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## Chomsky on Regime Change in Nicaragua

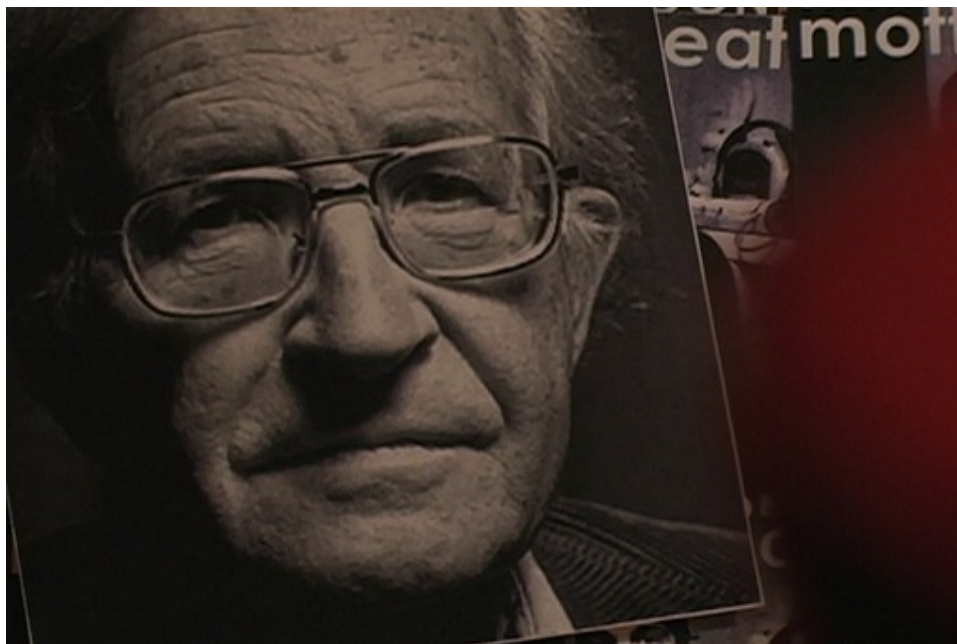


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With patented angst, Noam Chomsky opined on President Daniel Ortega's Nicaragua to an agreeing Amy Goodman: "But there's been a lot of corruption, a lot of repression. It's autocratic, undoubtedly."

Earlier in their DemocracyNow! interview, the main talking points were established via a video clip of a dissident former official from Ortega's Sandinista Party: Ortega's "entire government has been, in essence, neoliberal. Then it becomes authoritarian, repressive."

Left out of this view is why the US has targeted Nicaragua for regime change. One would think that a neoliberal regime, especially if it were authoritarian and repressive, would be just the ticket to curry favor with Washington.

**In Chomsky's own words, Nicaragua poses a threat of a good example to the US empire**

Since Ortega's return election victory in 2006, Nicaragua had achieved the following, according to NSCAG, despite being the second poorest country in the hemisphere:

- + Second highest economic growth rates and most stable economy in Central America.
- + Only country in the region producing 90% of the food it consumes.
- + Poverty and extreme poverty halved; country with the greatest reduction of extreme poverty.
- + Reaching the UN Millennium Development Goal of cutting malnutrition by half.
- + Free basic healthcare and education.
- + Illiteracy virtually eliminated, down from 36% in 2006.
- + Average economic growth of 5.2% for the past 5 years (IMF and the World Bank).
- + Safest country in Central America (UN Development Program) with one of the lowest crime rates in Latin America.
- + Highest level of gender equality in the Americas (World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2017).
- + Did not contribute to the migrant exodus to the US, unlike neighboring Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.
- + Unlike its neighbors, kept out the drug cartels and pioneered community policing.

**Nicaragua targeted by the US for regime change**

Before April 18, Nicaragua was among the most peaceful and stable countries in the region. The otherwise inexplicable violence that has suddenly engulfed Nicaragua should be understood in the context of it being targeted by the US for regime change.

Nicaragua has provoked the ire of the US for the good things its done, not the bad.

Besides being a "threat" of a good example, Nicaragua is in the anti-imperialist ALBA alliance with Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, and others. The attack on Nicaragua is part of a larger strategy by the US to tear apart regional alliances of resistance to the Empire, though that is not the whole story.

Nicaragua regularly votes against the US in international forums such as challenging retrograde US policies on climate change. An inter-ocean canal through Nicaragua is

being considered, which would contend with the Panama Canal. Russia and China invest in Nicaragua, competing with US capital.

The NICA Act, passed by the US House of Representatives and now before the Senate, would initiate economic warfare designed to attack living conditions in Nicaragua through economic sanctions, as well as intensify US intelligence intervention. The ultimate purpose is to depose the democratically-elected Ortega government.

Meanwhile, USAID announced an additional \$1.5 million “to support freedom and democracy in Nicaragua” through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to overthrow the democratically elected government and “make this truly a hemisphere of freedom.” That is, freedom for the US empire.

### **Holding Nicaragua to a higher standard than our own government**

Although Chomsky echoes the talking points of the USAID administrator Mark Green about “Ortega’s brutal regime,” he can’t quite bring himself to accept responsibility for regime change. Chomsky despairs, “it’s hard to see a simple way out at this point. It’s a very unfortunate situation.”

Chomsky is concerned about corruption, repression, and autocracy in Nicaragua, urging the democratically elected president to step down and run for re-election. Need it be mentioned that Chomsky chastised leftists who did not “absolutely” support Hillary Clinton? It is from this moral ground that the professor looks down on Nicaragua.

These charges of corruption and such are addressed by long-time solidarity activist Chuck Kaufman:

+ The World Bank, IMF, and EU countries have certified Nicaragua for its effective use of international loans and grants; funds were spent for the purposes they were given, not siphoned off into corruption.

+ Kaufman asks, “why a police force that in 39 years had not repressed the Nicaraguan people would suddenly go berserk,” while videos clearly show the violence of the more militant opposition.

+ Ortega won in 2006 with a 38% plurality, in 2011 with 63%, and 72.5% in 2016. The Organization of American States officially accompanied and certified the vote. Kaufman notes, “Dictators don’t win fair elections by growing margins.”

### **Alternatives to Ortega would be worse**

Those who call for Ortega’s removal need to accept responsibility for what comes after. Here the lesson of Libya is instructive, where the replacement of, in Chomsky’s words, the

“brutal tyrant” and “cruel dictator” Qaddafi has resulted in a far worse situation for the Libyan people.

Any replacement of Ortega would be more, not less, neoliberal, oppressive, and authoritarian. When the Nicaraguan people, held hostage to the US-backed Contra war, first voted Ortega out of office in 1990, the incoming US-backed Violeta Chamorro government brought neoliberal structural adjustment and a moribund economy.

The dissident Sandinistas who splintered off from the official party after the party’s election defeat and formed the MRS (Sandinista Renovation Movement) are not a progressive alternative. They are now comfortably ensconced in US-funded NGOs, regularly making junkets to Washington to pay homage to the likes of Representative Iliana Ros-Lehtinen and Senator Marco Rubio to lobby in favor of the NICA Act. Nor do they represent a popular force, garnering less than 2% in national elections.

When the MRS left the Sandinista party, they took with them almost all those who were better educated, came from more privileged backgrounds, and who spoke English. These formerly left dissidents, now turned to the right in their hatred of Ortega, have many ties with North American activists, which explains some of the confusion today over Nicaragua.

The world, not just Ortega, has changed since the 1980s when the Soviet Union and its allies served as a counter-vailing force to US bullying. What was possible then is not the same in today’s more constrained international arena.

### **Class war turned upside down**

Kevin Zeese of Popular Resistance aptly characterized the offensive against the democratically elected government of Nicaragua as “a class war turned upside down.” Nicaragua was the most progressive country in Central America with no close rival. Yet some North American left intellectuals are preoccupied with Nicaragua’s shortcomings while not clearly recognizing that it is being attacked by a domestic rightwing in league with the US government.

Noam Chomsky is a leading world left intellectual and should be acclaimed for his contributions. His incisive warning about the US nuclear policy is just one essential example. Nevertheless, he is also indicative of a tendency in the North American left to accept a bit too readily the talking points of imperialist propaganda, regarding the present-day Sandinistas.

There is a disconnect between Chomsky’s urging Nicaraguans to replace Ortega with new elections and his longtime and forceful advocacy against US imperialist depredations of

countries like Nicaragua. Such elections in Nicaragua would not only be unconstitutional but would further destabilize a profoundly destabilized situation. Given the unpopularity and disunity of the opposition and the unity and organizational strength of the Sandinistas, Ortega would likely win.

Most important, the key role of Northern American solidarity activists is to end US interference in Nicaragua so that the Nicaraguans can solve their own problems.

The rightwing violence since April in Nicaragua should be understood as a coup attempt. A significant portion of the Nicaraguan people have rallied around their elected government as seen in the massive demonstrations commemorating the Sandinista revolution on July 19.

For now, the rightwing *tranques* (blockades) have been dismantled and citizens can again freely circulate without being shaken down and threatened. In the aftermath, though, Nicaragua has suffered unacceptable human deaths, massive public property damage, and a wounded economy with the debilitating NICA Act threatening to pass the US Senate.

***Roger Harris** is on the board of the [Task Force on the Americas](#), a 32-year-old anti-imperialist human rights organization*