

Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua: Hostile Media Coverage and Economic Sabotage

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Member countries of the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas are natural targets for the relentless psychological warfare of Western news media, because they form a resistance front to the foreign policy imperatives of the United States government and its allies. Right now, Venezuela is the most obvious example. Daily negative coverage in Western media reports invariably attack and blame the Venezuelan government for the country's political and economic crisis. Similar coverage is applied to the governments of Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Cuba's revolutionary government led by Raul Castro and also to Nicaragua's Sandinista government led by Daniel Ortega.

By contrast, the permanent economic sabotage, the attacks on democratic process and the cynical promotion of violence by the dysfunctional Venezuelan opposition gets a free pass. Likewise, U.S. and European news media have virtually nothing to report about Argentina's abrupt plunge into crisis with 40 percent inflation and a dramatic increase in poverty after barely six months of Mauricio Macri's corruption tainted government. Nor has coverage of the chronic complicity of the Mexican government in covering up the disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students or the mass murder of striking teachers in Oaxaca matched the hysteria applied by Western media to Venezuela over bogus human rights concerns.

No doubt political scientists could work out the correlation between adverse or downright hostile media coverage and official measures or announcements by U.S. and allied governments. What's clear in general is that Western media coverage actively and purposefully serves U.S. and allied government foreign policy preparing the ground for otherwise categorically inexplicable measures of diplomatic and economic aggression. For example, the self-evidently absurd declaration by President Obama that Venezuela constitutes a threat to the security of the United States or the anti-humanitarian failure of the U.S. government to lift the illegal economic blockade of Cuba despite President Obama's duplicitous avowals recognizing the blockade's political failure.

Venezuela and Cuba are close, loyal allies of Nicaragua, now in an election year. Nicaragua's Sandinista government has faced a Western media assault over the last month or so with the U.S. government issuing a travel alert. The alert warns U.S. travelers to Nicaragua to be wary of "increased government scrutiny of foreigners' activities, new requirements for volunteer groups, and the potential for demonstrations during the upcoming election season in Nicaragua.... U.S. citizens in Nicaragua should be aware of heightened sensitivity by

Nicaraguan officials to certain subjects or activities, including: elections, the proposed inter-oceanic canal, volunteer or charitable visits, topics deemed sensitive by or critical of the government.” In a [video mixed message](#) about that alert, the U.S. Ambassador to the country, Laura Dogu, states that the advisory should in no way deter tourists from the United States visiting Nicaragua.

The travel alert appears to have been provoked by the experiences of a U.S. academic and also two U.S. government functionaries who were asked by the Nicaraguan authorities to leave the country in June. The official U.S. reaction has a lot in common with the mentality described in “Orientalism,” Edward Said’s intricate psycho-cultural map of Western perceptions of Muslim countries. Said writes, “The scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader or the soldier was in or thought about the Orient because he could be there or could think about it with very little resistance on the Orient’s part.” Translated to the Americas, the attitudes and behavior of Said’s orientalist are clearly present among U.S. Americanists, both governmental and non-governmental, and their regional collaborators.

The latest example of Americanist hubris here in Nicaragua has been a remarkably [unscholarly outburst](#) by [Evan Ellis](#), the professor of the U.S. College of War who was expelled by the Nicaraguan government while attempting an unauthorized investigation of Nicaragua’s proposed interoceanic canal. Ellis’ ill-tempered diatribe repeats a familiar litany of downright falsehoods, wild speculation and poisonous calumnies, attacking Nicaragua’s Sandinista government led by Daniel Ortega as a dictatorship. It appeared in [Latin America Goes Global](#), closely associated with the center right [Project Syndicate](#) media network. Project Syndicate lists among its associate media right-wing media outlets like Clarin and La Nación in Argentina, Folha de Sao Paulo and O Globo in Brazil and El Nacional in Venezuela.

So it is no surprise that in Nicaragua its associate media outlet should be the virulently anti-Sandinista Confidencial, which published the Spanish version of Ellis’s attack, making Ellis’ accusations of dictatorship look stupid. Addressing Chinese involvement in Nicaragua’s proposed interoceanic canal, Ellis displays his ignorance of Nicaragua’s relationship with both China and Taiwan. His tendentious, ahistorical analysis betrays the mentality of an unreconstructed Cold Warrior in all its inglorious torpor. That ideological straitjacket prevents Ellis from even beginning to appreciate Daniel Ortega’s hard-headed but deep commitment to promoting peace and reconciliation based on genuine dialog. Western political leaders and their media and academic shells perceive that commitment as a sign of weakness, which explains a great deal about repeated failures of Western foreign policy all around the world.

Around the same time as the Ellis affair, Viridiana Ríos a Mexican academic associated with the U.S. Woodrow Wilson Center left Nicaragua [claiming police persecution](#). Ríos entered Nicaragua as a tourist but then proceeded to carry out a program of interviews with various institutions for her academic research. The curious thing about her claims is that she was never actually interviewed by any Nicaraguan official, either of the police or the immigration service. But she claims her hotel alerted her to a visit by police, in fact if it happened at all more likely immigration officials, who presumably left satisfied because otherwise she would certainly have been interviewed. Ríos then supposedly contacted the Mexican embassy who allegedly and inexplicably advised her to leave for Mexico. The upshot is that Ríos visited Nicaragua only to suddenly fear, for no obvious reason, being disappeared by government officials who could easily have detained her had they so wished. Ríos then, with no complications, left Nicaragua, the safest country in the Americas along with Canada and

Chile, and went home to Mexico, a country with [28,000 disappeared people](#).

Around the same time, as the reports about Ellis and Ríos, the Guardian published a disinformation [scatter-gun attack](#) on the Nicaraguan government also firming up the false positive of Nicaragua under Daniel Ortega's presidency as a dictatorship. The dictatorship accusations are complete baloney. Neither Ellis nor the Guardian report faithfully that even [center-right polling companies](#) agree that support for Daniel Ortega and his Sandinista political party runs at over 60 percent of people surveyed while the political opposition barely muster 10 percent support. Similar polls show massive confidence in both the [police \(74 percent \)](#), [the army \(79.8 percent\)](#) and satisfaction with [Nicaragua's democracy](#) (73.9 percent). Another common theme in the attacks by Ellis and the Guardian is the supposed suspension of the construction of Nicaragua's planned interoceanic canal, based on yet another false positive -the bogus hypothesis that the canal has no finance.

The basis for this claim is sheer speculation based on the afterwards-equals-because fallacy, typified by another unscrupulous and disingenuous Guardian article from [November 2015](#) offering zero factual support for the claim that the Canal 's construction has been postponed for financial reasons. That report and numerous others reflect the outright dishonesty of the Canal's critics. From the outset the canal's critics accused the government and HKND, the Chinese company building the canal, of moving too quickly and failing to take into account environmental concerns and also for an alleged lack of transparency. When the government and the HKND took on board recommendations from the ERM environmental impact study to do more environmental studies, the Canal's critics changed tack, accusing the government of covering up that the Canal has been delayed because HKND has run out of money. That claims seems to originate in Western psy-warfare outlets in Asia like the South China Morning Post and the Bangkok Post which have consistently run attack pieces on HKND's owner, Wang Jing.

This standard operating intellectual dishonesty by NATO psy-warfare outlets like the Guardian, omits various inconvenient facts. For example, preparatory work on the Canal route continues with various studies in progress, including aerial surveys by an Australian company, one of whose pilots, Canadian Grant Atkinson [tragically died](#) in a crash late last year. This year, the government reached a [conclusive agreement](#) with local indigenous groups affected by the Canal after an extensive process of consultation. This year too, Nicaragua has signed a memorandum of understanding with Antwerp's Maritime Academy [to train the pilots](#) who will guide shipping through the Canal and also a [cooperation agreement](#) with the UK Hydrographic Office for training and advice in relation to the hydrographic maps the Canal will need. This is hardly the behavior of people managing a project in crisis. That said, the global economic environment right now is so uncertain that investors in any large project let alone one as huge as the Nicaraguan Canal will certainly be wary.

The global economic context and the Canal's geostrategic aspect receive a more rational treatment than Ellis' self-serving rant in an [article by Nil Nikandrov](#). Even Nikandrov seems to accept as fact the Guardian's entirely speculative claim that the Canal's financing is in crisis, but he rightly treats Ellis's Cold War style anti-Sandinista hysteria with amused scepticism. In fact, neither Nikandrov nor Ellis make the obvious point that the strongest geostrategic reality in relation to the Canal is that, should U.S.-China tensions in the South China Sea accentuate into outright confrontation, China could not defend militarily the strong investment by Chinese companies in Nicaragua's Canal. In any case, Nikandrov, rightly points out with regard to Nicaragua's economy, "Nicaragua's socioeconomic

progress, Nicaraguans' improved standard of living, and the stability and security there (compared to the increase in crime in most Central American countries) can all largely be credited to President Ortega."

But even that reality can be turned on its head in the hands of a butterfly columnist as Bloomberg's Mac Margolis demonstrated in his July 4 article "[Nicaragua Prospers Under an Ex-Guerrilla](#)." Just for a change Bloomberg's editors omitted their trademark "unexpectedly", usually slipped in to any headline reporting unpalatable news. But the premier U.S. business news site could only finally recognize the incredible progress achieved by Daniel Ortega's Sandinista government by at the same time smearing and denigrating President Ortega in the process. On the positive side Margolis recognizes, "the Nicaraguan economy grew [4.9 percent](#) last year and has averaged 5.2 percent for the last five. Although three in 10 Nicaraguans are [poor](#), unemployment and inflation are low. Public sector debt is a modest 2.2 percent of gross domestic product."

That apart, Margolis writes, "Ortega's critics know a darker side. Consider the ever-accommodating Nicaraguan Supreme Court, which last week deposed opposition leader Eduardo Montealegre as head of the [Independent Liberal Party](#) - essentially clearing the way for Ortega to run unchallenged in the November elections." This is identical to the [dishonest argument](#) in Nina Lakhani's Guardian article. Montealegre's PLI had around 3 percent support, under the new PLI leader that seems to have crept up to around 5 percent. The Supreme Court decision made no difference to the fact that Nicaragua's political opposition has been incapable of a serious electoral challenge to Daniel Ortega since before the last elections in 2011. Since then Daniel Ortega's popularity has grown while support for the Nicaraguan opposition has collapsed. Implicitly contradicting himself, Margolis acknowledges that fact but goes on to make speculative, fact-free accusations of corruption, directly in relation to Nicaragua's proposed Canal.

Without being specific he hints at widespread opposition to the Canal in Nicaragua, writing "a shadowy project that Ortega farmed out to Chinese investors led by billionaire [Wang Jing](#). Ground has yet to be broken on the [US\\$50 billion development](#), but Nicaraguans have raised a stink over the lavishly generous terms of the deal". While opposition to the Canal certainly does exist, [73 percent of people](#) in Nicaragua support it. Evan Ellis mentions an alleged opposition demonstration of 400,000 people, which is simply untrue. The biggest demonstration against the Canal drew about 40,000 people back in 2014 when Nicaragua's political opposition bussed people to a march from all over the country. [Plenty of information](#) is available about the Canal and Margolis has no facts to back up his baseless accusation of corruption "I'd wager a fistful of Nicaraguan córdobas that 'Presidente-Comandante Daniel' has something he's uneager to share."

Only the crass Americanist mind set could provoke such presumptuous contempt for the opinion of the great majority of Nicaraguans. Margolis really seems to believe Nicaraguans are so stupid as to support a President who he alleges is self-evidently corrupt. In fact, Margolis' discredited protagonist, Eduardo Montealegre, has precisely the kind of corruption tainted track record so familiar from the U.S. government deregulation of Wall Street. Montealegre was the Nicaraguan Treasury Minister under a U.S. supported right wing government and oversaw a massive bailout of Nicaragua's rotten banking system from which his own bank benefited directly at the time. Perfectly natural then for a Bloomberg columnist to highlight Montealegre while attacking Daniel Ortega who rescued Nicaragua from precisely that culture of abject corruption. This banal irrational attack on Daniel Ortega deliberately obscures the reasons for Nicaragua's economic success, which shows up

current US and European economic policy as faith based nonsense.

Domestically, President Ortega has prioritized poverty reduction, implementing very successful socialist redistributive policies and extensive infrastructure development. Overseas, his Sandinista government has dramatically diversified commercial and development cooperation relationships, in particular structuring Venezuela's aid in a way equivalent to deficit spending, whose success contrasts sharply with the mindless futility of current Western economic policy. Contradicting the Bloomberg article, Nil Nikandrov is much closer to reality when he writes that Ortega is, "a faithful defender of Nicaragua's interests on the international stage and enjoys the support of the vast majority of Nicaraguans." As the NATO country psychological warfare media crank up their attacks on Nicaragua in an election year, it remains to be seen whether Nikandrov is right when he argues, "the subversive activities of the U.S. intelligence services and their 'strategy of chaos' will not work in Nicaragua."

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