

Rebellion or Counter-Revolution: Made in US in Nicaragua?

Many things can change for the better in Nicaragua, but it must be the work of the Nicaraguans themselves and not the United States, writes Achim Rödner.

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Many wonder if the United States is involved in the student protests of the past month in Nicaragua which attempted to destabilize the country. Western media writes nothing about the issue, while at the same time similar scenarios have played out in Venezuela, Brazil, Cuba, Honduras, Bolivia and other countries in which the left has made progress. At this moment, three Nicaraguan students are touring Europe and Sweden in search of support for their campaign. At least one of the students represents an organization funded and created by the United States.

The student protests in Nicaragua are described in the Western media as legitimate protests by young Nicaraguans who have spontaneously united to fight the supposed dictatorship. Surely there are many young people who have joined the fight with these ideas. Surely many people here in Sweden have joined and support that struggle. But there is much that indicates that these are not just spontaneous protests. There are many indications that organizations led by the United States waited for the right moment to create chaos, and exacerbate the contradictions to destabilize the democratically elected government of Nicaragua.

Changing Society

One of the three students on tour in Sweden right now is Jessica Cisneros, active in issues of integration and youth participation in political processes. She is a member of the Movimiento Civico de Juventudes (MCJ). That organization is financed, created by and an integral part of the National Democratic Institute. The NDI is an organization that works to change society in other countries. The president of the NDI is Madeleine Albright, former U.S. secretary of state. The general secretary of the MCJ, Davis Jose Nicaragua Lopez, founder of the organization, is also the coordinator of the NDI in Nicaragua and active in a series of similar organizations in Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Excerpt from the NDI website:

"The Civic Youth Movement (MCJ) has been part of an NDI project that began in 2015 with the aim of expanding youth leadership and political commitment by providing hands-on training in organizational techniques. Several of the group members are graduates of the Leadership and Political Conduct Certification (CLPM) program that the NDI has supported in conjunction with Nicaraguan universities and civil society organizations."

Yerling Aguilera is from the Polytechnic University (UPOLI) of Managua and has specialized in research on the revolution and the feminist movement. She has also been an employee and consultant for IEEPP in Nicaragua, which works to strengthen the capacity of political, state and social actors for a better informed public through creative and innovative services. IEEPP has received support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) of US\$224,162 between 2014 and 2017.

Madelaine Caracas participates in the national dialogue currently taking place in Nicaragua. She is also active in the feminist and environmental movement.

From 2015 on, the United States expanded its support to Nicaragua, especially through support for leadership courses and money for young people in universities, schools, NGOs and political parties. Organizations that work with feminist movements and women, human rights and the environment have been prioritized.

This from the NDI website:

“To ensure that the next generation of leaders will be equipped to govern in a democratic and transparent manner, since 2010 the NDI has partnered with Nicaraguan universities and civic organizations to lead a youth leadership program that has helped prepare more than 2,000 youth leaders, current and future, throughout the country. The NDI has also contributed to Nicaragua’s efforts to increase women’s political participation and initiatives to reduce discrimination against LGBT people, as well as shared best practices for monitoring electoral processes.”

Is foreign interference in democracy and elections good for Nicaragua, but unacceptable for the United States and Sweden?

Foreign Interference

It is also interesting to compare what happens in Nicaragua with what happens in other countries. The NDI also works in Venezuela, also with subversive tasks. The activity of the United States and the NDI in Latin America should be compared with the debate on the interference of powers in the electoral systems of the United States, Sweden or Europe. For example, would those countries accept that Russia form and support organizations that train political leaders in Sweden or the United States?

This is how the NDI describes its activities in Venezuela on its website:

“The NDI began working in Venezuela in the mid-1990s in response to requests to exchange international experiences on comparative approaches to democratic governance. After closing its offices in Venezuela in 2011, the NDI has continued – based on requests – offering material resources to democratic processes, including international approaches on electoral transparency, monitoring of political processes and civic and political organization, and the Institute promotes dialogue among Venezuelans and their civic and political peers and politicians at an international level on topics of mutual interest. “

Organizations from the United States work towards the development of democracy and foreign interference in Nicaragua. According to its website, the Instituto Democrático Nacional (NDI) has 2,000 young leaders in Nicaragua. The National Foundation for

Democracy (NED) is another organization that, according to its own version of events, since the 1990s has been dedicated to doing the work that the CIA used to do in secret. It promotes the destabilization of other countries. The NED works with a number of other organizations, media, websites and NGOs in Nicaragua. Officially, its support for Nicaragua amounted to US\$4.2 million between 2014 and 2017.

USAID officially works with medical and disaster relief, but the NDI and the NED support a number of organizations that work with issues concerning women, children, the environment and human rights. On their website, they write that they want to

“Promote democracy by training young and emerging leaders and giving them technical help so that they strengthen civil participation and improve local leadership.”

They do not say whose democracy they want to strengthen: whether it is the vision of democracy in the United States and the CIA, or the people of Nicaragua.

Previously, USAID worked in Bolivia but it was expelled in 2013 for carrying out destabilizing activities. In the same raid, a Danish organization was also expelled. That does not mean the organization necessarily engaged in illegal activities, but that it did work with an organization that received money from the United States. USAID also works in Venezuela, and also says there is work to strengthen “civil society.” Its budget in Venezuela in 2015 was US\$4.25 million. Its partners in Venezuela are, among others, Freedom House and the NDI.

Creating Change

Who will create change in Nicaragua? And will it be violently or through elections? USAID, NDI and NED have extensive activities in Nicaragua, with thousands of activists trained to “change society,” and hundreds of NGOs, universities and political parties that receive money and material for these organizations. The United States participates in this process and its interests are to destabilize the democratically elected Sandinista government.

Believing that the United States is not involved in the riots in Nicaragua is naive. The situation in Nicaragua is serious and a dialogue for peace is necessary. Those responsible for the violence, the criminal fires, the riots, the destruction and the looting must answer for them, both on the side of the demonstrators, as well as on the critical elements, the political groups of young people and the responsible politicians. If, as the student leaders say, Daniel Ortega has ordered the police to shoot to kill, go ahead and have the president tried. And if there has been foreign interference in the internal affairs of Nicaragua, those responsible for it have responded, both from activists in Nicaragua and from politicians in the United States. Many things can change for the better in Nicaragua, but it must be the work of the Nicaraguans themselves and not the money and agenda of the United States determining the changes.

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