

Letter to Senate Majority Leader Dole on the Central American Peace Proposal and United States Assistance for the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance

April 23, 1985

Dear Senator Dole:

I announced on April 4 a proposal to promote peace in Central America by fostering a dialogue between the Government of Nicaragua and the democratic resistance, accompanied by a ceasefire in the conflict between them. My proposal was intended, in the words of the Contadora Document of Objectives agreed to by Nicaragua and its neighbors, "to promote national reconciliation efforts . . . , with a view to fostering participation in democratic political processes in accordance with the law."

Since April 4, I have had the benefit of many fruitful discussions with Latin American leaders and with members of the Congress. I have been encouraged by these discussions, which have shown that a broad consensus exists on the need for reconciliation in Nicaragua, based on democratic principles, as an essential aspect of achieving peace in Central America.

Today the Senate will vote on a resolution, S.J. Res. 106, the text of which is required by a law enacted last October. That text purports to release appropriated funds and free the Executive Branch from restrictions against the support of military or paramilitary action in Nicaragua. However, my intentions are founded on a different approach. Accordingly, I want to make clear to the Senate, as it approaches this important vote, how I will proceed in pursuit of peace if S.J. Res. 106 is enacted.

First, I will provide assistance to the democratic resistance only for food, medicine, clothing, and other assistance for their survival and well-being -- and not for arms, ammunition, and weapons of war. Second, I will not use more than the \$14 million already appropriated during the current fiscal year for such assistance. No other U.S. Government funds would be spent for such material assistance to the armed democratic resistance. I will personally establish thorough procedures for the detailed management and accountability of the program in order to assure that these limitations on both the nature and amount of U.S. assistance are scrupulously observed.

I recognize the importance some Senators have attached to bilateral talks between the United States and Nicaragua and the establishment of a ceasefire. I have considered these views and believe that such steps could help to promote the internal reconciliation called for by Contadora and endorsed by so many Latin American leaders.

Therefore, I intend to resume bilateral talks with the Government of Nicaragua and will instruct our representatives in those talks to press for a ceasefire as well as a church-mediated dialogue between the contending Nicaraguan factions. I must emphasize, however, that such bilateral talks must be in support of the Contadora process and the internal dialogue and cannot become a substitute for these efforts to achieve a comprehensive, verifiable agreement among all the nations of Central America. Also, as I said on April 4, peace negotiations must not become a cover for deception and delay. If the Sandinista government shows bad faith by seeking to gain unilateral advantage, for example through a further arms buildup during a ceasefire or intransigence in negotiations, I would feel obligated to respond accordingly in our diplomatic efforts and would not expect the democratic resistance to continue to observe a ceasefire which was unfairly working to their disadvantage.

I will report to the Congress no later than September 1, 1985, on the progress made in achieving a verifiable peace and reconciliation in Nicaragua based on democratic principles. Such report shall also include an accounting for the funds obligated or expended under this joint resolution and may include such recommendations as I deem appropriate with respect for Nicaragua. I shall expect any recommendations for additional legislation for further assistance or sanctions to receive expedited handling.

While economic sanctions are unlikely by themselves to create sufficient pressure to change Nicaragua's behavior, the Sandinistas should not benefit from their present access to the U.S. market while continuing their intransigence on issues affecting our national security. The Administration will favorably consider economic sanctions against the Government of Nicaragua and will undertake multilateral consultations with other Central American states in this regard.

The U.S. condemns atrocities by either side in the strongest possible terms. We will use our assistance to help ensure against wrongful acts by those who seek our help and we will urge them to take steps to investigate allegations of such acts and take appropriate actions against those found to be guilty.

The United States now stands at a moment of judgment. Experience has shown that a policy of support for democracy, economic opportunity, and security will best serve the people of Central America and the national interests of the United States. If we show consistency of purpose, if we are firm in our conviction that the promising developments over the past year in El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala also show the way for a better future for Nicaragua, then over time we can help the democratic center prevail over tyrants of the left or the right. But if we abandon democracy in Nicaragua, if we tolerate the consolidation of a surrogate state in Central America, responsive to Cuba and the Soviet Union, we will see the progress that has been achieved begin to unravel under the strain of continuing conflict, attempts at subversion, and loss of confidence in our support.

There can be a more democratic, more prosperous, and more peaceful Central America. I am prepared to devote my energies toward that end. But, I also need the support of the Congress. I hope that you will give me your support today.

Sincerely,

/s/Ronald Reagan

[The Honorable Robert Dole, Majority Leader, United States Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510]

Note: The original was not available for verification of the content of this letter, which was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 24.

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1985/42385h.htm>