

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپائی

MAY 10, 2018

by EDWARD HUNT
11.05.2018

Is the U.S. Meddling in Nicaragua?



Photo by Adam Baker | [CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/)

For the past decade, the United States has been quietly assisting opposition groups in Nicaragua, helping them organize resistance to the country's popular leftist president Daniel Ortega.

U.S. officials hope the country's opposition groups will create a new political movement that can defeat Ortega at the polls or pressure him into stepping down from power. They fear that without their support, Ortega's opposition will remain weak and divided, making

it impossible for anyone to mount a successful political campaign against the Nicaraguan president.

“Our assistance programs are primarily directed at civil society, in order to limit engagement with the central government,” State Department official Juan Gonzalez [told](#) Congress in September 2016.

The assistance programs appear to be having some effect, especially now that opposition groups are leading [major protests](#) against the Nicaraguan government. After the Nicaraguan government passed a number of mild reforms to the country’s social security program in April, Ortega’s opponents organized a series of protests that quickly turned violent.

Observers estimate that as many as 45 people [died](#) in the protests.

Since the protests began, U.S. officials have [declared](#) their support for the opposition, [blaming](#) the Nicaraguan government for the violence. They have not said if any of the protesters have benefited from their assistance.

While questions remain about the extent of [U.S. involvement](#), it is no secret that the United States has historically played a heavy-handed role in Nicaragua. During the early 20th century, U.S. marines occupied the country for two decades. When the marines left in the 1930s, they handed things over to the Somoza family, which ruled Nicaragua with U.S. support from the 1930s to the 1970s.

During the late 1970s, the Sandinistas ousted the U.S.-backed Somoza dictatorship in a popular revolution. Following the revolution, Ortega led a new government that began putting more resources into education and health care, helping to increase literacy and reduce child mortality.

To prevent the revolution from succeeding, U.S. officials directed two major campaigns against the Sandinistas. During the mid-1980s, the Reagan administration organized a [terrorist war](#) against Nicaragua, backing counterrevolutionary forces (“contras”) that tried to overthrow the new Nicaraguan government. As the contras waged their campaign of terror, U.S. officials began supporting Ortega’s political opponents, helping them gain political power through the country’s presidential election in 1990.

In the following years, U.S. officials remained closely involved with their political allies. U.S. diplomatic cables published by WikiLeaks reveal that U.S. officials continued working to [keep](#) their political allies in power while preventing the Sandinistas from regaining political power. Before the presidential election in 2006, U.S. diplomats

spearheaded a [multi-faceted campaign](#) to steer campaign funds to their political allies while discouraging voters from voting for Ortega.

In spite of these efforts, U.S. meddling was not enough to tilt the presidential election in favor of U.S.-backed candidates. Ortega won, bringing him back into office and providing the Sandinistas with an opportunity to revive their revolution.

U.S. diplomats in Nicaragua were stunned by the result. They called for an intensification of programs to confront Ortega. “We need to take decisive action and well-funded measures to bolster the elements of Nicaraguan society that can best stop him before he lulls the majority of the Nicaraguan people into complacency, or threatens them into silence,” they [reported](#).

In September 2016, U.S. official Marcela Escobari [told](#) a congressional committee that U.S.A.I.D. was working with more than 2,000 “young people” and over 60 civil society organizations to help them play a more active role in Nicaraguan politics and society. “These efforts are allowing them to exercise their political muscle and see results,” she said.

It has not always been easy for U.S. officials to mobilize opposition, however. Since returning to power, Ortega has created a number of popular social welfare programs, providing Nicaraguans with free education, free health care, and various home-improvement programs. The programs have been quite effective, raising incomes and significantly reducing poverty.

The programs have also bolstered Ortega’s popularity, especially among the poor.

In September 2016, a [report](#) by the Congressional Research Service described Ortega as “the most popular political figure in Nicaragua.”

That same month, State Department official Juan Gonzalez [acknowledged](#) that Ortega was supported by the majority of the population, attributing his support to “a lot of the social investments that he has made in the country.”

Regardless, U.S. officials have not abandoned their efforts to remove Ortega from power. While many officials acknowledge that Ortega has maintained favorable economic policies for U.S. investors and businesses, they insist that he is not doing enough.

Earlier this year, U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua Laura Dogu [complained](#) that international investors face too much risk in the country. She said the country’s cheap labor, which she called its “main competitive advantage,” was losing its appeal. “As more activities are done by robots, the cost of labor becomes irrelevant,” she said.

Dogu insisted that the Nicaraguan people must accept sweeping economic reforms if they want their country to remain relevant in the global economy. She called for more vocational training for young people and the introduction of genetically engineered crops into the country. “Nicaragua can choose to capture emerging markets and growth industries... or can chose to be left behind as other countries seize those opportunities,” she said.

But the bigger problem, according to U.S. officials, is that Ortega remains the leader of Nicaragua. As long as he remains president, they fear that they will never be able to move the country in their preferred direction.

They view Ortega as a “relic” of the Cold War, as U.S. Senator Marco Rubio once called him. The time for leftist revolutions in Latin America is over, they believe. And with leftist leaders being driven from office throughout the region, U.S. officials hope Ortega will be next.