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## The Upcoming Nicaraguan Election Will Be a Test

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After three Americans from the US embassy were accused of espionage and tossed out of Nicaragua, a protest was lodged in Managua against this «unwarranted» decision, and the Nicaraguan government was warned that the relationship between the two countries would suffer

inevitable damage in tourism, trade, and investment from the US. The State Department issued notice that Americans might face threats in Nicaragua. The war of propaganda waged against Daniel Ortega's regime has become so ferocious that political commentators are drawing conclusions about Washington's plans to «end the dictatorship» in Nicaragua once and for all.

The Democratic Initiative of Spain and the Americas (IDEA), an international forum, was created in April of 2015 in order to launch attacks on Ortega and other Latin American «populist» leaders, and Washington was responsible for choosing its members: the chosen favorites include – Álvaro Uribe of Colombia, Alejandro Toledo of Peru, Lucio Gutiérrez of Ecuador, Felipe Calderón of Mexico, Óscar Arias of Costa Rica, José María Aznar of Spain, and others. These politicians work closely with the United States and continue to defer to Washington, even after leaving office.

IDEA released a statement in August that was highly critical of Nicaragua and which reads like something out of the Cold War: *«The international community finds the violation of the democratic system in Nicaragua so worrisome that the former Ibero-American heads of state and of government have decided to ask the OAS and the EU to maintain critical oversight of these serious violations of democratic and constitutional order».* And it goes on to say that statements by the members of IDEA *«may be preceded by certain political and diplomatic actions, as provided by international law ... in order to defend democracy and reestablish it where it has been compromised, as in the current example of Nicaragua».*

In its attacks on the Nicaraguan government, the US National Security Agency uses materials obtained over the course of years of electronic surveillance of President Ortega, as well as his family and inner circle. Its deft use of such materials makes it possible to circulate all sorts of drivel that is designed to defame politicians who have been marked for public retaliation. Almost every «populist bloc» leader in Latin America is currently up against such cheap shots – Inácio Lula da Silva, Dilma Rousseff, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, Rafael Correa, Nicolás Maduro, Evo Morales, and others.

Daniel Ortega has led his country for 13 years. He has been elected three times: in 1985, 2006, and 2012, and no one is predicting that he will have any opponents in the upcoming Nov. 6 election. Ortega's political rivals are feuding amongst themselves. Despite the behind-the-scenes efforts of the US embassy, it has not been possible to consolidate the opposition in the run-up to the election. For this reason, the US has launched a blitzkrieg of propaganda against Daniel Ortega, his wife Rosario Murillo, and their grown children. The leitmotif of these «revelations» is a familiar one – some hogwash about the abuse of power, corruption, multi-million-dollar accounts in overseas banks, and the ownership of foreign real estate. The US continues to harp on the supposed parallels with the family of the dictator Anastasio Somoza; *«Somoza García amassed a huge fortune, making him and his family some of the richest people in all of Latin America. By the time of his death in 1956 he left his children \$200 million, which they managed to triple within a few years. His son, Anastasio Somoza DeBayle, owned 130 real estate holdings, as well as estates, residences, and tracts of land. He was owner of an airline (Líneas Aéreas de Nicaragua), a television station (Televisora de Nicaragua), the San Uribe and San Albino gold mines, and more».*

One might well ask, what does Somoza's wealth have to do with Ortega and his family? Nevertheless, the author of the article writes: «*As is usual for totalitarian regimes of the past, there is no reliable information about the finances of the Nicaraguan president and his wife. That knotty question is top secret*». Although there is no «reliable information», he goes on to claim that the family owns the Distribuidora Nicaragüense de Petróleos chain of gas stations, plus media outlets including four TV channels, radio stations, newspapers, websites, etc. In addition, Ortega has control over the project to build a transoceanic canal that would link the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, the cost of which is estimated at \$50 billion. That mega-project has the backing of the Chinese entrepreneur Wang Jing.

Naturally of course the Chinese-Nicaraguan canal mega-project was met with hostility by Washington. They don't want anything competing with the updated Panama Canal. And as for the company Distribuidora Nicaragüense de Petróleos, that is a model for energy-sector cooperation between Venezuela and Nicaragua – not some private racket that is allegedly being used by Ortega's friends for their personal enrichment.

During the years when the Sandinistas were in the opposition, Ortega was constantly faced with the problem of getting access to the media. His attempts to communicate his views to the public invariably ran up against an information boycott. But now the situation has changed drastically. Ortega has turned the tide to his own advantage. The government controls hundreds of Internet websites, as well as the news services *Nicaragua Triunfa* and *Nicaragua Comovamos*. Dozens of provincial radio stations work on the side of the government, as do influential national stations like *Radio Sandino*, *La Nueva Radio Ya*, *Radio Nicaragua*, and *Radio Primerísima*. The work of the government and the president gets favorable coverage by TV channels that are managed by members of the Ortega family – *Canal 13*, *Multinoticias Canal 4*, *Canal 8*, and *Telenica Canal 10*. The pro-government channels also include *Canal 23*, *Canal Extra Plus*, *100 % Noticias*, and others. None of the «leftist» Latin American presidents enjoy such an effective mouthpiece for information and propaganda as Ortega.

Yet despite the accusations that it is a dictatorship, the country has no censorship restrictions. The opposition and, consequently, the US embassy have every opportunity to proselytize there. Popular newspapers like *La Prensa* and *El Nuevo Diario* and the weekly *Confidencial* are employed with particular vigor toward this goal. Ortega responds immediately, using fiercely anti-imperialist and anti-American terminology. Nor does he keep silent when Washington directs attacks against Nicaragua's allies. Ortega's speeches in support of Russia, Cuba, and friendly governments in Ecuador, Bolivia, and other countries resonate far and wide.

The ideological underpinnings of Ortega's international policy have remained unchanged throughout recent years: they consist of a fundamental rejection of American hegemony, coupled with patriotism, nationalism, and «socialism with a Nicaraguan face», plus support for the Latin American path to a true people's democracy. This 70-year-old politician has never altered his revolutionary convictions. That said however, he is flexible strategist who understands that a superpower can strike at any time and that the US is still unpredictable and dangerous. As the leader of a small country he has no choice but to maneuver, and he manages to do so without compromising his principles.

In December 2015 the CIA launched into yet another act of provocation against Nicaragua. Under the influence of inflammatory media reports about the Obama administration's possible suspension of the preferential treatment Cuban migrants receive upon entering the US, hundreds rushed to emigrate from that island nation. The route suggested by the «well-wishers» from Miami: first by air from Havana to Ecuador (no visa needed), then by bus across several borders into Mexico, and from there into the US. Nothing to worry about, or so it would seem. However, Nicaraguan counter-intelligence got its hands on some information about CIA plans to use those migrants to stir things up. After arriving in Nicaragua from Costa Rica, their onward path – through Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico – was to be closed, and the Cuban migrants would find themselves stranded in Nicaragua for a long time. As envisioned by the CIA, they were supposed to be the fuse to the ticking bomb of the country's destabilization. Therefore, Daniel Ortega's decision was emphatic: there should be no back doors, and the ones who came up with the whole migrant scheme should be the ones to deal with the mess! Demands that the migrants be admitted were hurled at that «inhumane regime» from all manner of human rights organizations patronized by American foundations. The members of the Central American Integration System (SICA) went public with their criticism of Ortega's decision. The migrants themselves, as if on cue, tried to crash through the Nicaraguan border, with children and pregnant women planted in their forward ranks. The Nicaraguan government needed time to force the fugitives into Costa Rica. Tensions eased by February-March 2016. Ortega's government refused to be blackmailed, and Washington had to quietly furnish its ally Costa Rica with financial assistance in order to provide for the migrants and evacuate them by air...

As the date of the Nicaraguan presidential election nears, new acts of provocation should be expected from US intelligence agencies and the American embassy. Ambassador Laura Dogu works assiduously with the Nicaraguan business community, persuading them that the ongoing Sandinista administration and its policy of «socialism with a Nicaraguan face» can only hurt their business interests.

The US embassy has conspicuously stepped up its work with the media and activists from NGOs and indigenous organizations, as well as the country's youth. US intelligence agencies, diplomats, staffers with USAID (which is in reality a branch of the CIA), and Peace Corps volunteers are pinning their main hopes on Nicaragua's youth, viewing that demographic as the most promising in the struggle against the Nicaraguan regime.

The Constitution offers no barriers to President Ortega's reelection. He has been accused of taking control of executive, legislative, and judicial power, but the main factor ensuring his reelection is his broad popular support, which Ortega enjoys thanks to the social programs established during his years in office. Despite his socialist, anti-imperialist views, the president has many supporters in the country's business community.

The November election forecasts don't look too auspicious for the conspirators in the US embassy: Daniel Ortega is once again going to be elected president.