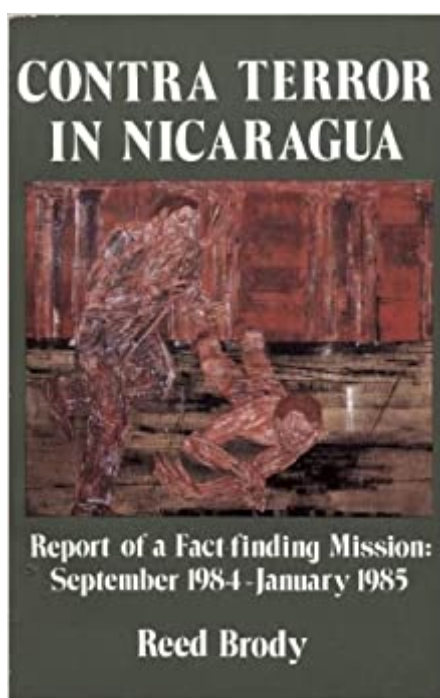


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Contra Terror In Nicaragua: Report Of A Fact-finding Mission: September 1984-January 1985



Synopsis

A telling indictment of the U.S. policy of attempting to destabilize Nicaragua through a campaign of terror directed at its people. The testimony of the victims of contra attacks exposes the policy of torture, murder, rape, kidnapping, and random violence employed by the people Ronald Reagan describes as "the moral equals of our founding fathers".

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Customer Reviews

This is an important historical record. Don't expect any lavish prose or entertaining reading. This is "just the facts", documenting case after case of attacks against civilians by lavishly US funded and orchestrated Contra forces in the 1980's. In the book, you get an introductory explanation of the methods and sources for the information, followed by background information of the political climate. Then you get a number of selected individual cases of attacks on civilians that are thoroughly detailed with names, dates and descriptions. Each of these stories is told over a couple pages each. Lastly are a cronology of Contra attacks on civilians between 1981 and 1984 which seems to list a couple hundred instances with a short description of each, and the source notes. Many cases are compiled from the reports of groups like America's Watch, Center for Constitutional Rights, Washington Office on Latin America...etc. Many are compiled from eye-witness and victim's affidavits, and from the extensive report of Reed Brody's fact finding team from between 1984-85 in Nicaragua. What you will see here are the tactics used by the people that the US government was hailing as "freedom fighters", and whom Reagan called "the moral equals of our founding fathers". The overriding point, and what this book shows, is that the attacks against civilians were not random

errors, or the acts of a few renegade contras. They were conscious, pervasive and intentional policy of the leadership. I'm writing this review over 15 years after the publication of this book, but it's very important to know what our government was really doing. And, in the year 2002, When "terrorism" is on everyone's mind, and you hear our leaders repeatedly saying things like: "there's no justification for attacking civilians" or how we must go after any evil "states that sponsor terrorism", it's important to remember the not too distant history, and consider how well our own government would measure up to these principles.

This book is the result of an 1984 fact-finding mission to Nicaragua undertaken by Reed Brody, who is now with Human Rights Watch. It is based on a rigorous methodology involving sworn affidavits of personal eyewitness accounts of atrocities. The witnesses were interviewed with no Nicaraguan government presence or interference. The book consists of detailed descriptions of numerous attacks on civilians by the Contras. A section is devoted to attacks on coffee pickers; there is one on attacks on farms and villages, and another on attacks on civilian vehicles. Also included are sections on kidnappings and rapes. When it appeared, this book was considered dangerous enough by the Reagan administration that Brody was publicly denounced by President Reagan who attempted to smear his reputation. Unfortunately, "Contra Terror in Nicaragua" is accurate. It provides a glimpse into the Reagan administration's policy of directing systematic violence at a civilian peasant population for the purpose of ousting the government of Nicaragua. It will be recalled that this government won internationally certified elections in 1984 and was the choice of the people. The campaign of violence was unremitting and lasted about nine years. Brody's book is an important historical document on an extremely sad and disturbing episode in American foreign policy. The people in Washington who were responsible for this are rightly regarded as war criminals. This includes John Negroponte, currently US ambassador to Iraq. From 1981-84 he was overseeing operation of the Contras from their bases in Honduras, where he was US ambassador.

Unlike some Americans who read a book or two and, moved by a guilt born of real or imaginary imperialistic sins, from their armchairs undertake to demonizing their own country, what I know about Nicaragua I learned it first hand, as I spent there three critical years (1985-1988). Remarkably enough, after my experience I have very little to criticize to the US on this matter. Stating that the Contras acted as outright terrorists might be somehow fair, perhaps, but certainly is far from complete. It totally leaves out what was available to them, and how bad the other fellows were. Even if the Contras were at some point behaving as terrorists --more on that later-- the Contras were not

born as terrorists (guerrilla yes, terrorists, no) nor were they created by the US. In fact they were a product of the Sandinistas themselves. The Sandinistas began their struggle against Somoza in 1962, if my memory serves me well, but they didn't make a chink in Somoza's armor nor they recruited many followers until the dictator made the colossal blunder of killing Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, the democratic director of La Prensa newspaper, in 1978. That was Somoza's end. All political parties and everybody joined forces against him; many followed the Sandinistas not due to a shared socialist belief but because they were the only armed political force at that time. But the revolution was not done only by the Sandinistas, a reality recognized by the fact that in the Junta appointed immediately after Somoza's exile (1979) Sandinistas were in the minority, while the majority was held by other, democratic parties. Later, the Sandinistas orchestrated a coup and managed to substitute a new Junta in which they held a majority. Months later they got rid of the remaining minority and began governing as dictators. And then wrongdoings began to pile up. For instance, it was previously agreed among the parties involved in the revolution that Somoza's newspaper was going to become the Government's paper; instead, the Sandinistas grabbed it and turned it into "Barricada", the Party line voice. Everybody realized then that, again, democracy was not going to happen in Nicaragua. Emigration began, and with it, opposition groups, among them the people who were later called "the Contras", organized themselves. The US happened to be the only country which financially assisted the Contras, but everybody in the opposition was agreed that it would have been much better if other countries would had joined in the support. But they didn't, because they were pinkos themselves and/or they operated under false assumptions: that as Somoza was bad any anti-Somoza had to be good, and if Conservatism + Imperialism is bad, then Leftism had to be good. Some European countries (Sweden comes to mind) fell into the trap to believing that as Scandinavian politicians are overwhelmingly honest the Sandinistas should be so, and then everything Sandinistas declared had to be true because they were saying it. Tell me about it. The US did everything in his power to avoiding a break up with the Sandinista government. Lawrence Pezzullo, then the US Ambassador to Managua exhorted his government to be patient, to avoid pushing Nicaragua into becoming a new Cuba. But it was a hopeless cause: anti Americanism was ingrained in the Commandantes' formation (they had studied in Moscow and or East Berlin) and it was projected even in the Sandinista Anthem, which goes "we fight against the Yankee, enemy of humankind". Somoza was a dictator and a bastard, no doubt about it, but for the common people he was just an alien figure who ignored them: Nicaraguans had to fend for themselves but on the other hand Somoza didn't mess with them. Somoza persecuted only political opponents who could threaten his regime. But when the Sandinistas took power that changed: they

began a systematic generalized brainwashing campaign; nobody was spared from the ideological propaganda that permeated all media and academic institutions. Unlike Somoza's indifference, they gave children compulsory education all right, but only their brand of it: primary school reading books consisted on short narrations about how Juanito is a good revolutionary child and how his father goes to the weekly Sandinista meeting, and so on. Or included copy-paste speeches by the nine Comandantes, or poems like the true story epic about a stone caressed and polished by the sea for millennia until a Nicaraguan grabbed it, and with it he lapidated a Yankee. History was reduced to the exploits of Augusto César Sandino (anti-American guerrilla of early XX Century) and to the 1979 Sandinista revolution; everything in between or before ceased to exist. First and second grade Arithmetic books consisted on additions of rifles, grenades, revolvers and the like. While children were brainwashed --as Palestinian children are today-- adults had to attend to the weekly meetings of the neighborhood Sandinista's committees, to report on their neighbors' suspicious activities and to show commitment to the revolution --otherwise they would not receive soap, tissue paper or the government rations of food (corn flour, sugar, rice and beans) now so necessary for survival. After the 1979 coup production and exports had shrunk immensely (for example, Matagalpa's Department coffee production fell from 1.5 million quintals to 300 thousand quintals) and people were starving. The token private sector remaining after the "socialization" was so deprived of inputs and freedoms --everything, from salaries to prices, was regulated-- that the economy became unmanageable and black market flourished on all areas. Tap water was rationed and daily power shortages lasted for hours. In spite of an unprecedented inflow of money from good intentioned countries, the trade surplus Nicaragua enjoyed under Somoza until July 1979 stopped, and the balance of trade kept being negative and dropping until the Sandinistas were forced to step down ten years later. The Mosquito coast became a safe haven for a blatant drug trafficking from South America to the US; the local Miskito Indians had no historical grievances against Somoza because he had just ignored them, but those who now complained of this drug trafficking in their front doors and protested the forced indoctrination they received from the Sandinistas were persecuted, relocated, imprisoned, tortured or killed. In Managua, the Seguridad del Estado (fashioned after the East German model) prison held an unaccounted and growing number of political adversaries who suffered and died malnourished and tortured, their plights ignored by those governments, NGO's and intellectuals (think Chomsky, Rushdie, Le Monde Diplomatique) who were so keen in congratulating the Sandinistas for their glorious revolution. Governments and visitors were easily fooled by the very good propaganda machine created by the Sandinistas. (It took me weeks and months to perceive the truth.) The government had a ready made answer for each objection and

held a double discourse: the same Cabinet Minister who sounded so democratic, peaceful and Western when speaking to foreigners, the next day delivered a combative Marxist speech to workers, children or party members. Same as lying to an infidel is a duty and a right of any good Muslim, lying to a capitalist was a right and a duty of a good bolshevik. Outwardly the Sandinistas strenuously denied being Communists, while in places barred to foreigners they hung huge signs with messages such as "No country attains Communism without a technical revolution". Week after week, I saw visitors and "fact-finding" committees (ha! like Brody's...) arrive, then being treated to the usual propaganda BS and leave, having entirely bought the party line. Under the circumstances, I suspect Mr Brody was the (willing/unwilling?) recipient of such orchestrated farce. On the other hand, I remember the case of a foreign politician who was invited by the Sandinistas but they forgot to pick him up at the airport, so I had the chance to take him to the places this man really wanted to visit. He asked to go to the popular agricultural *Grupos* market. In there he asked the opinion of an old poor lady who was selling vegetables on the floor. "We were better when ruled by my General" she said, meaning Somoza... This politician was the only one I know who left the country with an accurate impression of what was really going on. More than one prominent Nicaraguan had to spirit away a wife or a daughter to escape the lubricious harassment of Comandante Tomás Borge, Minister of the Interior (who, by the way, in his speeches rather pathetically imitated Fidel Castro's voice and style). Daniel Ortega ended up being an incestuous pedophile while his brother was never prosecuted for killing a guard during a bank robbery in Costa Rica. The Comandantes held private bank accounts abroad. At the beginning the Sandinistas expropriated all Somoza's properties. So far so good. Later, they took the properties of Somoza's accomplices, later his allies, friends, his family... Years later they were still confiscating properties; impossible to fathom which excuses they used at that point. Morally, the Comandantes were collapsed. Even though the Contras never ousted the Sandinistas, many forcefully drafted government soldiers died in the struggle against them; a struggle which could have been avoided if only the Sandinistas would have granted political plurality. When financial support from the URSS stopped and Western countries finally conditioned assistance to seeing democratic changes (yeah, right) the Sandinistas were forced to call for elections (otherwise they would have never done it, as Castro, their role model, never did). Beforehand they run a poll to be sure they would win anyway. All polling agencies told them they would win; all except an Argentine company who used Argentine pollsters. What happened was that people were too scared to tell the truth, but they dared to when they heard the distinct Argentine accent, which they didn't link to the many foreign "collaborators" or spies the Sandinistas had. Thus, with internationally monitored elections, the Sandinistas were defeated and

democracy, albeit flawed, returned to the country after so many years...As reported then by the Los Angeles Times, "Brody acknowledged that he had been recruited to write the report by a Washington lawyer who represents the Sandinista government and that he received help from the Managua regime during his three months in the country but insisted that his investigation was not swayed by those circumstances". As I wouldn't dare accusing Brody of bad faith, I at least find this to be a sterling example of colossal gullibility. From the get go, by calling the contras "counterrevolutionaries" the report shows its true color. The term was only used by the Sandinistas, since in fact, the Contras were part of the genuine, original, revolution. The Contra leaders were part of the group that ousted Somoza. Even if Mr Brody's 145 reported cases of Contras crimes are true they were nothing compared to the thousands and thousands of human rights violations committed by the Sandinista Government during ten years. When reviewing complex and statistically massive realities, everybody can come out with enough examples to prove whatever you want to demonstrate. This kind of arguing means nothing. Though biased, this report may have helped the Contras to clean up their act; being essentially democratic, unlike the Sandinistas the Contra leaders never denied that some of their men may have done bad things in the jungle. However, on the other hand it helped the Sandinistas to delay the far more crucial human right changes which needed to be implemented in Managua. Mr Brody was paid to do what he did: to find a hundred+ wrongdoings among the Contras and to ignore the thousands of wrongdoings of the Sandinistas; to splitting a hair while ignoring the big picture.

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