

The Tar Heel

Nicaragua: A moral crisis in US foreign policy

Editorial

The U.S. as World Moral Force

Perhaps the most hotly debated topic in America today is the issue of whether or not the U.S. should aid rebel insurgents in Nicaragua. In Chapel Hill, 15 people staged a sit-in in Rep. Bill Cobey's office to protest current U.S. policy toward Nicaragua while in Washington, Congress in reaction to Ortega's recent visit to Moscow, passed a \$27 million aid package for the contras.

But the issue goes much deeper; contra leader Pastora has been quoted as saying even with U.S. aid, rebel forces have a slim chance of overthrowing Nicaragua's current left-wing government. The real question is not simply whether or not to aid the contras, but what kind of role the U.S. wants to play in world politics.

The Reagan Administration would like to present to the American people the image of the U.S. as a moral force, a benevolent "big brother," if you will, fighting in the rest of the world for the freedom and justice we already enjoy here. Our aid to El Salvador against its "terrorist rebels" and our mission as a "peace-keeping force" in Lebanon last year and are both examples of this. Though we do not yet know the full effect of our policies in El Salvador, we do know that when President Duarte asked that we provide humanitarian aid, we sent weapons and military advisors. Our policies flatly blew up in our face in Lebanon, where our unclear goals and lack of

understanding of the situation ended with the death of 250 U.S. Marines. Is the U.S. acting for the good of its world neighbors in an exemplification of moral conduct, or do we treat the world and its people as space in which to exercise our own will by sheer power and strength?

U.S. Policy Toward Nicaragua

A simple look at the facts of events between the U.S. and Nicaragua of the past few years can answer this question. The U.S. started out as a lender, though not a major one, to the brand new and very needy Government of National Reconstruction. By 1984 however, the tone of the Reagan Administration toward Nicaragua had changed from not totally receptive to completely hostile.

In September 1984 a helicopter was shot down while attacking a Nicaraguan military school. Four Nicaraguan children died in the attack, and four people in the helicopter were killed. Later, two of the helicopter victims were identified as Americans who had independently decided to fly to Nicaragua and provide the contras with their own aid. The incident brought into light Reagan's policy not discouraging such support of the contras by private individuals and groups. John Hughes of the Reagan Administration said that Reagan chose this policy after Congress refused to approve more aid for the Contras. One of the implications of this kind of policy is that any person or group (for example, the recently infamous radical group MOVE, the Ku Klux Klan or the American Nazi Party) could take themselves to any war, anywhere in

the world, any time they felt like it, without it ever even being considered in Congress.

In November 1984, there were reports that Nicaragua had received a number of MIG jets from a Soviet freighter ship that reached the port of Corinto. This claim was batted about for four days, until Administration officials reported that they were almost certain that there were no fighter planes aboard the freighter after all. At this, Reagan warned that if such aircraft are ever delivered, the U.S. will take action. Is it any wonder the Nicaraguans are convinced that Administration created this report as media-hype before an invasion? Later in the same month, Reagan expressed his concern over what he called "an increased flow of Soviet bloc weapons" to Nicaragua, a claim he had no evidence to support. Even anti-Sandinist leader Aldolpho Calero said his troops have seen very little evidence in Nicaragua of a major USSR-backed arms buildup.

But the worst outrage of the past year is the publication and subsequent downplay of a CIA-written booklet titled Psychological Operations in Guerilla Warfare, which tells rebels how to win popular support and gives advice on political assassination, blackmail and mob violence. The Administration reacted by ordering two investigations — a move which on the face of it looked as if it were trying to get to the bottom of the problem — but the two parties investigating the leaflet were the CIA's inspector general and the CIA's oversight board. The leaflet included such euphemisms as "remove" meaning "assassinate," and the Administration further insulted American intelligence by saying that "remove" meant "remove from office."

Reagan's final action in this case was to promise that those responsible for the leaflet would be punished; he then proceeded to discipline several middle-level members of the CIA who couldn't have had enough power to create and distribute such a pamphlet.

The U.S. has done more that it is difficult to label "moral". CIA agents have been trying to destroy Nicaragua's economic infrastructure since 1981; then the Reagan Administration in 1984 points out how poorly the economy is doing then under the Sandinistas as compared to five years ago. When Nicaragua tried to take its charges against U.S. military attacks to the World Court, the U.S. walked out. Is this any way to maintain our moral position in the world community? How can we flagrantly violate international law as it suits us on the one hand, and then on the other, condemn terrorists and the like for similar behavior.

Another Reagan deception is his evaluation of the Nicaraguan elections as a "farce." It is true that they had some flaws: for example, three anti-Sandinista parties were stripped of legal status because they refused to register candidates for the elections. Predictably, although a large contingent of observers from the U.S. and other countries were in Nicaragua to watch the elections, the America claimed they were rigged. Actually, several charges turn the other way, towards the U.S.: in October 1984, several Reagan Administration officials say the Administration privately disputed Arturo Cruz's (an opposition leader) participation in the Nicaraguan elections fearing his presence would legitimize the electoral process.

A Real World Moral Force

The U.S. is doing exactly the opposite of what it should be doing in Nicaragua if it wants to actually be the "world moral force" Reagan paints it to be. We have the strength, the resources, and the influence to really make a difference to the smaller countries in the world. We lack the vision.

Instead of making an enemy out of the Nicaraguan government, we should be trying to make a friend. They were the smaller and younger of the two of us; therefore it was up to us to make the initiative of friendliness when they were first starting out. We should have extended to them not just a token, but a real offer of support. Above all, we should not have cut off that support. A young and poor country has to get aid from somewhere, and if not from us, they will have to go to the Soviets. The best way to protect ourselves and Nicaragua from the "Red Scare" is to keep them with us through financial support. Then why would they want to become a Russian satellite?

We should not try to force any country, including Nicaragua, into our will for it through a political blackmail. Everybody wants the integrity of self-determination. We should, however, watch, study, and come to understand another country before taking any action. If we want to be effective in building peace, we must know how to use our power. Without knowledge, we will experience still more Lebanons and Viet Nams. It is high time America got beyond the kind of arrogance and egocentrism that makes us think that what is good for us is good for everyone else.

Nicaragua: Some background information

Editorial

Geography and Society

The Republic of Nicaragua, the largest country in Central America, is about the size of Michigan. It has three major geographical regions, the Pacific or western region where the two largest freshwater lakes of Central America are located, the eastern Atlantic Coast Region, and the Central American Highlands. Most of Nicaragua's 2.67 million inhabitants (the 1980 figure) are concentrated in the Pacific Zone. The population is about 70 percent Miskito (Spanish and Indian or other), 17 percent white, 4 percent

Indian, and perhaps 9 percent black. Indians and blacks predominate the East; Miskito and blacks the Pacific region. Roman Catholicism is by far the pervasive religion.

Economy and Communication

Nicaragua's main agricultural products are cotton, coffee, sugar, tobacco, rice, beans, corn, and cattle. The manufacturing industry includes food processing, clothing, chemicals, and light metals. Nicaragua's chief exports are cotton, coffee, sugar and beef. Imports in 1980 totalled \$800 million and consisted mostly of machinery and equipment, raw materials, and semifinished components for industry. Ten Nicaraguan

cordobas equal \$1.

Nicaragua has three principal ports (Corinto, Puerto Sandino, and Bluefields). It has one international airport in the capitol city Managua, and nine secondary airports. Its three daily newspapers are the *Barricada* (official Sandinista), *El Nuevo Diario* (leftist) and *La Prensa* (rightist).

Early Background

Nicaragua was ruled by Spain from the 16th century until 1821,

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when it became part of the Central American Federation. At Nicaragua's request, U.S. forces established bases in 1912, but left in 1925. They returned again in 1927, when a See Nicaragua page 4

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