The Decline of the Democratic Ideal

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Contents

One fundamental goal of any well-conceived indoctrination program is to direct attention elsewhere, away from effective power, its roots, and the disguises it assumes. Thus to enter into debate over Vietnam, or the Middle East, or Central America, one is required to gain special knowledge of these areas while avoiding scrutiny of the United States. Rational standards are permitted for the study of Soviet intervention, which focusses on Moscow, not Kabul and Prague; for us, however, the problems lie elsewhere, not here. Respectable commentators can even speak of "the tragic self-destruction of Central America," with the two superpowers playing a (symmetrical) background role (Theodore Sorenson). A similar comment about Eastern Europe would merely arouse ridicule.[1]

The serviceability of the doctrine is apparent. Those who hope to understand world affairs will naturally resist it. The February elections in Nicaragua are a case in point. The forces at work within Nicaragua are surely worth understanding, the reactions to the elections here no less so — far more so, in fact, in terms of global import and long-term significance, given the scale and character of U.S. power. These reactions provide quite illuminating insight into the dominant political culture. They provide further and quite dramatic evidence that the concept of democracy is disappearing even as an abstract ideal.

The Winner: George Bush

As a point of departure, consider a few reactions beyond the borders. In Mexico City, the liberal La Jornada wrote: "After 10 years, Washington examines with satisfaction the balance of an investment made with fire and blood…, an undeclared war of aggression… The elections were certainly cleanly prepared and conducted, but a decade of horror was behind them."

While welcoming the electoral outcome, the right-wing daily El Universal acknowledged that "The defeated Sandinista Front does not have all of the responsibility for the disasters that have fallen upon Nicaraguans. Its lead role in the construction of Nicaragua in recent years cannot be denied, either. But the voters have made an objective use of the essential prerogative of democracy: to vote for who they believe can better their situation," surely George Bush's candidate, in the light of invariant U.S. policies that are as familiar to Latin Americans as the rising of the sun. For the independent El Tiempo in Colombia, passionately opposed to "frightening communism" and the Sandinistas who represent it on the continent, "The U.S. and President Bush scored a clear victory."[2]

In Guatemala, the independent Central America Report (Inforpress Centroamericana) concluded that "Most analysts agree that the UNO victory marks the consummation of the US government's military, economic and political efforts to overthrow the Sandinistas." Under the heading The Winners, the journal added:

> US President George Bush emerged as a clear victor in the Nicaraguan elections. The decade-long Reagan/Bush war against Nicaragua employed a myriad of methods — both covert and open — aimed at overthrowing the Sandinistas. Bush's continuation of the two-pronged Reagan policy of economic strangulation and military aggression finally reaped tangible results. Following the elections, Ortega said that the outcome

[1] Sorenson, Op-Ed, NYT, Nov. 13, 1987.

[2] Cited in World Press Review, April 1990.

> was not in retrospect surprising since the voters went to the polls "with a pistol pointed at their heads"

— a conclusion that the journal accepts without comment. "The consensus attributes the population's defection…to the critical economic crisis in Nicaragua," the report continues, citing an editorial in the Guatemala City press that "pointed out that more than ten years of economic and military aggressions waged by a government with unlimited resources created the setting for an election determined by economic exhaustion." "It was a vote in search of peace by a people that, inevitably, were fed up with violence," the Guatemala City editorial concluded: "It is a vote from a hungry people that, more than any idea, need to eat."[3]

The analysis ends with this comment:

> "While many observers today are remarking that never before has a leftist revolutionary regime handed over power in elections, the opposite is also true. Never has a popular elected leftist government in Latin America been allowed to undertake its reforms without being cut short by a coup, an invasion or an assassination"

— or, we may add, subversion, terror, or economic strangulation.

Readers in Guatemala, or elsewhere in Latin America, need no further reminders of this truism. One will search far for any hint of such a thought, let alone a discussion of what it implies, in U.S. commentary. Even the fact that Nicaragua had a popular elected government is inexpressible in the U.S. propaganda system, with its standards of discipline that no respectable intellectual would dare to flout.

Much of the press abroad saw the events in a similar light. The editors of the London Financial Times observe that "The war against the Contras has eroded the early achievements in health and education of the Sandinista revolution and brought the country close to bankruptcy." The victors, they add, are the contras — which is to say, the White House, Congress, and the support team who set up, maintained, and justified what was conceded to be a "proxy army" by contra lobbyists, who hoped that Washington might somehow convert its proxies into a political force (Bruce Cameron and Penn Kemble of Freedom House); in vain, despite resources and advantages undreamt of by authentic popular and guerrilla movements. Their Managua correspondent Tim Coone concludes that "Nicaraguans appeared to believe that a UNO victory offered the best prospect of securing US funds to end the country's economic misery" — correctly, of course.[4]

The left-wing Costa Rican journal Mesoamerica added that "the Sandinistas fell for a scam perpetrated by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias and the other Central American Presidents," which "cost them the 25 Feb. elections." Nicaragua had agreed to loosen wartime constraints and advance the scheduled elections by a few months "in exchange for having the *contras* demobilized and the war brought to an end." The White House and Congress broke the deal at once, maintaining the contras as a military force in violation of the agreements and compelling

[3] Central America Report, March 2, 1990.

[4] Financial Times, Feb. 27, 1990. After noting that the contra war brought the country close to bankruptcy, with $12 billion in damages in addition to the vast costs of the economic sanctions, they attribute primary responsibility to Sandinista "economic mismanagement" and their "totalitarian system." I leave the logic to others to decipher. Cameron and Kemble, From a Proxy Force to a National Liberation Movement, ms, Feb. 1986, circulated privately in the White House.

them to be modified to focus on Nicaragua alone. With the deal effectively broken, the U.S. candidate could promise to end the war, while Ortega could not. "War weary Nicaraguans voted for peace." The operation was a stunning success for White House-Congress duplicity, which succeeded brilliantly in undermining the diplomatic settlement while the media provided their crucial assistance by concealing the operation, a regular pattern in Vietnam and the Middle East as well, as documented elsewhere.[5]

In short, the winner of the elections was George Bush and the Democrat-Republican coalition that waged ten years of economic and military aggression, leaving a hungry and distraught people who voted for relief from terror and misery. Democracy has been dealt a serious blow, with a "popular elected leftist government" replaced by one elected under duress, by violent foreign intervention that proved decisive.

United in Joy

Returning home, we find a different picture. The New Republic editorial on the elections is entitled "Who Won Nicaragua?" The answer is: "Why, the Nicaraguans, of course" — not George Bush and U.S. aggression. "Those who supported aid to the contras…, as did this magazine, can find considerable vindication in the outcome," which "made nonsense of both the left-wing myth that anti-Yankeeism is the centerpiece of all Latin America's political identity and the right-wing myth that Leninists can never be induced to change." Adding what remains unsaid, the former "myth" succumbed to the successful use of terror and economic strangulation, and the latter is based on the loyal denial of familiar and well-attested facts about "the Sandinistas, who had won free and fair elections in 1984" (London Observer). "Gratifying as the election results are," the editorial continues, "democracy is not yet quite safe in Nicaragua," and "having served as an inspiration for the triumph of democracy in our time, the United States now has an opportunity to see to it that democracy prevails" — "democracy," New Republic-style: the kind that "prevails" in the Central American domains where the U.S. has had ample opportunity to entrench it, to take the obvious example.[6]

Perhaps it is unfair to illustrate U.S. reaction by a journal that gave "Reagan & Co. good marks" for their support of state terror in El Salvador as it reached Pol Pot levels in 1981, and then, surveying the carnage three years later, advised Reagan & Co. to explain to the American people that we must support "Latin-style fascists," sending military aid "regardless of how many are murdered," because "there are higher American priorities than Salvadoran human rights." In assessing U.S. political culture let us, then, put aside the more passionate advocates of state terror — though not without noting that these values, familiar from the Nazi era, in no way diminish the reputation of the journal, or even merit a word of comment in left-liberal circles. Let us concentrate attention, rather, on what is called the "establishment left" by editor Charles William Maynes of Foreign Policy. He is referring specifically to the New York Times, but doubtless would include also the Washington Post, the major TV news bureaus, the Boston Globe (which perhaps

[5] Tony Avirgan, Mesoamerica, March 1990; on the subversion of the accords and the media role, see my Culture of Terrorism (South End, 1988), Necessary Illusions (South End, 1989). This story is almost completely suppressed in the media and is destined to be eliminated from history, along with earlier similar successes in undermining diplomacy. Ibid.; my Towards a New Cold War (Pantheon, 1982); Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent (Pantheon, 1988).

[6] TNR, March 19; Observer, March 4, 1990.

qualifies as "ultra-left"), and his own journal, the more liberal of the two major foreign affairs quarterlies.[7]

Turning to the left, then, we begin with the New York Times, where Elaine Sciolino reviewed the U.S. reaction to the elections. The headline reads: "Americans United in Joy, But Divided Over Policy." The policy division turns out to be over who deserves credit for the joyous outcome, so we are left with "Americans United in Joy."[8]

Such phrases as "United in Joy" are not entirely unknown. One might find them, perhaps, in the North Korean or Albanian press. Obviously the issue was contentious, certainly to Nicaraguans, to others in Latin America as well. But not to educated U.S. elites, who are quite eager to depict themselves as dedicated totalitarians.

The review of opinion opens by noting that "the left and the right and those in between [have] a fresh opportunity to debate one of the United States's most divisive foreign policy issues of the last decade." The left-right debate now reduces to who can justly claim credit. Sciolino begins with eleven paragraphs reviewing the position of the right, followed by five devoted to the left. In the former category, she cites Elliott Abrams, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Fred Ikle of the Pentagon, Oliver North, Robert Leiken of the Harvard University Center for International Affairs, and Ronald Reagan. They portray the outcome as "spectacular," "great, wonderful, stunning," a tribute to the contras who, "when history is written, ...will be the folk heroes," a victory "for the cause of democracy" in a "free and fair election."

Sciolino then turns to the left: "On the other side, Lawrence A. Pezzullo, who was appointed Ambassador to Nicaragua by President fantastic'." We return to Pezzullo's left-wing credentials directly. The second representative of "the other side" is Sol Linowitz, who, as Carter Administration Ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS), sought in vain to mobilize Latin America in support of Carter's program of "Somocismo sin Somoza" ("Somozism without Somoza") after the murderous tyrant could no longer be maintained in power, and later urged pressures to make Nicaragua more democratic — like El Salvador and Guatemala, both just fine and hence needing no such pressures. The final representative of the left is Francis McNeil, who quit the State Department in 1987 when his pessimism about contra military prospects aroused the ire of Elliott Abrams.[9]

The last paragraph observes that some "were not entirely comfortable with the results" of the election, citing Lawrence Birns of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, who "seemed to side with the Sandinistas," expressing his "inner rage that the corner bully won over the little guy."

Sciolino remarks incidentally that "Sandinista supporters expressed sadness, and said that the defeat was a product of Nicaragua's economic troubles — a result of the American trade embargo and other outside pressures" — thus lining up with much of Latin America. But recall that Americans were United in Joy. By simple logic, it follows that these miscreants are not Americans, or perhaps not people. Earlier Times reporting suggests the latter interpretation. Thus, when the Times reported in 1985 that "no one is arguing strenuously that [the embargo] be amended," many featherless bipeds were arguing strenuously that these murderous and illegal measures be

[7] For further details, see my Turning the Tide (South End, 1985, 167f.). Maynes, Foreign Policy, Spring 1990.

[8] Sciolino, NYT, Feb. 27, 1990.

[9] On Linowitz, see below and Culture of Terrorism, 119. McNeil, War and Peace in Central America (Scribner's, 1988), 33.

not merely amended but terminated. Evidently, then, they bore only a superficial resemblance to the human race.[10]

Summarizing, there are "two sides," the right and the left, which differed on the tactical question of how to eliminate the Sandinistas in favor of U.S. clients and are now "United in Joy."

There is one person who *seems* to side with the Sandinistas, but couldn't *really* be that far out of step, we are to understand. And there are some non-Americans, or perhaps non-humans, who share the exotic opinions of Latin Americans as to what happened and why. Having failed to obey state orders, these strange creatures are off the left-right spectrum entirely, and do not participate in the great debate over the sole issue still unresolved: Who deserves the credit for the happy outcome?

The Times conception of the spectrum of opinion is, then, very much like that of the editor of Foreign Policy. Or former Undersecretary of State David Newsom, now director of the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University, who urges "the ideological extremes of the nation's political spectrum" to abandon the fruitless debate over the credits for our victories. Or Jimmy Carter, who explained to the press that his observer commission was "carefully balanced — half Democrat and half Republican," thus carefully balanced between two groups that satisfy the prior condition of objectivity: passionate opposition to the Sandinistas and support for Washington's candidates.[11]

Throughout, we see with great clarity the image of a highly disciplined political culture, deeply imbued with totalitarian values.

The Case for the Doves

In the new phase of the debate, the right attributes the defeat of the Sandinistas to the contras, while the left claims that the contras impeded their effort to overthrow the Sandinistas by other means. But the doves have failed to present their case as strongly as they might. Let us therefore give them a little assistance, meanwhile recalling some crucial facts that are destined for oblivion because they are far too inconvenient to preserve.

We begin with Lawrence Pezzullo, the leading representative of the left in the Times survey of opinion. Pezzullo was appointed Ambassador in early 1979, at a time when Carter's support for the Somoza tyranny was becoming problematic. Of course no one contemplated any modification in the basic system of power, surely no significant role for the Sandinistas (FSLN). As explained by Carter dove Robert Pastor, Director of Latin American and Caribbean Affairs on the National Security Council, there was complete agreement that Somoza's National Guard must be kept intact, and it was not until June 29, shortly before the end, that any participant in an NSC meeting "suggested the central U.S. objective was something other than preventing a Sandinista victory." By then it was finally realized that means must be sought "to moderate the FSLN," who could not be marginalized or excluded, as hoped.[12]

As in U.S. political democracy generally, the Carter Administration had its left-right spectrum. On the right, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski proclaimed that "we have to demonstrate that we are still the decisive force in determining the political outcomes in Central

[10] Clyde Farnsworth, NYT, Nov. 10, 1985.

[11] Newsom, Christian Science Monitor, March 22, 1990; Mike Christensen, NYT news service, Feb. 7, 1990.

[12] Pastor, Condemned to Repetition (Princeton, 1987), 107, 157.

America," warning of apocalyptic outcomes if the U.S. did not intervene. On the left, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Viron Vaky pursued a more nuanced approach. Pezzullo's task was to implement the policy of the left, that is, to bar the FSLN from power through the "preservation of existing instititutions, especially the National Guard" (Vaky, June 15, 1979). This plan was proposed to the OAS, but rejected by the Latin American governments, all ultra-left extremists, by U.S. standards. Pezzullo was then compelled to inform Somoza that his usefulness was at an end. On June 30, he noted in a cable to Washington that "with careful orchestration we have a better than even chance of preserving enough of the [National Guard] to maintain order and hold the FSLN in check after Somoza resigns," even though this plan would "smack somewhat of Somocismo sin Somoza," he added a few days later. For the "successor government," the Carter Administration approached Archbishop Obando y Bravo (in contrast, our religious sensibilities are deeply offended by political engagement of priests who envision a church that serves the poor) and the right-wing businessman Adolfo Calero (later civilian director of the main contra force); and for head of the National Guard, it considered Colonel Enrique Bermudez, later contra commander.[13]

At the time, the National Guard was carrying out murderous attacks against civilians, leaving tens of thousands killed. Pezzullo recommended that the bloodbath be continued: "I believe it ill-advised," he cabled Washington on July 6, "to go to Somoza and ask for a bombing halt." On July 13, Pezzullo informed Washington that the "survivability" of the Guard was doubtful unless Somoza left, as he did, four days later, fleeing to Miami with what remained of the national treasury. On July 19, the game was over — that phase, at least.[14]

As the FSLN entered Managua on July 19, the Carter Administration "began setting the stage for a counterrevolution," Peter Kornbluh observes, mounting a clandestine operation to evacuate Guard commanders on U.S. planes disguised with Red Cross markings. This is a war crime punishable under the Geneva conventions, the London Economist observed years later, when the same device was used to supply contras within Nicaragua (pictures of CIA supply planes disguised with Red Cross markings appeared without comment in Newsweek, while the vigorous denunciation of this violation of international law by the Red Cross passed without notice in the newspaper of record). Within six months after the overthrow of Somoza, the Carter Administration had initiated the CIA destabilization campaign, inherited and expanded by the Reaganites. The Carter doves did not give direct support to the National Guard forces that they helped reconstitute, preferring to use the neo-Nazi Argentine generals "as a proxy for the United States" (Rand Corporation terrorism expert Brian Jenkins). The U.S. took over directly with the Reagan presidency.[15]

Pezzullo's next task was to "moderate the FSLN." The Carter doves proposed economic aid as "the main source of U.S. influence" (Pastor). The U.S. business community supported this plan, particularly U.S. banks, which, as noted in the London Financial Times, were pressuring Carter to provide funds to Nicaragua so that their loans to Somoza would be repaid (courtesy of the U.S. taxpayer, as in the Savings & Loan scam of the Reagan years). The banks were particularly concerned that if Nicaragua, reduced to utter ruin and bankruptcy by the U.S.-backed Somoza

[13] Ibid., 161; Peter Kornbluh, Nicaragua (Center for Policy Studies, Washington, 1987), 15f. For general discussion, see Holly Sklar, Washington's War on Nicaragua (South End, 1988).

[14] Kornbluh, op. cit.

[15] Ibid., 19; see Culture of Terrorism, 86; Bob Woodward, Veil (Simon & Schuster, 1987), 113; Jenkins, New Modes of Conflict (Rand Corporation, June 1983).

regime, were to default on the Somoza debt, it would serve as a "bad example" for other U.S. clients. It was also recognized that aid directed to anti-Sandinista elements in the ruling coalition was the last remaining device to block the FSLN and its programs.[16] After Nicaragua reached a settlement with the banks, $75 million in aid was offered, about 60% for the private business sector, with $5 million a grant for private organizations and $70 million a loan (partly credits to buy U.S. goods, another taxpayer subsidy to corporations). One of the conditions was that no funds be used for projects with Cuban personnel, a way of ensuring that nothing would go to schools, the literacy campaign, health programs, or other reform measures for which Nicaragua was likely to turn to those with experience in such projects and willingness to serve. Nicaragua had no choice but to agree, since, as the Wall Street Journal noted, without this "signal of U.S. confidence in the stability of the country" there would be no bank loans, which were desperately needed. Nicaragua's request for U.S. military aid and training was rejected, and efforts to obtain such aid from the West were blocked by U.S. pressure, compelling reliance on East bloc aid as the external threat mounted.[17]

As these events pass through the U.S. doctrinal system, they undergo a subtle alchemy and emerge in a different form: The Sandinistas "enjoyed American encouragement at first; having helped get rid of Somoza, the Carter administration also gave them $75 million in aid. But when the Sandinistas brought in Cuban and East German military advisers to help build their Army into the region's largest fighting force, conflict with Washington was sure to follow…" (Newsweek).[18]

Nicaragua also attempted to maintain its trade links with the U.S. and the West, and succeeded in doing so through the mid-1980s despite U.S. efforts. But Washington naturally preferred that they rely on the East bloc, to ensure maximal inefficiency and to justify the attack on these "Soviet clients." The U.S. also blocked aid from international development organizations, and, after failing to displace the FSLN, sought to destroy private business in Nicaragua to increase domestic discontent and undermine the mixed economy (a major and predicted effect of the Reagan embargo, and the reason why it was bitterly opposed by the Nicaraguan opposition that the U.S. claimed to support).[19]

So enormous was the devastation left as Somoza's final legacy that a World Bank Mission concluded in October 1981 that "per capita income levels of 1977 will not be attained, in the best of circumstances, until the late 1980s" and that "any untoward event could lead to a financial trauma." There were, of course, "untoward events," but such facts do not trouble the ideologues who deduce Sandinista responsibility for the subsequent economic debacle from the doctrinal necessity of this conclusion. A standard rhetorical trick, pioneered by the Kissinger Commission, is to "demonstrate" Sandinista economic mismanagement by comparing living standards of 1977 to those of the eighties, thus attributing the effects of the U.S.-backed Somoza terror to the Marxist-Leninist totalitarians.[20]

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[16] Pastor, op. cit., 157, 208–9; Susanne Jonas, in Stanford Central America Action Network, Revolution in Central America (Westview, 1983), 90f.

[17] Ibid.; Theodore Schwab and Harold Sims, in Thomas Walker, ed., Nicaragua: the First Five Years (Westview, 1988), 461.

[18] Charles Lane, Newsweek, March 12, 1990.

[19] Walker, Nicaragua: The Land of Sandino (Westview, 1986), 67f.; Michael Conroy, in Walker, ed., op. cit.; La Prensa (Managua), April 20, 1988, and Stephen Kinzer, "Anti-Sandinistas Say U.S. Should End Embargo," NYT, Jan. 12, 1989.

[20] Conroy, op. cit.

Despite the horrendous circumstances, Nicaragua's economic progress through the early 1980s was surprisingly good, with the highest growth rate in Central America by a large margin, an improvement in standard of living in contrast to a substantial fall for the rest of Central America and a somewhat lesser fall for Latin America as a whole, and significant redistribution of income and expansion of social services. In 1983, the Inter-American Development Bank reported that Nicaragua's "noteworthy progress in the social sector" was "laying a solid foundation for long-term socio-economic development." The World Bank and other international development organizations lauded the "remarkable" Nicaraguan record and outstanding success, in some respects "better than anywhere in the world" (World Bank). But U.S. pressures succeeded in terminating these dangerous developments. By early 1987, business leader Enrique Bolanos, well to the right of the UNO directorate, attributed the economic crisis in Nicaragua to the war (60%, presumably including the economic war), the international economic crisis (10%), the contraction of the Central American Common Market (10%), and decapitalization by the business sector and government errors (20%). The London Financial Times estimates the costs of the contra war at $12 billion; UNO economist Francisco Mayorga adds $3 billion as the costs of the embargo. Actual totals are unknown, but plainly fall within the range of the "untoward events" which, the World Bank predicted, would lead to catastrophe.[21]

Naturally, the idea that the U.S. might pay reparations for what it has done can be relegated to the same category as the notion that it might observe international law generally: Too ludicrous to merit a word of comment.

Underlying their various tactical moves, the Carter doves had a strategic conception. Robert Pastor comments that "The United States did not want to control Nicaragua or the other nations in the region, but it also did not want to allow developments to get out of control. It wanted Nicaraguans to act independently, *except* when doing so would affect U.S. interests adversely." Nicaraguans, in short, should have complete freedom to do what we want them to do, and need not be controlled unless they are out of control.[22]

Applying these principles to Nicaragua, Viron Vaky outlined "the principal arguments" for supporting the contras: "a longer war of attrition will so weaken the regime, provoke such a radical hardening of repression, and win sufficient support from Nicaragua's discontented population that sooner or later the regime will be overthrown by popular revolt, self-destruct by means of internal coups or leadership splits, or simply capitulate to salvage what it can"; another one of those cases of "the tragic self-destruction of Central America" lamented by Theodore Sorenson. The sole aim of Reagan policy, Vaky continues, was "a negotiation on the terms and schedule under which the Sandinistas would turn over power," a goal that he sees as "reasonable" and "idealistic," while acknowledging that the U.S. proxy forces to which power is to be turned over "have been unable to elicit significant political support."[23]

As a dove, Vaky saw these goals as unattainable, and preferred other measures (not excluding force) to "contain" the Sandinista threat and promote "the evolution of Nicaragua's internal system into a more open, less virulent one," perhaps even one as benign as in the U.S. terror states. In this way, he concludes, we might be able to reach our "objective of promoting Nicaraguan

[21] Ibid., 232–3, 223, 239; Diana Melrose, Nicaragua: the Threat of a Good Example? (Oxfam, 1985); Sylvia Maxfield & Richard Stahler-Sholk, in Walker, ed., op. cit.; Kornbluh, op. cit., 105f.; Culture of Terrorism, 52; Andrew Marshall, Financial Times, Feb. 27; Christopher Marquis, Miami Herald, Feb. 21, 1990.

[22] Pastor, op. cit., 32 (his emphasis).

[23] Vaky, Foreign Policy, Fall 1987.

self-determination," now happily achieved, at last. The concept of democracy shines through bright and clear.

With a sufficiently powerful microscope one can distinguish this left-wing perspective from that of the right, for example, the DoD official who informed the press a few months later that a small number of "hard-core guys could keep some pressure on the Nicaraguan government, force them to use their economic resources for the military, and prevent them from solving their economic problems — and that's a plus," because "Anything that puts pressure on the Sandinista regime, calls attention to the lack of democracy, and prevents the Sandinistas from solving their economic problems is a plus."[24]

Nicaragua must be reduced to "the Albania of Central America," a State Department insider is reported to have observed in 1981. In a "Latin American Albania…the Sandinista dream of creating a new, more exemplary political model for Latin America would be in ruins," John Carlin comments in the London Independent. There would be no "revolution without borders" of the sort anticipated by Tomas Borge, with Nicaragua serving as a model for its neighbors, the source of a well-known fraud perpetrated by the government, the media, and segments of scholarship.[25]

Other government officials explained that they did not expect a contra victory, but were "content to see the contras debilitate the Sandinistas by forcing them to divert scarce resources toward the war and away from social programs"; the consequences could then be adduced as proof of "Sandinista mismanagement". Since this understanding is common to hawks and doves, it is not surprising that no reaction was evoked when it was reported in the Boston Globe, just as no reaction was to be expected when ex-CIA analyst David MacMichael testified at the World Court that the goals of the contra program were to "provoke cross-border attacks by Nicaraguan forces and thus demonstrate Nicaragua's aggressive nature" and to pressure Nicaragua to "clamp down on civil liberties" so as to demonstrate "its allegedly inherent totalitarian nature and thus increase domestic dissent within the country." It is superfluous to document the enthusiasm with which the educated classes undertook the task assigned to them in these programs.[26]

It thus made perfect sense for the U.S. command to direct its proxy forces to attack "soft targets" — that is, undefended civilian targets — as SOUTHCOM commander General John Galvin explained; to train the contra forces to "attack a lot of schools, health centers, and those sort of things" so that "the Nicaraguan government cannot provide social services for the peasants, cannot develop its project." "That's the idea," contra Intelligence Chief Horacio Arce (El Mercenario) informed the press in Mexico after defecting in November 1988 (but not the U.S. press, which succeeded in evading such unpleasant testimony).[27]

The Maynes-Sciolino left did not object to these policies in principle. They had no fundamental disagremeent with the conclusion of George Shultz's State Department that "Nicaragua is the cancer and [is] metastasizing" and that "the Sandinista cancer" must be removed, "by radical surgery if necessary."[28] Furthermore, the Carter doves effectively set these policies in motion. They can therefore claim to have succeeded in their aims, as the election showed. Their only fault was excessive pessimism over the prospects of success of terror and economic warfare; in

[24] Doyle McManus, Los Angeles Times, May 28, 1988.

[25] See Culture of Terrorism, 219f.; Necessary Illusions, 71f.

[26] See my Necessary Illusions, 103, and On Power and Ideology (South End, 1986), 37–8. See these and other sources cited here for further discussion of the context and media performance.

[27] Necessary Illusions, 204f., 71–2; Culture of Terrorism, 43, 219–22.

[28] Bill Gertz, Washington Times, Dec. 5, 1988, citing a leaked classified State Department report.

this respect, the judgment of the right was correct, and it is unreasonable for the left to deny that their right-wing opponents had a sounder appreciation of the efficacy of state violence. Thus left and right have every reason to be United in Joy at the triumph of democracy, as they jointly conceive it: Free choice, with a pistol to your head.

"Rallying to Chamorro"

The Kim Il Sung-style unanimity considered so natural and appropriate by the Times has, in fact, been characteristic of the "divisive foreign policy issue" that is said to have rent the United States in the past decade. As has been extensively documented, both reporting and permissible opinion in the media were virtually restricted to the question of the choice of means for returning Nicaragua to "the Central American mode." There was indeed a "division": Should this result be achieved by terror, or, if violence proved ineffective, by arrangements enforced by the death squad democracies that already observe the approved "regional standards," as advocated by Tom Wicker and other doves? This spectrum of thought was safeguarded at a level approaching 100% in the national press, a most impressive achievement.[29]

Pre-election coverage maintained the same high standards of conformism. It was uniformly anti-Sandinista. The UNO coalition were the democrats, on the sole grounds that the coalition had been forged in Washington and included the major business interests, sufficient proof of democratic credentials by the conventions of U.S. political discourse. On similar assumptions, Bob Woodward describes the CIA operations launched by Carter as a "program to boost the democratic alternative to the Sandinistas"; no evidence as to the concern for democracy is provided, or needed, on the conventional understanding of the concept of democracy.

Commentary and reporting on the Sandinistas was harsh and derisive. Some did break ranks. The Boston Globe ran an op-ed by Daniel Ortega a few days before the election, but the editors were careful to add an accompanying caricature of an ominous thug in a Soviet Field Marshal's uniform wearing designer glasses, just to ensure that readers would not be misled.[30] Media monitors have yet to come up with a single phrase suggesting that an FSLN victory might be the best thing for Nicaragua. Even journalists who privately felt that way did not say it; not out of fear, I suppose, but because they took for granted that such an idea would be unintelligible, on a par with "the U.S. is a leading terrorist state," or "Washington is blocking the peace process," or "maybe we should tell the truth about Cambodia and Timor," or other departures from dogma. Such statements lack cognitive meaning. They are imprecations, like shouting "Fuck You" in public; they can only elicit a stream of abuse, not a rational response. This is the ultimate achievement of thought control, beyond what Orwell imagined. Large parts of the language are simply ruled unthinkable. It all makes good sense: In a Free Society, *all* must march on command, or keep silent. Anything else is just too dangerous.

There must have been departures somewhere, but the performance in the mainstream would have impressed any dictator.

On TV, Peter Jennings opened the international news by announcing that Nicaragua is going to have its "first free election in a decade."[31] Three crucial doctrines are presupposed: (1) the

[29] See Necessary Illusions; also Manufacturing Consent.

[30] BG, Feb. 22, 1990.

[31] ABC World News Tonight, Feb. 20, 1990.

elections under Somoza were free; (2) there was no free election in 1984; (3) the 1990 election was free and uncoerced. A standard footnote is that Ortega was driven to accept the 1990 elections by U.S. pressure; here opinion divides, with the right and the left differing on who deserves the credit for the achievement. Recall that truly sophisticated propagandists understand that it is a mistake to articulate basic doctrines, thus opening them to critical reflection. Rather, they are to be presupposed, setting the bounds of thinkable thought.

We may disregard point (1), though not without noting that it has been a staple of the "establishment left," with its frequent reference to "restoring democracy" in Nicaragua. The second point expresses a fundamental dogma, which brooks no deviation and is immune to fact; I need not review this matter, familiar outside of the reigning doctrinal system. The footnote ignores the unacceptable (hence unreportable) fact that the next election had always been scheduled for 1990, and that the total effect of U.S. machinations was to advance it by a few months.

The most interesting point, however, is the third. Suppose that the USSR were to follow the U.S. model as the Baltic states declare independence, organizing a proxy army to attack them from foreign bases, training its terrorist forces to hit "soft targets" (health centers, schools, etc.) so that the governments cannot provide social services, reducing the economies to ruin through embargo and other sanctions, and so on, in the familiar routine. Suppose further that when elections come, the Kremlin informs the population, loud and clear, that they can vote for the CP or starve. Perhaps some unreconstructed Stalinist might call this a "free and fair election." Surely no one else would.

Or suppose that the Arab states were to reduce Israel to the level of Ethiopia, then issuing a credible threat that they would drive it the rest of the way unless it "cried uncle" and voted for their candidate. Someone who called this a "democratic election," "free and fair," would be condemned as an outright Nazi.

The pertinence of the analogies is obvious. Simple logic suffices to show that anyone who called the 1990 Nicaraguan elections "free and fair," a welcome step towards democracy, was not merely a totalitarian, but of a rather special variety. Fact: That practice was virtually exceptionless. I have found exactly *one* mainstream journalist who was able to make the obvious points.[32] Surely other examples must exist, but the conclusion, which we need not spell out, tells us a great deal about the dominant intellectual culture.

It was apparent from the outset that the U.S. would never tolerate free and fair elections, as I have been emphasizing in these columns since the campaign opened in October. The point was underscored by repeated White House statements that the terror and economic war would continue unless a "free choice" met the conditions of the Enforcer. It was made official in early November when the White House announced that the embargo would continue unless the population followed U.S. orders. In a political culture that is more free and independent than ours — the military-run terror state of Guatemala, for example — the media had no difficulty perceiving these trivialities, as we have already seen.

To be sure, the kinds of "divisions" that the Times perceives were to be found here as well. There were a few who simply denied that the military and economic wars had any notable impact; what could a mere $15 billion and 30,000 dead mean to a society as rich and flourishing

[32] Randolph Ryan, BG, Feb. 28. Also, outside the mainstream, Alexander Cockburn in his monthly Wall Street Journal column, March 1. See also New Yorker, "Talk of the Town," March 12, 1990.

as Nicaragua after Somoza?[33] Turning to those who tried to be serious, we find the usual two categories. The right didn't mention these crucial factors, and hailed the stunning triumph of democracy. The establishment left did mention them, and *then* hailed the stunning triumph of democracy. Still keeping to that sector of opinion, let us consider a few examples to illustrate the pattern.

Michael Kinsley, who represents the left on the New Republic editorial staff and in CNN television debate, presented his analysis of the election in the journal he edits (reprinted in the Washington Post).[34] He recalled an earlier article of his, omitting its crucial content: that terrorist attacks against civilian targets are legitimate if a "cost-benefit analysis" shows that the "blood and misery that will be poured in" yields consequences that he takes to be favorable. This doctrine, which could readily be accepted by Abu Nidal, helps us situate the establishment left in the general spectrum.[35] Kinsley then observes that "impoverishing the people of Nicaragua was precisely the point of the contra war and the parallel policy of economic embargo and veto of international development loans," and it is "Orwellian" to blame the Sandinistas "for wrecking the economy while devoting our best efforts to doing precisely that." "The economic disaster was probably the victorious opposition's best election issue," he continues, and "it was also Orwellian for the United States, having created the disaster, to be posturing as the exhorter and arbiter of free elections."

Kinsley then proceeds to posture, Orwellian-style, as the arbiter of free elections, hailing the "free election" and "triumph of democracy," which "turned out to be pleasanter than anyone would have dared to predict."

At the extreme of the establishment left, Anthony Lewis of the New York Times writes that "the Reagan policy did not work. It produced only misery, death and shame." Why it did not work, he does not explain; it appears to have worked very well, including those parts that were supported throughout by the doves. Lewis then proceeds to hail "the experiment in peace and democracy," which "did work." This triumph of democracy, he writes, gives "fresh testimony to the power of Jefferson's idea: government with the consent of the governed, as Vaclav Havel reminded us the other day. To say so seems romantic, but then we live in a romantic age." We are "dizzy with success," as Stalin used to say, observing the triumph of our ideals in Central America and the Caribbean, the Philippines, the Israeli-occupied territories, and other regions where our influence reaches so that we can take credit for the conditions of life and the state of freedom.[36]

The reference to Havel merits some reflection. Havel's address to Congress had a remarkable impact on the political and intellectual communities. "Consciousness precedes Being, and not the other way around, as the Marxists claim," Havel informed Congress to thunderous applause; in a Woody Allen rendition, he would have said "Being precedes Consciousness," eliciting exactly the same reaction. But what really enthralled elite opinion was his statement that the United States has "understood the responsibility that flowed" from its great power, that there have been "two enormous forces — one, a defender of freedom, the other, a source of nightmares." We must put "morality ahead of politics," he went on. The backbone of our actions must be "responsibility — responsibility to something higher than my family, my country, my company, my success." To

[33] See, e.g., Robert Leiken, BG, March 4, 1990, reprinted from the Los Angeles Times.

[34] Kinsley, NR, March 19; WP, March 1, 1990.

[35] See Culture of Terrorism, 77–8.

[36] NYT, March 2, 1990.

be moral, then, we must not shirk our responsibility to suffering people in the Dominican Republic, Timor, Vietnam, Guatemala, El Salvador, Mozambique, and others like them throughout the world who can offer direct testimony to the great works of the "defender of freedom."[37]

These thoughts evoked an overwhelming reaction. Lewis was not alone in being entranced. The Washington Post described them as "stunning evidence" that Havel's country is "a prime source" of "the European intellectual tradition," a "voice of conscience" that speaks "compellingly of the responsibilities that large and small powers owe each other." The Boston Globe hailed Havel for having "no use for cliches" as he gave us his "wise counsel" in a manner so "lucid and logical." Mary McGrory reveled in "his idealism, his irony, his humanity," as he "preached a difficult doctrine of individual responsibility" while Congress "obviously ached with respect" for his genius and integrity. Columnists Jack Germond and Jules Witcover asked why America lacks intellectuals so profound, who "elevate morality over self-interest" in this way. A front-page story in the Globe described how "American politicans and pundits are gushing over" Havel, and interviewed locals on why American intellectuals do not approach these lofty heights.[38]

This reaction too provides a useful mirror for the elite culture.

Putting aside the relation of Being to Consciousness, the thoughts that so entranced the intellectual community are, after all, not entirely unfamiliar. One finds them regularly in the pontifications of fundamentalist preachers, Fourth of July speeches, American Legion publications, the journals and scholarly literature generally, indeed, everywhere. Who can have been so remote from American life as not to have heard that we are "the defender of freedom" and that we magnificently satisfy the moral imperative to be responsible not just to ourselves, but to the Welfare of Mankind? There is only one rational interpretation. Liberal intellectuals secretly cherish the pronouncements of Pat Robertson and the John Birch society, but are embarrassed to say so; they can therefore gush in awe when these very same words are produced by Vaclav Havel.

Havel's "voice of conscience" has another familiar counterpart. In the Third World, one sometimes hears people say that the Soviet Union defends our freedom while the U.S. government is a nightmare. I have heard such sentiments in remote villages in Vietnam in areas destroyed by U.S. bombardment, in the Israeli-occupied territories, and other places, as have many others. Journalist T.D. Allman, who wrote one of the few serious articles on El Salvador in the early eighties, described a visit to a Christian base community, subjected to the standard practice of the U.S.-backed security forces, where an old man told him that he had heard of a country called Cuba across the seas that might have concern for their plight, and asked Allman to "tell us, please, sir, how we might contact these Cubans, to inform them of our need, so that they might help us."[39]

Let us now try another thought experiment. Suppose a villager in Vietnam, or Allman's Salvadoran peasant, had reached the Supreme Soviet to orate about moral responsibility and the confrontation between two powers, one a nightmare and the other a defender of freedom. There would doubtless have been a rousing ovation, while every party hack in Pravda would have gushed with enthusiasm. I do not, incidentally, mean to draw a comparison to Havel. It is easy to understand that the world might look this way to someone whose experience is limited to U.S. bombs and U.S.-trained death squads on the one hand, and, on the other, Soviet tractors

[37] See Excerpts, NYT, Feb. 22; WP weekly, March 5, 1990.

[38] Editorial, WP, Feb. 26; BG, Feb. 23, Feb. 26; Feb. 24; Charles Radin, March 1, 1990.

[39] Harper's, March 1981.

and anti-aircraft guns, and dreams of rescue by Cubans from unbearable torment. For victims of the West, the circumstances of existence — incomparably worse than those of Eastern Europe — make the conclusion plausible while barring knowledge of a broader reality. Havel and those who gush over his familiar pieties can claim no such excuse.

We once again learn something about ourselves, if we choose. The other Times spokesman for the left, Tom Wicker, followed the same script. He concludes that the Sandinistas lost "because the Nicaraguan people were tired of war and sick of economic deprivation." But the elections were "free and fair," untainted by coercion.[40]

At the dissident extreme, William LeoGrande also hailed the promise of the "democratic elections in Nicaragua," while noting that "In the name of democracy, Washington put excruciating military and economic pressure on Nicaragua in order to force the Sandinistas out of power." Now, he continues, "the United States must show that its commitment to democracy in Central America extends to pressuring friendly conservative governments as well." Thus, having demonstrated its "commitment to democracy" by terror and economic warfare, the U.S. should "extend" this libertarian fervor to pressure on its friends.[41]

Turning to the shining light of American liberalism, the lead editorial in the Boston Globe was headlined "Rallying to Chamorro." All those who truly "love Nicaraguans," editorial page editor Martin Nolan declared, "must now rally to Chamorro." Suppose that in 1964 someone had said that all Goldwater supporters "must now rally to Johnson." Such a person would have been regarded as a throwback to the days when the Gauleiters and Commissars recognized that everyone must rally behind der Fuehrer. In Nicaragua, which has not yet risen to our heights, no one issued such a pronouncement. We learn more about the prevailing conception of democracy.[42]

Nolan goes on to explain that "Ortega was not an adept politician. His beloved masses could not eat slogans and voted with their stomachs, not their hearts." If Ortega had been more adept, he could have provided them with food — by following Nolan's advice and capitulating to the master. Now, in this "blessing of democracy," "at long last, Nicaragua itself has spoken" — freely and without duress, wherever "their hearts" may have been.

Times correspondent David Shipler contributed his thoughts under the headline "Nicaragua, Victory for U.S. Fair Play." Following the liberal model, Shipler observes that "it is true that partly because of the confrontation with the U.S., Nicaragua's economy suffered terribly, setting the stage for the widespread public discontent with the Sandinistas reflected in Sunday's balloting." Conclusion? "The Nicaraguan election has proved that open, honorable support for a democratic process is one of the most powerful foreign policy tools at Washington's disposal" — to be sure, after imposing "terrible suffering" to ensure the proper outcome in a "Victory for U.S. Fair Play." Shipler adds that now Nicaragua "needs help in building democratic institutions" — which he and his colleagues are qualified to offer, given their profound understanding of true democracy.[43]

In Newsweek, Charles Lane recognized that U.S. efforts to "democratize Nicaragua" through the contra war and "devastating economic sanctions" carried "a terrible cost," including 30,000 dead and another half million "uprooted from their homes," "routine" resort to "kidnapping and assassination," and other unpleasantness. So severe were the effects that "by the end of 1988, it was pride alone that kept the Sandinistas from meeting Reagan's demand that they cry uncle'!"

[40] NYT, March 1, 1990.

[41] NYT, March 17, 1990.

[42] Nolan, BG, Feb. 27, 1990. Nolan identified himself to the Nation as the author of these fine words.

[43] Op-Ed, NYT, March 1, 1990.

But the population finally voted for "a chance to put behind them the misery brought on by 10 years of revolution and war." "In the end, it was the Nicaraguans who won Nicaragua." We must "celebrate the moment" while reflecting "on the peculiar mix of good intentions and national insecurities that led us to become so passionately involved in a place we so dimly understood."[44]

The moral cowardice reeks even more than the hypocrisy.

Editorials in the national press hailed "the good news from Nicaragua," "a devastating rebuke to Sandinistas," which "will strengthen democracy elsewhere in Central America as well" (New York Times). The editors do recognize that one question is "debatable," namely, "whether U.S. pressure and the contra war hastened or delayed the wonderful breakthrough." But "No matter; democracy was the winner," in elections free and fair. Note that this contribution falls on the "conservative" side of the debate: No mention of the crucial factors, rather than mention and dismissal, as in the liberal model. The Washington Post editors hoped that these elections would launch "Nicaragua on a conclusive change from a totalitarian to a democratic state," but are not sure. "The Masses Speak in Nicaragua," a headline reads, employing a term that is taboo apart from such special occasions.

The Christian Science Monitor exulted over "another stunning assertion of democracy," an unflawed triumph.[45]

Perhaps that is enough. I have sampled only the less egregious cases, avoiding the right. It would be hard to find an exception to the pattern.

Several features of the election coverage are particularly striking: the extraordinary uniformity; the hatred and contempt for democracy revealed with such stark clarity across the political spectrum; and the utter incapacity to perceive these simple facts. Exceptions are marginal indeed.

Within Nicaragua

I have kept to the factual circumstances and the reaction here, saying nothing about why Nicaraguans voted as they did under the conditions imposed upon them by the terrorist superpower, an important question, but a different one. But the Nicaraguan reaction merits a few comments for what it shows about U.S. political culture.

Within the United States, the standard reaction was joyous acclaim for the Nicaraguan "masses" who had triumphed over their oppressors in fair elections. In Nicaragua, the reaction seems to have been rather different. After informing us that the winners were "the Nicaraguans, of course," the New Republic turns to its Managua correspondent Tom Gjelten, who writes: "UNO victory rallies were small, mostly private affairs, and there was no mass outpouring into the streets. Most people stayed home." Almost a month after the elections, AP reported that "UNO supporters still have not held a public celebration." Many other reports from around Nicaragua confirm the somber mood, which contrasts strikingly to the Unity in Joy here. The comparison may suggest something about who won and who lost, but the thought was not pursued — here, that is; in Latin America, the meaning was taken to be clear enough.[46]

[44] Lane, op. cit., possibly also the author of the unsigned New Republic editorial cited in note 5, to judge by the similarity of wording.

[45] NYT, Feb. 27; WP-Manchester Guardian Weekly, March 11, WP weekly, March 5; CSM, Feb. 28, 1990.

[46] Gjelten, New Republic, March 19 (written weeks earlier; I am concerned only with the facts he describes, not his personal interpretation of them); Candice Hughes, AP, March 19, 1990.

AP reporter Candice Hughes filed an interesting report from Bluefields on the Atlantic Coast, where "Anti-communism runs deep, a legacy of the region's ties to the Yankees who mined its gold, cut its lumber, fished its waters, and to the missionary fervor of the Moravians and the Capuchin priests who educated its children"; a well-known center of opposition to the Sandinistas with close ties of travel and trade with the United States, so much so that "anti-Cuban riots erupted when the government announced plans to send in more teachers" in 1980. A Cuban medical brigade has been working in Bluefields, "15 idealistic envoys of a revolution becoming isolated and stale," along with a construction brigade that is building 5,000 homes to replace those destroyed in Hurricane Joan (which devastated the region, eliciting aid from Cuba and U.S. citizens who are non-Americans by Times standards, but few others). The Cubans are living in a complex they built that will become a university when they leave. They stayed home after the elections, and "Bluefields got a taste of life without the Cubans," as "things fell apart" at the hospital and construction stopped. "After two days, community leaders went to the Cubans and persuaded them to return to work, reassuring them they were not only safe, but desperately needed. The experience converted all but the most fervent anti-communists in Bluefields," the Nicaraguan doctor who directs the local hospital said: "People changed colors like chameleons." Hughes reports that "today, many Bluefilenos dread the Cubans' departure," which "would strip Nicaragua's isolated South Atlantic coast" of its major medical services and "would shatter the vision" of the "sturdy new homes replacing shacks flattened by Hurricane Joan."[47]

Yet another Nicaraguan reaction is described by Times reporter Larry Rohter, in a typically bitter and scornful condemnation of the "internationalists," who carry out such despicable activities as fixing bicycles and distributing grain "to child care centers and maternity clinics," and who intend to continue "serving the vast majority of workers and peasants whose needs have not diminished," an activist in the Casa Benjamin Linder says. Rohter quotes Vice President-elect Virgilio Godoy, who says that the new government will keep a close eye on these intruders: "we are not going to permit any foreigner to interfere in our domestic political problems."[48]

In a well-disciplined society, no one laughs when such statements are reported. Under the totalitarian Sandinistas, foreigners were permitted to forge a political coalition based upon the terrorist force they created to attack the country and to pour millions of dollars into supporting it. Foreigners engaged in what the World Court condemned as "the unlawful use of force" against Nicaragua were nevertheless allowed to fund a major newspaper that called for the overthrow of the government and openly identified with the terrorist forces pursuing these ends, proxies of the foreign power funding the journal. Under these totalitarians, such foreigners as Jeane Kirkpatrick and U.S. Congressmen were permitted to enter the country to present public speeches and news conferences calling for the overthrow of the government by violence and supporting the foreign-run terrorist forces. "Human Rights" investigators accompanied by contra lobbyists posing as "experts" were permitted free access, along with journalists who were scarcely more than agents of the foreign power attacking the country. Nothing remotely resembling this record can be found in Western democracies; in the United States, Israel, England, and other democracies, such freedoms would be inconceivable, even under far less threat, as the historical record demonstrates with utter clarity.

[47] AP, March 18, 1990.
[48] Rohter, NYT, March 13, 1990.

But now, at last, totalitarianism is yielding to freedom, so Nicaragua will no longer tolerate "interference" from foreigners who have the wrong ideas about how to contribute to reform and development, foreigners who are not working for the violent overthrow of the government but rather are supporting the only mass-based political force in the country.

In short, freedom in Nicaragua is over, so, naturally, "Americans are United in Joy." Again we see exactly what is meant by "freedom" and "democracy" in the elite political culture.

Looking Ahead

Let us depart now from the factual record and turn to a few speculations.

A fundamental goal of U.S. policy towards Latin America (and elsewhere), long-standing and well-documented, is to take control of the police and military so as to assure that the population will not act upon unacceptable ideas. As Edward Herman has observed, just as there are "worthy and unworthy victims" (the worthy being those persecuted by official enemies, who arouse great anguish, the unworthy being our victims, whose fate is therefore a matter of indifference), so there are "worthy and unworthy armies." Worthy armies, such as those of Somoza, El Salvador, Guatemala, South Africa, or Indonesia, need no interference, because they are doing their job quite satisfactorily. Unworthy armies, which do not meet these high standards, must be reformed. In Nicaragua, then, the goal will be to restore something like the Somozist National Guard, following the prescriptions of the Carter doves.

A secondary goal is to destroy any independent press. Sometimes this requires murderous violence, as in El Salvador and Guatemala. The broad elite approval of the practice is evident from the reaction when it is carried out; typically, silence, coupled with praise for the advances towards democracy. Sometimes market forces suffice, as in Costa Rica, where the Spanish language press is a monopoly of the ultra-right, so there are no concerns about freedom of the press.

More generally, there are two legitimate forces in Latin America: First and foremost, the United States; secondarily, the local oligarchy, military, and business groups that associate themselves with the interests of U.S. economic and political elites. If these forces hold power without challenge, all is well. The playing field is level, and if formal elections are held, it will be called "democracy." If there is any challenge from the general population, a firm response is necessary. The establishment left and right will typically differ over tolerable levels of atrocities, repression, and general misery.

In Nicaragua, it will not be so simple to attain the traditional objectives. Any resistance to them will, of course, be condemned as "Sandinista totalitarianism." One can write the editorials in advance, just as those with sufficient literary skill might be able to write the unpublishable editorials on the reality of life in U.S. domains.

Perhaps the political coalition constructed by Washington will be unable to meet the demands imposed upon it by the master. If so, new managers will be needed. It is clear where to turn. There is a mass-based political organization, and if it can be brought to heel, perhaps it can be assigned the task. The point was made obliquely by the Wall Street Journal, in its triumphal editorial on the elections. "In time," the editors wrote, "Daniel Ortega may discover the moderating influences of democratic elections, as did Jamaica's Michael Manley, himself formerly a committed Marxist."[49] Translating from Newspeak, the U.S. may have to try the Jamaica model, first

[49] WSJ, March 1, 1990.

working to undermine and destroy a popular movement, then lavishly supporting the preferred capitalist alternative that proved to be a miserable failure, then turning to the populist Manley to manage the resulting disaster — but *for us,* now that he and the population generally have been tamed, and understand that they have no choice but to follow orders.

The point is widely understood, though generally left tacit in the media. As if by instinct, when the election returns were announced, Ortega was instantaneously tranformed from a villain to a statesman, with real promise. He can be kept in the wings, to be called upon if needed to follow our directions.

The policy is routine. Once popular movements are crushed, once the dream of a better future is abandoned and "the masses" understand that their only hope is to shine shoes for whitey, then it makes good sense to allow a "democratic process" that may even bring former enemies to power. They can then administer the ruins, for us. A side benefit is that populist forces are thereby discredited. Thus the U.S. was quite willing to permit Manley to take over after the failure of the Reaganite free market experiment, and would observe with equanimity (indeed, much pride in our tolerance of diversity) if Juan Bosch wins the elections in the Dominican Republic. There is no longer any need to send the Marines to bar him from office as in 1965, when the population arose, defeating the army and restoring the populist constitutional regime that had been overthrown by a U.S.-backed coup. After years of death squads, starvation, mass flight of desperate boat people, and takeover of the rest of the economy by U.S. corporations, we need not be troubled by democratic forms. On the same reasoning, it is sometimes a good idea to encourage Black mayors — if possible, civil rights leaders — to preside over the decline of what is left of the inner cities of the domestic Third World. Once demoralization is thorough and complete, they can run the wreckage and control the population. Perhaps Ortega and the Sandinistas, having come to their senses after a dose of reality administered by the guardian of order, will be prepared to take on this task if the chosen U.S. proxies fail.

If all works well, Maynes's establishment left will once again be able to celebrate what he calls the U.S. campaign "to spread the cause of democracy." It is true, he observes, that sometimes things don't quite work out. Thus "specialists may point out that the cause of democracy suffered some long-run setbacks in such places as Guatemala and Iran because of earlier CIA successes' in overthrowing governments there," but ordinary folk

[text is missing here — JBE]

will not be troubled by the human consequences of these setbacks.

More successful is the case of the Dominican Republic, or Grenada, where the cause of democracy triumphed at not too great a cost to us, "and the island has not been heard from since." There has been no need to report the recent meaningless elections, the social dissolution and decay, the state of siege instituted by the official democrats, the decline of conditions of life, and other standard concomitants of "the defense of freedom." Perhaps, with luck, Nicaragua will prove to be a success of which we can be equally proud. Panama is already well along the familiar road.

While the official left and right differ in their tolerance for atrocities and misery, we should bear in mind that the standards are quite high, on all sides. As an illustration, consider the events of March 22–24 in El Salvador, a three-day commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Romero. "The poor, the humble and the devout flocked by the thousands" to honor his memory at a Mass in the cathedral where he was murdered, AP reported, filling the plaza and the streets outside after a march led by 16 bishops, three from the United States. Romero is being formally proposed for sainthood by the Salvadoran Church — the first

such case since Archbishop Thomas a Becket was assassinated at the altar over 800 years ago. Americas Watch published a report on the shameful decade, symbolically bounded by "these two events — the murder of Archbishop Romero in 1980 and the slaying of the Jesuits in 1989" — which offer "harsh testimony about who really rules El Salvador and how little they have changed," people for whom "priest-killing is still a preferred option" because they "simply will not hear the cries for change and justice in a society that has had too little of either." In his homily, Archbishop Romero's successor, Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas, said that "For being the voice of those without voice, he was violently silenced."[50]

The victims remain without voice, and the Archbishop remains silenced as well. No high-ranking official of the Cristiani government or his Arena party attended the Mass, not even their leader Roberto d'Aubuisson, assumed to be responsible for the assassination in coordination with the U.S.-backed security forces. The U.S. government was also notable for its absence. The anniversary passed with scarcely a notice in the country that funds and trains the assassins. Not a great surprise, after all, considering that from the start the media suppressed the circumstances of the assassination, the evidence of military complicity, and the role of the U.S. government in the background events and the aftermath. The assassination did not even merit an editorial in the New York Times. Why trouble, then, to remember ten years later?[51]

There should be no further embarrassment, however — assuming that there is any now. This will be the last public religious homage to Romero for decades, because Church doctrine prohibits homage for candidates for sainthood. Revulsion at the assassination of Thomas a Becket compelled King Henry II, who was held to be indirectly responsible, to do penance at the shrine. One will wait a long time for a proper reenactment, another sign of the progress of civilization.

Outside of the official left-right spectrum, the non-people have other values and commitments, and a quite different understanding of responsibility to something other than ourselves and of the cause of democracy and freedom. They will also understand that solidarity work is now becoming even more critically important than before. Every effort will be made to de-educate the general population so that they sink to the intellectual and moral level of the cultural and social managers. Those who do not succumb have a historic mission, and should not forget that.

[50] Douglas Grant Mine, AP, March 23, 24; Americas Watch, A Year of Reckoning, March 1990.

[51] I saw one notice of the anniversary, in the religion pages of the Boston Globe, by Richard Higgins, who is writing a book about Romero: "Religion Notebook," BG, March 24, 1990, p. 27. On the record of suppression and distortion of the assassination, see Turning the Tide, 103f.; Manufacturing Consent, 48ff.

Noam Chomsky
The Decline of the Democratic Ideal
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