



Nicaragua: A Renewed Partnership with China Defangs US Regime Change Tactics

By Ben Gutman

From Washington D.C.

In a bold and consequential decision with rippling geopolitical implications, Nicaragua recognized the “One-China Principle” and resumed diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) for the first time since the beginning of the neoliberal period in 1990.^[1] This was announced December 9, 2021 shortly after a meeting of the China-CELAC Forum in which CELAC’s 32 Latin

American member states ^[2] agreed to adopt a [China-CELAC Joint Action Plan for Cooperation](#). The strengthening of Chinese ties with Western Hemisphere partners in a forum without US presence comes as a red flag for US hegemony and control over its own “backyard,” which, since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, has been firmly fenced off from other “external” global actors seeking influence in the region. However, unlike the last two centuries of US imperialism, China offers an approach that respects the rule of law and national sovereignty.

Last January 16, the replacement of Taiwanese investment with the sustainable socio-economic development model of the PRC’s “Belt and Road Initiative” in Nicaragua is particularly threatening to regional US economic domination. In 2014, Nicaragua partnered with a Chinese firm to initiate construction of a second shipping lane connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans in addition to the current US-dominated Panama Canal.^[3] The anti-Sandinista opposition party Unamos (formerly known as the Sandinista Renovation Movement or MRS), whose leaders

frequently met and provided information to the US embassy, helped organize an NED-engineered pseudo-movement in opposition to the project, which eventually came to a halt during the political violence of 2018.^[4] The potential relaunch of the Nicaraguan canal project could prove to be a pivotal point in the US's New Cold War and flailing bid to remain the world's lone superpower.

Nicaragua leaves the OAS, the *de facto* diplomatic branch of the US in the Americas

On November 19, following the re-election of President Daniel Ortega, the Nicaraguan government announced its withdrawal from the US-dominated Organization of American States (OAS), joining Venezuela and Cuba in what former Bolivian president Evo Morales called “an act of dignity.”^[5] In an official letter to OAS Secretary-General Luis Almagro, Nicaragua's Foreign Minister Denis Moncada repeated previous condemnation of the OAS as an “instrument of interference and intervention” with the “mission to facilitate hegemony of the United States with its interventionism against the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.”^[6]

As [reported](#) by John Perry for COHA, the OAS produced a 16-page report within 48 hours of the alleged “illegitimate elections” that contained no evidence of fraud on election day. In lockstep with the White House’s [perverse and ridiculous claim](#) of support for the “inalienable right to democratic self-determination of the Nicaraguan people,” Almagro’s coup-fomenting false narrative of fraud came straight out of the US/OAS playbook used during their facilitation of the 2019 coup d’état against Morales’ MAS party in Bolivia.^[7] Constructed by the US as an anti-socialist alliance of right-wing regimes at the onset of the First Cold War, the OAS and its delegitimization of the 2021 Nicaraguan election reflects continuity of its role as “Ministry of Colonies” of the United States, as it was referred to by Fidel Castro.^[8]

Nicaragua’s withdrawal from the OAS and its reestablishment of relations with the PRC are bold decisions that flex Nicaraguan sovereignty and communicate to developing countries that a path of resistance against Western coercion leads to independence, inclusive

development, and promising new opportunities. The Sandinista Front's defeat of a three-year long US regime change operation, which culminated in the inauguration of Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega on January 10, 2022, has translated the sacrifices made by the Nicaraguan people into a concrete plan to further the egalitarian principles of the Sandinista Revolution.

Against a militarized and neoliberal model for Central America

With support from the fastest growing economy in the world with a population of 1.4 billion, in addition to an array of other governments and solidarity movements, Nicaragua has earned the ability to lead a more aggressive charge against Washington's proposed militarized security and neoliberal development model for Central America.^[9] Such a model which aims to enrich corporations through private investment and austerity to the detriment of the poor and working-class remains the antithesis to the Chinese and Sandinista revolutions. During his [inauguration speech](#), President Ortega elucidated this key point, stating that the "Chinese revolution and the

Sandinista revolution [have] the same north, the same path, the same destiny, which is to end poverty.”

As the process of poverty alleviation runs contrary to the exploitative goals of Western imperialists, the US and EU levied coordinated unilateral coercive measures against Nicaraguan officials on the day of President Ortega’s inauguration.^[10] However, the strategy of relentless hybrid warfare used to isolate and punish “enemy states” like Nicaragua has lost some of its impact. “The unipolar world is over. It’s a multipolar world,” said Black Alliance for Peace’s Margaret Kimberley at the inauguration. The Nicaraguan people’s defeat of US regime change attempts over the last three years is a remarkable accomplishment that helped the paradigm shift towards a multi-polar world. However, it is important to recognize the inevitable sacrifices that come with resistance, to dissect imperial destabilization strategies, and to reflect on the manufactured policies that have brought us to where we are today.

Revisiting the 2018 Attempted Coup, and the US media supported narrative

In Nicaragua-based journalist Ben Norton's investigation titled *"How USAID Created Nicaragua's Anti-Sandinista Media Apparatus, Now under Money Laundering Investigation,"* Norton presents documented evidence that the Violeta Barrios de Chamorro Foundation received more than \$7 million of the \$10 million funneled to Nicaraguan opposition media from the US's soft-power arm the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) between 2014 and 2021.^[11] The majority of this funding was distributed amongst some 25 publications including Chamorro Foundation-owned outlets that are widely quoted by the international press and elite US think tanks like the Open Society Foundation, which characterized *El Nuevo Diario*, *Confidencial*, and *La Prensa* (all Chamorro owned) as "the most important online news providers" in Nicaragua.^[12] As reported by Norton, the foreign funding and cultivation of these opposition and media groups led to arrests under *Nicaragua's law 1055*, which was then framed by the

corporate media as an authoritarian crackdown against opposition leaders.

Many international corporate media outlets like the BBC framed “Nicaragua’s worsening crisis” in 2018 as “unexpected” and a result of grassroots movements peacefully protesting against a corrupt dictatorship.^[13] This false narrative was exposed by John Perry in a report for *The Grayzone* titled “*A Response to Misinformation on Nicaragua: It Was a Coup, Not a ‘Massacre.’*” First, Perry points out that even anti-Ortega mainstream academics had admitted that US institutions like the USAID and NED were “laying the groundwork for insurrection,” debunking the narrative that the protests were organic and fortuitous.^[14] Second, Perry makes it clear that in an attempt to facilitate the established “peaceful protester” narrative by white-washing violence perpetrated by coup-supporters, academics and corporate media engaged in the systematic omission of inconvenient facts including the murder of 22 police officers and the torture of Sandinista civilians. The Nicaragua-based anti-imperialist collective *Tortilla con Sal* published independent researcher Enrique

Hendrix's in-depth analysis of this bad-faith framing as well as additional evidence backing claims of torture used against Sandinistas.

Much like corporate media and billionaire-funded foundations, a Nicaraguan human rights industry intricately connected and funded by US and European governments pushed propaganda, including the decontextualization of deaths and faulty death count figures, to provide cover for US regime change goals masquerading as unprovoked government repression.^[15] In the article *“The Rise and Fall of Nicaragua’s ‘Human Rights’ organizations”* published in the *Alliance for Global Justice’s NicaNotes*, John Perry relays how three vocally anti-Sandinista human rights groups wielded disproportionate influence over the narratives presented in international bodies such as Amnesty International and the UN Commission for Human Rights (UNCHR). For example, included in the UNCHR’s 2018 report on Nicaragua were detailed references to the Nicaraguan Association for Human Rights (ANPDH), which was created by the Reagan administration to whitewash Contra atrocities

and received \$88,000 from the NED and \$348,000 from other US sources in 2018.

In June of 2019, to the dismay of many Sandinistas whose family members were murdered during the coup attempt, the Nicaraguan government passed an Amnesty Law pardoning and expunging the records of those involved in violent and treasonous acts as part of a national dialogue with the opposition.^[16] This clemency came even after the opposition refused to ask the United States to end illegal unilateral coercive measures packaged as the 2018 [NICA Act](#) (passed in the US House of Representatives with zero opposition by a 435-0 margin), which opposition activists themselves had requested in 2015.^[17] During coverage of the peace and reconciliation process and in a continuation of the 2018 information warfare campaign, corporate media outlets like *Reuters* took a rather one-sided approach highlighting the law's "protection to police and others who took part in a violent clampdown on anti-government protesters," but failed to mention the violent acts committed against the police by these so-called anti-government protesters.^[18]

US Hybrid Warfare Revisited during the 2021 Nicaraguan Presidential Election

In the months prior to the November 7 election, the US government and its affiliated ecosystem of obedient corporate media, social media, and hawkish think tanks took aim at Nicaragua in an effort to further isolate the nation with the ultimate goal of regime change to a more business-friendly neoliberal leadership.

A [USAID regime change document](#) leaked to independent Nicaraguan journalist William Grigsby in July 2020 and analyzed in John Perry's ["The US Contracts Out its Regime Change Operation in Nicaragua"](#) provides useful insight into US destabilization plans. This RAIN or Responsive Assistance in Nicaragua document provides Terms of Reference for a contract to hire a company to oversee the "transition to democracy" in Nicaragua. The word "transition," an obvious euphemism for regime change, is used more than 60 times throughout the document to describe different post-election scenarios. In the case of a "delayed transition" or Sandinista

victory, the hired company would provide “research and planning for USAID and for civil society leadership with discrete technical assistance.” In other words, the company would continue USAID’s work subverting Nicaragua’s democratic process by funding, training, and directing opposition groups and media hostile to the FSLN.

However, despite clear evidence that the US was engaged in a multidimensional destabilization campaign before, during, and after the 2018 coup attempt, even progressive publications like *NACLA* failed to accurately report on events in Nicaragua. In the article *“How Can Some Progressives Get Basic Information About Nicaragua So Wrong?”* John Perry and Rick Stirling dismantle a popular State Department narrative promoted by *NACLA* that the November 7 election was rigged because seven potential candidates were prevented from running for president, by laying out the real crimes of which they are accused and the dubiousness of their candidacies. While the corporate media pushed this narrative ad nauseum regarding Nicaragua, it was almost completely absent prior

to the 2021 Ecuadorian presidential election during which neoliberal president Lenin Moreno jailed, exiled, and banned Correístas from running in elections.^[19]

In addition to news media propaganda, a bizarre censorship campaign launched by social media monopoly Facebook in the days leading up to the November 7 election silenced around 1,300 Nicaragua-based accounts run by pro-Sandinista media outlets, journalists, and activists on Facebook and Facebook-owned Instagram, as reported by *The Grayzone's* Ben Norton.^[20] Facebook [justified](#) this action by claiming that the censored accounts were part of a “troll farm run by the government of Nicaragua and the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) party.”^[21] In John Perry’s COHA article titled “*Facebook Does the US Government’s Censorship Work in Nicaraguan Elections*”, Perry points out that “many commentators suffered double censorship: blocked because they were falsely accused of being bots, then prevented from proving that the accusations were false when they posted videos of themselves as real people.” Facebook and other tech

giants like Google and Microsoft have an extensive history of collaboration with the U.S. security state, often enjoying lucrative U.S. Defense Department contracts, and are known to have a revolving door with the public sector.^[22] Norton shows this connection by exposing Facebook's Head of Security Policy Nathaniel Gleicher as the former director for cybersecurity policy at the White House National Security Council who had also worked at the U.S. Department of Justice.

Despite intense and ongoing hybrid warfare targeting the integrity of Nicaragua's 2021 presidential election, 65% of the eligible 4.4 million Nicaraguans voted and 75% of those voters chose to re-elect

Comandante Daniel Ortega of the Sandinista Front. While the Nicaraguan government did prevent the OAS from sending observers given its role in the 2019 Bolivian coup, there were 165 election observers and 67 journalists from 27 countries present on November 7.^[23] Members of delegations from the U.S. and Canada, including COHA's Jill Clark-Gollub, who observed the elections held a press

conference during which they characterized the election process as “efficient, transparent, with widespread turnout and participation of opposition parties.”^[24] In the COHA report *“Despite US led Dirty Campaign, Nicaraguans Came Out in Force in Support of the FSLN”*, Clark-Gollub expressed her disbelief that corporate media and the Biden administration had declared the vote a fraud with as few as 20% of the electorate turned out to vote. “This flies in the face of my own experience,” Clark-Gollub said.^[25] However, despite US and NATO rejection of the election results, 153 sovereign nations around the world supported Nicaraguan democracy by recognizing the election results at the United Nations.^[26]

Conclusion: A Brighter Future for Inclusive Economic Development in Nicaragua?

After more than a century of US aggression, including three decades of global hegemonic control, Obama’s “pivot” to Asia in 2016 marked a paradigm shift and the start of a New Cold War against China. The People’s Republic of China’s unparalleled economic growth and eagerness to use its deep coffers to jumpstart economic

development projects in the “third world” is a direct threat to neoliberal capitalist hegemony, as China offers developing nations an alternative to the predatory debt traps sprung by western lending institutions like the World Bank and IMF.

Mere weeks after Nicaragua’s resumption of diplomatic relations with the PRC, Chinese government representative Yu Bo extended an invitation to Nicaragua to [join its Belt and Road Initiative](#) during the newly established Chinese embassy’s flag-raising ceremony in Managua. Nicaragua’s Foreign Minister Denis Moncada responded to the invitation with approval stating, “we are sure that we will continue working together, strengthening each day the fraternal ties of friendship, cooperation, investment, [and] expanding communication channels with the Belt and Road...”

This bilateral economic partnership brings a potential scaffolding with which the “*pueblo presidente*” can “start with a clean slate” and get back on the road to the progress being made prior to April 2018. In the [words of Comandante Ortega](#), this means “building peace to

combat poverty...so that there can be roads and paths...so families can feel confident; their children can feel confident in their work; [and so] they feel confident in having a dignified life.” Nicaraguans can also feel confident that economic development in partnership with the Chinese will not come with the relinquishment of national sovereignty through coerced neoliberal structural adjustment programs or debt trap gangsterism.

If the Sandinista government chooses to reject future development proposals put forth by China through Belt and Road, they can expect good faith negotiation without the threat of violent hybrid warfare favored by the U.S. and NATO. In a [2019 interview](#), [Jamaican-British rapper Akala](#) explains this key difference in the context of Jamaican participation in the Belt and Road Initiative: “there are several projects that the Chinese have proposed in Jamaica that the Jamaican people said ‘no’ to [so] the Jamaican government had to say ‘no’... what was the Chinese response? Was it to send the CIA in? Was it to overthrow the Jamaican democracy? Was it to cut off

aid to Jamaica? No. They said ok, we proposed a business deal and you said no. Here's another one."

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[Main photo: video-screenshot from Kawsachun News]

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