

THE SANDINISTAS SHOULD NOT SURRENDER POWER UNCONDITIONALLY

BY LUIS 'RAS BABA' CARDOSO

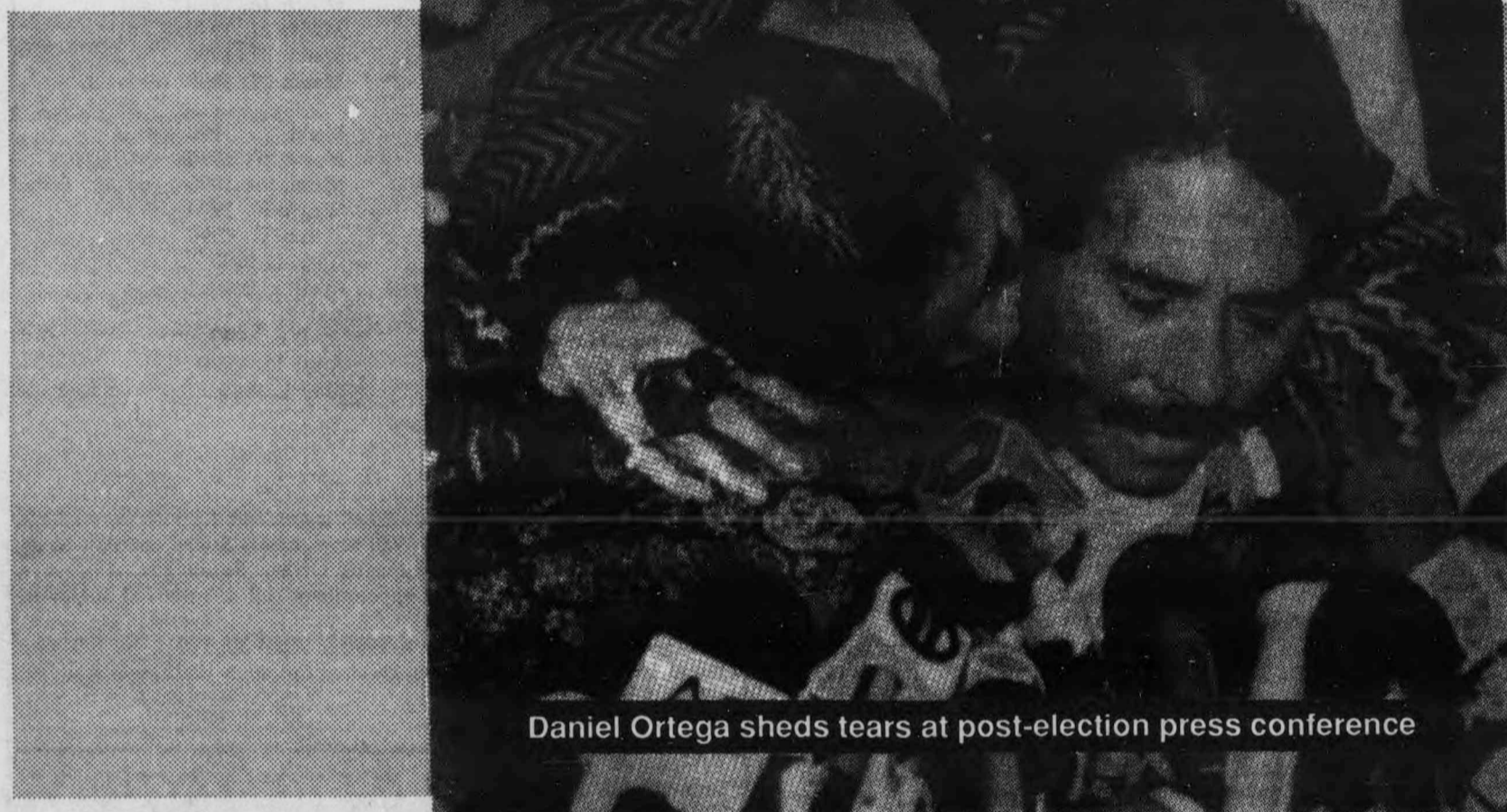
It was July 19, 1979 when the Sandinista National Liberation Front entered Managua, only two days after Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza fled in secret, and began what became a decade of rule. The Sandinista victory brought hope to a people that had been oppressed by a regime kept in power by the American government: there was new hope for democracy, and freedom of political expression, not to mention hope for improved economic conditions.

It was not long (November 1980), however, before the first attacks by anti-Sandinistas, who became known as Contras, began. It was also not long before the Reagan administration announced suspension of aid to Nicaragua, accusing the Sandinistas of aiding leftist guerillas in El Salvador, the home of another right-wing dictatorship propped up by the American government. The Reagan administration began supplying millions of dollars in military aid to the Contras in their war against the Sandinista government.

THE WORLD COURT ANNOUNCED THAT U.S. SUPPORT OF THE CONTRAS VIOLATED THE U.N. CHARTER'S BAN ON THE USE OF FORCE

The suspension of aid to Nicaragua, along with economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. and the war on the Sandinistas financed by the Reagan administration, nullified any chance of economic recovery in Nicaragua. Rather, economic conditions quickly worsened. During the past eight years the war against the Contras has cost Nicaragua more than 65,000 casualties. The U.S. economic blockade, not to mention the effect on an economy when 60% of the gross national product is used on defence, has created economic hardships that the Nicaraguan people could no longer bear. By 1989 the average income had fallen to 30% of its 1980 level.

It is clear that the U.S. sponsored war against the Nicaraguan people was both brutal and unprovoked. On April 8, 1984 Nicaragua asked the World Court to order the U.S. to stop their backing of the Contras; the Reagan administration announced that it would not accept the Court's ruling. After Daniel Ortega was inaugurated as president following national

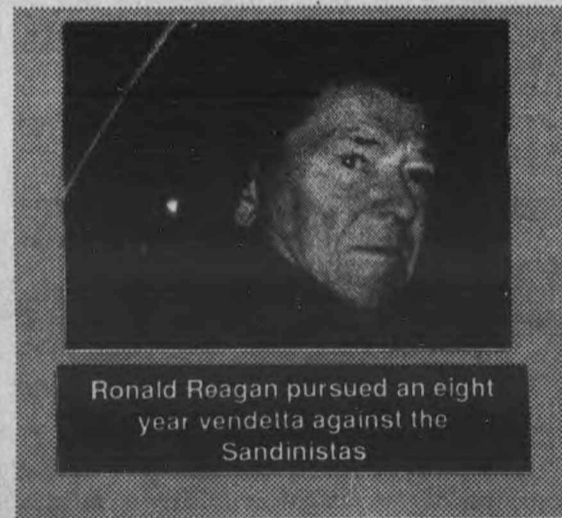


Daniel Ortega sheds tears at post-election press conference

elections Reagan announced a trade embargo against Nicaragua (May 1, 1985). Later that same summer (June 27) the World Court announced that U.S. support of the Contras violated the U.N. charter's ban on the use of force. On August 13, the U.S. Senate approved Reagan's request for military aid to the Contras.

Although the Sandinistas complied with every major request of the Reagan administration, the American backing of the Contras continued. Each new concession to the U.S. was followed by a new demand: these included open elections (1985), amnesties for political prisoners, democratic reforms, and freedom of the press. Even when Ortega signed the regional peace plan drawn up by Costa Rican president Oscar Arias (Arias received the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts) Congress cut military aid to the Contras but continued non-lethal aid, a token gesture to peace in Nicaragua, especially in light of revelations in 1986 that profits from the sale of arms to Iran were secretly diverted to the Contras.

The U.S. government's war on the Sandinistas has contributed to the unbearable economic conditions: Nicaragua's world record inflation surpassed 33,600% in 1988. Inflation eventually peaked in 1989 at an incredible 40,000%. After the five Central American presidents signed the peace accord on February 14, 1989, newly elected President George Bush

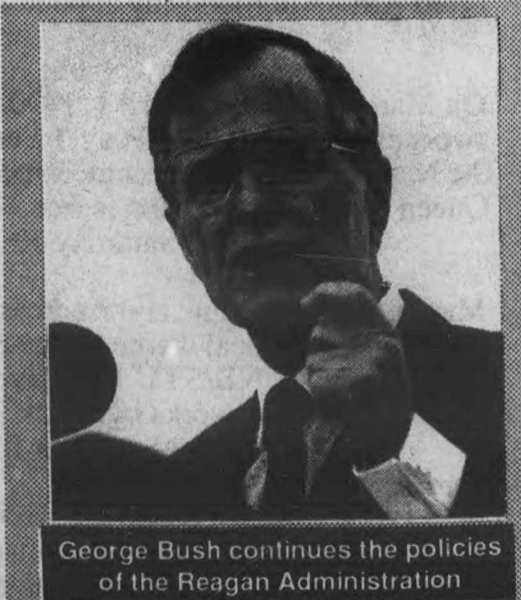


Ronald Reagan pursued an eight year vendetta against the Sandinistas

signed a \$49 million dollar non-lethal aid package for the Contras which expires February 28, 1990. When the five Central American presidents met in August to sign an agreement to dismantle the Contra's bases in Honduras, they asked for help from both the United Nations and the Organization of American States; the Bush administration, however, wanted the Contras to remain intact to guarantee that the election on February 25, 1990 would be free and fair. Contra commander Israel Galeano ignored the Tela accord and moved his troops back into Nicaragua for several attacks. This action forced Ortega to suspend the then 19-month old ceasefire.

The Sandinista government's decision to move up the election date and invite observers from the U.N. and the O.A.S. was a signal of their commitment to democracy in the face of continued American aggression. It was a gamble that the Nicaraguan people would accept the way they had governed for the past ten years, a gamble they lost. When power is turned over to the UNO government this transfer will be the first of its kind in Nicaraguan history.

The election result expresses the Nicaraguan nation's desire for change; it shows a haggard people, tired of years of civil war. Voters seem to have decided that their best option was to vote for Mrs. Chamorro, the candidate George Bush referred to as "our candidate," in the hope that the Bush administration would keep its promise



George Bush continues the policies of the Reagan Administration

to end the economic blockade upon a UNO victory. (The U.S. congress also provided \$9 million for Chamorro's campaign.) Political writers have also forwarded the view that perhaps the Nicaraguan people feared a "Panamanian solution" by Washington and decided to opt out of further resistance.

The Sandinistas have set conditions for a transfer of power, and rightly so. Ortega cannot allow the UNO coalition to dismantle programs and measures that took ten difficult years to accomplish. Washington could go a long way to helping Nicaragua by paying them the \$12.2 billion that the World Court ruled they owe in war reparations. This is unlikely, however, given that they have only offered Panama \$1 billion since the December invasion.

Allowing the UNO coalition free control over every aspect of the nation would be to concede victory to the U.S., and this is an unthinkable option for Daniel Ortega.

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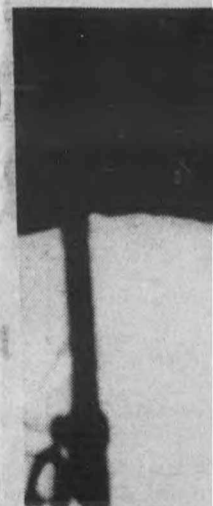
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