CHAPTER VI

U.S. POLITICAL INTERVENTION IN NICARAGUA
In earlier two chapters, we have described the US military and economic intervention. Every act, whether military or economic is directed by political motivation. If economy is the super-structure of a country, the polity is the director which moulds the economy according to the ideology being pursued by that country. All activities are the manifestation of the political ideology of a country.

This chapter is an endeavour to analyse the political motives of America which brought a number of hardships to the infant economy of Nicaragua resulting in the political instability of the country.

The history of the U.S. intervention is not a new phenomenon. It stretches back to the days of Monroe Doctrine of 1823 which gave birth to the 'Gunboat' and 'Dollar Diplomacy', when Washington sought to make Central America and the Caribbean safe for the United States.¹ The main purpose to keep Central America safe, from the emerging European power, was to have international freedom of access to raw materials, markets for manufactured goods, to secure the expansion of American corporate and banking concerns and to maintain a favourable international "balance of power".²

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These interventions have secured American investment abroad and have protected the U.S. access to the world’s resources, but it has also intensified poverty, inequality, and human rights abuses for two-thirds of the world’s population. This poverty and inequality is the major cause of instability in Third World countries.

Earlier chapter, devoted to the history, economy, polity and geography of Nicaragua, explains the U.S. interventions in Nicaragua. For a century, America treated Nicaragua as its colony and maintained direct control by installing Somoza regime. From 1909 to 1979, the United States, either directly through the marines or indirectly through Somoza and the National Guards, ruled the country. Theoretically, Nicaragua was an independent country, but in practice, it was dominated completely, economically and politically, by the United States. It was only in July, 1979 that a nationalist government was established by overthrowing the Somoza regime.

This chapter analyses the U.S.-Nicaraguan confrontation since 1979 to 1988. The policies adopted under the Presidency of Carter, could not bear fruits for the U.S. With Reagan coming into power in 1981, the covert war being pursued by President Carter, started taking an overt shape. The Contras (The counter-revolutionaries) were declared as the freedom-fighters by President Ronald Reagan. They were given enormous monetary and military help to overthrow the
Sandinista regime. Sandinista regime was declared as Marxist Leninist. This regime was blamed for giving help and training to the El Salvadoran guerrillas. President Reagan was hellbent on overthrowing this regime. He started giving aid to the Contras covertly which became overt later on. He also imposed economic sanctions against Nicaragua; which culminated into a trade embargo. Keeping in mind the consequences of direct attack, and in order to avoid another 'Vietnam', President Reagan never dared to attack Nicaragua. Rather, he preferred to continue his aid to the Contras. A time came when President Reagan was severely criticised by his inner circle and Democrats. Then Reagan administration invented indirect means to support the Contras. The money and material was supplied to them through Israel via Iran. At last, Daniel Ortega was left with no option. Every peace proposal made by Nicaragua was put into the dustbin. Finally Nicaragua appealed to the world court and filed a suit against the U.S. In its final verdict, the Hague Court directed the U.S. not to resort to such overt or covert activities which endanger the integrity and independence of Nicaragua. This chapter attempts to analyse these events.

Before going further, it would be pertinent to analyse the economic situation at the time of Sandinista revolution. Though discussed in the preceding chapter, a reference to the economy which was inherited by the new regime in Nicaragua will reflect upon the exploiting policies of the U.S.
administration during the Somoza era. The revolutionary government inherited an economy not only poor, but also severely damaged. "Almost half the population needed food supplies. A third were unemployed. Many of the crops-staple foodstuffs, and cotton, the big export-had gone unplanted during the war. Many factories had been damaged or destroyed".  

The Carter Administration which had supported Somoza till the end, was fundamentally hostile to the Sandinista revolution. The U.S., at first, followed a 'soft' line, hiding its hostility under the claim that all it was interested in, was the welfare of the Nicaraguan people and their human and democratic rights.  

In fact, during the Somoza regime America was compelled to accept the human rights violation in Nicaragua. The National Guard, had committed enormous atrocities on the civilians in Nicaragua. Therefore, The Nicaraguan Catholic bishops, led by Archbishop Obandoy Bravo, issued a letter to President Carter, condemning the reign of terror which the National Guard had been conducting in the countryside for two years. The United States Ambassador in Nicaragua, James Therefore acknowledged the accuracy of the allegations, but


4. ibid, p. 21.
Washington was unwilling to endorse the bishops' criticism without further study.  

The main problem to the Somoza regime, came on 10 January, 1978, when Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, the editor of the 'La Prensa' and the leader of the moderate opposition was assassinated in Managua. His murder detonated two weeks of spontaneous rioting in the capital, followed by a general strike organised by the business community. Somaza's National Guards tried to restore order with their usual brutality.  

Within the U.S. Congress, Somoza's supporters also went over to the offensive. President Carter accepted the human rights violation in Nicaragua. All political parties in Nicaragua. gathered under one banner of FSLN. Peasants, workers, students, women, and others participated in overthrowing the brutal Somoza regime. Ultimately on 19 July, 1979 the revolution reached its climax by overthrowing the Somoza regime.  

The Reagan Administration, representing an ultra-right turn, adopted an aggressive foreign policy. The 'soft line' which was being pursued by the preceding administration under President Carter, was overtaken by a hard one. In August 1981, Thomas Enders, then Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, held discussions with various

5. Leogrande, n.1, p.64.  
Nicaraguan leaders in Managua. Serue Arana, head of the U.S. desk at the Nicaraguan Foreign Ministry, recalled Enders, saying: "You can never forget that the United States is exactly 100 times bigger than you are". Arana interpreted - "I took this message from him: "This is a chance for dialogue, but you have to do what we say".\footnote{Ray Gutman, "Nicaragua: America's Diplomatic Charade", \textit{Foreign Policy} (Washington, D.C.), Fall, 1984, p.5.}

In late 1981, the Reagan Administration started organising and training the mercenary forces known as Contras, for undercover operations against the Nicaraguan regime. Originally, the announced justification for these mercenaries was that they would interdict arms shipments from Nicaragua to the Salvadoran rebels. But this transparent pretense did not last. The Contras announced that their goal was to overthrow the Sandinista government and Reagan described them as "freedom fighters".\footnote{Boorstein, n.3, p.22.}

President Reagan did not keep his activities limited upto Contras only. He started joint military operations with Honduras. The United States stationed large forces around Nicaragua. The U.S. personnel were also stationed in Honduras. Both the forces (U.S. and Honduras) carried out large-scale joint military maneuvers.\footnote{Rubenberg, n.2, p.1502.}

When the Contadora countries (Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Panama) began talk to try to work out a solution
to the 'Central American' problem, the United States backed them - so long as it appeared that they could not find one. But when these countries proposed a solution which Nicaragua accepted, the United States rejected it. These peace proposals will be discussed under the sub section - 'Peace-Initiatives' of this chapter.

President Reagan appointed Kissinger Commission in July, 1983 to find out a solution to the Central American problem. In its report the Commission stressed the need to give more aid to the socially and economically backward countries of Central America. In fact, this Commission was appointed in order to get the sanction of the Congress to continue aid to the Contras. There was no intention to improve the social and economic conditions of the people.10

It is worthwhile to mention here that the Bipartisan commission was not in full agreement.

The FSLN party was elected to power on 4 November, 1984. In its first legislative action, the Assembly approved an amnesty as announced by President Ortega in his inaugural speech. Unfortunately the offer was rejected by the two major groups of Contras, Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN) and the


ii) *Keesings Contemporary Archives* (Bristol), 1984, p. 32491.
Revolutionary Alliance (ARDE).11

These Contra groups were creating much problem of law and order in Nicaragua. On 5 March, a report was issued by the America's Watch Committee entitled, "Violations of the Laws of War by Both Sides in Nicaragua", stating that the Sandinista government had reduced human rights abuses, but that those of Contras had increased involving kidnapping, torture, mutilating and killing both soldiers and civilians.12

To pressurise in a big way, the Reagan administration tried to use its influence on the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to get the loan to Nicaragua cancelled. The Reagan administration used its veto over 'soft-window' (low interest) loans in January, 1982 and in June, 1983, to block aid to Nicaragua. The US does not have veto power over 'hard-window' (high interest) loans in the IDB but nevertheless, it managed to obstruct Nicaragua's access to those developmental credits as well. In January, 1985, it threatened to terminate the U.S. funding of the IDB if further loans were made to Nicaragua. After that no loan was issued to Nicaragua.13 Similarly, the Reagan administration put pressure on private American banks not to lend to the Sandinistas.

12. Keesings Contemporary Archives (Bristol) 1985, p. 33968A.
This act of economic war was followed by the reduction of bilateral trade between the U.S. and Nicaragua. It was followed by the imposition of a complete trade embargo. President Reagan announced on 1 May, 1985, an executive order (not requiring congressional approval) imposing a trade embargo with effect from 7 May, 1985, barring the exchange of all goods and services.\textsuperscript{14}

In 1981 the US terminated Export-Import bank guarantees to finance American exports to Nicaragua; in 1982 prohibitions were placed on the export of U.S. chemical feedstocks, shortly thereafter Washington imposed a highly unfavourable schedule for the shipping of the Nicaraguan sugar to the US, and in June 1983, Reagan ordered the closing of all Nicaraguan consultants without which commercial relations were virtually impossible. Finally, in May 1985, Washington imposed a full embargo.\textsuperscript{15}

It is worthwhile to mention here that this economic war proved highly destructive to the Nicaraguan economy. Production declined, the private sector contracted; inflation soared; decreased export earnings forced the government to limit imports of machinery, fertilisers, oil and other industrial and agricultural necessities. Economic war became

\textsuperscript{14} Keesings Contemporary Archives (Bristol), 1985, p.33968A.

\textsuperscript{15} For details see preceding chapter.
unbearable when military attacks were made on Nicaragua. These military tactics reached their climax when Iran-Contras affair revealed the heinous U.S. intentions to topple the Sandinista regime. The affair earned for the US, international criticism for embezzlement.16

On 16 March, 1988, four of the leading figures in the Iran-Contras Scandal, Adml. John M. Poindexter, Lt. Col. Oliver North, Air Force Gen. Richard v. Secord and Mr. Albert Hakim were indicted by a federal grand jury on charges of conspiracy, fraud, obstruction, and embezzlement. The congressional committee on 18 November issued majority and minority reports on the affair.

The majority report identified Col. North as the 'Central figure' in the affair, finding that he acted with the "express approval" of Adml. Poindexter and had at least the tacit support of McFarlene. It also emphasised the role of Mr. Casey, who encouraged Lt. Col. Oliver North. The Report found no evidence that President Reagan had known of the Contra diversions, but concluded that he bore "ultimate responsibility in that he had allowed a "Cabal of the zealots" to take control of policy, and that, the President created or at least tolerated an environment where those who did know of the diversion believed with certainty that they were carrying out President's policies....

The minority report... concluded that although there had been errors of judgement "there was no constitutional crisis, no systematic disrespect for the "rule of law" no grand conspiracy.... 17

After going through these reports one cannot say that President Reagan had no knowledge about the arms transfer to Contras. This becomes clear from the statement of Mr. McFarlene who says that President Reagan had given explicit oral approval fo the initial shipment of arms to Iran by Israel in August, 1985 and had been informed of subsequent sales. 18

The U.S. claims to be the defender of democracy, liberty and justice. On the contrary it pursues such policies which endanger these universal values. The question is, how long can a nation that proclaims itself as the defender of these universal values, continue to pursue foreign policies whose explicit effects is to deny those same values to the two-thirds of the world's people? It is striking that intellectuals hesitate in exposing the dichotomy between the US rhetorical commitment to these universal values and the reality that its foreign policy means to serve Americans only. 19

The U.S. opposition to the Third World nationalist movements is a long standing policy that originated in the early nineteenth century. It arises from the structural and ideological factors inherent in the American economic system. Monroe Doctrine reflects upon the U.S. intentions towards Central America and for that matter towards the whole of Latin America. The practice started by Monroe Doctrine was continued through a series of policies such as the Roosevelt Corollary.20

When Nicaragua could not mobilize public opinion against the U.S. propaganda, it filed an application with the world court on 9 April, 1984, against United States for "using military force and intervening of her sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence, violating Article 2, paragraph 4 of the Charter of the United Nations; Articles 18 and 20 of the Charter of the Organisation of American States; Article 8 of the Convention of the Rights and Obligations of States; and first and third Article of the Convention of Rights and Obligations of States in Situation of Civil War".21

On 27 June 1986, the ICJ pronounced its final definitive and unappealable ruling condemning the United


States, in favour of Nicaragua. The ICJ decided that the United States, by training, arming, equipping, financing, and supplying the contra forces or otherwise encouraging, supporting and aiding military and paramilitary activities in and against Nicaragua, in breach of its obligation under customary international law, must not intervene in the affairs of other states". 22

The Court also declared that self defense of the United States is a fallacy and the evidence presented by Nicaragua has proved that terrorist activities of the United States violated international law. Furthermore, the commercial embargo and mining of ports are acts which have violated international law openly. 23

One fails to understand why in spite of such world public opinion, America has refused to accept the unappealable verdict of International Court of Justice. What is critical in the present situation in Nicaragua is that now the United States does not maintain even the most minimum appearance of legality for its international activities.

II. PEACE INITIATIVES

A. U.N. Negotiations:

In spite of all these provocations, Nicaragua used


every possible opportunity to resolve the Central American crisis, through international organisations. At least six initiatives were taken in the United Nations Security Council, in which Nicaragua reaffirmed its willingness to reach an agreement with its neighbours and with the United States. The U.S. responded with evasion and denial, resorting to the use of its veto power in the Security Council.

B. The Contadora Negotiations:

On 8 and 9 January, 1983 the foreign ministers of Venezuela, Colombia, Panama and Mexico met on the island of Contadora, off Panama, in search of a path toward peace in Central America. These four countries began to meet regularly with the five Central American countries, seeking a regional solution. This work received the support of Latin America, Europe and the Non-aligned Movement.

After many months of negotiations, proposals and revisions, Contadora presented a revised peace plan to the countries of Central America. On 21 September, 1984, Nicaragua became the first country to state its willingness to sign the peace proposal. Unfortunately the revised draft was not signed by the U.S.24

The last major effort came from the Costa-Rican President, Arias Sanchez. The plan is known as 'Arias Peace plan'. This plan won the Nobel Peace Prize for the year 1987.

This initiative along with others will be discussed chronologically at the end of this chapter.

**Who's Threatening Whom?**

This is the core of this chapter. We have noticed that the U.S. did not bother about the public opinion and kept on giving help to the Contras. Every peace initiative was paid no heed. Rather, the US levelled charges against Nicaragua.

(a) What is the cause of conflict in Central America?

The Reagan administration has used all its media and public relations tricks to justify its aggression against the Nicaraguan people by portraying the Central American crisis as a part of the East-West conflict. But contrary to it, if we go into the historical roots of the US intervention in Central America we find that the US had already launched attacks on Nicaragua to subjugate it as its colony.

1. From 1855 to 1857, Nicaragua was invaded by the US military adventurer, William Walker, who tried to reestablish slavery in the country.

2. In 1909, the Liberal Government of Jose Santos Zelaya was overthrown by the US diplomatic and military aggression.

3. In 1912, the US Marines occupied Nicaragua, which were expelled in 1933 by General Augusto Sandino.

4. From 1936 to 1979, the US installed and maintained in power Anastasio Somoza, whose family ruled the country until the triumph of the revolution.
The real conflict in Central America is the historical United States' policy of dominance. Whenever, a voice was raised against the United States, it was crushed. It was done in 1954 when democratic government of Arbenz in Guatemala was overthrown. The same was repeated with the Dominican Republic in 1965 and Grenada in 1983. In each of these cases, Washington attempted to justify its armed attacks on democratic and independence movements of the Third World nations under the pretext of East-West conflict.

The United States' aggressive intentions towards Nicaragua are manifested in the Constant military harassment that Nicaragua suffered since 1980 by the Contras based in Honduras and Costa Rica. Today Honduras is literally an occupied country. Utilizing a series of uninterrupted military exercises with Honduras, the US has become a source of great tension in the region. 25

B. Was Nicaragua a Threat to the U.S. National Security?

The argument of Reagan administration that Nicaragua was a threat to US security was baseless. This claim was just as fictitious as that of Nicaragua's role in the East-West conflicts. Is it rationally possible that a country of Nicaragua's size, population and natural resources might threaten the Western hemisphere's greatest economic and military power? Nicaragua's sincere attempts to resolve its

differences with the United States through negotiations and in accordance with the international law became evident when in the wake of the attacks on and the mining of the ports carried out directly by the CIA in March 1984, Nicaragua brought the suit against the US government at the International Court of Justice at the Hague. 26

Moreover, Nicaragua's legal suit before the International Court of Justice followed its course despite the Reagan administration's refusal to recognize the jurisdiction of the Court in cases related to Central America.

3. Was Nicaragua a threat to Other Central American Countries?

The Reagan Administration also sought to justify the enormous amount of military aid that it provided to Honduras and Costa Rica. To continue this help to the neighbouring countries, The US argued that Nicaragua was a threat to the democracies of Central America. If we study the political systems of these countries, we would find the system of these countries being run on the direction of the US. No where we would be able to see a true democratic system, to which the US talks about.

The shortage of material resources, air and land transport, fuel, ammunition, etc. makes it objectively impossible for the weaponry in Nicaragua's possession to be used for any means other than defense.

The strength of the Nicaraguan armed forces is a direct result of the popular support that it enjoys. It is based on the hundreds of thousands of citizens who have already taken up arms to defend their homeland or who are prepared to take them up in the event of a foreign invasion. In short, the army is an army of the people, created and designed to respond to the possibility of a future US intervention.

Nicaragua does not blame the neighbouring countries for the growing militarization of the region. It certainly blames the US for the problems in the region. All the time, Nicaraguan proposals to the Contadora Group tried to seek guarantee the security of each Central American country. At the end of 1983, Nicaragua presented "Fundamental Commitments for Establishing Peace in Central America", an official document with eight proposals which gave considerable weight to the security needs of each country, and included measures to strengthen friendship, cooperation, and socio-economic development among the Central American nations. 27

4. Who was blocking the Peace Accords?

Nicaragua had been willing at all times to sign a peace treaty which guarantee basic security ocnditions for each of the countries of the region. Nicaragua's most concrete peace effort has been to support the initiatives of the Contadora Group. Nicaragua was the first country to sign it but the US backed out, when it was to sign it.

Many other peace initiatives were also taken. At last, Arias peace plan was agreed upon by both the US and Nicaragua. It shows the sincerity on the part of Nicaraguan government which started the political process, recognised the Contra groups as political parties, gave them the right to fight elections, announced ceasefire and lifted the state of emergency, according to the Arias peace plan of August 1987. It is worthwhile to mention here that United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO) which comprises 14 Contra Groups out of 20 and assisted by the US, elected to power in February 1990. Violeta Chamorro became the President of Nicaragua. It shows the good intentions of Sandinista party who sincerely abided by the accord of August, 1987. 28

Nicaragua's major concern was its territorial integrity and independence. In almost, every proposal the major concern of Nicaragua was its security which is evident from the proposals of 22 June.

(a) An end to the use of any Central American territory as base for attacking other countries;
(b) A prohibition on membership in military or political alliances which threaten the peace and security of the region;
(c) An end to military or logistical support by

Superpowers to irregular forces or subversive groups.

5. Are the Sandinistas Totalitarian?

Before dealing with this question, it is pertinent to present in brief the historical background of the Sandinista party. The Sandinista party was formally organised in 1962 by some students after the name of Augusto Cesar Sandino, who lost his life in defending his country fighting against the US imperialism in 1933. Till 1978 the party was just a guerrilla group which had a great mass support. After the murder of the editor of 'La Prensa'in 1978, all the parties organised themselves under the banner of FSLN. Immediately after coming into power, the Sandinista party was dubbed as Marxist-Lenist, thus a danger to the neighbouring democracies of Central America.

The revolution of July 1979, brought a series of changes in education, health and economy greatly benefitting the people of Nicaragua. At the same time substantial progress has been made in institutionalizing the revolution. Despite the situation of aggression, on 4 November, 1984, under the supervision of Supreme Electoral Council, the first free election in Nicaragua's history were held. The Sandinista party was brought again to power.

Another important step in the institutionalization of the Nicaraguan revolutionary process was the drafting of a new constitution. The other aspects of this process were the legislation with respect to human rights in spite of the counter-revolutionary aggression; abolition of death-penalty;
and the enactment of an amnesty law which covered all Nicaraguans who at some point took arms but later decided to rejoin civilian life.

As it was clear in the U.S. congressional debates and in declarations of Contra leaders, the counter-revolution would have ceased to exist without the U.S. aid and financing. This shows not only the absence of a popular base for the counter-revolution within Nicaragua, but the interventionist and foreign origin of the armed aggression.29

In spite of all these activities, it is clear from the elections of February, 1990 that the U.S. has kept its hold over the Nicaraguan internal affairs. The Candidature of Mr. Chamorro for the Presidentship was supported by President Bush. On the other hand, it also shows that commitment of Sandinista party to abide by the provisions laid down under the Arias Peace Plan Agreement of August, 1987. But it cannot be denied that the U.S. has been intervening in the internal affairs of the countries of Central America in a big way.