

# REIGN OF THE REAGANISTAS

BY MICHAEL McCUSKER

Like time and space is theorized to be, the Bush administration might be considered emergent phenomena — from the darkest malignancies of perceived psychoses, fundamentally capable of perpetrating horrible inhumanities, which are after all particularly human however monstrous and savage. They are predators of an atavistic kind despite veils of theolitical pieties and righteousness, and they have hands on the grotesquely destructive forces concocted by humanity in its short bitter existence on this planet.

But their emergent phenomena is also political, almost predestined by the earlier Republican administrations of Nixon and Reagan/Bush who softened up the Constitutional process for the second Bush to rape. Though disgraced, the Nixonians prepared the way for Reaganomics, the onerous ideology of rich over poor, and to religiously punish the poor for being poor. This is the Republican revolution. Alexander Hamilton trounces Thomas Jefferson, the essential and eternal struggle of American democracy. Plutocratic aristocracy versus equality and liberty. A belief in the manifest destiny of the United States to be the ruling power of Earth. The New World Order.

The eight Clinton years between Reagan/Bush and G.W. Bush might be considered an Cromwellian interlude: *filis* is the direct heir of *pers*. The next stage of perennial one-party (Republican Party) rule, which guarantees plutocracy, theocracy and militocracy as the American way of life in the homeland and abroad.

Although the Bushies fulminate about terrorism as evil, and a disturbing threat to seamless U.S. sovereignty (as well as justification for protracted militarism), one President's terrorists are another's "freedom fighters." For instance, the Contra guerrillas of Nicaragua in the 1980s whom President Reagan compared to America's revolutionary ancestors while they pillaged and burned hundreds of undefended villages and murdered helpless generally apolitical peasants.

Ronald Reagan, who was never in combat but dreamed he had been, loved to move soldiers around. His instinctive response to almost everything contrary to his view of the world was to send in the troops. They were his fist. His obsession with military adventure killed 250 Marines who were absurdly stacked in a single hotel in Beirut in 1983 — one suicide blast killed them all — and a month later he sent the youth of America charging World War 2-style onto the beaches of a Caribbean island the size of a city parking lot, and although a couple of dozen Cuban civilian mechanics contracted to the Granada island government almost sent them back to sea, the conquering heroes were given more medals for their three-day war than in all the nation's wars combined — and President Reagan cinematically personated himself as a victorious Roman.

The Reagan administration persistently attempted to eradicate the presumed "leftist" Sandinista regime of Nicaragua and perhaps intended, as did the Romans at Carthage, to salt the ruins so that anything akin to Marxism or anything smelling like socialism would never grow again in the southern half of the Western hemisphere, which is, after all, the USA's plantation for coffee and bananas (as well as a few illicit additives).

Reagan sent about 3,000 Airborne and straight-leg troops to Honduras in 1988 to possibly force a war between Honduras and Nicaragua to not only save a ruthless gang of thieves, drugrunners and cutthroat mercenaries he persisted in calling "freedom fighters" but to also salvage a failing foreign policy that never had the support of a majority of Americans.

The Nicaraguans had chased the mercenaries, who were the invention of Reagan's covert warfare experts and were known as Contras, to the Honduran border, and although they denied crossing over the border to reach the large Contra bases a few miles inside Honduras, it must have been frustrating to not take the opportunity to wipe out the Contras after seven years of a terrorist war against the Nicaraguan government and people that cost about 50,000 lives.

Following the refusal of the U.S. Congress to approve a compromise to supply the Contras with so-called humanitarian aid, the Nicaraguan army attacked the Contras and pushed them over the Honduran border in pitched battles which the Contras were unaccustomed to fighting. The Contras, a shorthand term for counterrevolutionaries, a religion of Cold War America's paranoid suspicion of revolutions all over the globe, usually struck at underdefended villages — a few farmers with old rifles the normal defense force — and their victims were most often unarmed and helpless villagers, particularly children\* whose aggregate loss of limbs created a cottage prosthesis industry.

Although Reagan liked to portray the Contras as direct heirs of America's founding revolutionaries, the Contra ranks were made up of former police and soldiers of the brutal Somoza regime the United States put into power in the 1930s and which was overthrown in 1979 after a long bloody struggle during which Somocita death squads murdered thousands in tandem with U.S. supported death squads in neighboring El Salvador and Guatemala.

From the beginning of the Reagan presidency in 1981, the U.S. attempted to destroy the Sandinista government that had taken its name from Augusto Sandino who fought against an earlier dictatorship in Nicaragua propped up by U.S. Marines who were sent abroad to protect America's vast properties from his rebellion and who eventually engineered his death and put the first Somoza in power.

When the Sandinistas overthrew the last Somoza in 1979, the American rightwing went into hysterics about Soviet domination of Latin America, which by right of the Monroe Doctrine was considered U.S. real estate. Instead of providing support to the long suffering common people who finally persevered in Nicaragua, the U.S. in its usual manner first attempted to keep Somoza in power then tried everything to destroy the Sandinista revolution short of once again sending in the Marines.

The Somoza death squads were resurrected as the insurgency, the aforementioned Contras, and the Reagan administration arrogantly and unconcernedly violated laws it was pledged to uphold to keep them in arms and ammo. On the same day Reagan sent the 3,000 soldiers to Honduras, some of his most notorious counterrevolutionary experts were indicted for breaking several U.S. laws, among them stealing millions



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of dollars of public money to aid Contras in violation of the Congress (the Boland Amendment) and for raising private armies and arms supplies in order to destroy a foreign government (among precedents were Iran in 1953 and Chile in 1973).

The World Court severely chastised the Reagan administration for its intent to overthrow the Sandinista government and found it guilty of mining Nicaraguan harbors in violation of Geneva accords, demanding it pay Nicaragua \$17 billion in reparations. The United States is the only nation found guilty by the World Court of international terrorism, and in retaliation the U.S. vetoed a United Nations resolution for all nations to obey international law in response to Nicaragua's protest against U.S. instigation and support of the anti-Sandinista Contras. In addition, the U.S. conducted an economic boycott of Nicaragua which almost wrecked its economy.

Yet Reagan and his experts bungled just about every game they played against Nicaragua. Reagan bankrupted his once powerful influence in his obsession to destroy the Sandinistas. He was (like his current successor) caught in too many lies, broke too many laws, misused and abused his powers too often (also like G.W.). He threatened Congress with the possibility of committing American soldiers to combat if aid was not reinstated to the Contras.

The mobilization of the American troops to Honduras was supposedly at the request of its President. He was probably anxious of the risk of allowing Contras to be based in his country in violation of the Arias peace plan, formulated by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias to end hostilities through mutual agreements between Latin American countries (for which he was awarded a Nobel Prize) but was consistently undermined by the Reagan administration. Reagan threatened to send soldiers in an earlier attempt to stop the Nicaraguan army from crossing over into Honduras in pursuit of Contras but had to be content with using American helicopters to carry Honduran troops to the border, but by then the Sandinistas had withdrawn. At any rate the affair had been grossly exaggerated.

Although Reagan raised great fuss when Nicaraguans crossed into Honduras in pursuit of marauding Contras, seldom was there outcry over the thousands of times Contras crossed from their Honduran sanctuaries to raid Nicaraguan villages. Another part of the official hypocrisy went back to 1970 when American soldiers invaded Cambodia to destroy Viet Cong sanctuaries, which then-President Nixon called a "limited incursion." Reagan critics used the same handle to describe Nicaragua's desire to end its costly seven year war against the Contras.

Whatever anyone might have thought of the Sandinistas, they were fighting for their lives and their revolution, attempting once and for all to end U.S. interference in Nicaraguan affairs and perhaps someday end its dominance of Central America, which to people who suffered it was comparable to the simultaneous Soviet subjugation of Eastern Europe or any other empire's repressive control of colonies to exploit labor and resources to indulge the empirical core's predatory appetites.

The American troops were withdrawn from Honduras, the Sandinistas were defeated in precontrived elections rather than by coup, the Contras disappeared from history after a massive scandal that briefly threatened to upend the Reagan Presidency, and Ronald Reagan died and received a Pharaoh's funeral last year. There might be another contradictory parallel with Vietnam: although the United States insisted the Sandinistas recognize and share power with the Contras, the U.S.

refused to politically acknowledge or negotiate with the Viet Cong for several years and after finally being forced to accord them a place at the table during the Paris peace talks, never granted them equality with the South Vietnamese government which was, after all, like the Contras, a political fiction created by the United States.

U.S. Ambassador to Honduras during Reagan's first administration, from 1981 to 1985, was John Negroponte who has been appointed by President G.W. Bush as the first czar of all American intelligence services. Honduras, a "banana republic" dominated by a coalition of the U.S. embassy, United Fruit Company and the Honduran military, became a base for the Nicaraguan Contras. Negroponte obliquely supervised military operations that included illegal funding of the Contra mercenaries and a massive buildup of the Honduran armed forces, the building of bases, airfields and supply dumps. He chaperoned a 20-fold increase in U.S. military aid to Honduras and defended the country as a model of democracy while silencing reports of killings and torture, threatening dissenting Honduran officials by accusing them of aiding communism.

A U.S. sponsored torture manual was written and distributed to police and military in Central American countries during the Reagan/Bush Sr. years to use against "leftist insurgencies" — which belies current claims of only a few enlisted "bad apples" torturing prisoners in Iraq and Guantanamo.

"Negroponte would have been totally blind not to know about human rights violations in Central America," a former ambassador to Honduras prior to Negroponte has said, saying also that Negroponte's claim of ignorance of torture and mass murder by American-trained soldiers and rightwing death squads "is inexcusable and his plea of non-culpability is a lie."

Honduras was not Negroponte's introduction to covert operations. He was political affairs officer at the U.S. Embassy in Saigon from 1964 to 1968, a position that often serves as a cover for CIA operatives, and from 1969 to 1971 was an aide to Henry Kissinger in the Paris peace talks, reportedly criticizing Kissinger for making too many concessions to the Vietnamese. From 1971 to 1973 he was back in Vietnam working for the National Security Council.

Negroponte seems to have been the quintessential fixit man in dark circumstances, capable of countenancing torture as well as the liquidation of political adversaries, union leaders, student organizers and other opponents of American foreign policy.

He didn't have much opportunity to carry out his usual routine as ambassador to Iraq — if Fallujah is discounted. But now in a very real sense, as Chief American Spook he has the whole world in his hands.

President Bush is sending his emissaries out into the world; John Bolton, who proclaims the U.S. is the world's only real authority, as ambassador to the United Nations he seems to ardently loathe (its only worth, he says, is in service to the U.S.); Paul Wolfowitz, architect of the Iraq War and neocon zealot as head of the World Bank; and Negroponte, dark knight and master Machiavellian minister of the shadow world.

A postscript is that a former Sandinista has been denied entry into the United States to accept a job as a professor of history at Harvard University. The Bush administration accuses her of "terrorism" for her part in the overthrow of the Somoza regime and participation in the Sandinista government.

"The laws make no distinction between those who fight against tyranny and those who commit terrorism against innocent people," an American colleague at Harvard says. "Even George Washington would not be able to get into this country under these stupid and prejudicial laws."

Although our revolutionary ancestors would undoubtedly be barred access to the country they founded, former Nicaraguan Contras probably have no problem entering the USA under its current jurisdiction.

The so-called neoconservative ideology elected under the guise of democracy, similar to the election of national socialism which immediately destroyed German democracy in the 1930s, the hard-right Presidency of George W. Bush might be the vestigial Hitlers, Stalins and Torquemadas of the 21st century. If ordinary people want to prevent history descending into a black hole — which extreme-Christians call the 'Rapture' — they must eliminate the patent hypocrisy of democracy and restructure its real purpose of liberating common folk rather than nominally acquiescing to the despotic triad of plutocracy, theocracy and militocracy.

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\*And at least one unarmed engineer from Oregon, Ben Linder, who was executed pointblank while inspecting a dam he was helping build near a village.