

*Secretary Shultz*

# The United States and Central America: A Moment of Decision

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*Following is an address by Secretary Shultz before the Indianapolis Economic Club and the Organizing Committee for the 10th International Pan-American Games, Indianapolis, Indiana, April 22, 1985.*

In 2 years, the United States will host the 10th pan-American games here in Indianapolis. I know that, when the athletes from 37 nations come to compete, this beautiful city will display America at its best.

The meaning of the pan-American games goes beyond sports. They offer us a chance to strengthen friendship among all the peoples of the Americas. They remind us of our common heritage—as founders and creators of the New World—and of our common destiny—as peoples united in the pursuit of peace and freedom. There is extraordinary diversity in our hemisphere, but this diversity is overwhelmed by what we share in common: a love of liberty, a strong commitment to religious values, a passion for democracy, and a desire for peace.

The United States has an important role to play in helping achieve these noble goals. If we act with wisdom and determination, in a spirit of bipartisanship, we can play that role effectively.

I am especially pleased to be here today in the home state of a true statesman and an outstanding political leader, Senator Dick Lugar. He has taken charge of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and brought it new energy and dynamism, and he is working hard

to forge strong, bipartisan commitment in Congress to our nation's security and our goals around the world. He is a champion of peace and freedom. We are grateful for his counsel and his strong leadership—particularly on the issue that I would like to address today: our policy in Central America.

## **The Challenge to Democracy and Peace**

In Central America today, we confront a fundamental challenge—a challenge to our national interests and to the freedom and security of our neighbors. Our goals in Central America are clear: we seek peace, security, economic progress, and the growth of freedom and democracy in every country.

In recent years, we have seen tremendous progress. Costa Rica's democracy remains strong and vibrant, despite threats and attempted subversion from Nicaragua and despite the fact that Costa Rica maintains no standing army. In Honduras and Panama, military rulers have been replaced by civilian governments. In Guatemala, the transition to democracy is moving steadily ahead, with presidential elections scheduled next October. The triumph of democracy in El Salvador was reaffirmed last month as more than a million voters went to the polls to choose their legislative and municipal leaders. President Duarte has shown his readiness for dialogue with the armed opposition. Peace in El Salvador is more possible under Duarte's democratic administration than ever before.

In short, the transition to democracy is succeeding everywhere in Central America—everywhere, that is, except Nicaragua, where a small group of Marxist-Leninists who call themselves “Sandinistas,” backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba, are in the process of imposing a brutal tyranny. In Central America, everyone knows that Nicaragua’s intransigence is the single most important obstacle to peace and security in the region. And the threat the Sandinistas pose is growing, not receding.

With Soviet and Cuban help, the Sandinistas are still working to consolidate their power and turn Nicaragua into a full-fledged communist state. Should they achieve this goal, we would face a second Cuba in this hemisphere, this time on the mainland of the Americas—with all the strategic dangers that this implies. If the history of Cuba is any guide, Nicaragua would then intensify efforts to undermine its neighbors in the name of so-called revolutionary principles—principles that Fidel Castro himself flatly reaffirmed on American television earlier this year.

Needless to say, the first casualty of a communist consolidation in Nicaragua would be the freedom and hopes for democracy of the Nicaraguan people. The second casualty would be the security of Nicaragua’s neighbors and the security of the entire region.

And the results of our failure to stop the spread of communism in this hemisphere will be clear for all to see, in the millions of refugees who will escape to freedom from tyranny, just as others have before them—from Eastern Europe and Afghanistan, from Cuba and Indochina. In the past 10 years, over a million and one-half people have fled Indochina alone. Seven hundred and fifty thousand have come here to the United States; thousands more died before they could reach safe haven. Do we want to see this tragedy reenacted in this hemisphere?

Such a disaster in Central America is avoidable if the United States has the will and the wisdom to take prudent steps now. There is an alternative to war and oppression—a peaceful alternative, based on negotiations toward democracy and internal dialogue among Nicaraguans, *all* Nicaraguans, armed and unarmed, in and out of the country, in and out of power.

### A New Opportunity

On March 1, in San Jose, Costa Rica, the leaders of the Nicaraguan democratic resistance asked the San-

dinista regime to begin a dialogue for peace and democracy in their country. They offered a cease-fire. They asked for a dialogue to let the people of Nicaragua decide, finally, after years of dictatorship—first under Somoza and then under the Sandinistas—who *they* want to govern their country and *how*.

On March 22, the bishops of Nicaragua’s Roman Catholic Church agreed to mediate.

On April 4, President Reagan made an urgent appeal in the name of peace and on behalf of the American people. He called upon the government and the armed opposition to stop fighting and to begin talks on national reconciliation, the restoration of democracy, and an end to repression and tyranny.

The Sandinistas, so far, turned a deaf ear to the calls for dialogue, for peace and democracy. We hope they will reconsider. Without further incentives, however, that seems unlikely. Throughout their 6 years in power, the Sandinistas have been flexible only when they were convinced they had no choice.

There are those in this country who would look the other way, imagining this problem will disappear by itself. But hesitation or neglect on our part will only allow the Sandinistas the time they need to consolidate their totalitarian control. The time for us to act is now.

The Congress will vote tomorrow on funds for the Nicaraguan democratic resistance. President Reagan has asked the Congress to release the \$14 million already appropriated. If Congress approves, those funds would be used for humanitarian purposes, not for arms or munitions. We want to give the Sandinistas a chance to consider and accept the offer of peace. If the *comandantes* do accept the offer of the democratic opposition, the restrictions the President has put on the funds will remain in effect. But if the *comandantes* continue to reject all peaceful, democratic alternatives, then the United States will be obliged, sooner or later, on both moral and strategic grounds, to support the democratic resistance in Nicaragua with the resources they need to defend themselves.

As Senator Dick Lugar stressed yesterday, we face a challenge far more important than the sum of \$14 million. It is the challenge “of whether the United States is prepared to be involved effectively in the region during the coming years.” And, as the Senator said, we are unlikely to see a change in Nicaraguan policy if we turn our backs on the one force that has demonstrated it can command the attention and the concern of the Nicaraguan regime.

The choice before Congress is grave and cannot be avoided. We are at a pivotal moment that will help to determine the future of Central America and directly affect the national security of the United States.

The situation today in Nicaragua is dangerous because both sides are poised to settle in for the long haul: on one side are the nine *comandantes*, entrenched along exactly the same repressive ideological and subversive lines staked out by Fidel Castro in Cuba 25 years ago. They face the resistance of the armed and unarmed democratic opposition, growing in popular support, and digging in on the classic model of extended civil war. If the regime rejects dialogue, if it continues to stifle the democratic aspirations of the Nicaraguan people, then the conflict in that war-torn country will continue and worsen.

That is why the opportunity of internal reconciliation through dialogue is so important—*now*. And that is why we Americans have a special responsibility to profit by the experience of the past 6 years in Central America and act, *now*, to seize that opportunity. We have learned in El Salvador that dialogue within the framework of a democratic and constitutional order offers the best chance to break through the frustrating stalemate of prolonged conflict.

The positive lesson of El Salvador tends to be ignored in the so-called alternatives to the President’s initiative being proposed in the Congress. Some of these alternatives are potentially constructive—and I believe the President and a group of Senators, Democrats and Republicans, are discussing this issue right now in the White House—but some are not alternatives at all.

Consider, for example, the proposal to provide funds for refugees outside Nicaragua and for monitoring an eventual Contadora treaty. These are fine goals, but, in this situation, they are worse than nothing. The President’s proposal of April 4 promotes peace by supporting Nicaragua’s democrats and providing incentives for the *comandantes* to enter into a dialogue with them. This alternative does neither. It supports neither dialogue nor enduring peace. If anything, it is a formula for turning freedom fighters into refugees without hope of a democratic outcome. It is a green light for the regime to continue its foreign subversion without ever accepting a Contadora treaty.

The fundamental problem with this so-called alternative is that it ducks the central issue of *incentives*. The Sandinistas will not change their behavior without powerful reasons to do so. We

wish this were not true. But 6 years have taught us that the *comandantes* listen to others only when they have a reason. That is why the President has asked Congress to provide a reason. A "yes" vote will maintain the pressure on the communists and provide incentives for change. A "no" vote or a phony alternative would remove the incentive and guarantee a prolonged conflict. Those in Congress who vote "no" must accept their share of the responsibility if this crucial opportunity is lost.

### The Democratic Opposition in Nicaragua

The democratic forces in Nicaragua are on the front line in the struggle for security and freedom in Central America. We must support their courageous efforts for peace and democracy through dialogue.

In 1979, the anti-Somoza organizations pledged to the Organization of American States (OAS), and to their own people, to bring freedom to their country after decades of tyranny. Somoza fell, but the *comandantes* then betrayed these pledges and the hopes of the Nicaraguan people; they purged the noncommunists from their regime and imposed a new and brutal tyranny that has respected no frontiers. They are attempting to force Nicaragua into a totalitarian mold whose pattern is all too familiar. They are suppressing internal dissent; displacing the free labor movement with their own government-controlled unions; censoring the press; persecuting the church; cooperating with the terrorists of Iran, Libya, and the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization]; and seeking to undermine the governments of their neighbors. This emerging totalitarianism is supported by political, military, and intelligence links to Cuba and the Soviet Union.

This betrayal has forced many Nicaraguans who opposed Somoza back into opposition. And, while many resist peacefully, thousands have seen no choice but to take up arms again, to risk everything so their hopes for freedom and democracy will not once again be denied. Many poor peasants, unwilling to be drafted to defend communist rule, have fled the country.

The Sandinistas denounce all opponents as mercenaries or as former National Guardsmen loyal to the memory of Somoza. We can expect them to make such charges. What is surprising is that some in this country seem all too willing to accept such charges at face value.

The truth about the democratic resistance is that it is a popular move-

ment led mostly by men who fought in the revolution *against* Somoza. Its key political leaders either supported or actually served in the new government until it became clear that the *comandantes* were bent on communism, not freedom; repression, not reform; and aggression, not peace. Adolfo Calero, the commander in chief of the democratic armed resistance, is a lifelong opponent of Somoza who tried to cooperate with the Sandinistas in rebuilding Nicaragua after Somoza's fall. Alfonso Robelo founded a political party opposed to Somoza and then served as one of the original five members of the post-Somoza junta. Arturo Cruz was a member of that junta after Robelo left. These men and the thousands who follow them are democrats committed to a struggle against tyranny—whether of the right or the left.

The ranks of the democratic forces in Nicaragua are swelling day by day. Many thousands of Nicaraguans are risking their lives. Would these men and women be making such great sacrifices if they believed it would lead to a return to tyranny? The answer is no.

The resistance fighters include peasants and farmers, shopkeepers and vendors, teachers and professionals. What unites them to each other, and to the other thousands of Nicaraguans who resist without arms, is disillusionment with Sandinista economic failure, repression, militarism, and subservience to foreign communist governments. The young people of Nicaragua are sending the message: draft dodging is one of the biggest problems the regime faces today. Yet, at the same time, when the resistance fighters go out on patrol, they come back with more people than they started with—as volunteers are choosing the side of freedom.

### The Challenge to the Sandinistas

As we have said many times, the goals we share with our neighbors in Central America cannot be achieved unless Nicaraguan behavior changes in four fundamental ways.

**First**, Nicaragua must stop playing the role of surrogate for the Soviet Union and Cuba. As long as there are large numbers of Soviet and Cuban security and military personnel in Nicaragua, Central America will be embroiled in the East-West conflict. The Soviet-Cuban-Nicaraguan power play injects that East-West conflict into the Western Hemisphere. Central America is West. The East must get out.

**Second**, Nicaragua must reduce its armed forces—now in excess of 100,000 and heavily armed—to a level comparable to those of its neighbors. The current imbalance in both men and weapons is incompatible with regional stability.

**Third**, Nicaragua must absolutely and definitively stop its support for insurgents and terrorists in the region. All of Nicaragua's neighbors—particularly El Salvador but also democratic Costa Rica—have felt the brunt of Sandinista efforts to destabilize their governments. No country in Central America will be secure as long as this continues.

**And fourth**, the Sandinistas must live up to their commitments to democratic pluralism made to the OAS in 1979. The internal Nicaraguan opposition, armed and unarmed, represents a genuine political force that is entitled to participate in the political processes of the country. The government in Managua must provide the political opening that will allow their participation.

In essence, all that we and the Nicaraguan democrats ask is that the Sandinistas live up to the promises they have *already* made: the promises they made in 1979 to the OAS, the commitments they made when they signed the 21-point Contadora Document of Objectives in September 1983, the principles they purported to accept when they endorsed the Contadora draft of September 1984.

The fact that they now *refuse* a dialogue can only raise new doubts about their willingness to abide by *any* commitments. Can the Sandinistas be trusted to abide by what they agree to? If they cannot be trusted—if their commitments to peace and pluralism are hollow—what does this imply about the long-term prospects for peace and democracy in Central America? The present peace offer of the democratic opposition is a crucial test of the Sandinistas' willingness to live in peace with their neighbors and their own people. It may well be the last chance for a peaceful solution.

Any treaty, as we all know, requires adequate verification of compliance. This is one of the key issues now in the Contadora negotiations. But the most important assurance of compliance is the internal openness of Nicaragua's political system. Closed societies, and particularly communist societies, have a long record of disregarding agreements. The record of the Sandinistas is dismal, and everyone in the region knows it.

President Reagan's peace proposal has won support throughout Latin

America. President Duarte of El Salvador said he believes "it is the right step at the right time in our quest for peace and democracy in this region." Contadora leaders have emphasized that their Document of Objectives calls for internal dialogue in all countries of Central America, in Nicaragua as well as El Salvador. President Monge of Costa Rica called the initiative "a proposal for a peaceful solution to one of the great problems of our time." Presidents Suazo of Honduras, Lusinchi of Venezuela, Betancur of Colombia, Alfonsin of Argentina, Barletta of Panama, and Febres Cordero of Ecuador, among others, have made clear their support for the proposed dialogue. From a wide range of political viewpoints, *all* urge the Sandinista leaders to accept the offer of peace and begin the dialogue.

### **The Moral Responsibility of the United States**

The United States cannot escape its responsibility. Peace and freedom can be achieved in Central America only if we are willing to support those in the region who share these goals.

How can we as a country say to a young Nicaragua: "Learn to live with

oppression; only those of us who already have freedom deserve to pass it on to our children"? How can we say to those Salvadorans who stood so bravely in line to vote: "We may give you some economic and military aid for self-defense, but we will also give a free hand to the Sandinistas to undermine your new democratic institutions"?

We must make every effort to convince the Sandinistas that the path of peaceful democratic change is the only path they can take. To cut off support now for the democratic resistance in Nicaragua would be to turn our backs on a crucial opportunity for peace in that country. If we do not take the appropriate steps now to pressure the Sandinistas to live up to their past promises, then we may find later, when we can no longer avoid acting, that the stakes will be higher and the costs greater. And that would be a tragic mistake. Today, we have a chance to bring about real change in Nicaragua and throughout Central America, and at a low cost. We cannot afford to miss this opportunity.

I agree with those who say that this could be the most important moment in Congress since 1947. Then, the Congress supported President Truman's

determination to stand up to the expansion of Soviet imperialism. Tomorrow, Congress will choose whether to support the President in his determination to stop Soviet encroachment right here in this hemisphere. If Congress fails this test, the message will go worldwide—to freedom fighters in Afghanistan, Southeast Asia, Africa, and elsewhere where the spark of freedom still glows. But it is a message that will have its greatest impact right here in the Americas.

We in this country must stand firmly in the defense of our interests and principles and the rights of peoples to live in freedom. Nicaragua's democrats deserve our support. Their struggle is vital to hemispheric peace. To abandon them would be a shameful betrayal—a betrayal not only of brave men and women but of our highest ideals and the national security of the United States. ■

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