

SUBJECT 3

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CABWTE 001/12

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FM CABINET OFFICE LONDON
TO THE WHITE HOUSE

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SECRET

MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
DEAR RON,

PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No. T 28/85

I WANTED TO LET YOU KNOW THAT I SAW VICE-PRESIDENT RAMIREZ OF NICARAGUA ON 8 FEBRUARY, AT HIS REQUEST. IN DECIDING TO DO SO, I WEIGHED THE RISK OF HANDING THE NICARAGUAN REGIME A PROPAGANDA BONUS AGAINST A CHANCE TO EXPRESS MOST SERIOUS MISGIVINGS, DIRECTLY AND AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL, ABOUT THE NATURE OF THAT REGIME AND ITS ACTIVITIES IN CENTRAL AMERICA. THE LATTER SEEMED TO ME THE MORE IMPORTANT. IT WAS VERY HELPFUL TO RECEIVE, BEFORE SEEING RAMIREZ, THE BACKGROUND INFORMATION IN MR. MCFARLANE'S MESSAGE TO SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG.

I TOLD RAMIREZ THAT IN MY VIEW NICARAGUA HAD MOST OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A MARXIST-LENINIST STATE BOTH INTERNALLY AND BY ITS SUPPORT FOR SUBVERSION BEYOND ITS BORDERS. I RECALLED OUR HOPES THAT, AFTER SAMOZA HAD BEEN TOPPLED, THE SANDINISTAS WOULD MOVE TOWARDS A GENUINELY PLURAL SOCIETY. REGRETTABLY THESE HOPES HAD PROVED FALSE. WE DID NOT ACCEPT THAT THE RECENT ELECTIONS HAD BEEN FAIR OR THAT NICARAGUA IS A DEMOCRACY IN A SENSE THAT WE UNDERSTAND THE WORD. I EXPRESSED OUR CONCERN AT THE SIZE OF NICARAGUA'S ARMED FORCES, THE INCREASING SOPHISTICATION OF ITS ARMS AND THE PRESENCE OF FOREIGN MILITARY ADVISERS. I POINTED OUT THE EXTENT TO WHICH NICARAGUA'S FOREIGN POLICY SEEMED SLAVISHLY TO FOLLOW THAT OF THE SOVIET UNION AND CUBA. THEIR RECORD IN THE THIRD WORLD WAS ONE OF SUPPLYING ARMS RATHER THAN REAL ASSISTANCE TO THE PEOPLE, AND HAD NOTHING TO OFFER NICARAGUA. ETHIOPIA AND VIETNAM WERE BUT TWO REVEALING EXAMPLES OF COMMUNIST BEHAVIOUR OF THIS SORT. I TACKLED HIM, TOO, ABOUT NICARAGUA'S DISGRACEFUL TREATMENT OF THE POPE DURING HIS VISIT. THIS HAD SHOWN THE REGIME IN ITS TRUE COLOURS. FINALLY, WHILE REAFFIRMING OUR SUPPORT FOR THE CONTADORA PROCESS, I STRESSED THAT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ANY AGREEMENT MUST BE VERIFIABLE.

RAMIREZ ARGUED IN REPLY THAT DEMOCRACY WAS STILL IN ITS INFANCY, THAT THE SIZE OF NICARAGUA'S ARMED FORCES WAS DETERMINED BY THE THREAT FROM THE CONTRAS AND DENIED THAT NICARAGUA WAS SUPPLYING ARMS TO THE REBELS IN EL SALVADOR (INDEED HE SAID THAT THE UNITED STATES NO LONGER ALLEGED THIS). HE OPENLY ADMITTED HOWEVER THAT THEY HAD BEEN WRONG IN THEIR RECEPTION OF THE POPE. HE REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES NICARAGUA'S DESIRE TO RE-ESTABLISH A DIALOGUE WITH THE UNITED STATES, AS WELL AS READINESS TO AGREE TO WITHDRAWAL OF FOREIGN MILITARY ADVISERS IN THE CONTEXT OF A REGIONAL AGREEMENT. HE DENIED THAT NICARAGUA WAS A MILITARY BASE OR BEHOLDEN TO THE SOVIET UNION. AGAINST PREDICTIONS HE DID NOT SPECIFICALLY ASK ME TO TAKE ACTION WITH YOU TO BLOCK FURTHER ASSISTANCE TO OPPONENTS OF THE SANDINISTA REGIME.

I DO NOT THINK THAT HE WILL HAVE DERIVED MUCH SATISFACTION FROM OUR MEETING. I ENCLOSE A COPY OF THE STATEMENT PUT OUT BY MY SPOKESMAN AFTERWARDS, WHICH WILL MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR HIM TO ARGUE THAT HE HAS CREATED WIDER UNDERSTANDING HERE FOR HIS GOVERNMENT.

I LOOK FORWARD TO DISCUSSING THIS FURTHER WITH YOU ON 20 FEBRUARY.

WITH BEST WISHES.

YOUR EVER
MARGARET

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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SENT AT 12:1428Z BY PRC

JPGRGRGRG MATE AND W QSL AT 1428Z AND TSKKKKKK

SUBJECT

CC OPS
MASTER

PM has seen

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PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE

COO

14/2

SERIAL No. 29/85

SWQP UQAUNBL
OO WTE24
DE WTE £1073 0450040
O 140045Z FEB 85
FM THE WHITE HOUSE
TO THE CABINET OFFICE
ZEM

S E C R E T VIA CABINET OFFICE CHANNELS WH01073

FEBRUARY 13, 1985

DEAR MARGARET,

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THE THOROUGH READ-OUT OF YOUR MEETING WITH NICARAGUAN VICE PRESIDENT RAMIREZ.

IN OUR VIEW, YOU TOOK EXACTLY THE RIGHT LINE. I WISH TO EXPRESS MY APPRECIATION AND COMMEND YOU PERSONALLY. I LOOK FORWARD TO DISCUSSING THIS AND OTHER ISSUES WITH YOU NEXT WEEK. LET ME REITERATE NOW, HOWEVER, HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO US THAT YOU CONVEYED SUCH FIRM VIEWS WITH CLARITY AND DIRECTNESS.

BEST REGARDS,
RON

DECLASSIFY ON: OADR
0130
~~0130~~

QSL AT 140057Z PB

US Declassified



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister.

Nicaragua.

I have had another
go at a message to
the President, taking
account of your points.

Do ^{Mr} Agree to send it?
or

Prefer to tell him
when you see him?

[Given the short time with
the President, there's much to
be said for letting him know in
advance]

SECRET

12-1320²

VIA WHITEHOUSE

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PRESIDENT REAGAN FROM PRIME MINISTER (via Cabinet Office channels)

DEAR RON

I wanted to let you know that I saw Vice-President Ramirez of Nicaragua on 8 February, at his request. In deciding to do so, I weighed ~~two considerations~~ the risk of handing the Nicaraguan regime a propaganda bonus against a chance to express most serious misgivings, directly and at the highest level, about the nature of that regime and its activities in Central America. The latter seemed to me the more important. It was very helpful to receive, before seeing Ramirez, the background information in Mr. McFarlane's message to Sir Robert Armstrong.

I told Ramirez that in my view Nicaragua had most of the characteristics of a Marxist-Leninist state both internally and ~~by~~ its support for subversion beyond its borders. I recalled our hopes that, after Somoza had been toppled, the Sandinistas would move towards a genuinely plural society. Regrettably these hopes had proved false. We did not accept that the recent elections had been fair or that Nicaragua is a democracy in a sense that we understand the word. I expressed our concern at the size of Nicaragua's armed forces, the increasing sophistication of its arms and the presence of foreign military advisers. I pointed out the extent to which Nicaragua's foreign policy seemed slavishly to follow that of the Soviet Union and Cuba. Their record in the Third World was one of supplying arms rather than real assistance to the people, and had nothing to offer Nicaragua. Ethiopia and Vietnam were but two revealing examples of communist behaviour of this sort. I tackled him, too, about Nicaragua's disgraceful treatment of the Pope during his visit. This had shown the regime in its true colours. Finally, while reaffirming our support for the Contadora process, I stressed that the implementation of any agreement must be verifiable.

Ramirez argued in reply that democracy was still in its infancy, that the size of Nicaragua's armed forces was

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determined by the threat from the Contras and denied that Nicaragua was supplying arms to the rebels in El Salvador (indeed he said that the United States no longer alleged this). He openly admitted however that they had been wrong in their reception of the Pope. He repeated several times Nicaragua's desire to re-establish a dialogue with the United States, as well as readiness to agree to withdrawal of foreign military advisers in the context of a regional agreement. He denied that Nicaragua was a military base or beholden to the Soviet Union. Against predictions he did not specifically ask me to take action with you to block further assistance to opponents of the Sandinista regime.

I do not think that he will have derived much satisfaction from our meeting. I enclose a copy of the statement put out by my spokesman afterwards, which will make it difficult for him to argue that he has created wider understanding here for his government.

I look forward to discussing this further with you on 20 February

With best wishes.

Yours EVER
Margaret

[Pl. follow on with
attached statement].

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.

PRIME MINISTER

NICARAGUA

I attach a message about your meeting with Vice-President Ramirez which you might send to President Reagan via the Cabinet Office channel.

C.D.P.

Charles - I don't think

this is worth sending.

The only point on which Ramirez openly admitted they were using was in their respect of the Pope which you will recall, showed them in their true colours. We also told him about Norberto's powers to the third world. Further

seen to remember telling him about had been the hope of the Sandinistas when Somoza was toppled and they (the Sandinistas) had not created a good

points. It would be better if I told the President - in the previous paragraph in the letter at

8 February, 1985

Press statement
issued after
PM's meeting
with Vice-President
of Nicaragua on
8 Feb. 1979.
COO 8/2.

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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.

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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.

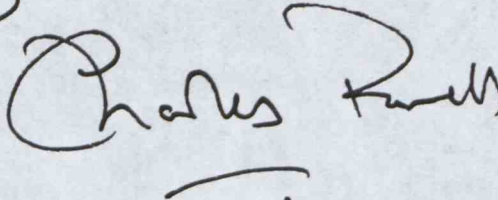
The Prime Minister suggested looking to the future. Our attitude towards of Nicaragua would be based on whether or not there was progress towards genuine democracy, the removal of foreign military advisers, a reduction in the size of Nicaraguan armed forces, and the cessation of support for subversion 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,


C.D. POWELL

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

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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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KELATZ.