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Washington Targets Nicaragua, Once Again



An anti-government demonstrator fires a home-made mortar during clashes with riot police at a barricade in the town of Masaya, 35km from Managua on June 9, 2018. — AFP

Yet another dirty war has returned to a little Central American state that has suffered US intervention for more than a century. The aggressive economic sanctions of the 1980s are coming back, as agent provocateurs engage in violent destabilisation. Nicaragua joins Venezuela, Libya and Syria as the target (<https://morningstaronline.co.uk/a-3c95-nicaragua-is-once-again-in-sights-for-us-intervention-1>) of what Bolivian President Evo Morales calls fourth generation warfare (<http://www.plenglish.com/index.php?o=rn&id=28102&SEO=evo-morales-links-protests-in-nicaragua-and-venezuela>). In Washington nowadays this combination of propaganda, proxies, repeated 'false flags' and direct intervention is called 'smart power' (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/lanny-davis/smart-power-us-strategy-f_b_5120137.html).

The contrived message from the operation in Nicaragua is that the popular Sandinista government has, suddenly and for no apparent reason, decided to 'kill its own people'. The implication is that it must be ousted, on humanitarian grounds. The President is demonised and the violence is ongoing. Opposition newspaper *La Prensa* reported that 18 civilians were gunned down by Sandinista Government paramilitaries (<file:///C:/Users/Ahmad%20N/Downloads/:%20https://www.laprensa.com.ni/2018/06/01/nacionales/2428529-la-masacre-orteguista-en-el-dia-de-las-madres-cobro-18-vidas>) in the Mothers' Day March of 30 March. Many others have been killed, mostly by groups of masked men.

'The Ortega government is responsible' is the clear message from Washington. It is repeated by most western media, including Amnesty International (<https://www.amnesty.ca/news/nicaragua-violent-attack-mass-mother%E2%80%99s-day-march-managua>), which spoke of violence from 'Sandinista mobs'. Even a UN report, albeit without any direct investigation, castigated the Nicaraguan Government. The UN experts said (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23005&LangID=E>) they were 'appalled by Government's violent response to peaceful protests' and were 'outraged that State officials have openly stigmatised protesters'. More than a hundred have been killed and the western consensus is that it is all the fault of the 'hated' President Daniel Ortega. Nevertheless, even Amnesty International does report attacks (<https://www.amnesty.ca/news/nicaragua-violent-attack-mass-mother%E2%80%99s-day-march-managua>) on Government television and radio, both in the capital and León.

The government aligned media in Nicaragua and other Latin American sources tell a very different story. Those killed have included police and Sandinista figures. Telesur quotes local police saying that ‘organised groups’ are committing acts of terrorism

(<file:///C:/Users/Ahmad%20N/Downloads/:%20https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Nicaragua-Police-Organized-Groups-Committing-Acts-of-Terrorism-20180611-0002.html>), including the Mothers’ Day killings (<http://www.dw.com/en/nicaragua-death-toll-rises-after-mothers-day-protests/a-44028455>).

Nicaragua Radio La Primerísima reported on 12 June

(<http://www.radiolaprimerisima.com/noticias/general/244507/matan-a-dos-combatientes-historicos-en-jinotepe/>) that two historic Sandinista figures, Marcos Gutiérrez y Guillermo Méndez, were killed in Jinotepe. Further, three other Sandinistas were kidnapped, the Jinotepe hospital was attacked and seized, cars were burned and the house of the Mayor was ransacked.

The Government has reported the Jinotepe attack

(https://twitter.com/gema_izaguirre/status/1006698998428852224) to the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights. On that same day three more police were killed (<https://www.enca.com/world/three-dead-in-fresh-nicaragua-clashes-police-0>) when an armed group attacked a police post in the northern town of Silao Paraska. Police said ‘15 hooded individual attacked with firearms the police post ... Two police officers – Dixon Soza, 43 and Carlos Zamora, 36 – were killed, two wounded and one was kidnapped by the armed group.

That level of detail does not appear in most of the western media. However even in some anti-government reports we do see mention of police being killed alongside photos of armed ‘protestors’ holding home-made bazookas (<http://highschool.latimes.com/calabasas-high-school/how-mothers-day-in-nicaragua-went-from-a-peaceful-demonstration-to-an-angry-bloodbath/>). Nicaraguan police have attributed all the killings to ‘the actions of delinquent groups who operate wearing masks’ (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nicaragua-protests/fifteen-killed-in-nicaragua-protests-including-mothers-day-march-attack-idUSKCN1IW27E>).

Some of the masked men have been identified by police

(<https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Nicaragua-Police-Organized-Groups-Committing-Acts-of-Terrorism-20180611-0002.html>) as members of the ‘Frijoleros’ gang. They carry firearms, mortar shells and molotov cocktails and engage in looting as well as killing. Such youth gangs operate throughout Central America and are notorious as mercenaries for political groups. Opposition figures claim these gangs are ‘Sandinista paramilitaries’. However their use of pick-up trucks makes an ominous link to the ‘death squads’ of El Salvador in the 1980s. Those gangs were all backed by Washington.

The original cover for the violence, protests over a social security reform, has disappeared. That proposal has been withdrawn (<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/04/22/604762080/violent-unrest-continues-in-nicaragua-over-social-security-reforms>). The Nicaraguan Government has set up a Truth, Justice and Peace Commission (<https://www.elnuevodiario.com.ni/nacionales/463242-comision-verdad-nicaragua-sandinistas/>), to investigate the violence.

What had the Sandinista Government been up to? It remains a firm member of the Cuba-Venezuela-Bolivia-led ALBA coalition, but has also made some compromises, through alliances with business and the church. It had some notable success. Even the Washington-based World Bank reported last year (<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/27560/Nicaragua-SCD-Copyedit-final-jun-20-06272017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>) that ‘Nicaragua has undergone a solid economic recovery from a very low base’. Ortega was re-elected in 2007 and introduced an array of strong social programs. Again, according to the World Bank (<https://data.worldbank.org/country/nicaragua>), between 2005 and 2014 poverty fell by 40% and extreme poverty more than halved. Between 2010 and 2016, unemployment fell from 7.8% to 4.4%, social safety program coverage increased from 40% to 60% and critical health indicators kept improving.

In late 2016 President Daniel Ortega was re-elected with his biggest ever vote of 72.5%. The US Government announced that it was 'concerned'; but the BBC reported (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37903647>) that Ortega 'had been widely expected to win both due to the popularity of his social programs and because he faced no obvious political challenger'. The main right wing opposition coalition boycotted the election and then claimed that most voters had abstained. However, as the BBC also reported, the participation rate was 65.8% (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37903647>). Sandinistas were also elected in most of the municipalities, leaving the right wing opposition in disarray.

I was in Nicaragua 30 years ago. This was towards the end of the first Sandinista Government, when they had virtually won the war against US-backed 'contra' terrorists (https://www.brown.edu/Research/Understanding_the_Iran_Contra_Affair/timeline-nicaragua.php), based in Honduras. Years earlier the 1979 Sandinista-led revolution, which overthrew US backed dictator Anastasio Somoza (<https://www.nytimes.com/1979/07/16/archives/anastasio-somoza-debayle-men-in-the-news-determined-to-fight-to-the.html>), had inspired the world. The US militarily occupied Nicaragua for two decades at the start of the 20th century, then imposed a family of dictators. Strong resistance had begun under Augusto Sandino (<https://vianica.com/go/specials/16-augusto-sandino.html>), in the 1930s, but was only vindicated with the 1979 revolution (<http://www.counterfire.org/a-marxist-history-of-the-world/16699-the-nicaraguan-revolution>). There is no doubt that the Sandinistas remain the historic party of the little country's liberation.

In 1988, with a group of Australian indigenous students, I visited Nicaraguan communities. On one occasion we sat up all night as armed guards. The danger had mostly passed by then, but we did that to experience what communities had gone through in previous years, defending themselves from US-backed terrorism. Later I saw the repression in El Salvador and Guatemala, in the wake of death squads (<https://libcom.org/library/behind-death-squads-exclusive-report-us-role-el-salvadors-official-terror>), also organised in Washington. That experience of propaganda and mercenaries, combined with my reading of the later Syrian crisis, led me to write a book called The Dirty War on Syria (<https://www.globalresearch.ca/the-dirty-war-on-syria/5491859>).

The criminality of Washington in Nicaragua was well documented. In 1986 the International Court of Justice had delivered a historic ruling against the US Government (<http://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/70/070-19860627-JUD-01-00-EN.pdf>), for its terrorism against Nicaragua. By a strong majority the ICJ found that the USA had breached international law by training and supplying the contras, carrying out a series of attacks, mining Nicaraguan ports and other economic aggression. The court rejected the US claim that it was acting in 'self-defence' and ordered compensation to be paid to the little target country. Washington ignored the ruling.

In 1988 Jim Wright, Speaker of the US House of Representatives, would denounce CIA intervention in the politics of Nicaragua. That sparked a storm in which it emerged that the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a foreign propaganda group created by the Reagan administration in the early 1980s, was funding the opposition, including La Prensa (<https://www.nytimes.com/1988/09/24/world/furor-in-nicaragua-on-cia-charges.html>), the opposition newspaper owned by the Chamorro family. That is the same paper that is a primary source for the current accusations against the Sandinista Government.

In that same year, as it became clear that the Sandinistas had defeated the contras, the country was wilting under US economic sanctions (<https://morningstaronline.co.uk/a-3c95-nicaragua-is-once-again-in-sights-for-us-intervention-1>). There was deep poverty. In that climate of desperation the Sandinistas would lose the 1990 elections. After that came a liberal government and a period of stagnation and deepening poverty, broken only by the Sandinista electoral victory of 2007.

With a relatively successful Sandinista government well entrenched, the US has once again turned to economic aggression and violent destabilisation. In the run up to the 2016 election the [Nicaraguan Investment Conditionality Act \(https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1918\)](https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1918) was drafted, to punish the independent government. Now the killing has begun, once again.

**(Masked men with home-made weapons confront police in Masaya, Nicaragua. Image credit: AFP)*

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