Carter Confronts Somoza: When Lofty Ideals Collide with Cold War Realities

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Historical Backdrop: A Legacy of US Involvement

Perhaps more than any other Latin American nation, US intervention has left an indelible mark on the Nicaraguan psyche. After gaining independence in 1823, Conservatives and Liberals vied for power over Nicaragua. In 1855, the Liberals recruited the American adventurist William Walker in their fight against the Conservatives. Walker quickly took control of the country and named himself president. He legalized slavery and made English the official language. Washington refused to recognize the "filibuster" government. A coalition of Central American armies, financially back by Vanderbilt, defeated Walker, but not before he burnt the town of Granada to the ground. The Honduran army later executed Walker in 1860. The Liberals discredited themselves by inviting Walker and would not govern for another thirty five years. Most importantly, Walker created a precedent in which civil unrest in Nicaragua justified North American intervention into the political affairs of the republic.

It was the Liberal government of Jose Santos Zelaya which once again saw US intervention. Conservative leaders in 1909 launched a rebellion in the Caribbean coastal city of Bluefields. The US sent 400 Marines to protect American citizens in Bluefields. Zelaya's forces captured and executed two American troops, inciting public fury against the Zelaya government. By 1912, the country was ungovernable and the new president, Adolfo Diaz, asked for US help in putting down the rebellion. US Marines occupied Nicaragua until 1933. In the meantime, Augusto Cesar Sandino fought the US occupation, capturing the imagination of Nicaraguans as an icon of nationalism against US imperialism.

The US government sent Harold Dodds from Princeton University to draft new election laws and the Marines began training the National Guard as a two-prong exit strategy to create political stability in Nicaragua. Anastasio Somoza Garcia quickly rose through the ranks of the National Guard to become Director-General. In 1934, Somoza ordered the Guard to assassinate Sandino. Somoza then used the National Guard seize control of the government in 1936. The Somoza dynasty maintained its grip over Nicaragua through the National Guard. In an effort to create civil stability in another sovereign nation, the US created a politicized institution which employed a consistent pattern of gross human rights violations in order to maintain its grip over the country. Moreover, military intervention created the possibility for Sandino to portray himself as a national hero against US imperialism. The Sandinistas enshrined their revolutionary movement with the nationalist legacy of Sandino.

The Cuban Revolution emboldened guerrilla movements throughout Latin America. In Nicaragua, multiple guerrilla groups formed an alliance in 1961 becoming the *Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional* (FSLN), or the Sandinistas. The Alliance for Progress, however, stymied popular motivation for revolution. At the same time, Luis Somoza held the presidency and

proved a more flexible politician than his father. Meanwhile, Luis's brother, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, continued consolidating loyalty of the Guardsmen under his patronage and won the presidency in 1967. Anastasio Somoza found a dependable anti-communist ally in the White House with the election of Richard Nixon.

The Earthquake that Shook Somoza

In the early hours of December 3, 1972 an earthquake rocked Managua, Nicaragua. The quake took over 7,000 lives and left 30,000 more homeless. Somoza declared martial law to quell subsequent unrest. The US, Latin American and European nations rushed aid to Nicaragua. Somoza siphoned much of the foreign aid to his family owned businesses and encouraged his guardsmen to do the same. Somoza's exploitation of the earthquake for personal gain further isolated the Guard and himself from the Nicaraguan public. Nicaragua's middle class generally places the 1972 earthquake as the start of the revolution.[1]

In 1974, Somoza rewrote the constitution, allowing him to run for president for another term. This time the opposition, led by Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, refused to participate. Neither the bishops of Nicaragua nor the opposition attended Somoza's inaugural ceremony.[2]

With mounting opposition to Somoza, the Sandinistas acted boldly to capture the national stage. Under Tomas Borge, whom received two years of military training in Cuba, the Sandinistas charged into the Christmas party of a close friend of Somoza. The US ambassador, Turner Shelton, had just left. The Sandinistas killed the host, Jose Maria "Chema" Castillo, took the guests hostage, and then called for Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo to mediate a negotiation. Somoza released 14 Sandinista captives, including Daniel Ortega, provided the Sandinistas with $1 million in cash and safe passage to Cuba, and published a 12,000 word

[2] Pastor, 36-38.

communique denouncing Somoza and the US and pleading for the people of Nicaragua to join the FSLN in their revolutionary struggle. In response to the humiliation of the Christmas party kidnapping, Somoza declared a state of siege. The Guard slowly picked off the leadership of the Sandinistas. On November 6, 1976, they killed Carlos Fonseca Amador, the founder of the FSLN.[3]

The Election of Carter and the Panama Canal: Turning Over a New Leaf in US Foreign Policy

In his inaugural address, President Carter exclaimed "Our commitment to human rights must be absolute… We will not behave in foreign places so as to violate our rules and standards here at home."[4] Carter publicly wed respect for national sovereignty with a commitment to encouraging human rights. In the first 18 months of his presidency, Carter worked vigorously to pass the Panama Canal treaties in order to restore Panamanian sovereignty over the Canal. Carter spent considerable political capital passing the treaties through Congress. Congressman Charles Wilson of Texas, a former classmate of Somoza's at West Point, used his position in the House Appropriations Committee to incite Congressional opposition to the treaties if Carter did not approve a $10.5 million aid bill to Nicaragua in 1978. In an exit interview, Deputy of the National Security Council, Aaron David, explained the cost of the treaties, "it was very important to do it, but I think it was wrong to make it the first NSC meeting we ever had… we paid a very great price for it… It was our Bay of Pigs."[5] The Canal Treaties were widely unpopular in the states. Ronald Reagan made a mantra out of "We built it, we paid for it, it's ours and we're going to keep it" The fact that Carter immediately moved to pass the canal treaties, despite vehement opposition, shows his commitment to respecting the sovereignty of

[3] *Ibid.*, 39-40.
[4] *Inaugural Address of Jimmy Carter*, January 20, 1977, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum (Atlanta, Georgia), www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov (accessed November 5, 2013).
[5] Interview with David Aaron by Marie Allen on December 15, 1980, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum (Atlanta, Georgia), www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov (accessed November 5, 2013).

other nations. Throughout the process, Carter cultivated close ties with the Andres Perez, President of Venezuela. In a 1977 joint communique to the OAS with President Perez, Carter affirmed US "respect for the sovereignty of other nations, for peace, the rule of law, individual liberties, and social justice" and "combatting abuses of human rights, including those caused by political, social, and economic injustice."[6] Through this joint communique, Carter attempted to build international solidarity around human rights and respect for national sovereignty at the same time he was paying a political price at home for pursuing these same objectives. Later, in a press conference in March 1979, Carter reiterated the treaties' connection to gaining respect abroad through human rights and respect for national sovereignty, "it gave our country a genuine reputation not only in this hemisphere but throughout the world as one that genuinely believed in human rights and didn't just preach human rights for others."[7] Clearly, Carter conceived of human rights and national sovereignty as two sides of the same coin to purchase greater American moral standing within the Third World.

The effort to cool tensions over the Canal reached back to the Nixon years and in 1978, President Carter and General Omar Torrijos of Panama signed a set of treaties which granted sovereignty of the Canal to Panama in 1999, allowed the US to enforce the Canal's neutrality, and gave priority to US warships in emergency situations. Throughout the process, Carter built close ties with the heads of state of Panama and Venezuela. The issue of nonintervention in the crisis in Nicaragua later divided Carter from Torrijos and Perez. Whereas Perez and Torrijos wanted to rid Nicaragua of Somoza to close the door to Castro, Carter placed greater priority on upholding international norms through respect for national sovereignty.

The Making of a Human Rights Policy

[6] General Services Administration, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Jimmy Carter: 1977*, Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1977.
[7] *Ibid.*, 1980.

Congress was the first branch of the US government to take up the mantle of human rights. In 1975, the Church Committee released a series of reports detailing the CIA's covert operations abroad, including attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro and General Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic. Gerald Ford signed an executive order banning US involvement in assassination plots.[8] Later in December of that year, the Kennedy Amendment became law which forbade Chile from receiving military or training. In 1976, Congress passed the Harkin Amendment directing the US to vote "no" on all Inter-American Development Bank loans to a country that "engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights… unless such assistance will directly benefit the needy people in such country."[9] Part of the thrust behind Carter's emphasis on human rights was to create better relations between the Executive and Legislative branches. In order to forge greater international awareness of human rights, the Carter Administration designed its policy so that it would not conflict with other international norms, specifically, respect for national sovereignty.

In July 1977, Deputy Secretary of State, Christopher Warren, submitted an 85-page presidential review memorandum on human rights to Carter's cabinet members.[10] Even the CIA received the PRM. It defined and distinguished between the various human rights of integrity of the person from the transgression of the state; economic and social; and civil and political rights. The PRM did not make a principled priority of one set of human rights over another but, rather, a pragmatic consideration that respect for the integrity of the person ought to be pursued first. Moreover, the PRM treated the distinction delicately:

[8] Gregory Weeks, *U.S. and Latin American Relations* (Charlotte: University of North Carolina), 143.
[9] Warren Christopher, Department of State, *Presidential Review Memorandum on Human Rights*, circular, July 8, 1977, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum (Atlanta, Georgia), www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov (accessed November 5, 2013).
[10] *Ibid.*

> In promoting the third group of rights [civil and political], there is a particular need, however, for caution to avoid giving our policy a parochial cast that appears to export American-style democracy. Our goal is the enhancement of societies; we do not seek to change governments or remake societies. Our experience in Vietnam and elsewhere have taught us the limits of our power to influence the internal workings of other nations.

Obviously, Carter did not seek to employ human rights in order to interfere with the internal politics of other nations. The Administration foresaw the problems in garnering international support for a human rights policy and, therefore, employed diplomatic encouragement to advance its objectives rather than seeking to "remake societies" through coercion. In fact, the PRM also explicitly discouraged extending the Harkin Amendment's force to other international financial institutions. Instead, it called for building consensus among member governments of developmental institutions around considering human rights conditions when approving loans. The Carter Administration was astutely aware that its human rights message may be confused as an interventionist policy and looked to create international consensus around human rights objectives through multilateral institutions.

Concerning tactics, the PRM suggests a case-by-case approach and employing the carrot before the stick to bring about "evolutionary change." It recognized the inconsistency and potential political costs in promoting human rights while supporting Iran, Korea, and the Philippines where national security concerns were greatest. The PRM also acknowledged the likely potential for the deterioration of ties with friendly military regimes:

> In some friendly states where human rights problems do exist, we have considerable influence, especially where the regime does not feel overwhelmingly threatened by internal security problems. The bulk of these countries are in the developing world. Our efforts in these countries will offer reform-minded elements a viable alternative to communist rhetoric. It is also important to note that in many such nations our failure to express human rights concerns would give real support to the continuation of repressive regimes.

At the writing of this PRM, the Sandinistas posed a minimal threat to Somoza. Carter envisioned Nicaragua as a test case for human rights considering its long tradition of symbolic and material support from the US. As the crisis unfolded, the US Ambassador in Managua continually met with opposition figures and lent his moral support, yet the administration drew the line at materially supporting any single opposition figure. Before the crisis, Carter worked tirelessly to pass the canal treaties to demonstrate to the world that US could work with a smaller country and, in doing so, rebuke communist rhetoric.

One month after Deputy Christopher drafted the PRM on human rights, 1977 Carter issued a memorandum on US national strategy to his cabinet outlining the economic and political advantages of the US and how to employ them to meet the Soviet challenge.[11] The memorandum called for the US to "compete politically with the Soviet Union by pursuing the basic American commitment to human rights and national independence." Human rights and nonintervention, therefore, were not merely lofty ideals to restore the moral standing of the US after the Vietnam War, but were also conceived as complimentary strategies to curb Soviet influence. One without the other would fail to deliver the greater moral standing to the US which Carter sought. Carter, like all US presidents before him, framed the Cold War debate between democracies that protect human rights and communist regimes which export class conflict. The difference here, though, is that this memorandum is an internal document defining policy, not a public grandstanding of principles. On February 17, 1978, Carter issued Presidential Directive/NSC-30 calling on his cabinet to make it a "major objective of U.S. foreign policy to promote the observance of human rights throughout the world." US promotion of human rights would be pursued by using "the full

[11] Warren Christopher, *U.S. National Strategy*, circular, August 26, 1977, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum (Atlanta, Georgia), www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov (accessed November 5, 2013).

range of its diplomatic tools."[12] The directive in no way suggested interference into the internal political affairs of other nations. By the time of the directive, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro was dead and the crisis in Nicaragua was in full swing.

Nicaragua: Human Rights in Action

Through pursuing human rights objectives through diplomatic means, Carter encouraged palpable advances in Nicaragua. In response to Carter's threats to withhold aid to Nicaragua over human rights concerns, Somoza lifted the three year state of siege on September 19, 1977. The press, led by Chamorro's *La Prensa*, continued attacking the Somozas for corruption and human rights violations. After Somoza lifted the state of siege, Carter continued to follow the tactics outlined in the PRM through the carrot and stick approach. In theory, regimes that violated human rights would receive "the stick" of reduced military spending and the "the carrot" of economic aid was specifically aimed at addressing the needs of the poor. Due to congressional rules, however, military aid was transferrable from year to year yet economic aid expired at the end of each year. Thus the Carter administration was stuck in an unenviable position in which it had the stick but congressional procedures held the carrot. Not wanting to ignore the lifting of the state of siege, Carter felt the US government had to give some measure of support to Somoza's recent actions. Nonmilitary aid could be rolled over to the next year, but military aid expired at the end of 1977. Christopher made the decision to sign on to military aid with the stipulation that it would only be released pending further improvements in human rights. Somoza

[12] Jimmy Carter, *Presidential Directive/NSC-30*, circular, February 17, 1978, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum (Atlanta, Georgia), www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov (accessed November 5, 2013).

portrayed the garbled message as a sign of support for his regime despite the fact that he was ostensibly playing by the rules of a new US human rights policy.[13]

The death of Chamorro on January 10, 1978 spurred a nation-wide general strike led by the Democratic Union of Liberation which closed nearly 90% of businesses in Managua. Carter's human rights pressure indirectly encouraged the moderate opposition to coalesce around the strike. As William Baez Sacasa, Manager of the Nicaraguan Development Institute, explained, "With Nixon in the White house and a pro-Somoza ambassador here, this strike simply would not have taken place. No one was prepared to take on both the Somozas and the United States."[14] Within a month the Sandinistas joined the strike. On January 24, the US Embassy in Managua reported that Somoza "may have to reestablish martial law to reassert his authority."[15] Carter, however, threatened to break ties with the Somoza regime if he reinstated martial law. Reporting later in July for the *Washington Post*, Karen DeYoung cited an administration official in claiming "that if he [Somoza] imposes a state of siege, closes the opposition newspaper, or arrests political opposition leaders, the U.S. ambassador will be recalled, and we might have to break relations."[16] Still, Somoza found a loophole through calling a state of emergency and censuring the media for a month. Carter's human rights policy encouraged the moderate opposition to act boldly and, at the same time, tied Somoza's hands from employing violence to end the strike.

On July 5, *Loc Doce* or "The Twelve" returned from exile in Costa Rica. *Los Doce* was a broad mix of intellectuals and businessmen that opposed Somoza. Tens of thousands of

[13] John M. Goshko and Karen DeYoung, "U.S. Decisions Send 'Garbled' Rights Message," *Washington Post*, October 25, 1977.
[14] Riding, "U.S. Neutrality Heartens Nicaragua Rebels: No Hostility Toward U.S. U.S. Criticized Rights Violations," *New York Times*, February 5, 1978, 3.
[15] *Analytical Update*, Secret Cable, 00342, January 24, 1978, Digital National Security Archives.
[16] Karen DeYoung, "The Twelve: Nicaragua's Unlikely Band of Somoza Foes," *Washington Post*, July 23, 1978, A26.

supporters met the group at the airport or rallied in support of them across Nicaragua. The group promised to join the Broad Opposition Front and to fight Somoza in Nicaragua. At least two members, Joaquin Cuadra Chamorro and Emilio Baltodano Pallais, had sons fighting alongside the Sandinistas. Another, Father Fernando Cardenal, would later organize the Literacy Crusade in the Sandinista government's fight against illiteracy. *Los Doce* became the spokes-group of the Sandinistas.

The Sandinistas struck again on August 22, 1978. Led by "Comandante Cero," Eden Pastora, the Sandinistas stormed the National Palace in Managua and held 1,500 dignitaries captive. Once again, Archbishop Obando y Bravo mediated a solution. The Sandinistas freed the captives in exchange for $500,000 in cash, the release of 59 political prisoners, and the airing of a Sandinista communique on radio and television. Crowds of Nicaraguans flocked to the streets to congratulate the Sandinistas on their way to board planes provided by Panama and Venezuela.[17] *Los Doce* endorsed the kidnapping as politically mature. By September 1, the US Embassy reported that a general strike was spreading across the country with 90-100% of major commercial centers closed in Managua.[18] Wary of the repercussions of Carter's human rights policy, Somoza did not impose martial law until September 14 and even then for only 30 days.[19] The force of the US behind human rights freed Nicaraguans to publicly demonstrate their support for the Sandinistas and *Los Doce.*

On September 3, 1978 US Archbishop Obando y Bravo met with US Ambassador Mauricio Salaun and pushed for the US to take a more active role to mediate the crisis. The moderate opposition, however, was an amorphous group united solely in resistance to Somoza and their most likely leader, Chamorro, had been dead for months. Nineteen days after

[17] Pastor, 72.
[18] Mauricio Salaun, *Sitrep 6: 1,* Secret Cable 04135, September 1, 1978.
[19] Digital National Security Archives, *Nicaragua: The Making of US Policy, 1978-1990,* "Chronology."

Chamorro's assassination in February the *New York Times* cited a non-Sandinista opposition leader in saying that, "At the moment the FSLN is easily the most important real and symbolic opposition to the government."[20] The words *FSLN* were spray-painted on walls throughout Nicaragua in defiance of Somoza. The moderate opposition may have had the political and financial competence to govern, yet the Sandinistas held the arms and revolutionary zeal and cohesion required to overthrow the dictator. A CIA memorandum four days after Archbishop Obando y Bravo's appeal reflected this dilemma:

> the opposition is likely to enter into mediation in the same disorganized and acephalous manner in which it has operated to date...If the US does not bring to bear whatever additional pressure is necessary to prompt Somoza to agree to his early departure from office, then the mediation process will likely fail, with both sides returning to the status quo ante, and the possible attendant violence.

The memorandum predicted that mutual suspicions would infect the mediation process. Still, it outlined the contours of the various ideologies of the opposition and their respective leaders with the cautionary note that each side's strength "waxes and wanes". Alfonso Robelo, whom promoted the strike, was cast as a potential leader of the Broad Opposition Front (FAO). Robelo later joined the governing junta after the fall of Somoza. *Los Doce* was cited as a proxy for the Sandinistas. The report finds that the common denominator among the opposition is Somoza's early departure; however, it predicted that Somoza would attempt to draw out the negotiation process until he could step down as president in 1981 according to the constitution he had written.[21]

The crisis in Nicaragua escalated to a point in which if the US did not intervene, another country would. Pastor quotes President Perez in exclaiming that "A Sandinista victory will open the door to Castro." On September 22, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski awoke

[20] Riding, "Respectable Rebels Threaten Somoza Dynasty," *New York Times,* January 29, 1978, E4.
[21] *Memorandum: Nicaragua- Factors and Figures in the Process Leading to a Transition Government,* September 7, 1978, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum (Atlanta, Georgia), www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov (accessed November 5, 2013).

President Carter to notify him that Panama and Venezuela had stationed bombers in Costa Rica and were planning on taking out Somoza's bunker. Carter phoned Panamanian Ambassador Lewis to express his position against the raid. After several tense hours, Panama and Venezuela stepped down to allow for a political solution through an OAS mediation effort.[22] Not only did Carter's emphasis on nonintervention preclude heavy US involvement, it also thwarted Panama and Venezuela from forcibly deposing Somoza. Intervention on the part of Venezuela or Panama would have violated international norms which Carter sought to employ in encouraging global observation of human rights.

It seemed that the force of US influence for Democracy could open the way for a political rather than military solution, yet Carter's policy of nonintervention into the political affairs of other nations proved the CIA's prescience. On September 29, Somoza agreed to a three-party mediation process with the US, Dominican Republic, and Guatemala. Former US Ambassador to Uruguay, William Bowdler headed up the mediation talks. Late October, Washington instructed Bowdler to notify Somoza that "you no longer have the political and moral support of your government… we are obliged to withdraw from you the support which we have historically given." And that if Somoza does not accept the Broad Opposition Front's call for his resignation, the US will "respond appropriately."[23] Instead, Somoza proposed a plebiscite on his rule, which the opposition flatly rejected. Attempting to cultivate North American sympathies for constitutional processes, Somoza told the mediation group that "he had searched his conscience… and reached the conclusion that he should carry out his constitutional mandate until 1981."[24] In response, Bowdler advocated that the US implement tougher sanctions upon

[22] Pastor, 87-90.
[23] *Nicaragua Mediation No. 58: Proposed Talking Points for Use with Somoza,* Secret Cable 05273, October 24, 1978. Digital National Security Archives.
[24] *Nicaragua Mediation No. 120,* Secret Cable, November 10, 1978, Digital National Security Archives.

Somoza. By December, Bowdler was encouraging the US to act "unilaterally and invite likeminded states to do the same."[25]

Instead, Carter continued his commitment to respect the sovereignty of Nicaragua. In November 13, the National Security Review convened a policy review meeting to discuss the administration's options. The first option favored a plebiscite on Somoza's rule; the second dismissed the plebiscite and instead would pressure Somoza to accept the FAO's demand of his resignation; and the third option was to ignore the problem. The choice split Carter's cabinet and the president chose to pursue option one: accept the plebiscite and negotiate the terms of its free and fair execution.[26] Approaching the final hours of the Somoza dynasty, Carter chose the option providing for the greatest possible respect for the sovereignty of Nicaragua while also addressing the overwhelming opposition against Somoza.

Somoza used negotiation over the details of the proposed plebiscite to bide for time. In the meantime, the Carter Administration debated over the best measures to end the crisis. The Administration finally "drew the line" in mid-January and authorized Bowdler to implement tougher sanctions.[27] Somoza's intransigence ended the prospect for a mediated solution, and the US began looking into more forceful options to draw a close to the bloodshed.

Against the warnings of Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights Patricia Derian, the Administration drafted a proposal for an Inter-American peacekeeping force. Derian wrote to Christopher, "the costs of such a strategy, even if it succeeds are high… If the FSLN-supported Provisional Government should win, our relations will have begun on a hostile note…"[28] The proposal, however, offered the best way to end the ongoing civil war. The US had attempted to

[25] *Nicaragua Mediation No. 270,* Secret Cable, December 22, 1978, Digital National Security Archives.
[26] Pastor, 106-107.
[27] *Ibid.*, 114.
[28] *Strategy Proposing That Anastasio Somoza Resign and Name a Provisional Government*, Secret Briefing Memorandum, June 18, 1979, Digital National Security Archives.

end the Sandinistas' supply lines from Panama and Costa Rica to no avail and National Guard loyalty to Somoza remained firm. In late June, Somoza agreed to leave the country if an Inter-American peacekeeping force "be imposed rather than him asking for it."[29] Thus the OAS proposal stood as the best option for removing Somoza without unilateral intervention. From June 21-23 the OAS foreign ministers met in Washington to discuss the proposal. The OAS rejected the proposal and passed its own resolution calling for "immediate and indefinite replacement of Somoza" in favor of a democratic government. The OAS reaffirmed its commitment to nonintervention in stating, "the solution to this serious problem is exclusively within the jurisdiction of the people of Nicaragua."[30] Multilateral military intervention with the support of the OAS was the furthest the Carter Administration would venture in intervening to end the conflict. When the OAS rejected the proposal, Carter refused to fall back on the historical precedent of unilateral intervention in the affairs of Latin American countries.

At 4:00am on July 17, 1979, Somoza left Nicaragua for exile in the US. Two days later, on the 19th the Sandinista Provisional Junta marched into Managua supported by tens of thousands of supporters. The bloodshed finally ended and the Sandinistas enjoyed indisputable political legitimacy at home and among Nicaragua's democratic neighbors to the south.

Recalling the lessons learned from the Cuban Revolution, the Carter Administration unanimously decided to deny the Sandinistas an enemy by extending the fig leaf of support for the revolution. Carter approved a relief package including over 1,700 tons of food and thousands of medical supplies. The President lobbied for a foreign aid bill to the nascent regime. Hesitant to support a communist government to the south, Congress loaded the aid bill with conditions

[29] *Somoza Will Go,* Secret Cable, Excised Copy 02772, June 23, 1979, Digital National Security Archives.

[30] *Meeting of Foreign Ministers- Resolution on Nicaragua,* Unclassified Cable 163598, June 23, 1979, Digital National Security Archives.

stipulating that the money go directly to the private sector and forbid the Sandinistas from supporting insurgents in El Salvador. The aid bill became law on May 31, 1980 marking the zenith of US-Sandinista relations. At the same time, US citizens debated who their next president would be. Disillusioned by economic stagnation and growing Soviet influence, the US public elected Ronal Reagan to the presidency. Scholars continue to debate to what degree the Carter and Reagan Administrations differed in their approach to international relations. They will also continue to debate over the causes of the Sandinistas' hard swing to the left in the early 80s. It is not my task to address these important questions.

I have focused on how Carter conceived of the connection between human rights and respect for national sovereignty. Upon inauguration, Carter spoke passionately in defense of human rights. For the first 18 months, the president worked voraciously to pass a Panama Canal treaty despite harsh criticisms that he was "giving it away." To Carter, the Panama Canal was as much an issue about respect for the sovereignty of other nations as it was about human rights. President Carter understood respect for national sovereignty as an integral component of his national strategy objectives which sought to encourage the global observance of human rights and marshal international support for human rights. Unilateral intervention in Nicaragua would have revealed to the world that regime change lay as the ulterior motive behind Carter's human rights policy. Despite the unpalatable result of a revolutionary government with strong Marxist hues, Carter followed through on his commitment to respect national sovereignty in order to build greater international consensus around human rights.

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