista revolution. The US-backed counterrevolutionaries, operating from their base camps in neighbouring Honduras, launched the first of many military offensives on Nicaraguan territory in March 1983, when more than one thousand contras infiltrated the country and attacked towns and hamlets in the northern province of Matagalpa.[150] Moreover, on 23 April 1983, Reagan criticised the Nicaraguan government in a combative speech, accusing the

[149] William I. Robinson and Kent Norsworthy, 'Elections and US Intervention in Nicaragua', *Latin American Perspectives* 12 (1985) 84.
[150] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* (1998) 268.

Sandinistas of spreading violence to El Salvador, destabilising the Western Hemisphere by collaborating with the Soviet Union and Cuba, burning the villages and crops of Miskito Indians living on the country's Atlantic Coast, and imposing a totalitarian dictatorship.[151] Finally, on 9 May 1983, the US administration reduced Nicaragua's sugar export quota by 90 percent. According to Sandinista officials, who described Reagan's decision as a clear violation of international law, the reduction meant an annual loss of more than $54 million for the Nicaraguan government.[152]

In the eyes of Sandinista officials, Reagan's hostile rhetoric and the growing strength of the anti-FSLN counterinsurgents in the first half of 1983 were part of a US-coordinated imperialist plan to create the necessary conditions and 'prepare' domestic and international audiences for an upcoming 'military intervention' in Central America.[153] Cold War hardliner Ronald Reagan desperately wanted to overthrow the Sandinista regime before the US electoral campaign in 1984, Nicaraguan diplomats believed, since 'a victory over international communism would secure his presidential re-election'.[154] The impending attack against the revolution, Julio López, the head of the FSLN's Department of International Relations explained to solidarity activist Hans Langenberg on 19 July 1983, would probably be launched from Honduras. More than 14,000 Latin American mercenaries, Honduran soldiers, and former members of Somoza's national guard were already stationed there, and they were supported by the American warships that were circling the shore and blockading Nicaraguan harbours.[155] Reagan was just waiting for a border incident between the *Ejército Popular Sandinista* and the Honduran army, Sandinista diplomats predicted, as this would provide his administration with a powerful justification to send the US marine corps to Nicaragua.[156]

In this context of rising tensions, FSLN leadership proclaimed that the Sandinista army would not be easily defeated, hoping that the prospect of a long and bloody war in Central America would dissuade US officials from launching a military attack against the RPS. As Sandinista *comandante* Henry Ruiz told Erich Honecker during a visit to Berlin in February 1983, the FSLN was doing 'everything' it could to avoid war, but it also needed to demonstrate that it was 'prepared' to fight for the revolution.[157] Indeed, Nicaraguan diplomat Antonio Jarquín told Dutch solidarity

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151 Reagan Library, Address on Central America, 27 April 1983. Online at: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/april-27-1983-address-central-america
152 *The New York Times*, 10 May 1983.
153 ABPA, MINEX, Consenso general sobre la coyuntura actual. The exact date is unknown but, based on the content, this document was written between May and September 1983.
154 ABPA, MINEX, Consenso general sobre la coyuntura actual.
155 IISG, INW, Hans Langenberg to Western European solidarity committees, August 1983.
156 ABPA, MINEX, Consenso general sobre la coyuntura actual.
157 SAPMO, DY30/43863, Bericht über die Gespräche mit einer Delegation der Nationalleitung der Sandinistischen Front der Nationalen Befreiung Nikaraguas (FSLN) unter Leitung des Genossen Henry Ruiz Hernandez, 16 February 1983.

activists in Managua in May 1983, Reagan needed to understand that a regional war in Central America, similar to the devastating struggle for Vietnam, would take on its own dynamics, becoming impossible to control.[158] Capitalising on the so-called Vietnam syndrome, then, the Sandinista government made clear to Western audiences, and particularly US members of Congress, that a war against Nicaragua would take many years, cause thousands of innocent people to suffer, and negatively impact the entire Western Hemisphere.[159]

Moreover, behind the scenes, the Nicaraguan government sought to increase the amount of weaponry it received from the socialist countries, requesting new helicopters, ammunition, rocket launchers, and armoured vehicles. In April 1983, FSLN *comandante* Daniel Ortega visited the GDR and the Soviet Union to ask for new military equipment and specialised training for Sandinista soldiers. Not wanting to provoke Western European and the US criticism, though, Ortega made sure to wear 'civilian clothes' and requested that there were 'no reports' of his trip in the 'mass media'. [160] Unfortunately, we still know little about the exact results of these and similar visits by Sandinista leaders to the socialist countries in the mid-1980s. According to historian Danuta Paszyn, who primarily relies on US sources and Soviet newspapers, socialist military aid to Nicaragua was worth around $100 million in 1983, which was double the amount of 1982, and at least $150 million in 1984.[161] American officials operating in the 1980s, however, worked with higher numbers. A CIA report from 1988 estimated that Nicaragua received $160 million in military aid from the Eastern bloc in 1982, $260 million in 1983, and $320 million in 1984.[162] Despite these quantitative differences, it is clear that there was a significant increase in socialist military aid to the Nicaraguan government in the period 1983-1984.

Yet, even though the FSLN prepared for war by obtaining weapons in the East, its priority was to avoid further military escalation. And to achieve the latter, the revolutionaries looked towards the West, expanding and building on earlier propaganda, solidarity, and diplomatic campaigns to influence public opinion and government policies. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in the early 1980s, the anti-intervention movement in Western Europe had been remarkably successful in undermining the legitimacy of Reagan's militaristic foreign policy towards Central America. Yet, due to the campaign's focus on US imperialism and the guerrilla struggle in El Salvador, the accomplishments of the Sandinista revolutionaries themselves had been somewhat absent from its narrative. And as US hostilities against the Sandinista government

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[158] IISG, NKN, Box 73, report of IKV trip to Nicaragua, April and May 1983.
[159] ABPA, MINEX, Obstáculos que la administración tiene para implementar una intervención directa contra Nicaragua, date unknown.
[160] Storkmann, 'East German Military Aid', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 16 (2014) 60.
[161] Paszyn, *The Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change in Central America* (2000) 49.
[162] CREST, Soviet Bloc and Cuban Military and Economic Assistance to Nicaragua, 27 January 1988

intensified in early 1983, this lack of focus on the RPS became a problem for the FSLN leaders, who wanted their country to be seen as a beacon of peace and cooperation in a chaotic and violent region. From 1983 onwards, therefore, the FSLN set out to shift the spotlight back on the Sandinista revolution, arguing publicly that Nicaragua, unlike the US and the other Central American countries, was genuinely in favour of peace.

In particular, the Nicaraguan government adopted a positive attitude towards the efforts of the four Contadora countries (Mexico, Panama, Venezuela, and Colombia) to facilitate a regional dialogue between the Central American governments of Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. This so-called Contadora initiative was launched on 9 January 1983 by the leaders of Mexico, Panama, Venezuela, and Colombia, who announced after a summit at the Panamanian island of Contadora that they would collaborate to find 'Latin American solutions to Latin American problems'.[163] To encourage dialogue and diplomacy as a means to end Central America's violent and externally-funded civil wars, the Contadora Group organised a number of peace conferences and summits for Central American foreign ministers and heads of state. Western European governments supported the Contadora negotiations, seeing it as a welcome alternative to the threat of further military escalation and US intervention, about which more below.[164]

For the Sandinistas, Contadora was an important counterweight to US foreign policy in Central America, as well as a means to present revolutionary Nicaragua in a positive light to the international community, particularly Western Europe. It was crucial to keep the negotiations 'active and alive', diplomats from Nicaragua's *Ministerio del Exterior* wrote in May 1983, as Contadora prevented Nicaragua's international 'isolation' and could be used as an 'instrument' against the Reagan administration's 'politics of aggression', as well as the 'complicity' of neighbouring Honduras, which harboured the contras. Indeed, Nicaraguan diplomats wrote, the 'support of European and Latin American countries for a negotiated solution in the region presents a limitation to the military solution that Reagan pursues'.[165] The opinions of Western Europeans, most notably Britain and France, Sandinista officials argued, could have a 'major impact' on Reagan's foreign policy, in particular due to their influence on the opinion of US members of Congress.[166] Therefore, the FSLN worked hard to make sure that Nicaragua was not 'perceived as a disruptive factor' in the Contadora process, as this would damage the country's

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[163] Bruce Michael Bagley, 'Contadora: The Failure of Diplomacy', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 28 (1986) 1-32.
[164] Hill and Smith eds., *European Foreign Policy* (2000) 430h.
[165] ABPA, MINEX, Obstáculos que la administración tiene para implementar una intervención directa contra Nicaragua, date unknown.
[166] ABPA, MINEX, Evaluación, Perspectivas y Planes – 1984, MINREX, date unknown.

image as 'flexible and in search of peace'.[167] In sum, the Sandinistas' support for Contadora was a pragmatic move, designed to strengthen Nicaragua's position in the international arena and isolate the US administration.[168]

At the same time, and in addition to participating in regional negotiations, FSLN officials sought to capitalise on the popularity and political influence of the Western European peace movement, organising a number of peace concerts, benefits, and lectures in Europe and Nicaragua.[169] In speeches and interviews, Sandinistas and solidarity activists argued that Nicaraguans and Europeans were both victims of the US president, whose dedication to winning the Cold War put the lives of millions of people in Europe and the Americas at risk. The Reagan administration's ideological extremism, Nicaraguan junta member Sergio Ramírez explained in an interview with Colombian-German journalist Carlos Rincón in August 1983, did not only affect the people of Central America, but also 'its own allies in Western Europe'.[170] In particular, Ramírez continued, Reagan's insistence to 'impose the installation of missiles in the European countries' was driven by the same 'mental insanity' that caused the bloodshed in Central America.[171]

As alluded to in the chapter's introduction, the festival in Managua in April 1983 was the highpoint of the FSLN's peace campaign, effectively using music as a means to garner support for the Sandinista revolution, thereby fostering bonds of solidarity between visitors, international audiences, and Nicaraguan revolutionaries. In particular, due to the work of solidarity activists, who acted as intermediaries between the FSLN and prominent figures of the Western European peace movement, the festival in Managua mobilised a large number of peace activists for Nicaragua's revolutionary cause. At the invitation of the *Nicaragua Komitee Nederland* and the Sandinista government, for instance, the Dutch Interchurch Peace Council (*Interkerkelijk Vredesberaad*, IKV), a key player in the Western European peace movement, sent a large delegation to attend the festivities in Nicaragua, which included representatives from Britain, the Netherlands, West Germany, France, the United States, and Pax Christi International, a Catholic peace

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167 ABPA, MINEX, Memorandum, 26 May 1983.
168 ABPA, MINEX, Evaluación preliminar de la ultima ronda de Contadora, exact date unknown but based on the content it was published in 1983.
169 For more on the peace movement, see, Lawrence S. Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb: Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Remco van Diepen, *Hollanditis: Nederland en het kernwapendebat 1977–1987* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2004); Beatrice de Graaf, *Over de Muur: De DDR, de Nederlandse kerken en de vredesbeweging* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2004); Leopoldo Nuti, Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey, and Bernd Rother eds., *The Euromissile Crisis and the End of the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); Eckart Conze, Martin Klimke, and Jeremy Varon, eds., Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear and the Cold War of the 1980s (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).Eirini Karamouzi and Dyonysios Chourchoulis, 'Troublemaker or peacemaker? Andreas Papandreou, the Euromissile Crisis, and the policy of peace, 1981–86', *Cold War History* 19 (2019) 39-61.
170 'Interview with Sergio Ramírez', 13 August 1983. As published in Bruce Marcus, ed., *Nicaragua: The Sandinista People's Revolution: Speeches by Sandinista Leaders* (New York and London: Pathfinder Press, 1985).
171 Ibid.

organisation.[172] After returning from Managua, Laurens Hogebrink, the head of the international section of the IKV, described the concert as the perfect opportunity for Western European peace organisations to learn more about 'liberation struggles' in Central America.[173] Hogebrink agreed with Ramírez' abovementioned comments, arguing that that events in Central America and the global campaign for disarmament were 'obviously linked'.[174] Indeed, in July 1983, as part of a speech entitled 'No Pasarán: No Contras, No Missiles', Hogebrink reiterated this view, declaring that Western European activists and Nicaraguan revolutionaries shared the same goal of building a future with no war, no interventions, and no nuclear weapons.[175] The timing of the peace concert in Managua worked out well for the Sandinistas, too. In 1983, European peace organisations were already developing an interest in promoting Third World causes, as their own anti-nuclear campaign was losing some momentum.[176] It was due to efforts of the FSLN and its allies, however, that peace activists shifted their attention to the *Revolución Popular Sandinista*, rather than to other countries in the Global South.

In Western European towns and cities, solidarity committees utilised the prospect of the peace festival to raise money for the FSLN and propagate the Sandinista cause. On 24 April 1983, in response to a telex from DRI diplomat Luis Caldera, activists organised demonstrations in front of US embassies and consulates, celebrating the *Concierto* and carrying banners with the slogan 'Peace in Central America: No Intervention!'.[177] Moreover, the organisers of the concert, most notably Ernesto Cardenal from the Nicaraguan *Ministerio de Cultura* (Ministry of Culture), De Rooy, and Langenberg, turned the festival into a political and financial success for the FSLN. To organise and record the concert, the Nicaraguan authorities received more than $600,000 in financial and material assistance from the Dutch and Greek governments, public broadcaster IKON (*Interkerkelijke Omroep Nederland*, Dutch Interchurch Broadcaster), development organisation *Novib*, and the West German protestant church group, the *Thomas Kirche Gemeinde*. In addition to funding the festival, Langenberg and De Rooy made a documentary about the Nicaraguan revolution, which was broadcast in fifteen countries. This documentary, as the director of IKON explained to several Dutch journalists, demonstrated that problems in Latin America were not caused by the Cold War, as American propaganda wanted people to believe, but rather by poverty and social injustice.[178] Finally, Dutch activists produced a popular commercial record of the festival, entitled

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[172] IISG, NKN, Box 73, European and US Peace Movement Delegation to Nicaragua, 8 February 1983.
[173] IISG, NKN, Box 73, Speech Laurens Hogebrink, Amsterdam, July 1983.
[174] IISG, NKN, Box 73, European and US Peace Movement Delegation to Nicaragua, 8 February 1983.
[175] IISG, NKN, Box 73, Speech, Laurens Hogebrink, Amsterdam, July 1983.
[176] Helm, 'The Sons of Marx Greet the Sons of Sandino', *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 20 (2014) 156.
[177] IISG, INW, Luis Caldera to European Secretariat of the solidarity movement, 18 April 1983.
[178] *Leeuwarder Courant*, 9 September 1983.

April in Managua, which solidarity committees around Western Europe sold to make a financial profit for the FSLN.[179]

Despite the obvious propaganda benefits of collaborating with peace groups, some European activists voiced concerns about the new direction in which the FSLN was taking the solidarity movement. For instance, some activists feared that 'hard-line pacifists' in the peace movement would undermine the armed struggles of revolutionaries; as solidarity activists argued, revolutionary wars were crucial for the liberation of Central America. Another concern was that the much larger peace movement would overshadow the individual message and propaganda of the Nicaraguan campaigns.[180] Nevertheless, for the majority of the Sandinistas' supporters, the benefits of cooperation with peace groups far outweighed the costs, particularly since the latter provided the FSLN and its allies with new target audiences and prominent spokespeople in Western Europe. The British Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, to name one example, handed out leaflets about the accomplishments of the Nicaraguan revolution during CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) demonstrations in London.[181]

Amongst the peace activists, there also existed doubts about their movement's alliance with the Sandinistas, which some peace groups considered to be too closely aligned to the Soviet Union. Even though peace protesters mostly targeted NATO and the foreign policy of the United States, most peace organisations did not want to be seen as pro-Soviet. Officially, the peace movement campaigned against the bipolar Cold War framework and rejected 'domination' by both superpowers.[182] The Nicaraguan organisation CONIPAZ, however, had close ties to the Moscow-led World Peace Council (WPC). Furthermore, peace activists noted, a large number of participants at the *Concierto por la paz* in Managua represented communist organisations from the Eastern bloc and the Global South. This worried and irritated some Western activists, who wanted to bring across a different and 'more nuanced' message. IKV representative Wim Bartels, for instance, described the conference as 'disappointing' due to the pro-Moscow speeches of the participants.[183] In particular, Bartels complained about WPC president Romesh Chandra, the former leader of the Indian Communist Party, arguing that he had given an extremely anti-American and pro-Soviet speech that apparently even shocked the Eastern bloc representatives. Fortunately for the Sandinistas, Nicaraguan officials succeeded in convincing Western European

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[179] Interview with Jan Kees de Rooy, 11 August 2016; Author's interview with Wellinga and Langenberg, 6 August 2014; Author's interview with John Bevan, 20 March 2017, London, United Kingdom; *Leeuwarder Courant*, 9 September 1983; *NRC*, 20 April 1983.
[180] IISG, NKN, Box 20, Background Document, 2 January 1984.
[181] PHM, NSC, Box 77, Minutes of General Meeting, 6 June 1984.
[182] IISG, NKN, European and US Peace Movement Delegation to Nicaragua, 8 February 1983.
[183] IISG, NKN, Box 73, report of IKV trip to Nicaragua, April and May 1983.

representatives that the FSLN was not a communist organisation, and truly wanted to be non-aligned in the global Cold War. Sandinista *comandante* Carlos Núñez Téllez, for example, openly distanced himself from Chandra's pro-Soviet speech and, as Bartels noted with relief, made an impressive case for 'political pluralism and economic diversification' in Nicaragua.[184]

Overall, in fact, the FSLN's strategy of presenting Nicaragua as a beacon of peace and hope to build up support for the RPS worked remarkably well in 1983. By participating in regional negotiations and organising festivals, Sandinistas and solidarity activists presented the revolution in a positive light, thereby reaching out to new audiences. In particular, the British solidarity campaign, which had been relatively small in the late 1970s and early 1980s, started to thrive in 1983, rapidly evolving into one of the largest and more effective movements in Western Europe. As John Bevan of the NSC remembers, 13 February 1983 was a turning point for the UK movement, as the activists organised a successful benefit in Shaftesbury Theatre entitled 'An Evening for Nicaragua'.[185] This popular event in London, hosted by actor Andy de la Tour and aired by new television network Channel 4, featured performances by Daniel Viglietti, the band Pookiesnackenburger, and singer-songwriter Charlie Dore. In addition to cultural entertainment, a speech by the Nicaraguan ambassador Francisco d'Escoto reminded audiences 'of the reason' why the gathering was taking place, asking people 'to remember those Nicaraguans who have fallen in combat trying to preserve the gains of the Nicaraguan revolution against US-inspired aggression'.[186] Through cultural engagement, then, the FSLN and its Western European allies romanticised the revolution and vilified the Reagan administration. And as the next section demonstrates, this angered US officials, who embarked on their own propaganda campaign to counter the Sandinistas' message.

KISSINGER MEETS THE SANDINISTAS

While the Sandinistas used unconventional but powerful methods to strengthen the Nicaraguan revolution in the face of growing hostilities, Americans officials grew irritated with their inability to shape the public narrative. The domestic and international press was not giving 'fair coverage' to 'our true goals' in Central America, Reagan complained to Thatcher in the Oval Office on 29 September 1983, who agreed with the American president that Western countries were 'losing the propaganda battle in Europe'.[187] Reagan's frustration with being misunderstood was not just a

[184] Ibid.
[185] Interview, John Bevan, London, 20 March 2017.
[186] NSC, *Nicaragua Today* 11 (1983).
[187] Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Subject Files, Memorandums of Conversations - President Reagan, Box 51, Reagan and Thatcher, 29 September 1983.

question of vanity; US officials knew that public support could make or break the administration's Central America policy. Indeed, as one US diplomat wrote on 16 July 1983, 'much of what we would like to do, we cannot do now because of Congressional and public opinion concerns'.[188] US officials also regarded the insistence of European leaders that socio-economic inequalities, rather than Soviet and Cuban interventions, lay at the root of Central America's unrest, as naïve and highly problematic. On 29 June 1983, for instance, US Secretary of State George Shultz sent a letter to West German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, stating that he was 'concerned that our views do not coincide as closely as they might'. In particular, Shultz complained about a recent statement by EC foreign ministers, which blamed the 'current uncertainty in the region primarily on long-term socio-economic consequences, with no mention of outside interference'.[189]

Frustrated with attitude of EC governments, as well as with the fact that the FSLN was clearly winning the international battle for hearts and minds, the Reagan administration mounted an ambitious campaign to obtain the support of Western European peoples and governments. Launched in June 1983, the project was led by Cuban-American Otto Juan Reich, who was responsible for all 'foreign and domestic efforts' to gain support for policies towards Latin America as a whole, and Central America in particular.[190] Otto Reich's newly created Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean, as it was called, received interagency support, as well as covert CIA assistance, to coordinate a global network of individuals and organisations to amplify and lend credibility to Reagan's anti-communist message.[191] Reich relied on a variety of strategies to influence public and congressional opinion, including conferences, lecture series, and media briefings.[192] He also brought anti-Sandinista speakers, such as Faith Ryan Whittlesey, Miguel Bolanos, Richard Stone, and Jeane Kirkpatrick into contact with media outlets, trade unions, business leaders, church groups, government officials, rotary clubs, academics, politicians, human rights organisations, and foreign affairs groups.[193] Finally, in cooperation with the State Department and the CIA, the office edited and distributed a range of papers and pamphlets, lecturing people on the dangers of Nicaragua's military build-up, Cuban and Soviet infiltration Central America, and the 'broken promises' and human rights violations of the Sandinistas.[194]

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[188] Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Meeting Files, Report on Central America, 16 July 1983.
[189] AAPD, 1983, Document 192, Martius to Botschaft Washington, 29 June 1983.
[190] Reagan Library, Raymond Walter Files, CentAm Meetings, Box 3, Memorandum, 7 July 1983.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair, 17 November 1987.
[193] See, Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Meeting Files 00081-00090, Box 9.
[194] See, Reagan Library, Raymond Walter files, CentAm meetings, Box 3; CREST, CIA Background Paper: Nicaragua's military buildup and support for Central American subversion, 18 July 1984.

Outside the domestic sphere, the US campaign primarily targeted Western European media, politicians, and governments.[195] In 1984, the propaganda office would broadcast seven live satellite programs about Nicaragua and El Salvador in Western Europe, organise two tours through Central America for Western European journalists, and send more than thirty pro-Reagan speakers to European cities.[196] This extra effort to bring across the American message was crucial, the White House believed, because of the worrying success of Sandinista propaganda in this part of the world. The FSLN, according to American officials, had 'almost unlimited access' to Western European media and used 'that access with superb skill'.[197] Moreover, White House officials admitted, younger generations in Western Europe remained disillusioned with the United States, which they associated with 'reactionary causes', such as the Watergate scandal and the Vietnam war.[198] The goal of the US propaganda campaign, then, was to counter the Sandinistas' diplomatic offensive and convince Western European audiences that Reagan's foreign policy was well-intentioned, fair, and necessary. In doing so, US officials also hoped to pave the way for EC governments to cut off aid to the Nicaraguan government and break ties with the Sandinista leaders.[199]

The highpoint of Reagan's campaign to turn public and governmental opinion, both at home and abroad, against the FSLN was the establishment of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America and the Caribbean, chaired by former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, in July 1983. The purpose of the Kissinger Commission, as it came to be known, was to 'provide a rationale' for the Reagan administration's foreign policy proposals for Central America.[200] To prepare for the report, Kissinger and his companions toured around Central America, visiting Managua in October 1983, demanding to speak to Sandinistas and opposition leaders. Reluctantly, Daniel Ortega and foreign minister Miguel d'Escoto decided it would damage the Sandinistas' public image too much if they refused to meet with the US representatives. However, they had no faith in the commission's intentions, objectivity, or bipartisanship. In the eyes of Nicaraguan leaders, Kissinger's commission was simply a propaganda tool to legitimise Reagan's illegal crusade against their revolution. What is more, they decried Kissinger as a leader of such a project, given

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[195] Reagan Library, Raymond Walter Files, Subject Series 1, Box 4, Memorandum, from Otto J. Reich to George F. Twohie, 24 November 1983.
[196] CREST, Memorandum, USIA Public Diplomacy Activities on Central America, 2 November 1984.
[197] Reagan Library, Raymond Walter Files, Subject Series 1, Box 4, Memorandum, from Otto J. Reich to George F. Twohie, 24 November 1983.
[198] Reagan Library, Raymond Walter Files, Subject Series 1, Box 4, Memorandum, Project Democracy: An Inter-Agency Program to Foster the Growth of Democracy Worldwide, 1 March 1983.
[199] For more on transatlantic relations in the 1980s, see, for instance, Patel and Weisbrode eds., *European Integration and the Atlantic Community* (2014).
[200] LeoGrande , *Our Own Backyard* (1998) 210.

his past role in US intervention in Chile during the early 1970s. Sandinista newspaper *Barricada*, for example, declared that 'Reagan is sending us the man who killed Allende'.[201] Kissinger's commission members, the Nicaraguan foreign ministry predicted, would refuse to listen, behave in a 'provocative' manner, and simply shout accusations at the Sandinistas.[202] The only reason the American representatives did not exclude Nicaragua from their Central America tour, Nicaraguan officials stated privately, was to 'project an image' of credibility and objectivity to the outside world.[203]

Unsurprisingly, given each side had already made up its mind about the other's intentions, private meetings between the American and Nicaraguan officials went badly. As predicted by the Nicaraguans, US representatives asked D'Escoto critical questions about religious freedom, democracy, censorship, and the presence of Cuban advisors in Nicaragua. Why were all of Nicaragua's Central American neighbours, even peaceful and democratic Costa Rica, so worried about Nicaragua's military build-up? When would the FSLN finally organise the elections they had promised before the 1979 revolution? The government clearly must be doing something wrong, commission member John Silber insisted, if even West German social democrats, the Sandinistas' former allies, now talked about how the Nicaraguan revolution had been 'betrayed'.[204] The Sandinistas, on the other hand, maintained that Reagan was the real aggressor in Central America and refused to talk about anything else. When asked about press freedom, D'Escoto attacked the 'hypocrisy' of the United States government, pointing out that the White House 'never showed any interest in the liberty' of Nicaraguans when Somoza was in power.[205] Instead of lecturing the Sandinistas about freedom and censorship, he recommended the members of the commission talk to the mothers and widows of those Nicaraguans killed as a result of Reagan's foreign policy.[206]

Nicaraguan records show that Kissinger's meeting with Sandinista *comandante* Daniel Ortega on 15 October 1983 occurred in a similarly unfriendly atmosphere. The former Secretary of State barely spoke during the entire session, while Ortega gave Kissinger a lecture about the history of the Sandinista revolution, an analysis of the policies of the Carter administration, and an explanation of how Reagan's support for the anti-communist counterinsurgents destabilised Central America and isolated Nicaragua from its neighbours. Nicaragua, Ortega concluded his monologue, was simply a small country trying to defend itself from the aggression and imperialism of the United States. After listening to Ortega's speech, Kissinger solemnly declared he resented

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[201] *UPI*, 19 July 1983.
[202] Ibid.
[203] ABPA, MINEX, Comisión Kissinger, 15 October 1983.
[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.

the Nicaraguan leader's attitude and arguments, felt disinclined to respond to his allegations, and left the room.[207] Publicly, Kissinger later warned the Nicaraguan government that the US 'should not be asked to choose between peace and democracy'.[208] The Nicaraguans fired back. Sandinista *comandante* Omar Cabezas announced that Kissinger had behaved 'with the arrogance of a Roman consul' and had refused to engage in any meaningful conversation with the Nicaraguan government, solely encouraging them to start a dialogue with the contras, which the FSLN refused to do as they perceived the counterinsurgents as US-funded mercenaries.[209]

Sandinistas did not have much time to come up with an elaborate response to Kissinger's accusations, though, as more pressing issues presented themselves to the Nicaraguan revolutionaries less than two weeks later. As the next section demonstrates, Kissinger's painful visit to Managua was soon overshadowed by the US invasion of the Caribbean island of Grenada, which served as a painful reminder of the capacity and willingness of the United States' government to rely on military means to achieve its Cold War objectives.

GRENADA AND BRIGADES

On 25 October 1983, the US attacked the republic of Grenada. Within weeks, US marines were in control of the small island and its 100,000 inhabitants. The swift and successful military occupation of Grenada, codenamed Operation Urgent Fury, significantly boosted the confidence of the hardliners in Reagan administration. Grenada had been under a left-wing government since Maurice Bishop seized power in a coup in March 1979, and the island received significant Cuban support. For the White House, therefore, the overthrow of what it called a 'Marxist military dictatorship' in Grenada was a small but significant victory in the global Cold War. In particular, Cold War ideologues saw the invasion as proof that direct military action was the most effective method in the global fight against communism.[210] And although not all Americans backed the use of overt military force, Congress and the media were generally supportive of the invasion, which was thought to bring back order and democracy to the island.[211]

Unsurprisingly, the FSLN observed Operation Urgent Fury with alarm. Sandinistas, and many other critics of Reagan's foreign policy towards Central America, were shocked by the invasion and feared that the occupation of Grenada was, in fact, a prelude to a much larger military intervention with the purpose of destroying the Nicaraguan revolution. As the editors of *Revista*

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[207] Ibid.
[208] *Washington Post*, 16 October 1983.
[209] *Het Vrije Volk*, 27 October 1983.
[210] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* (1998) 302.
[211] Westad, *The Global Cold War* (2005) 345.

Envío, a pro-FSLN Nicaraguan journal, wrote in November 1983: 'the invasion of Grenada created a precedent and may also have created political momentum inside the White House for another invasion'.[212] Meanwhile, solidarity activists in Western Europe responded to the invasion of Grenada by organising 'emergency' demonstrations, carrying banners with the slogan 'First Grenada, then Nicaragua?'.[213] The possible implications of Grenada's capture for Nicaragua were also debated in Western European parliaments. On 26 October 1983, to give one of many examples, Labour politician Denis Healey argued that there was 'a grave danger' that the Reagan administration, inspired by Grenada, would use the same questionable methods to defend 'freedom' in Nicaragua.[214] Finally, the invasion led to frustration and concerns about Reagan's militaristic foreign policy amongst Western European governments, who had not been informed in advance of the plans to attack Grenada (a member of the Commonwealth). In particular, in the weeks following the invasion, officials in London and Bonn, although sceptical that Reagan would take such a risk, had in-depth discussions about the effect that direct US military action against Nicaragua would have on the transatlantic alliance and the international Cold War system.[215]

In the aftermath of the invasion, Nicaragua's relationship with the US deteriorated even further, which is reflected by the increasingly hostile tone adopted by US officials and anti-Sandinista propaganda. On 10 May 1984, for instance, Constantine Menges, a member of the Reagan's National Security Council, praised US-backed military actions in Nicaragua to British diplomat David Thomas. To the astonishment of the UK representative, Menges described the 'mining of harbours', which took place in early 1984, as 'arguably one of the most humane ways of reducing Nicaragua's offensive capability'.[216] Defected Sandinista guerrilla Miguel Bolanos, too, used confrontationalist and aggressive language when he told journalists from the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think tank, that Sandinista leaders were 'more repressive than Somoza' and that revolutionary Nicaragua was 'the base of operations for the spread of international communism in the Western Hemisphere'.[217] Based on these alarmist and distorted claims, Bolanos called for more American support for the contras, declaring the Sandinistas were 'today's Nazis'

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[212] *Revista Envío*, November 1983.
[213] Hansard, House of Commons Debate, 26 October 1983. Accessed online at: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/
[214] Hansard, House of Commons Debate, 26 October 1983.
[215] See, for instance, TNA, FCO 99/1743, Carrington and Shultz, 11 December 1984.
[216] TNA, FCO 99/1741, Record of call by Mr David Thomas or Mr Constantine Menges, National Security Council, Washington DC, 10 May 1984.
[217] The Heritage Foundation, Inside Communist Nicaragua: The Miguel Bolanos Transcripts, 30 September 1983. Accessed online at: http://www.heritage.org/americas/report/inside-communist-nicaragua-the-miguel-bolanos-transcripts

and that therefore the 'only option' for the United States was to financially and politically back 'those who are trying to defeat the Sandinista regime'.[218]

In this tense and hostile context, the Kissinger Commission published its findings. Released on 11 January 1984, the 132-page report predictably concluded that Soviet interference in Central America threatened the security of the United States. Pleased with report's content, which was essentially an endorsement of US foreign policy in Central America and the Caribbean, the Reagan administration used it to try and influence Western European foreign policy. When Shultz visited London on 15 January 1984, for instance, he handed Margaret Thatcher a copy of the report, which included policy recommendations for Western European countries, such as cutting off aid to the Nicaraguan government and increasing support to El Salvador.[219] Western Europe had 'significant' security interests in Central America and the Caribbean, Kissinger wrote, 'since the ability of the United State to fulfil its commitments to the Western Alliance would be adversely affected by developments in Central America'. If the situation in the Central America escalated further, he warned, the US would be forced to redeploy troops that were currently based in Western Europe to Central America. These Cold War security concerns were not 'well-appreciated' in Western Europe. In fact, Kissing wrote, 'some European governments and organizations have taken actions inimical to US – and indeed, to European – security, such as supporting the Sandinista government or the Salvadoran insurgents'.[220]

Fortunately for the FSLN, Western European governments were unimpressed by Kissinger's conclusions. The British Foreign Office criticised the report for its 'confrontationalist tone', its implication that Western Europe should 'toe the American political line', and the 'exaggerated perception of Soviet designs' in Central America.[221] The West German *Auswärtiges Amt*, too, believed that the contents of the report, especially the negative description of Western European foreign policies, were 'controversial'.[222] With regards to the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, European officials agreed that Kissinger's foreign policy proposals, such as increasing military and political support for the anti-Sandinista counterrevolutionaries, as well as demanding that the Sandinistas break their ties to Cuba, were 'unrealistic' and 'disappointing'.[223] The US insistence that Nicaragua should no longer benefit from economic aid from Western Europe was also seen as

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[218] Ibid.
[219] Margaret Thatcher Foundation Archive, Record of a conversation between the Prime Minister and the US secretary of State, 15 January 1984. Accessed online at: https://www.margaretthatcher.org/
[220] Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, January 1984.
[221] TNA, FCO 99/1738, Memorandum, MCAD, Central America: European Involvement Proposed by Kissinger Report, 21 January 1984.
[222] AA, AV Neues Amt 15.534, Memorandum Bericht der Kissinger-Kommission zu Zentralamerika und die Lage in dieser Region, 17 January 1984.
[223] TNA, FCO 99/1738, Memorandum, MCAD, Kissinger Commission Report, 19 January 1984.

counterproductive by those countries that still believed that financial support could keep Nicaragua non-aligned. Finally, even though Thatcher was largely sympathetic to Reagan's message, British diplomats argued that the report failed 'to deal fairly with the real pressure on European governments from public opinion'.[224]

Indeed, the negative Western European response to the Kissinger report demonstrates that, in the aftermath of the controversial attack against Grenada, the US was unable to mobilise support for its foreign policy towards Central America. In spite of a multimillion-dollar propaganda campaign, Western European public and governmental opinion remained highly critical of Reagan's approach to revolutionary Nicaragua. In January 1984, a CIA officer concluded that, 'despite the Department's efforts to increase the flow of information and high level visitors to European capitals, attitudes generally remain critical of US policies in the region'.[225] Another CIA official added that, at the governmental level, 'the most the United States can hope for from its allies is a sort of pained silence'.[226] In particular, Western Europeans had no sympathy for the contras, as the US-backed counterinsurgents failed to obtain any 'significant funds from either Western European officials or private sources', despite several sponsored visits to Western Europe from contra leaders Alfonso Robelo (the former junta member) and Adolfo Calero.[227] On the contrary, in January 1984, nearly 600 parliamentarians from the Netherlands, France, West Germany, Britain, Italy, Austria, and Denmark signed a letter to Thomas O'Neill, the Speaker of the House, asking Congress to 'oppose new CIA funds against Nicaragua' and declaring that they rejected the 'economic isolation of Nicaragua'.[228]

Even though it was clear that Western Europeans would not endorse a military attack against Nicaragua, the might displayed by US forces in Grenada convinced the FSLN of the urgency of a strong military defence, hence the increase in Soviet military aid discussed in the previous section. Moreover, the FSLN hoped to complement this by boosting the solidarity movement, which they hoped could function as a non-military means of defence. Less than two months after the invasion, therefore, the Sandinista government launched another campaign to raise Western European public and media interest in the Nicaraguan revolution. On 20 December 1983, as *The Times* reported, the FSLN leaders made an important announcement, inviting tens of thousands of international volunteers to come to Nicaragua and assist with the harvest of the

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[224] TNA, FCO 99/1738, Note, MCAD, Baker to Watt, 23 January 1984.
[225] CREST, Memorandum, from the National Intelligence Officer for Western Europe to the Director of Central Intelligence, 13 January 1984.
[226] CREST, Intelligence Assessment, Western Europe and Central America: Influence but not Power, April 1984.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid.

country's 'all-important coffee crop'.[229] The Sandinistas' call for international solidarity did not go unanswered. In spite of the high financial costs (around $800 per person), potential danger, and the long journey to Nicaragua, thousands of curious people in Britain, West Germany, and the Netherlands enthusiastically sent in their applications to the recruiting Nicaragua solidarity committees.[230] And on 21 December 1983, the first of many coffee-picking brigades from Western Europe arrived in Managua, where they were received by Ernesto Cardenal himself.[231] After the harvest season, the practice of sending solidarity brigades to Nicaragua increased still further, as it proved to be an effective way of attracting people to the Sandinista cause. In 1984, for example, the London-based NSC sent more than 120 brigadistas to visit Nicaragua, 'the vast majority for the first time'.[232]

The purpose of solidarity brigades went beyond helping farmers with the coffee harvest or building schools for children. While European volunteers could certainly make valuable contributions to local Nicaraguan communities, particularly if they were trained construction workers, medical specialists, and teachers, the propagandistic value of having hundreds of European and American solidarity activists working for revolutionary Nicaragua was much more important. Brigadistas did not join the Sandinista army to fight against the contras, as some British civil servants initially feared, but the FSLN certainly hoped the presence of European and American solidarity activists in Nicaragua's most vulnerable and dangerous regions would function as an 'element of containment' against further contra raids and US-orchestrated military strikes.[233] West German solidarity committees made a similar point, declaring that, by being physically present in Nicaragua's border areas, the brigades lend 'practical, political, and moral support' to the everyday struggle of Nicaraguan *campesinos* against US aggression.[234] Richard Owen, the British ambassador to Costa Rica, too, suggested that solidarity brigades functioned as a 'propaganda tool' for the Nicaraguan government. Indeed, he wrote after running into a group of British brigadistas in Managua, imagine 'the rumpus that would ensue if one or more brigadistas were wounded or killed in the course of a Contra attack'.[235] The FSLN's decision to invite Western European brigadistas to Nicaragua, then, was an unusual but effective way to defend the RPS against the contras and the possibility of a US military intervention, which seemed much more likely after Grenada.

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[229] *The Times*, 20 December 1983.
[230] See, for example, IISG, NKN, Box 41.
[231] Informationsbüro Nicaragua, *Gemeinsam werden wir Siegen! Arbeitsbrigaden in Nicaragua* (Edition Nahua: Wuppertal, 1984).
[232] NSC, Box 77, Report on the Brigades for NSC General Meeting, 12 June 1984.
[233] Helm, 'The Sons of Marx Greet the Sons of Sandino', *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 20 (2014) 158.
[234] IISG, INW, Pressemitteilung, 24 June 1984.
[235] TNA, FCO 99/1779, Memorandum, San Jose to MCAD, 17 January 1984.

On a more personal level, brigades, visits, and study tours were an effective way of creating connections between solidarity activists and the people who, in the eyes of the Western European activists, symbolised the Sandinista revolution. After working, eating, studying, and living side by side with Nicaraguan farmers, school children, and construction workers, many of whom were negatively affected by the contra war, solidarity activists felt a deep sense of responsibility and emotional attachment to the revolution, the country, and its inhabitants. By learning 'at first hand of the sacrifices made by Nicaraguans', British coffee-pickers later wrote about their experience, they left the country 'with a compelling obligation to become more involved in solidarity work'.[236] John Allan, too, who worked for the British trade union NALGO (National and Local Government Officers' Association) and visited Nicaragua in 1984, wrote that he was 'enormously impressed by everything [he] saw in Nicaragua'. The 'enthusiasm of the people so long oppressed by the brutal Somoza dictatorships', Allan concluded, needed 'to be seen to be understood'.[237] Personal connections between Nicaraguans and brigadistas lived on after the activists' returned to their home countries. When a group of Dutch activists received news that 'their' coffee farm had been destroyed by contras, for example, the ex-brigadistas raised money to rebuild the community that they felt part of.[238]

To be sure, many international volunteers – sometimes mockingly described as 'rucksack revolutionaries' – were disillusioned by their 'revolutionary' experience in Nicaragua.[239] Helping the FSLN achieve its ideals in such a 'concrete way' sounded very 'romantic' at first, one Dutch activist commented, but the reality on the ground turned out to be very different, as coffee-picking was difficult, painful, and mind-numbing work. The beautiful and tranquil mountain region also had its downsides, brigadistas admitted after spending several weeks in the countryside, noting that the daily practice of eating *frijoles* [beans] at the farmhouse had become rather boring.[240] Others experienced the brutality of the contra war up close, as Nicaraguan friends were killed, raped, or kidnapped by contra forces. Solidarity work could also be dangerous for the activists themselves, although it needs to be stressed that Western European activists were in a much more privileged position than the Nicaraguans. On 17 May 1986, for example, fifteen Nicaraguan farmers and twelve West German brigadistas, who had been working at an agricultural cooperative in southern Nicaragua, were abducted by contras. While four of the activists managed to escape from their kidnappers, the *campesinos* and other eight brigadistas were held captive for more than three

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[236] Hoover Institute, Nicaragua subject collection, Box 5, NSC, Nicaragua Work Brigades/Study Tours 1988.
[237] PHM, The Judith Hart Papers, Section 5, File 24, Report on NALGO visit, December 1984.
[238] IISG, NKN, Box 17-18, Brigades, November 1984.
[239] *The Christian Science Monitor*, 12 June 1986.
[240] IISG, NKN, Box 46, Wim Jillings to NKN, 22 November 1984.

weeks.[241] After their release, which was brought about by heavy pressure from West German officials, the activists told journalists that 'they were never certain they would emerge from their ordeal alive'.[242]

Despite these problems, Western European popular interest in the Nicaraguan revolution grew significantly in the aftermath of the invasion of Grenada. While it is difficult to determine to what extent the solidarity brigades to Nicaragua were a key factor in mobilising new audiences for the Sandinista cause, activists in Western Europe described the brigades as an enormous success, noting that at least seventy percent of the returning brigadistas became active members of the solidarity movement.[243] British diplomats, too, believed that many Western Europeans had taken up 'the Nicaraguan cause' because 'they had been the guests of the Nicaraguan government'.[244] The new strategy of using emotional connections and personal experiences to popularise the Nicaraguan revolution in Western Europe, therefore, worked in the Sandinistas' favour.

The EC and Contadora

Despite the growing strength and popularity of the solidarity movement, the FSLN calculated that popular support alone was not enough to ward off a US military intervention; they also needed to obtain the political backing of EC governments. Of course, the Sandinistas were happy with the fact that Western European leaders rejected Reagan's militaristic foreign policy towards Central America, but this rejection was not the same as an endorsement of the Nicaraguan revolution. Moreover, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Western European governments had failed to agree on a proactive foreign policy towards the region in 1982, thereby limiting their influence in Central America. And as the political landscape in Western Europe shifted from the left to the right in the early 1980s, the Nicaraguan government's foreign diplomacy and propaganda fell onto increasingly barren ground. In particular, the fact that Nicaragua was excluded from the European Community's special aid package in 1982 weakened the Sandinistas' international standing. Therefore, when Western European governments, fearful of another Cold War conflict and worried that the Contadora process was on the brink of collapse, stepped up their involvement in Central America, the FSLN *comandantes* were keen to use these developments to strengthen the position of the Nicaraguan revolution.

In early 1984, Western European officials noted that the threat of military escalation in Central America had drastically increased in the months following the Grenada invasion. First, as

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241 For more on the kidnapping of West German activists in 1986, see, AA, AV Neues Amt, 15.495.
242 *The New York Times*, 13 June 1986; *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 12 June 1986.
243 IISG, NKN, Box 17-18, Brigades, November 1984.
244 TNA, FCO 99/1911, Memorandum, MCAD, 7 December 1984.

Central American leaders were unable to make progress in their regional negotiations, the Contadora countries appeared to be 'reaching the point of considering abandonment of their efforts'.[245] This possibility worried Western European officials, who calculated that without the Contadora process, the balance could easily tip in favour of the Reagan administration's preferred methods.[246] Indeed, British diplomats warned their European colleagues on 27 April 1984, the implosion of the Contadora process, would make the situation in the region 'much less hopeful'.[247] Second, even though Reagan publicly claimed to support the Contadora negotiations, Western European leaders lost all faith in the US administration's willingness to pursue a diplomatic solution in March 1984, when they found out that the CIA, in collaboration with the counterinsurgents, had mined several Nicaraguan harbours, damaging at least one British merchant vessel.[248] The French government, in particular, took a strong stance against the illegal mining, even offering to help the Sandinista government sweep the mines from its ports.[249]

In this context of heightening tensions and militarisation, an intra-European consensus about a regional foreign policy towards Central America could finally emerge. In view of the 'difficulties the Contadora-initiative is facing', the AA concluded on 4 May 1984, 'joint European support is needed more than before'.[250] Hans-Dietrich Genscher, collaborating closely with the Costa Rican president Luis Alberto Monge, was the driving force behind the new Western European initiative.[251] In May 1984, Genscher successfully proposed a regional cooperation agreement between the EC and the Central American countries, which was designed to give momentum and political legitimacy to the Contadora negotiations, as well as provide Central American states with increased (but still limited) financial aid and a forum to discuss their grievances. Different from the early 1980s, Genscher was able to convince his Western European colleagues that Nicaragua should be included. Failing to pursue an inclusive regional approach, he argued, would undermine 'both the Contadora-initiative, as well as efforts by the EC to encourage regional integration in Central America'.[252]

Genscher's plans to stabilise Central America through political dialogue culminated in a historic summit between Latin American and Western European officials in San José, Costa Rica on 28 and 29 September 1984. The conference's final joint communiqué, signed by the EC

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[245] TNA, FCO 98/2045, London Coreu to Paris Coreu, 27 April 1984.
[246] BZ, Inventarisnummer 25292, Van den Broek to Paris Embassy, 18 June 1984.
[247] TNA, FCO 98/2045, London Coreu to Paris Coreu, 27 April 1984.
[248] TNA, CAB 128/78/13, Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet, 29 March 1984; Reagan Library, Speech at the United Nations, 9 May 1984. Online at: https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/speeches/1984/50984h.html
[249] *Revista Envío,* May 1984; *The Washington Post*, 7 April 1984.
[250] BZ, Inventarisnummer 25292, Bonn Coreu to All Coreu, 4 May 1984.
[251] AAPD, 1984, Document 110, Ruhfus to AA, 17 April 1984.
[252] AA, Zwischenarchiv 146679, Vermerk, Allgemeiner Rat 20/21.2.1984; EG-Zentralamerika, 16 February 1984.

countries, Spain and Portugal (both of whom were on the threshold of EC membership), the Contadora states, and the Central American governments, encouraged regional actors to 'bring the Contadora process rapidly to final fruition'.[253] The summit also marked the beginning of the so-called San José dialogue, which took the form of yearly meetings between Western European and Central American ministers and diplomats, about which more in chapter six. At the time, the historic and political significance of the San José conference was clear to all involved; this was the first time that EC foreign ministers came together in an official capacity outside of Western Europe, and they had chosen to do so in Central America, a region traditionally described as the 'backyard' of the United States. Indeed, the fact that Western European leaders found it necessary to become collectively involved in Central American affairs at all – despite the absence of traditional ties and without the lubricant of extensive trade links – highlights how remarkably important the region had become in the mid-1980s.

The San José meeting, and the fact that Shultz was not invited, presented the FSLN government with an excellent opportunity to present Nicaragua as a symbol of peace and mobilise international public and governmental opinion against Reagan's foreign policy.[254] In speeches and declarations, Sandinista leaders emphasised that EC involvement in the region demonstrated that revolutionary Nicaragua had international backing, while the US stood isolated and alone. By gathering in the traditional 'backyard' of the United States, the editors of *Revista Envío* concluded, the European Community 'challenged the Monroe Doctrine' that was at the core of Reagan's foreign policy.[255] Triumphantly, the editors referred to the words of French foreign minister Claude Cheysson, who responded to a question about US efforts to influence the proceedings by asking: 'What does Reagan have to do with this? As far as I understand, he is not part of the EC, the Contadora group, or the Central American group'.[256]

Moreover, on 21 September 1984, the Sandinista government capitalised on the upcoming conference in San José by announcing that Nicaragua was willing to sign the revised Contadora Act, without any modifications.[257] By agreeing to sign the *Acta de Contadora*, which was presented on 7 September 1984 to the Central American countries, the Sandinistas agreed to several concessions, such as limiting the number of Eastern bloc advisors in Nicaragua, reducing the size of its army, and ending its support for the guerrillas in El Salvador. This was worth it, the FSLN calculated, as the Act would also force the Reagan administration to give up its support for the

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253 Hill and Smith eds., *European Foreign Policy* (2000) 430-432.
254 ABPA, MINREX, Ayuda Memoria, 24 May 1984.
255 *Revista Envío*, October 1984.
256 Ibid.
257 Permanent Respresentatives of Nicaragua to the UN to President of the Security Council, 21 September 1984. Accessed online at: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/69318

contras. Therefore, the Nicaraguan government demanded that the US government signed an 'additional protocol' to the revised Act, promising to 'cease immediately all the acts of aggression against Nicaragua'.[258]

The Nicaraguan decision to sign the *Acta de Contadora*, made official just one week before the San José conference, was a strategic and cleverly timed move, challenging a key argument of the US administration. In the weeks leading up to the summit, Reagan and his allies had accused Nicaragua of obstructing the Contadora process, specifically citing the Sandinistas' refusal to sign the revised Act. On 7 September 1984, for instance, Shultz sent a letter to the EC foreign ministers, 'strongly' urging them to ensure that the San José summit would 'not lead to increased economic aid or any political assistance to the Sandinistas'.[259] Unlike the Reagan administration and the governments of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and El Salvador, who all considered the revised Contadora Act an 'important step forward' in the peace process, Shultz told his European colleagues, Nicaragua 'has rejected key elements of the draft', including a reduction 'in arms and troop levels'.[260] By suddenly agreeing to cooperate, therefore, the FSLN had turned the tables on the US administration. Indeed, journalists Stephen Kinzer wrote in *The New York Times* on 30 September 1984, the Sandinistas' surprise offer was 'a propaganda victory for Nicaragua and it caught the United States by surprise'.[261]

Despite the propaganda victory, Nicaragua's willingness to sign the revised Contadora Act failed to push the Reagan administration towards a less militaristic foreign policy. On the contrary, after the surprise announcement, the Reagan administration, already committed to the overthrow of the Sandinista regime, became, in the words of the British Ambassador in Washington, 'extremely keen' to block the Contadora Act.[262] In Western Europe and Central America, US officials immediately contacted their colleagues, arguing that the Nicaragua government was trying to use the peace process to its own advantage by pushing through an agreement that was unacceptable to the US and its regional allies, as it lacked adequate control and verification mechanisms.[263] In particular, Reagan and his Central American allies, such as Salvadoran president José Napoleón Duarte, urged EC foreign ministers to refrain from publicly supporting the revised Act at the San José conference, warning that the FSLN was unlikely to keep its promises.[264]

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[258] Ibid.
[259] TNA, FCO 99/1774, Dublin Coreu to All Coreu, 7 September 1984.
[260] Ibid.
[261] *The New York Times*, 30 September 1984.
[262] TNA, FCO 99/1773, Washington to FCO, 22 September 1984.
[263] *The New York Times*,
[264] AA, Zwischenarchiv 17889, San Salvador to Bonn, 27 September 1984.

Less than a month after the Nicaraguan declaration, it was clear that Reagan's diplomatic offensive against the Contadora Act had succeeded. The governments of El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Honduras, suspicious of the Sandinistas' intentions and under heavy pressure by US officials, changed their position and insisted that the draft needed to be changed. 'Following intensive US consultations with El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica', CIA officers concluded on 30 October 1984, 'we have effectively blocked Contadora Group effort to impose the second draft of a Revised Contadora Act'.[265] As a result, EC leaders, unwilling to side with revolutionary Nicaragua over the other Central American countries, refrained from publicly backing the Act in San José, deciding to declare support for the Contadora *process* instead.

Moreover, the declaration that Nicaragua was willing to sign the Contadora Act failed to bring about a radical change in opinion in the right-wing governments of West Germany, Britain, and the Netherlands, which remained sceptical of the Sandinistas' motivations. Indeed, Western European governments – particularly those led by conservative and Christian Democratic politicians – regarded the Nicaraguan declaration as a tactical move, designed to strengthen the Sandinistas' international image and win a propaganda victory over the United States, the counterinsurgency, and the other Central American countries. After the San José conference, therefore, British officials concluded that, in the previous months, the Western European tendency to give Nicaragua 'the benefit of the doubt' had diminished.[266] Diplomats at the *Auswärtiges Amt*, too, continued to perceive what they saw as Nicaraguan stubbornness as the primary reason for Contadora's failure. Instead of blaming the shifting position of El Salvador or US pressure for the failed peace talks, West German officials pointed to the fact that Sandinista leaders did not accept the proposed changes to the revised Contadora Act in October 1984.[267]

How then, from the Sandinistas' perspective, can we assess the heightened level of Western European state involvement in Central America in the aftermath of Grenada? On the positive side, the public position of EC governments functioned as a valuable deterrent for the Nicaraguan government, both to a US invasion and to further military support for the Honduran-based contras. Moreover, the Sandinista government welcomed EC involvement in Central America due to Western Europe's economic and material contributions to Nicaragua, which was now included in the EC's regional aid package. Aid from the European Commission to Nicaragua, consequently, increased from $6.9 in 1983 to $14.7 million in 1984. The FSLN desperately needed this extra support, as financial aid from Latin America, as a result of the debt crisis, decreased from $220 in

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[265] CREST, CIA Background Paper for NSC Meeting, 30 October 1984.
[266] TNA, FCO, 99/1742, Memorandum, 3 October 1984.
[267] AA, Zwischenarchiv 136331, Vermerk, 14 January 1985.

1983 to $120 million in 1984.[268] Of course, the EC increase did not make up for the drastic decrease in Latin American aid, but at a time when the only other possible source of money was the Soviet Union, the FSLN was relieved that the Western Europeans continued to provide them with some financial backing. On the other hand, the importance of Western European public and governmental opinion for the survival of the Nicaraguan revolution meant that the Sandinista *comandantes* needed to accommodate and collaborate with governments and organisations ideologically different from the FSLN and, in some cases, highly critical of the Nicaraguan regime. Western European governments, for instance, criticised the Sandinista government's attitude towards Contadora, its support for the Salvadoran guerrillas, press censorship, human rights violations, and the lack of political pluralism and concerns. Citing these concerns, Britain and West Germany postponed or reduced the levels of bilateral aid to Nicaragua.[269]

In other words, as regional tensions heightened, Western European involvement in Central America became somewhat of a necessary inconvenience for the Sandinista leaders. In order to survive, Nicaragua needed to demonstrate to the world that Western European states and politicians, who were perceived as moderate and neutral parties in the Central American conflict, were on their side. To do so, the FSLN *comandantes* were sometimes forced to make concessions, such as signing the revised Contadora Act and issuing an amnesty decree, they otherwise might not have approved. To survive in a context of hostility and tensions, as the next section further demonstrates, the Sandinista government decided to yield to international pressure.

THE 1984 ELECTIONS

The most important step the Sandinista government took to appease its international critics was making a commitment to organise democratic elections, which took place on 4 November 1984, two days before Americans went to the polls to re-elect Ronald Reagan. As contemporary commentators, the Sandinista leadership, the CIA, and West European solidarity committees had predicted, the FSLN, with Daniel Ortega and Sergio Ramírez on the ballot paper, won the elections with a landslide.[270]

However, a crucial part of the electoral struggle took place in the international arena. First and foremost, the Sandinista leadership needed the elections to bring the FSLN international legitimacy. By holding a democratic election, the FSLN would demonstrate to the rest of the world that accusations that Nicaragua was an oppressive, communist, and 'totalitarian state' were

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[268] Instituto de Relaciones Europeo-Latinoamericanas.
[269] TNA, FCO 99/2141, Nicaragua: Annual Review for 1984, 4 January 1985; TNA, FCO 99/1906, Nicaragua: Annual Review for 1983, 2 January 1984.
[270] *Revista Envío*, November 1984.

completely false. This, in turn, would diminish support for the United States' 'policy of aggression against the Sandinista People's Revolution'.[271] Regarding Western Europe, MINEX officials speculated that the electoral process would not only 'boost and deepen the economic cooperation between Western Europe and Nicaragua' but also lead to a renewed influx of expressions of political solidarity from Western European politicians and activists.[272] In particular, the Sandinistas hoped this would repair their relationship with the Socialist International, which had pressured the FSLN about democracy, political pluralism, and elections for years. While the aspiration of the SI to 'put its own stamp on the Sandinista People's Revolution', as Nicaraguan diplomats phrased it, irritated Sandinista government officials, they recognised it was crucial for the RPS to maintain the support of social democrats.[273] The 1984 elections, therefore, Sergio Ramírez writes in his memoirs, for the United States, as well as for the Sandinistas, 'were part of the war strategy'.[274]

The FSLN leadership, however, had a very different understanding of democracy and elections from most Western European politicians and government officials. The purpose of the electoral process in Nicaragua, according to MINEX officials, was the international legitimisation of a revolutionary process that benefitted all Nicaraguans. This national process, the Sandinistas believed, was under threat from forces outside of the country, most notably the aggressive 'imperialism' of the US administration.[275] Democratic elections in capitalist countries were different from the Nicaraguan elections, Sandinista officials argued, because capitalist elections only exist to 'strengthen the interests' of one particular domestic group, while the Nicaraguan electoral process aims to improve the society as a whole.[276] In other words, the electoral process in Nicaragua was up against foreign opposition, while democracy in Western Europe and the United States neutralised domestic opposition. Taking these contrasting perceptions of democracy into account, it is not surprising that, in the weeks leading up to polling day, the FSLN candidate for the Estelí constituency, Rosario Antuñez, rather than campaigning in Nicaragua, chose to travel through Western Europe to convince government officials, activists, and politicians of the 'pluralistic nature' and legitimacy of the Nicaraguan electoral process.[277]

With international legitimacy as the ultimate prize of the electoral process, public opinion and perceptions once again became powerful weapons in the struggle for Nicaragua's future. Before and after the elections, the White House and the Sandinistas, relying on a combination of

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[271] ABPA, Memorandum, Evaluación, Perspectivas y Planes – 1984, MINREX, date unknown.
[272] ABPA, Memorandum, MINREX, 14 February 1984.
[273] ABPA, Memorandum, MINREX, 14 February 1984.
[274] Ramírez, *Adiós Muchachos* (2012) 101.
[275] ABPA, Memorandum, Evaluación, Perspectivas y Planes – 1984, MINEX, date unknown.
[276] ABPA, Memorandum, MINEX, 14 February 1984.
[277] TNA, FCO 99/1779, MCAD, Memorandum, 18 October 1984.

state diplomacy, propaganda material, and transnational support networks, aimed to convince Western Europeans that the elections were, respectively, a 'Communist-style sham' or a massive democratic success.[278] The US government, for example, distributed a 'resource book' on the undemocratic nature of the elections, in which they argued that the Sandinistas would never willingly give up power.[279] Meanwhile, solidarity committees in Western Europe embarked on a campaign to publicise the positive aspects of Nicaragua's transition towards democracy.[280] The NSC, for example, wrote to Thatcher that 'Nicaragua has recently held the first meaningful, democratic elections in its history', adding that 'several hundred independent witnesses from governments and political bodies throughout the world were able to attend the polling, and their reports reflect an overwhelming consensus that the elections were free and fair'.[281] Noticing that statements from prominent social democrats would carry a lot of weight in the international debate, both the FSLN and Reagan administration specifically targeted members of the Socialist International. MINEX officials, for instance, encouraged members of the Socialist International to disseminate positive information about the openness of the Nicaraguan electoral process.[282] The US embassy in Bonn, on the other hand, asked the West German social democrat Willy Brandt to put out a negative statement about Sandinista harassment against opposition parties, which Brandt refused to do.[283]

Already before the elections had taken place on 4 November 1984, however, it was clear that the electoral process would fail to bring the Sandinista government the international legitimacy it sought. In his memoirs, Ramírez writes that the FSLN only 'partially' gained legitimacy by organising elections.[284] Alejandro Bendaña, too, concedes that the Nicaraguan government lost the electoral battle for external legitimacy, noting that the 1984 elections 'were called Soviet sham elections, even though by historical standards, or Central American standards, they weren't that bad'.[285] To be sure, not all reports about the elections were negative, but unfortunately for the new Nicaraguan government, an international consensus about the nature of the elections was not reached. For example, the Netherlands, the only EC country to send an official observer team to the Nicaraguan elections, produced a generally positive report about the elections, which concluded that 'there were no irregularities during polling or in the count' and conceded that the

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[278] Reagan Library, Remarks at the Welcoming Ceremony for President Jaime Lusinchi of Venezuela, 4 December 1984. Accessed online at: https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/120484a
[279] CREST, CIA, USIA Public Diplomacy Activities on Central America, 2 November 1984.
[280] IISG, NKN, Box 14, Letter, Nicaragua Komitee Nederland to Paul Bremer, 21 February 1984.
[281] TNA, FCO 99/1779, Letter, NSC to Thatcher, 2 December 1984.
[282] ABPA, Memorandum, MINREX, 14 February 1984.
[283] CREST, CIA, USIA Public Diplomacy Activities on Central America, 2 November 1984.
[284] Ramírez, *Adiós Muchachos* (2012) 102.
[285] Interview, Sutterlin with Bendaña, 29 July 1997.

FSLN had won the elections with a 'clear majority'.[286] Dutch foreign minister Van den Broek, however, added at an European Political Cooperation meeting that this did not mean the Sandinista government was 'representative' of the Nicaraguan people.[287] The British government, too, dismissed positive reports about the elections. On 9 November 1984, Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe presented his views of the Nicaraguan elections in the House of Commons, and these were largely in agreement with the Reagan administration's position. To the frustration of many Labour MPs, Howe declared that there had been 'no possibility of a genuinely free and fair contest' in Sandinista Nicaragua, 'however orderly the polling may have appeared to visitors who spent the last few days in Nicaragua'.[288]

The main reason why Western European governments and politicians were sceptical of the validity of the Nicaraguan elections was that, a couple days before the vote, Arturo Cruz, the leader of the *Coordinadora Democrática Nicaragüense*, the main opposition party, declared that he was forced to withdraw his candidacy. In a televised interview on CBS Nightwatch, Cruz argued that he was 'excluded on purpose by the Sandinistas' and suggested that, if the elections had been truly free, his party could have easily defeated the Sandinistas in the polls, considering the 'pervading disillusionment' with the 'Marxist-Leninist' leaders of Nicaragua.[289] Conscious of the fact that the withdrawal of a prominent and internationally respected opposition leader would raise doubts about electoral freedom and political pluralism, the United States' public diplomacy office widely publicised the withdrawal of Arturo Cruz, using it as proof of the Sandinistas' bad intentions.[290] In Western Europe, it became an often-heard argument to undermine the legitimacy of the Nicaraguan elections. Howe, for instance, told the House of Commons that opposition parties in Nicaragua had 'decided to withdraw from the elections' since they were 'effectively intimidated and often physically harassed by Sandinista mobs'.[291]

Controversy exists to this day about the exact reason for Arturo Cruz' withdrawal from the election campaign. Sandinistas and their supporters maintain that the US government actively lobbied Arturo Cruz and other opposition candidates to boycott the elections. Bendaña, for instance, argued that 'because the principal opposition candidates had been heavily pressured by the U.S. to withdraw' the elections failed to fulfil their promise.[292] In October and November 1984, *The New York Times* made a similar argument, reporting on several occasions that American

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[286] *Washington Post*, 22 October 1984.
[287] Ibid.
[288] Hansard, House of Commons Debate, 9 November 1984.
[289] CREST, CIA, USIA Public Diplomacy Activities on Central America, 2 November 1984.
[290] CREST, CIA, Background Paper NSC Meeting on Central America, 30 October 1984.
[291] Hansard, House of Commons Debate, 9 November 1984.
[292] Interview, Sutterlin with Bendaña, 29 July 1997.

diplomats in Managua 'pressured opposition politicians to withdraw from the ballot in order to isolate the Sandinistas and to discredit the regime'.[293] In 1998, historian William M. LeoGrande, too, relying on secondary sources, newspapers, and interviews, argued that it was the White House's strategy to dissuade opposition parties from running in order to 'to wreck the elections as completely as possible'.[294] Either way, the refusal of opposition parties to participate in the elections was welcomed by the White House, as it confirmed the argument that Sandinista revolutionaries and genuine democracy were, in fact, mutually exclusive. Moreover, as the CIA noted, it left the Nicaraguan regime 'holding a near worthless hand' in the struggle for international legitimacy.[295]

However, it is important to note here that, with regards to Western Europe, it is uncertain if governmental opinion about the nature of the elections would have been radically different if Nicaraguan opposition parties had participated in the elections. Ideological preferences, as well as an effort to keep the Reagan administration relatively content, had a significant impact on how Western Europeans decided to assess the Nicaraguan elections. For example, already on 8 July 1984, months before Cruz announced his boycott, Margaret Thatcher told George Bush that 'no one should be under any illusions that the forthcoming elections in Nicaragua would be free'.[296] Moreover, the fact that all EC countries but the Netherlands rejected the Nicaraguan invitation to come and observe the electoral process suggests that, in most cases, Western European government officials had already made up their minds prior to Cruz' withdrawal.[297]

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that the FSLN adopted an increasingly defensive foreign policy in the months building up to the Grenada invasion in October 1983 and even more so thereafter. As fears of a US military invasion grew to unprecedented heights, Sandinista leaders realised that they could only prevent such an intervention, which would undoubtedly signify the end of Nicaragua's revolutionary experiment, by accommodating and collaborating with Western European and Latin American governments and politicians. Diplomatic support from these countries for a non-military solution to the Central American conflicts, the FSLN calculated, was more valuable than military support from the Soviet Union, even though the latter was obviously important for keeping the contras at bay. Rather than allowing the US administration to push the Nicaraguan

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[293] *The New York Times*, 15 November 1984; 21 October 1984.
[294] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* (1998) 319-321.
[295] CREST, CIA, Background Paper NSC Meeting on Central America, 30 October 1984.
[296] TNA, FCO 99/1742, Summary of Record, 6 July 1984.
[297] TNA, FCO 98/2024, MCAD, Memorandum, 11 September 1984.

government into the arms of the Soviet Union, therefore, as had happened with the Cubans in the 1960s, the Sandinistas opted to make several concessions to accommodate the West, such as organising elections, ensuring press freedom, and going along with the Contadora process.

Did this strategy work? Not as well as the Sandinistas hoped it would, but it certainly did not fail completely. By building connections with Western European audiences and governments, encouraging them to become involved in the revolution and Central American affairs, the Nicaraguan government contributed to the formation of a European foreign policy that – albeit sceptical of the Sandinista leaders' intentions – delegitimised and undermined the Reagan administration's militaristic foreign policy objectives in Central America. Of course, the FSLN *comandantes* hoped for more, as they desperately needed democratic legitimacy, financial support, and an end to the contra war. Yet, in the context of the Cold War and considering Reagan's unwavering determination to get rid of the Sandinista regime, it appears unlikely that the FSLN revolutionaries could have manoeuvred themselves into a better position in 1984. In the next chapter, where the long-term consequences and aftermath of the Nicaraguan elections are discussed, we will see if it was enough.

CHAPTER 5

NICARAGUA MUST SURVIVE, 1985-1986

In May 1985, as part of a diplomatic tour through Western Europe, the recently elected vice-president Sergio Ramírez launched the *Campaña Nicaragua Debe Sobrevivir* (Nicaragua Must Survive Campaign, CNDB).[1] The purpose of the new fundraising campaign, which was coordinated by Ligia Vigil of the *Comité Nicaragüense de Solidaridad con los Pueblos* (Nicaraguan Committee for People's Solidarity, CNSP), was to increase the levels of financial and material aid revolutionary Nicaragua received from Western Europe, Canada, and the United States.[2] Moreover, by channelling all the campaign's proceeds through one central body, namely the CNSP, the Sandinista government increased its control over the allocation and redistribution of the donated money and material. Indeed, as the campaign's coordinating committee reminded Western European solidarity activists that, because the leaders of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* best understood the economic and political 'needs' of the Nicaraguan people, they should also be the ones to decide on the distribution of the funds.[3] In contrast to previous solidarity campaigns, therefore, which primarily targeted international public opinion and state policies in Western Europe and the US, the highly centralised *Campaña Nicaragua Debe Sobrevivir* had a clear economic orientation.

The financial focus of the CNDB was reflective of the Sandinistas' wider preoccupation with stabilising the Nicaraguan economy, which came under high pressure in the mid-1980s. In April 1985, Mexican president Miguel de La Madrid told Sandinista *comandante* Henry Ruiz that Nicaragua, which was fully dependent on Mexican oil, would no longer be able to import petrol 'on the favourable terms that had been in place up to now'.[4] Moreover, on 1 May 1985, US president Ronald Reagan, capitalising on Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega's visit to the Soviet Union, imposed an economically damaging trade embargo on Nicaragua, making it impossible for the Sandinistas to export products such as bananas, coffee, and beef to the US, as well as import

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[1] *Barricada Internacional*, 13 June 1985.
[2] The CNSP was part of the foreign policy arm of the FSLN, the *Departamento de Relaciones Internacionales*.
[3] IISG, NKN, Box 41, 'Balance Anual de la Campaña Nicaragua Debe Sobrevivir en el Año 1987', exact date unknown.
[4] SAPMO, DY30/43863, Vermerk, Gespräch des Erick Honecker mit Henry Ruiz, 11 February 1983; Wilson Center Digital Archive, Minutes of Conversation, Todor Zhivkov and Daniel Ortega Saavedra on the Situation in Central America and Bulgarian Aid to Nicaragua, 2 May 1985. I want to thank Vesselin Dimitrov for kindly providing me with a translation of this document.

much-needed US manufactured goods, including spare parts for agricultural equipment.[5] Finally, as Latin American countries struggled to comply with the structural adjustment packages demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), regional aid to Nicaragua decreased from $120 million in 1984 to $80 million in 1985, and finally to a meagre $40 million in 1986.[6]

These external developments, combined with the high costs of keeping the anti-FSLN contra fighters at bay, made it difficult for the Sandinista government to improve the country's standard of living. As the FSLN struggled to come up with viable solutions for Nicaragua's economic troubles, an increasing number of people complained of low salaries, rapid inflation, lack of consumer goods, expensive basic foodstuffs (as the government eliminated subsidies on basic consumption), and poor public transportation.[7] This growing dissatisfaction at home was a potentially dangerous development for the FSLN leadership, which relied on the support and participation of the Nicaraguan people to carry out its ambitious revolutionary programme and ward off external threats. For the revolution's continued existence, therefore, it was absolutely crucial for the Sandinistas to find a way out of the difficult status quo.

This chapter, then, analyses how the Sandinistas used a range of old and new international strategies to ensure the economic and political survival of the Nicaraguan revolution in the years following the 1984 elections. Similar to the early 1980s, Nicaragua's revolutionary government combined traditional diplomacy with a clever use of international institutions, a coordinated propaganda campaign, and the mobilisation of its transnational network of solidarity activists. Sergio Ramírez, for instance, used visits to Western Europe to promote his novel, speak to European Community (EC) officials about the illegality of the US embargo, and criticise Reagan's support for the Nicaraguan counterinsurgents. The Sandinista government also scored a valuable propaganda victory in 1986, when the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Hague ruled that the US government had indeed breached international law by imposing the embargo, supporting the contras, and mining Nicaraguan harbours.

Yet, in spite of efforts by the FSLN and its allies in 1985 and 1986, the Nicaraguan government largely failed to strengthen the country's economy or increase international pressure on the Reagan administration. Western European governments and politicians, citing the Sandinistas' authoritarianism, human rights violations, and dependency on the Soviet Union, were unconvinced by the election results, and continued to treat the Nicaraguan revolutionaries as

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[5] William M. LeoGrande, 'Making the economy scream: US economic sanctions against Sandinista Nicaragua', *Third World Quarterly* 17 (1996) 338-339.
[6] These numbers are based on data by the Instituto de Relaciones Europeo-Latinoamericanas.
[7] SAPMO, DY30/13771, Einige Bermerkungen zur aktuellen situation, July 1985; *Revista Envío*, October 1985; September, 1986.

troublemakers. Within the solidarity movement, too, there were signs of discontent with the behaviour and decisions of the nine Sandinista *comandantes*. As the FSLN attempted to centralise the solidarity movement, they encountered resistance from activists, who saw this as a patronising and ineffective strategy. Rather than distancing themselves from the revolution altogether, however, solidarity workers and local politicians searched for new ways to engage with the country's revolutionary project. By establishing twinning links with towns, schools, and local communities in Nicaragua, Western European sympathisers bypassed the Sandinistas' top-down bureaucratic system. Levels of popular enthusiasm for the Nicaraguan revolution in Western Europe therefore remained relatively high, but the solidarity movement took on its own life, and it became impossible for the FLSN to control and channel its activities.

In sum, this chapter seeks to understand why the Sandinistas reached a series dead ends as they sought the economic, moral, and political support of Western European governments and peoples in the period 1985-1986. Crucially, because the international context the changed, the FSLN could no longer present Nicaragua as non-aligned in the global Cold War. As economic assistance from Latin America declined even further and the EC countries refused to increase their aid levels, the Nicaraguan government had no other option than to rely on the Soviet Union for material and financial support. In doing so, however, they further alienated Westerns Europeans and provided the Reagan administration with powerful arguments to intensify its policy of isolating and undermining the Sandinista revolution. Furthermore, transformations in Western European civil society and public opinion caused the revolutionary diplomacy of the FSLN to fall onto less fertile ground than in the early 1980s. In particular, when Reagan and the new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev started to engage in a superpower dialogue, the image of the American president as a dangerous Cold War hawk, which had been so important for the Sandinistas' propaganda campaign and collaboration with the peace movement, started to lose its persuasive power, which particularly damaged the political influence of the peace activists.

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

Interestingly, the year 1985 started on a positive note. Even though the Sandinistas knew the elections of November 1984 had failed to bring about an international consensus regarding the legitimacy of Nicaragua's revolutionary government, the FSLN still believed its electoral victory could be a step in the right direction. In the early months of 1985, newly appointed officials, cautiously optimistic, reassessed the international situation and developed plans for Nicaragua's future. For a brief moment, there even existed a glimmer of hope that its new government could end the counterrevolutionary war and come to a peaceful understanding with the Reagan administration.

The primary threat to the survival of the Nicaraguan revolution, the military overthrow of the Sandinista government, appeared largely under control in early 1985. The US-backed counterinsurgents were slowly but steadily being pushed backed to their base camps in Honduras and Costa Rica by the *Ejército Popular Sandinista*.[8] To the Sandinistas *comandantes* and the Reagan administration, it was crystal clear that without a new injection of US military aid, the contras would not be able to continue their armed struggle much longer. And as Miguel D'Escoto, who stayed on as foreign minister after the elections, wrote to Daniel Ortega in March 1985, the Reagan administration had virtually no chance of getting Congressional approval for a proposed $14 million aid package for the contras.[9] With regards to the possibility of a direct military intervention by US marines, documents from Nicaragua's *Ministerio del Exterior* demonstrate that government officials, taking into account US domestic politics and the fact that there was virtually no Western European or Latin American support for such a radical move, believed that this option was no longer on the Oval Office table.[10]

For the revolutionaries, therefore, it seemed like the right time to start making amends with their opponents, particularly the Reagan administration and the contra guerrillas. Daniel Ortega's inauguration speech at the Plaza de la Revolución in Managua on 10 January 1985 certainly struck a conciliatory tone. As the country's new president, Ortega told an audience of around ninety thousand Nicaraguans and international delegates, he remained committed to political pluralism, a mixed economy, and a non-aligned foreign policy. According to Peter W. Summerscale, the British ambassador to Costa Rica who also attended the inauguration, Ortega's normally hostile references to the United States remained 'relatively restrained' in his first presidential speech.[11] Ortega stressed that Nicaragua was not the 'enemy' of the United States and described an ongoing dialogue between Nicaraguan and US delegates, which was launched in late 1984 in the Mexican town of Manzanillo, as a 'magnificent opportunity' for the normalisation of US-Nicaraguan relations.[12] Furthermore, in a demonstration of the Sandinistas' willingness to bring the expensive and devastating contra war to an end, Ortega offered a general amnesty to all counterrevolutionaries – including the formerly excluded contra leaders – who were willing to lay down their arms and reintegrate into Nicaraguan society.[13] In sum, the key message of Daniel

[8] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* (1998) 349.
[9] ABPA, Miguel D'Escoto to Daniel Ortega, 29 March 1985.
[10] Ibid.
[11] TNA, FCO 99/2138, Summerscale to FCO, 11 January 1985.
[12] *De Volkskrant*, 12 January 1985. For more on Mexico's involvement in the Central America, see Vázquez Olivera and Campos Hernández eds., *México ante el conflicto centroamericano* (2016).
[13] *The Guardian*, 12 January 1985; Revista Envío, February 1985.

Ortega's speech was that, in 1985, his government would do everything within its power to bring peace to Nicaragua.

Despite Reagan pulling the plug on the Manzanillo talks three days before his second presidential inauguration on 21 January 1985, the Nicaraguan government remained committed to improving its relationship with the US administration. Nicaraguan diplomats, for example, actively lobbied for an indirect dialogue with the Reagan administration, hoping that the Mexican government could act as mediator.[14] D'Escoto, in particular, pushed for better relations with the US government. In a letter to Daniel Ortega on 29 March 1985, the foreign minister argued that, if Nicaragua's new government seriously wanted to 'deepen and consolidate the revolutionary process' by successfully implementing economic, social, and political reforms, peace was simply a necessary precondition.[15] And for the country to get to a state of peace, the foreign minister continued, the FSLN *comandantes* needed to do more than bring about the military defeat of the counterrevolutionaries; they also had to find a way to get the American president to 'seriously consider the possibility' of living with the Sandinista movement in power in Nicaragua.[16] In his letter to Ortega, D'Escoto proposed several concrete steps that might push Reagan towards peaceful coexistence with the Sandinistas. For instance, he advised Ortega to send at least one hundred of the 786 Cuban military instructors that were based in Nicaragua back to Cuba.[17] While the Sandinista leader's immediate response to D'Escoto's message is unknown, one hundred Cuban military advisors did withdraw from Nicaragua in May 1985, demonstrating that the FSLN *comandantes* were willing to make certain concessions to accommodate the US president.[18] By 1985, then, the FSLN had come to the conclusion that the continued survival of the revolution would be best served by reaching some sort of accommodation with its ideological enemies, even if this might have been an unlikely scenario.

This is not to say that Nicaraguan officials were naïve about the Reagan's not-so-secret desire to get rid of the Sandinista revolution. Indeed, even though the FSLN leadership believed the US administration could be forced by Congress and international public opinion to give up its support for the counterrevolutionaries, and perhaps even accept the existence of the left-wing government in Central America, they knew it was much more likely that Reagan would resort to different measures to hurt the Nicaraguan government, such as the imposition of economic sanctions or a trade embargo.[19] Therefore, Nicaraguan leaders were constantly looking for ways to

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[14] ABPA, MINEX, Documento de Trabajo: Contadora, date unknown.
[15] ABPA, D'Escoto to Ortega, 29 March 1985.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] *The New York Times*, 3 May 1985.
[19] ABPA, D'Escoto to Ortega, 29 March 1985; ABPA, MINEX, Documento de Trabajo Contadora, date unknown.

make their country's economy less dependent on trade with the United States. From 19 July 1979 onwards, as one CIA official noted, the Nicaraguan revolutionaries had implemented 'contingency plans to cut back its economic ties with the United States'.[20] To an extent, the Sandinista government succeeded in finding alternative markets for Nicaraguan export products such as bananas, seafood, tobacco, and beef. Between 1980 and 1984, Nicaraguan sales to the US had decreased from $214 to $58 million, as the country increasingly exported to Latin America, the Soviet Union, and Europe.[21] So, while Sandinista officials were relatively hopeful about improving the country's relationship with Reagan administration, they made sure to have a back-up plan in place.

With regards to the governments of Western Europe, in the first three months of 1985, Nicaraguan politicians and journalists also briefly observed a positive change in the attitude of European leaders.[22] In January 1985, for example, Jürgen Möllemann, the West German vice-minister of foreign affairs, included Nicaragua in his journey through Central America. This was a good sign, according to pro-Sandinista journals *Barricada*, *El Nuevo Diario*, and *Revista Envío*, as Möllemann's visit increased pressure on the Reagan administration, strengthened the Contadora peace initiative and suggested that West Germany was about to relaunch its bilateral aid programme to Nicaragua, which it had cut in 1982.[23] In addition, in March 1985, Nicaraguan officials noted with satisfaction that Western European leaders were growing increasingly concerned about the 'negative effects' that Reagan's Central America policy had on the unity of NATO.[24] Finally, on 20 February 1985, Sergio Ramírez wrote to Daniel Ortega that, despite the contested nature of the elections, Western European leaders no longer challenged the democratic legitimacy of the Nicaraguan government.[25] Indeed, Ramírez assured Ortega, the Sandinistas' decision to organise democratic elections had given the Nicaraguan government a 'great political advantage' in Western Europe.[26] Ramírez also believed that EC leaders appreciated the Nicaraguan government's declaration of support for the Contadora process and its willingness to engage in bilateral talks with the US administration, which stood in stark contrast to Reagan's confrontational attitude.[27]

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[20] CREST, CIA Report, Nicaragua: Initial Reaction to US Sanctions, 23 May 1985.
[21] Ibid.
[22] TNA, FCO 99/2153, San Jose to FCO, 31 January 1985.
[23] *La Prensa*, 23 January 1985; *Barricada*, 1 February 1985; *El Nuevo Diario*, 23 January 1985; *Revista Envío*, February 1985.
[24] ABPA, Memorandum, MINEX, 19 March 1985.
[25] Princeton University Library, Sergio Ramírez Papers, Box 62, Folder 8A, Ramírez to Ortega, 20 February 1985.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

Sergio Ramírez based his arguments about a possible shift in the foreign policies of Western European countries on the experiences and conversations he had during a diplomatic visit to Britain, Spain, Ireland, and France in February 1985. During the trip, the members of Ramírez' delegation, such as Nora Astorga from MINEX and Pedro Antonio Blandón from the Ministry of External Cooperation, received a warm welcome from a wide variety of European organisations, politicians, and activists. In Britain, Ramírez conversed with Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe, gave a talk in Chatham House, appeared on *Newsnight*, got a standing ovation at Oxford University, was interviewed by *The Times,* met with John Bevan of the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, and had a friendly dinner with Neil Kinnock, leader of the Labour Party.[28] Furthermore, to the surprise of both Howe and ambassador Summerscale, who deemed a Nicaraguan call on the prime minister not 'appropriate', Margaret Thatcher, too, decided that she wanted to meet with the Nicaraguan representatives.[29] Jonathan Steele of *The Guardian* noted optimistically that this decision marked 'a significant change in her attitude towards the Sandinista Government'.[30] And while Sergio Ramírez knew that Thatcher's real sympathies lay with the Reagan administration, he also detected some changes in the British attitude. Indeed, the greatest 'diplomatic success' of his Western European tour, Ramírez wrote to Ortega after his return to Nicaragua, was Thatcher's description of him as 'the vice-president of Nicaragua'.[31] The prime minister's public admission that he was, in fact, the country's vice-president, Ramírez argued, demonstrated that the British government had finally accepted the legitimacy of the Sandinista government.[32]

Nicaraguan speculation about a forthcoming change in British and Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) foreign policy, however, was largely based on wishful thinking. Even Ramírez' suggestion that Thatcher, swayed by the Nicaraguan elections, now accepted the legitimacy of the Sandinista government was an overly optimistic reading of the UK government's perspective. More than anything, FCO officials noted, the prime minister wanted to speak with Ramírez to give him 'a piece of her mind' about the situation in Central America and to express concern about 'the direction the Nicaraguan revolution' was taking.[33] According to Private Secretary Peter Ricketts, in advance of the meeting, Thatcher was particularly 'anxious' to have a brief with 'sharp concise points' she could make to Ramírez about the undemocratic nature of Nicaraguan elections, the

[28] See, TNA, FCO 99/2153 and Princeton University Library, Sergio Ramírez Papers, Box 62, Folder 8A.
[29] TNA, FCO 99/2153, Telegram, Summerscale to FCO, 18 January 1985.
[30] *The Guardian*, 29 January 1985.
[31] Princeton University Library, Sergio Ramírez Papers, Box 62, Folder 8A, Ramírez to Ortega, 20 February 1985.
[32] Ibid.
[33] TNA, FCO 99/2142, MCAD, Note, 30 January 1985.

arms build-up, and the Marxist leanings of the Sandinistas.[34] Despite its earlier optimism, therefore, *The Guardian* covered her meeting with Ramírez with the headline 'PM berates Nicaragua'.[35] In addition to Thatcher's personal dislike of the Sandinistas, diplomats of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office also remained sceptical of the Nicaraguan government. The Mexico and Central America Department, for example, considered proposed concessions by Sandinista leaders, such as the abovementioned offer to withdraw Cuban military advisors, to be 'empty gestures' of little value.[36] And with regards to West Germany, the subject of FRG aid to Nicaragua was not even raised in Ortega's meeting with Möllemann, which took place in Managua in January 1985.[37]

Nevertheless, the sense of anticipation in early 1985 was not entirely baseless. Overall, Ramírez' journey through Western Europe was a useful and important exercise, and it highlights that many West Europeans – at least outside government– continued to see revolutionary Nicaragua as a symbol of hope. The trip was good for publicity, the strengthening of relationships, and the public image of the FSLN. Press coverage of the diplomatic mission, as Ramírez later wrote to Ortega, had been extensive and overwhelmingly positive.[38] British government officials, too, noted that the Nicaraguan delegation had successfully adopted a high media profile while they visited Britain, Spain, Ireland, and France.[39] The fact that Sergio Ramírez' visit to London coincided with the English publication of his novel *To Bury Our Fathers*, which narrated the early days of the Somoza dictatorship, contributed to the romantic portrayal of the Nicaraguan revolution in the British media.[40] On personal level, too, the Nicaraguans received a warm welcome from left wing politicians, solidarity activists, and other Western European supporters of the FSLN. Kinnock, in particular, treated the Nicaraguans in a very 'cordial and fraternal' manner. The Labour leader even promised Ramírez he would lobby France and Spain to send military equipment to Nicaragua.[41] Kinnock evidently felt very close to the Sandinistas, as he also attended Daniel Ortega's inauguration in January 1985, and later told *The Times* that he considered the Nicaraguans elections 'a demonstration of the strength of the will and principles of Sandinism, with its emphasis on democracy and human rights'.[42]

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[34] TNA, FCO 99/2153, MCAD, Note, 29 January 1985.
[35] *The Guardian,* 9 February 1985.
[36] TNA, FCO 99/2145, 'Nicaragua: Statement by President Ortega of 26 February', 5 March 1985.
[37] TNA, FCO 99/2147, 'Visit of Herr Moellemann to Nicaragua: 22-25 January', 1 February 1985.
[38] Princeton University Archives, Sergio Ramírez Papers, Box 62, Folder 8A, Ramírez to Ortega, 20 February 1985.
[39] See, FCO 99/2147 and FCO 99/2142.
[40] Princeton University Library, Sergio Ramírez Papers, Box 62, Folder 8A, Ramírez to Ortega, 20 February 1985; *The Guardian*, 25 January 1985.
[41] Princeton University Library, Sergio Ramírez Papers, Box 62, Folder 8A, Ramírez to Ortega, 20 February 1985.
[42] *The Times*, 12 Jan 1985.

Furthermore, it is important to note here that, while Nicaraguan officials believed in the possibility that Western European governments would adopt a more pro-Sandinista stance in international politics after the elections, they were aware that there were likely limits to the Western European role. True, with the obvious exception of the Thatcher government, Western Europeans, both at the grassroots and at the level of the state, considered Reagan's confrontational Central America policies to be extremist, dangerous, and ineffective.[43] Yet, the Nicaraguan government knew that Western Europe's unanimous rejection of the US administration's aggressive Central America policies would not automatically translate into governmental or economic support for the Sandinista revolution, or even into public criticism of US foreign policy. For instance, in March 1985, MINEX officials concluded that the levels of economic and political support for the Nicaraguan revolution were still to a large extent dependent on the electoral performance of left-wing parties.[44] At a time when most Western European governments were ruled by centrist or right-wing governments, this was a sobering conclusion. Furthermore, Nicaraguan officials noted that, while Western European states publicly supported the Contadora negotiations and rejected the option of a direct US military intervention in Central America, their position on the counterrevolutionaries was much less clear. Some Western European leaders, including Dutch foreign minister Hans van den Broek, for instance, pushed the Nicaraguan government to engage in a dialogue with the contra leaders, which the FSLN categorically refused.[45]

In early 1985, then, the Sandinista leaders were hopeful but not naïve about how the international context would influence the development of the Nicaraguan revolution in the months following the elections. Nicaraguan officials implemented plans that might lead to a peaceful agreement with the Reagan administration, but also took cautionary measures in case US foreign policy would escalate. And while Sandinista leaders encouraged further political, cultural, and economic cooperation with EC countries and peoples, they realised that Western European governments would never throw their full weight behind the Nicaraguan revolution.[46] Indeed, MINEX officials concluded in March 1985, the only region that unconditionally sided with the *Revolución Popular Sandinista* was the socialist bloc.[47]

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[43] Princeton University Library, Sergio Ramírez Papers, Box 62, Folder 8A, Ramírez to Ortega, 20 February 1985.
[44] ABPA, MINEX, Memorandum, 28 March 1985.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

SETBACKS

Unfortunately for the Sandinista leaders, hopes that the FSLN's electoral victory would bring Nicaragua international legitimacy and stability were dashed within months. In April and May 1985, a series of setbacks and miscalculations led to a significant weakening of the country's economy and global standing, which, as former Sandinista diplomat Luis Caldera remembers, pushed Nicaragua's revolutionary government further 'into the arms of the Soviet Union'.[48]

The situation started to deteriorate on 15 April 1985, when FSLN *comandante* and planning minister Henry Ruiz received the unwelcome news, as alluded to above, that Mexico would no longer supply the Sandinista government with cheap oil unless it paid 80% in advance, which the Nicaraguan state could not afford.[49] According to the Sandinistas, the Mexican government's decision was brought about by heavy US pressure. Indeed, as Daniel Ortega told Bulgarian leader Todor Zhivkov on 2 May 1985, the Reagan administration had used a combination of 'blackmail' and 'foreign debt' to pressure Mexican leaders 'not to help Nicaragua'.[50] Specifically, Ortega added, the Americans were using information about the illegal involvement of 'very high-ranking people in the drugs trade' to force the Mexican government's hand.[51] Due to the limited availability of sources, it is difficult to know if Ortega's accusations regarding the drug trade had any truth to them. There is little doubt, however, that the Reagan administration welcomed the Mexican government's decision to, in the words of a CIA report, 'give greater balance to its regional policies'.[52]

The news that Nicaragua's petrol supply was no longer guaranteed shocked the Sandinista leaders, who realised they had no other option than to ask the Soviet Union and its allies for help in resolving the impending oil crisis.[53] Venezuela, the other petrol-rich country in Latin America, had already cut off oil supplies in July 1982, because Nicaragua was unable to pay back its debts.[54] To avoid an economic disaster, therefore, the Nicaraguan government acted quickly, and the FSLN leaders were thankful 'for the speed' with which the socialist leaders responded to their urgent 'request for a meeting'.[55] Already on 24 April 1985, less than ten days after Henry Ruiz' visit to Mexico City, the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS), announced that Daniel Ortega

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[48] Author's interview with Luis Angel Caldera Aburto, Managua, Nicaragua 16 April 2018.
[49] George Grayson, *Oil and Mexican Foreign Policy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988) 147-148.
[50] Wilson Center Digital Archive, Minutes of Conversation, Todor Zhivkov and Daniel Ortega Saavedra on the Situation in Central America and Bulgarian Aid to Nicaragua, 2 May 1985.
[51] Ibid.
[52] CREST, Directorate of Intelligence, Nicaragua: Oil Problems and Prospects, May 1985.
[53] Interview, Luis Caldera, 16 April 2018; Author's interview with Jaime Wheelock Román, Managua, Nicaragua, 18 April 2018.
[54] CREST, CIA Report, Nicaragua: Oil Problems and Prospects, May 1985; *Barricada Internacional*, 30 May 1985.
[55] Wilson Center Digital Archive, Todor Zhivkov and Daniel Ortega Saavedra, 2 May 1985.

would travel to the Soviet Union 'within a week'.[56] And on 28 April 1985, a prominent Nicaraguan delegation arrived in Moscow, which consisted of Daniel Ortega, Henry Ruiz, Miguel d'Escoto, and the director of the FSLN's *Departamento de Relaciones*, Julio López. After visiting the Soviet Union, the Sandinista delegates also spoke to officials in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia.[57] With regards to oil supplies, Ortega's trip to the Soviet bloc was certainly a success. On 30 May 1985, Sandinista newspaper *Barricada Internacional* announced that, for the year 1985, Moscow agreed to cover at least 80% of Nicaragua's petrol needs on 'favourable' terms, while the remaining 20% would be supplied by Libya, Iran, and Algeria.[58]

Yet the timing of the visit could not have been worse. On 23 April 1985, one day before the TASS announcement, Miguel D'Escoto's prediction that Reagan would lose the Congressional vote on the $14 million contra aid package came true. US politicians, to Reagan's disappointment, rejected the administration's foreign policy proposals for Nicaragua.[59] In this context, the news that Ortega would travel to Moscow led to a storm of angry responses, as Western European and American commentators, initially unaware of the Mexican oil decision, described Ortega's journey as a blatant insult to the members of Congress who had voted against contra aid.[60] The Nicaraguan president's 'pilgrimage to Moscow', the US embassy in Managua wrote to the State Department, 'drew criticism not only in the United States but also among Latin American and Western European states often inclined to side with the [Government of Nicaragua] in its dispute with the United States'.[61] The ill-timed visit, according to the British ambassador in Costa Rica, was a watershed in US-Nicaraguan relations, as it convinced the majority of Congress that the Sandinista regime was, in fact, 'Marxist and Communist backed'.[62] Even the Dutch Nicaragua Committee, staunchly in favour of the FSLN, failed to understand the Nicaraguan decision and was frustrated by the lack of information it received from the DRI.[63]

Aside from causing public outcry, Ortega's highly published trip to the socialist bloc strengthened the hand of the US administration, as the majority of Congress no longer felt inclined to resist Reagan's policies towards Nicaragua. On 1 May 1985, citing 'an unusual and extraordinary

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[56] *UPI*, 24 April 1985.
[57] *El País*, 1 May 1985; *UPI*, 8 May 1985; *Barricada Internacional*, 9 May 1985.
[58] *Barricada Internacional*, 30 May 1985
[59] Reagan Library, Statement on House of Representatives Disapproval of United States Assistance for the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance, 24 April 1985. Accessed online at: https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/42485c
[60] AA, Zwischenarchiv 136368, Sachstand, Zentralamerika, 29 May 1985; Stephen Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2007) 359.
[61] Digital National Security Archive, AmEmbassy Managua to SecState Washington, 5 May 1985.
[62] TNA, FCO 99/2387, Nicaragua: Annual Review 1985, 9 January 1986; AmEmbassy Managua to SecState Washington, May 1985; The Times, 29 April 1985.
[63] IISG, NKN, Box 101, 'Noodtoestand afgekondigd in Nicaragua, een aantal rechten teruggedraaid', October 1986.

threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States', Reagan capitalised on Ortega's visit and announced an economic embargo against Nicaragua.[64] Moreover, in June 1985, Reagan and his allies brought about 'a major reversal' in Congressional opinion, and obtained approval for $27 million in 'humanitarian' aid to the contras, such as medicine, clothing, and food.[65] Several months later, in February 1986, Reagan requested another $100 million in contra aid, including $70 million for military equipment and training, which Congress approved on 25 June 1986.[66] In the year following the Nicaraguan visit to the Soviet Union, therefore, Reagan and his Congressional allies pushed through foreign policy proposals for Nicaragua with relative ease.[67]

As soon as the Sandinistas realised that Ortega's trip to Moscow had unforeseen and unwelcome consequences, they responded with a diplomatic offensive to limit the damage as much as possible, focusing primarily on Western Europe. Similar to previous years, the FSLN hoped to demonstrate their continued non-alignment in the global Cold War, as well as provide the world with evidence of a transatlantic split regarding the correct policy towards Sandinista revolution. To make clear that the Nicaraguan-US conflict was once again falsely portrayed by the Reagan administration as a struggle between East and West, Ortega immediately added several Western European stops to his journey of the Soviet bloc, including Paris, Rome, and Madrid. Sergio Ramírez, too, for the second time that year, travelled to Western Europe, visiting Austria, the Netherlands, and the FRG in May and June 1985.[68] During these trips, the Sandinista leaders assured EC politicians that their country's dependency on Soviet oil was only temporary, as they were actively seeking economic assistance to be able to pay their debts to Mexico.[69] Moreover, with the US embargo in mind, they also tried to open up new markets for export products, such as coffee, bananas, seafood, and cotton, and to obtain higher levels of Western European financial aid, arguing that Nicaragua continued to seek 'economic diversification' to prevent 'total' economic dependency on the Soviet Union.[70]

The Sandinistas' diplomatic campaign in Western Europe had mixed results. None of the European leaders joined the US economic embargo, but the EC countries could not agree on a common response to the economic escalation of the Central American conflict. For example,

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[64] Reagan Library, Executive Order 12513, Prohibiting Trade and Certain Other Transactions Involving Nicaragua, 1 May 1985. Accessed online at: https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/50185a
[65] Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran/Contra Affair (Washington: U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran/U.S. Senate Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, 1987).
[66] For more on US aid for the contras, see, Hoekstra, 'Helping the Contras', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2019)
[67] LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard* (1998) 363-373.
[68] *Barricada Internacional*, 30 May 1985.
[69] BZ, Inventarisnummer 03795, BZ to San Jose, 4 June 1985.
[70] BZ, Inventarisnummer 03795, BZ to San Jose, 4 June 1985; CREST, CIA Report, Nicaragua: Initial Reaction to US Sanctions, 23 May 1985.

when Greece and France pressured their European allies for a joint EC declaration to publicly denounce the embargo in May 1985, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and West Germany, unwilling to damage the transatlantic alliance, blocked these proposals, arguing that the bilateral responses of individual European leaders had been sufficient.[71] It was better for Western Europeans to take a 'low profile' in this situation, the *Auswärtiges Amt* stated privately, since there was no point in aimlessly attacking US foreign policy.[72] As a result of these disagreements, the EC also failed to adopt a common position in the United Nations. On 17 December 1985, when the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that criticised the US trade embargo and invited the international community to 'help reduce the negative effects' of the measures imposed against Nicaragua, the vote of the EC countries was split. France, Greece, Denmark, and Spain, voted in favour of the resolution while the rest, in order to avoid the possibility of 'a three-way split' of the European Community, decided to abstain.[73]

Although hesitant to issue a joint declaration on the embargo, individual EC countries, including West Germany, Britain, and the Netherlands, made very clear that they found the US decision to impose an embargo counterproductive. Van den Broek, for example, told Dutch parliamentarians that the Netherlands rejected any measures that could lead to the economic and political isolation of Nicaragua, including the imposition of an 'economic boycott'.[74] FRG foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, too, publicly declared that his government believed economic sanctions served no useful political purpose.[75] Furthermore, at the G7 economic summit in Bonn, Western European leaders, backed by Canadian government, privately explained to the Americans they had serious concerns about Reagan's unilateral decision.[76] Roland Dumas, the new French foreign minister, told George Shultz that Nicaragua would only become more dependent on the Soviet Union if the European countries joined the US embargo. Giulio Andreotti, the Italian minister of foreign affairs, after reminding everyone that the Sandinistas were not 'simply emanations of the devil', made the point that economic sanctions were 'rarely helpful'.[77] In this particular case, Andreotti added, the FSLN could use the embargo as an excuse if the Nicaraguan economy, as a result of the Sandinistas' own 'incompetence', inevitably collapsed. Finally,

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[71] AA, Zwischenarchiv 129579, 'Sitzung der EPZ-AG Lateinamerika am 20 Mai in Rom', 22 May 1985; BZ, Inventarisnummer 02037, Ambassade Parijs naar BZ, 19 June 1985.
[72] Ibid.
[73] See, for more on the UN debate, TNA, FCO 99/2152. Officially, Spain only joined the EC on 1 January 1986, but the Spanish government already coordinated its foreign policy with its European allies before this date.
[74] Handelingen Tweede Kamer, 1 May 1985.
[75] Gary Clyde Hufbauer et al eds., *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered: History and Current Policy* (Washington: Institute for International Economics, 1990) 185.
[76] AAPD, 1985, Document 112, Gespräch der Außenminister der G-7 in Brühl, 3 May 1985.
[77] TNA, FCO 99/2142, Minutes of Economic Summit in Bonn, Foreign Ministers' Meeting, 3 May 1985,

Genscher told Shultz that the embargo would primarily hurt the 'independent part' of Nicaraguan society, namely the private sector.[78]

Apart from expressing concern, however, there was little Western European governments could and wanted to do to alleviate the damage of the US trade embargo. First of all, with regards to sanctions, the Reagan administration did not seem to care much about the concerns of its Western European allies. Shultz, for example, made it very clear that the US did not seek Western European permission to impose sanctions. The American government had never expected the EC countries to 'respond positively' to the embargo, Shultz told his colleagues in Bonn, and that was exactly why the US had not lobbied for Western European support in the first place.[79] Either way, Shultz added, the opinions of EC leaders simply would not deter President Reagan from making his own foreign policy decisions regarding revolutionary Nicaragua.[80] British officials came to a similar conclusion in September 1985 when they evaluated their approach to the US-Nicaraguan conflict. Britain had 'few means of influencing events' in Central America, David Thomas concluded, and there was 'little evidence' that British statements, both public and private, had 'any effect' on Reagan's confrontational approach towards the Sandinistas.[81]

Furthermore, Ortega and Ramírez largely failed to win additional economic assistance and secure new export markets for Nicaraguan products. Except for some minor concessions from the governments of Sweden and Norway, the majority of the Western European leaders made clear that, while they rejected the US embargo in principal, they would not compensate Nicaragua for the economic damage it caused.[82] The EC countries, in particular, were reluctant to pick a side in the Central American crises, and had a strong preference for a multilateral approach to the region as a whole, rather than a 'fixation' on Nicaragua alone.[83] In June 1985, therefore, Van den Broek explained that the Dutch government would not give more financial aid to Nicaragua, since this would only undermine the foreign policy objectives of the EC towards the Central American region. Furthermore, he added, the Nicaraguan government already received significant amounts of aid through the EC regional development programme.[84] With regards to the FRG, Sergio Ramírez mission to obtain financial credits was doomed from the start. Helmut Kohl did not even

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[78] Ibid.
[79] It seems likely that the attitudes of EC and US officials regarding the embargo were rooted in the transatlantic conflict about the Euro-Soviet gas pipeline project, which the Reagan administration actively opposed. For more on this, see Ksenia Demidova's chapter in Patel and Weisbrode eds., *European Integration and the Atlantic Community* (2013).
[80] AAPD, 1985, Document 112, Gespräch der Außenminister der G-7 in Brühl, 3 May 1985.
[81] TNA, FCO 99/2145, David Thomas to MCAD, 18 September 1985.
[82] Staten-Generaal Digitaal, Buitenlandse Zaken, Verslag van een Mondeling Overleg, 2 September 1985.
[83] *Het Vrije Volk*, 6 June 1985.
[84] Staten-Generaal Digitaal, Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Verslag van een Mondeling Overleg', 2 September 1985.

want to see Ramírez, as the Chancellor was insulted by Daniel Ortega's comments in East Berlin, where he stated that the West Germans were 'accomplices in the US attempt to exterminate the Nicaraguan people'.[85] Instead, the Nicaraguan vice-president had a brief and tense conversation with Genscher about the emotional causes of Ortega's 'unfortunate' remarks, and aid was not mentioned at all.[86] Aside from a handful of individual statements denouncing the US embargo and some minor pressure on Reagan's policies, therefore, Ortega's and Ramírez' journeys through Western Europe were therefore largely unsuccessful.

It is useful to mention here that Western European reluctance to compensate for Nicaragua's economic damage in the aftermath of the US embargo was symptomatic of an already existing trend, in which financial flows from individual Western European countries to Nicaragua were slowly but steadily drying up in the mid-1980s.[87] Indeed, in addition to the British government, which never made any significant financial contribution, governments in France, the FRG, Spain, and the Netherlands were also cutting back on bilateral aid. In the case of West Germany and Britain, the Nicaraguan government assessed, this was predominantly due to the Sandinistas' political differences with the British Conservatives and German Christian Democrats. In France, Spain, and the Netherlands, MINEX officials believed, the main cause for the discontinuation of aid was Nicaragua's inability to pay back its debts. According to Nicaraguan sources, for example, the country's debt to France in March 1985 was more than $54 million. Of the Western European states, only the Nordic countries increased their levels of aid to the Nicaraguan revolutionaries. In particular, under the leadership of social democrat Olof Palme, who had supported the FSLN since the late 1970s, Swedish financial aid to Nicaragua remained at a consistently high level.[88]

In this context of heightening international tensions and reduced aid flows, the frustrated FSLN *comandantes* cracked down internally to ward of opposition in midst of economic crisis and prolonged conflict, undoing many of the concessions they had made in the run-up to the elections in November 1984. On 15 October 1985, the Sandinista leadership announced the reintroduction of the State of Emergency (first imposed in 1982), which suspended various civil rights, such as press freedom, the right to appeal, the right to strike, and the right to peaceful assembly.[89] Publicly,

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[85] AA, Zwischenarchiv 136368, Sachstand: Zentralamerika, 29 May 1985; TNA, FCO 99/2147, Bonn to FCO, 5 June 1985.
[86] AAPD, 1985, Document 139, Gespräch des Bundesministers Genscher mit dem nicaraguanischen Vizepräsidenten Ramírez, 28 May 1985.
[87] ABPA, MINEX, Memorandum, 28 March 1985.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Normas Jurídicas de Nicaragua, Decreto No. 128, Estado de Emergencia Nacional, 15 October 1985. Online at: http://legislacion.asamblea.gob.ni/normaweb.nsf/($All)/F755D17CE08D3865062570A10057E246?OpenDocument

the FSLN and its allies argued that emergency decree was 'a direct response to the latest escalation of the US-backed war against Nicaragua'.[90] Yet, as international observers and Nicaraguan journalists pointed out, this argument was hardly convincing since the 'military situation' had actually improved in the months leading up to the emergency announcement.[91] East German diplomats in Managua noted privately, for instance, that Sandinista *comandantes* Humberto Ortega, Luis Carrión, and Jaime Wheelock had repeatedly argued that the contras were 'as good as defeated'.[92] More likely, therefore, the East Germans reported, the reintroduction of the State of Emergency was a response to a considerable 'lapse in confidence' amongst the Nicaraguan population in the FSLN leaders, who consequently felt the need 'to strenghten their influence and authority' over the country, which suffered from a growing international isolation, civil war, and an economic crisis.[93] Indeed, the Nicaraguan editors of *Revista Envío* speculated, the state of emergency was designed 'to consolidate the recent military gains with political restraints and controls'.[94]

The emergency decree came as an unwelcome surprise to many Western Europeans, both from the left and the right. Predictably, the US State Department portrayed the Nicaraguan decision as evidence that the FSLN was, as Reagan had predicted, 'imposing a totalitarian regime on the people of Nicaragua'.[95] The British government had a similar response.[96] In addition to the usual suspects, however, the suspension of political rights in Nicaragua was also criticised by left-wing parties, newspapers, activists, and the leaders of, amongst others, France, Spain, West Germany, and the Netherlands.[97] The immediate reaction of Western European solidarity committees was one of frustration, disbelief, and confusion. Not only were the national representatives irritated by the lack of information they received from the DRI about the state of emergency, but they also questioned if it was truly necessary to restrict civil liberties.[98] For example, one of the reasons the pro-Sandinista *Agencia Nueva Nicaragüense* gave for the measures was the growing strength of an 'internal front' in Nicaragua, which was allegedly backed by the CIA, sabotaged the economy, secretly assisted contra guerrillas, and encouraged Nicaraguans to evade military conscription. However, solidarity activists noted, prior to the Sandinista decision, they had

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[90] PHM, NSC, Box 1, Press Release, date unknown; TNA, FCO 99/2385, Nicaraguan Embassy in London, Press Release on the State of Emergency, 17 October 1985.
[91] *Revista Envío,* November 1985.
[92] SAPMO, DY30/13771, Monatsbericht November 1985, 8 November 1985.
[93] Ibid.
[94] *Revista Envío,* November 1985.
[95] TNA, FCO 99/2139, Washington to FCO, 17 October 1985.
[96] TNA, FCO 99/2139, Coreu London to Coreu, 21 October 1985; FCO 99/2385, Budd to Addison, 1 April 1986.
[97] *The Times*, 17 October 1985; TNA, FCO/2139, Statement French Foreign Ministry, 17 October 1985.
[98] IISG, NKN, Box 101, Verslag van het Europees Congres in Lissabon, 20 October 1985.

never received any information about this so-called internal front.[99] Similar points were made by national representatives from, amongst others, Finland, the FRG, and Britain at the Western European solidarity conference in Portugal on 18, 19, and 20 October 1985. In particular, they pointed out to Silvia McEwan, the representative of the *Comité Nicaragüense de Solidaridad de los Pueblos*, that they could not convincingly argue in favour of the decision without up-to-date information about the situation in Nicaragua.[100]

Even though solidarity activists initially criticised the state of emergency, their public declarations defended the decision of the Sandinista *comandantes*. John Bevan of the London-based NSC, for example, sent out a press release stating that the state of emergency was 'a direct response to the latest escalation of the US-backed war against Nicaragua'.[101] By comparing the Nicaraguan restrictions on civil liberties to the measures that Britain adopted in the Second World War, the NSC hoped to convince the British people of the urgency of the Nicaraguan situation.[102] After recovering from the initial shock, in fact, Western European activists quickly came to terms with state of emergency. The official – and rather dubious – assessment of the Dutch NKN, for example, was that the measures primarily targeted the US-sponsored 'internal front' and that there would be no consequences for the 'normal civilians' of Nicaragua.[103] With regards to the lack of press freedom, Dutch activists believed that, even though it was certainly important for Nicaraguan people to receive information and read opinions from a variety of sources, the anti-Sandinista newspaper *La Prensa* was simply spreading 'subtle lies' to undermine the revolution. Noting that the anti-communist newspaper *El Mercurio* had played a crucial role in the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, solidarity activists deemed the Nicaraguan government's controversial decision to censor *La Prensa* to be fully justified.[104]

In contrast, social democratic politicians in Western Europe found it impossible to defend the state of emergency in public, notwithstanding their previous support for the Nicaraguan revolutionaries. François Mitterrand's government, for example, responded to the announcement by releasing a statement declaring that France 'deplored all measures' that restricted democratic liberties.[105] Furthermore, Kinnock, on behalf of his party, wrote a solemn letter to Daniel Ortega

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[99] IISG, NKN, Box 101, 'Noodtoestand afgekondigd in Nicaragua, een aantal rechten teruggedraaid', October 1986.
[100] IISG, NKN, Box 101, Verslag van het Europees Congres in Lissabon, 20 October 1985.
[101] PHM, NSC, Box 1, NSC Press Release, date unknown.
[102] Ibid.
[103] IISG, NKN, Box 96-97, NKN to local solidarity committees, 17 October 1985; The causes and consequences on the ground of the State of Emergency are complex and – as far as I know – have not been covered in detailed by historians. For a detailed contemporary analysis, see, 'Nicaragua: El país en Emergencia', *Revista Envío*, November 1985.
[104] IISG, NKN, Box 101, 'Noodtoestand afgekondigd in Nicaragua, een aantal rechten teruggedraaid', October 1986.
[105] TNA, FCO 99/2139, Press Release, French Ministry for External Affairs, 17 October 1985.

in which he greeted the news about the reintroduction of the state of emergency 'with sadness and dismay'. Even though he fully understood the 'terrible problems' that Nicaragua encountered as a result of American 'support for the contra terrorists', Kinnock wrote, he was forced to urge Ortega to 'restore the provisions for safeguarding civil liberties' as soon as possible.[106] Dutch Labour leader Joop den Uyl, too, declared in parliament that he 'deplored' the Sandinista decision to limit civil rights.[107] In addition to providing critics of the FSLN with more material, therefore, the imposition of the state of emergency also alienated Western European social democrats.

Rather than gradual improvement, the period following the Nicaraguan elections brought new problems for the Sandinistas. When Daniel Ortega, upon his return from Europe, explained that the visit to the Soviet Union was necessary because the Mexican government had suspended oil supplies, most of the political damage had already been done. Clearly, the Sandinista *comandantes* had not expected such a powerful international backlash. Daniel Ortega's emotional comments in Berlin, as well as the fact that the government did not send a lower-ranking delegation to Moscow, suggests that the Sandinistas were surprised and disappointed by Reagan's ability to capitalise on Ortega's trip so soon after the 1984 elections. In this context, the controversial decision to impose a state of emergency in October 1985 might well have been caused by the Sandinista leaders' growing sense of disillusionment with the international community, most notably with the Western countries. Of course, we should not overlook domestic causes, but from the perspective of the FSLN *comandantes*, it must have seemed like there was little benefit to making concessions to domestic opponents regarding democracy, amnesties, and pluralism in Nicaragua, if it did not fundamentally alter the way Western European, Latin America, and US politicians treated the Sandinista government.

Fundraising and Twinning

Due to the country's economic and political crises, however, Nicaraguan leaders could not afford to give up on their revolutionary diplomacy towards the Western European region as a whole. At a time when EC governments showed little sympathy for the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, the FSLN decided to turn to Western European people and NGOs for desperately needed material and financial support. Crucially, in May 1985, in a direct response to the US economic embargo, the FSLN launched their centralised solidarity campaign, *Nicaragua Debe Sobrevivir*, which targeted non-state actors in the Americas and Western Europe.

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[106] PHM, The Judith Hart Papers, File 05/58, Kinnock to Ortega, 16 October 1985.
[107] Staten Generaal Digitaal, Handelingen Tweede Kamer, 17 October 1985.

While the campaign title suggests that Nicaraguans were on the brink of starvation in 1985, the funds raised by the CNDS were actually going towards the country's relatively well-off middle classes, which included doctors, teachers, and engineers. After the US embargo, the materials the FSLN received from the Soviet Union, as Luis Caldera remembers, were not enough to satisfy the needs of these mostly urban Nicaraguans, who were accustomed to buying products made in the US, such as sardines, boots, condensed milk, dolls, and clothing.[108] The purpose of the CNDS, therefore, was to collect goods in Western Europe, Canada, and the US, which would be shipped to Nicaragua in containers and sold to the middle classes in government stores. The FSLN provided solidarity committees with detailed lists of the products the government needed, which varied from nylon stockings for nurses to tools for mechanics. It was up to the solidarity committees to decide if they wanted to raise money and buy the products themselves or call on people to donate the requested materials.[109] From the financial profits of the sales, the Nicaraguan government could import more manufactured goods from neighbouring Costa Rica, Panama, and Honduras, such as refrigerators and televisions.[110] The CNDS, therefore, was designed to neutralise opposition, prevent the middle classes from leaving the country, and to keep the economy going in the aftermath of the damaging US economic embargo.

Although most Western European solidarity committees agreed to support the CNDS, they were highly sceptical of the new campaign. In essence, the Sandinistas' broad focus on economic development and fundraising clashed with the desire of Western European activists to be personally involved in the revolutionary process, as well as with their conviction that solidarity activism should have a clear political component. The character of the Sandinistas' new project was simply too 'apolitical' to be successful in Western European countries, Isabel Cárcamo of the *Informationsbüro Wupperta*l, the headquarters of the West German solidarity movement, wrote in October 1986. Because it was almost impossible to mobilise local solidarity activists for what was essentially a humanitarian cause, Cárcamo argued, the FRG solidarity movement had only raised around $100.000 for the Nicaraguan government in the last year.[111] Representatives of the *Nicaragua Komitee Nederland*, too, argued that Dutch people were not interested in the CNDS because the campaign offered no 'structural solutions' to the problems revolutionary Nicaragua encountered as a result of US destabilisation policies.[112]

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[108] Interview, Luis Caldera, 16 April 2018.
[109] IISG, NKN, Box 17-18, Coordinadora Europea de Comités Nacionales de Solidaridad con Nicaragua, 31 August 1985.
[110] Interview, Luis Caldera, 16 April 2018; Adam Jones, 'Nicaragua: Seven Years On', *Latin America Connexions* 4 (1986).
[111] IISG, NKN, Box 17-18, 'Informe de la coordinación alemana-RFA correspondiente Nov 85 - Nov 86', 23 October 1986.
[112] IISG, NKN, Box 17-18, 'Informe para el 11 Congreso Europeo del Comité de Holanda', date unknown.

In addition, since the CNSP determined how the donations were distributed, solidarity activists and contributors had no way of finding out where in Nicaragua their money and materials ended up. This would damage the campaign's impact, the Danish and Greek solidarity committees predicted, as potential donors in Western Europe would only respond to a clear message and objective. People simply did not care about such an abstract concept as the economic 'survival' of the Nicaraguan revolution as a whole, they argued, and the fundraising campaign would be more successful if committees were allowed to raise money for specific causes in Nicaragua, such as a coffee cooperative, a hospital, or a community theatre.[113]

At a solidarity conference of West European committees in Lisbon in October 1985, therefore, national representatives pressured the Milan-based Nicaraguan consul-general Bergman Zuniga Perez, who was responsible for coordinating the CNDS in Western Europe, to provide the solidarity movement with better opportunities to trace their donations within Nicaragua. John Bevan of the NSC, for example, wanted to make sure the money ended up with the *Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüense Luisa Amanda Espinoza* (Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women, AMLAE).[114] To be sure, not everyone in the solidarity movement shared this point of views. According to Mary Timmerman, for instance, who represented the NKN in Managua in 1986-1990, the most important thing was that the Nicaraguan people profited from the material aid. Did solidarity activists and donors really have to know, she asked rhetorically, if certain products came from Spain, Eastern Europe, or the Netherlands?[115]

If we look at the results of the campaign, however, it appears that Mary Timmerman underestimated the importance of visible results and personal connections for effective solidarity work. In November 1986, at the Western European solidarity conference in Athens, national representatives presented the proceeds of *Nicaragua Debe Sobrevivir* to FSLN-representatives Ligia Vigil and Bergman Zuniga. The activists concluded that the campaign had been a relative success in some countries, such as the Netherlands, where solidarity committees collected around $120,000, and West Germany, where local activists eventually managed to raise around $130,000. This was not a bad result. However, compared to the literacy campaign of 1980, when Dutch solidarity activists raised more than $250,000, it was less than the activists had hoped for. Moreover, other countries, such as France and Denmark, decided to quit fundraising for the CNDS altogether and focus on lobbying their national governments and spreading political information about US economic aggression and contra war instead.[116] Out of all the Western

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[113] IISG, NKN, Box 17-18, Danish Solidarity Committee, 'Balance del Trabajo de Solidaridad de Nov 85 a Sep 86'.
[114] IISG, NKN, Box 101, Records of European Solidarity Conference in Athens, 22-23 November 1985.
[115] Hertogs ed., *Nederlanders naast Nicaragua* (1989).
[116] IISG, NKN, Box 101, Records of European Solidarity Conference in Athens, 22-23 November 1986.

European countries, the British solidarity movement, which had since 1983 established fruitful relations with trade unions, the Labour Party, and charities such as War on Want, was the most successful solidarity committee. Indeed, in 1989, the NSC calculated that, since the launch of the campaign in June 1985, the UK solidarity movement had collected enough money to send fifteen containers filled with medical supplies, kitchen utensils, and educational material, which cost around $900,000.[117]

The mixed results of the Sandinistas' fundraising campaign must not be confused with a decline of interest in the Nicaraguan revolution. On the contrary, popular interest in Central America continued to grow in the mid-1980s. Instead of collaborating with Nicaragua's central bureaucracy and raising money for the CNDS, however, Western European solidarity activists moved in the opposite direction, focusing on more direct forms of solidarity activism and grassroots collaboration with people in Nicaragua. In addition to the fact that it was easier to mobilise Western Europeans for local development projects, such as helping with the harvest or the construction of a school, some solidarity activists were also frustrated by what they saw as the FSLN's tendency to undermine the independence of the Western European committees. As demonstrated by a letter that NKN coordinator Wim Jillings wrote to his colleague Hans Langenberg in May 1985, the Dutch national committee was particularly averse to efforts to centralise the Western European solidarity movement.[118] Jillings, for example, wrote to Langenberg that it was simply 'astonishing' that Rafael Corea, the recently appointed head of the CNSP, had provided each national solidarity committee with a list of urgent tasks, which included buying 'emergency plane tickets' in case Sandinista representatives needed to interrupt their travels to fly back to Nicaragua.[119] By opting for direct cooperation with Nicaraguan towns and grassroots organisations, then, solidarity activists could operate with more freedom and flexibility than in centralised projects, such as Nicaragua Must Survive, and build visible and human connections with revolutionary Nicaraguans.

In addition to the continued popularity of solidarity brigades, discussed in the previous chapter, the most obvious example of this trend was the rapid growth of twinning links with Nicaraguan cities, towns, schools, and universities in the late 1980s. From 1984 onwards, more than a hundred Western European cities established formal or informal relationships with Nicaraguan municipalities.[120] In 1988, West Germany alone had forty-nine partnerships with

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[117] IISG, NKN, Box 146, 'Campaña Británica de Solidaridad con Nicaragua: Monografía', July 1989.
[118] IISG, NKN, Box 41, Jillings to Langenberg, 29 May 1985.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Marike Bontebal, *Cities as Partners: the challenge to strengthen urban governance through North-South city partnerships* (Delft: Eburon, 2009) 85-86.

Nicaraguan organisations, regions, and towns. Often, twinning links were established as a result of active lobbying by Nicaragua solidarity committees and Nicaraguan representatives, such as the London-based ambassador Francisco D'Escoto.[121] Preferably, these so-called sister cities shared certain characteristic or interests. For example, Amsterdam, London, and Managua were national capitals, Oxford, Hamburg, Utrecht, and Léon were university cities, and Masaya and Leicester shared a sewing and clothing industry. Through twinning, solidarity activism with Nicaragua became a more personal and local experience. As a result of the newly established partnerships, for instance, mayors from small Dutch towns travelled to Central America, German school children wrote letters to Nicaraguan pupils, murals about life and art in revolutionary Nicaragua were painted on buildings in British cities, and money was donated to the Nicaraguan sister cities to construct hospitals and community centres.[122]

The practice of setting up economic, political, and cultural links between towns and cities from distinct geographical areas was not new; it had existed in Western Europe since the end of the Second World War. Then, local councils and mayors had used twinning as a method to improve the relationships between former enemy states, such as Britain and Germany, and later to overcome the Cold War division of Europe.[123] Starting in the 1960s, city linking was then increasingly focused on North-South cooperation and local development projects. French municipalities, for example, formed relationships with cities in their former colonies, in particular Senegal. In combination with a preference for direct and local forms of development cooperation, political activism and international solidarity were important driving factors behind the establishment of twinning links. For instance, in a clear example of so-called municipal internationalism in final decade of the Cold War, dozens of Dutch cities built partnerships with black South African communities to support the fight against apartheid.[124] Through twinning, local activists and politicians could bypass their national governments to directly participate in international politics and contribute to development programmes in the Global South. Indeed, according to the summary of a Dutch report on twinning with Nicaragua, 'at the city to city level, the gap between the North and South can be bridged' and political solidarity can be effectively translated into tangible 'acts or projects'.[125]

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[121] See, IISG, NKN, Box 17-18; Stichting Stedenband Nijmegen-Masaya, 'Burgemeester Ortega van Masaya in Nijmegen', November 1986.
[122] Hertogs ed., *Nederlanders naast Nicaragua* (1989).
[123] See, Antoine Vion, 'Europe from the Bottom up: Town Twining in France during the Cold War', *Contemporary European History* 11(2002) 623-640 and Nick Clarke, 'Town Twinning in Cold War Britain: (Dis)continuities in Twentieth-Century Municipal Internationalism', *Contemporary British History* 24 (2010) 173-191.
[124] Bontebal, *Cities as Partners* (2009).
[125] IISG, NKN, Box 17-18, 'European Conference on city linking with Nicaragua: an example of North-South cooperation and dialogue', 26-28 May 1988.

Western European municipalities' decisions to establish twinning links with Nicaraguan cities were often driven by a combination of political factors, most notably sympathy for the Nicaraguan revolution, anger with US foreign policy, and frustration with the approach of Western European governments to Central America. At a time when the European left had little influence on national foreign policy, twinning links offered left-wing politicians, who often dominated in urban areas, an alternative foreign policy track. For example, on 1 October 1985, Labour Councillor Colin Grundy chaired a town meeting to discuss plans to link Leicester with the Nicaraguan city of Masaya. At the public gathering, several local politicians, activists, and civil servants exchanged opinions and 'enthusiastically' described their recent experiences as visitors in revolutionary Nicaragua. City council worker John Perry, who was also a member of the Leicester Central America Support Group, explained how, due to the US embargo and Reagan's 'influence' on the Thatcher government, there were now 'great shortages of imported goods' in revolutionary Nicaragua.[126] And Rhys Evans, who was involved with the Nicaragua solidarity movement and had just returned from a visit to Masaya, declared 'he remained convinced of the authenticity of the revolution' and stressed that it was important for British people to be 'well informed' so that they could 'argue in the Nicaraguan's favour'.[127] After noting that the Nicaraguans would perceive the partnership as an expression of 'support for their country and the revolution', all those present at the meeting voted in favour of twinning with Masaya.[128] Other Western European cities were motivated by similar reasons, as is demonstrated by a joint declaration of Nijmegen, Leicester, Aken, and Dietzenbach in 1986, in which they rejected US support for the contras.[129] Twinning with Nicaragua, therefore, was a way for opposition politicians to bypass national governments and actively participate in the global struggle for Nicaragua's ideological future.

As solidarity activism for the Sandinista revolution took on a more personal and local character, the Sandinista government's conflict with the Reagan administration became internalised into local and domestic politics. In European town halls, universities, and community centres, politicians, activists, and students had heated, and in some cases violent, discussions about US foreign policy, the Sandinistas' political programme, and the possibility of West German and British support for the contra fighters.[130] Opinions about the situation in Nicaragua were predictably split along party lines. Local Tories in Leicester, for example, accused the 'loony Left'

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[126] Leicester Masaya Link Group Archive, Leicester City Council, Public Meeting, 'Twinning with Nicaragua', 1 October 1985.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] *De Gelderlander*, 1 December 1986.
[130] Labour member Paul Gosling was assaulted at the public meeting about twinning Masaya with Leicester. The assailants, he later claimed, all wore Federation of Conservative student badges.

of wasting public money on projects in Masaya. If the citizens of Leicester realised 'what a terrible regime there was in Nicaragua', Conservative councillor Michael Johnson stated to the local newspaper, they would refuse to pay another 'penny' for the twinning programme.[131] Similarly, Labour politician Ken Livingstone, leader of the Greater London Council, was ridiculed when he proposed to twin London with Managua as 'a gesture of support' for the Sandinistas. Kenneth Baker, a conservative MP and minister, for example, declared that Managua and London had nothing in common, except for their 'upwardly mobile Marxist politicians'.[132]

Although politicians in West Germany and the Netherlands also used the Sandinista revolution as a stick to beat their political and ideological enemies with, the debate was most heated in Britain, where the Nicaraguan contras had a small group of supporters. In particular, the Federation of Conservative Students (FCS), which had also backed the US invasion in Grenada in 1983, actively promoted the cause of the anti-Sandinista counterrevolutionaries, amongst others by setting up the so-called Committee for a Free Nicaragua. Furthermore, on 6 and 7 December 1986, the FCS organised a pro-contra conference at the Barbican centre in London. In addition to former Nicaraguan presidential candidate and contra leader Arturo Cruz, the conference's programme included anti-communist intelligence expert Brian Crozier, who spoke about 'Central American and Soviet geopolitical design', and Republican Congressman Robert Dornan, whose speech was entitled 'towards a free Nicaragua'.[133] According to the FCO, the Federation 'evidently received considerable help and advice from their American contacts' to put together the conference, as the CIA and the US State Department provided them with literature, financial assistance, and publicity material.[134] The FCS was closely monitored by the NSC, which declared that the conservative anti-Sandinista group did not 'represent anything more than a front for US propaganda' and set up a picket in front of the Barbican centre.[135] In a way, therefore, Western European urban centres became another front in the global struggle for the Nicaraguan revolution.

In sum, as Western European governments became increasingly reluctant to provide the Nicaraguan government with financial aid and political support, the FSLN once again tried to call upon its transnational network of solidarity activists to alleviate Nicaragua's economic and political troubles. However, as civil society evolved in Western Europe, solidarity with the Nicaraguan revolution took on a variety of new forms and meanings. Solidarity committees continued to thrive in the mid-1980s, but the FSLN started to lose control over the narrative, ideals, and practices of

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131 *Leicester Mercury*, 14 February 1987.
132 *The Times*, 4 June 1985; *The Standard*, 6 June 1985; *The Sun*, 5 June 19865.
133 TNA, FCO 99/2390, Pamphlet, 'Conference for a Free Nicaragua', 6 December 1986.
134 TNA, FCO 99/2390, 'Note on the Conference for a Free Nicaragua', 8 December 1986; Martin Durham and Margaret Power eds., *New Perspectives on the Transnational Right* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 142.
135 PHM, NSC, Box 1, 'NSC Policy towards the Committee for a Free Nicaragua', January 1987.

the movement as a whole. While Sandinistas pushed for more fundraising and centralisation, local activists and politicians in Western Europe bypassed the FSLN and opted for more intimate forms of cooperation with towns, people, and organisations. For many Western Europeans, participating in Nicaragua's revolutionary project no longer meant unconditionally supporting the FSLN's political programme, but rather building emotional and practical connections with individual Nicaraguans and development projects. The ideological Cold War, then, was no longer the only frame of reference through which the *Revolución Popular Sandinista* was understood.

The International Court of Justice

As local politicians, activists, and students fought each other over the question of who was to blame for the US-Nicaraguan conflict, judges of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague were confronted with a very similar question. On 9 April 1984, Carlos Argüello Gómez, the Nicaraguan ambassador to the Netherlands, filed an application to the Court that accused the US government of 'responsibility for military and paramilitary activities in and against Nicaragua'.[136] Rejecting several claims from US representatives that the ICJ had no jurisdiction to intervene in this conflict, the fifteen judges of the Court decided on 26 November 1984 that the Nicaraguan case was admissible. On 27 June 1986, more than two years later, the Court sided with Nicaragua and ruled that the Reagan administration had broken international law and violated Nicaraguan sovereignty by, amongst others, organising, financing, and training the contras, as well as mining the ports of El Bluff, Corinto, and Puerto Sandino.[137] As a consequence, the Court declared, the United States should from that moment on 'refrain from all such acts' that violated international law. Furthermore, the Court ruled that the US should pay the Nicaraguan government reparations 'for all injury caused'.[138] To no one's surprise, the Reagan administration categorically refused to pay these reparations, which were estimated at around $17 billion, and continued aiding the anti-Sandinista counterinsurgents. Indeed, a couple days after the Court ruled in Nicaragua's favour the US House of Representatives decided to provide the contras with another $100 million in aid, which included $70 million for military equipment.[139]

Despite the US administration's refusal to comply with the Court's decision, the Sandinista government described the ICJ ruling as the 'greatest triumph' in the international arena in 1986.[140] The judgement of the Court was important, not because Nicaraguan diplomats seriously believed

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[136] *Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua* (Nicaragua v. United States of America), Merits, Judgment, ICJ Reports 1986, 27 June 1986. Online at: https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/70/judgments
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.
[139] *Los Angeles Times*, 26 June 1986.
[140] ABPA, MINEX, 'Balance Anual de Political Exterior Durante 1986', date unknown.

the Reagan administration would actually start paying reparations or reconsider its foreign policy towards Nicaragua, but rather because the ICJ decision could strengthen the international position of the Sandinista government. In sharp contrast to the United States, one MINEX official wrote on 10 February 1986, a positive ruling of the ICJ demonstrated to the world that Nicaragua was a 'respectable country' that abided by international law and the UN Charter.[141] On a less abstract level, this meant that the ICJ ruling could separate the US from its Western European allies and isolate the Reagan administration in international fora, such as the United Nations. Furthermore, by declaring US assistance to the contras illegal, the Court further delegitimised the struggle of the counterrevolutionary guerrillas. Therefore, Nicaraguan diplomats urged the Sandinista government to 'internationalise' the decision of the Court as much as possible.[142]

With regards to the transnational solidarity movement, the ICJ ruling provided committees in Western Europe with new material to use in campaigns, demonstrations, and lobbying efforts. Naturally, solidarity committees used the ICJ ruling as evidence that Nicaragua, a small Central American country, was illegally attacked by the most powerful state in the world. The Dutch NKN, for example, mentioned the ICJ judgements in its advertisements for the Nicaragua Must Survive campaign. In these adverts, citizens were invited to 'condemn' US aggression against Nicaragua, just like the World Court had done.[143] The ruling of the ICJ, however, did not drastically alter the grassroots discussion about the US-Nicaraguan conflict, nor did it figure prominently in the campaigns of the Nicaragua solidarity movement. Although the Court's ruling was mentioned regularly, it was never more than a slogan. As John Bevan of the London-based NSC remembers, 'other than dropping [the Court's ruling] now and again' into public attacks on US foreign policy, we did not really 'know how to use the ICJ case'.[144] In essence, the judgment of the Court and the UN debates that followed were too abstract to mobilise people at the grassroots level.

In the months after the ICJ ruling, then, Nicaraguan officials primarily targeted UN institutions to internationalise the issue. Nicaraguan ambassador to the United Nations Nora Astorga tabled several resolutions at the UN Security Council and General Assembly that called on the US to comply with the Court's judgement.[145] In the UN General Assembly, a large majority of countries voted with the Nicaraguan resolutions. On 3 November, for instance, the Assembly adopted a resolution (with 94 votes to 3) that emphasised that all states were obliged 'not to intervene in the internal affairs of other states' and urgently called 'for full and immediate

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[141] ABPA, MINEX, 'Balance Anual 1985 Relaciones Políticas Estados Unidos/Nicaragua', 10 February 1986.
[142] Ibid.
[143] *Trouw*, 11 May 1984.
[144] Author's correspondence with John Bevan, 22 February 2018.
[145] Nora Astorga, a former guerrilla, was one of only four women who represented their country at the UN in 1986. See, *The New York Times*, 28 September 1986.

compliance' with the ICJ judgement.[146] Predictably, in July and October 1986, the United States vetoed the Nicaraguan proposals in the Security Council. According to US ambassador Vernon Walters, the US government had to use its veto powers because Nicaragua would have exploited the acceptance of 'such a resolution as a blanket endorsement of its military and domestic policies'.[147] Nora Astorga, on the other hand, denounced the veto as 'a vote against the fundamental principles and norms of this organisation, […] a vote against international peace and security, and a vote for war, intervention and the use of force'.[148] Although Nicaraguan officials were happy that the majority of the UN Security Council member states (eleven out of fifteen), including US allies Australia and Denmark, voted in favour of the Nicaraguan proposal, it was frustrating that Britain, France, and Thailand abstained.[149] The British representative, for example, declared that the resolution failed 'to acknowledge that Nicaragua [had] largely brought its troubles upon itself'.[150] The Western European abstentions, in particular, demonstrated that the ICJ ruling could not fully isolate the United States from its Western European allies and that the FSLN's hopes that it would amount to an international coup against Reagan were ill-founded/proved difficult to translate into reality.

The decision-making process behind the UN Security Council vote on 28 October 1986, however, sheds light on how the Court's ruling certainly put the transatlantic relationship under strain. Britain, in particular, was expected to vote in favour of the Nicaraguan resolution – and as a consequence publicly oppose the United States – since it had always presented itself as a standard bearer of international law. It would be highly controversial and damaging for their international standing and credibility, British officials believed, if the UK did not vote in favour of a resolution that simply asked for an ICJ judgement to be respected. David Joy of the Foreign Office, for example, noted that a vote in favour of the resolution would 'clearly underline, in a high profile way, our wish to be seen to be upholding international law'.[151] And Richard Wilkinson, who worked at the British embassy in Mexico, concluded that the Nicaraguans had 'tried hard' and eventually succeeded in tabling a resolution that 'any country which accepts the compulsory jurisdiction of the ICJ would find hard not to vote for'.[152] Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe came

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[146] UN General Assembly, 53rd Plenary Meeting, 'Judgment of the International Court of Justice of 27 June 1986 concerning military and paramilitary activities in and against Nicaragua: need for immediate compliance', 3 November 1986. Accessed online at http://www.un.org/
[147] *Washington Post*, 1 August 1986.
[148] Ibid.
[149] In favour: Denmark, China, the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Australia, Madagascar, Trinidad and Tobago, Congo, Ghana, Venezuela, the United Arab Emirates; Against (veto): the United States; Abstained: Britain, France, Thailand.
[150] TNA, FCO 99/2404, Telegram, FCO to New York, 27 October 1985.
[151] TNA, FCO 99/2403, 'UN Security Council: US/Nicaragua and the ICJ', 30 July 1986.
[152] TNA, FCO 99/2403, 'Security Council: Nicaragua and the ICJ', 7 August 1986.

to the same conclusion. The Nicaraguan resolution, he told Thatcher, was entirely in accordance with the statute of the Court and there were 'no legal grounds on which [Britain] could object to the text'.[153] Nicaraguan officials, keenly aware of the British predicament, constantly reminded the Thatcher government of its well-known position on international law. In October 1986, ambassador Francisco D'Escoto pointed out that Thatcher had recently told Ortega that 'the support that Her Majesty's Government [gave] to international law [could not] be questioned'.[154] By contrast, the French government experienced much less pressure than Britain, as France did not accept the compulsory jurisdiction of the Court.

The British government's eventual decision to sidestep international law and abstain on the Nicaraguan resolution was partly the result of US pressure but mostly due to a personal intervention from Thatcher, who overruled her foreign secretary. American officials were certainly lobbying hard to get the British to vote against the Nicaraguan resolution, or at a minimum abstain. On 31 July 1986, Shultz wrote a personal letter to Howe, in which he stressed he was 'very concerned' the ICJ ruling would bring the two countries 'into diametric opposition in the Security Council'.[155] If Britain voted in favour of the resolution, Shultz threatened, it would be 'detrimental to Alliance solidarity' and embolden critics of US foreign policy 'at home and abroad'.[156] Foreign Office officials, however, resisted American pressure and continued to push for a British vote in favour. Noting that there was 'little doubt that the US [...] had engaged in actions contrary to the rule of international law' by supporting the contras, they argued that the international community would perceive Britain as a puppet of the United States if it did not stick up for international law.[157] While 'the Americans may huff and puff', political officer Derek Thomas wrote, Britain should take this opportunity to express 'a clear and distinct British point of view'.[158] Howe agreed and told Thatcher's private secretary Charles Powell that the American arguments were hypocritical. The US, he pointed out, 'voted against [Britain] on the Falklands issue in the General Assembly for several years and will no doubt do so again in a month's time'.[159] In sum, the FCO took the position that unbiased support for international law should trump political considerations.

To the disappointment of the majority of British officials, Thatcher disagreed and ordered an abstention. She regarded the Nicaraguan resolution, even though it simply called for compliance with the Court's judgement, as a 'blatantly political and propagandist exercise'.[160] The Nicaraguan

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153 TNA, PREM 19/2367, 'UN Security Council: Nicaragua/ICJ Decision', 23 October 1986.
154 TNA, FCO 99/2403, Letter, D'Escoto to Young, 20 October 1986.
155 TNA, FCO 99/2403, Letter, Shultz to Howe, 31 July 1986.
156 TNA, FCO 99/2403, 'UN Security Council: US/Nicaragua and the ICJ', 30 July 1986.
157 TNA, FCO 99/2403, 'UN Security Council: US, Nicaragua and the ICJ', 31 July 1986.
158 Ibid.
159 TNA, PREM 19/2367, 'United Nations Security Council: Nicaragua/ICJ', 24 October 1986.
160 TNA, PREM 19/2367, 'United Nations Security Council: Nicaragua/ICJ', 26 October 1986.

government, she noted, was 'manipulating a legal judgement to make political capital' and embarrass the United States, an important Cold War ally.[161] Furthermore, as Powell pointed out, in the grand scheme of things, Nicaragua simply did 'not matter' to Britain, while the US mattered 'very much'.[162] That being the case, Thatcher wondered, then 'how on earth' could Britain find itself in a position of voting for Nicaragua and against the United States, particularly in such an important body as the UN Security Council? For the British Prime Minister, then, in the case of the US-Nicaraguan conflict, there was no such thing as objective support for international law.

To summarise, while the Nicaraguan government almost succeeded in isolating the United States in the international arena by turning to international law, Thatcher's intervention in the Security Council demonstrates that it was difficult, if not impossible, for the Sandinistas to overcome Cold War alliances and ideologies in the mid-1980s. This episode reveals that, even beyond America's backyard, the FSLN could not escape the global power of the US and its ability to influence international institutions and Western European foreign policies. In particular, Britain and France showed themselves unwilling to publicly oppose the US government, even though – behind the scenes – they believed Nicaragua was probably in the right. If the Sandinistas wanted to use Western Europe as a means to put pressure on the Reagan administration, they thus had to look for alternative methods and channels.

Conclusion

Overall, in the period 1985-1986, the Sandinistas failed to achieve the goals set out in their revolutionary and electoral programmes. True, the FSLN was still in power and it was not likely that they would be overthrown through military means any time soon. However, as a result of the contra war and the deteriorating economic situation, the Sandinistas were forced to let go of many of their ambitions to, for instance, improve health care, spread literacy, empower workers, and bring social justice to the country. This was a dangerous development, as it meant the FSLN leadership was at risk of losing the support of the Nicaraguan population.

Furthermore, as Western European and Latin American economic assistance to Nicaragua decreased, the Sandinistas had become increasingly dependent on Cuba and the Soviet Union, something they had not initially wanted as it undermined their non-aligned image. In 1980, the Soviet bloc and Cuba provided only $45 million in economic aid, while the OECD countries and Latin America provided $290 million. In 1986, however, due to the economic embargo and the contra war, Nicaragua needed more money than in the OECD countries could and wanted to

[161] Ibid.
[162] TNA, PREM 19/2367, Memorandum, 24 October 1986.

offer. So, the socialist countries provided Nicaragua with $582 million in 1986, while the Latin Americans and Western Europeans only gave $113 million. Economic assistance from the Netherlands, for example, went down from $24 million in 1983 to $15 million in 1986. West Germany, which sent $17 million in 1983, scaled down to only $3 million in bilateral economic assistance in 1986. Aid from multilateral institutions also declined; from $121 million in 1981 to $35 million in 1986.[163]

As this period in the revolution's history made painfully clear, the struggle for Nicaragua was more than a direct military conflict between the Sandinistas and the US-backed contras. The country's future and revolutionary trajectory were, to a crucial extent, shaped by perceptions and popular ideas about modernity, democracy, development, freedom, and (social) justice. In the mid-1980s, in contrast to the decade's early years, the Sandinistas were no longer in a highly advantageous position when it came to the international battle for hearts and minds. As Cold War tensions between the US and the Soviet Union started to decline, peace movements failed to prevent the stationing of euromissiles, and Western European societies moved increasingly towards the right, the FSLN found it difficult to argue that the Nicaraguan revolution was representative of the wave of the future. Rather, during the second half of the 1980s, a significant number of Western European politicians, civil servants, and journalists compared the claiming government to the aging, unpopular, and ineffective socialist regimes of the Eastern bloc, arguing that Nicaraguan leaders needed to reform and democratise to survive. So, even though there were still many Western Europeans who rejected Reagan's bullying and sympathised with the Nicaraguan plight, the optimism of the revolution's early years had clearly disappeared. In this context, the Sandinistas were confronted with the difficult task of using their limited room for manoeuvre to ensure the continued survival of the revolution.

[163] CREST, CIA Report, Nicaragua: Prospects for Sandinista Consolidation, August 1987.

CHAPTER 6

PEACE AND ELECTIONS, 1987-1990

On 7 August 1987, in Guatemala City, the presidents of Nicaragua, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras signed a historic peace treaty, known as the Esquipulas II Peace Accords. After hours of intense negotiations, the five Central American presidents declared they had taken up 'the historical challenge of forcing a peaceful destiny for Central America'.[1] They also agreed on a document that included promises to implement amnesty decrees, organise free elections, and embark on processes of national reconciliation and internal democratisation. In order to bring an end to Central America's violent armed conflicts, most notably the Nicaraguan contra war and the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*'s struggle against the government of El Salvador, the treaty also called on governments from outside the region to terminate the provision of any 'military, logistical, financial, or propaganda support' to 'irregular forces or insurrectionist movements'.[2] At the regional level, the Central American leaders committed to the 'non-use of territory to attack other states', which meant they would not allow any armed guerrilla groups, such as the contras and the FMLN, to operate from within their territories.[3]

For the Sandinista government, the Esquipulas accords offered the only way out of a difficult and dangerous status quo. By mid-1987, the FSLN leaders were desperate to find solutions to the contra war and the devastating economic situation. They realised that measures taken in previous years, such as the Nicaragua Must Survive campaign, were simply not sufficient to ensure the survival of the revolution in the face of increasing international pressure, criticism, and isolation. Crucially, the Soviet Union and its allies also made it clear that they wanted the Sandinistas to reach an agreement with their Central America neighbours and obtain economic and material aid from the West rather than the Eastern bloc. Changes in the international Cold War context in the late 1980s, then, pushed the FSLN *comandantes* towards making concessions and implementing reforms to comply with the Esquipulas agreement, such as democratic elections, negotiations with the contras, and austerity measures.

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[1] 'Procedure for the establishment of a firm and lasting peace in Central America', 7 August 1987. Accessed online at: https://peacemaker.un.org/
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

As the 1980s came to a close, Western Europe once again became a key area for the Sandinistas' revolutionary diplomacy, as the FSLN simply had nowhere else to turn for financial and political assistance. The Sandinista government, fearing that the US would sabotage the peace negotiations, worked hard to drum up Western European state and popular support for the Esquipulas process and, more specifically, to demonstrate that Nicaragua, unlike the other Central American countries, was making a genuine effort to comply with the peace treaties. In addition, the FSLN and solidarity activists lobbied actively for increased economic and material support from Western European governments and financial institutions, arguing that it would be unfair to keep withholding aid now that the Nicaraguan government was doing everything it could to accommodate the wishes of the Western countries. In particular, they pointed out, Nicaragua deserved Western European countries' assistance to organise democratic elections in February 1990, which would be monitored by hundreds of international observers.

This chapter, then, from the perspective of Nicaragua's relations with Western Europe, analyses the participation of the Sandinista government in the Central American peace process, which eventually resulted in the FSLN's electoral loss in February 1990.[4] It highlights the difficulties the Sandinistas encountered as they sought to present a positive image to the international community, while at the same time keeping the economic and political situation at home under control. Moreover, this chapter seeks to assess the effectiveness of Nicaragua's revolutionary diplomacy in the late 1980s. In particular, it grapples with the complex question of failure and success. Did the Sandinistas' foreign policy succeed, because the Nicaraguan government survived the Reagan administration and organised elections that were generally seen as legitimate and democratic? Or did it fail, because the FSLN was unable to end the war and raise sufficient economic funds to defeat the US-backed opposition through the ballot box? These are difficult to answer questions, particularly considering the Sandinistas' limited room for manoeuvre in the global arena. Indeed, as this chapter demonstrates, when the post-Cold War international order started to take shape in the late 1980s, the ability of a Central American revolutionary state to determine its own destiny was drastically reduced.

THE ROAD TO THE ESQUIPULAS II ACCORDS

[4] The exact causes of Chamorro's victory in 1990 are still being debated by academics, Sandinistas, and former solidarity activists. See, Carlos M. Vilas, 'Especulaciones sobre una sorpresa: las elecciones en Nicaragua', *Desarrollo Económico* 30 (1990) 255-276; Philip J. Williams, 'Elections and Democratization in Nicaragua: The 1990 Elections in Perspective', *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 32 (1990) 13-34; *Revista Envío*, April 1990. William I. Robinson, *A Faustian Bargain: US Intervention in the Nicaraguan Elections and American Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1992); Vanessa Castro and Gary Prevost eds., *The 1990 Elections in Nicaragua and their Aftermath* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1992); Manuel Hernández Ruigómez, *La Nicaragua sandinista y las elecciones de febrero de 1990* (PhD dissertation, Universidad Computense de Madrid, 2012).

When the Costa Rican president Oscar Arias first presented his peace plan at a Central American presidential summit in San José on 15 February 1987, very few believed this so-called Arias plan had the potential – or even the ambition – to end the region's conflicts. In particular, it seemed unlikely the Nicaraguan government would accept proposals from the Costa Rican president, who was known as a staunch anti-communist and critic of the Sandinista leadership. Indeed, due to Arias' claim that 'democracy' was a necessary precondition for an end to the region's hostilities, his peace proposal appeared specifically designed to isolate Nicaragua, reject the FSLN's claims to democratic rule, and pressure the Sandinistas into implementing domestic reforms.[5] What is more, Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega, on the grounds that he was not fully committed to democracy, was not even invited to the summit in San José where Arias first announced his plans. An annoyed and suspicious Ortega, therefore, described the meeting as a 'US-inspired' manoeuvre, while his foreign minister Miguel D'Escoto declared it was 'totally unacceptable' for other countries 'to draw up recipes' for Nicaragua's internal affairs.[6] Private comments from US Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams, too, demonstrate the US administration hoped and expected the Nicaraguan government to reject Arias' peace plan. A couple days before the San José summit in February 1987, Abrams told Günther van Well, the West German ambassador to Washington, that the Nicaraguan government would 'certainly reject' Arias' proposals, commenting that the Reagan administration planned to use this Nicaraguan refusal to isolate and 'score propaganda points' against the Sandinistas.[7] And yet, even though Nicaraguan officials initially dismissed the Arias plan as 'made in the USA', their perspective shifted drastically in the following months, and in the weeks leading up to the abovementioned Esquipulas II summit in Guatemala City. Indeed, the nine *comandantes* of the FSLN's National Directorate came to the conclusion that supporting a – somewhat modified – version of Arias' peace proposal was the right way forward to ensure the continued survival of Nicaragua's revolutionary project.

To understand this change in the position of the Nicaraguan government, it is important to analyse the increasingly precarious situation in which the Sandinista leaders found themselves in 1987, while at the same time assessing how these developments intersected with the growing international legitimacy and popularity, particularly among Western European government officials, of the Costa Rican president and his regional peace plan. First of all, Sandinista officials were under heavy pressure to find a diplomatic solution to war. As a result of the shift in US

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[5] Dunkerley, *The Pacification of Central America* (1994) 45-46; AAPD, 1987, Konferenz des Bundesministers Genscher mit Botschaftern in zentralamerikanischen Staaten in San José, 9 April 1987.
[6] AAPD, 1987, Konferenz des Bundesministers Genscher mit Botschaftern in zentralamerikanischen Staaten in San José, 9 April 1987; *The Guardian*, 16 February 1987.
[7] AAPD, 1987, Gespräche MR Dr. Teltschik in Washington am 11.2.1987, 14 February 1987.

Congressional opinion on 25 June 1986, when Congress approved a $100 million aid package for the counterrevolutionary forces, the armed conflict between the *Ejército Popular Sandinista* and the US-backed contra fighters grew more violent, costly, and deadly in early 1987. Aside from forcing the Nicaraguan government to spend exorbitant amounts of money on the military, the counterinsurgency war had devastating impact on everyday life in Nicaragua.[8] Newspapers in Central America, Europe, and the Americas chronicled the many atrocities inflicted on Nicaraguan people living in the war zones, giving examples of abductions, torture, rape, and murder.[9] And while both the Sandinista army and the counterinsurgents were accused of excessive violence and human rights violations, there existed little doubt that the tactics of the counterinsurgents caused most of the human suffering in Nicaragua.[10] International human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch, for instance, reported that contras were 'major and systematic violators' of human rights and committed all sorts of abuses, including 'launching indiscriminate attacks on civilians, selectively murdering non-combatants, and mistreating prisoners'.[11] After years of armed conflict, it was clear that the war could not be brought to an end through military means. Even though the contras could not defeat the EPS, they were at the same time unlikely to be vanquished, since the counterinsurgents could simply retreat to their base camps in Honduras and Costa Rica if the Sandinista army advanced. As long as the US provided funding and military training, Central American states allowed the contras to operate from their territories, and Nicaraguans – even if it was only a small number – were willing and able to take up arms against the Sandinista government, the war would most likely continue.[12]

Secondly, Sandinista leaders were increasingly open to making concessions in 1987 because they desperately needed to fix the country's chaotic financial situation, which undermined the domestic popularity and legitimacy of the revolutionary project. Despite earlier attempts to manage the economy by seeking international aid and introducing market-oriented reforms to boost production, Nicaragua's economic situation did not improve in the late 1980s. Rather, as

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[8] CREST, Directorate of Intelligence, Nicaragua and El Salvador, Monthly Report, July 1987; TNA, FCO 99/2844, Nicaragua: Annual Review 1987, 20 January 1988. For more on the impact of the war on everyday life in Nicaragua, see, Anja Nygren, 'Violent Conflicts and Threatened Lives: Nicaraguan Experiences of Wartime Displacement and Postwar Distress', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 35 (2003) 467-393.

[9] *Los Angeles Times,* 24 June 1987; *Chicago Tribune*, 10 January 1987; *Revista Envío*, January 1989.

[10] *UPI*, 20 February 1986

[11] Human Rights Watch, Report on Nicaragua, 1989. Accessed online at: https://www.hrw.org/reports/1989/WR89/Nicaragu.htm

[12] CREST, Directorate of Intelligence, Nicaragua: Assessment of Insurgent and Regime Capabilities in First Quarter 1988, 21 April 1988; Nicaragua: Assessment of Insurgent and Regime Capabilities in First Quarter 1988, 21 April 1988, 20 July 1988. According to these reports, urban support for the contras in the period 1986-1988 was non-existent (they only operated in the border areas). The appeal of the contra movement in Nicaragua as a whole, including the rural areas, was deemed 'weak'. The total number of contra soldiers was estimated to be between 15,000 and 16,000.

Sandinista *comandante* Bayardo Arce told Western European ambassadors in Managua, the state of the Nicaraguan economy was 'disastrous'.[13] As inflation skyrocketed, average incomes of Nicaraguans plummeted, and exports declined, the government was unable to pay back its debts.[14] State finances were stretched to the limit, as the contra war used up most of the country's resources. In 1988, the Nicaraguan government spent more than 60% of its budget on the military.[15] At the grassroots level, Nicaraguans were struggling: there were empty stores, scarcity, energy shortages, long lines, and regular power cuts.[16] Dutch solidarity activists living in Managua, such as Mary Timmerman, wrote about the 'dire food situation' they and their Nicaraguan friends experienced, noting that there was little rice, no beans, and that almost all restaurants had closed.[17] Daniel Ortega, according to West German officials, admitted to his Guatemalan colleague Vinicio Cerezo in April 1987 that the country was economically 'exhausted'.[18] And while Ortega stressed that the Sandinistas would never 'surrender' their revolutionary project to their enemies, he also confessed the Nicaraguan government was certainly willing to 'make concessions' to the other Central American leaders at the upcoming regional summit in Guatemala City.[19]

Thirdly, changes in the international Cold War context, particularly the Soviet Union's desire to reduce tensions with the United States and reform the Soviet economy, also pushed the Sandinista leaders towards accepting the Arias peace plan. Between 8 and 22 June 1987, Nicaraguan vice-president Sergio Ramírez travelled through the Soviet bloc, where he visited the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR), hoping to obtain much needed economic, political, and material support, most notably oil supplies. Instead of providing Nicaragua with all the necessary assistance, however, the socialist leaders wanted to talk about the Sandinistas' contribution to the Central American peace process. As Ramírez later wrote to Ortega, Eastern European government officials were very critical of Nicaragua's public rejection of the Arias plan, and it took quite some time and effort to defend the Sandinista government's position. Even after a 'detailed' explanation from the Nicaraguan delegation, Ramírez noted, the socialist leaders maintained the Sandinista *comandantes* should make a more serious effort to improve their relations with the other Central American states.[20]

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[13] BZ, Inventarisnummer 03761, Memorandum, from OS/Managua to CDP/San José, 28 April 1988.
[14] CREST, Directorate of Intelligence, Nicaragua: Prospects for the Economy, 24 June 1988.
[15] Ibid.
[16] BZ, Inventarisnummer 03026, Dienstreis Nicaragua, van 4 tot 18 November 1987, door L.P.M. van Geel.
[17] IISG, NKN, Box 97, Solidarity activists in Managua to NKN, 7 July 1986.
[18] AAPD, 1987, Konferenz des Bundesministers Genscher mit Botschaftern in zentralamerikanischen Staaten in San José, 9 April 1987.
[19] AAPD, 1987, Konferenz des Bundesministers Genscher mit Botschaftern in zentralamerikanischen Staaten in San José, 9 April 1987..
[20] ABPA, Informe del viaje al Campo Socialista 8.6.1987/22.6.1987, Ramírez to Ortega, 25 June 1987.

According to Ramírez, the principal factor behind the decline of Soviet support for the Nicaraguan revolutionaries in the late 1980s was the desire of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to pursue a 'policy of détente' with the United States, so that he could focus on raising the 'standard of living' in the Soviet Union instead. For economic reasons, then, Gorbachev had decided to seek for diplomatic solutions to expensive regional Cold War conflicts, such as Central America and Southern Africa. Indeed, Ramírez informed Ortega at the end of his trip, the Soviet Union was now urging its ideological allies, such as the FSLN in Nicaragua, to search for 'quick negotiated solutions' that could resolve their problems with US-backed neighbours.[21] Gorbachev's reformist ambitions therefore had a direct impact on Central American affairs, as they pushed the Sandinista leaders towards adopting a more cooperative and pragmatic attitude in the Esquipulas negotiations of August 1987.[22]

At the same time as international, military, and economic pressure on the Nicaraguan government intensified, Oscar Arias' peace plan started to gain momentum and international legitimacy, particularly in Western Europe and amongst the Contadora countries in Latin America.[23] After announcing his regional peace proposal, the Costa Rican president travelled around the world, drumming up significant support. In May and June 1987, Arias visited Western Europe, where he spoke, amongst others, with West German chancellor Helmut Kohl, British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, Spanish prime minister Felipe González, French president Francois Mitterrand, and Claude Cheysson, the European Commissioner responsible for North-South relations. While some Western European leaders, such as Thatcher, were hesitant to throw their weight behind the peace plan without first consulting the Reagan administration, the response was overwhelmingly positive.[24] Cheysson, for instance, declared in a joint press conference with Arias that the European Commission fully supported his peace plan, adding that he was 'sure' the twelve individual EC members would soon do the same.[25] And on 5 August 1987, on the eve of the Guatemala Summit, Western European leaders issued a joint declaration, encouraging the Central Americans to come to an agreement and stating that Arias' peace plan represented 'an original and constructive contribution to the establishment of peace through political means and to the consolidation of democracy in Central America'.[26]

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[21] Ibid.
[22] For more on this, see Paszyn, *The Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change in Central America* (2000).
[23] For more on Oscar Arias and Esquipulas, see Philip Travis, 'Oscar Arias and the Treaty of Esquipulas', *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Latin American History* (2017). Online at: http://latinamericanhistory.oxfordre.com/
[24] TNA, FCO 99/2474, Memorandum MCAD, 24 April 1987.
[25] *The Guardian*, 22 May 1987.
[26] AEI, European Political Cooperation Documentation Bulletin, Statement on the Guatemala Summit, 5 August 1987.

In the eyes of EC leaders, the Arias plan represented an opportunity to breathe new life into the Central American peace process, which had stagnated in previous months, and supporting it simply made sense. After all, since 1984, the Western Europeans' official position was that a workable solution to the Central America's problems could only come from 'political solutions springing from the region itself'.[27] Furthermore, since the Arias plan targeted the region as a whole, demanding democratic reforms and compliance from all five Central American countries, Western European politicians from different sides of the political spectrum could draw on a variety reasons to get behind it. Sympathisers with the Sandinista revolution, for example, were happy with the aspects of Arias proposal that criticised the US-backed contra war, such as the request to the international community to terminate all assistance to irregular forces and insurrectionist movements. Western European conservatives and Christian Democrats, on the other hand, were more interested in the parts that dealt with domestic reforms and democratisation, hoping that a successful peace agreement could strengthen the anti-Sandinista opposition in Nicaragua. For instance, West German ambassador to Nicaragua Josef Rusnak told foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher in April 1987 that the Europeans should back Arias' proposal, not only because it had the support of Nicaraguan opposition parties, but also because the Sandinista government, weakened as a result of the contra war, was in no position to reject it.[28] British FCO officials, too, were primarily interested in the extent to which the Nicaraguan government's 'tactical concessions' on democratisation could lead to 'further dilution of Sandinista control'.[29]

Of the EC member states, the government of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), was the most dedicated to Arias' plan, hoping it would boost the Nicaraguan opposition and bring peace to the Central American region. In the run-up to the Guatemala City summit, FRG officials lobbied actively to strengthen the proposal. Amongst others, Kohl and Genscher encouraged their European allies to openly support the Costa Rican president, tried to assuage Reagan's concerns about the possibility that the Sandinistas could abuse and manipulate the peace process, and pushed the president of El Salvador, José Napoleón Duarte, who complained the proposal did not mention 'Nicaraguan and Cuban aid' to the FMLN guerrillas, towards a more cooperative attitude.[30] In conversations with US officials, West German diplomats promoted the Arias plan by smartly capitalising on the Reagan administration's dislike of the Sandinista leaders. For instance,

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[27] Joint Communiqué of the Conference of Foreign Minister of the European Community and its Member States, Portugal and Spain, the States of Central America and the Contadora States, San José, Costa Rica, 28-29 September 1984' in Hill and Smith eds., *European Foreign Policy* (2000).
[28] AAPD, 1987, Konferenz des Bundesministers Genscher mit Botschaftern in zentralamerikanischen Staaten in San José, 9 April 1987
[29] TNA, FCO 99/2844, Nicaragua: Annual Review 1987, 20 January 1988.
[30] AAPD, 1988, Gespräch des Bundeskanzlers Kohl mit Präsident Duarte, 7 July 1988.

Genscher explained to US Secretary of State George Shultz at the Venice Economic Summit in June 1987 that the FRG government's principal reason for supporting the Arias' peace proposal was that it forced the Sandinista regime to 'show its true colours to the world' on issues such as pluralism, freedom of speech, and democratisation.[31] Genscher also told a highly sceptical Shultz, the Arias plan put the question of democracy at the centre of the political debate on Central America's crises.[32]

It is important to note here that Reagan's criticism of the Arias Plan in 1987 had less of an impact on Central American decision-making than, for instance, US efforts to undermine the Contadora process in 1984. In fact, Oscar Arias' peace plan was able to gain strength and momentum, not only due to Latin American and Western European diplomatic support, but also because the US administration's Central America policy was under severe strain as a result of Iran-Contra affair. The story of the Iran-Contra scandal broke in October 1986, when the soldiers of the Nicaraguan army successfully shot down a contra supply plane and captured Eugene Hasenfus, a US citizen who claimed to be working on direct orders from the CIA. In the following months, it became public knowledge that the US government, using a complex covert network of private funds, transnational agencies, and third parties, had secretly channelled profits from illegal arms sales to Iran to the Nicaraguan contras. As a result of the Iran-Contra affair, Sandinista officials noted optimistically, Reagan's foreign policy, particularly with regards to Central America, lost international legitimacy and congressional support.[33] Costa Rican officials, too, concluded that the Reagan administration was definitely in a position of 'weakness' in the months leading up to the Guatemala City Summit.[34]

Due to the outbreak of the Iran-Contra affair, the Central American summit in August 1987 was more likely to produce a positive outcome. With US influence in the region temporarily weakened, political space opened up for the five Central American presidents, with the diplomatic support of the European Community and Contadora countries, to work out a peace agreement they could all agree on. By doing so, Central American leaders undermined the US administration's diplomatic efforts, which were aimed at isolating the Sandinistas from the four 'democracies' in the region.[35] Even during the Iran-Contra scandal, though, it still was not easy for the five

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[31] AAPD, 1987, Ministerialdirektor Freiherr von Richthoften z.Z. BM-Delegation, an das Auswärtige Amt. Betr.: Weltwirtschaftsgipfel, 11 Juni 1987

[32] Ibid.

[33] ABPA, Evaluación Anual: Dirección de Norteamérica 1988, date unknown.

[34] AAPD, 1987, Konferenz des Bundesministers Genscher mit Botschaftern in zentralamerikanischen Staaten in San José, 9 April 1987

[35] Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC, Meeting Files, Box 13, Meeting with the National Security Council, 5 May 1987; Reagan Library, National Security Planning Group Meeting, 20 February 1987. Online at: http://www.thereaganfiles.com/870220.pdf.

presidents to exclude the Reagan administration from the negotiating table and create a temporary regional block. According to former Nicaraguan diplomat Alejandro Bendaña, Reagan's phone calls 'to get the whole thing sabotaged' constantly interrupted the negotiations in Guatemala City. To solve the issue of US interference, therefore, Bendaña remembers that 'the five Central American presidents [decided to] shut themselves off in a room with no advisers there, nobody taking phone calls, especially from Washington, until they hammered out a document called the Esquipulas II, or the Arias plan'.[36]

For the Nicaraguan government, the Esquipulas peace process that came out of the Arias Plan was both an irritating necessity and a welcome opportunity. On the one hand, precarious domestic, regional, and international circumstances forced the Sandinista leaders towards concessions with regards to greater press freedom, a dialogue with domestic opposition parties, and a promise to organise democratic elections. Faced with regional isolation, which would be a diplomatic disaster that could easily be exploited by the Sandinistas' enemies, the Nicaraguan government did not really have another choice than to go along with Arias' proposals once they gained international legitimacy and support, particularly from the Western Europeans. On the other hand, the Esquipulas II Accords presented the nine FSLN *comandantes* with a unique opportunity to terminate the contra war, end their regional isolation, and undermine US foreign policy, thereby ensuring the survival of the Nicaraguan revolution. Moreover, they calculated that if they played their cards right in the following months, the FSLN could potentially use the Esquipulas process to resolve the country's economic problem and promote Nicaragua as a symbol of peace and democracy. In short, Esquipulas was the Sandinistas' only option, but it wasn't necessarily a bad one.

WHO CONTROLS THE PEACE PROCESS?

Having decided that the Esquipulas II Accords were the only possible way out of the risky status quo, the Sandinista government put the peace process at the core of its diplomatic and media campaigns in months following the Guatemala City summit of August 1987. By demonstrating Nicaraguan compliance and contributions to the Esquipulas peace process, the Sandinistas hoped to boost Nicaragua's international image, obtain much-needed economic aid from Western European countries, and increase pressure on the US and Honduras to cut ties with the anti-Sandinista counterrevolutionaries. The FSLN leaders were particularly worried about US efforts to obstruct the peace process and hoped that, by mobilising international support for the

[36] Interview, Sutterlin with Bendaña, 29 July 1997.

Esquipulas II Accords, Reagan could be forced into adopting a more accommodating attitude.[37] As FSLN *comandante* Bayardo Arce told General Secretary of the East German *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (Socialist Unity Party of Germany, SED) Eric Honecker in March 1988, the Sandinista government was convinced that 'international pressure [was] absolutely crucial to get the US to accept the sovereign decision of the Central American presidents to commit to the peace process'.[38]

The Nicaraguan government was not wrong about the US administration's antipathy towards the Esquipulas process and its desire to isolate Nicaragua from its Central American neighbours. In the eyes of the Reagan administration, revolutionary Nicaragua was part of the Soviet bloc and therefore a fundamental threat to the United States and its 'political and security interests in the [Western] hemisphere'.[39] The Esquipulas process failed to assuage Reagan's concerns about this Cold War threat as it allowed for the possibility that the FSLN remained in power. In a combative radio speech on 12 September 1987, therefore, Reagan announced that the US administration 'welcomed' the Esquipulas II Accords but that, unfortunately, the treaty was fatally flawed. In particular, the president noted, since there was absolutely no guarantee that the Sandinistas would keep their promises regarding democratisation, the treaty fell short of the necessary 'safeguards for democracy and our national security'.[40] So, Reagan continued, the US administration continued to believe that the presence of armed counterrevolutionaries was a necessary precondition for democracy and Nicaragua and in a couple of weeks, he planned to ask Congress to support another funding request of $270 million in contra aid. Indeed, the president concluded, there should be 'no uncertainty' about his 'unswerving commitment to the contras'.[41] In the period following the Guatemala City summit, as British diplomats concluded, the US administration's real objective in Central America thus 'remained quite clearly the removal from power rather than the containment of the Sandinistas', even though they continued to give public support to the Esquipulas process.[42]

To counter Reagan's narrative, the Sandinistas and their supporters published reports on the Esquipulas II Accords and Nicaragua's many contributions to the peace process, which they contrasted with the attitude of the US administration and, albeit to a lesser extent, the other Central

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[37] ABPA, Alejandro Bendaña to Directores Generales y Directores, 13 January 1989.
[38] SAPMO, DY30/13776, Über das Gespräch des Genossen Erich Honecker mit Genossen Bayardo Arce am 4 März 1988 im Hause des Zentralkomitees, 5 March 1988.
[39] Reagan Library, Executive Secretariat, NSC: Meeting Files, Box 13, Memorandum by Frank C, Carlucci, Meeting with the National Security Council, 12 March 1987.
[40] Reagan Library, Radio Address to the Nation on the Situation in Nicaragua, 12 September 1987. Online at: https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/research/speeches/091287a
[41] Ibid.
[42] TNA, FCO 99/2707, Coltan to Eggar, 13 January 1988.

American countries. Indeed, British Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe lamented in 1987, 'not a day went by without media reports of new Nicaraguan concessions' with regards to Esquipulas.[43] In private meetings with European officials, Nicaraguan diplomats focused on the steps the Sandinista government had taken to implement the peace treaty. On 12 August 1987, for instance, Javier Chamorro Mora, a Nicaraguan official from the *Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores* told EC diplomats in Managua that his government had already invited the eleven registered opposition parties to participate in a national dialogue mediated by Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, who was known as a critic of the FSLN.[44] Ortega and Miguel D'Escoto made similar points to Dutch Minister for Development Cooperation Piet Bukman in October 1987, pointing out that Nicaragua was the first Central American country to create a reconciliation commission, and that they had allowed opposition newspaper *La Prensa* and critical radio station *Radio Católica* to reopen. In contrast, they declared, Reagan was still sabotaging the peace process by refusing to give up on the contras.[45]

The European-Central American dialogue, launched after the ministerial conference in San José in 1984, provided the Sandinista government with a particularly useful platform to mobilise Western European leaders for the peace treaty. This dialogue, which in part consisted of yearly ministerial meetings in both Europe and Central America, presented Nicaraguan officials with opportunities to share their views of the peace process with high-ranking EC officials. Indeed, in the period following the Guatemala Summit, as British FCO officials noted, the 'level of contact' between EC diplomats and Central American governments 'increased substantially' because the 'Central Americans continue to attach great importance to the political influence of the Twelve which they see as a means of counterbalancing the influence of the United States'.[46] For instance, at a meeting in New York on 25 September 1987, Nicaraguan diplomat Victor Hugo Tinoco was part of a Central American delegation, which stressed to EC representatives Genscher, Tindemans, and Cheysson the crucial importance of 'continued political support from the Twelve' for the Esquipulas II Accords.[47] Naturally, the fact that the Nicaraguan government was able to bring across its pro-Esquipulas message as part of a Central American regional block contributed to the impact, visibility, and legitimacy of their diplomatic campaign.

Similar to previous years, the FSLN asked the Nicaraguan solidarity committees to support their propaganda campaign. On 24 August 1987, Hernán Estrada from the FSLN's *Departamento*

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[43] TNA, FCO 99/2474, Record of meeting held by the Secretary of State to discuss policy on Central America, 28 September 1987.
[44] AA, AV Neues Amt 16.917, Managua to Bonn, 13 August 1987.
[45] Staten Generaal Digitaal, Bukman to Tweede Kamer, 10 December 1987.
[46] TNA, FCO 99/2726, Background brief MCAD, 25 February 1988.
[47] AA, Zwischenarchiv 145031, Copenhagen Coreu to All Coreu, 29 September 1987.

de Relaciones Internacionales, asked solidarity activists living in Managua to inform the Western European public about the advances of the peace process.[48] At Western European solidarity conference in Helsinki in December 1987, too, FSLN-DRI representative Patricia Elvir stressed the vital importance of the solidarity movement's contribution to the Esquipulas process, and encouraged solidarity committees to lobby their governments and mobilise public opinion in support of the initiative.[49] In response, the solidarity committees published pamphlets and booklets, in which they urged EC leaders to support the peace process, put pressure on the US administration, and praise the role of Nicaragua. The *Nicaragua Komitee Nederland*, for example, published an advert in the newspaper *De Volkskrant*, which declared the Nicaraguan government had taken the lead in the peace process and therefore 'deserved support' from the international community.[50] And in another booklet, the solidarity committees called on EC leaders to work harder so that the Central American peace process could succeed, even 'if that means taking a stance against the US'.[51]

Fortunately for the FSLN, the Nicaraguan government and its allies were not alone in their conviction that the Esquipulas process deserved international support. Except for the US administration, the entire international community appeared willing to throw its weight behind it. Most notably, in October 1987, the Costa Rican president Oscar Arias was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his contribution to the Esquipulas II Accords.[52] In addition, Western European governments, the Socialist International (SI), and the Organisation of American States (OAS) issued multiple declarations of support. And even though the twelve EC countries refrained from publicly criticising the US role in Central America, Western European declarations were clearly designed to push the Reagan administration towards a more cooperative attitude. In November 1987, for instance, the Twelve issued a joint declaration in which they urged 'the international community and, in particular, countries with links to and interest in Central America, to contribute to the region's effort to achieve peace, democracy, and economic development'.[53]

While the FSLN was content with the international support for Esquipulas, believing it would end to the contra war and pave the way for consolidating their revolutionary regime, they hoped for more than that. Nicaragua's suffering economy remained 'the Achilles heel' of the revolution, as Ortega told Honecker in Moscow on 3 November 1987, because food shortages,

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[48] IISG, NKN, Box 3, Mary (Managua Dependance) to NKN, 24 August 1987.
[49] IISG, NKN, Box 145, Report solidarity conference in Helsinki, 6 December 1987.
[50] *De Volkskrant*, 9 January 1988; 17 October 1987.
[51] IISG, NKN, Box 117, Commentaar van het Guatemala Komitee Nederland, Het Nicaragua Komitee Nederland en de gezamelijke El Salvador Komitees op één jaar regiobeleid voor Midden-Amerika ten behoeve van begrotingsbehandeling 1988/89 van ontwikkelingssamenwerking, date unknown.
[52] *The New York Times*, 14 October 1987.
[53] AA, Zwischenarchiv 136369, Declaration by the Twelve on Central America, 13 November 1987.

hyperinflation, and growing unemployment significantly weakened the Sandinistas' domestic support base. The growing discontent among the Nicaraguan population as a result of the war and the economic crisis, Ortega disclosed, was particularly worrying now that the *comandantes* had been forced to open up 'political space' at home to demonstrate their commitment to the peace process. The counterrevolutionary opposition, Ortega recognised, could use the new measures with regards to press freedom and a national dialogue to weaken the FSLN's position. Nevertheless, he added optimistically, the Sandinista leaders were convinced that EC and the Scandinavian countries would be more forthcoming with economic and development aid now that Nicaragua had taken concrete steps to implement the Esquipulas treaty.[54]

In public declarations and private meetings, therefore, FSLN officials linked the promise of peace in Central America to the necessity of economic assistance to the region, and Nicaragua in particular. Sergio Ramírez, before travelling to Western Europe and Latin America in search of financial support on 18 August 1987, announced that 'a country without relative economic normality cannot fully commit to the peace process'.[55] Solidarity activists and left-wing politicians in Western Europe, too, argued that the Nicaraguan government should be awarded with increased developmental aid for its proactive contribution to the Esquipulas process. The leader of the West German Social Democratic Party, Hans-Jürgen Wischnewski, to give one example, argued in a *Bundestag* debate in September 1987 that the Sandinista leaders had taken positive steps to implement the Esquipulas II requirements and that, in response, the FRG's bilateral aid programme to Nicaragua should be resumed immediately.[56]

Unfortunately for the Sandinista *comandantes*, however, Western European governments refused to provide the Nicaraguan government with more bilateral aid until it had 'fulfilled all the requirements of the Guatemala City summit'.[57] Nicaraguan officials, such as vice-minister Pedro Antonio Blandón, who visited the FRG on 16 December 1987, tried to counter these Western European demands by pointing out that it was unfair to push Nicaragua towards compliance, while the other Central American countries and the US experienced much less diplomatic pressure, even though they were less forthcoming than Nicaragua to implement the peace treaty. The government of Honduras, Sandinista officials noted, had made no effort to close down the contra bases. And in El Salvador, the government was unable to prevent left-wing activists and politicians from being murdered by extreme right-wing forces.[58]

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[54] SAPMO, DY30/2385, Vermerk: Honecker und Ortega, 3 November 1987.
[55] AA, AV Neues Amt 16.917, Managua to Bonn, 20 August 1987.
[56] Deutsche Bundestag, 39. Sitzung, 12 October 1987. Accessed online at: https://pdok.bundestag.de/
[57] AA, Zwischenarchiv 136369, Vermerk, 17 December 1987.
[58] *New York Times*, 10 January 1987.

To the frustration of the FSLN and its supporters, who blamed US pressure and the rise of the Western European right for the uncompromising stance of the majority of the EC countries, the Nicaraguan claim that the Sandinistas were under much more scrutiny than the other Central American states failed to have a significant impact on the policies of Western European governments towards Nicaragua. On the contrary, the levels of EC aid to Nicaragua continued to decline after the Esquipulas II Accords were signed, and Nicaragua's economic situation did not improve. Even the Dutch and French governments, which had provided revolutionary Nicaragua with significant amounts of aid throughout most of the 1980s, announced they would cut back on their bilateral assistance to the Nicaragua in favour of a regional aid programme that targeted Central America as a whole.[59] Only the Swedish government, as Bayardo Arce told Western European ambassadors in Managua, deserved 'praise' for its continued efforts to support the Nicaraguan people.[60]

Nicaraguan officials were not wrong when they stated that – for ideological reasons – the Sandinista government was held up to a different standard than the other Central American states. As British diplomats noted in May 1989, 'the West' was clearly 'demanding of Nicaragua a level of immediate democratisation that [it did] not demand simultaneously from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala'.[61] The problem was that, in the late 1980s, state officials in the Netherlands, Britain, and the FRG were convinced the ideology of the Sandinista *comandantes* was inherently undemocratic, because it left no space for the possibility that, at some point in the future, Nicaragua might not be a revolutionary country. As the Dutch consul in Managua concluded in May 1988, the freedom and potential influence of opposition parties in Nicaragua was bound to be limited since the Sandinista leadership considered the FSLN as the only political organisation capable of carrying out Nicaragua's 'revolutionary process'.[62] Therefore, in the eyes of these Western European diplomats, the widely publicised democratic opening in revolutionary Nicaragua was no more than window-dressing, designed to consolidate Sandinista rule in the face of international pressure and economic chaos. Louise Croll from the FCO's Mexico and Central America Department (MCAD), for example, concluded that Nicaraguan compliance with Esquipulas was a purely pragmatic decision to end the contra war, and that the Sandinista 'determination' to stay in power at all cost gave little hope for 'genuine democratisation'.[63] West German government officials, too, treated the Nicaraguan domestic reforms in the context of

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[59] Reagan Library, Raymond Walter Files, Central America, Box 2, AmEmbassy Paris to SecState WashDC, 28 February 1987.
[60] BZ, Inventarisnummer 5029, OS/Managua to CDP/San José, 27 April 1988.
[61] TNA, FCO 99/2969, Note, MCAD, 10 May 1989.
[62] BZ, Inventarisnummer 5039, OS/Managua to Ambassador, 4 May 1988.
[63] TNA, FCO 99/2844, Croll to FCO, 5 February 1988.

Esquipulas with suspicion, and constantly worried about the possibility that Ortega would go back on his promises if the international community did not keep up its diplomatic and economic pressure on the Sandinistas.[64]

In this context, on 15 and 16 January 1988, when the five Central American presidents came together for another summit to discuss the future of the Esquipulas process in Alajuela, Costa Rica, the Nicaraguan government still found itself in a position of weakness. The country's economic and military situation had not improved, and even though the FSLN leaders gained some political capital because of their attitude towards the Esquipulas II Accords, they clearly failed to convince the international community that Nicaragua was the most peaceful, democratic, and cooperative of the Central American countries. Certainly, Arias, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, remained a much more popular and less controversial figure internationally than ex-guerrilla Daniel Ortega. Crucially, in January 1988, the Nicaraguan government desperately needed to make a good impression because US Congress was scheduled to vote on a new contra aid package on 4 February 1988. If the Central American peace talks collapsed at the Costa Rican summit, international observers and FSLN officials speculated, Reagan was significantly more likely to obtain the congressional support he needed to continue the counterrevolutionary war against Nicaragua, as he could blame the Sandinistas for the failure of Esquipulas. More than any of the other Central American states, then, the Nicaraguan government needed the Costa Rican summit to be a success, or at the very least not a massive failure.

At the Alajuela meeting, the four other Central American countries were able to profit from the Nicaraguan government's predicament. When Ortega demanded compliance from his Central American colleagues, the leaders of Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Guatemala threatened him with a 'joint statement condemning Nicaragua for obstructing the peace process' unless he gave in and made further concessions. Faced with the unwelcome prospect of regional isolation and conscious of the upcoming US congressional vote on contra aid, the Nicaraguan government had no other choice than to agree to these demands. And after an a 'tense' and 'ill-tempered' summit, Daniel Ortega announced he agreed to immediately suspend the state of emergency and start direct negotiations with the contra leaders about a ceasefire.[65] The latter was a particularly awkward concession, as the Sandinista *comandantes* had categorically refused to negotiate with the contra leaders in the past, seeing the counterrevolutionaries as merely 'delegates from the North American government'.[66] Indeed, Bendaña remembered, before the Esquipulas

[64] See, AAPD, 1987, Konferenz des Bundesministers Genscher mit Botschaftern, 9 April 1987.
[65] TNA, FCO 99/2685, San Jose to FCO, 16 January 1988.
[66] TNA, FCO 99/2707, Francisco d'Escoto to Geoffrey Howe, 22 January 1988.

process, the FSLN's position on a direct dialogue with the contras had consistently been that 'we don't talk to the monkeys we talk to the zookeepers'.[67] The other Central American states were under much less pressure during the Alajuela summit. According to an analysis of the British ambassador in El Salvador, Duarte 'achieved his prime objectives of concentrating the heat on Nicaragua' and, as a consequence, was spared the 'embarrassment' of having to take 'further measures to comply with the spirit of Esquipulas II'.[68]

While the Costa Rican summit had been a painful demonstration of the Nicaraguan government's regional isolation and lack of alternatives, Ortega's concessions to ensure the survival of Esquipulas had not been in vain. On 4 February 1988, the US Congress rejected Reagan's proposed contra aid package of $36.3 million. Reagan's defeat, the Dutch solidarity committee announced in a press release, was 'an important victory for the people and government of Nicaragua'.[69] What is more, the fact that Reagan could no longer provide the contras with military assistance gave an impulse to ceasefire negotiations between the Sandinistas and the counterinsurgents, and these progressed surprisingly quickly in the subsequent weeks. After days of intense negotiations in the Nicaraguan border town of Sapoá, Sandinista defence minister Humberto Ortega and the three contra leaders Adolfo Calero, Aristedes Sánchez, and Alfredo César signed a temporary ceasefire agreement on 23 March 1988, in which the Sandinista government, amongst other things, promised a general amnesty and compliance with the Esquipulas treaty. To be sure, the Sapoá agreement did not bring an end to the counterinsurgent war, as the contras did not demobilise, but it was an important step towards peace and, at the very least, it gave the Sandinista government and the Nicaraguan people some breathing space. In March 1988, therefore, as American journalist Stephen Kinzer put it, 'a nation torn by war slowly stopped bleeding'.[70]

Ultimately, then, the signing of Sapoá accords and the congressional vote against Reagan's contra aid package were positive developments for the Nicaraguan government, which considered the US-backed counterrevolutionary war as one of the main threats to the revolution.[71] It is important to clarify, however, that US politicians did not vote in favour of the FSLN's revolutionary project. Rather, the vote on 4 February 1988 represented a rejection of Reagan's militaristic foreign policy and, more importantly, an endorsement of the Esquipulas II Accords. This is a relevant distinction to make since, because, as the Central American summit in Alajuela

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[67] Interview Sutterlin with Bendaña, 29 July 1997.
[68] TNA, FCO 99/2707, San Salvador to FCO, 16 January 1988.
[69] IISG, NKN, Box 23, Persbericht, 4 February 1988.
[70] Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers* (2007) 376.
[71] ABPA, Alejandro Bendaña to Directores Generales y Directores, 13 January 1989.

clearly demonstrated, the Sandinistas had very little influence on the way the Esquipulas process was implemented and perceived. This meant that, in the beginning of 1988, the nine FSLN *comandantes* found themselves in a position of weakness, but also at the centre of a regional peace process with strong international backing. The international actors that supported Esquipulas, such as the West German, British, and Dutch governments, used the process to demand concessions from the Nicaraguan government that could, in the eyes of the Sandinista leaders, potentially weaken the revolutionary process. Until March 1988, when the ceasefire with the contras was signed, the FSLN leaders calculated that concessions with regards to domestic policy, such as allowing for greater press freedom, were necessary to appease the international community and end the contra war. As we shall see in the following section, however, even though the counterrevolutionary war slowly came to an end in the late 1980s, the Sandinistas were not always able to successfully balance their domestic and international politics.

DOMESTIC CONTROL AND INTERNATIONAL DISILLUSIONMENT

With the military threat curtailed and a temporary ceasefire in place, the Nicaraguan government still had to resolve the country's other pressing problems, most notably economic chaos and growing social tensions. As Bayardo Arce told Honecker in March 1988, the situation in Nicaragua had grown more 'complicated' in the preceding months because the disastrous economic situation 'undermined the social basis of the revolution'.[72] Moreover, as result of the Esquipulas accords, Arce admitted, the anti-Sandinista opposition was in a better position than ever to exploit the growing discontent amongst the Nicaraguan population.[73] International observers and newspapers confirmed Sandinista *comandantes'* claims that the economic situation, combined with concessions made during the Esquipulas process, weakened Sandinista rule in Nicaragua. Journalists wrote about surprisingly large anti-government demonstrations, hunger strikes by construction workers, and frustrated doctors who demanded higher wages to cope with inflation and food shortages.[74] Solidarity activists living in Nicaragua, too, noted the increasing tension and polarisation in Nicaragua as a result of the war and economic crisis. For example, on 15 February 1988, British activist Naomi Cohen wrote about a demonstration she witnessed in Masaya – historically a Sandinista stronghold – where young Nicaraguans protested against the *Servicio Militar Patriótico* (SMP), a military draft obliging all Nicaraguan men to serve for two years in the Sandinista army.

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[72] SAPMO, DY30/44238, Bericht über den Besuch einer Delegation der Nationalleitung der FSLN Nikaraguas unter Leitung des Genossen Bayardo Arce, Stellvertratender Koordinator der Exekutivkommission der Nationalleitung der FSLN Nikaraguas, vom 2. bis 6. März 1988 in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 8 March 1988.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers* (2007) 378.

According to Cohen, in this volatile situation, anti-government groups 'were easily able to manipulate the feelings' of the Masayan population and, as a result, 'an anti-government and specifically anti-SMP demonstration marched through the [city's] centre.[75] Later that evening, she noted, 'in response to the opposition' there were 'fortunately' many 'spontaneous mobilisations' in favour of the Sandinista government and the military draft.[76]

In previous years, when the domestic situation had proved difficult to manage for the Sandinista leaders, they had been able to turn to the international community for financial support and diplomatic backing. These international campaigns were not always a massive success, but the FSLN could usually count on a decent level of sympathy and solidarity. In 1988, however, as we have seen, it was clear the international context no longer favoured the Sandinista government. True, the Soviet Union remained an important financial donor but, as Ramírez had already realised during his visit to the USSR and Eastern Europe in June 1987, the leaders of the socialist bloc had their own economic and social problems to deal with and Gorbachev was seeking to resolve regional Cold War conflicts through diplomatic channels. In 1988 and 1989, therefore, Gorbachev – without first consulting Cuba or Nicaragua – negotiated an end to the interference of the Soviet Union in Central America affairs with the US, agreeing to suspend arms deliveries to the Sandinistas.[77] Fidel Castro, in contrast, remained willing to support the Nicaraguan revolutionaries as much as he could. Yet, Cuba itself was dependent on the Soviet Union for economic and military aid and, as Gorbachev made clear during a visit to the island in April 1989, the time of Soviet generosity had come to an end. Ultimately, then, Cuban aid was not enough to keep the Nicaraguan economy afloat and the Sandinista military strong.[78] Moreover, because of the Latin American debt crisis, Central American scepticism, and the US embargo, the FSLN had little prospect of obtaining extra financial aid or material support from other countries in the Americas.

With regards to Western European governments, as we have seen above, the EC countries remained firmly committed to their regional policy towards Central America and were not inclined to give the Sandinistas preferential treatment, even though the Nicaraguan economy was in an exceptionally bad state. Crucially, the Nicaraguan solidarity movement in Western Europe was also losing members, popular support, and political influence. At the 14th solidarity conference in Rome on 29 and 30 October 1988, Western European representatives reluctantly concluded that, in spite

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[75] Leicester Masaya Link Group Archive, Naomi Cohen to Twinning group, 15 February 1988.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ramírez, *Adiós Muchachos* (2012) 110-111.
[78] Kruijt, *Cuba and Revolutionary Latin America* (2017) 176. For more on Cuba's relations with the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, see, Mervyn J. Bain, 'Cuba-Soviet Relations in the Gorbachev Era', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37 (2005) 769-791.

of their hard work, the solidarity movement was in decline.[79] While the domestic situation differed slightly in each country, the overall trend was clear: politicians avoided the topic, there were not enough volunteers to organise events and publish material, and money was short. In the Netherlands, as NKN activists observed in July 1988, the public was no longer concerned with Central American affairs and the 'unconditional sympathy' the Nicaraguan revolutionaries enjoyed in the early 1980s had disappeared.[80]

The Sandinistas and their supporters came up with various explanations for the downward trend in Western European interest and support, but they found it hard to decide on a definitive answer. Gerrit Vledder of the NKN concluded in February 1988 that the reasons for the negative 'atmosphere surrounding Nicaragua' were 'difficult to grasp'.[81] One explanation solidarity committees offered for the shift in public opinion was 'rebirth' and growing popularity of right-wing ideologies in Western Europe, which made it easier for anti-FSLN groups and contras to spread 'reactionary information' amongst the population, most notably through the 'multinational press'.[82] Sergio Ramírez, for example, told Ed van Thijn, the mayor of Amsterdam, who visited Nicaragua as part of the Managua-Amsterdam twinning programme in November 1988, that a 'conservative mentality' had somehow taken hold of Western Europe and consequently 'double standards' were applied to Nicaragua.[83] The solidarity activists that came together in Rome, too, argued that biased media coverage limited the effectiveness of their work, most notably since committees were forced to spend most of their time and money on 'defending' the Nicaraguan government from unfair accusations, rather than on spreading information about the complex peace process and the positive aspects of the Sandinista revolution, such as the literacy campaigns and agricultural reforms.[84] Finally, Sandinistas and their allies blamed US pressure for what they saw as the Western European governments' unfair treatment of the Nicaraguan government. Ramírez, for instance, told Van Thijn that the negative Western European attitude could 'certainly' be explained by the fact that Nicaragua was in the backyard of the United States.[85] Another reason, while not mentioned by the Sandinistas and activists themselves, might have been the issue of keeping up momentum after more than a decade of revolution. After all, there were several other issues that attracted Western Europeans' attention around the world in the late 1980s, such as the

[79] IISG, NKN, Box 245, Resultados y Conclusiones del 14 Congreso Europeo de Solidaridad con Nicaragua Celebrado en Rome el 29 al 31 de Octubre de 1988.
[80] IISG, NKN, Box 3, Notulen KOKO, 9 July 1988.
[81] IISG, NKN, Box 4, Stuk ter voorbereiding op de KOKO-special, 10 February 1989.
[82] IISG, NKN, Box 245, Resultados y Conclusiones del 14 Congreso Europeo de Solidaridad con Nicaragua Celebrado en Rome el 29 al 31 de Octubre de 1988.
[83] BZ, Inventarisnummer 15035, Van Muyzert/Managua aan CDP/San José, 22 November 1988.
[84] IISG, NKN, Box 145, XIV Congreso Europeo de Solidaridad con Nicaragua, Roma 29-39 October 1988.
[85] BZ, Inventarisnummer 15035, Van Muyzert/Managua aan CDP/San José, 22 November 1988

struggle against apartheid in South Africa and the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe.

In addition to changes in civil society, another factor that shaped Western European public opinion was the tense situation in Nicaragua itself. In the late 1980s, a growing number of solidarity activists and revolutionary sympathisers voiced their criticism and disillusionment with the FSLN's domestic policies, which often ran counter to Western perceptions of democracy.[86] At a national meeting on 9 July 1988, the NKN concluded it had become very difficult to maintain a 'positive attitude towards the FSLN considering the current situation' in Nicaragua.[87] And while Labour politician Van Thijn agreed with Ramírez that many of the accusations against Nicaragua were 'unjust', he added that the Sandinistas should nonetheless work harder to improve the human rights record and prevent the possibility of becoming 'political isolated' in Western Europe.[88] The *Consejo Nicaragüense de Amistad, Solidaridad y Paz* (CNASP), the division of the FSLN-DRI responsible for managing the transnational solidarity network, was also aware of the growing sense of disillusionment within the solidarity movement. Nevertheless, FSLN officials were careful to underline that this was not a structural problem. In the words of the CNASP, 'cultural differences' and a lack of proper communication between the Sandinista government and individual Western European committees was to blame for the fact that some solidarity activists misunderstood the Nicaraguan 'reality'.[89] The simple solution to this problem, in the eyes of the CNASP, was to improve the lines of communication and provide better information about the complex situation in Central America rather than address the source of concerns in Nicaragua itself.[90]

The problem with this line of argumentation was that the Sandinista government made certain decisions in 1988 that, according to former FSLN diplomat Luis Caldera, were simply 'indefensible' to Western European audiences, even though they were made in an atmosphere of polarisation, 'despair', and economic chaos.[91] The most notorious example was the police crackdown on protesters in the small town of Nandaime on 10 July 1988. This demonstration was organised by the opposition alliance *Coordinadora Democrática Nicaragüense* (Democratic Coordinating Committee, CDN) and, according to Dutch diplomat Erik Klipp, the number of participants was somewhere between 2,000 and 15,000.[92] Clashes between the Sandinista police and the protesters in Nandaime broke out during a speech of conservative leader Miriam Arguello

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[86] IISG, NKN, Box 3, Notulen KOKO, 8 and 9 July 1988.
[87] *Ibid.*
[88] BZ, Inventarisnummer 15035, Muyzert/Managua naar CDP/San José: Nicaragua, 22 November 1988.
[89] IISG, NKN, Box 144, Documente Base del III Encuentro Internacional de los comites de solidaridad con Nicaragua.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Author's interview with Luis Caldera, phone conversation via Signal, 22 October 2018.
[92] BZ, Inventarisnummer 15035, Codebericht, van San Jose aan Min van BZ, 2 August 1988.

Morales, as police officers fired tear gas grenades and arrested more than forty demonstrators, including Arguello Morales, labour leader Carlos Huembes of the *Central de Trabajadores de Nicaragua* (Nicaraguan Worker's Centre, CTN), and Agustín Jarquín of the Social Christian Party. In the days following the Nandaime demonstration, the Nicaraguan government, which argued the US embassy had encouraged the protesters to provoke the Sandinista police, expelled US ambassador Richard Melton and seven other American diplomats, shut down *Radio Católica* indefinitely, and prohibited *La Prensa* from appearing, although only for fifteen days. The Reagan administration immediately retaliated, and ordered Nicaraguan envoy Carlos Tunnerman, together with seven colleagues, to leave the United States.[93]

The violence in Nandaime – despite being on a far lesser scale than the brutal atrocities carried out by neighbouring governments – cost the Sandinistas dearly in terms of international support. According to a public document written by a number of Latin America solidarity committees in the Netherlands, as a result of the developments in Nandaime, the Nicaraguan government – 'in one fell swoop' – had lost all the sympathy of the 'Western world'.[94] Western European governments were quick to denounce the Sandinista government for its response to the opposition demonstration. Foreign Office junior minister Tim Eggar, for instance, stated in the House of Commons that Britain 'deplore[d] these Nicaraguan actions' and considered them 'further evidence of Nicaraguan failure to comply with its obligations to democratisation under the Esquipulas II agreement'.[95] In the West German *Bundestag*, Irmgard Schwaetzer from the *Auswärtigen Amt* declared that the Sandinista government's violations of the 'spirit of the peace process' during and in the aftermath of the Nandaime protest were 'incomprehensible and disappointing' to everyone that wanted the Esquipulas process to succeed.[96] What is more, at the initiative of the FRG, the twelve EC countries joined forces and sent a troika – a diplomatic delegation composed of representatives from the current, previous, and upcoming EC presidencies – to Managua to express 'concern' about the 'recent closing of *La Prensa* and *Radio Católica* and the imprisoning of opposition politicians after the Nandaime demonstration' to the Nicaraguan foreign minister Miguel d'Escoto.[97] The twelve EC leaders, then, were united in their criticism of the Sandinista government's crackdown against the country's opposition parties and critical media in July 1988.

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[93] *New York Times*, 16 July 1988.
[94] IISG, NKN, Box 117, Commentaar van het Guatemala Komitee Nederland, Het Nicaragua Komitee Nederland en de gezamenlijke El Salvador Komitees op één jaar regiobeleid voor Midden-Amerika, date unknown.
[95] Hansard, House of Commons Debate, 14 July 1988.
[96] Deutscher Bundestag, 11. Wahlperiode, Schriftliche Fragen, 21 October 1988.
[97] TNA, FCO 99/2710, Telegram, Managua to San Jose, 25 July 1988.

At the grassroots level, however, some Europeans interpreted the events in Nandaime in a very different light. Most notably, a large number of solidarity activists shared the Sandinistas' opinion that the anti-FSLN opposition movement in Nicaragua was little more than the 'domestic manifestation' of Reagan's foreign policy objectives in Central America. On 15 July 1988, Dutch activists discussed the situation in Nandaime and came to the conclusion that the US administration was desperately trying 'to get rid of the Sandinistas' while Reagan was still in office.[98] Specifically, the FSLN and its allies believed the US administration, annoyed by the Sandinista ceasefire with the contras, had developed a new strategy to undermine the Nicaraguan revolution. According to the FSLN, the new US ambassador Richard Melton, abusing the political opening in Nicaragua, was trying to destabilise the Sandinista government from within, amongst others by financing and encouraging the right-wing opposition to organise strikes and demonstrations, which would hopefully provoke a violent response from the Sandinista police. As a result, Nicaragua would enter a 'downward spiral of strife' and the revolution would be weakened. During the demonstration in Nandaime, the NKN argued in a press release on 21 July 1988, the international community had seen this so-called 'Plan Melton' in operation.[99]

Undoubtedly, solidarity activists and the FSLN were right when they argued that the US embassy in Nicaragua had become 'part of the anti-Sandinista political movement'.[100] This was even admitted by Jim Wright, the US Democratic House Speaker, who announced in a press conference that he received testimony from the CIA about attempts provoke the Sandinistas 'into taking repressive measure that would undermine support for the government'.[101] Nevertheless, by reproducing the Sandinista government's war rhetoric and siege mentality, in which you could only be with the revolution or against it, solidarity activists failed to connect with Western European people and politicians, who naturally did not feel the same sense of solidarity and closeness with the Sandinistas and Nicaragua's revolutionary project. In the Nicaraguan context of economic chaos, social tension, and an externally funded civil war, it might have made sense to group opposition politicians together with the contras, the Reagan administration, and the CIA, but this line of reasoning simply did not work in Western Europe, nor did it reflect the complexity of the Nicaraguan crisis. Naomi Cohen described this dilemma in one of her letters to the solidarity group in Leicester. In England, she wrote, it is important to 'argue your case calmly and tolerantly' to get people to support the Nicaragua's revolutionary process. However, she continued, 'living here and seeing the determination of people, the sacrifices made, the achievements of the Revolution and

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[98] IISG, NKN, Box 3, Notulen van de KOKO, 15 July 1988.
[99] IISG, NKN, Box 23, Persbericht, 23 July 1988.
[100] Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers* (2007) 381.
[101] *Washington Post*, 21 September 1988.

what the war is doing – how it's affecting everything and everyone – makes me burst with indignation and anger.'[102]

There is little doubt that 1988 was an incredibly difficult year for the Sandinistas. In the context of a spiralling economy, a growing opposition movement, and a continued contra presence in Honduras, the FSLN government lost international and domestic support. When asked about this period, many Nicaraguans also mention Hurricane Joan, one of most devastating storms in their country's history. In late October 1988, this powerful hurricane destroyed many towns along the Atlantic coast and around 150 people lost their lives. In addition to having to deal with more chaos and destruction, the slow and inadequate reaction of the international community to the hurricane served as a painful reminder for the Sandinistas that they had become even more isolated in the previous months. Indeed, while some countries such as Cuba and other 'unexpected' donors such as Britain were quick to send emergency aid, the overall response was meagre and there was little effort to help the Nicaraguan government with the reconstruction project.[103]

PLAN DE SANDINO A SANDINO

In 1989, the Sandinistas made one final push to save the revolution from economic collapse, international condemnation, and political isolation. On 14 February 1989, after a Central American presidential summit at Tesoro Beach in El Salvador, Daniel Ortega announced that democratic elections in Nicaragua would take place on 25 February 1990. In the run-up to these elections, he guaranteed, there would be freedom of expression, international observers, equal access to state television and radio for all political parties, and a process of 'national reconciliation'.[104] The other Central American leaders made no such pledge, even though they were also required to organise elections in the framework of the Esquipulas process. In exchange for Ortega's concessions, however, they did agree to draw up a 'joint plan for the voluntary demobilization, repatriation or relocation [..] of members of the Nicaraguan resistance and their families'.[105] In addition, they called on the international community, and particularly the Western Europeans, to 'support the social and economic recovery process of the Central American nations'.[106] Similar to 1984, then, the FSLN leaders hoped that elections could 'secure and strengthen' the revolution in the face of an unfriendly international environment.[107]

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[102] Leicester Masaya Link Group Archive, Naomi Cohen to Leicester Committee, 15 February 1988.
[103] TNA, FCO 99/3103, Nicaragua: Annual Review 1988, 18 January 1989.
[104] Letter dated 24 February 1989 from the representatives of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, 27 February 1989. Accessed online at: https://peacemaker.un.org/
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] ABPA, *Plan de Sandino a Sandino*, 23 May 1989.

The nine Sandinista *comandantes* set out their strategy for the electoral process in a secret document entitled *Plan de Sandino a Sandino* [Sandino to Sandino Plan], which they shared with a small number of MINEX and DRI officials in early 1989.[108] This strategy, as FSLN leader Henry Ruiz explained to East German officials in Berlin on 24 April 1989, was developed in close collaboration with Cuba and the Soviet Union.[109] At its core, the plan recognised that legitimate elections were the only way to resolve Nicaragua's conflict with the United States and, by extension, ensure the survival of the revolution. To neutralise the threat of renewed military escalation and further economic hostility, the National Directorate argued, Nicaragua would have to comply with the promises made by Ortega in El Salvador.[110] Indeed, if the government adopted a cooperative attitude towards the Esquipulas process and the Tesoro Beach agreements, the newly inaugurated US president George Bush would no longer be able to 'deny the legitimacy' of the revolution. Therefore, they concluded, the electoral process, which would naturally have to result in an 'overwhelming' triumph for the FSLN, was the country's 'one single priority'. [111]

The *Plan de Sandino a Sandino* combined domestic and international components, focusing primarily on the contra war, the economy, and international public opinion. To ensure victory, the *comandantes* reasoned, the government needed to 'accelerate the defeat' and 'demobilisation' of the contras, bringing an end to more than a decade of violence and civil war.[112] They also needed to improve the economic situation. Arguably, Ruiz explained to his East German hosts, the latter was even more urgent than ending the war, because the US-backed counterinsurgents were already on the brink of collapse.[113] To 'reactivate' the country's production process, then, the FSLN launched an economic readjustment programme, which it combined with lobbying in Western Europe to obtain aid.[114] At the same time, the *comandantes* warned, the Nicaraguan population should be shielded as much as possible from 'the negative effects' of the austerity and anti-inflationary measures, as further deprivation could alienate voters from the FSLN.[115] Finally, as we have seen in 1984, since a Sandinista electoral victory would be worthless without the international seal of approval, the FSLN launched a publicity campaign to project 'the fairness and honesty' of the

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[108] ABPA, Josefina Vigil (despacho del Cmdt. Bayardo Arce) to Alejandro Bendaña, 3 August 1989.
[109] SAPMO, DY30/44301, Gespräch Hermann Axen, Egon Krenz und Gerhard Schürer mit Henry Ruiz, 24 April 1989.
[110] ABPA, Plan de Sandino a Sandino, 23 May 1989.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] SAPMO, DY30/44301, Gespräch Hermann Axen, Egon Krenz und Gerhard Schürer mit Henry Ruiz, 24 April 1989.
[114] ABPA, Plan de Sandino a Sandino, 23 May 1989
[115] Ibid.

elections, targeting audiences and governments in 'the United States, Western Europe, and the rest of the international community'.[116]

So, the positions of Western European governments and people mattered greatly for the success of the *Plan de Sandino a Sandino*. By convincing Europeans of the validity of the electoral process, the FSLN calculated, pressure on the Bush administration to demobilise the contras and accept the results of the elections would increase. And by demonstrating that Nicaragua was taking meaningful steps towards democratisation and economic stabilisation, the FSLN hoped to receive much-needed economic aid. Therefore, the FSLN asked the solidarity committees to widely spread positive information about the elections and the peace process.[117] Moreover, in April and May 1989, Daniel Ortega, accompanied by Miguel d'Escoto, went on an extensive Western European tour, meeting with politicians, civil servants, solidarity activists, artists, students, and journalists in France, Belgium, Greece, Italy, West Germany, Spain, Britain, Sweden, Norway, and Ireland.[118] Aside from propagating Nicaragua's democratisation process, Ortega's journey was designed to push Western European governments towards participating in an upcoming donor conference in the Swedish capital of Stockholm, where the Nicaraguan government hoped to raise $250 million for its economic recovery programme.[119]

The results of the Sandinistas' diplomatic campaign in the run-up to the elections were mixed. On the one hand, Ortega received positive press coverage and a warm welcome by his Western European followers. A public lecture by the Nicaraguan president in Brussels was attended by hundreds of enthusiastic solidarity activists and politicians, who praised the revolution's accomplishments and path towards democracy.[120] In Britain, famous playwright Harold Pinter threw Ortega a soirée at his London home, which was attended by artists, activists, and intellectuals, such as Graham Greene, Bianca Jagger, Ian McEwan, and Peter Gabriel.[121] On the other hand, Western European governments generally preferred to adopt a wait-and-see attitude before making any commitments regarding long-term financial aid, statements supporting the elections, or pushing for the demobilisation of the Honduran-based contras. After all, with the Soviet Union wanting to pull out of Central America, the primary reason for Western European governments to send financial aid to revolutionary Nicaragua (keeping the country out of the

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[116] Ibid.
[117] IISG, NKN, Box 18, Report to BINLUK meeting, date unknown; Box 147, CNSAP to solidarity committees, 26 September 1989.
[118] BZ, Inventarisnummer 9112, Bonn Coreu to Madrid Coreu, 12 May 1989; TNA, FCO 99/3119, March to Imrie, 3 May 1989.
[119] SAPMO, DY30/44301, Gespräch Hermann Axen, Egon Krenz und Gerhard Schürer mit Henry Ruiz, 24 April 1989.
[120] TNA, FCO 99/3119, March to Imrie, 26 April 1989.
[121] *The Guardian*, 12 March 2017; IISG, NKN, Box 146, NSC report, July 1989.

Soviet camp) was no longer relevant. West German officials, therefore, while welcoming the Nicaraguan decision to organise elections, told Ortega that the FRG would only increase its bilateral aid 'after demonstrably free and fair elections' had taken place in February 1990.[122] Tellingly, at $50 million, the results of the Stockholm conference – although not inconsiderable – were significantly lower than the Nicaraguan government needed for an economic revival.[123] The Bush administration also tellingly prevented the demobilisation of the Honduran-based contras, arguing that the Sandinistas 'would not go forward at all with democratization' if the rebel army was completely disbanded.[124]

Yet, different from the electoral process in 1984, the international community was increasingly convinced that the Nicaraguan elections would be democratic and transparent. The official position of the British government in December 1989, for example, was to 'welcome' the decision to hold 'free and fair elections' in Nicaragua. Britain even accepted the invitation of Nicaragua's electoral council to send an official observer to the elections, which Thatcher had refused to do in 1984.[125] The FRG, Spain, France, Italy, and the Netherland, too, adopted a cooperative attitude; providing the Nicaraguan government with technicians, money, training, observers, and computers for electoral registration.[126] Indeed, arguing publicly that it was 'preferable to be invaded by observers to an electoral process in which we have nothing to hide than to confront an invasion of U.S. troops with all its consequences', the Sandinista *comandantes* welcomed around two thousand observers from Europe and the Americas.[127] Amongst those observers were prominent figures, such as former US president Jimmy Carter, João Baena Soares, the Secretary General of the Organisation of American States, and Elliot L. Richardson, a US attorney general who led the team of UN observers. The impressive number of international observers further contributed to the election's legitimacy.

One of the reasons for the existence of this – somewhat fragile – international consensus was that critics of the Sandinistas increasingly believed that the main opposition party in Nicaragua, the *Unión Nacional Opositora* (National Opposition Union, UNO), had a decent chance of beating the FSLN at the ballot box. Oscar Arias, for instance, told George Bush on 27 July 1989 that the Sandinistas were doing 'very badly' according to the polling data he had seen (official polls were not allowed in Nicaragua).[128] Indeed, British officials reported on 26 July 1989, according to a

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[122] TNA, FCO 99/3116, Brown to Webb, 25 August 1989.
[123] TNA, FCO 99/3119, Falconer to San Jose, 15 May 1989.
[124] George H. W Bush Presidential Library, Telcon, Oscar Arias, 27 July 1989. Online at: https://bush41library.tamu.edu/
[125] TNA, FCO 99/3105, Webb to Francisco d'Escoto, 5 December 1989.
[126] TNA, FCO 99/3095, Managua to FCO, 10 August 1989.
[127] *Los Angeles Times*, 25 February 1990.
[128] George H. W Bush Library, Conversation with Oscar Arias, 27 July 1989.

private opinion poll commissioned by *La Prensa* and carried out by a Costa Rican company, Chamorro would obtain more than 46% of the vote, while only 26% of the population would side with Ortega.[129] Rather than trying to undermine the legitimacy of the elections as they had done in 1984, therefore, anti-Sandinista groups focused on funding, supporting, and assisting UNO opposition candidate Violeta Chamorro (a former member of Nicaragua's junta). Certainly, behind the scenes, the Bush administration and its allies worked hard to make a Chamorro victory possible, even though American officials were careful 'not to smother [the UNO] with a US embrace'.[130]

On the other side of the political spectrum, Sandinistas and their supporters also wanted clean elections, as they were convinced of an easy FSLN victory, a view shared by most Western European journalists. The people would never vote for the UNO, West German solidarity activists argued, as everyone in Nicaraguan realised that the opposition alliance was no more than a US-backed group of contra leaders.[131] Dutch solidarity activists agreed with their German colleagues, and declined to discuss the possibility of a Sandinista defeat at the 1989 national conference, arguing that this was simply not a 'realistic' scenario.[132] As Managua-based Mary Timmerman wrote to local solidarity committees in the Netherlands, even though the UNO was funded and 'directed' by the United States, the FSLN, with Ortega and Ramírez on the ballot, would certainly win the elections.[133] Similarly, Leonel Urbino Pérez from the Cuban Communist Party's Americas Department remembers that Havana's leaders expected the FSLN to defeat the UNO in February 1990.[134] Soviet officials, too, counted on a Sandinista triumph. They were a bit more cautious, however, warning that 'one should not overlook the strengthening of the position of opposition parties' in recent months.[135]

Ultimately, however, the *Plan de Sandino a Sandino* failed to safeguard the Nicaraguan revolution. In the morning of 26 February 1990, to the surprise and shock of the Sandinistas and their supporters, the Supreme Electoral Council announced that, with 60% of the vote counted, the UNO obtained 54% and the FSLN 41% of the popular vote. After a decade of revolutionary change and hardship, the Sandinistas had lost the support of the Nicaraguan population. Daniel Ortega immediately conceded defeat, promising that the FSLN and the Nicaraguan government

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129 TNA, FCO 99/3095, Brown to FCO, 26 July 1989.
130 George H.W. Bush Library, Memcon, Violeta Chamorro, 8 November 1989.
131 IISG, NKN, Box 147, Llamamiento, Wuppertal, 23 September 1989.
132 IISG, NKN, Box 119, Aandachtspunten, date unknown.
133 IISG, NKN, Box 4, Timmerman to Dutch committees, 26 September 1989.
134 Author's interview with Leonel Urbino Pérez, Havana, Cuba, 5 April 2018.
135 Wilson Center Digital Archive, Excerpt from Protocol No. 179 of the Meeting of the Politburo CC CPSU, 17 February 1990.

were going to 'respect and obey the popular mandate coming out of the vote in these elections'.[136] For the solidarity activists in Western Europe, Chamorro's victory was devastating news and a massive blow to their political legitimacy. Critics of the Sandinistas mockingly asked Dutch activists if they were planning to raise funds for the UNO. After all, gleeful commentators pointed out, the solidarity movement had previously claimed to support the 'Nicaraguan people' and these people had clearly sided with the anti-Sandinista movement.[137] In Britain, too, the right-wing *Daily Mail* was happy to point out that Britain's 'well-heeled Left' had once again picked the wrong side. Unfortunately for Ortega, journalist Paul Johnson commented, 'his voters do not live in Hampstead but in Central America'.[138]

Two months after the FSLN's defeat, on 25 April 1990, Violeta Chamorro was inaugurated as Nicaragua's president. In power, Chamorro received support from the US administration, which lifted the embargo, offered a $300 million aid package, and assisted with the demobilisation of the contras. The EC countries, like the IMF and the World Bank, also lifted their restrictions on financial aid to Nicaragua. To be sure, it took several years before some form of peace could return to the impoverished and war-torn country. Nevertheless, with the end of the *Revolución Popular Sandinista*, a new period in the country's history had begun.

Conclusion

In the late 1980s, as this chapter demonstrated, the Sandinista government realised that their country's participation in the Esquipulas peace process was necessary to ensure the continued survival of the Nicaraguan revolution. At home, the FSLN was confronted with an economic crisis and an externally funded civil war, both of which threatened to undermine the social basis of the *Revolución Popular Sandinista*. In the international arena, they were faced with continued US hostility and the declining global power of the Soviet Union, as Gorbachev made clear that Nicaragua should come to an agreement with its neighbours. In this context, the Central American peace process, which was backed by a large number of Western European and Latin American governments, provided the Nicaraguan government with a much-needed way out of an impossible situation. Through the Esquipulas treaties – at least if everything went according to plan – the FSLN could terminate the contra war, avoid regional isolation, obtain economic aid from Western Europe, undermine US foreign policy towards the revolution, and stay in power.

Of course, the problem was that – with the Soviet Union out of the picture – the FSLN had no other alternatives than to go along with the Esquipulas process, which greatly limited

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[136] *The New York Times*, 27 February 1990.
[137] IISG, NKN, Box 4, Rapport van de Uitgangspunten-commissie, date unknown.
[138] *Daily Mail*, 27 February 1990.

Nicaragua's ability to influence the outcome of the peace negotiations. As a result, the Sandinistas were pushed towards further concessions regarding democratic elections, press freedom, and negotiations with the contras, while the other Central American countries faced no such pressure. The Honduran-based counterinsurgents, for instance, were not forced to demobilise, even though this was officially required by the Esquipulas treaty. Moreover, because Western European countries were no longer preoccupied with Nicaragua's alignment to the Soviet bloc, they decided to withhold further economic aid until the Sandinistas had fulfilled their promise to democratic elections in February 1990. As the post-Cold War international order started to take shape, therefore, the FSLN's ability to use diplomacy as a means to strenghten the Nicaraguan revolution was drastically reduced.

From an ideological perspective, too, the message of the Sandinistas had lost its global appeal and capacity to mobilise Western Europeans for the Nicaraguan revolution. In the eyes of many Western Europeans, who closely followed the protests and democratic transitions in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, the Sandinistas represented a failed and old-fashioned ideology. In this context, solidarity activists that continued to support the FSLN struggled to present the Nicaraguan revolution in a positive light, as audiences were increasingly confronted with news about Sandinista human rights violations, police repression in Nandaime, and economic chaos. Interestingly, then, as the Cold War in Europe came to an end, audiences appeared much more willing to criticise the Nicaraguan revolution, while at the same time ignoring the – generally more violent – situation in other Central American countries, most notably El Salvador and Guatemala. In part, the singling out of Nicaragua should be understood as an unintended consequence of the Sandinistas' own revolutionary diplomacy, which sought to raise Western European interest in the RPS. Yet, it also reflects the growing strength and legitimacy of right-wing forces in Western Europe in the late 1980s, as people were keen to point out the flaws of left-wing governments.

Meanwhile, as the FSLN focused on demonstrating to the international community that the Nicaraguan government was making genuine efforts to comply with the peace agreements, they lost the support of the domestic population. In 1989, Nicaraguan officials calculated that for the revolution's survival, the FSLN leadership needed to terminate the war, improve the economy, and organise elections that the international community would recognise. Yet, in the international environment of the late 1980s, the Sandinistas were only able to accomplish the latter, as the economy continued to spiral and the contra war – even though there was a temporary ceasefire in place – could have been re-ignited at any moment. Indeed, after years of civil war and economic decline, the situation in Nicaragua on the ground in the late 1980s contrasted sharply with the hopes and promises made by the Sandinistas revolutionaries one decade earlier. In this context,

the majority of the Nicaraguan people decided to vote for the US-approved opposition, which appeared much more likely than the Sandinistas to improve the country's standard of living and terminate the externally funded civil war.

CONCLUSIONS

After Violeta Chamorro assumed the presidency on 25 April 1990, Nicaragua quickly disappeared from the international headlines. From a contemporary perspective, then, it might be difficult to imagine that the inhabitants of this small Central American country once captured the attention of a global audience. Yet, in the late 1970s and 1980s, the guerrillas of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* did exactly that, as they successfully employed revolutionary diplomacy and transnational activism to put Nicaragua on the world map. From local bars in Western European towns to the United Nations General Assembly in New York, the *Revolución Popular Sandinista* was a popular topic of – often heated – conversations and debates. In turn, the revolution's global resonance and international significance impacted its domestic trajectory, as public opinion, foreign policies, economic trends, and Cold War ideologies created welcome opportunities and frustrating limitations for the Sandinista leadership. During Nicaragua's revolutionary decade, the global, national, and local were closely interconnected.

As this thesis demonstrated, the global resonance and impact of the *Revolución Popular Sandinista* was the result of the Nicaraguan revolutionaries' international strategy. Both before and after the fall of the Somoza regime in 1979, the FSLN used the international environment to obtain power, isolate enemies, and foment alliances. The revolutionaries targeted not just politicians and government leaders, but also journalists, activists, students, and Western public opinion as a whole. At its core, the Sandinistas' foreign policy was a balancing act. On the one hand, to ensure the revolution's survival, the Sandinistas responded pragmatically to the international conditions they encountered, presenting themselves in a non-threatening way to the rich and powerful Western states. On the other hand, the FSLN *comandantes* believed in a radically different future, in which the global order was no longer dominated by capitalism and US imperialism, but rather by Third World national liberation movements and the socialist countries of the Global South. So, like the Cubans before them, Sandinistas operated on the assumption that there would be many more revolutions. While believing that a new international system was within reach, the FSLN was nevertheless careful to avoid the same fate as Cuba, isolated from the West and dependent on the Soviet Union. It therefore did not actively promote revolution abroad, with the exception of supporting the revolutionaries in El Salvador. In particular, before Reagan assumed the presidency in 1981, the FSLN hoped to strenghten its position in Central America by pushing for the victory of another revolutionary movement in the region. Meanwhile, it worked hard to square the circle of neutralising opposition while furthering a revolutionary programme by presenting Nicaragua as

moderate, democratic, and non-aligned in the global Cold War at the same time as furthering revolution at home.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, this was a remarkably effective strategy. The FSLN encountered an unusually receptive international audience, excited that there was still hope for Latin America's revolutionary left after the devastating defeat in Chile and disillusioned with the United States' global role. Responding to these sentiments with an optimistic message of non-alignment, anti-imperialism, and social justice, the Nicaraguan guerrillas and their allies isolated the Somoza regime and obtained support from activists, governments, and social democrats from Europe and the Americas, thereby creating the international and domestic conditions necessary for a popular revolution. In the years following the revolution's triumph, too, the Sandinista government successfully relied on transnational propaganda and state diplomacy to secure economic assistance, political legitimacy, and popular support, building on the popularity of the peace movement and the political strength of social democrats. By doing so, they limited the ability of the Reagan administration to implement militaristic policies to overthrow Nicaragua's revolutionary government, while at the same time strengthening the FSLN's domestic position, as the Nicaraguan government obtained financial aid for popular public programmes, such as the nation-wide literacy crusade.

As the US invasion of Grenada in October 1983 and the brutal counterinsurgent policies in El Salvador and Guatemala made painfully clear, however, the Sandinistas' ideals and visions of a new international order lost out. The FSLN's victory did not trigger more revolutions and its leaders were unable to effectively support their regional counterparts, particularly in neighbouring El Salvador. Rather than marking the beginning of a new and hopeful decade for the transnational left and the Third World, the Nicaraguan revolution remained an exception in a world that moved increasingly towards the right, as governments in the Global South embraced neoliberal economic policies and conservative leaders obtained power in most Western European countries. In this global climate, political and civil rights, such as the right to free speech, were given prominence over the egalitarian social and economic human rights that the Sandinistas propagated, such as the right to education, food, and health care.[139] Moreover, as Cold War tensions declined in the late 1980s, it became harder for the FSLN to present the US president as a dangerous fanatic, which had been a key part of its message in the early revolutionary years. In sum, as Western civil society and the global order transformed from the mid-1980s onwards, the Sandinistas encountered a significantly less receptive audience.

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[139] See, for more on this transformation, Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

The FSLN managed to survive these global transformations by going on the defensive, seeking material aid and military support in the socialist countries and, perhaps more importantly, mobilising political support for the Contadora and Esquipulas peace processes in Western Europe and Latin America. The financial and military assistance from the Eastern bloc and Cuba, which increased drastically in the mid-1980s, were crucial for the revolution's survival in the face of the counterinsurgency and US economic embargo. Nevertheless, the peace negotiations were arguably more important, as they provided the only alternative to a military invasion by US forces. To keep Western European and Latin American governments interested and involved in the Central American peace processes, the Sandinistas agreed to significant ideological concessions and domestic reforms, including organising democratic elections in 1984 and 1990, implementing structural economic reforms, and setting up direct negotiations with the contra leadership. Somewhat ironically, therefore, to prevent the collapse of Nicaragua's revolutionary regime in the face of a changing global order and growing US pressure, the Sandinistas adapted their style of governing to the demands of the Western world.

As the Soviet Union started to pull out of the Central American conflicts in the late 1980s, the FSLN made one final attempt to convince Western Europe and the US that their revolution was legitimate. And for a couple months it seemed as though the Sandinistas' plan to stay in power through an internationally observed electoral process would succeed. Yet, after years of civil war and economic chaos, the nine FSLN *comandantes* could no longer count on the support of the Nicaraguan population, which decided in February 1990 that Violeta Chamorro was the right person to take the country out of the war and towards a better future. Even though the Sandinista leadership calculated that, to win the elections, they needed to improve the country's chaotic economic situation and end the war (which they failed to do), the FSLN's defeat came a shock to the revolutionaries; they had been convinced that Nicaraguans would never side with Chamorro's opposition alliance, which they perceived as a group of contras, coordinated and funded by the US administration. So, while the trajectory of the *Revolución Popular Sandinista* was to a significant extent shaped by the changes in the international environment, the decision to bring an end to Nicaragua's revolutionary experiment was made in the country itself.

By studying the Nicaraguan revolution through a global lens, *Sandinistas Go Global* provided new insights into its domestic trajectory. During Nicaragua's revolutionary decade, as this thesis revealed, grassroots developments and changes on the ground were often the result of shifts in the international context or components of the Sandinistas' revolutionary diplomacy. To a significant extent, for example, the victory of the FSLN guerrillas over the Somoza dictatorship on 19 July 1979 was aided by their global campaign, which fell into surprisingly fertile ground in

the international environment of the late 1970s. In particular, the Sandinistas' ability to tailor their message to the interests, ideologies, and hopes of wide range of state and non-state audiences in Western Europe and the Americas was key to their success. The electoral processes of 1984 and 1990, too, are better understood if we adopt a global perspective. In both cases, the FSLN sought to utilise elections as a means to influence foreign policies and public opinion, seeking to bring an end to the US administration's support for the contras and hoping to obtain the backing (financial and political) from Western European and Latin American countries. Similarly, the willingness of Western European and US politicians to accept the legitimacy of the 1990 elections, as opposed to their ambivalence and rejection in 1984, is reflective of changes in the international environment as the Cold War came to an end. In the mid-1980s, the possibility that the Nicaraguan revolutionaries would stay in power – even by winning democratic elections – was simply unacceptable to their ideological enemies, who could never accept the existence of what they perceived as a socialist state in Central America. As the Soviet Union pulled out of the region's conflicts in the late 1980s, however, the Cold War framework became less relevant for the international community's approach to the revolution. In this context, the possibility that the FSLN would stay in power was a less threatening prospect to its critics.

A global perspective also sheds light on the vulnerability and eventual decline of the *Revolución Popular Sandinista*. One of the revolution's inherent weaknesses was the fact that Nicaragua was a small, poor, and economically dependent country in Central America, a region traditionally dominated by the US. Confronted with this reality, the Nicaraguan revolutionaries – seeking to break free of what they described as US imperialism – needed an effective foreign policy and, more importantly, a favourable international context that offered alternatives to North American money and a deterrent or means of resisting US power. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the FSLN found exactly that. By successfully presenting Nicaragua's new government as moderate, pluralistic, and eager to remain non-aligned in the Cold War, the Sandinistas were able to take advantage of the global context, raising enough money in Western Europe, Latin America, and the Eastern bloc to move forward with their ambitious domestic programme. Moreover, in this atmosphere of euphoria and optimism, the FSLN leadership – in close collaboration with the Cuban government – could consolidate its power over the Nicaraguan state without causing too much suspicion or protest at home and abroad.

By contrast, from the mid-1980s onwards the Sandinistas' room for manoeuvre in the international arena declined rapidly, which affected their domestic standing. As the ideology of non-alignment lost its persuasive power and Reagan stepped up his anti-communist offensive in Central America, the Sandinistas struggled to appeal to both sides of the Iron Curtain. And when

the Soviet Union's global power declined in the late 1980s, the FSLN was essentially dependent on the West, which refused further economic aid until the Sandinistas implemented domestic reforms that ran counter to the revolution's original promises, such as implementing neoliberal reforms and austerity measures. In this hostile international context, then, the FSLN could no longer generate sufficient funds to implement its revolutionary programme, nor could they improve the country's standard of living. On the contrary, as the Sandinistas – despite giving in to the demands of the West – struggled to end the US-backed war and keep the economy from collapsing, Nicaraguans lost faith in the country's revolutionary project. In other words, in context of the end of the Cold War, the Nicaraguan revolutionaries' ability to shape their country's destiny was drastically reduced.

A global perspective also reveals that Western Europe was central to the Sandinistas' international strategy and ability to survive the tumultuous 1980s. There were various – albeit interrelated – reasons for this. First, the attitude adopted by Western European governments and politicians towards Nicaragua mattered greatly for the FSLN's political legitimacy and image, both at home and abroad. During the guerrilla struggle, the public position of European leaders gave credibility to Sandinista propaganda. And after Reagan assumed the presidency in 1981, the fact that Western European governments had a relatively friendly – or at least not openly hostile – relationship with Managua undermined the Reagan administration's argument that Nicaragua was a totalitarian Soviet satellite and a threat to US security. To demonstrate in a convincing manner that Reagan's accusations were false, Sandinista leaders sought to maintain good relationships with Western European officials, bolstering the country's image of a moderate revolutionary state.

Second, the Sandinistas saw Western Europe as a welcome source of material and financial support. After the fall of the dictatorship, hopes that the RPS would be non-aligned – or worse, aligned to the Soviet bloc – pushed Western European governments towards funding the reconstruction effort. Financial support from Europe became more essential for Nicaragua's economy after Reagan came to power, refusing further aid and imposing a controversial embargo on the country in 1985. Meanwhile, economic support from Latin American countries declined rapidly from 1982 onwards, as the region plunged into a decade-long debt crisis. Through aid and trade with Western Europe, the FSLN could partly mitigate the damage, even though the country became increasingly dependent on the Soviet Union for financial assistance and resources (especially military equipment). In 1987, however, the Soviet Union started to reduce its financial support for the revolutionaries, which essentially left Western Europe as Nicaragua's only possible source of money.

Thirdly, Western European political and economic involvement in Central America functioned as a necessary counterweight to US power in the region. For the FSLN and its allies, it was clear that Reagan wanted to sabotage the Nicaraguan revolution, preferably by provoking an escalation that could be used as an excuse to launch a US military intervention. Western European foreign policy towards Central America, even if it was not directly supportive of the Nicaraguan regime, could help avert a military confrontation between the Sandinistas and the US, which would undoubtedly have meant the end of Nicaragua's revolutionary experiment. In particular, after the invasion of Grenada in 1983 and the intensification of the contra war in 1986, the Sandinistas stepped up their efforts to convince Western European governments that Nicaragua was genuinely in favour of peace in Central America, agreeing to go along with regional proposals such as the Contadora act and the Esquipulas treaty. In sum, to ensure the revolution's survival in the face of US hostility and domestic tensions, the FSLN needed Western European governments to play an active role in Central American peace building.

As a result of its focus on Nicaraguan and Western European relations, *Sandinistas Go Global* also highlighted an understudied aspect of the transatlantic relationship in the 1980s, namely the diverging European and US approaches to Central America, and particularly the Sandinista regime. The existence of a revolutionary government in Nicaragua put pressure on the transatlantic alliance; Western European leaders not only rejected the US administration's approach to Central American affairs, but even went as far as developing a foreign policy that ran counter to Reagan's ambitions, as it would allow for the continued existence of the *Revolución Popular Sandinista*. Yet, while it is important to acknowledge that Western Europe acted independently from the US in the 1980s, it is also vital to appreciate that these disagreements did not fundamentally threaten the alliance. In particular, from the mid-1980s onwards, the foreign policies of both the US (hostile) and the EC countries (friendlier but critical) functioned as a sort of carrot and stick approach to the Nicaraguan revolutionary regime, pushing the FSLN towards economic reforms, a regional dialogue, and liberal democratic elections. So, even though the Reagan administration was more adamant in wanting the collapse of the Sandinista regime, from an ideological perspective, Western European foreign policies actually helped the US to achieve many of its goals in Central America by pushing the FSLN to alter its course and, pivotally, to hold elections that removed the Sandinistas from power.

Even so, the global struggle for Nicaragua's future was more than diplomatic history. Rather, as this thesis demonstrated, it was a battle of ideas and perceptions, hearts and minds, ideologies and values, music and art, demonstrations and donations. From the late 1970s onwards, a wide range of non-state actors, including solidarity activists, priests, teachers, feminist, writers,

and musicians participated in this struggle for the Nicaraguan revolution, influencing foreign policies, public opinion, and everyday life in this small Central American country. For the Sandinistas, transnational activism and grassroots campaigns were crucial aspects of their revolutionary diplomacy, particularly at times when Western European governments appeared reluctant to provide Nicaragua with money and political support. Unable to defeat its ideological enemies through military means and government diplomacy alone, the FSLN employed non-traditional strategies to consolidate and strengthen the revolution, organising peace festivals, anti-intervention demonstrations, solidarity brigades, and fund-raising campaigns. As they did so, the Sandinistas were more successful in influencing Western European public opinion and policies than the Reagan administration, whose propaganda campaign to discredit the Nicaraguan revolution, counter the Sandinistas' message, and mobilise support for the US-backed contras was largely unsuccessful.

Furthermore, by writing the history of solidarity activism for the Nicaraguan revolution from a transnational perspective, this thesis provided a window into Western European civil society. Overall, the FSLN found it increasingly difficult to keep up momentum and reach out to new audiences as the 1980s progressed. As international Cold War tensions declined and Western European audiences focused on development, liberal democracy, and human rights – rather than on the ideologies of capitalism and socialism – the Sandinistas' message of social justice, non-alignment, and anti-imperialism no longer resonated as it had done during the revolution's early years. Moreover, from the mid-1980s onwards, the Sandinistas were no longer in full control of the narrative and activities of the solidarity movement, as Western Europeans bypassed the FSLN's centralised model and embarked on more intimate forms of activism, most notably by establishing twinning links with Nicaraguan towns, cooperatives, trade unions, and schools. Again, this is reflective of the declining power of Cold War ideologies in the second half of the 1980s; Western Europeans lost interest in grand designs and utopian revolutionary ideals, opting instead to work for smaller and less ambitious grassroots projects in Nicaragua.

This raises the issue of transnational activism's limitations. As the Sandinistas realised soon after the revolution's triumph, even though transnational campaigns were a crucial aspect of the FSLN's revolutionary diplomacy, solidarity activists were not salaried officials and, consequently, they did not always do what the Nicaraguan revolutionaries wanted. Rather, the way in which Western Europeans chose to support the RPS was often shaped by their own personal interests and ambitions, and not by a proper understanding of international affairs or the situation on the ground in Nicaragua. The reluctance of many solidarity committees to raise money for the Nicaragua Must Survive campaign, in particular, demonstrates that many Western European

activists believed they knew better than the FSLN what sort of solidarity the revolution needed. Even if they tried, though, solidarity committees could not raise the same amounts of money as governments and international institutions. Solidarity activism, then, was primarily a process aimed at influencing public opinion and, by extension, government policies. Furthermore, as it became clear in the late 1980s, high levels of public interest in the revolution could also backfire. Indeed, while the international spotlight on Nicaragua was mostly good news for the Sandinistas, it also meant that negative news about the revolution, such as the crackdown in Nandaime and the state's treatment of the Miskitos Indians, resulted in widespread international condemnation and disillusionment. In sum, for the FSLN, solidarity activism was a necessary but risky strategy, with varying – and sometimes unexpected – results.

While this thesis is primarily a global history of the Nicaraguan revolution, it also provides us with new insights into the chronology and character of the Cold War in Latin America and beyond. Crucially, the victory and survival of the left-wing Sandinista revolutionaries in Nicaragua complicates the idea that the Cold War in Latin America was essentially over by the late 1970s and early 1980s, as left-wing movements were defeated by the anti-communist dictatorships of the Southern Cone.[140] The triumph of the FSLN guerrillas demonstrated that the Latin American left, despite the strength of the Central America's military regimes, was still capable of overthrowing an anti-communist dictatorship and installing a hugely popular and ambitious revolutionary government in the United States' so-called backyard. And it was not just the revolutionary left who made this happen. It is worth repeating here that the Sandinista revolutionaries were able to mobilise significant financial and military support from a variety of sources that included Fidel Castro's Cuba, Latin American social democrats and anti-imperialists, as well as Chilean, Argentinian, and Brazilian exiles based in Western Europe, who contributed greatly to the success of the Sandinistas' transnational solidarity campaign. The defeat of the Somoza regime on 19 July 1979, therefore, was not just a victory for the Sandinista guerrillas, but also a triumphant moment for the Latin American left as a whole. From this perspective, rather than a teleological viewpoint, the Cold War looked far from over. To the contrary, many of the FSLN's backers believed they were turning the tide and working to usher forth a new chapter of revolutionary change.

Rather than seeing the early 1980s as a period when the Cold War fizzled out in Latin America, it can be argued that the triumph of the Nicaraguan revolutionaries marked the beginning of one of its most global and transformative phases. Crucially, the sheer magnitude of the violence that was carried out in Central America in the name of anti-communism and, albeit to a lesser

[140] Marchesi, *Latin America's Radical Left* (2017) 188.

extent, left-wing revolutionary ideals contrasts sharply with the idea that the Cold War in Latin America was already on its way out by the time the FSLN came to power. Throughout the 1980s, the question of how to deal with the Sandinista government and, more in general, Central America's revolutionary upheaval was also high on the foreign policy agendas of governments in Western Europe, the Americas, and the Soviet bloc. By the mid-1980s, Western European leaders considered Central America such an important, unstable, and dangerous conflict zone – capable of upsetting the international Cold War system – that they were able to agree on a common foreign policy towards a region they had previously largely ignored, challenging US power in the Western Hemisphere and contributing to the eventual success of the Esquipulas peace process. At the non-state level, too, the RPS attracted an unprecedented number of foreign sympathisers and observers to Central America, transforming the Nicaragua and particularly its capital Managua into a cosmopolitan hub of the transnational left and epicentre in the global Cold War.

This is not to say that the Cold War in Latin America only ended when the Sandinistas lost power in the elections of 25 February 1990. Rather, it demonstrates that, if we study Latin America's experience in the 1980s from a global perspective, it becomes clear that the Southern Cone – and not Central America – is the exception to the general chronology of the Cold War, particularly in the first half of the decade. As superpower détente broke down in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Cold War tensions were intensifying rapidly, and fears of military escalation increased. The escalation of the Central American conflicts in the aftermath of the Nicaraguan revolution is representative of this trend. Furthermore, events in Iran, Poland, Nicaragua, Afghanistan, and Grenada suggested that Western countries were at risk of losing this global ideological battle. In this precarious context, the US and Western Europe disagreed about the right way to respond to these changes in the international environment, including the revolutionary upheaval in Central America. While the Reagan administration preferred militaristic and confrontational solutions, European governments – although hesitant to break too clearly with the US – were more inclined to rely on verbal encouragement, financial aid, diplomacy, and regional solution, such as the Contadora process. In other words, the history of the Nicaraguan revolution presented in *Sandinistas Go Global* epitomises the global Cold War tensions and transatlantic divergences of the first half of the 1980s.

In addition, this thesis has addressed the question of when the Cold War conflict over Nicaragua's ideological future actually ended. While it might be tempting to equate the FSLN's unexpected electoral loss with the democratic transitions that marked the end of the Cold War in Eastern Europe, such a perspective overlooks the transformations that had already taken place in Nicaragua before the Sandinistas left office. To a significant extent, Nicaragua's ideological future

was essentially determined by late 1987, when the Sandinista government, under pressure from Gorbachev, the Contadora countries, and Western European governments, was forced to adapt its state-led economic model to the demands of the West. Indeed, the late 1980s, the FSLN leaders vowed to 'never' reintroduce a 'socialist economy' in Nicaragua, as this would only lead to 'disaster'.[141] Moreover, as alluded to above, regarding the global dimensions of conflict, the decline of international interest in the Nicaraguan revolution predated Chamorro's electoral victory with several years, as the solidarity movement was losing members and political legitimacy. Nicaragua's transition out of the Cold War, therefore, was a more gradual, complex, and multi-dimensional process than generally assumed by those who focus simply on the 1990 elections.[142]

Regarding the Cold War's character, this thesis also focused on the crucial and often undervalued influence of Latin American and Western European governments, public opinion, and ideologies on international politics during the 1980s, demonstrating that the late Cold War was more multipolar and complex than the 1950s and 1960s. By convincing Western European peoples and governments to participate in the ideological struggle for Nicaragua's future, the Sandinista revolutionaries temporarily succeeded in altering the unequal power dynamics that had shaped Central American relations since at least 1954, when Guatemalan elites conspired with US officials and the CIA to overthrow the leftist government of Jacobo Árbenz. Furthermore, the interest of Western European actors in Central American affairs, both at the state and non-state level, was not born out of a sense of solidarity with either one of the two Cold War superpowers. Rather, it was exactly the belief that there was an alternative to the way the US and the Soviet Union fought, understood, and approached the Cold War – a conviction that the FSLN actively encouraged – that motivated Western European involvement in Central America in the 1980s. More than a global struggle between two superpowers or diametrically opposed ideologies, then, the Cold War in the 1980s was shaped by Western European and Latin American political agendas, popular perspectives, and ideas.

In addition to complicating international affairs, Latin American and Western European governments actually contributed to the termination of the Cold War bloodiest battlefields in the 1980s. As *Sandinistas Go Global* demonstrated, Western Europe's political backing for the Contadora and Esquipulas peace negotiations, in combination with the yearly EC-Central American dialogue launched after the historic San José conference in 1984, provided Central

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[141] TNA, FCO 99/3116, Brown to Webb, 25 August 1989.

[142] In his book *The Cold War: A World History* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), Odd Arne Westad makes a similar point about the end of the Cold War in Southern Africa. The 1988 agreement about Cuba's withdrawal from Angola and Namibia's independence, Westad argues on page 568, was 'a high point in in dismantling the Cold War conflict in the Third World.

American governments with a unique platform to discuss diplomatic solutions to the region's problems. In this context, Reagan's ability to pursue a military solution, which would have led to even more bloodshed, was reduced. Of course, it needs to be pointed out that these diplomatic alternatives could only come to full fruition once Cold War tensions declined in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, considering the fact that the Central American conflicts were largely caused by grassroots grievances, competing ideologies, and inequalities, we should not underestimate the value of the collective action of Latin American and Western European governments, which resulted in a – albeit flawed – framework that allowed Central American politicians and revolutionaries to work out their differences and bring an end to more than a decade of violence.

Of course, much more remains to be said about the global history of the Nicaraguan revolution. Even though this thesis provided the first comprehensive and in-depth international account of Nicaragua's revolutionary decade, more research is needed to grasp the global significance of the Nicaraguan revolution, and vice versa. To comprehend how the victory of the FSLN guerrillas impacted the Cold War system, for instance, it is crucial to study how Moscow's approach to the Nicaraguan revolution evolved from the late 1970s until the elections of February 1990.[143] Research in the archives of the former Soviet Union and the Warsaw pact countries, moreover, will also deepen our understanding of the Sandinistas' changing perceptions of the international world order, and the socialist bloc in particular. Finally, observations made by Eastern bloc diplomats based in Nicaragua throughout the 1980s – beyond those incorporated into this thesis – will complicate and add to our knowledge of the FSLN's domestic strategy for Nicaragua.

Research into revolutionary Nicaragua's place in the inter-American system will also be beneficial. In particular, we still know little about the response of the Latin American right to the Sandinista triumph. Did they consider the FSLN an existential threat and, if so, how did Latin America's anti-communist bloc try and undermine the revolutionary upheaval in Central America? Similarly, by analysing archives in other Latin American countries, most notably Costa Rica, Cuba, and Mexico, we can shed new light on the Contadora and Esquipulas processes, and particularly on the attitude that the Sandinista government adopted to the peace negotiations. This research will also reveal how other Latin American countries perceived Western Europe's involvement in the region, thereby deepening our understanding of the global dynamics of the final decade of the Cold War in Latin America.

On another level, it would be useful to delve deeper into the question of to what extent developments, ideas, and trends that were not directly related to Cold War politics, such as the

[143] To date, the best book that deals with Moscow's approach to the Nicaraguan revolution is based on published sources and newspapers. See, Paszyn, *The Soviet Attitude to Political and Social Change in Central America* (2000).

Latin American debt crisis, Third World solidarity, and the ambition of countries in the Global South to install a new and more just international economic order, shaped the ideology, aims, and trajectory of the *Revolución Popular Sandinista*. Especially during the revolution's early years, the Nicaraguan revolutionaries expressed very strongly that they were part of what Vijay Prashad has called 'project' Third World.[144] Indeed, the FSLN collaborated with a range of national liberation movements, such as the Palestine Liberation Organisation, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, the Yemeni Socialist Party, and the Cuban and Algerian revolutionaries.[145] It was also no coincidence that the first head of state to visit Nicaragua after the revolutionary triumph was Vietnamese prime minister Pham Van Dong. Sandinista guerrillas often mentioned how the North Vietnamese victory and anti-Vietnam war movement influenced and inspired them.[146] Although this thesis has already begun to examine the FSLN's relations with the Global South, there is certainly more that needs to be done.

To conclude, it is worth briefly reflecting on how the humanitarian and political crisis that broke out in Nicaragua in April 2018 might shape future scholarship on the revolution's history. Undoubtedly, the violent manner in which ex-guerrilla and current president Daniel Ortega – who returned the FSLN to power in 2007 – cracked down on the opposition will influence how the country's revolutionary history is understood, written, and remembered, both within Nicaragua and abroad. For many Nicaraguans and former solidarity activists, Sandinista became a dirty word after April 2018, associated with violence, corruption, trauma, and intimidation, and not with the optimism, solidarity, and utopian ideals of the early revolutionary days. As a historian working on the revolution, too, it was impossible not to look for parallels and clues in the revolutionary past to make sense of the more recent behaviour of the Nicaraguan government.

Of course, historians need to critically analyse contemporary parallels with the past, but it is worth noting that former Sandinista *comandantes* – albeit with some exceptions – have certainly adopted a more self-critical approach to their behaviour during Nicaragua's revolutionary decade. In May 2019, at a historic conference at Brown University, former participants in the Nicaraguan revolution, including contra leaders and FSLN officials, came together to discuss the revolution's past and future.[147] A 'dramatically new' aspect in the speeches of former Sandinistas, journalist Stephen Kinzer wrote, was 'the amount of responsibility they placed on their own shoulders'. In contrast, the counterinsurgents that fought against the Sandinista government in the 1980s were

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[144] Prashad, *The Darker Nations* (2007).
[145] The *Gaceta Sandinista*, published by the FSLN's office in Cuba, gives insight into the global imageries and sympathies of the Sandinistas in the late 1970s. Available at IHNCA.
[146] *El País*, 15 September 1979.
[147] You can listen to the talks given during the Brown conference on YouTube. Access it here: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBrPYoChOfODGzDyAwEBoRy8odgofjRuE.

no longer described as US-funded mercenaries, but rather as a 'massive social movement'.[148] While this claim is rather exaggerated and difficult to back up with historical evidence, it says a lot about the extent to which history can be rewritten to fit the exigencies and context of contemporary events. Undoubtedly, then, the final word has not yet been said about the history and global dimensions of the *Revolución Popular Sandinista*, and it will be interesting to see how the historiography on this exciting topic will develop in the coming years.

[148] *The Boston Globe*, 8 May 2019.

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