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### TransAfrica Forum Issue Brief

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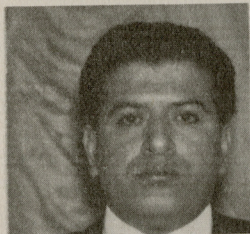
### WASHINGTON'S WAR WITH NICARAGUA

Since the 1979 overthrow of the regime of Anastasio Somoza Debayle by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), Nicaraguans have been confronted by a fierce U.S.-led destabilization campaign. According to the Reagan administration, such a campaign is justified by the fact that the Sandinista government is a Soviet-Cuban puppet which poses a dire threat to the stability of the Hemisphere and the security of the U.S.

To date, there has been no direct U.S. military intervention of Nicaragua, but an unacknowledged and undeclared war is clearly being waged against that country. What the U.S. has done is to organize, finance, supply, and direct a proxy-war fought by former members of the National Guard, the hated police and military force used by the Somoza dynasty to repress the Nicaraguan population for more than forty years. These "contras" claim that they serve merely as a rallying point for disaffected Nicaraguans who would like to join them in opposing the Sandinistas. The U.S. claims that it is backing these "freedom fighters" only as a means of ending Sandinista support for and supply of arms to rebels in El Salvador. But even knowledgeable U.S. officials must admit that the Salvadorean guerrillas have had easy access to arms from a range of sources and that at no time since 1981—and probably not before—have they been critically dependent on supplies that might have reached them from Nicaragua.

In the face of the growing tension that Washington's war with Nicaragua brings to Latin America, other governments in the region have attempted to find a negotiated settlement before war explodes among neighboring countries. The governments of Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela have formed a regional negotiating body called the CONTADORA Group, but the U.S. response to their initiatives have been lukewarm. Instead, the Reagan administration has created a National Bipartisan Commission on Central America to study the situation. This ISSUE BRIEF presents the views of Dr. Antonio Jarquin, Nicaragua's Ambassador to the U.S.; describes the current situation in Nicaragua; analyzes Reagan administration policy; and examines alternatives to current U.S. policies. □

#### Ambassador Antonio Jarquin



**NICARAGUA IS PREPARED TO ESTABLISH NORMAL . . . RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. WE DEMAND ONLY THAT OUR COUNTRY . . . BE RESPECTED. WE HAVE A RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION. WE HAVE A RIGHT TO A LIFE OF**

**DIGNITY, AND WE WILL DEFEND THAT RIGHT.**

#### How would you describe current relations between the United States and Nicaragua?

**Jarquin:** The relations between the two countries are tense because of the hostile attitude of the Reagan administration towards the people and government of Nicaragua. Even before taking office, the Reagan administration announced that they would do everything possible to overthrow the government of Nicaragua. And just a few months after President Reagan was inaugurated, we began to hear reports about millions of dollars being allocated to finance CIA covert operations against the Nicaraguan government. The Reagan administration has promoted the regrouping of the defeated former Somoza National Guard; allowed them to train openly in Florida, Texas, and California (in clear violation of the United States Neutrality Act); and later transferred them to Honduras. From bases in Honduras, these former guards are now attacking and killing Nicaraguan citizens along the border areas—with weapons and direction provided by the CIA.

Our government as well as those of several Western European and Latin American countries have tried, to no avail, to persuade the Reagan administration to set aside its militaristic approach to the problems of Central America.

#### What role is Nicaragua playing in the current situation in El Salvador and Central America?

**Jarquin:** The government of Nicaragua morally supports the struggle of the people of El Salvador. We cannot do otherwise because we are a people that have suffered oppression and injustice and we are a people who since July 19, 1979 began to enjoy freedom for the first time in our history. We believe that it is the moral obligation of those who enjoy freedom to support the struggle of people elsewhere who are fighting to be free.

Our support, however, does not include material aid. It is interesting to note that the Reagan administration has not presented any evidence to support its allegation that there is a flow of arms from Nicaragua to the revolutionary forces in El Salvador. I submit that no such evidence is forthcoming because such flows of arms do not exist. It is not the policy of the government of Nicaragua to give material aid to the guerrillas in El Salvador because we know that this is precisely the pretext that the Reagan administration would like to have as a justification to intervene in El Salvador.

#### What are the problems that Nicaragua sees as impediments to the normalization of relations between your country and the United States?

**Jarquin:** The fundamental impediment is the attitude of the Reagan administration as reflected in its policy towards Nicaragua. Nicaragua is prepared to establish normal and



friendly relations with the United States. We demand only that our country, though small in territorial extension, be respected. We have a right to self-determination. We have a right to a life of dignity, and we will defend that right. We cannot accept the proposition that a life of dignity for the Nicaraguan people precludes the possibility of normal, respectful, and peaceful relations between our country and the government of the United States of America.

**What steps is your government prepared to take to bring about regional peace and to improve relations with the United States?**

**Jarquín:** On the 19th of July of this year, the government of Nicaragua presented a six-point peace proposal. At that time, my government stated its willingness to address the concerns that the government of the United States claims to have with respect to Nicaragua. We also stated that the concerns of Nicaragua with respect to the United States should be addressed as well. The Reagan administration's response was the deployment of three major naval task forces and the announced stationing of U.S. troops in Honduras, precisely in the region of that country which is used by the former Somoza national guards as sanctuaries and staging areas for attacks against Nicaragua.

Nevertheless, we will continue to pursue a peaceful solution to the conflict and be supportive of the initiatives of the CONTADORA group because the alternative that is being pursued by the Reagan administration will inevitably lead to a Vietnam-like situation in the heart of this continent. We are convinced that the people of the United States do not wish to see a repetition of the nightmare of Vietnam—an experience we in Central American most definitely would like to avoid.

**The Reagan administration describes the counterrevolutionary forces as "freedom fighters" and denies that it is aiding in an attempt to overthrow your government. How would you describe these forces?**

**Jarquín:** The Reagan administration's "freedom fighters" are, in fact, remnants of the former Somoza National Guard—organized, trained, armed, and directed by the U.S. government through the CIA. These "freedom fighters" are the same people that murdered more than fifty thousand Nicaraguans during the last two years of the Somoza family dictatorship. The Reagan administration's "freedom fighters" are former members of what was, in effect, Somoza's private army—an army which kept Somoza in power for more than forty-five years through torture, repression, and murder of more than three hundred thousand citizens of Nicaragua.

With respect to U.S. aid to these former Somoza National Guards, there is no question whatsoever. The U.S. House of Representatives voted this past summer to cut off funds going to Somoza guards—via the CIA—precisely because the majority of the members of that body have become convinced that these funds are being used, in violation of the laws of the United States, to sponsor the overthrow of a government that has diplomatic relations with the United States. Also there are statements by the leaders of these counterrevolutionary forces affirming that they are receiving aid from the U.S. government.

Recently, three former pilots of Somoza's Air Force were shot down in a DC-3C while flying a supply mission over Nicaraguan territory. These former Somoza guards, one of them an ex-major, stated categorically that the CIA gave the airplane to the counterrevolutionary forces. They added that the CIA plans to ship more planes and to retrain more pilots before November, when a major offensive against Nicaraguan population centers is scheduled to begin.

**How would you assess the recent U.S. invasion of Grenada? What are the implications for U.S.-Nicaraguan relations?**

**Jarquín:** The U.S. invasion of Grenada is in fact the culmination of a plan set in motion by the Reagan administration upon assuming office, and it consists fundamentally of doing everything possible, including the use of military force, to impose the will of the U.S. government on countries like Grenada and Nicaragua.

Why has the U.S. government unleashed an international campaign of slogans, lies, half truths, and distortions against Nicaragua? I submit that this is all part of a plan that seeks to create a climate that the Reagan administration would then use to provoke actions in Central America which would subsequently and irrevocably lead to direct U.S. military intervention, an eventuality bound to spark a regional war in Central America.

The tragedy in Grenada should give us pause. We should ask ourselves whether in the fourth quarter of the twentieth century we are going to allow the discredited and failed policy of the past hundred and more years of successive U.S. governments towards Latin America and the Caribbean to continue and hence, foster the seeds of resentment and conflicts, or if we are to fashion a new relationship based on respect and the recognition that peace is guaranteed only when justice and freedom prevails for all.

Today the people of Nicaragua are enraged because of the crimes against us committed by the U.S. government. The fury of the people when just is also sacred and more powerful than naval fleets, tanks, or war planes. We are not a military power but we feel ourselves to be a moral power. That is why the war against Nicaragua would not be conventional. If attacked, we will defend ourselves. We are sure that we will be supported by other people of this continent, including important sectors of the U.S.

The people of Nicaragua, even as we prepare ourselves to repel any outside aggression, continue to be optimistic that reason will triumph and that the forces of war presently unleashed will be reined in, never again to be set free. It is still not too late. □



## THE KISSINGER COMMISSION

World attention was at least temporarily diverted from U.S. militarization of Central America by President Reagan's appointment of Henry Kissinger as chairman of the *National Bipartisan Commission on Central America*. The Commission seems to be an essential element of administration efforts to dispel the growing opposition of U.S. policy in Central America. Reagan administration officials repeatedly have told reporters that criticism of U.S. policy should be withheld until the Commission report is submitted on January 10, 1984.

The names of appointees to the Commission were announced with great fanfare, but of the twelve named (Nicholas Brady, Henry Cisneros, William Clements, Carlos Diaz-Alejandro, Wilson Johnson, Lane Kirkland, Richard Scammon, John Silber, Potter Stewart, Robert Strauss, and William Walsh) none has generated the controversy which accompanied the announcement of its chairman. Even Kissinger supporters admitted that the former Secretary of State had neither exhibited an interest or demonstrated expertise in Central American affairs. Many others noted his tendency to view every conflict as a product of Soviet influence. Kissinger's role in the CIA orchestrated overthrow of Chile's Salvador Allende and in U.S.-South African attempts to unseat the Angolan government exacerbated concerns about his leadership of the Commission.

The Commission's investigative process has been as controversial as its membership. The Commission sent questionnaires to more than 200 people selected by its staff and approved by the 12 Commissioners. Some recipients commented publicly that the questions were too broad, sought basic information, and were suggestive of particular answers. Others noted that educational groups and area specialists with progressive postures were not even asked to share their views.

The travel itinerary for the Commission's fact finding mission also suggested that only information favorable to the administration was being sought. Only nine hours were scheduled for a visit to Nicaragua. Instead, at least three members of the Commission, including Kissinger himself, took time while in Costa Rica to meet with U.S.-sponsored forces fighting the Nicaraguan government. This meeting not only contradicted the publicly-stated Commission policy of traveling together, but caused dissension among Commission members who felt that it was an inappropriate breach of protocol to meet with anti-government forces before meeting with the Nicaraguan government itself. San Antonio Mayor Henry Cisneros spoke to reporters about the apparent double-standard: the Commission refused to meet with the liberation movement fighting against the Salvadoran junta but willingly met with anti-Nicaraguan forces. Perhaps because of the attention given his statements, the Commission later amended its plans to include a meeting with Salvadoran representatives in Washington DC. Unless rather dramatic changes are made, the Kissinger Commission promises to serve only as another tool of U.S. policy. As Mayor Cisneros stated, "The U.S. generally is in a poor position to be either the solution to the problem alone, or even to aspire to lead negotiations because of our history in the region." □

## THE CONTADORA GROUP

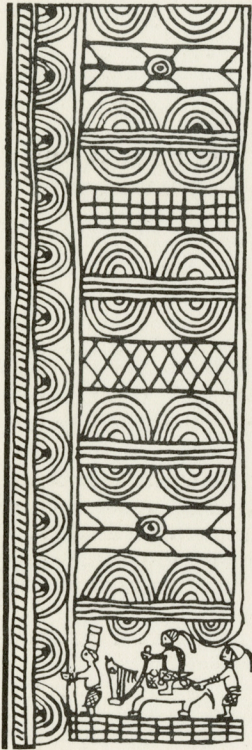
Working together since their January 1983 meeting on Contadora Island (off the coast of Panama), the governments of Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela have attempted to make progress in their effort to reduce tensions in Central America. While their peace initiatives have been welcomed by the Central American countries and supported by many other nations throughout the world, the Reagan administration has greeted each success of the CONTADORA Group with skepticism and continued to seek its own military solution to the region's problems.

CONTADORA Group members have warned of the danger of viewing Central American conflicts within the context of the East-West confrontation. Their own histories have helped them to understand that neither the systemic problems of developing countries nor the tensions among Latin American countries and the U.S. began with the 1917 Soviet Revolution or the development of a "Communist Bloc." Each of the CONTADORA nations has had its own experience with U.S. intervention. Therefore, the group continues to stress the importance of non-intervention and self-determination in its proposals for peace.

The approach taken by the CONTADORA Group in its search for peace is markedly different from that of U.S.-sponsored initiatives. The CONTADORA Group has arranged rounds of discussions between representatives of all Central American nations and has incorporated suggestions received from each. In response to a Costa Rican government request, an Observer Commission consisting of two representatives from each country was formed under CONTADORA auspices in May and now continues to serve as an advisory group in all matters pertaining to the solution of border problems. By September the foreign ministers of the CONTADORA Group and those of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua had reached agreement on a document of common objectives that constituted a basis of understanding for future negotiations over the mechanisms needed to formalize commitments and ensure systems of verification and control. On October 5, 1983 President Betancur of Colombia was able to announce that the five Central American nations had agreed to a declaration on future issues to negotiate, the freeze on arms importation and army size, the reduction of the number of military advisors, and the use of one nation's territory for the destabilization of another. The declaration, which Nicaragua was the first to sign, constitutes a statement of intention to begin substantive negotiations on issues outlined in the twenty-one point proposal formulated in September by the Central American foreign ministers. However, even as the declaration was being sent to the U.N. Secretary General in accordance with Security Council resolutions on the issue, the U.S. was denigrating the value of such diplomatic breakthroughs and reiterating its support for anti-government forces attacking Nicaragua. The CONTADORA Group has argued that the primary responsibility for achieving an agreement that will guarantee lasting peace and stability falls primarily on the Central American nations themselves. Unless the U.S. curtails its military and political involvement in the region, however, the efforts of the CONTADORA Group will prove futile. □



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## THE U.S. AND NICARAGUA: "AFTER 126 YEARS THE ENEMY IS THE SAME"

An American visitor to Nicaragua recently saw a banner which read, "*A 126 años el enemigo es el mismo*" (After 126 years the enemy is the same). Nicaraguans recall that since the 19th century, the U.S. has intervened—both directly and indirectly—in their internal affairs with great regularity. Citing the Monroe Doctrine as the basis for its claim, by the mid-1800s, the U.S. sought to expel the British from Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast so that it could control the area's resources. Pressure from wealthy slaveowners—who sought to add Nicaragua as a slave territory—and from industrialists—who competed to build railroad and canal routes—made the issue of U.S. or British control a central theme of Nicaraguan politics until 1894 when the British effectively transferred control of the region to the U.S.

Major armed U.S. intervention in Nicaragua began in 1854 when the Navy destroyed the Nicaraguan town of San Juan del Sur. In 1855 the Tennessee filibuster William Walker, accompanied by his 58-man "American Phalanx of Immortals," occupied Nicaragua, unilaterally installed himself as president, contracted foreign loans which used Nicaraguan territory as collateral, reinstituted slavery, confiscated Nicaraguan landholdings for redistribution to U.S. citizens, and declared English the official language. Although Walker acted as an individual, he was backed by the Southern slave states; and he received immediate diplomatic recognition from the U.S. government. In 1857 Walker was defeated by the combined armies of several Central American countries and was forced to return to the U.S.

The administration of President William Howard Taft helped to sponsor a revolt and supported the establishment of a more pro-American government in 1909 because it argued that Nicaragua's president was contributing to internal turmoil in neighboring states. Three years later, Taft sent more than 12,000 American fighting men to restore "stability" to Nicaragua. U.S. financial interests operated the railway and the Central Bank, and the U.S. government supervised the collection of custom duties. A small marine force remained in the country until 1925.

In 1927 President Coolidge ordered a second protracted military occupation of Nicaragua. The foreign menace to be fought was Mexico, which the U.S. described as being under "Moscow's influence," charged with promoting "bolshivism," and accused of supplying arms to Nicaraguan rebels led by General Augusto Cesar Sandino. In 1928 the Marines supervised elections at the same time that they fought Sandino's forces. On December 31, 1930 eight Marines on patrol in the hills were killed by Sandino's guerrillas. The resulting uproar from the U.S. led to the withdrawal of the Marines from a direct combat role; and in two years, the Senate adopted an amendment to the appropriations bill prohibiting the use of funds to transport Marines to Nicaragua.

The solution to its continuing problems in Nicaragua, so the U.S. thought, was the creation of a Nicaraguan substitute for the Marines: the National Guard, a military and police force. When the Marines were finally sent home in January 1933 unable to win a military victory, they left in their stead the National Guard with Anastasio Somoza Garcia as its commander. Sandino, who accepted a ceasefire and disarmament agreement in February 1933, was killed by the Guard one year later. Somoza consolidated the harshly repressive rule of the Guard which was continued by his son, Anastasio Somoza Debayle. The U.S. plan seemed to work for more than four decades—that is, until Somoza



Debayle was overthrown by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in 1979.

In the 1920s Will Rogers is quoted as having asked, "Why are we in Nicaragua and what the hell are we doing there?" The same questions may be as easily asked today, and the answers would be quite simple. The Reagan administration is attempting to overthrow the Sandinista government. Currently, U.S. forces may not be directly "in Nicaragua," but the Reagan administration has chosen an exile army, composed of former members of the Guard, who are backed by American military power, to serve as its proxy in the war with Nicaragua. For more than two years, the CIA has paid, supplied, and trained 10,000 counterrevolutionaries, known as "*contras*," who are based in Honduras just across the border from Nicaragua. The administration has assured the Congress that these "freedom fighters" strike only at military targets. The truth is that, since March 1982, the *contras* have killed more than 700 persons who were mostly unarmed civilians. Farm buildings have been destroyed by mortar fire; peasants have been kidnapped across the border; teachers, health care workers, and agricultural technicians have been innocent victims of assassination.

In early August U.S. army, marine, and air forces units began preparing for an *unprecedentedly* long six months of training maneuvers with Honduran forces, including nearly 6,000 U.S. combat troops ashore and two carrier task groups patrolling positions off Nicaragua's Atlantic and Pacific coasts. The administration's assertion that these maneuvers are "routine" is completely unfounded. The largest previous land exercise in Honduras involved 900 U.S. troops and lasted only 6 days. No precedent exists for the *scale, proximity, or intent* of the naval deployments.

But the U.S.-sponsored wars on Nicaragua's borders cannot topple the Sandinista government *without* more direct U.S. intervention. The *contras* may be well-trained and well-armed, but they are far outnumbered by the Sandinistas. More importantly, Nicaraguans—unlike their fellow Central Americans—are no longer a people terrorized by their own armed forces and will fight to protect hard-won gains made since 1979.

What the Reagan administration wants is a full-scale war between Nicaragua and Honduras which Nicaragua would appear to have provoked. Such a situation would create the perfect pretext for a U.S. invasion. The Sandinistas have been exceedingly careful in avoiding such a provocation. Let us hope that the Reagan administration has not been so emboldened by the recent assault on Grenada as to make this pretext unnecessary. □



## PROFILE: NICARAGUA'S ATLANTIC COAST

Until the Sandinista Liberation Front began the difficult task of social reconstruction, the Atlantic region of Nicaragua was ignored by the Managua government and in fact dominated by external forces seeking to control this strategically located Central American nation. While the land of both the Atlantic and Pacific regions was coveted and the people of each region exploited, Nicaraguans on the Atlantic Coast were also cruelly neglected. Only the Sandinista government has attempted to document and preserve the region's unique cultural legacy and to ensure opportunities for the participation of its people in Nicaraguan national society. Unfortunately however, the complexity of the Atlantic Coast's circumstances and ethnic composition makes it a prime target of the U.S. campaign to discredit and destabilize the Nicaraguan revolution.

By the time the Spanish "discovered" Nicaragua in 1522, virtually all the fertile land areas were populated by Indigenous people who fiercely resisted attempts to displace them. Thousands of Nicaragua's original inhabitants were killed or deported to Spain's Viceroyalty of Peru before the conquistadores were able to establish settlements along the Pacific. The Spanish were unable to effectively penetrate the dense jungle and vast savannahs of the Atlantic, however; and the area became a haven for Africans escaping the harshness of Caribbean slavery. Referred to as "cimaronos," these Africans joined the Indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Coast to protect their freedom.

The Indigenous and African peoples who lived on the Atlantic Coast were not to be left in peace. By 1604 English slave ships arrived in an attempt to expand the plantation economies of the Caribbean, and the English established their first settlement on the Atlantic Coast in 1630. Twenty-five years later, they claimed as a protectorate a strip of Central America's Atlantic Coast that stretched from modern day Belize to the Nicaraguan-Costa Rican border, and by 1697 had taken an English-speaking black to Jamaica to be crowned "King of the Mosquitia," with the governor of Jamaica named as "Mosquitia's" president. This artificially-created "Indigenous monarchy" survived for almost two full centuries as a ruse to cover England's commercial exploitation of the region's people and natural resources.

The Miskito people were but one of many Indigenous groups which lived along the coast—each speaking their own language, retaining their own customs, and reflecting various degrees of African influence. English records are illustrative of the blatant racism which characterized the period: "... During the last century the whole Caribbean (coast) was flooded with escaped slaves ... The greater the proportion of Negro (sic) blood, the more stupid are the tribes ... " Thus, whether Paya, Suma, Zama, Seco, or Rama peoples, racism led each to be defined along a spectrum of Afro-Indigenous fusion, with the percentage of African blood the distinguishing characteristic. This ethnic composition contrasted with the Pacific, where most people were labeled mestizos because of their Indian and Spanish origin.

Along the Atlantic Coast, foreign-owned industries stood in sharp contrast to the feudalistic farm system in the Pacific. The intimidation used to bind generations of peasants to family haciendas within the Pacific region was un-

necessary in the wage labor enclaves of the Atlantic, where English-speaking blacks (Creoles) served as functionaries for faceless corporations and controlled mostly illiterate Indigenous workers. As a result of this relative lack of repression, their geographic isolation from the brutalities of the Somoza dictatorship, and differences in the cultural legacies of British and Spanish colonialism, Atlantic Coast residents remained fairly aloof from the revolutionary processes resulting in Somoza's overthrow.

Today, the historic manipulation of the Atlantic Coast continues. U.S. sponsored forces have deliberately chosen the Atlantic coast as a war zone. CIA-controlled forces based in Honduras consistently cross the border to attack the traditional homes of Miskito people, forcing the Nicaraguan government to evacuate the area and resettle the people in order to spare civilian lives. Puerto Cabezas, an important port on the Atlantic Coast, has been bombed by those calling themselves representatives of Indigenous people but who are organized, financed, and directed by the CIA.

Despite total U.S. silence on the existence of Indigenous and African people in Nicaragua during the Somoza dynasty, the Reagan administration has been quick to accuse the Sandinistas of genocidal practices and cultural chauvinism. Photos taken of atrocities committed during the Somoza regime were instead attributed to the Sandinistas, and anti-government rebels of Indigenous descent have been promoted as spokespersons of their people. Yet representative Indigenous organizations have commended the Sandinistas for their attempts to respect and preserve the culture and peoples of the Coast.

The U.S. has similarly disregarded other changes taking place on the Atlantic Coast. After centuries of deliberate neglect, roads have been built, electric and sanitation facilities expanded, and television and telephone systems installed. Health care centers have been established to combat the rampant but preventable diseases of silicosis and tuberculosis and to lower an infant mortality rate of one hundred twenty per thousand. A massive literacy campaign is being conducted in English, Miskito, and Suma in which children are taught in their traditional language until fourth grade when Spanish is introduced as a second language.

The U.S. has paid even less attention to changes in racial attitudes. Under Somoza's dynasty, the fact that eighty-five percent of Nicaragua's people are non-white was downplayed and the existence of Afro-Nicaraguans unpublicized, but the Sandinista's proudly assert their Indigenous-African heritage and their historic links to the Caribbean. Under Somoza, Nicaragua's votes in the UN were aligned 100 percent with those of South Africa, one of Somoza's primary supporters; and Nicaraguan law prohibited the immigration of "Negroes, ... Arabs, ... and Gypsies." These policies have been reversed by the Sandinistas, who have made special efforts to express their solidarity with progressive African and Caribbean countries, national liberation movements, and Indigenous organizations. Such radical shifts in policy have helped to earn the Nicaraguan government the respect of African and Indigenous people and the enmity of the United States. □



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