

Notes on the failed coup attempt in Nicaragua between April 8th and July 17th 2018

Articles from Tortilla con Sal



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Nicaragua - next in line for regime change?

Tortilla con Sal, Telesur, April 21st 2018

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/Nicaragua-Next-in-Line-for-Regim...>

Events in Nicaragua over the last week are clearly modeled on the kind of US-led, NATO driven regime change that succeeded in Libya, Ivory Coast and Ukraine, but has so far failed in Thailand, Syria and Venezuela. At a national level, the protests have been led by the private sector business classes defending their rate of profit against socialist policies in defense of low income workers and people on pensions.

Events

Since last April 18th violent protests have taken place across Nicaragua. The protests began a couple of days after the government announced proposed reforms to the country's social security system which is running a deficit of around US\$75 million a year. The government announced the proposed reforms following the suspension of talks by Nicaragua's private sector business organization COSEP. Pending possible modifications, the reforms are due to come into effect on July 1st.

In the protests, as of Friday, 10 people have been killed and over 80 people injured including over 30 police officers with most fatalities resulting from lethal use of firearms by right wing provocateurs. Mainstream Western media reports cover up the fact that far from being peaceful the protests have been characterized by lethal violence from extreme right wing shock groups trying to destabilize Nicaragua just as they have done in Venezuela. In reply, workers and students supporting Nicaragua's Sandinista government have mobilized against the violent opposition provocations.

The protests started in earnest in Nicaragua's capital Managua during Wednesday April 18th rapidly spreading to important provincial centers like Leon in the West, Granada to the south and Estelí to the north. The protests were fueled by inflammatory messaging on the social networks and deliberate manipulation by right wing media. Some right wing television cable media went off the air, apparently having their signal deliberately taken down, apparently without any clear independently verifiable explanation.

Apart from the deaths and injuries caused by the violent opposition protests, widespread damage was caused to infrastructure including local Social Security Institute offices, municipal authority offices in Estelí and Granada, university buildings in Managua and Leon, Sandinista party offices in Chinandega and Masaya and government offices in Managua. There too, opposition gangs tried to enter and destroy the brand new "Denis Martinez" baseball stadium, the brand new Fernando Velez Paiz Hospital and the Institute of Social Security head office. The gangs also attacked most of the Sandinista aligned radio stations, including Nuevo Radio Ya and Radio Sandino, trying to set them on fire.

A group of over 100 protesting students retreated from the main university area in Managua and took refuge in the city's Catholic cathedral. The police contained them there until eventually their peaceful departure was negotiated without further problems. Further afield in Nueva Guinea, towards Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast, an opposition gang attacked a cultural event held in support of the government, wounding various government supporters attending the event. In many places, gangs of

opportunistic delinquents have intermingled with the political protests which have also seen attacks on commercial business premises and vehicles, as well as bystanders not involved in the protests.

While the private business sector organization COSEP has called for peaceful demonstrations over the issue of Social Security reform, extremists from the right wing Citizens for Liberty and Sandinista Renewal Movement political organizations have led the violent protests. They have made effective use of social networks spreading false information and inflammatory accusations so as to confuse and mislead people, especially young people, who know little or nothing about the Social Security reforms, which have turned into a mere pretext for violent protests aimed at destabilizing a government which enjoys overwhelming electoral support.

Both evangelical religious authorities and the Catholic Church hierarchy have urged calm and called for dialogue. COSEP has insisted that people protest peacefully and called to reopen talks on social security reform with the government. The army and police completely support the government and the police have acted with restraint in the face of lethal provocation. Trades unions and the country's main student organization have condemned the violence and expressed support for the government's proposed social security reform. For their part the Union of Older Adults, which lobbies for better pension rights and health benefits for older people, also supports the government's proposed Social Security reforms, which include a 5% deduction from older people's pensions in exchange for full rights to the same health care as active workers.

Context - Nicaragua's social security system

After Nicaragua's right wing parties won the national elections 1990, the three subsequent right wing governments mismanaged the country's Social Security Institute (INSS), cutting back coverage and reducing benefits. During the same period, millions of dollars of INSS funds were misappropriated to fund private sector businesses and make illicit payments to individuals. When a new Sandinista government took office under President Daniel Ortega in January 2007, the social security fund had an unsustainable deficit and a much reduced contributions base. Since then, the INSS has increased the number of people covered by social security and also extended the benefits the system provides. These now include hemodialysis, oncology therapies, spinal surgery, ophthalmology, neurosurgery, hip and knee replacements, kidney transplants and other very expensive, specialized procedures.

Despite having greatly increased the number of people contributing to the system, the INSS is still running a deficit of around US\$75 million. The dispute between the government and the private business sector is over how to fund that deficit. The private business sector wants to reduce costs by applying the following neoliberal plan:

- raising the retirement age from 60 to 65
- eliminating the reduced pension paid to retired people who were unable to complete the 750 weekly contributions required to receive a full pension
- eliminating the minimum pension that ensures no one has a pension lower than the minimum wage for industrial workers
- eliminating the annual Christmas bonus equivalent to one month's pension

- no longer maintaining the value of the pension against the national currency to compensate for the annual sliding devaluation of 5% applied by the Central Bank
- doubling the number of weekly contributions qualifying for a pension from 750 to 1500
- privatizing the INSS medical clinics

The government wants to protect the social security health system and increase social security coverage and benefits as a collective public good by:

- gradually increasing the employers contribution by 3.25%
- increasing the employee's contribution by 0.75%
- increasing the governments contribution for public sector workers by 1.25%
- removing the salary ceiling so that people earning high salaries pay social security contributions proportionate to their income
- deducting 5% from retired peoples' pensions so they receive the same health care benefits as active workers (which they currently do not)
- maintaining the number of weekly contributions to qualify for a full pension at 750
- maintaining the reduced pension and the minimum pension
- maintaining the Christmas bonus
- maintaining pensions' value against the annual 5% devaluation
- keeping all INSS clinics in the public system

Latest developments

President Daniel Ortega has confirmed the government will continue discussions with COSEP, the organization representing Nicaragua's private sector business, as well as the other organizations taking part in the talks about how to defend the sustainability of the INSS. Disturbances continue in various parts of Nicaragua with more deaths and injuries being reported. Church representatives, business leaders and political figures are all calling for an end to the violent protests. For the right wing political groups provoking the violence, the INSS reform is simply the opportunistic pretext of the moment, but it is unclear whether they aim to cause longer term destabilization.

The pattern so far is very similar to events in Libya, Ivory Coast, Syria, Ukraine, Thailand and Venezuela. In all these countries extreme right-wing political minorities conspired with foreign elites, mainly in the United States and Europe, to overthrow the national status quo and take power. In Nicaragua, the country's small minority right wing political opposition have openly sought financial and political support in the United States and Europe explicitly to undermine and destabilize Nicaragua's Sandinista government. The obvious model they are working from is Venezuela. The next couple of weeks will tell if Nicaragua is going to suffer yet another US intervention with all that implies for the country's people and the region.

Nicaragua regains its balance

Tortilla con Sal, April 30th 2018

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/analysis/Nicaragua-Regains-Its-Balance-A...>

Recent disturbances in Nicaragua have served as a kind of who-is-who separating anti-imperialists from cynical phonies both inside and outside the country. The tsunami of disinformation has swamped both the usual suspect mainstream corporate media outlets and their alternative accomplices but also other news sites that are generally anti-imperialist on issues like Syria or Palestine, Russia or Iran. Like Venezuela, Nicaragua is in the cross hairs of the Western elites and their governments because the country's Sandinista President Daniel Ortega and his team have successfully implemented socialist inspired policies while also defending the principles of a multi-polar world based on international law.

What happened

The events in Nicaragua resulted from years of frustration and resentment among the country's political opposition that they cannot win elections. Since 2011, in elections ratified by observers from US government dominated Organization of American States and from the European Union, Nicaragua's political opposition parties have struggled to win more than around 30% electoral support. In 2016, President Daniel Ortega was re-elected with around 70% of the vote. In recent months, national and international opinion polls have indicated levels of support for President Ortega at well over 60%, making claims of mass rejection of his government look ridiculous. The apparent trigger for the sudden explosion of violence between April 18th and April 22nd across the country was the April 16th announcement of reforms to the country's social security system.

Two aspects of that announcement played into the hands of the country's extremist minority opposition. Firstly, the government mistakenly thought they could announce the reforms due for implementation in July and explain them in detail later to the public. Secondly, the reforms were announced during a university election period with students actively debating and mobilizing around issues of concern to them. That opened the way for the political opposition to mount a vigorous disinformation campaign via social media cynically fooling large numbers of students into public protests by misrepresenting the government's pro-worker, pro-pensioner proposals while omitting the private business sector's plan to slash benefits, restrict coverage and privatize public sector clinics.

On Wednesday April 18th, rival groups of students clashed violently in Managua and then student protesters against the government fought with police trying to restore order. The government condemned the protests, which inflamed the demonstrating students, many of whom have supported the Sandinista government's very successful social and economic programs. Then from April 19th onward, extremist opposition activists hijacked the student protests, attacking hospitals, government and municipal authority offices, public buildings of all kinds, university precincts and even the country's brand new national baseball stadium. Among many similar incidents, in the small southern town of Diriamba, hundreds of opposition activists attacked and seriously damaged the municipal offices which were defended by just 12 police officers.

Similar attacks occurred in other cities, including Managua and the northern town of Estelí where municipal workers occupied their offices to defend them against possible attacks by extremist opposition activists. Estelí's municipal offices were attacked on the night of Friday April 20th by over 500 people, most of whom were not from Estelí but including both local students and a number of opportunist delinquents. With police trying to keep order, the attackers fired over 1000 mortar rounds and threw around 17 molotov cocktails trying to destroy the municipal offices and other targets nearby. 18 police and 16 municipal workers were wounded. Among the protesters, two young students were shot dead and numerous people injured. The fighting lasted for five hours, covering an area of around 16 blocks with the attackers using firearms and knives. While the opposition media blame the police for the deaths, local reporters insist it is impossible assign blame in such confused events without a detailed investigation.

Sequels

Nationally, most estimates reckon around 20 people were killed in the violence. Among the dead were two police officers and a Sandinista journalist, while other fatalities include Sandinista and opposition activists as well as bystanders caught up in the violence. The pattern of the attacks suggests a well formulated plan with preparations already in place before the protests started. For example, outside Managua there was no violence reported in important towns like Matagalpa, Jinotega and Ocotal. By focusing on Masaya, León and Estelí, the opposition extremists tried to create false symmetry between their violent offensive and the centers of insurrection against the Somoza dictatorship in 1979.

Obvious questions are who may have funded the very widespread attacks and how they were able to have ready for instant use a quantity of weapons produced on a semi-industrial scale. Overall the attackers fired many thousands of mortar rounds each one costing over US\$3. The cost of transport to move hundreds of militants between Managua, Leon and Chinandega, Estelí, and towns around Granada also runs into many thousands of dollars. In Managua, impoverished young delinquents were being paid US\$10 to US\$15 per day to participate in the attacks. Clearly, the opposition extremists who hijacked the student protests for their own ends were very well organized, funded and prepared before the protests even began.

From Sunday April 22nd onward, numerous sectors, including religious and business sectors, reacted against the violence increasingly calling for it to stop. In Managua, thousands of ordinary people mobilized extensively to defend their neighborhoods from marauding looters. That day, President Ortega announced the withdrawal of the proposed Social Security reforms and the start of an inclusive national dialogue. In towns outside Managua, life abruptly returned to something like normal as if someone had thrown a switch. On Monday, funerals for the dead, as well as protest marches in Managua and elsewhere, went off peacefully. Despite inflated opposition claims, independent media like El Nuevo Diario reported numbers similar to other big opposition demonstrations of recent years.

Scheduled to start over the weekend of April 28th-29th, the national dialogue is planned to include all sectors of Nicaraguan society and will be mediated by the Catholic Church led by Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes. The government and the country's other authorities are supporting the dialogue by means of a public investigation into the deaths, injuries and damage to property by the country's Public Prosecution service. The official Legal Office for the Defense of Human Rights is establishing a

nationwide Committee of Victims for Punishment and Reparations to support people affected by the disturbances. The country's legislature, the National Assembly, has established a Truth Commission to give a hearing to conflicting accounts of the disturbances.

Together with the national dialogue process, these initiatives will help inform people inside and outside Nicaragua of what really happened during the violent incidents that began last April 18th. Many people in Nicaragua think what will emerge will radically contradict the sinister fictions and false beliefs massively propagated by opposition social media and Western corporate media and NGOs. As the facts emerge, the extremist opposition minority and their agenda promoting US intervention will probably find even more widespread abhorrence and rejection than exists already of what they have done to damage Nicaragua's hard won social peace and economic well-being.

Dialogue in Nicaragua – an inauspicious start

Tortilla con Sal, Telesur, May 12th 2018

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Dialogue-In-Nicaragua-An-Inauspicio...>

The student protests of April 18th in Nicaragua were immediately hijacked by violent right wing extremists backed locally by sections of the business classes, the right wing Catholic Church hierarchy and center right politicians, long funded by the US and allied governments. Internationally, those governments echoed the false claims of their own extreme right wing politicians, cynically alleging disproportionate repression by Nicaragua's police. Even so, neither Nicaragua's protesting students nor most international progressive and liberal opinion seem to note the paradox that viciously repressive reactionary right wing forces are supposedly promoting genuinely democratic protests against the most economically successful and electorally popular government in Central America.

Ever since Saturday April 21st, the Nicaraguan police have limited themselves to a policy of not responding to violent provocations by right wing gangs and only doing the minimum necessary to control public order. That followed the announcement by President Daniel Ortega of a dialogue process to be mediated by the country's Catholic Church hierarchy and the acceptance of that initiative by the country's main business organization, COSEP. The sequel to those decisions has been extreme, persistent violence from right wing political groups, ever more intense disinformation on the social networks and in opposition news media and also intense right wing efforts to sabotage economic life via roadblocks and unsuccessful calls for national strike action.

While the moderates on Nicaragua's right wing have ostensibly called for dialogue and an end to the violence, the most reactionary people in the business sector and the Catholic Church either openly encourage the violence or dissimulate their support in unconvincing blanket condemnations of "all violence". For example on the night of Saturday April 21st [Piero Coen](#), Nicaragua's wealthiest individual and head of Nicaragua's most important transnational business group, distanced himself from COSEP's call for an end to the violence. Likewise, the right wing church hierarchy pointedly refused to condemn their right wing political allies' support for terrorist violence that has continued claiming lives despite the announcement of the national dialogue process.

In recent days, right wing terror gangs burned down municipal authority buildings in Managua and in La Concepción near Masaya. They attacked and damaged other municipal authority offices in Chinandega and Granada, shot dead three people in Managua and also shot and seriously wounded four police officers on traffic duty. Other incidents have seen the gangs attack a school bus carrying children with disability, threaten and damage commercial premises, attack groups praying in public for peace and dialogue, and carry out numerous attacks on drivers and passengers in public buses, private vehicles and taxis. Right wing gangs have occupied part of the public National Autonomous University (UNAN) and are also preventing classes in the private Polytechnic University (UPOLI). The UNAN authorities have [publicly denounced](#) the role of the right wing CENIDH human rights organization in the occupation of their university.

After over two weeks of talks, the Episcopal Conference finally secured agreement from Nicaragua's fractious right wing over their participants in the proposed National Dialogue. Then, on May 11th, the bishops presented [a letter to President Daniel Ortega](#) setting out four preconditions for what was supposed to have been dialogue without preconditions. Their four preconditions are:

- * Immediate entry to Nicaragua of the Inter American Commission for Human Rights to investigate and clarify "deaths and disappearances" of people in Nicaragua.
- * Suppression of "paramilitary bodies" and "shock forces" that intimidate, coerce and attack ordinary citizens and also the non-use of police for "any type of repression".
- * Immediately stop all forms of repression against peaceful protests, ensure the physical integrity of students, people involved in the National Dialogue and all citizens.
- * Give "credible signs" of a willingness to negotiate for peace, respecting the human rights of all citizens and neither oblige public employees to take part in political party demonstrations nor "paralyze national transport" with such events

In response, [President Ortega wrote](#) in the most conciliatory terms possible, accepting the preconditions and merely noting "great concern over the climate of fear in communities where, well beyond the peaceful protests that we respect absolutely, devastating violent actions proliferate, damaging the quality of life of Nicaraguans of all ages who cry out to God for a return to normality".

The clear pro-opposition bias of the Episcopal Conference is hardly news. However, the language of the letter's four preconditions is unusually provocative. The Nicaraguan government had already said it will allow a CIDH mission to visit Nicaragua. But the mention of deaths "and disappearances" adopts the inflammatory language of opposition human rights organizations who have inflated their lists of people killed in the recent protests with various individuals who subsequently protested the false reports of their deaths or whose families have insisted that the deaths had nothing to do with the protests. In any case, if the CIDH do their job, it should become clear that no credible evidence exists of any forced disappearance by Nicaragua's police or anyone else.

Likewise the demand to suppress "paramilitary bodies" also reflects opposition rhetoric. The right wing opposition accuse anyone who resists their violent terror gangs of being organized by the government. In fact spontaneous self-defense groups have defended their businesses and barrios and public employees have organized to defend their workplaces. The Sandinista students and youth groups who

challenged the initial student protests on Wednesday April 18th are the only groups that could legitimately be described as shock forces, but they were off the streets by the afternoon of Thursday April 19th, otherwise the violence would have been even worse than it actually was. The government has no paramilitary groups, but the right wing opposition are funding and supporting paramilitary terror gangs across the country.

However, the bishops have nothing to say about that incontrovertible fact. Of even more concern is the bishops' insistence that the police not be used "for any type of repression". This is completely incoherent with their calls for an end to all violence while also ensuring the protection of the rights of all citizens. The only rational critical interpretation of this point is that the Bishops have internalized and adopted the demented right wing opposition false belief that government supporters are responsible for attacks on the population, on public infrastructure and on the governing FSLN party's own local offices.

Another indication of the bishops' profound hypocrisy is their call on the government not to involve public employees in government events calling for peace and dialogue and to avoid "paralyzing national transport" with those events. Meanwhile, the right wing business sector themselves regularly dragoon their employees into the big opposition demonstrations against the government. But, here too, the bishops have nothing to say. Nor do they condemn the right wing terror groups attacking vehicles of all kinds or the opposition protesters setting up road blocks preventing day to day traffic from circulating freely.

In the current context of events in Nicaragua, the blatant opposition bias in the bishops' letter indicates that the dialogue will collapse sooner rather than later because the opposition very clearly do not want genuine dialogue. President Daniel Ortega's remarkably conciliatory response to the bishops' provocative letter makes clear he and his team are determined that it will be the opposition representatives that walk away from the dialogue, not the government. What is happening in Nicaragua more and more resembles events in Venezuela.

Nicaragua – extortion, dialogue and a longing for peace

Tortilla con Sal, Telesur, May 20th 2018

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/Nicaragua-Extortion-Dialogue-And...>

Recent experience confirms that the Latin American and the Caribbean right wing, like US government, cannot be trusted to comply with agreements. That has been true for Cuba's revolutionary government in its direct talks with the US authorities, for Colombia's FARC former guerrillas over government implementation of the peace agreement and for Venezuela's government in the national dialogue with the political opposition. Likewise, misgivings prevail about the integrity of the National Dialogue for Peace in Nicaragua mediated by the Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church as witness of the process.

Ever since April 23rd, violent right wing extremists have murdered government supporters and bystanders, continued to attack municipal offices and police installations, vandalized and looted commercial property as well as buses, taxis and private vehicles and have shot and wounded numerous

police officers. But the Episcopal Conference openly sides with the opposition, falsely suggesting that the violent opposition are victims. The dialogue process has only been kept on track thanks to the dour patience of the Nicaraguan authorities led by President Daniel Ortega and their determination not to allow provocations to sabotage the chance for peace.

On April 22nd President Ortega asked the Catholic bishops to mediate a dialogue without conditions. The bishops led by Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes accepted. But they took almost three weeks to agree the dialogue with an opposition made up of business organizations, students, and opposition politicians. Everything suggested the opposition simply did not want dialogue. That was confirmed on May 11th, when, after originally agreeing to mediate without preconditions, the bishops set out four aggressive preconditions involving a fundamental contradiction. Claiming to defend the rights of all Nicaraguans, the bishops insisted that the police be taken off the streets, implicitly leaving the violent opposition gangs free to continue their attacks.

President Ortega accepted the four preconditions of the bishops' provocative ultimatum, self-contradiction and all, noting diplomatically his government's agreement about the need to stop all violence, intimidation and aggression. He also expressed "our great concern about climates of fear in communities, where, far beyond peaceful protests, which we absolutely respect, acts of violence proliferate that destroy and damage the quality of life of Nicaraguans of all ages, who cry out to God for a return to normality". All through that same weekend armed gangs attacked and intimidated people across Nicaragua, burning down a famous craft market in Masaya and setting up road blocks, the majority operated by masked thugs preventing freedom of movement.

Between the events of May 11th up to and including the day the dialogue finally began on May 16th, the armed gangs attacked police installations and municipal offices in Matagalpa, Masaya and Jinotega. In Matagalpa they shot dead two government supporters and a one year old girl. They also shot and wounded three police officers. In Masaya they shot dead a government supporter. In Jinotega, they wounded two police officers. At one of the roadblocks, a woman patient in an ambulance held up for hours went into convulsions and died before she could be stabilized.

These were the most serious of innumerable incidents of violence and intimidation by the right wing opposition gangs. In response to these events, on May 12th Cardinal Brenes issued a general appeal calling for an end to all violence, omitting any explicit call on the political opposition to stop their violent provocations. The bishops' extraordinarily cynical statements biased in favor of the opposition falsely suggest that primary responsibility for the violence lies with the government. That perverse propaganda line persists and also characterized the dialogue's opening session on May 16th. Aggressive opposition students tried unsuccessfully to shout down President Ortega during his statement and the mediating bishops themselves attacked the government for not withdrawing the police from the streets. In response, President Ortega pointed out that the opposition were responsible for the violence, that the police had orders not to use their firearms and had indeed refrained from taking action.

He noted, however, "We cannot be in a country where one part of Nicaraguans has the right to terrorize and the other part has no alternative but to be terrorized, as currently thousands of families are." That opening session of the dialogue, with the bishops mediating entirely in favor of the opposition was a

triumph of resilient patience on the part of the government representatives in an atmosphere designed to provoke them. Subsequently, on Friday May 18th, the first session of direct talks ended with an agreement from both sides to work for peace and develop proposals covering the various issues to be negotiated. The day before, on May 17th, a delegation from the OAS Inter-American Commission for Human Rights arrived to begin their investigation of the violent events from April 18th onward.

Even OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro has conceded that dialogue in Nicaragua has worked in terms of promoting peace. For the moment, the government has defused the opposition violence and intimidation ordinary Nicaraguans have experienced for over three weeks now while opposition forces absurdly pretend they are victims. Apart from the intimidation they have suffered, tens of thousands of workers and small businesses and farmers have been unable to work normally and the cost to the economy currently runs to over US\$200 million. As for the opposition, as usual, they are divided. Most of the business sector and their associated politicians are anxious to get the economy back to normal.

By contrast, the extremist political opposition led by ex-Sandinistas do not, logically enough, since the income for the NGO network they depend on is guaranteed by funding from the US and Europe. Similarly, many of the students regret the damaging results of the violence, but others are more intransigent. The bishops too are divided. The most right wing bishops continue to cynically exploit their mediation role in favor of the opposition while others do not. Priests at grass roots have played an important role genuinely mediating often in very difficult conditions at some risk to themselves.

These divisions put the opposition and their supporters among the bishops at a disadvantage up against a solidly united government team with vast experience and negotiating skills accumulated over more than thirty years. Some opposition leaders, like Violeta Granera, a perennial client of US government funding, are now so frustrated they have even accused Luis Almagro of treachery for not facilitating their extremist agenda as they had expected. The problem for the government in the negotiations is that whenever these opposition extremists feel they are losing ground, they can reactivate their violent terrorist gangs and plunge the country into chaos again.

Against that constant extortionist threat, the government is likely to sit tight waiting for public opinion to force the extremists to back down. If the extremists withdraw from the talks it will be very hard for the bishops to continue to insist, as they have done implicitly for weeks now, that the government allows violent opposition extremists to destroy public order when a clear majority in the country craves normality. While talks on issues like institutional changes or social security and tax reform take their course, above all, people in Nicaragua want to be able to live, work and study in peace.

Nicaragua – religion, dialogue and non-violence

Tortilla con Sal, Telesur, June 6th 2018

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/Nicaragua-Religion-Dialogue-and-...>

Ever since April 23rd, legitimate peaceful demonstrations both for and against Nicaragua's Sandinista government have taken place in the shadow of murderous violence and extortion by [opposition paramilitaries](#) allied with [organized crime](#). To date over 110 people have been killed and over eleven hundred injured, the great majority government supporters, police officers or bystanders. But opposition media and human rights NGOs systematically misrepresent their paramilitaries' murderous anti-democratic violence and falsely accuse the Sandinista government of unprovoked attacks and repression.

Even Luis Almagro, Secretary General of the Organization of American States has denounced the lies of Nicaragua's political opposition. The OAS has [declared support](#) for Nicaragua recognizing the contribution of the government to a peaceful resolution of the current crisis. In that somber context, Nicaraguans of all political opinions were deeply saddened by the death of Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo last Sunday June 3rd aged 92.

Cardinal Obando was Archbishop of Managua all through the 1970s insurrection against the Somoza dictatorship, serving as a mediator to resolve stand offs between Sandinista guerrillas and the Somoza regime, one of which led to the liberation of Daniel Ortega from prison in 1974. But during the 1980s, Archbishop Obando became a strong critic of the Sandinista revolutionary government, in the end openly supporting the Contra fighters supported by US President Ronald Reagan. The anti-Communist Pope John Paul II made Miguel Obando y Bravo Nicaragua's first ever Cardinal in 1985.

Later, Cardinal Obando was a key figure facilitating the peace negotiations that ended the Nicaraguan war in 1989, making possible elections in February 1990 and a peaceful transfer of power in April that year. But it took another decade before Cardinal Obando reconciled with the Sandinista National Liberation Front and its leader Daniel Ortega to the point where he accepted in 2007 the new Sandinista government's request to preside over the country's Peace and Reconciliation commission. The commission worked to finally overcome the bitter divisions and hatreds left over from the time of Somoza and the US government supported 1980s terrorist war against the Sandinista Revolution.

From 2007 right up until his death, Cardinal Obando constantly promoted reconciliation at every level of Nicaraguan society. His unifying role as peacemaker and mediator gave prestige to the Catholic Church in Nicaragua and moderated the divisive sectarianism of the country's more extreme right wing bishops. Cardinal Obando died just a few days before the first anniversary of the death in June 2017 of his long time antagonist Father Miguel d'Escoto, the liberation theology Maryknoll priest who served as Nicaragua's Foreign Minister all through the 1980s.

Cardinal Obando was very critical of Sandinista priests like Miguel d'Escoto for serving in Nicaragua's revolutionary government. Obando and Father Miguel only really reconciled once the vindictive ban imposed by Pope John Paul II on Miguel d'Escoto's priestly office was lifted in August 2014 by Pope Francis after 30 years of what amounted to relentless psychological abuse of Miguel d'Escoto by the

Catholic Church hierarchy. However, beyond their ideological and theological differences, both men shared an uncompromising commitment to peace and an ineradicable love for Nicaragua.

Cardinal Obando was committed to peace and reconciliation but also passionately concerned about the future of the Catholic Church in a time of increasing secularism and the growing challenge from evangelical churches. He clearly came to believe that both the future of his Church and true national reconciliation necessarily required the kind of economic democratization embodied in policies of President Daniel Ortega's Sandinista government. Perhaps that was his version of the liberation theology option for the poor concept which inspired Miguel d'Escoto's vocation ever since his days as a priest in the most impoverished barrios of Santiago de Chile in the 1960s.

In Father d'Escoto's case, his uncompromising spirituality, advocacy of non-violence and practice of solidarity marked a lifetime of tireless public service and internationally recognized diplomatic achievements. The paths taken by both men ran parallel before converging at the very end of their lives. Cardinal Obando's death one year after Miguel d'Escoto, signals the end of an era in Nicaraguan political and religious life. No one among Nicaragua's religious leaders, certainly among the Catholic bishops, begins to compare in terms of either achievement or prestige or moral and spiritual vision.

Nothing bears that out more clearly than the categorical failure of leadership by Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes in the current crisis provoked by the country's minority right wing opposition. When President Daniel Ortega requested Nicaragua's Catholic bishops to mediate a dialogue process between the government and the opposition, he surely had in mind the role played by Cardinal Obando y Bravo ending the war of the 1980s. But Leopoldo Brenes and the country's Catholic bishops have neither the necessary political acumen, nor sufficient moral will and spiritual vision, nor an unambiguous commitment to peace.

So although Cardinal Brenes accepted the role of mediator, the dialogue itself was broken from the start because Brenes allowed the most right wing bishops to dictate the agenda and the process. Bishop Abelardo Mata of Estelí directly attacked President Ortega the day the dialogue began. Bishop Rolando Alvarez of Matagalpa blatantly favored the minority opposition Civic Alliance agenda of regime change. Bishop Silvio Baez of Managua openly encouraged the protests and roadblocks to continue. Neither Leopoldo Brenes nor his bishops ever clearly condemned the violence by the Civic Alliance paramilitaries and their associated delinquent gangs.

Nor have they ever clearly called for an end to the roadblocks that have devastated Nicaragua's economy, caused hardship and death to Nicaraguans trying to get medical care, and thrown tens of thousands of Nicaraguans into unemployment. In just a matter of weeks, thanks to Cardinal's Brenes ineffectual leadership, he and his right wing bishops have destroyed the prestigious role of the Catholic Church so carefully nurtured by Cardinal Obando over his lifetime. An undeniable sign of that failure was an unprecedented declaration by Nicaragua's leading evangelical churches on June 5th last stating :

"We propose to the government that if the Catholic bishops cannot agree among themselves to continue as mediators and given that the dialogue for peace cannot be allowed to expire or be delayed, then the OAS should be asked to mediate a broad National Dialogue incorporating representatives of political parties and the Evangelical Church since the current structure of the dialogue is more sectoral than national and does not represent the 50% of the country's population that is evangelical." For the main

evangelical churches to rebuke Nicaragua's Catholic bishops in those terms is unprecedented and shows how badly damaged Cardinal Brenes' credibility now is.

In the current war of attrition for public opinion in Nicaragua a growing majority of people increasingly see through the endless lies of the Civic Alliance opposition media and the hypocrisy of the Catholic hierarchy. On the other hand, President Daniel Ortega's unflinching commitment to reaching a non-violent resolution of the crisis via dialogue free of opposition paramilitary violence and roadblocks has overwhelming national support. Faced with the perverse violent onslaught of Nicaragua's US backed right wing opposition, the Sandinista government of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo has inherited and made its own the legacy of peace, reconciliation and non-violence left by Cardinal Miguel Obando and Father Miguel d'Escoto.

Nicaragua : defeating the attempted coup

Tortilla con Sal, Telesur, June 12th 2018

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/Nicaragua--Defeating-the-Soft-Co...>

Nicaragua has been a good example of how Western corporate and alternative news media are able to create a custom-made bizarro-world to suit the propaganda requirements of their countries' elites. The current media onslaught against Nicaragua uses the whole toolbox of propaganda tricks portraying aggressors as victims, reporting non-existent massacres of peacefully protesting students, denying systematic destruction by opposition paramilitaries of public property and private businesses, even omitting attacks on hospitals and ambulances. The big fundamental fiction has been that a majority of people in Nicaragua reject the Sandinista government led by President Daniel Ortega. The converse of the lie is that most people support the so called Civic Alliance composed of right wing business leaders, right wing political parties, reactionary Catholic bishops, US funded NGOs and university students allied to those interests.

But events in real life contradict the minority opposition story line. On April 22nd, the supposed dictatorship proposed a national dialogue mediated by the Catholic church. It took the opposition almost three weeks to agree. They did so on condition the government withdraw the police from the streets. In fact, police had already been ordered not to intervene against the violent opposition paramilitaries. The government agreed, but when the dialogue began the bishops refused to condemn opposition violence while still falsely accusing the government of violent repression. The opposition never tried to negotiate in good faith, simply demanding the government resign and refusing to dismantle roadblocks which the government, supposedly a dictatorship, allowed to operate so as to avoid more violent conflict.

The government strategy has been to accept extraordinary levels of opposition violence and intimidation so as to allow the opposition to discredit themselves with public opinion. The opposition violence and roadblocks have disrupted economic life, affecting thousands of small and micro businesses, throwing tens of thousands into unemployment and causing hardship for many thousands of people with serious health problems. The opposition paramilitary violence has destroyed numerous

public buildings and government offices in various cities, decimated the tourist industry, cost the lives of around 150 people and left over 1100 injured. Some of the worst violence has been in the tourist cities of Granada and Masaya where hundreds of businesses have been practically destroyed. In that context, the Catholic bishops categorically betrayed their mediation role last week by presenting President Ortega with an undisclosed ultimatum very obviously in sympathy with the political opposition and demanding a response in two days.

Following that ultimatum delivered on June 7th, the opposition paramilitaries staged a wave of attacks against government offices in León, Masaya and Jinotega, also attacking police stations elsewhere to steal firearms, kidnapping and torturing police officers. In an attack on Monday June 11th, a gang of paramilitaries killed two more police officers, wounding two in Mulukukú in the country's northern Mining Triangle. At the same time they intensified their roadblocks almost completely stopping traffic along the highway between Managua and the north of the country. That same day, police acted to clear some of the roadblocks in what many people view as the beginning of President Ortega's response to the bishops' ultimatum. The government decision to act against the roadblocks strangling the economy is clearly supported by a majority of people in the country. But it remains to be seen how the opposition will react.

One feature in particular of the crisis covered up by alternative and corporate media has been the role in the opposition violence of organized crime and delinquents. From the very start of the crisis on April 18th criminals and youth gangs have operated alongside right wing extremists to foment civil disturbances and lethal violence. One notorious group involved in attacks portrayed as political protest and also responsible for various murders, including one of a US citizen, was broken up by police on May 31st. The group operated out of the private Polytechnic University occupied by opposition students and associated protestors, including this group of criminals. The police have accused right wing political activist Felix Maradiaga of involvement with that criminal group. Maradiaga, one of the leaders of the opposition protests against the government is currently in the United States where he went to lobby against the Nicaraguan government in the Organization of American States General Assembly on June 4th and 5th.

During that OAS General Assembly, Nicaragua's diplomats defeated opposition efforts to secure any condemnation of President Ortega's government. Secretary General Luis Almagro had previously denounced deceitful and misleading statements from Nicaragua's opposition, insisting on a constitutional resolution of the country's crisis. That lead Felix Maradiaga to accuse Almagro of being President Ortega's accomplice, to which Almagro retorted that he is indeed an accomplice, but an accomplice of democracy against anti-democratic moves in violation of constitutional norms. Subsequently, the United Nations Secretary General expressed his satisfaction that the Nicaraguan government is working closely with the OAS to reach a negotiated settlement to Nicaragua's political crisis, a position supported by the European Union and, at least nominally, even by the US State Department.

These setbacks at the international level for Nicaragua's political opposition have been followed by the collapse of the Catholic bishops' credibility as mediators for the dialogue and the emergence of clear majority support nationally for an end to the violence and the economic damage and distress it has

caused. In this new context, Nicaragua's Sandinista government seems to be moving cautiously to clear the roadblocks while at the same time developing local initiatives for peace and dialogue aimed at isolating the violent opposition paramilitary groups. As that process advances, Nicaragua's political opposition are likely to act with increasing desperation to try and mitigate the likely consequences of their attempted coup. While the next couple of weeks may well see the beginnings of a political settlement of the crisis, achieving that outcome is likely to come at the price of yet more death and destruction from Nicaragua's opposition extremists.

Nicaragua - breaking out of the "soft coup" psychosis

Tortilla con Sal, Telesur, June 24th 2018

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/Nicaragua-Breaking-Out-of-Soft-C...>

In his 2005 Nobel address, British playwright Harold Pinter wrote of US foreign policy that the US rarely invades its target countries, preferring to infect the country with "a malignant growth and watch the gangrene bloom." Then, when its local allies succeed in taking power, the US President of the day goes on camera to declare "Democracy has prevailed." Talking about the last decades of the 20th century, Pinter went on to say of US crimes during those years that, for Western public opinion, "Nothing ever happened. Even while it was happening it wasn't happening. It didn't matter.It's a brilliant, even witty, highly successful act of hypnosis."

US policy remains unchanged, but tactics have moved on. In Latin America, first Venezuela and now Nicaragua have been proving grounds for a new variation on Pinter's summary of US intervention. Now it is of supreme importance for everyone to see that things do indeed happen, happen as they happen and really do matter a great deal. US interventionist strategy has evolved now to accuse its victims of their own murders. Target governments are accused of destroying their own economies, attacking their own health systems and schools and burning down their own public offices. It is all savagely witty.

In Venezuela, those tactics, have been constant since 2014, but intensified even more from April to July 2017, in a campaign of vandalism and terror blamed by Western media on the government of President Nicolas Maduro. Opposition extremists set fire to over 20 people during that time, but the images were projected in Western media to falsely reflect government repression rather than the reality of barbaric opposition violence. In April 2017, despite having the support, tacit or explicit, of most member countries of the Organization of American States, Venezuela announced its withdrawal from that body after abuse of the OAS rules by Secretary General Luis Almagro. Almagro justified his attacks on Venezuela based on grossly biased reports from the Inter American Commission for Human Rights.

Last Friday, the OAS Permanent Council received an equally absurdly biased IACHR report on Nicaragua. The report consisted entirely of recycled false opposition propaganda, completely omitting the Nicaraguan government's account of events. For the IACHR, the deaths of nine police officers and the wounding of over 200 more somehow resulted from police repression of peaceful protests. Reporting on abuses by non-existent government paramilitaries and phantom "para-police", the report

completely omitted wholesale destruction by opposition paramilitaries and allied delinquents of public and private property, including ambulances and health infrastructure. The resolution approving the IACHR report was supported by the US and its closest allies, just a third of the OAS member States.

On Saturday June 23rd, violent opposition gangs murdered a female municipal worker in Masaya and killed a one year old child in Managua. Both deaths resulted from attacks by opposition armed gangs on municipal workers clearing the gangs' makeshift barricades to allow free circulation of traffic. Even those deaths the opposition media and NGOs are blaming on the government and the police.

Commenting on this reversal of the facts, FSLN international relations representative, Carlos Fonseca Terán noted in [a television interview](#), "Various elements make up this violent screenplay, but I'd summarize it like this: Sandinistas have neither the right to defend ourselves, nor the right to let ourselves be killed. Although it sounds absurd, if we defend ourselves they say we're paramilitary gangs attacking peaceful protesters, but if we don't defend ourselves and get killed, we become just one more in the list of their dead."

Fonseca also recalled how during the visit last May by IACHR Executive Secretary Paulo Abrão to Nicaragua, an armed opposition gang in Managua attacked unarmed Sandinista supporters returning from a peace march. The social media immediately reported that the Sandinistas were attacking peaceful opposition student protesters. Paulo Abrão arrived at the scene, only to rouse the opposition supporters saying, as Fonseca recalls, " 'Continue the struggle, you are in the right, your struggle is a just one, we support you!' ...and that's been recorded and circulated. it should provoke an international scandal or lead to the IACHR removing that guy for the sake of the organization's prestige or at the very least to maintain the appearance that they are supposed have as 'experts', but no one is even bothered about that. So it's self-evident these people aren't coming to investigate anything."

Despite failing to secure condemnation of President Ortega's Sandinista government, Nicaragua's political opposition regard last Friday's theatrical events in the OAS as a victory. Within Nicaragua itself, the process of national dialogue continues, the government is progressively and cautiously removing the roadblocks and barricades around the country, finally restoring national economic life to normality. Majority opinion in Nicaragua is critical of the Catholic Church bishops mediating the national dialogue for their clear bias in favor of the political opposition. Evangelical churches in particular have complained that they are not represented in the national dialogue despite serving over half the population professing religious belief.

Opposition representatives in the national dialogue have dropped their demand for President Ortega to resign and now aspire most urgently to bring forward the presidential elections currently scheduled for 2021. The OAS have already been working with the Nicaraguan authorities for almost two years now on reforms to the country's electoral system for which a schedule has also already been agreed. It remains to be seen what the eventual outcome of the dialogue process will be. But the opposition's attempted coup d'etat has clearly failed and they are obliged now to operate within the current legal institutional framework defined by Nicaragua's Constitution.

However, for the foreseeable future opposition violence is likely to continue, with the aim of creating a constant climate of fear and hatred fed with systematic media falsehood endlessly blaming their violent crimes on the government. Over the next couple of months, the IACHR team in Nicaragua may

collaborate in that process, continuing their pro-opposition antics. But they will be under scrutiny and subject to the superior professionalism and experience of the country's Commission for Truth, Peace and Justice sworn in on May 6th by the National Assembly. For the government, the objective has to be a return to rationality among the general population who are trapped in a kind of collective psychosis.

As Carlos Fonseca Teran puts it, "their minds and souls are being attacked by a machinery scientifically designed to achieve that.... as part of the People and defenders of the People's interests, we cannot fall into the mistake of seeing ordinary people who are trapped in this psychological warfare as blameworthy, or as our enemies. They are not! To the contrary they are our people and we have to continue defending them." He adds, "It's like when a left wing party loses elections, that isn't the fault of the people either, it's that the revolutionary forces were not up to achieving their objective. It's not that the People have to measure up to us. It's we that have to measure up to the People."

Nicaragua – legitimacy and human rights

Stephen Sefton, *Tortilla con Sal, Telesur*, July 4th 2018

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/Nicaragua-Legitimacy-And-Human-R...>



The murder of Miguel Ramos yesterday July 3rd focuses many aspects of the current crisis in Nicaragua to do with conflicting claims of legitimacy involving fundamental issues of civil and political rights and social and economic rights. In 1978 and 1979, as a teenager in the Carlos Fonseca Northern Front guerrilla column, Miguel fought for Nicaragua's sovereign

independence. Yesterday he died for that same cause, gunned down by supporters of the US-backed right wing coup in progress against the Sandinista government of President Daniel Ortega. Miguel was one of a group of civilians helping the authorities clear an opposition roadblock at La Trinidad on the Panamerican Highway about 20km south of Estelí.

Yesterday, Carlos Ascencio, El Salvador's ambassador, published an appeal on behalf of all the Central American ambassadors in Nicaragua to clear similar roadblocks in Jinotepe. [His letter](#) provides independent corroboration of the violent intimidation and extortion practised by opposition gangs who have operated these roadblocks for two months, strangling Nicaragua's economy. and abusing people's basic rights. Ascencio denounces the effective detention of [400 truck drivers](#) and their vehicles near the

town of Jinotepe for over a month. The drivers, from all over Central America, have been threatened and their vehicles damaged. The political opposition activists operating the roadblocks refuse to liberate the trucks and their drivers because “they are our protective shield and negotiating card to support our demands in the dialogue”.

That is just one of the innumerable gross human rights abuses by the right wing opposition forces promoting the attempted coup in Nicaragua. For two months the road blocks, operated by opposition paramilitaries and paid thugs, have been a focus for murder, torture, kidnapping, intimidation and extortion and criminal delinquency. Supporters of the coup turn that reality upside down, blaming the resulting violence on the government. In their upside down world, ordinary citizens organizing to defend their rights against armed and violent opposition gangs metamorphose into “Sandinista paramilitaries”.

In the case of Miguel Ramos, the opposition have already portrayed the incident in which he died as a government paramilitary attack on peaceful protesters. They will add Miguel’s death to the tally of their own casualties even though he died at their hands. Abundant documentation and audio-visual evidence exists now disproving categorically the constant falsehoods propagated by US-funded opposition human rights organizations and local Nicaraguan opposition media. The original list of 55 deaths, proclaimed with such theater on the first day of the National Dialogue, has been completely [debunked](#). There was never any “student massacre”.

Other material exposes media and NGO manipulation of [opposition marches](#), or the [deaths of women](#) during the crisis. Numerous videos demonstrate the [sadistic violence](#) of opposition activists. Various writers like [Alex Anfruns](#) have explained the systematic pattern of media distortion and manipulation of opposition attacks and abuses reported by opposition media and NGOs as government human rights violations. No Western corporate media and only a handful of alternative media publish this material or any version challenging the demonstrable false witness of Amnesty International and the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights.

Just as in the case of Venezuela, those organizations have failed to investigate impartially any of the incidents they report, merely recycling the version already prepared for them by US funded local NGOs and media and ignoring or rejecting documentation from the Nicaraguan authorities out of hand. IACHR Director Paulo Abrao effectively disqualified himself as an independent arbitrator during a visit to Nicaragua last May, when he was recorded publicly declaring his support for the opposition. The investigative process accompanied by a group of IACHR experts had not even begun when, on June 22nd, the IACHR presented their final report to the OAS Permanent Commission

Perhaps as the political price of avoiding, at least for the moment, the kind of all out economic and diplomatic assault applied to Cuba and Venezuela, the Nicaraguan government has accepted these gross methodological irregularities and the blatant political bias of the OAS and its IACHR subsidiary. For its part, the Commission for Truth, Justice and Peace appointed by the National Assembly has actively sought an exchange of information with the opposition human rights organizations. As Commission member Cairo Amador has explained, “It’s a matter of everyone providing their data and their versions so, in the end, everyone contributes to getting at the truth.”

But as Estelí's mayor Francisco Valenzuela has pointed out the effects of the attempted coup are much broader than the civil rights violations, "The damages can definitely be classified in order of importance. First, the suffering and the victims that we all lament. Secondly, everything to do with the economy and with people's freedoms, the roadblocks that impede freedom of movement and have affected employment. The inability to move goods and products for export has caused enormous financial losses. Tourism has suffered nationally and locally, especially small businesses. Most businesses in Nicaragua are small or medium sized and have been very badly affected. A lot of businesses have closed."

Economy Minister Ivan Acosta has stated, "Growth projections for the economy were 4.5% to 5% but now we think the economy is not growing. 200,000 jobs have been lost, which affects social security, trade, domestic demand and real productive activity." Nicaragua's municipal authorities report losses to vehicles, machinery and equipment of over US\$10 million and to buildings and infrastructure of over US\$112 million. The country's technical training institute reports losses of US\$80 million. The Ministry of Education reports over 60 schools attacked and damaged. A preliminary MINSA report in June reported 55 ambulances destroyed or damaged as well as other damage to hospitals and health centers, all resulting from opposition attacks. The Infrastructure and Transport Ministry also reports extensive losses, for example damage valued at US\$1.5 million from just one incident, when opposition activists attacked a plant in Sebaco and destroyed equipment.

None of that extraordinary level of violence and destruction figures anywhere in the reports by Amnesty International or the IACHR, nor the abuse of the basic rights of the government workers and local population involved. Similarly, neither those organizations nor the Western media have reported the role of criminals contracted to operate the opposition roadblocks and carry out attacks. On June 30th, Nicaraguan police arrested [Salvadoran mara leader](#) Óscar Rivas Carrillo, who confirmed he and other criminals were being paid to operate roadblocks, carry out murders, burn public buildings and attack economic targets. Rivas and other criminals worked jointly with opposition activists supported by right wing business interests, US-funded NGOs, right wing political parties and the Catholic Church.

Clearly, Amnesty International and the IACHR have deliberately covered up that reality and misled international opinion, faithlessly exploiting their image as defenders of human rights, just as they do on Venezuela and Cuba. Even so, despite the extreme violence and the egregious dishonesty of its apologists, the US backed right-wing opposition coup to oust President Daniel Ortega has failed. People in Nicaragua overwhelmingly support efforts to return to normality and a political solution to the crisis. The Nicaraguan authorities will tolerate the IACHR's theatricals for another few months before the OAS circus eventually moves on. Defeated opposition leaders hoped to impose their coup, failed because they lacked popular support and now have to accept what the Sandinista government is prepared to agree as the sovereign power in Nicaragua. Miguel Ramos did not die in vain.

Nicaragua defeats the not-so-soft coup

Tortilla con Sal, Telesur, July 17th 2018

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/opinion/Nicaragua-Defeats-The-Not-So-Sof...>

This Thursday July 19th, hundreds of thousands of people from across Nicaragua will converge on the capital Managua to celebrate the 39th anniversary of their historic 1979 defeat of the Somoza dictatorship. The event takes place as the authorities continue to liberate communities blockaded by roadblocks operated by armed opposition activists whose not-so-soft coup attempt against the Sandinista government, begun on April 18th, has failed. Ever since April 21st when President Daniel Ortega called for a process of National Dialogue to resolve peacefully opposition demands, Nicaragua's political opposition and their allies have worked to sabotage talks for a negotiated solution. They have regularly staged extremely violent provocations falsely seeking to portray the government as being wholly responsibly for the crisis. and demanding President Ortega's resignation.

Early in July, the opposition reneged on an agreement to dismantle the roadblocks their armed supporters have used ever since late April to try and destroy the country's economy and intimidate the general population. On July 9th, the [government declared](#) it would no longer permit the opposition to abuse the population's basic rights to peace and security, stating "Faced with the daily suffering imposed on Nicaragua's families who since last April 18th have suffered violence from terrorists who have murdered, tortured and kidnapped hundreds of citizens, the same terrorists that have burned and destroyed hundreds of families' homes, public buildings, small and medium sized businesses; such that the State is bound to act in accordance with the Law to guarantee the Right of its citizens to live in Peace, with Security and the respect for the human rights enshrined in our Political Constitution, in the Charters of International Organizations and in Human Rights Conventions."

Subsequently, Nicaragua's national police have worked with local communities around the country to clear the opposition roadblocks. In Jinotepe they set free hundreds of trucks and their drivers from all over Central America held hostage by opposition gangs for over a month. In many places it has been possible to negotiate agreements to remove the roadblocks peacefully. Elsewhere the process has involved violence and casualties provoked by very well armed activists and associated paid criminals resisting the authorities' efforts to restore freedom of movement. On July 13th in Managua, two opposition activists were killed during the clearance of blockades in and around the National Autonomous University.

Elsewhere in the country, on July 12th, opposition activists from roadblocks operated by Francisca Ramirez and Medardo Mairena's anti Canal movement, infiltrated an opposition peace march in the town of Morrito on the eastern shore of Lake Nicaragua on the highway to the Rio San Juan. They attacked a police post and the local municipal office, murdering four police officers and a primary school teacher, wounding four municipal workers and kidnapping nine police officers. Subsequently, that evening the police officers were set free, six of them with injuries.

In Masaya, opposition activists [tortured, murdered and burned](#) police officer Gabriel Vado Ruiz and would have done the same to another police officer, Rodrigo Barrios Flores, had he not escaped from

his captors after enduring two days of torture and abuse. Although the extreme violence of the armed opposition activists has been responsible directly and indirectly for almost all the loss of life and injuries during the crisis, international news media and human rights organizations continue to falsely blame the government for virtually all the deaths and people injured. Amnesty International and fellow coup apologists like Bianca Jagger and SOS Nicaragua, along with their allies in corporate media like The Guardian, The Telegraph, Washington Post, New York Times, Al Jazeera, CNN, BBC, all cover up [very serious human rights violations](#) by the opposition activists during the failed attempted coup against Nicaragua's legitimate government.

However, abundant audiovisual and photographic material exists providing irrefutable evidence of systematic human rights violations practiced by Nicaragua's political opposition. From the the start, on April 18th, the armed opposition offensive has manipulated legitimate peaceful protest so as to give cover to a very deliberate campaign of violence and deceit, promoting a climate of fear and casting blame on the government so as to create a psychosis of hatred, polarizing Nicaraguan society. The campaign's objective is to make impossible a negotiated solution to the crisis provoked by the country's political opposition. Over the weekend of July 13th-15th, events in Nicaragua have shown how refined the techniques of psychological warfare have become.

The political opposition have used social media to misrepresent and exaggerate events, create incidents that never happened and obliterate their own criminal terrorist attacks. For example, the crisis in Nicaragua began with a fake "student massacre" that never took place. Now Nicaragua's opposition have faked attacks on a church in Managua, exaggerated casualties during the clearance of opposition thugs from the national university and covered up their own deliberate murders of police in Morrito and Masaya as well as their gratuitous attacks on peaceful Sandinista demonstrators. In the national university, the opposition gangs also set fire to a classroom module and destroyed a preschool facility on the university campus.

Right from the start of the crisis the opposition have expertly staged phony scenes of students taking cover from gunfire and used those images to justify their own savage attacks, like those in which they burned down pro-government Nuevo Radio Ya and CARUNA, the rural cooperatives' savings and loan institution. [Various photographs](#) show opposition journalists and photographers filming opposition activists pretending to be attacked. But despite the obvious fakery, those false stories get published uncritically in international corporate and alternative media. Nicaragua provides a text book case study bearing out the work of analysts like Cuba's Randy Falcon [who has emphasized](#) how new technologies multiply exponentially the digital reproduction of long standing conventional propaganda motifs.

In Nicaragua, the government has in several cases negotiated agreements to clear armed opposition roadblocks only to find that the opposition refuse to honor the agreements. The country's extremist political opposition are desperate to keep up their violence so as to sabotage efforts at National Dialogue and project the false image of a repressive government without popular support. Large demonstrations across the country supporting the government's efforts for peace show exactly the reverse is true. Majority national opinion in Nicaragua is well aware of the opposition's propaganda ploys and false claims.

Within Nicaragua the opposition hardly bother to conceal their invention and artifice because their false political theater is staged almost entirely to impress overseas opinion. Their sinister cynical theater aims to set the scene for the Organization of American States to change its previously moderate position on Nicaragua and give the US government an institutional pretext on which to intensify sanctions against Nicaragua's government and its people. Even so, despite probable opposition attempts to sabotage it, July 19th will see a massive celebration of the coup's defeat and a categorical vindication of President Daniel Ortega's Sandinista government's efforts for peace in Nicaragua.

After the failed coup, after all the lies, Nicaragua rebuilds

Stephen Sefton, *Tortilla con Sal, Telesur*, July 23rd 2018

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/After-The-Failed-Coup-After-All-The...>

Nicaragua is entering a new political phase of reconstruction in multiple senses, now the US backed right wing coup attempt has failed. The country's political opposition have suffered another catastrophic failure. After months of intimidation and insecurity, savage violence and economic blockade at the hands of the country's extremist opposition, people in Nicaragua long for a return to peaceful social and economic life. Overseas, Western media and NGOs have confirmed their role as propaganda outlets for the US government and its allies.

Media from the Guardian and the New York Times to the BBC and Al Jazeera as well as phony progressive media like Democracy Now have misrepresented the crisis as have human rights organizations like Amnesty International. All have deliberately omitted overwhelming evidence of crimes, violations and abuses by Nicaragua's opposition. The destruction of Sandinista radio stations, the well documented strategy of torture and intimidation to terrorize ordinary people, the murder of 22 police officers and dozens more Sandinista supporters as well as 400 police officers injured with gunshot wounds are only the most egregious omissions.

These deceitful Western media and NGOs also omitted the taking hostage of hundreds of truck drivers for over a month, the destruction by opposition terror gangs of public sector buildings, vehicles and equipment running into hundreds of millions of dollars, attacks on over 60 schools, damage and destruction of over 50 ambulances, attempted murder of and threats against Sandinista student leaders: the list of omissions is damning. Similarly, these same media have used staged fake news of disappearances and non-existent police attacks as well as falsely claiming the protesters were mainly peaceful students. Mendaciously attributing all deaths to the government, phony opposition human rights NGOs and the Interamerican Commission for Human Rights have [inflated the casualty list](#) with people whose deaths had nothing to do with the protests.

In tune with that policy of systematic falsehood, practically no Western mainstream media reported the overwhelming demonstrations of support for President Ortega's government on July 19th. In Managua, aerial photos showed hundreds of thousands of people [packing the main Plaza de la Fe](#) and the adjacent boulevard. To avoid the threat of violent opposition ambushes, instead of the traditional July 19th

celebration with people traveling from across Nicaragua to the capital Managua, separate events were held in Nicaragua's main urban centers, also with massive participation. By contrast an opposition march held in Managua on Saturday July 21st attracted barely 1000 participants

Few observers familiar with Nicaragua will be surprised at this outcome. The government always had the support of the labor movement and the great majority of people in the popular economy that generates around 70% of employment in the country. The opposition coalition against the government consisted of right wing big business, reactionary Catholic bishops, US government funded NGOs and related groups like the foreign-funded anti-Canal movement, regional organized crime, Colombian finance interests and embittered ex-Sandinistas now allied with right wing US politicians. A look at how the attempted coup developed explains much about why it failed.

Social media massively reproduced the initial big lie about a non-existent massacre of students on April 18th provoking widespread outrage. Then between April 19th and April 22nd opposition extremists ruthlessly exploited legitimate protests, creating provocations and attacks on public and private property causing numerous deaths and injuries. Opposition media and US funded NGOs falsely blamed all the casualties on the government, provoking both more widespread outrage locally and also feeding an international diplomatic offensive. By Monday April 23rd, opposition demands switched from repeal of proposed legislation to a non-negotiable demand for the government resign.

President Ortega proposed a national dialogue, but the opposition then started operating roadblocks and intensifying violent provocations. The political wing of the coup, the reactionary Catholic bishops and US funded NGO representatives, extorted concessions from the government as a precondition for participating in the dialogue, including the withdrawal of police to their stations. Also something international media practically never report. Then through May and June the opposition continued extremely violent provocations causing numerous deaths, attacking police quartered in their stations and strangling the economy with their roadblocks.

While international condemnation developed based entirely on false opposition propaganda, the coup attempt's momentum inside Nicaragua collapsed. By mid-June popular opinion had reacted strongly against the roadblocks, the intimidation and delinquency, the torture and abuse, the murders and the wanton destruction. A great majority of people were deeply angered by the economic and social effects of the roadblocks, which caused serious, widespread hardship for ordinary people who live from day to day or week to week. In addition to their own personal difficulties people came to realize the broader reality of the coup.

Few people in Nicaragua now believe the propaganda lie about a government crackdown on peaceful protests. Regular legitimate peaceful protests took place throughout the crisis but these were constantly abused by provocateurs to create incidents causing death and destruction. Nor do most people in Nicaragua believe the lie that the people leading the protests after the first few days were students. Most middle-class students who began the demonstrations on April 18th avoided serious violence and few took part in the roadblocks. Most less well-off public university students soon realized they'd been duped and used as cannon fodder by opposition extremists. However, overseas opinion continues to be fooled by Nicaragua's opposition media offensive.

People in North America and Europe, trapped in a propaganda bubble, are [denied the real life information](#) they need to be able think freely for themselves. All Western mainstream media and most alternative media operate an endless garbage-in garbage-out feedback loop. Their anti-democratic betrayal of people's right to truthful news intensifies in inverse relation to the decline of US power and influence and the consequent desperation of US and allied elites. In Latin America, their victims include countries like Cuba, Bolivia, Venezuela and Nicaragua and leaders like Nicolas Maduro, Evo Morales, Daniel Ortega, Lula da Silva, Rafael Correa and Cristina Fernandez : any government or leader challenging US dominance in the region.

Although the coup attempt failed internally in Nicaragua it achieved the momentum needed to sustain an international offensive, setting in motion probable sanctions at a time when Nicaragua needs to rebuild all that has been destroyed both materially and morally. Faced with looming economic and diplomatic attacks the Sandinista government is likely to strengthen the popular economy even more than before and rethink domestic policy in the context of the political polarization that has supplanted the previously successful model of consensus and alliances.

With little popular support, the country's political opposition seems committed to continue destabilizing the economy by promoting foreign intervention. The Catholic church is finished as the principal moral arbiter in Nicaragua after committing political and social suicide by supporting the coup's murderous sadistic violence. Big business is discredited as a trustworthy interlocutor for economic policy because it was the popular economy that sustained the country through the crisis. Grass roots based evangelical churches now have a stronger voice in national life than before because they very publicly rejected the cynical hypocrisy of the Catholic bishops. These are important changes for Nicaragua.

In institutional terms, the national police have strengthened their moral prestige as they re-establish citizen security. The army stayed completely out of the civil conflict generated by the coup attempt. Its prestige too has been enhanced. Both institutions categorically support the government. Politically, the FSLN has consolidated its core support of over 50% of Nicaraguans. It seems extremely unlikely there will be early elections before those scheduled in 2021. Nicaragua has entered a new phase, balancing between the inherent political instability caused by a weak, divided opposition and the economic attack threatened by sadistic, vindictive US and European elites. Despite everything, the government has committed [to rebuilding Nicaragua](#), better than before.

Lessons from Nicaragua

Stephen Sefton, Tortilla con Sal, September 9th 2018

Apologists for the attempted coup in Nicaragua hemorrhage credibility with every week that passes. Both inside and outside Nicaragua, reality is fast catching up with their falsehoods and distortions. Last week, [the New York Times](#) revealed US government involvement in plans for a military coup in Venezuela, confirming long standing accusations by the Venezuelan authorities. The report demolishes the credibility of US government claims to support peaceful, democratic political change in Venezuela, Nicaragua or anywhere else in Latin America. Opposition apologists deny in vain [President Ortega's accusation](#) of US government complicity in the extreme violence of their attempted coup in Nicaragua.

Likewise, opposition leaders have always denied their complicity in systematic human rights violations by the criminal gangs they paid to spearhead attacks against government targets and ordinary Sandinistas. They continue to lie that the protests were peaceful from the start and all the deaths resulted from government repression. The very reverse is true. Their big lie suffered yet another demolition blow in Nicaragua last week with the publication of videos showing the [savage brutality](#) of yet another criminal gang supporting the opposition Civic Alliance. The videos were from the smart phones of gang members operating roadblocks in Jinotepe obtained after the gang's arrest for the disappearance of [Bismarck Martínez](#), a municipal worker in Nicaragua's capital Managua.

Despite false international media reporting, massive demonstrations for peace and justice for victims of the opposition violence in Nicaragua vastly outnumber the insignificant turnout for opposition marches. These continue to serve as pretexts for isolated violent attacks on government targets, usually the police, and Sandinista supporters. An attempted employers' lock-out on September 7th [flopped hopelessly](#) both in Managua and in the country's other main urban centers. Nicaragua's minority opposition still cling to vain hopes of regime change. But throughout Nicaragua most ordinary people by far just want their lives back, to work and study normally and to return to the stability they had before the opposition coup started last April 18th.

As has been the case in previous attacks on progressive governments in Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela, lessons abound from Nicaragua's experience over the last five months. To defeat the kind of not-so-soft coup currently favored by the US government and its local allies various elements are crucial. After the initial shock of the opposition social media offensive, Sandinistas mobilized masses of supporters using social media to counter the scandalous lies propagated by the Civic Alliance opposition teams trained and funded by the US government. North American and European solidarity networks prevented a complete international media walkover for opposition propagandists, forcing [even the BBC](#) to adhere from time to time to basic journalistic standards. President Ortega has made a point of giving extensive interviews to international media including virulent [psy-warfare opponents](#) and regular [investigative reporters](#) as well as ideologically [sympathetic media](#).

As they have done in conflicts elsewhere, teams from the Inter American Commission for Human Rights (IACHR) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OUNHCHR) acted as propaganda shells for the US government. Like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, they shamelessly betrayed fundamental principles of competent investigation and good faith reporting, relying exclusively on opposition news media, US funded human rights organizations and fleeting on-the-spot reports carefully arranged around staged opposition provocations. Their claims of over four hundred dead and thousands wounded have been repeatedly exposed as false, both by [freelance analysts](#), by [investigative reporters](#) and by the National Assembly's [independent Truth Commission](#). Inside Nicaragua only minority opposition supporters believe the comprehensively mendacious opposition media reports on which almost all the human rights reporting of the crisis was based

Nicaragua's experience confirms the same lesson learned for almost 60 years from Cuba, 20 years in Venezuela and more recently in Ivory Coast, Libya, Ukraine, Thailand and Syria. Namely, Western human rights organizations and media of all kinds will tell any lie and suppress every truth in order to mislead and deceive their populations into supporting US and allied government policy in the service of Western corporate elites. Despite overwhelming evidence, Western human rights organizations and

media have deliberately covered up the US funded Nicaraguan opposition's deliberate policy of terror aimed at promoting fear and hatred so as to deepen a cycle of violence aimed at securing regime change. This is exactly the reverse of what the opposition leaders and supporters avow.

One might argue in that case, that any other governments likely to face similar US regime change assault like, self evidently, Bolivia, should ensure they make accessible the truth about the crimes Western human rights organizations and news media seek to cover up. In Nicaragua, the murders of police officers and Sandinista supporters like Gabriel de Jesús Vado tortured and set on fire, Yadira Ramos raped and murdered, Francisco Arauz gunned down and set on fire, or Roberto Castillo Cruz deliberately murdered a week after the same opposition gang murdered his son Cristopher Castillo Rosales were all cases that shocked public opinion in Nicaragua.

They are just a few of 198 police officers, government workers, Sandinista supporters and bystanders murdered by opposition gangs as against around 70 people identified as opposition supporters killed in the violent opposition-driven crisis from April to mid July. Those figures are based on genuine investigations by the Nicaraguan legislature's Truth Commission, as against hearsay opposition accusations and phony research used to inflate the figures of the Inter American Commission for Human Rights, the UN's OHCHR and Amnesty International, for example.

But another argument is that , while combating all the falsehoods on various fronts, the more important imperative is to communicate the reality of what is in fact one last determined assault by US and allied corporate elites on Latin America's resources against competition from Asia, especially China. In this respect, Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega's [latest interview](#) with the Deutsche Welle media outlet is very telling. Deutsche Welle's journalist Carolina Chimoy was either incredibly ignorant and ill-prepared or else feigned ignorance in asking fake-naively "but why would the US target Nicaragua?" Very, very clearly, the US corporate elites are targeting any country that prevents their last gasp extraction of Latin America's resources before they themselves succumb to the realities of competition from a multipolar world.

To do so they apply regime change in all its currently viable variants. They use judicial and legislative corruption in Brazil and Argentina targeting progressive leaders like Lula and Dilma Rousseff, abuse of the constitution in Ecuador to facilitate persecution of former President Rafael Correa and his colleagues, betrayal of peace agreement commitments in Colombia and outright attacks via illegal, genocidal sanctions against Cuba, Venezuela and, no doubt before too long, Nicaragua. In Nicaragua's case the assault is not just against a rebellious government but against a truly revolutionary economic model, like Cuba's, like Venezuela's, placing the human person in a sustainable environment at the center of economic development.

That is why phony Western progressives and liberals ally with the US right wing to detest, misrepresent and distort the achievements of Nicolas Maduro and Daniel Ortega. They would rather be comfortably ensconced in the relative neocolonial privilege of the remaining few years of US and allied capitalist global dominance than face the difficult, complicated, uncomfortable realities of a more equitable multipolar world. Perhaps that is among the most important lessons of the failed coup in Nicaragua.