



VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM
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Daniel Ortega obsession with power

The massive popular uprising -with youth/peasants/autoconvocados claiming for democracy in Nicaragua last year- was not a random political situation, the crisis had been in the making for decades.

Daniel Ortega's failed "Sandinista" revolution, corruption and economic disaster from 1979 to 1990, along with the negotiation of the international community, forced the autocrat to organize an election in 1990. This opened the door for a democratic process in Nicaragua for the first time in 53 years after the Anastasio Somoza Garcia, Luis Somoza Debayle, Anastasio Somoza Debayle and Daniel Ortega dictatorships. By that time, Daniel Ortega was part in power for 11 years. Violeta Chamorro, wife of the journalist Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, killed by the Somoza regime (with alleged complicity from Ortega's FSLN) won the first democratic election with 54.74% of the votes, defeating the eternal candidate Daniel Ortega. Chamorro inherited a dysfunctional government, a hyperinflated war-torn economy and a communist corrupt model. She was able to end the war's hyperinflation, re-establish international banking credit, improve the relationship with the US, recover the economy and install a workable constitutional government.

Daniel Ortega has been obsessed with power and been an eternal candidate since 1990. He was defeated in 1996 by Arnaldo Aleman from the PLC party who won with 50.99% of the votes and defeated once again in 2001 by Enrique Bolaños who won with 56.28% of the votes. In 2006, Daniel Ortega took advantage of the division in the main political party and won the presidency with 38.07% of the votes. From 1990 to 2006 Daniel Ortega with his Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), conspired against all the governments, by organizing demonstrations and blocking any institutional changes.: making it difficult for them to operate efficiently. After the 2006 election, having barely won it and obtaining a minority in Congress (National Assembly), he reached an agreement with former president Arnaldo Aleman to control all the institutions in exchange for immunity for his crimes (corruption, racketeering, and money laundering). "The Ortega-Aleman Pact", allowed Ortega to control Congress, appoint new justices for the Supreme Court (among his closest collaborators), select and appoint members of the Supreme Electoral Council; control all the institutions and start a time of massive corruption and impunity. Thanks to his contribution to Ortega's absolute power, the Supreme Court absolved Aleman in 2009 from his 20-year sentence.



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Although the constitution had banned the re-election of a sitting president and explicitly prohibits re-election, the Constitutional Court, composed by Ortega's loyal appointees, some of them with expired mandates, ruled in 2009 to lift the ban allowing Ortega to run for one additional term. In those years Daniel Ortega also began his efforts to control the independent media, persecuted civil society, and eliminated all the institutional independence. Ortega also learned the lesson and instead of combating the elites, he became partner in crime with several major business owners. He also transformed the government in a massive structure of corruption. Daniel Ortega also found a major supporter for his electoral campaigns and corruption schemes, Hugo Chavez Frias from Venezuela. Hugo Chavez allowed Ortega to established major corruption and money laundering rings with Albanisa, partnership between the government of Nicaragua and PDVSA and other "commercial" and political agreements. In 2007, Ortega's government started receiving hundreds of millions of dollars in oil cooperation from Venezuela, the latest number is \$4,950 million dollars. Ortega's absolute control of the electoral authority and fraudulent elections, plus the support of his friend Aleman, allowed Daniel Ortega to "win" the 2011 election, this time his supporters allocated him 62.46% of the votes.

Controlling the main opposition party, banning other parties, persecuting candidates/leaders, crushing the independent media, controlling the security forces and supporting corrupt members of the opposition (Ortega's own opposition that will be useful to divide and conquer) and controlling all the institutions, Ortega and his cronies applied the Dictator's Manual; strong government and weak/divided opposition.

With total control of the National Assembly and the institutions, Daniel Ortega reformed the Constitution in 2013 to established new electoral rules and indefinite re-election, designed to keep the Sandinista leader in power for life. Four months before the elections, the Nicaraguan Supreme Court gave the opposition Independent Liberal Party (PLI) control to Ortega's cronies, removed 16 deputies/parliamentarians from the PLI and its Sandinista Renovation Movement from the National Assembly, banned numerous candidates from running and Ortega announced that international observers would not be allowed to oversee the elections. After numerous pressures against the regime for the fraudulent election, the regime tricked the Organization of American States (OAS) and offered an electoral reform in 2016, but never fulfilled its promises.

Ortega easily secured his fraudulent "victory" in the 2016 general elections and violating the Constitution once again, he imposed his wife as Vice-President. In January 2017, Daniel Ortega assumed office as President for a third consecutive term. Rosario Murillo, his wife, assumed office as Vice-President for the first time.

Ortega has ruled the impoverished nation for much of the past four decades, as head of the Junta of National Reconstruction or as president for 24 years and as head of the opposition in Congress and as main opposition candidate for another 16 years.

Nicaragua Backlash to Fundamental Freedoms

After 13 years continuously in power, Daniel Ortega has been efficiently dismantling all the institutions, including the once efficient National Police, and has been ruling as a ruthless dictator. Before 2018, allowing the business sector and some parts of the faith-based movements to be part of his power-structure, and exploiting the divisions of the Nicaraguan political actors, allowed him to go unnoticed by



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the international community. At the same time, during those years the regime persecuted journalists and human rights defenders. Attacks against women's human rights defenders increased because of the claims against Daniel Ortega's systematic rape of minors, including his own stepdaughter. Women's civil society organizations reported receiving death threats as well as being arbitrarily detained and attacked with the complicity or acquiescence of state officials. All the reports from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, Wola, among others, continuously showed the exponential human rights deterioration in Nicaragua from 2006 to 2017, aggravated by the massive crimes against humanity perpetrated by the regime in 2018.

I have been denouncing the corruption and human rights violations in Nicaragua for the last two decades, even for a foreigner that had a price tag, in February 2, 2016, when I traveled to Nicaragua to meet with local civil society organizations, and diplomatic officials. The regime detained me at the airport denied entry to the country, held overnight, and forced to return to Washington the next day.

The regime also was effective threatening any potential leader and controlling the universities, by brutal violence; the hard grip to power was effective in a combination of bribes, corruption and repression.

Nicaragua now is a criminal family business runs by Ortega, his family and close collaborators; a brutal corrupt dictatorship.

International Partners in Crime

One of the key partners to Nicaragua regime has been the Venezuelan dictatorship. Chavez and now Maduro have been supporting the regime with several corruption rings, money laundering, weapons and technical support to control the opposition. Same applies for Cuba's expertise torturing and security forces training. Russia also played a major role, providing the regime with weapons and expertise. Some sources indicate that Nicaragua also entered in the money laundering and drug trafficking rings. Communist Cuba's influence is also unmistakable. As one of Cuba's two primary client states in the Western Hemisphere, Nicaragua has long leaned on the Castros for training and support, stretching back to when Daniel Ortega himself trained in Cuba for guerilla warfare. In my conversations with Nicaraguan protestors and exiles over the past year, they often described the Cuban-like tactics used by police and paramilitary gangs, showing Havana's influence on training. Former prisoners also report hearing Cuban accents in Nicaragua's prisons, where torture is all too common. Rape, sexual abuse and human and moral degradation, as part of their physical and psychological torture, have been the same methods used in Venezuela and Nicaragua; a clear pattern of the Cuban training. A behavior supported by Daniel Ortega, denounced as a perverse rapist by his stepdaughter and other Nicaraguan underage girls whose lives were destroyed by the monster.

Uprising in the Making

Daniel Ortega appetite continue growing and in 2013 he proposed the construction of the Grand Interoceanic Canal, a shipping route through Nicaragua to connect the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean; Nicaragua's National Assembly approved a bill to grant a 50-year concession to finance and manage the project to a Chinese "investor" close to Ortega and also the expropriation of extensive



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portions of land in the whole country. The Canal was a clear attempt by Daniel Ortega to take control of the land and benefit his inner-circle.

In 2014, when the construction of the Nicaragua Canal was moving forward, land-owners' peasants/campesinos began a movement to oppose the construction of the Canal and defend their land; hundreds of protesters blocked roads and clashed with police during weeks. That was the birth of the Movimiento Campesino and the struggle to reestablish Democracy in Nicaragua. The Campesinos achieved numerous successful demonstrations in the country-side and in Managua. Tens of thousands of Nicaraguans thus began to join the Campesinos and also to protest against President Ortega's canal, but also against repression, corruption, lack of freedoms and the corrupt electoral system. The government responded with police brutality and the use of pro-government militias to intimidate the protesters. Up to that moment, the allegedly fight against drug-trafficking and economic stability of Nicaragua prevented the international community to pressure the regime.

The combination of a corrupt and violent regime with the 2016 massive electoral fraud motivated other groups to demonstrate against the regime. On April 13, 2018, several youth groups began a demonstration against lack of action from the regime to control the environmental disaster at the Indio de Maiz Park. Other groups joined the demonstrations and the government stopped the situation with violence.

The sentiment of frustration due to the lack of democratic spaces, massive corruption and lack of opportunities continued. The government made a mistake reforming the social security, increasing the contributions and reducing the benefits; retired people demonstrated against the decision forcing the government to use brutal force against defenseless old retired people. That was the ignition to youth demonstrations on April 18. Instead of negotiation, the regime and the pro-government militias used massive force to stop the demonstrations and went against the universities; violence instead of deterrent motivated more students to join the demonstrations as well as the Campesino Movement and common citizens self-named Autoconvocados. Clashes against the police and pro-government militias extended in the whole country and several demonstrators blocked numerous streets and chaos spread from April to June 2018.

After the 2018 uprising

For the people of Nicaragua, hope for democracy is fading fast. The nationwide protests that began one year ago on April 18th, 2018 captured America's attention and put pressure on its communist-trained president, Daniel Ortega, and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo. Despite the subsequent murder of more than 500 protestors, the imprisonment and disappearance of more than 1,200 others, and the flight of more than 50,000 Nicaraguans, the couple still clings to power over their impoverished nation, even as protests continue.

Deteriorating conditions led to widespread protests that threatened to topple the regime. While the protests captured headlines, the dictator cracked down and was determined to outlast the crisis. He promised dialogue and vague reforms, winning optimism and modest praise from the international community. Using time as an ally to remain in power until 2021 and beyond. Finally, the regime turned to its allies, communist Cuba and Venezuela, to bolster its rule and repression.



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The dictator playbook, developed by Cuba and Venezuela, has worked well for Ortega and his wife, if not for the Nicaraguan people. While the protests originally began over social-security reforms, they quickly morphed into a general revolt against Ortega's authoritarian rule. The crisis peaked last spring, when hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets. The regime responded with police and military brutality. It also empowered paramilitary gangs, funded and provided sophisticated Russian weapons, to target pacific demonstrators, students, doctors, journalists and Catholic bishops and priests without the appearance of state involvement. In my conversations with some members of the Nicaraguan military, under anonymity, they claimed that Venezuelan and Cuban experts trained those paramilitary pro-government forces.

At the same time, Ortega called for a national dialogue with the "Civic Alliance," a group of students, civic, and business groups that represents the protestors. The first round of dialogue occurred last spring and summer, collapsing without any agreement. The second round began in February but fell apart in late March after Ortega refused to agree on political reforms, call an early election, or allow international organizations like the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights or the United Nations to monitor progress. The regime, which earlier tried to buy goodwill by releasing under house arrest roughly 200 political prisoners, says it will "continue working toward national understanding." But the dialogue is a delaying tactic. Ortega's real goal is to tighten his and his wife's grip on power – no matter how long it takes and by any means necessary. Time is in his side.

Behind the headlines, the regime has driven democratic advocates into hiding and responds to continued protests with more violence and brutality. Earlier this year, new police officers were seen training with Russian military equipment, including submachine guns and rocket-propelled grenades.

Compared to a year ago, the protest movement has lost steam – largely due to the brutal effectiveness of the regime crackdown. But the desire for reform, accountability, and democracy remains strong, especially as Nicaragua's economy crumbles. Already the Western Hemisphere's second-poorest country; its economy is now expected to shrink by 5% this year. We can also expect the citizen exodus to grow. In my recent visit Central America, I witnessed how Nicaragua's southern neighbor, Costa Rica, is already straining under the refugee burden.

What to do?

To its credit, the United States initially responded to Nicaragua's crisis with a show of strength and support for the protestors. The Trump administration issued sanctions in June and November, including on Vice President Murillo. Congress then passed the "NICA Act" to allow further sanctions and use U.S. influence to block finance support for Nicaragua at the World Bank, the IMF, and Inter-American Development Bank. These sanctions also targeted the Venezuelan regime funds through the Ortega-Maduro business scam called Albanisa, more scrutiny is necessary to the corruption between Venezuela and Nicaragua. But apart from few sanctions to few individuals last year, the US government has been playing the negotiation card with the regime, supporting a false dialogue between the autocrat and the business driven Alianza, freezing the sanction process.

Despite these actions, Ortega and his wife show no signs of supporting real reform, much less stepping down. That's why President Trump and Congress must take even stronger steps. The regime shows signs of concerns due to the sanctions against Ortega's family, but more credible threats need to be in place.



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To start, the United States must remain vigilant in international forums, especially the Organization of American States. Just as it did in 2017 when the Ortega's regime signed an agreement to reform the electoral system to avoid sanctions before the fraudulent elections, now Nicaragua's rulers want the OAS to rubber-stamp fake electoral reforms, thereby restoring the country's international legitimacy. Fake and incomplete electoral reforms or an election without a real transition which should exclude Ortega and his cronies in power will be a disaster, Ortega and his wife will find a way to participate and manipulate the election. Instead, the Trump administration should rally the region to keep Nicaragua isolated and push for the departure of the dictatorship. The European Union needs to review the bilateral agreement with Nicaragua, CAFTA, to address the lack of rule of law and human rights violations and contribute with sanctions against the regime. Other Latin American countries need to join the US applying sanctions to the regime.

It is not only about reforming the electoral authority or some cosmetic changes or some basic commitments by the autocrat, the whole system is rigged. The judiciary, parliament, security forces and media controlled by the regime will be counterproductive to any possibility of change in Nicaragua, no matter how many agreements you reach with Ortega to reform the electoral laws.

Long-term, however, Daniel Ortega must go. To that end, the United States should enact even harsher financial, political and trade sanctions, visa restrictions and court indictments – starting with Daniel Ortega himself and his family members. The Trump administration could also sanction active and retired military officials and entities responsible for – or complicit in – the violence against protestors, journalist and opposition leaders. IRS needs to review the retirement funds in the US from the Nicaraguan military and their family members. Finally, sanctions are warranted against many of Nicaragua's business leaders, who enjoy wide latitude under Ortega and Murillo and therefore support them. The Ortega regime would struggle to survive if the US and the Nicaraguan business community withdrew its support. I have been maintaining a close contact with leaders from different movements and faith-based groups in Nicaragua and they agreed in the need for thought sanctions to elevate the political and financial cost to the regime.

The US and the international community need to pay more attention to the internal struggle and provide more technical, financial, political, communicational and strategic support to territorial movements, including the Campesinos, youth/student, auto-convocados, indigenous and faith-based movements, current projects are DC-based approaches with minimum impact. The Civic Alliance strategically reduced the influence of those movements to benefit the behind doors negotiations between the private sector and the government. It is time to combine the effect of the streets, effective sanctions and ultimate pressure against the regime.

Now several members of the opposition, business leaders and "potential" presidential candidates have been negotiating behind doors for a possibility of a 2021 election with better electoral conditions. The Ortega's regime has been allowing them to believe that he is willing to concede some changes in the electoral system. Numerous contacts between the Ortega's regime and the OAS and numerous rumors of potential concessions. For a person obsessed with power, who has been controlling the government for 24 years and has been in the spotlight since he was 15 years old, the idea of losing power is impossible, so we can presume that Ortega is simply manipulating the ambitions of the rest of the sectors.



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Sadly 2021 looks like it's on the plan of our administration. That is not the best approach.

The regime announced a plan to release all the political prisoners by June 18, but it is part of the plan to win time. The regime also approved an Amnesty Law, giving free ride to all the murderers, torturers and pro-government militia killers.

Without stronger action by the United States, Nicaragua will likely fall into an even worse dictatorship and Cuban domination, just as Venezuela has over the past half-decade. We know what's coming. For the sake of the Nicaraguan people, we can't just wait for it to happen.

Meanwhile, the United States has shifted its attention from Nicaragua to Venezuela. But Nicaragua deserves renewed attention – and action – too. Otherwise, Daniel Ortega may yet ruin his country just as Nicolas Maduro ruined his, and in the 2021 election Mr. Ortega or his wife will win again.