

# The CIA's Dirty War in Nicaragua

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Relevant to unfolding events, this carefully documented article by **Timothy Alexander Guzman** was first published by GR in February 2018

*What is happening in Syria is a reminder of what happened in Nicaragua during the U.S. supported Contra war against the Sandinistas in the 1980's. It was an important part of the Iran-Contra Affair, one of the most controversial scandals in modern history involving the Washington-CIA matrix worldwide.*

*From time to time, the mainstream media (MSM) likes to reflect on the historical legacies of U.S. interventions in the name of American-style democracy. On May 7th, 2016, The New York Times published a story by **Frances Robles** on a former Contra fighter who wished for U.S. aid to fight a covert war against **Daniel Ortega** and the **Nicaraguan government** titled 'Ortega vs. the Contras: Nicaragua Endures an '80s Revival' which paints a different picture in regards to what actually happened during the civil war in Nicaragua. The article is about a rebel fighter by the name of **Tyson** who lives in the mountains of Nicaragua who was "longing for the days when covert American funding paid for overt warfare."*

What Robles should have written was that Tyson was "longing for the days when covert American funding paid for terrorist activities that killed scores of men, women and children throughout the civil war in Nicaragua." That would have been a more honest written article, but we are talking about *The New York Times* here. Robles went on to say:

Tyson and his men are contras — yes, like the ones from the 1980s who received stealth funding during the Reagan administration to topple Mr. Ortega's leftist Sandinista government.

That war ended more than 25 years ago, when Mr. Ortega lost at the polls. But since being re-elected in 2006, Mr. Ortega has come to rule over this Central American nation in sweeping fashion. He has developed the economy and minted new millionaires, but also outraged an array of opponents who condemn his tight control over elections, Congress, the police, the military and the courts

The article also claims that the former Contras are complaining that "they are broke" without "international aid" which sounds like a plea for help to fight the Ortega government:

The contras of today, often nicknamed "the rearmed," are a shadow of what they once were. They complain they are broke and say the reason they are not more successful is that they do not have international aid, as they did during the Reagan administration.

Still, skirmishes in rural areas around the country as recently as last week have

left police officers, civilians and soldiers dead, a violent expression of the broader anger brewing against the government

Though Mr. Ortega enjoys strong support among the poor, he was widely criticized for constitutional changes that repealed term limits, allowing him to run this year for a third consecutive term. Students, opposition politicians and other protesters flock to the elections board every Wednesday to rally against his consolidation of power

Washington is still not particularly comfortable with the current President of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega who was an enemy of the U.S. during the Nicaragua's civil war that claimed more than 40,000 lives between 1978 and 1989 and wounded and displaced hundreds of thousands more. Now with the Trump Administration in the White House, Nicaragua's relationship with the U.S. remains to be seen especially after they voted against Trump and Netanyahu's plan to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem.

The history of the U.S. government intervening in Nicaragua since 1912 followed by a CIA-orchestrated covert war that began after the Nicaraguan Revolution of 1979 involved acts of terrorism and a Washington-sponsored propaganda campaign against the Sandinistas who overthrew the Somoza government is rarely mentioned in the MSM. Since the mid-1970's, the U.S. government has funded terrorist operations in Latin America right before they set their sights on the Middle East. Before Al-Qaeda (*Interestingly, it was the Carter Administration in 1979 with his National Security Advisor, the late Zbigniew Brzezinski who created the Mujahedeen to fight the Soviets before they became Al-Qaeda*), ISIS (the Islamic State), Jebbah al-Nusra, and other terrorist groups operating in the Middle East today, Latin America was already witnessing U.S. sponsored terrorism. Washington's support of terrorists is not new strategy since the terrorists are "*useful tools*" against governments in Latin America, Asia and the Middle East who were or still are "*non-compliant*" to Washington's geopolitical interests.

The CIA sponsored numerous terrorists from Latin America including the Cuban right-wing exiles, Orlando Bosch and Luis Posada Carriles (*a former CIA agent who was convicted of being involved in numerous terrorist attacks while still employed by the agency*) who carried out the 1976 bombing of a Cuban plane over Venezuelan territory. There were also other Cuban right-wing exiles such as Jose Dionisio Suarez and Virgilio Paz Romero who assassinated Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier with a car bomb in Washington D.C. on September 21st, 1976. The assassination was coordinated with Augusto Pinochet's regime and its secret police DINA (*The Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional*) in collaboration with members of the *Coordination of United Revolutionary Organizations*, a U.S.-sponsored, anti-Fidel Castro terrorist group. Not surprising, most of the Cuban terrorists were released under the George H. W. Bush administration. Latin America is America's backyard so keeping the continent under control by Washington and the Military-Industrial Complex by all means necessary is a standard practice to protect their political and economic interests.

### **The Somoza Dynasty: A U.S. Backed Dictatorship**



Anastasio Somoza Garcia and FDR

On January 1st, 1937, *Anastasio Somoza Garcia* became the 21st President of Nicaragua

until May 1947 then again from May 1950 until September 1956. Somoza Garcia was put into power originally by the U.S. Marines who invaded Nicaragua back in 1912, and from 1927 until 1933 they fought against Augusto Cesar Sandino and his rebel fighters in a guerilla war for almost five years. With U.S. backing, Somoza Garcia led the war against Sandino who was determined to end the U.S. occupation of Nicaragua. Sandino agreed to sign a truce under false pretenses with Somoza Garcia which led to his assassination ending the revolution for the time being. **Anastasio Somoza Garcia** ruled Nicaragua as a dictator until his assassination in 1956 by poet **Rigoberto López Pérez**. Then came his son, **Luis Somoza Debayle** who became acting president after his father's assassination and later on that year, was elected as Nicaragua's next president.

Although Luis Somoza's rule was not as bad as his father's but the restrictions on civil liberties remained and corruption was still widespread. Luis's brother, *Anastasio Somoza Debayle*, the future president was head of the National Guard at the time and was considered the second most powerful man in the Nicaraguan government during his brother's presidency. Luis Somoza remained in power until May 1963 since he refused to run for reelection. However, most politicians in Nicaragua were loyal to the Somoza dynasty allowing **René Schick Gutierrez** who was considered a puppet politician of Luis Somoza to become President from May 1963 to August 1966. Luis Somoza died from a heart attack in 1967.

Then on May 1967 Anastasio Somoza Debayles following in his family's footsteps becomes President of Nicaragua until May 1972, then again from December 1974 until July 1979. Somoza Debayles was naturally a multimillionaire and a U.S. puppet who inherited a fortune from his family plundering Nicaragua. As part owner along with his father of Plasmaferesis, Somoza Debayles continued his family's legacy by literally buying blood for cheap from the Nicaraguans who were mostly poor, homeless and hungry and some were even alcoholics, then selling the blood for a high price as *Telesur* reported in 2016:

The Nicaraguan newspaper La Prensa, the most prominent opposition voice that criticized the Somoza dictatorship, broke the scandal in 1977 in a series dubbed the "Vampire Chronicles." According to the Nicaraguan newspaper El Diario Nuevo, founded in 1980 by a breakaway group of La Prensa staffers, the Plasmaferesis exposé was among the dictatorship-era coverage that most repulsed the society and "devastatingly impacted Somoza."

"It was a dark business," former La Prensa journalist Roberto Sanchez Ramirez told El Diario Nuevo in 2008. "Every morning the homeless, drunks, and poor people went to sell half a liter of blood for 35 (Nicaraguan) cordobas"

It was estimated that Somoza made around \$12 million a year buying and then selling the blood of his people for a 300% mark-up price. In 1983, a report by *The Glasgow Herald* 'Inside the City that is Watched by American Might' said that "Another is that the blood plasma which arrived at Managua airport for the relief of earthquake victims were promptly re-exported by a Somoza company to the United States."

On December 23rd, 1972, a devastating earthquake took place destroying the nation's capital, Managua, killing more than 10,000 people with hundreds of thousands more wounded. Somoza declared Martial Law and gained control of the *National Emergency Committee* allowing him to embezzle relief funds sent from around the world to help the earthquakes victims and rebuild the capital.

Near the end of Somoza's rule, he ordered the bombing of Managua in an attempt to stay in power but was still overthrown in 1979 by the Sandinistas. Noam Chomsky, a Professor Emeritus at the *Massachusetts Institute of Technology* (MIT) wrote an analysis on what happened in Nicaragua under the *Carter Administration* and the MSM in a chapter titled '*Teaching Nicaragua a Lesson*' in his 1992 book '*What Uncle Sam Really Wants*' and said the following:

In the ten years prior to the overthrow of the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza in 1979, US television-all networks-devoted exactly one hour to Nicaragua, and that was entirely on the Managua earthquake of 1972. From 1960 through 1978, the New York Times had three editorials on Nicaragua. It's not that nothing was happening there-it's just that whatever was happening was unremarkable. Nicaragua was of no concern at all, as long as Somoza's tyrannical rule wasn't challenged.

When his rule was challenged, by the Sandinistas in the late 1970s, the US first tried to institute what was called "Somocismo [Somoza-ism] without Somoza"-that is, the whole corrupt system intact, but with somebody else at the top. That didn't work, so President Carter tried to maintain Somoza's National Guard as a base for US power.

The National Guard had always been remarkably brutal and sadistic. By June 1979, it was carrying out massive atrocities in the war against the Sandinistas, bombing residential neighborhoods in Managua, killing tens of thousands of people. At that point, the US ambassador sent a cable to the White House saying it would be "ill advised" to tell the Guard to call off the bombing, because that might interfere with the policy of keeping them in power and the Sandinistas out.

Our ambassador to the Organization of American States also spoke in favor of "Somocismo without Somoza," but the OAS rejected the suggestion flat out. A few days later, Somoza flew off to Miami with what was left of the Nicaraguan national treasury, and the Guard collapsed.

The Carter administration flew Guard commanders out of the country in planes with Red Cross markings (a war crime), and began to reconstitute the Guard on Nicaragua's borders. They also used Argentina as a proxy. (At that time, Argentina was under the rule of neo-Nazi generals, but they took a little time off from torturing and murdering their own population to help reestablish the Guard-soon to be re named the contras, or "freedom fighters.")

As time passed on during the revolution, the Carter Administration decided to end its support to the Somoza government who was internationally known for its human rights abuses, but at the same time, Carter did not want the *Sandinista National Liberation Front* (FSLN) in power. In an important note, the Carter Administration also put pressure on Israel to stop arming Somoza and his National Guard since Israel supported Somoza Debayles because his father, Anastasio Somoza Garcia supported Israel financially during *The Arab-Israeli War of 1948*.



So by 1979, Carter wanted to work with moderate elements within Nicaragua such as the *Broad Opposition Front* or *La Frente Amplio Opositor* (FAO) whose members included dissidents from the Somoza government, the *Democratic Union of Liberation* (UDELA) and the "Twelve" who represented the *Terceristas*. However, Carter and the FAO planned to remove

Somoza from office without the FSLN, but the Nicaraguan people did not want “*Somocismo sin Somoza*” (Somocism without Somoza), so protests flooded the streets in opposition to the idea. ‘The Twelve’ left the coalition and formed the ‘*National Patriotic Front*’ (Frente Patriótico Nacional – FPN) and joined forces with the ‘*United People’s Movement*’(MPU).

Tens of thousands of people, many of them young adults joined the fight with FSLN against the U.S. backed Somoza government which led to an the armed struggle reuniting the FSLN on March 7, 1979. The Sandinistas were in power from 1979 to 1990 first under *The National Directorate* that lead to the reunification of the FSLN with several known members of the revolution including Daniel Ortega (current President of Nicaragua), Tomás Borge, Bayardo Luis Carrión, Arce Castaño, Humberto Ortega, Henry Ruiz (GPP faction), Jaime Wheelock, Víctor Tirado (Terceristas) and Carlos Núñez.

In William Blum’s ‘*Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*’ explains the Carter Administration’s involvement in Nicaragua’s politics with his authorization of the CIA in an attempt to create a political movement that will protect U.S. interests and maintain its influence:

When Anastasio Somoza II was overthrown by the Sandinistas in July 1979, he fled into exile leaving behind a country in which two-thirds of the population earned less than \$300 a year. Upon his arrival in Miami, Somoza admitted to being worth \$100 million. A US intelligence report, however, placed it at \$900 million. It was fortunate for the new Nicaraguan leaders that they came to power while Jimmy Carter sat in the White House. It gave them a year and a half of relative breathing space to take the first steps in their planned reconstruction of an impoverished society before the relentless hostility of the Reagan administration descended upon them; which is not to say that Carter welcomed the Sandinista victory

Blum continued “*In 1978, with Somoza hearing collapse, Carter authorized covert CIA support for the press and labor unions in Nicaragua in an attempt to create a “moderate” alternative to the Sandinistas.*” In other words, the CIA was authorized to manipulate the press with U.S. approved propaganda and lead the labor unions to an alternative political party that can defeat the Sandinistas:

Towards the same end, American diplomats were conferring with non-leftist Nicaraguan opponents of Somoza. Washington’s idea of “moderate™”, according to a group of prominent Nicaraguans who walked out on the discussions, was the inclusion of Somoza’s political party In the future government and “leaving practically intact the corrupt structure of the somocista apparatus”, including the National Guard, albeit in some reorganized form.

Indeed, at this same time, the head of the US Southern Command (Latin America), Lt. General Dennis McAuliffe, was telling Somoza that, although he had to abdicate, the United States had “no intention of permitting a settlement which would lead to the destruction of the National Guard”. This was a notion remarkably insensitive to the deep loathing for the Guard felt by the great majority of the Nicaraguan people

The Nicaraguan Revolution replaced the long-hated Somoza Dynasty under Carter and then continued under the Reagan Administration who planned on destroying the Sandinistas. The

Sandinistas were popular among the Nicaraguan people because of their dedication to land and anti-poverty reforms, education and most important for its anti-Somoza stance. General support among the Nicaraguans for the Sandinistas grew after the 1972 earthquake. So why was the U.S. concerned about the Sandinista government? Was it that the Sandinista model of democracy for the people of Nicaragua was seen as a positive development around the world? Well at least according to Chomsky's 1992 book I just mentioned, yes, in fact it "*terrified US planners*":

Why did the US go to such lengths in Nicaragua? The international development organization Oxfam explained the real reasons, stating that, from its experience of working in 76 developing countries, "Nicaragua was...exceptional in the strength of that government's commitment...to improving the condition of the people and encouraging their active participation in the development process." Of the four Central American countries where Oxfam had a significant presence (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua), only in Nicaragua was there a substantial effort to address inequities in land ownership and to extend health, educational and agricultural services to poor peasant families.

Other agencies told a similar story. In the early 1980s, the World Bank called its projects "extraordinarily successful in Nicaragua in some sectors, better than anywhere else in the world." In 1983, The Inter-American Development Bank concluded that "Nicaragua has made noteworthy progress in the social sector, which is laying the basis for long-term socio-economic development."

The success of the Sandinista reforms terrified US planners. They were aware that-as Jose Figueres, the father of Costa Rican democracy, put it-"for the first time, Nicaragua has a government that cares for its people." (Although Figueres was the leading democratic figure in Central America for forty years, his unacceptable insights into the real world were completely censored from the US media.) The hatred that was elicited by the Sandinistas for trying to direct resources to the poor (and even succeeding at it) was truly wondrous to behold. Just about all US policymakers shared it, and it reached virtual frenzy

One of the main reforms instituted by the Sandinistas was in education which was definitely a step in the right direction especially since Somoza Debayles declared "*I don't want an educated population. I want Oxen.*" That quote is as Orwellian as one can get. The philosophy of the new Sandinista educational reform was to "*free*" Nicaragua's population from the historical lies perpetrated by the Somoza's education system or what can be called "*indoctrination.*" The idea was to "*awaken*" the political thoughts of the people to build a resistant society against any military or economic intervention imposed by a foreign power on the Nicaraguan home front.

The ideology of the Sandinistas follows the economic and political philosophies of the Nicaraguan Sandinista National Liberation Front which was led by Augusto César Sandino before his assassination. However, modern Sandinista ideology was mainly developed by Carlos Fonseca (inspired by the Cuban Revolution of 1959) who wanted a socialist populism among Nicaragua's peasant population. In an interesting article published by *Global Research* on June 27, 2013 titled '*CIA Covert Ops in Central America: Nicaragua and the Road to Contra-Gate*' by Greg Guma of *Maverick Media* which was based on his confrontation with U.S. Ambassador Anthony Quainton in Managua. Here is what Mr. Guma wrote:

Back in Managua we soon found an opportunity to confront US Ambassador Anthony Quainton. At an Embassy event, we asked for the justification of the covert US role in a Honduran-Nicaraguan war? “We are trying to get back to the original goals of the revolution” he said. The reply sounded arrogant. Asked about the pointless violence he tried to explain that “the killing of women and children is not the policy of our government,” then attempted to define the situation as “Nicaraguans fighting Nicaraguans.” Witness for Peace members became enraged as he defended the Contras, claiming that they wanted to “return to democratic political institutions”

Guma continued:

In a private conversation later, Quainton did acknowledge that Reagan’s characterization of the Sandinistas as “totalitarian” wasn’t constructive. He also agreed that US actions such as aid cut-offs and import sanctions were pushing Nicaragua toward the Soviets, a situation policy-makers claimed they were trying to prevent. “But the problem of regional destabilization is at the head of the agenda,” he said, “and that determines policies and makes other things less important.” In other words, it made little difference that Nicaragua had a mixed economy, open elections at the local level, or a Council of State with representatives from various parties and social groups. The country’s social and economic progress, agrarian reform and literacy crusade were simply cancelled out. Why? Perhaps because the existence of a “New Nicaragua” served as a good example that raised aspirations throughout the region. Now, that was “destabilizing” to US interests

In 1985, Daniel Ortega became President of Nicaragua until 1990 when he lost the election to **Violeta Barrios de Chamorro**, who won the presidency with help from the U.S. government interfering in the election process with of course, assistance from the CIA. The left-wing think tank located in the belly of the beast, Washington, DC called *‘The Council of Hemispheric Affairs (COHA)* published an article in 2009 based on Ortega titled *‘Nicaragua Under Daniel Ortega’s Second Presidency: Daniel-Style Politics as Usual?’* admitted that the Sandinistas did have “significant” and some “genuine” reforms for the people, but it was not a perfect administration which at some point was marked by corruption, alleged human rights violations and other scandals:

Once the dominant member of the 5-person “Junta of National Reconstruction” that ruled Nicaragua following the overthrow of President Anastasio Somoza in 1979, Ortega served as the country’s president from January 1985 to April 1990. Ortega and his administration attempted to institute a number of significant Marxist-inspired reforms while combating both dissent and the opposition of US-backed, right-wing Contras. Although the Ortega administration achieved some genuine social transformations during his term in office, including a higher literacy rate and, to a degree, the inclusion of women within the governing process, it was also marked by corruption and controversy, including human rights violations and numerous scandals. Ortega lost the 1990 presidential election to Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, with some help from the CIA

With today’s MSM headlines about the unproven claims about Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections, the U.S. government actually interfered in Nicaragua’s 1990 elections. *The New York Times* admitted in a 1997 article *‘Political Meddling by Outsiders: Not New for U.S.’* that that *The National Endowment for Democracy (NED)* which is

basically a CIA institution was used “For the Nicaraguan election of 1990, it provided more than \$3 million in “technical” assistance, some of which was used to bolster Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, the presidential candidate favored by the United States.”

## **Reagan Backs CIA War on Nicaragua**

The presidency of Jimmy Carter lasted one-term due to his economic and foreign policy failures which did pave the way for Ronald W. Reagan to easily defeat Carter in a landslide allowing the former Hollywood B-actor to become the 40th U.S. President. The Reagan Administration preferred what they called an “anti-communist” plan for Latin America and destroying the Sandinistas was part of that plan as his administration lobbied congress for more than \$100 million in foreign aid for Nicaragua’s private sector that included funds for Non-government organizations (NGO). When Reagan was a Presidential candidate he criticized the Carter administration’s Central America policies. Once in office, the Reagan administration put pressure on international aid agencies to cut aid and told international banks to stop lending to Nicaragua. In 1982, they also reduced Nicaragua’s sugar imports to the U.S. by more than 90%. By then, the Reagan Administration had initiated a large-scale war against Nicaragua with basically, economic sanctions. Since the Somoza government had a personal army called the National Guard, the Reagan administration found a way to form a Counter-revolution or Contrarrevolución against the Sandinistas by creating the Contras with the former National Guardsmen.

The Contras was originally created in 1981 to initially to remove the Sandinistas from power. The Reagan Administration authorized the CIA to arm and train the Contras. Between 1980 and 1981 the Contras began to organize along the border with Honduras and initiated a guerilla war against the Sandinista government that led to bloodshed throughout most of the 1980s. The Contras became a de-facto U.S. backed terrorist organization mainly based in Nicaragua and in Honduras during the height of the war that killed tens of thousands of civilians including women and children. In 1985, *The New York Times* reported on how Reagan spoke highly of the Contras calling them “our brothers” and “freedom fighters” in a speech at the *Conservative Political Action Conference* where he called for Congressional approval of \$14 million in aid for the rebels. Here is what Reagan said according to the report:

“And we owe them our help,” he said. “You know the truth about them, you know who they’re fighting and why. They are the moral equal of our Founding Fathers and the brave men and women of the French Resistance. ‘We cannot turn away from them,” he said. “For the struggle here is not right versus left, but right versus wrong”

## **Human Rights Violations, CIA Propaganda and the Censorship of ‘La Prensa’**

In March 1981, the Sandinistas implemented a mass literacy program along with universal healthcare and promoted gender equality. However, at least according to the MSM and U.S. funded human rights organizations, the Sandinistas was seen as a human rights violators and so were the contras to a point. The Nicaraguan people including the Miskito people, an indigenous ethnic group from the Mosquito Coast region who suffered from human rights abuses which I will get into detail later. Let me begin by quoting a *New York Times* article from November 18th, 1987 which took a balanced approach (*I know, it’s hard to digest the New York Times as being somewhat fair and balanced*) against both sides of the civil war.



The article '*Sandinistas and Contras Accused of Rights Abuses*' by Michael Freitag who was quick to point out the human rights violations of the Sandinistas:

"Ongoing and serious human rights violations" have resulted from the Nicaraguan Government's continued use of tribunals outside the regular court system to try people accused of national security offenses, a New York-based human rights organization has charged in a report.

The group, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, also criticized the Nicaraguan rebels for "continuing gross human rights violations" that included "political killings, disappearances and other serious mistreatment of civilian noncombatants." The 24-page report, called "Human Rights in Nicaragua," was issued on Monday to update a 1985 study that the lawyers' organization made of human rights violations in Nicaragua

The article also mentioned a report '*Nicaragua: Revolutionary Justice*' based on the Nicaraguan government's actions:

In its 1985 report, entitled "Nicaragua: Revolutionary Justice," which focused on the activities of the Sandinista Government, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights found that the Nicaraguan security police used threats of death and other forms of psychological coercion to obtain confessions from people who were accused of actions against the Sandinistas.

The Government appeared to continue such activities in 1987, the new report said. In the first six months of 1987, the lawyers' group asserted, about 3,000 people suspected of aiding the contras were arrested by the Nicaraguan security forces. #3,000 Held by Sandinistas "The Nicaraguan Government's chief concern, and its primary objective in carrying out these arrest and detention policies, is to discourage aid and assistance to the contras, whether or not it is given voluntarily," the report said. Of the 3,000 people detained, 1,118 were charged with aiding the contras, and their cases were referred to special tribunals

Freitag's article also pointed out the record of the Contras human rights abuses but had to add what described as "another peril" for Nicaraguan civilians, the Sandinista justice system:

In reviewing the contras' record on human rights, the new report found the rebels responsible for the disappearance, abduction and murder of civilians. It cited a study in July 1987 by an anti-Sandinista Nicaraguan human rights organization that "documented contra kidnappings and robberies, the forced recruitment of civilians, including women and children under the age of 16, and the summary execution of prisoners." 'Indiscriminate' Contra Violence

"Given the contras' reputation for indiscriminate violence," the report said, "Nicaraguan civilians who deny the request of a contra patrol for food or shelter or a local guide know they are doing so at their own peril."

Whether voluntarily or not, it said, "many civilians living in the war zone have aided the contras and encountered another peril: the Sandinista justice system"

Freitag did accuse both sides of the conflict but at the same time, the Sandinistas was seen

as the worst of the two factions. What should be known is that the *Lawyers Committee for Human Rights* (LCHR), founded in 1975 was a joint project of the *Council of New York Law Associates* and the *International League for Human Rights* which was funded by the *Ford Foundation* and the *Rockefeller Brothers Fund* which has ties to the CIA and other U.S. government agencies.

The Sandinistas were accused of human rights abuses by other CIA-linked human rights organizations such as *The Puebla Institute*. According to a 1987 article published by the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Associated Press* (AP) titled '*Rights Abuses Led 300,000 to Flee Sandinista Rule, Study Says*' claimed that "*Torture and other serious human rights violations by Nicaraguan authorities have led to the exodus of about 300,000 people—10% of the population—since the 1979 Sandinista revolution, according to a study released Tuesday.*" The report mentioned the Puebla Institute, a Roman Catholic human rights organization who published the findings:

The report by the Puebla Institute, a lay Roman Catholic human rights organization, cited a variety of reasons for the exodus, including alleged restrictions on freedom of religion and Sandinista military attacks against civilians.

Titled "Fleeing Their Homeland," the study was based on interviews with 100 Nicaraguans at refugee camps in Honduras and Costa Rica. None of the refugees testified to abuses by the U.S.-backed Nicaraguan contras or said they had left for that reason, according to the study

Of course the report claims that none of the refugees accused the contras of human rights abuses, but there is an explanation by a true journalist at heart, the late **Robert Parry**, founder and editor of *Consortium News*, who covered the *Iran-Contra affair* for the *AP* and *Newsweek* with Peter Kornbluh, a director of the *National Security Archive's Chile Documentation Project* and of the *Cuba Documentation Project* exposed the CIA's propaganda in an article published in 1988 by *Foreign Policy* magazine titled '*Iran-Contra's Untold Story*' and they said the following:

Through managing the contra war, however, Casey's CIA often found itself in a position to influence congressional attitudes about the conflict. According to Chamorro, CIA officers told contra leaders to play down their goal of overthrowing the Sandinista government, stressing instead a desire for negotiations and democratic reforms. The contras were instructed how best to lobby individual members of Congress, Chamorro said in his 1987 book *Packaging the Contras: A Case of CIA Disinformation*. He wrote that CIA money was channeled to the Nicaraguan exile Humberto Belli to help found the Puebla Institute, which published his book *Nicaragua: Christians under Fire* and later printed reports denouncing the Sandinista human rights record. "Of course the CIA told us to say that the money for the book and Institute was from private individuals who wanted to remain anonymous," Chamorro wrote. The Puebla Institute denies that it received CIA money or that it has any association with the CIA

Parry's 2013 *Consortium News* article '*Pope Francis, CIA and 'Death Squads*' detailed how Pope Francis remained silent on the disappearances of thousands of people by Argentina's military junta and the election of Argentine Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio and the role played by the Catholic church by supporting various dictatorships who oppressed leftists across Latin

America:

The election of Argentine Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio as Pope Francis brings back into focus the troubling role of the Catholic hierarchy in blessing much of the brutal repression that swept Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, killing and torturing tens of thousands of people including priests and nuns accused of sympathizing with leftists.

The Vatican's fiercely defensive reaction to the reemergence of these questions as they relate to the new Pope also is reminiscent of the pattern of deceptive denials that became another hallmark of that era when propaganda was viewed as an integral part of the "anticommunist" struggles, which were often supported financially and militarily by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

It appears that Bergoglio, who was head of the Jesuit order in Buenos Aires during Argentina's grim "dirty war," mostly tended to his bureaucratic rise within the Church as Argentine security forces "disappeared" some 30,000 people for torture and murder from 1976 to 1983, including 150 Catholic priests suspected of believing in "liberation theology"

Parry also sheds light on Pope John Paul II's policies during the reign of U.S. backed right-wing death squads across Latin America:

Pope John Paul II, another favorite of the U.S. news media, shared this classic outlook. He emphasized conservative social issues, telling the faithful to forgo contraceptives, treating women as second-class Catholics and condemning homosexuality. He promoted charity for the poor and sometimes criticized excesses of capitalism, but he disdained leftist governments that sought serious economic reforms.

Elected in 1978, as right-wing "death squads" were gaining momentum across Latin America, John Paul II offered little protection to left-leaning priests and nuns who were targeted. He rebuffed Archbishop Romero's plea to condemn El Salvador's right-wing regime and its human rights violations. He stood by as priests were butchered and nuns were raped and killed.

Instead of leading the charge for real economic and political change in Latin America, John Paul II denounced "liberation theology." During a 1983 trip to Nicaragua then ruled by the leftist Sandinistas the Pope condemned what he called the "popular Church" and would not let Ernesto Cardenal, a priest and a minister in the Sandinista government, kiss the papal ring. He also elevated clerics like Bergoglio who didn't protest right-wing repression.

John Paul II appears to have gone even further, allowing the Catholic Church in Nicaragua to be used by the CIA and Ronald Reagan's administration to finance and organize internal disruptions while the violent Nicaraguan Contras terrorized northern Nicaraguan towns with raids notorious for rape, torture and extrajudicial executions.

**The Contras were originally organized by an Argentine intelligence unit that emerged from the country's domestic "dirty war" and was taking its "anticommunist" crusade of terror across borders. After Reagan took office in 1981, he authorized the CIA to join with Argentine intelligence in expanding the Contras and their counterrevolutionary war.**

**A key part of Reagan's Contra strategy was to persuade the American people and Congress that the Sandinistas represented a repressive communist dictatorship that persecuted the Catholic Church, aimed to create a "totalitarian dungeon," and thus deserved violent overthrow.**

**A special office inside the National Security Council, headed by longtime CIA disinformation specialist Walter Raymond Jr., pushed these propaganda "themes" domestically. Raymond's campaign exploited examples of tensions between the Catholic hierarchy and the Sandinista government as well as with La Prensa, the leading opposition newspaper.**

To make the propaganda work with Americans, it was important to conceal the fact that elements of the Catholic hierarchy and La Prensa were being financed by the CIA and were coordinating with the Reagan administration's destabilization strategies

The Catholic church had an important role to play along with the right-wing death squads and the CIA who accused the Sandinista government of oppressing the Catholic church. Parry mentioned *La Prensa*, a national newspaper described as Nicaragua's only opposition paper during that time criticized the Sandinista government for its socialist economic policies and the FSLN's leader Daniel Ortega. The Sandinista government eventually ordered La Prensa to shut down. In 1986, *The New York Times* published an article highly critical of the Sandinistas government's decision titled '*Main Nicaragua Opposition Paper Indefinitely Closed by Sandinistas*' on what Capt. Nelba Cecilia Blandon, head of the press censorship office had said in a letter to editors of La Prensa:

La Prensa, the combative opposition newspaper that for 60 years has been a principal source of news for Nicaraguans, was ordered shut today by the Sandinista Government. The action was announced in a two-sentence letter from Capt. Nelba Cecilia Blandon, head of the press censorship office.

"In accordance with instructions from above, I notify you that from this moment the newspaper La Prensa is closed for an indefinite time," Captain Blandon wrote. "With nothing more to add, I send my considerations"

According to The New York Times, The Sandinistas decision came after the Reagan administration approved \$110 million in aid to anti-government rebels (the contras):

The indefinite closing came less than 24 hours after the United States House of Representatives voted in favor of President Reagan's proposal to provide \$110 million to anti-Government rebels.

President Daniel Ortega Saavedra, accompanied by other senior Sandinista leaders, said this evening that in the wake of the House vote, the Nicaraguan Government would begin to enforce the existing state-of-emergency decree "strictly and severely"

The report also mentioned how La Prensa was also critical at one point in its history of the Somoza government which led to the Assassination of its editor **Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal** in 1978 which led to the Nicaraguan Revolution that put the Sandinistas in power:

La Prensa has been the principal anti-Sandinista organ in Nicaragua during recent years. It had been subject to censorship, but was still able to publish

some material critical of the Government.

Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Cardenal, who was a fierce opponent of the deposed Somoza dictatorship, used the pages of *La Prensa* to castigate the Somoza Government. He was assassinated in January 1978, and it is widely believed that his killing, which was blamed on allies of President Anastasio Somoza Debayle, was a key spark to the anti-Somoza uprising that led to the Sandinista takeover in July 1979. Member of Original Junta

Mr. Chamorro's widow, Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, was a member of the original Sandinista junta. She later quit the junta because of her political disagreements with the Government. In a recent speech, Mrs. Chamorro said she considered *La Prensa's* situation more difficult now than at any time during the Somoza regime

In 1988, *The New York Times* reported that the Speaker of the House Jim Wright, accused the CIA of supporting the opposition from behind the scenes all along. The article '*Furor in Nicaragua on C.I.A. Charges*' was written by Stephen Kinzer, author of '*Overthrow*' said:

A furor has erupted in Nicaragua over charges by the Speaker of the House, Jim Wright, that the Central Intelligence Agency is manipulating opposition political parties here.

Leaders of the Sandinista Government say Mr. Wright's assertions prove their much-repeated contention that the opposition is a tool of Washington, and hence fundamentally illegitimate. Opposition leaders are outraged, and accuse Mr. Wright of tacitly encouraging the Sandinistas to practice political repression

The report also mentions that *La Prensa* admitted to receiving funds from the *National Endowment for Democracy*(NED):

Opposition leaders reacted angrily to Mr. Wright's accusations. Several charged he had endangered prospects for a fuller democracy in Nicaragua. "Consciously or unconsciously, Mr. Jim Wright acted very irresponsibly," said Mario Rappaccioli, a leader of the Conservative Party. "He should know that any allegation of ties between this United States agency and any Nicaraguan citizen means virtual death, in the form of a 30-year jail sentence. It is not necessary that the ties exist, only that someone say that they exist."

In a commentary, *La Prensa* said Mr. Wright's statements this week "have undoubtedly been very useful to the Sandinistas in their effort to discredit the civic struggle of the internal opposition."

The Government has charged that the United States is sending tens of thousands of dollars to *La Prensa* each year, and the newspaper said the charge was true. It said all the donations were public and duly registered with the central bank, and were therefore legal. *La Prensa* has received funds from the National Endowment for Democracy, a bipartisan, Congressionally financed agency created to take over financing of groups that in the past might have received covert aid from the C.I.A.

According to author **William I. Robinson** who published '*A Faustian Bargain: U.S. Intervention in the Nicaraguan Elections and American Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era*' explained how the CIA, USIA (*United States Information Agency*) and the NED played an

important role in the Anti-Sandinista campaign:

Despite the emphasis on externally based propaganda, the CIA, the USIA, and the NED maintained a foothold in the internal opposition media outlets throughout the 1980s, the most important of these being La Prensa. Given its prominence for the United States as a leading symbol of the anti-Sandinista campaign, that La Prensa's publisher went on to become the presidential candidate for the UNO coalition should come as no surprise. The United States had to generate an image of La Prensa as a struggling "independent" news outlet defending freedom and democracy in the face of Sandinista repression.

One NED document exclaimed "the history of La Prensa is one of struggle, courage and, at times, tragedy, parallel to that endured by the country and the people of Nicaragua. While La Prensa is by no means the sole key to a political opening in Nicaragua, it is probably true that without La Prensa a meaningful political opening cannot occur." Of course, there was nothing "independent" about La Prensa. It was funded by the United States and functioned as an important outlet inside Nicaragua for the U.S. war and as an official organ of the internal opposition

In other words, Washington was behind the opposition by providing the necessary tools including propaganda in an effort to overthrow the Sandinista government. In regards to propaganda, another article by Robert Parry exposed the CIA who produced a manual for the contras based on *Psychological Operations in guerrilla warfare tactics*. In 1985, Parry and Brian Barger also exposed the CIA and the Contras cocaine trafficking operation that made its way into the U.S. mainland. Parry's 2008 article '*Iran-Contra's 'Lost Chapter'*' is a look into how the CIA with help from the Republican party under the Reagan Administration transformed how the American public viewed world events through propaganda:

As historians ponder George W. Bush's disastrous presidency, they may wonder how Republicans perfected a propaganda system that could fool tens of millions of Americans, intimidate Democrats, and transform the vaunted Washington press corps from watchdogs to lapdogs.

To understand this extraordinary development, historians might want to look back at the 1980s and examine the Iran-Contra scandal's "lost chapter," a narrative describing how Ronald Reagan's administration brought CIA tactics to bear domestically to reshape the way Americans perceived the world.

That chapter which we are publishing here for the first time was "lost" because Republicans on the congressional Iran-Contra investigation waged a rear-guard fight that traded elimination of the chapter's key findings for the votes of three moderate GOP senators, giving the final report a patina of bipartisanship

Then CIA Director **William Casey** was in charge of the propaganda system that was meant to influence the media, the congress and the American people in favor of Reagan's policies:

The American people thus were spared the chapter's troubling finding: that the Reagan administration had built a domestic covert propaganda apparatus managed by a CIA propaganda and disinformation specialist working out of the National Security Council.

"One of the CIA's most senior covert action operators was sent to the NSC in 1983 by CIA Director [William] Casey where he participated in the creation of

an inter-agency public diplomacy mechanism that included the use of seasoned intelligence specialists," the chapter's conclusion stated.

"This public/private network set out to accomplish what a covert CIA operation in a foreign country might attempt to sway the media, the Congress, and American public opinion in the direction of the Reagan administration's policies"

According to Parry, the Reagan administration launched a "*clandestine propaganda operation*" that involved a system of inter-agency committees whose mission was to work with both private groups and individuals to raise funds, organize lobbying campaigns and to initiate a propaganda campaign to manipulate public opinion and U.S. government officials in their favor:

The seeds of this private/public collaboration can be found in the 84-page draft Iran-Contra chapter, entitled "Launching the Private Network." [There appear to have been several versions of this "lost chapter." This one I found in congressional files.]

The chapter traces the origins of the propaganda network to President Reagan's "National Security Decision Directive 77" in January 1983 as his administration sought to promote its foreign policy, especially its desire to oust Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government.

In a Jan. 13, 1983, memo, then-National Security Advisor William Clark foresaw the need for non-governmental money to advance this cause. "We will develop a scenario for obtaining private funding," Clark wrote. As administration officials began reaching out to wealthy supporters, lines against domestic propaganda soon were crossed as the operation took aim at not only at foreign audiences but at U.S. public opinion, the press and congressional Democrats who opposed funding Nicaraguan rebels, known as Contras.

At the time, the Contras were earning a gruesome reputation as human rights violators and terrorists. To change this negative perception of the Contras, the Reagan administration created a full-blown, clandestine propaganda operation.

"An elaborate system of inter-agency committees was eventually formed and charged with the task of working closely with private groups and individuals involved in fundraising, lobbying campaigns and propagandistic activities aimed at influencing public opinion and governmental action," the draft chapter said

So was the *New York Times*, the Reagan Administration and the CIA collaborating to influence public opinion and the U.S. congress to support the contras? *National Security Council staff member Oliver North* was one of the main people in the Iran-Contra affair where he was involved in secret arms shipments to the Contras and to Iran. In the 84-page draft Iran-Contra chapter, entitled '*Launching the Private Network*' a memo dated March 10th, 1985 from North described his involvement with the CIA Director William Casey of his pro-Contra news "*aimed at securing Congressional approval for renewed support to the Nicaraguan Resistance Forces*":

The Iran-Contra "lost" chapter depicts a sometimes Byzantine network of contract and private operatives who handled details of the domestic propaganda while concealing the hand of the White House and the CIA.

“Richard R. Miller, former head of public affairs at AID, and Francis D. Gomez, former public affairs specialist at the State Department and USIA, were hired by S/LPD through sole-source, no-bid contracts to carry out a variety of activities on behalf of the Reagan administration policies in Central America,” the chapter said.

“Supported by the State Department and White House, Miller and Gomez became the outside managers of [North operative] Spitz Channel’s fundraising and lobbying activities.

“They also served as the managers of Central American political figures, defectors, Nicaraguan opposition leaders and Sandinista atrocity victims who were made available to the press, the Congress and private groups, to tell the story of the Contra cause”

A civil war was brutal and complicated for both sides of the conflict. The Sandinistas probably did commit human rights abuses during the course of the war, but war is ugly and sometimes innocents get caught in the crossfire. However, Washington’s propaganda campaign was to discredit the Sandinistas and accuse them of human rights violations. After decades of Somoza’s brutal dictatorship, anger and despair among the Nicaraguan people created the conditions for a civil war. To be fair, the U.S. government actions for more than 44 years in its support of the Somoza Dynasty led to the Nicaraguan Revolution causing a massive blowback to both the Somoza government and to its own special interests.

### **Operation Red Christmas: A False Flag Operation?**



In a 1983 report by *Time* magazine suggested that human rights violations were committed by the Sandinistas:

*“According to Nicaragua’s Permanent Commission on Human Rights, the regime detains several hundred people a month; about half of them are eventually released, but the rest simply disappear”*

According to *Wikipedia* under the term ‘*Sandinista National Liberation Front*’ the section ‘*Allegations of Human rights Violations by the Sandinistas*’ claimed that ‘*Time also interviewed a former deputy chief of Nicaraguan military counterintelligence, who stated that he had fled Nicaragua after being ordered to kill 800 Miskito prisoners and make it look like they had died in combat.*’ The article (found [here](#)) ‘*Nicaragua: Nothing Will Stop This Revolution*’ does not mention anything about a former deputy chief of Nicaraguan military counterintelligence who claimed that he was ordered to kill more than 800 Miskito prisoners or any mention of the Miskito people in general.

One important fact about *Time* magazine is that they have extensive ties to the CIA since the 1950’s. An article by Carl Bernstein ‘*The CIA and the Media*’ ([www.carlbernstein.com](http://www.carlbernstein.com)) exposes the links between *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines and the CIA:

Time and *Newsweek* magazines. According to CIA and Senate sources, Agency files contain written agreements with former foreign correspondents and stringers for both the weekly news magazines. The same sources refused to say whether the CIA has ended all its associations with individuals who work for the two publications. Allen Dulles often interceded with his good friend, the late Henry Luce, founder of *Time* and *Life* magazines, who readily allowed



certain members of his staff to work for the Agency and agreed to provide jobs and credentials for other CIA operatives who lacked journalistic experience.

For many years, Luce's personal emissary to the CIA was C.D. Jackson, a Time Inc., vice president who was publisher of Life magazine from 1960 until his death in 1964. While a Time executive, Jackson coauthored a CIA sponsored study recommending the reorganization of the American intelligence services in the early 1950s. Jackson, whose Time Life service was interrupted by a one year White House tour as an assistant to President Dwight Eisenhower, approved specific arrangements for providing CIA employees with Time Life cover. Some of these arrangements were made with the knowledge of Luce's wife, Clare Boothe. Other arrangements for Time cover, according to CIA officials including those who dealt with Luce), were made with the knowledge of Hedley Donovan, now editor in chief of Time Inc. Donovan, who took over editorial direction of all Time Inc. publications in 1959, denied in a telephone interview that he knew of any such arrangements. "I was never approached and I'd be amazed if Luce approved such arrangements," Donovan said. "Luce had a very scrupulous regard for the difference between journalism and government."

In the 1950s and early 1960s, Time magazine's foreign correspondents attended CIA "briefing" dinners similar to those the CIA held for CBS. And Luce, according to CIA officials, made it a regular practice to brief Dulles or other high Agency officials when he returned from his frequent trips abroad. Luce and the men who ran his magazines in the 1950s and 1960s encouraged their foreign correspondents to provide help to the CIA, particularly information that might be useful to the Agency for intelligence purposes or recruiting foreigners

Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward broke the Watergate story for *The Washington Post* in the early 1970's that lead to the resignation of President Richard Nixon.

Other sources that accused the Sandinistas is the *Inter-American Commission on Human Rights* (IACHR) under *The Organization of American States* (OAS) also published a report in 1983 titled '*Report on the Situation of Human Rights of a Segment of the Nicaraguan Population of Miskito Origin*':

On February 19 and 20, 1981, approximately 30 Miskitos leaders of the Misurasata Organization were imprisoned by the State Security forces, among them Brooklyn Rivera, Hazel Lau, and Steadman Fagoth. In addition, the organization's offices were placed under army control. Government accused the leaders of Misurasata of promoting a separatist movement on the Atlantic coast. New waves of protest broke out in the area, and led to the formation of February 25 of that year of a Peace Committee comprised of members of the FSLN, Misurasata, and religious institutions

In response to the recommendations of that Committee, Rivera and Lau were released together with the other leaders who had been captured; Steadman Fagoth, representative of Misurasata in the Council of State, accused of high treason and of being an agent of the Security Force of the previous regime, a charge he denied, was not released.

At the insistence of Misurasata and other organizations, Fagoth was released in May 1981, returned to the Atlantic coast and moved to Honduras, where he was followed by 3,000 Miskitos. Later, in September of that year, Brooklyn Rivera, who had continued to negotiate with the Government on behalf of Misurasata, also left the country

In the same report the Sandinistas were also accused of forced relocation of more than 42 Miskito villages in the report:

7. On December 28, 1981, the Government of Nicaragua decided to move 42 villages of the Coco River region to an area located some 60 kilometers south of the river, on the Rosita-Puerto Cabezas road. The up-river towns, from Leimus to Raiti, had to be evacuated on foot, under very difficult and harsh conditions, as there were no passable roads for vehicles. The down-river villagers, from Leimus to the Atlantic coast, were moved in trucks and most of those evacuated were allowed to take some of their belongings. Throughout January and part of February, 1982, approximately 8,500 Miskitos were relocated in five different camps in what the Government has called the Tasba Pri project "free land" in the Miskito language).

8. As a result of the events related to the so-called Red Christmas operation, many Miskitos were captured by the Government of Nicaragua, and together with some ministers of the Moravian Church, accused of being counterrevolutionaries. A massive exodus then ensued; during which approximately 10,000 Miskitos and many Moravian ministers crossed the Coco River into Honduras, where some 8,000 were subsequently settled in refugee camps in the area of Mocoron, in the Gracias a Dios Department

However, the conflict led to human rights abuses even among the Miskito people themselves. According to a 1985 article by *The New York Times* titled 'Anti-Sandinista Indians Reported Quitting Battle' admitting to the fact that the Miskitos also committed numerous atrocities in their own community:

Miskito Indian rebels fighting the Nicaraguan Army are disenchanted with their leaders and have largely stopped their guerrilla operations in recent months, two former rebel commanders say.

The former rebel officials, who say they have been in close contact with the guerrillas in Honduras, said deep discontent with one guerrilla leader, Steadman Fagoth, had caused hundreds of Indians to quit fighting. They accused Mr. Fagoth of mistreating his men, of ordering the killing of prisoners and Miskitos who opposed his rule and of kidnapping other Indians who were considering voluntarily returning to Nicaragua

The *IACHR's 1991 annual report* claims that the discovery of "common graves" seemed to be people executed by the Sandinista People's army or the State Security and by the Nicaraguan resistance:

In September 1990, the Commission was informed of the discovery of common graves in Nicaragua, especially in areas where fighting had occurred. The information was provided by the Nicaraguan Pro Human Rights Association, which had received its first complaint in June 1990. By December 1991, that Association had received reports of 60 common graves and had investigated 15 of them. While most of the graves seem to be the result of summary executions by members of the Sandinista People's Army or the State Security, some contain the bodies of individuals executed by the Nicaraguan Resistance.

This raises a number of important problems. The first is the matter of the victims' identification. The second is to ascertain the circumstances of their deaths, the time and place of their deaths, and those responsible. This issue of

responsibility is directly linked to the amnesty that was decreed on March 14, 1990, when the National Assembly was controlled by the Sandinista Front. The amnesty has protected the authors of acts that violate human rights. Because of the circumstances under which the amnesty was granted, some human rights groups believe it was tantamount to a self-pardon. This measure was used at the very outset, to prevent investigations. Though those investigations are being carried out, members of human rights groups say that those investigations come up against numerous obstacles in the National Police or in the Office of the Inspector General of the Army, which is the institution to which investigations are referred when there is evidence that military personnel are involved.

The human rights groups state that one of their chief concerns is that those responsible for the human rights violations that the graves reveal remain in positions of power in either the Police or the Army, or are members of grass roots organizations of the Sandinista Front. Both the Nicaraguan Pro Human Rights Association and the Permanent Commission on Human Rights have proposed that a special committee be formed to investigate the circumstances surrounding the deaths of those whose bodies were found in the common graves

*The IACHR's 1992 annual report* also claimed that the discovery of mass graves were the result of mass executions carried out as early as 1984 by Nicaragua's security services (who supposedly pretended to be the contras) that contained more than 75 bodies. Another 72 grave sites were also discovered:

According to the information supplied to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, between January 14 and 15, 1992, seven common graves were discovered in El Bijagua district, Camoapa jurisdiction, department of Boaco. They contained the bodies of 75 people. The investigations conducted by human rights organizations found that they were the bodies of peasant farmers from the area who were murdered in November 1984, after being "recruited" by elements of State Security who pretended to be members of the Nicaraguan Resistance. They were taken to the site where the graves were discovered supposedly to receive military training. According to the reports received. The current Chief of the National Police, Commandant René Vivas Lugo, was Deputy Secretary of the Interior at the time these events occurred.

The Inter-American Commission was also told that in May, a common grave containing the six corpses of an entire family were discovered in the town of Quininowas, Department of Jinotega. Human rights groups investigated and found that the killings were allegedly committed by members of the Ligeró Cazador Battalion of the Sandinista People's Army, who invaded that town on February 7, 1985.

By December 1992, human rights groups had received 72 reports of common graves and had investigated 13 of those reports. While the majority of those graves seem to contain the remains of individuals summarily executed by members of the Sandinista People's Army, some contain the remains of persons executed by members of the Nicaraguan Resistance

However, in response to the CIA's covert activities against the Sandinistas, Sergio Ramirez Mercado, one of the three members of the governing body of Nicaragua at that time delivered a statement '*Nicaragua Makes Its Case*' (which can be found at the Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room at [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)) before the government declared a 'state of emergency' and said the following:

The supply of money, training and arms to the bands of former Somoza National Guardsmen operating from Honduran territory, as part of a clandestine operation run by the Central Intelligence Agency

Mercado went on to mention Operation Red Christmas was organized by the CIA:

As a consequence of this terrorist activity, bands of former National Guardsmen, in alliance with Steadman Fagoth, a former Somoza security agent, were able this past December and January to organize their "Red Christmas" operation, which destroyed indigenous communities along the Coco river between Nicaragua and Honduras and created a beachhead in Nicaraguan territory. Before the revolutionary government re-established absolute control of the zone, Red Christmas resulted in the murder of nearly sixty Nicaraguans, including civilians and members of our frontier guards, army troops and security forces. Red Christmas also provoked the forced exodus of a considerable number of indigenous communities into Honduras. National Guardsmen tortured and raped residents of the communities as well as local medical personnel.

The revolutionary government was forced to relocate the riverside communities in more secure areas of the national territory, where our Miskito brethren will have, for the first time, access to systematic medical assistance, education, adequate housing, electricity and cultivable land. This relocation has given rise to a ferocious, slanderous campaign of lies mounted by the C.I.A and the state department against our revolution

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, a historian, writer and feminist who wrote *'Blood on the Border: A Memoir of the Contra War'* published in 2005 based on her own experience when she visited Nicaragua to follow the situation of the Miskito communities in the northeastern region of Nicaragua. Dunbar-Ortiz wrote a chapter titled *'Red Christmas'* where she explains how the CIA planned to create a militarized northeastern front to draw in the Sandinista military and allow the real war to take place on the northwestern Honduran border and on the short southern border with Costa Rica:

This is what the CIA called it, Operation Red Christmas, and by that they meant bloody. They meant the red of fire and of the blood caused by gunfire, not the red of fireworks in celebration of Navidad. Red Christmas was the opening salvo of the US-organized and -financed Contra war to Oust the Sandinistas. Not many people knew about it at the time, and little of the reportage and history then or since identify Red Christmas as the beginning of the Contra war. I know only because I was there. It was reported at the time that the US government spent \$2.5 billion a year on media for domestic consumption. Against all propaganda to the contrary, my own word was a whisper, the testimony of an eyewitness. From then on, I would try to magnify the whisper.

What was publicized then and is now remembered about Red Christmas is the Sandinista army's evacuation ("removed," "forcibly relocated," "herded into concentration camps," as press accounts read at the time) of all the inhabitants of the Miskitu villages on the Rio Coco border with Honduras to five settlements eighty miles south of the border. The evacuation did in fact take place in January 1982 as a response to the start of the Contra military initiative.

In November 1981, the Reagan administration had signed a "finding" authorizing the CIA to spend \$19.5 million to the Contra project. The Red

Christmas attacks of December 21, 1981 made use of several thousand CIA-trained guerillas-mostly Miskitu Indians, followers of Steadman Fagoth, who attacked Sandinista forces along the Rio Coco. They were trained by former Somoza Guardsman and officers on loan from the Argentine military dictatorship that had been established in 1976 under General Jorge Rafael Videla, masters of murdering civilians, torture, and disappearances until their collapse in 1983.

The aim of the Red Christmas attack was to create a militarized northeastern front to draw the Sandinista military while the real war would take place on the northwestern Honduran border and the short southern border with Costa Rica. In western Honduras, former Somoza guardsmen were already operating as the FDN (Nicaraguan Democratic Front). Down in Costa Rica, a former Sandinista commander, Eden Pastora had formed a paramilitary unit, ARDE, funded by the CIA, and was allied with Brooklyn Rivera's MISURASATA. While the Sandinistas were busy putting down a CIA-created Miskitus rebellion, they would be unable to defend Managua from attacks from the north and south. The CIA's other objective was to place civilians, Miskitus, in the crossfire so that the US could accuse the Sandinistas of massacring the Indians.

The Sandinistas were not fooled by this strategy, however. And they had, no intention of allowing the Miskitus to be cannon fodder. Yet they had to stop the attacks on their northeastern front. They therefore chose to evacuate the Miskitu border population and create a free-fire zone in the northeast. In part, this choice was forced on them because the Miskitus border zone was the most densely populated of the three areas. But it was also based on Sandinista mistrust of the Miskitus-the Sandinistas did not believe the Miskitus would resist attacks by their own brothers, whereas they knew that the scattered northern mountain villages on the Pacific side and those on the southern frontier were strongly pro-Sandinista and could be relied on to defend themselves. Since then, Sandinista leaders have acknowledged that it was a mistake to have moved the Miskitus, but the Sandinistas were placed in a no-win situation by the US strategy.

Many Sandinista supporters in the United States and elsewhere faulted the Sandinistas for responding militarily without consideration of the alternatives. And in truth, the decision backfired almost immediately. Instead of moving to the camps the Sandinistas had created for them, nearly half the Miskitu population crossed the river into Honduras. After listening to Moravian and Contra propaganda, they were afraid that the Sandinistas really did plan to incarcerate them in Cuban concentration camps while Cuban settlers would be brought in to colonize their beloved land. They responded to promises made by the missionaries and the contras that they would be taken care of, even given land holdings, if they joined the Contra side. In Honduras, a refugee camp had been prepared for them-thanks to the US "proconsul" in Honduras, John Negroponte, and his wife, Diane. During his tenure as US ambassador to Honduras from 1981 to 1985, Negroponte oversaw the growth of military aid to Honduras from \$4 million to \$77.4 million a year, all for the Contra war

The IACHR's 1983 *'Report on the Situation of Human Rights of a Segment of the Nicaragua Population of Miskito Origin'* also acknowledged Nicaragua's concerns about the CIA's 'Red Christmas' operation:

On September 16, 1983, the Government of Nicaragua replied to this communication from the IACHR. The note, signed by the Foreign Minister and addressed to the Chairman of the Commission, reviews the process of friendly settlement, and then states the viewpoints of the Nicaraguan Government with respect to implementation of the Commission's recommendations. With

respect to the recommendation that it investigate the alleged violations of the right to life of the of Miskito citizens as a result of the events that took place in the region of the Coco River at the end of 1981, the note merely indicates that enclosed is “the report of the military investigation of the Leimus case, which contains the plan known under the name of Red Christmas, by means of which the armed Somocista counterrevolution attempted to invade Nicaragua from Honduras in the border area of Zelaya Norte, to seize part of our territory and declare it a liberated zone (seizure of the territory of Nicaragua), and to set up a provisional government that would immediately request the recognition of the governments in the region as well as military support.”

*That action, adds the Government of Nicaragua:*

Would be accompanied by an attempt to sow confusion through propaganda disseminated by a broadcast that is transmitted from Honduras in the Miskito language: many Miskitos, misled, left for that country, manipulated by the former agent of the Somocista security guard Steadman Fagoth Muller, who urged them to invade our territory in support of the Somocista bands that attacked the border populations, which were poorly armed and trained.

*It also states that:*

The deaths that occurred in Leimus were the consequence of the fierce attacks directed by the counterrevolutionary units that tried to take the town, and finding a group of 14 detainees, accused of collaboration with the counterrevolution, they took advantage of the confusion that prevailed at the time to flee toward the river under crossfire.

*And that:*

Also enclosed is the judgment of the Judge Advocate’s Office of the Sandinista Armed Forces, which investigated the events that took place at the end of December 1981, which led to a report dated April 2, 1983

Operation Red Christmas was basically a false flag operation intended to discredit the Sandinista government. The Reagan administration wanted to justify their covert actions by using the Miskito’s as cannon fodder to advance their cause, and that was to remove the Sandinista government by whatever means necessary.

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### **About the author:**

Timothy Alexander Guzman is an independent researcher and writer with a focus on political, economic, media and historical spheres. He has been published in Global Research, The Progressive Mind, European Union Examiner, News Beacon Ireland, WhatReallyHappened.com, EIN News and a number of other alternative news sites. He is a graduate of Hunter College in New York City.

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