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SUBJECT
c. Master Set

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

8 February 1984

Dear Peter,

MEETING BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE
VICE PRESIDENT OF NICARAGUA ON 8 FEBRUARY 1985 AT 1030

The Prime Minister met Vice President Ramirez of Nicaragua this morning. He was accompanied by Dr. Nora Astorga, Deputy Foreign Minister and the Nicaraguan Ambassador. Sir William Harding was also present.

The Prime Minister said that she understood that Senor Ramirez had gone to the Oxford Union to take part in a debate the previous evening but matters had taken a rather strange course. Senor Ramirez said that in the absence of Congressman Kemp he had declined to take part in the debate itself but had spoken before it. He had found it an interesting experience and had been impressed by the enthusiasm of the undergraduates for Central America.

Senor Ramirez thanked the Prime Minister for giving him an opportunity to explain the situation in Central America as seen by the Nicaraguan Government. Nicaragua was a small and weak country which had been at war for the past four years. The result had been to spread tension throughout the region. Nicaragua wanted to solve its differences with the United States through dialogue and negotiation. They had worked through the Contadora Group and also through a series of bilateral meetings with the US Administration. A final agreement had been tabled in the Contadora Process in September 1984. But sadly very little progress had been made towards acceptance of it. Subsequently the United States Government had now also suspended the bilateral dialogue. Despite these setbacks, Nicaragua continued to be interested in finding a way out of its problems with the United States through negotiations and would like to restore the bilateral channel. Nicaragua was ready to enter into such commitments as necessary to achieve agreement. Nicaragua had no desire for confrontation with the United States.

The Prime Minister said that she would speak candidly and get down to fundamental issues. Nicaragua was evidently a Marxist/Leninist state. The Sandinista Front did not see elections in the same way as we did: for them it was just a

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means of keeping themselves in power. They had been ready to use censorship, harrassment of Opposition parties and unabashed exploitation of state funds and powers in order to ensure their victory and hold on power. Another characteristic of Marxist/Leninist states, shared by Nicaragua, was to maintain unnecessarily large military forces and to devote funds to this rather than to improving the standard of living of the people. The same pattern was to be found for instance in Ethiopia or in Vietnam. When Somoza - whom none of us had supported - had stepped down we had thought that the Sandinistas would create a genuine pluralist democracy. That had not come about. We were concerned by the enormous amount of arms being poured into Nicaragua, the presence of foreign military advisers and by Nicaraguan support for guerilla movements elsewhere in Central America. We believed that President Duarte was a real democrat and should be helped not undermined. Opinion in Britain had also been very shocked by the treatment of the Pope on his visit to Nicaragua. Nicaraguan foreign policy seemed to be identical with that of Cuba and the Soviet Union: indeed Nicaragua seemed to allow itself to be used by those countries. The United Kingdom supported the Contadora process but it had to be genuine. Arms had to be reduced and foreign advisers removed and any agreement must be verifiable.

Senor Ramirez thanked the Prime Minister for her frankness which he would match. Marxist/Leninist countries permitted only one party to stand in elections. This was not the case in Nicaragua where seven out of ten opposition parties had taken part in the recent elections. He admitted that censorship existed. But this resulted from the state of war and would be abolished as soon as conditions returned to normal. Nicaragua was not a totalitarian state. It was true that Nicaragua had large numbers of men under arms but again this was imposed on the government by the threat from the Contras. The enemy which Nicaragua was fighting had a large army supported by the United States. The Sandinistas had held elections within five years of their revolution. They had not been perfect but then Latin America was not famous for exemplary elections. They had resulted in a substantial opposition representation in the Assembly. The next step would be to draw up a new constitution. A National Committee would start work on this next week, involving many disparate groups such as businessmen and trade unionists, with the aim of arriving at a national consensus. As regards the Contadora process, Nicaragua was ready to enter into commitments on the withdrawal of foreign military advisers. There were only a small number. These would anyway have no role once a regional agreement was reached. They would also reduce their military forces. Nicaragua had no interest in being a military base for Soviet power and had signed no military agreements with the Soviet Union. United States fears on this were groundless. Nicaragua accepted that there must be some international mechanism for verifying that the Contadora Agreement would be implemented. This could be done either by the Contadora countries themselves or others.

The Prime Minister asked why Nicaragua supplied arms to the guerillas in El Salvador. Senor Ramirez denied that they did and claimed that the subject had not even been mentioned at the last round of bilateral discussions with the United States. This had been a problem in the early stages of confrontation but it was no longer an issue.

The Prime Minister said that she accepted that Nicaragua was not a classic Marxist/Leninist state of the sort where the governing party automatically won 99% of the votes in an election. But she did question whether it was a genuinely pluralist society. It seemed to her that the Sandinista Front were ready to manipulate elections so as to ensure that they remained in power. This was a contrast with, for instance, Belize where free elections had recently resulted in a peaceful change of government. Nicaragua followed the Marxist/Leninist pattern in providing military assistance to guerilla movements and subversion. Communist states were not interested in letting others chose their form of government. The excessive size of Nicaragua's military forces and its close relations with Cuba naturally made us suspicious of Nicaragua's intentions, which seemed to be to further Marxist/Leninism throughout Central America. Nicaragua seemed to her to show every sign of becoming a military base. The Prime Minister continued that she would be interested to know how the Nicaraguan government had got on with Dr. Kissinger during his visit and what they made of his report.

Senor Ramirez said that the Kissinger report had been overtaken by events. The Prime Minister had referred to Nicaragua as a military base. But possession of a few helicopters did not constitute a military threat to anyone. Some of the helicopters came from France, others from the Soviet Union (and rifles had been brought from Greece). They were for tactical not strategic use and did not in any way affect US security. Nicaragua's weapons were defensive. He repeated that Nicaragua had no military agreements with the Soviet Union or with any other country. This was a fundamental political decision of the Nicaraguan government.

The Prime Minister suggested looking to the future. Our attitude towards of Nicaragua would be based on whether or not there was progress towards genuine democracy, the removal of foreign military advisers, a reduction in the size of Nicaraguan armed forces, and the cessation of support for subversion in Central America. We had attended the meeting between EC Foreign Ministers and the Contadora states to try to help peace and stability in the area. We would watch progress with close attention. Senor Ramirez agreed that it was reasonable to wait and see how the consolidation of democracy in Nicaragua progressed. It had only been established for five years. Discussions on the constitution would be a good way forward. If the Sandinistas were to win the next election it would not necessarily mean that Nicaragua was a totalitarian state any more than if the Conservative Party won the next election in Britain. The Prime Minister asked whether the Sandinista

Party had really changed from being the organisation which had treated the Pope so appallingly during his visit. This had done Nicaragua's image immense harm in this country. Senor Ramirez said that these events had taken place during a time of political tension and had not been the government's responsibility. He admitted that they had been unfortunate and would not be repeated. Relations with the Vatican had since improved.

The Prime Minister concluded that she wished the Nicaraguan people well. She hoped the Sandinista government would find ways to reduce the size of its armed forces and its expenditure on arms and would make progress towards democracy. She hoped that the Contadora Process would succeed. Senor Ramirez repeated that Nicaragua was ready to commit itself to reduce arms and the size of its forces as well as get rid of all foreign military advisers. Nicaragua wanted good relations with the United States and sought to renew its dialogue with this purpose. He wanted to pass to the Prime Minister a message of peace and understanding. The frankness of her views had made it easier for him to express his own with clarity.

The meeting ended at 1140.

I enclose a copy of the statement issued by the No. 10 spokesman issued following the meeting. You may wish to send this to posts principally concerned.

*Yours sincerely,
Charles Powell*

C.D. POWELL

P.F. Ricketts, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

PRESS STATEMENT

Vice President Ramirez of Nicaragua called on the Prime Minister today at his own request. The meeting lasted an hour.

The Prime Minister expressed her concern on two major points - the substantial build-up of arms, troops and foreign military advisers in Nicaragua; and Nicaraguan support for attempts to destabilise democratic Governments elsewhere in Central America. She made clear that Britain's future relations with Nicaragua would be determined by progress towards establishing genuine democracy there, scaling down of armaments in the country and the cessation of support for subversion.

The Prime Minister confirmed Britain's support for the Contadora process, whilst stressing that it was essential to have proper procedures for the implementation and verification of any agreement.

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WICHTIG
KELATZ.

Vice-President

① B. Salvador

1. Conflict with U.S.

2. Contadora - peace

3. Bilateral Commitment

Costa Rica
- very few
loops.

Don't want confrontation
with U.S.

① Don't have censorship, - Don't limit
7 - 10. Censorship

② Good Relations -

Conflict - Not involved

Revolution - Disturb - 99.9%

Other parties

③ Contadora - Commitment - F.M. Asturias - leave
Not want to be military take
Reduce weapons.
Verified