

Liberation and Lenin:

Marxism-Leninism in the Ideology of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*

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I. Significance

Was the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* a ‘Marxist-Leninist’ organization from 1961 to 1984? Or, more precisely, is its ideology, called ‘Sandinismo,’ a ‘Marxist-Leninist’ ideology? Understanding Sandinismo is, firstly, important to legitimize the foreign policy of the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations, namely, how they responded to the ‘Central American Crisis’ of the 1970s and 1980s. Specifically, this foreign policy reversed the influence of newly-empowered political forces perceived as allies or dependents of the Soviet Union. These political forces included the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN) of El Salvador, *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG) of Guatemala, and, of course, the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (henceforth FSLN) of Nicaragua. Calling the FSLN ‘Marxist-Leninist’ gives greater legitimacy to this foreign policy because it defines the FSLN by the political formation and ideological inspiration of Soviet Union, namely, by the efforts of Vladimir Lenin.

Understanding this ‘Sandinismo’ is also important because of the the FSLN’s historical influence on its country of origin, Nicaragua. This organization, consistently numbering less than a few hundred followers up to 1977, would govern Nicaragua’s 3.1 million inhabitants by 1979, continuing its effective national governance to 1990. To this day, it remains a powerful national influence; for example, its longtime leader Daniel Ortega has remained President of Nicaragua since 2007, effectively controlling all executive functions of the national government.

This study does not argue that every organization requires an ideology to remain cohesive, but every organization requires motivation for its existence. Until 1979, the FSLN did not offer its members financial incentive, social status, material comfort, or any other kind of motivation besides that of ideological devotion. An example of this all-encompassing devotion is evident in

the autobiographical work, *Fire from the Mountain*, by Omar Cabezas, a mid-level guerilla combatant during the Sandinista's pre-revolutionary years. It must be noted that Cabezas partly joins the FSLN out of personal loyalty to existing members, but his continuing membership in the FSLN necessitated ideological commitment.¹ His evolution into a jungle-based FSLN militant was physically and mentally grueling, if not damaging. Even moments after first entering the jungle, Cabezas and fellow new recruits lost their guide and heatedly curse at the cold, wet weather and the thick brush.² They find their guide, but they continued walking in these conditions through the entirety of the night.³ By the next morning, Cabezas was miserable:

By dawn I was half covered with mud, soaked to the skin, my hands were totally screwed, and we were starved. We had already gone two nights with no sleep and about twenty-four hours with no food; we had no idea, we could never have guessed what was in store for us.⁴

His equipment becomes a nuisance: "I held the shotgun in one hand, since it didn't have a sling, and the bag in the other; when I got tired I'd switch the bag, which was heaviest, to my other hand."⁵ Because of repeated slipping on the steep, muddy slopes, says Cabezas, "I had mud on my hair, on my face, everywhere."⁶ By the time they reach the main FSLN camp, Cabezas and his compatriots are filthy, drained to exhaustion, and malnourished if not starved.⁷

The situation becomes even more difficult with the beginning of military training. The local commander, codenamed Tello, established a routine that Cabezas terms "that unbelievable, unimaginable hell."⁸ For eighteen hours daily, Tello puts the recruits through various exercises, "First, running in place, then running for speed, then up-and-down squats, then stationary squats, and exercises for your waist, your legs, your arms, your head," all while carrying heavy packs of ammunition, food, and survival equipment.⁹ At any moment, Tello yelled, "Hit the ground... hit the ground... crawl!" and he would fire a machine gun over the recruits' heads.¹⁰ The physical

difficulties did not stop at training; there was always a “torturous lack of food,” the reality of always “having the enemy always on your track,” hygienic difficulties so one is perpetually “filthy and stinking,” and, because of the mountainous jungle climate, “being constantly wet.”¹¹

But the most difficult part of this life is the loneliness.¹² It is the “loneliness of not being able to kiss anybody, of knowing what it is for a human being not being able to caress something, the loneliness of never being smiled at, never being touched.”¹³ Eventually, Cabezas lost much of his sense of individuality, as remembrance and evidence for past life slowly disappeared:

When you left for the mountains, you began the process of the forced shedding of your present. Against your will you were hurling that present back into the past, as if bits of your flesh were being left behind. And that hurts. But you have no choice but to go forward in that process of deincarnation, of slowly dying. And each day you are deeper into the mountains. First you stop seeing the type of people you saw before. From then on you won't see the type of people you saw in the city; you won't see the things you used to see every day: the houses, the walls, the glass windows, the pavement. It's all gone; objectively it's behind you, though you have it stored in your brain.... As things continue to get lost or ruined, the objects that reaffirm your present are disappearing, the objects that confirm your identity, your consciousness of your own existence, your sense that you are not just living on the surface, but have a history.¹⁴

Then Cabezas loses his final link to real life: his longtime lover, Claudia, leaves him. Cabezas writes, “If I hadn't had a reason for living, another reason for living, namely the struggle to liberate Nicaragua, I would have fallen completely apart- into complete shit.”¹⁵

With this account as an example, the ideals of the FSLN remain the central motivation to the organization's continued existence as these ideals hold its followers together in miserable circumstances such as those confronting Cabezas. Therefore, an understanding whether Sandinismo is ideologically Marxist-Leninist is helpful to comprehending (1) FSLN historical

influence and (2) the validity of the Central American foreign policy of the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations.

II. The Liberation Approach

Certain analysts of the FSLN insist it should not be described as Marxist-Leninist and rather that it is a 'democratic' and 'patriotic' ideology against the 'tyranny' and 'imperialism' of its enemies. This approach is hereby termed the 'Liberation Approach.' Applying the terminology of this approach, a 'tyranny' here is to be understood as a form of government that (a) politically and materially disenfranchises its populace to empower and enrich an already powerful and wealthy few, (b) is not popular among its populace, and (c) systematically uses physical violence on its populace to maintain the power and wealth of that few. Liberationists describe this form of government in a wholly negative manner. On the other hand, the definition of 'democracy' is less clear because of its frequent use as something non-tyrannical.¹⁶ As such, 'democracy' is probably best defined as a form of government that (a) does not politically and materially disenfranchise its populace to empower and enrich an already powerful and wealthy few, (b) is popular among its populace, and (c) does not systematically use physical violence on its populace to maintain the power and wealth of that few. In contrast to tyranny, Liberationists describe this form of government in a wholly positive manner.

The terms 'imperialist' or 'imperial' describe a country that is 'tyrannical' in relation to a populace other than its own. In other words, it is a government that (a) politically and materially disenfranchises another country's populace to empower and enrich its already powerful and wealthy few, (b) is unpopular among that populace, and (c) systematically uses physical violence on that populace to maintain the power and wealth of the few. Liberationists

describe this form of government in wholly negative terms. The term ‘patriotic’ seems to describe the lack of, rather than the opposite of, ‘imperialism, so that this government (a) does not politically and materially disenfranchise another country’s populace to empower and enrich its already powerful and wealthy few, (b) is not unpopular among that populace, and (c) does not systematically use physical violence on that populace to maintain the power and wealth of the few. Liberationists describe this form of government in wholly positive terms. Whether by causation or coincidence, all tyrannical countries are part of an imperialist international system and all democratic countries are part of a patriotic international system.

Applying these definitions, the FSLN’s official *Platforma Electoral del FSLN Nicaragua 1984* (FSLN Electoral Platform Nicaragua 1984) is an excellent example of the Liberation Approach. *La Platforma* greatly stresses ‘tyrannical’ policies of the former Somoza regime. (This specific ‘regime’ refers to the administrations of Anastasio Somoza García (1934-1956) and his sons Luis Somoza Debayle (1956-1963) and Anastasio Somoza Debayle (1967-1979), who maintained control of Nicaragua’s government consecutively between 1934 and 1979 with the loyalty of Nicaragua’s armed forces, the *Guardia Nacional*. Liberationists collectively and exclusively termed these three persons ‘the Somozas,’ with a single ‘Somoza’ government or regime. The only Liberationist method of distinction between the three is to call the one in power ‘Somoza,’ whether at that time or in reference to a previous period.) *La Platforma* describes this governmental period as follows:

The regime of the Somozas meant terror, threat, and instability. In the dungeons of the *Guardia Nacional*, in the jails, in the police stations they murdered and they tortured. The police chiefs and departmental commanders were also the chiefs of bands of thieves, and they robbed and controlled drug traffic, prostitution, gambling, and organized corruption.¹⁷

The Somoza regime fits the aforementioned definition of ‘tyranny’ with ease: it empowers and enriches itself by disempowering and impoverishing the people, it hardly an object of widespread affection, and it uses readily uses physical violence to terror and threaten others into submission.

La Plataforma’s frequent use of the noun *asesinato* (murder) also characterizes its Liberationist approach. Whenever the *Guardia Nacional* kills a revolutionary, it is an *asesinato*, not a *matanza* (killing) or *muerte* (death). *La Plataforma* actually lists twelve instances of *asesinato* on various persons who sought to topple the Somozas, most importantly, Augusto César Sandino himself.¹⁸ For each case, *La Plataforma* clarifies that each is an “*asalto al pueblo*” (assault at the people).¹⁹ Through the use of *asesinato*, *La Plataforma* further stresses the Somoza regime’s physical violence upon the populace, described in a thoroughly negative manner.

La Plataforma describes the FSLN itself in terms opposite of the Somoza regime. They call their government a “popular democratic regime” or a form of “political pluralism” that harnesses the power of the “Workers, farmers, and peasants” who the Somozas perceived as most impoverished.²⁰ The FSLN empowers these classes, while at the same time distinctively representing “the masses.”²¹ They define these ‘masses’ within a large spectrum of society as “the worker’s unions, the neighborhood organizations, of women and the young, unions of small and medium agricultural proprietors, of artisans and small industrialists, of professionals and technicians, intellectuals, artists, and religious.”²² Lastly, it portrays itself as avoiding unnecessary violence, for example, granting amnesty and reprieve to former Somoza accomplices.²³ In total, therefore, the FSLN is a democratic regime, owing to its empowerment and enrichment of the most oppressed, popular support, and avoidance of violent political oppression.

Whereas the Somoza regime is a tyranny, the United States is imperialist. *La Plataforma* scathingly describes the United States as having oppressed Nicaragua for the entirety of the nation's existence, eventually installing Somoza and the *Guardia Nacional* as a substitute for an American occupation force.²⁴ Through these efforts, the United States continuously sacked and impoverished Nicaragua to its own benefit.²⁵ To this day, *La Plataforma* insists, the United States uses the *Contrarrevolucionarios* (Counterrevolutionaries, or *Contras*) as a continued "instrument of aggression and terror against our people."²⁶ *La Plataforma* thus defines the United States, using negative terminology, as an 'imperialist' government: it impoverishes the Nicaraguan population to its own benefit and readily applies violence whenever conducive to this aim.

The FSLN differentiates itself from the United States by pursuing a 'non-aligned' foreign policy. Nicaragua pursues relations with other countries in "solidarity" with the Sandinista revolution, including "the socialist countries, the Arab and Islamic countries, Western Europe, and Latin America."²⁷ Rather than comply with imperialism, Nicaraguans will "unite our voice with that of other peoples against... every form of oppression and social or economic discrimination."²⁸ This proposal is clearly 'patriotic': Nicaragua does not politically and materially disenfranchise another country's populace to empower and enrich itself, it seeks popularly supported relationships between countries, and it does not use physical violence on another country for its own benefit.

It is therefore apparent that *La Plataforma* describes Sandinismo as democratic and patriotic, in contrast to the tyranny of the Somozas and the imperialism of the United States. As importantly, *La Plataforma* does not promote Marxist-Leninism, or at least not directly. There are no mentions of the terms "communism," "Marxism," "Leninism," "Marxism-Leninism," or their respective adjectives. Nor does *La Plataforma* mention self-termed communists ideologues like

Karl Marx or Vladimir Lenin. It only mentions “socialist” or “socialism” once, in the quote seen in the previous paragraph. Though this certainly acknowledges friendship with socialist countries, it does not identify the FSLN with socialism any more than with qualities of other international allies, such as Arab ethnicity or Islamic religious affiliation. The FSLN official 1984 election platform thus emphasizes that its ideological bases are both democratic and patriotic, aimed “to construct the new society that the General of Free Men, Augusto César Sandino, dreamed.”²⁹

The Soviet political observers A. Glinkin, B. Martynov, and P. Yakovlev make a similarly Liberationist argument in their work, “U.S. Policies in Latin America: Postwar to Present.” Glinkin, Martynov, and Yakovlev say that FSLN’s governance between 1979-1984 is “progressive and anti-imperialist.”³⁰ The FSLN’s “decisive” victory in Nicaragua’s 1984 presidential election makes this particularly clear, for these observers, “thus indicating the strong determination of the Nicaraguan people to defend the gains of the revolution.”³¹ Again, these advocates of the Liberation approach describe the FSLN as democratic and anti-imperialist.

Glinkin, Martynov, and Yakovlev meanwhile portray the United States as thoroughly imperialist. Glinkin, Martynov, and Yakovlev classify American administrations in a manner. In their perspective, American administrations vary only in their methods of subjugating the Nicaraguan people. They perceive the Carter Administration’s efforts to promote human rights as a “camouflage” for “crucial issues concerning inter-American cooperation in the fields of trade and economy.”³² They further argue that the United States’ unwarranted influence regarding such issues could make Latin America as a whole “into an imperialist ally on the international scene.”³³ The Reagan administration sought control of Nicaragua with no less vigor, but its strategy was more forceful and militaristic, or as the three observers termed it, “A policy of aggression and interventionism.”³⁴

Glinkin, Martinov, and Yakovlev primarily portray the United States' 'imperialism' in its interactions with the Organization of American States (OAS). In November 1974 for example, the OAS could not pass a resolution permitting diplomatic and economic relations with socialist Cuba. Although twelve of twenty-one governments voted in favor of the resolutions, the United States could "impose its will on the majority" because it established a two-thirds majority voting rule some decades before.³⁵ After painstaking efforts the OAS changed the voting rules to a simple majority in July 1975, finally approving the normalization of relations with Cuba in July 1985 despite American efforts to the contrary.³⁶ Similar OAS majorities "forced" the United States from its overbearing position, approving "ideological pluralism" and "intensification of contacts with socialist countries."³⁷ At the same time, Latin American states rejected United States proposals, including "discriminatory trade laws," "economic aggression against Ecuador," "strong reprisals" against what the United States labels "international terrorism," and, more pertinently, sending an OAS peace-keeping force into Nicaragua during the 1979 revolution headed by the Sandinistas.³⁸ Indeed, Glinkin, Martinov, and Yakovlev argue, the United States only increased its efforts "to encroach on the country's right to self-determination" during the following decade.³⁹ The language of Glinkin, Martinov, and Yakovlev clarifies their characterization of the United States as a malevolent, invasive, unpopular, and, in other words, 'imperialist' influence in Latin America.

The mode of thought portrayed in this characterization therefore clear. For Glinkin, Martinov, and Yakovlev, every country has a right of self-determination, but the United States continuously undermines this right to satisfy its own power-lust. For these authors, the United States is the essence of this imperialism: any mentioned ally of United States efforts participate in imperialism, while any mentioned enemy of United States efforts participate in patriotism and

self-determination. Glinkin, Martinov, and Yakovlev do not mention Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, or Communism. Instead, ‘socialism’ becomes synonymous with freedom and democracy.

II. The Soviet Approach

Another mode of thought argues, to the contrary of Liberationists, that Sandinismo is Marxist-Leninist by definition. Those who promulgate such a view typically study the American and Soviet governmental struggles of 1945-1989. Cold War historians, such as G.W. Sand, can portray these struggles as internationally unavoidable. Even with relatively small countries like Nicaragua, for example, the United States had provided military aid for explicitly anti-Communist aims at least since 1960.⁴⁰ Fitting into this context, G.W. Sand argues that the FSLN originated more from Cuban governmental efforts than Nicaragua itself:

... Castro appointed Quintín Piño Machado as his first ambassador to Nicaragua (and last under Somoza) in late 1959 or early 1960. In his short tenure as ambassador, Piño Machado succeeded in establishing an organization called Patriotic Youth. According to former Sandinistas, it was this student movement that gave rise to the future Sandinista Front, or FSLN, in power today [1989] in Nicaragua. The Cuban ambassador formed the Sandinistas, according to Fausto Amador, brother of the former FSLN leader Carlos Fonseca, adding that Cubans were the architects of the FSLN both in its construction and in choosing its leadership.⁴¹

For Sand, Soviet governmental aid enabled Cuba’s efforts, so that it was well within Soviet means to stop Cuban revolutionary efforts.⁴² Actually, he argues that Soviet efforts to the contrary of this would contradict the revolutionary nature of Marxism-Leninism.⁴³ Therefore, Sand states, Sandinismo pledges fealty to Marxism-Leninism and Soviet interests, struggling “the so-called imperialism in the Americas” in a manner both unrepresentative and foreign to Nicaragua.⁴⁴

Perhaps the most powerful proponent of the Soviet Approach between 1961 and 1984 is United States President Ronald Reagan. According to Thomas L. Leonard, Reagan “viewed the Central American crisis [of the 1980s] in geopolitical terms,” the Sandinistas specifically as “Soviet clients directed by Cuban proxies,” not a popularly-supported, sovereign state.⁴⁵ Reagan’s foreign policy influence is apparent in the United States Senate Republican Policy Committee’s report, “Turmoil in Central America.” This 1986 document argues that Sandinismo is not a theory of democracy but, as FSLN governance exemplifies, a theory of subtle political repression to centralize governance under the party apparatus.⁴⁶ Neither is Sandinismo a theory of nationalism because the FSLN tries to make Nicaragua a client state of Soviet and Cuban political influence.⁴⁷ Because of these wholly undemocratic methods - never mind Sandinismo’s firm allegiance to Marxism-Leninism - the FSLN is adverse to both the Nicaraguan people and the interests of the United States.⁴⁸

Dr. Jeane Kirkpatrick, who served on Reagan’s National Security Council from 1981-1985, promotes a similar perspective. Kirkpatrick, in discussing pre-1979 Iran and Nicaragua, argues that FSLN governance is hardly ‘democratic’ because of its use of widespread violence to retain power. She chides the Carter administration for focusing on the “human rights violations of incumbent governments [of Iran and Nicaragua].”⁴⁹ Although “neither one of those governments was a good government,” in terms of how it treated its people, “both of them turned out to be a good deal better than the governments that followed them.”⁵⁰ In terms of widespread physical violence, therefore, the Sandinistas were *less* democratic than the Somoza governments. Kirkpatrick further rejects the concept of Sandinismo as a patriotic doctrine, asserting that the Soviet Union, in a show of “expansionism,” “assertiveness,” and “violence,” assisted the Sandinistas in coming to power.⁵¹ The Sandinista leadership “attended the Soviet birthday party

every year” and even “received a steady flow of Soviet arms.”⁵² As such, Kirckpatrick argues, Sandinismo promotes ‘imperialism,’ not ‘nationalism.’ Lastly, unlike the Liberation Approach, she argues that the Sandinista government was “a communist government” and “a Marxist-Leninist government.”⁵³ This is clear, at least, in that “The leadership described themselves again and again as Marxist-Leninist.”⁵⁴ Yet again one sees the basic premises of the Soviet Approach, Sandinismo classified as a doctrine of tyranny, imperialism, and Marxism-Leninism.

Janusz Bugajski, who himself devoted much of his career to the United States Department of State, summarizes the Soviet Approach in the most effective manner:

In the realm of ideology, the chapter [in this book] describes Sandinista attempts to blend Marxism-Leninism with radical Christian ‘liberation theology,’ anti-Americanism, Nicaraguan nationalism, and socio-economic reformism. These ploys were designed to broaden the public reach and popular appeal of the Sandinista movement.⁵⁵

I. Limitations

Before examining the validity of the Liberation Approach and the Soviet Approach, one must first establish limitations on the assertions of this study. First, this discussion will limit itself to the years of 1961 through 1984. The year 1961 is when the organization’s name, Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, came into existence. Furthermore, student members of this organization began to use the term ‘Sandinista’ as an adjective to describe their affiliation with the FSLN. In other words, this study analyzes self-termed ‘Sandinistas’ to understand Sandinismo from the bottom-up rather than first defining Sandinismo to analyze ‘true’ Sandinistas. The end-date of 1984 was chosen due to two factors that steadily changed the nature of the FSLN between 1979-1990: (1) The leadership of Daniel Ortega between 1979 and 1990 which made Sandinismo increasingly defined by the person of Ortega himself rather than certain

set principles; and (2) The *contrarrevolución*, the counter-revolution against the newly installed FSLN government, whose participants are commonly called *contras*.

The challenge that the *contras* posed to the FSLN was substantial between 1984 and 1990. Some historians such as William I. Robinson argue that the FSLN response to the *contras*, namely, a “declaration of war,” supported by a “war economy” and a “war policy” may have formed a “new hard-line Sandinismo.”⁵⁶ In short, the nature of the FSLN during the tenure of their governance may have changed to such an extent that it cannot be properly termed the same ‘FSLN’ as that of 1961 to 1979. At the same time, it would be a mistake to completely exclude Sandinista governmental programs from 1979 onward, as the FSLN had the means to enact its ideological aims. Therefore, 1979-1984 should remain open to analysis.

It is further important to define Marxism-Leninism, for otherwise one could only apply the term meaninglessly. To define Marxism-Leninism in a manner satisfactory to the Sandinistas, it will be helpful to draw from Martha Hornecker’s characterization of Lenin, as she had a strong impact on Sandinista conceptions of what this term meant. According to her characterization, therefore, Marxism-Leninism is the doctrine promoted directly by Vladimir Lenin that has three essential qualities. The first is (1) an inevitable historical progression characterized by consecutive eras of diminishing societal oppression. Eras are unique by the kind of systemic political, social, and economic subjugation of a certain class of persons against another class of persons.⁵⁷ The first era is feudalism, an early stage characterized by the oppression serf/slave by their lords.⁵⁸ The second stage is capitalism, a moderate stage characterized by the oppression of the proletariat (or working class) by the bourgeois (or business class).⁵⁹

Lenin’s proposed government characterizes the penultimate stage, called socialism. Lenin advocates (2) the establishment of a centralized, urban, and post-capitalist state that removes all

conception of ownership.⁶⁰ Lenin characterizes this state as having “control over all large businesses,” eventually causing “the transformation of the whole economic state mechanism in a great, unified machine” in a kind of multi-person “economic organism.”⁶¹ Because oppression requires a sense of ownership, and this ownership is thus removed, society will transition into a final era free of oppression, called communism.⁶²

Marxism-Leninism further promotes (3) the necessity of violent, nation-based revolutions of the oppressed to transition to a new historical era. Lenin describes such revolutions as follows:

...it is an incredibly complicated process, of the death of the old social order and birth of the new social order, of the way of life of tens of millions of men. The revolution is the class struggle and the most acute, most furious, most fierce civil war. There has not been a place in history nor a single great revolution without civil war.⁶³

Again, Lenin argues that these revolutions are nation-based. They “cannot occur simultaneously in every country” because not every country is at the same point in societal development as the other; some countries might be feudal, others capitalist, others socialist, etc.⁶⁴ With these three qualities simultaneously defining Sandinismo’s probable concept of Marxism-Leninism, one can more adequately define Sandinismo in relation to this theory.

III. Further Defining Marxism-Leninism

Yuri Pavlov, Latin American Director to the Department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, from 1983 to 1990, disagrees with the assertions of both the Liberation and Soviet Approaches to Sandinismo. He argues Sandinismo is “a different left,” a blend of Marxism Leninism “and some other leftist ideas and ideologists” which is just why “the [Soviet] support came only after the Sandinistas took power.”⁶⁵ Though the working definition of ‘Marxism-Leninism’ has satisfied

the perspectives of the previous authors, it does not do so for Pavlov. He argues that true Marxism-Leninism also promotes a certain kind of strategy in which the Soviet Union is a central, worldwide authority for Communist movements, acting “for the local communist parties” to “foster revolutionary movements” according to a certain uniform strategy.⁶⁶

Dr. Raymond Garhoff, in his 1962 article “Unconventional Warfare in Communist Strategy,” argues for the addition of these same two qualities. He says that Lenin advocated “the subordination to Moscow of Communist Parties everywhere,” so that “the suitability of local internal war was defined in terms of the prevailing foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union.”⁶⁷ A Leninist revolutionary strategic theory would promote “the use of subversion, or other non-violent means, to the use of guerilla warfare,” partly because this makes local Communist groups more independent of Soviet guidance.⁶⁸ As such, most revolutionary activity would be in the urban centers of power, caused by the oppressed people of such centers, the proletariat (or working class, especially in regard to factory workers).⁶⁹ Any warfare should be “defensive rather than offensive” and conventional rather than guerilla in method.⁷⁰

Consuelo Cruz Sequiera, though arguing that Sandinismo shares the aforementioned three qualities of Marxism-Leninism, also points out that it does not share the internationalism of Marxism-Leninism. His article “Mistrust and Violence in Nicaragua” analyzes the Sandinista oath as composed by Carlos Fonseca, the FSLN’s greatest ideological contributor between 1961 and his death in 1976. Sequiera argues that Sandinismo contains a nationalist vs. imperialist dichotomy, rather than a sense of global unity. The Sandinista oath exemplifies this dichotomy in that it vows “to defend our national honor and to fight for the redemption of the repressed and exploited.”⁷¹ Sequiera notes that this portion of the vow makes clear the cultural division between the oppressed and oppressors, the native and foreign.⁷² He argues that even its values,

“loyalty and self-abnegation,” express “the quintessential attributes of the exemplary conqueror and colonist.”⁷³ At the same time, the Sandinistas have a Leninist perception of historical progression. Analyzing FSLN leader Tomás Borge’s *The Patient Impatience*, Sequiera notes that “History according to Broge proceeds in uncluttered stages, with each stage a battle between two archetypal forces and each battle untainted by unholy alliances and internal betrayal.”⁷⁴ One either aligns with the poor oppressed or the rich oppressors, with no mentioned or hinted interchange between the two sides. Sequiera clearly classifies Sandinismo as substantially but not purely Marxist-Leninist.

The Department of State’s “National Intelligence Estimate” of 1964 defines certain kinds of Latin American ‘communism’ in a manner also conducive to this third approach. The report argues that a certain kind of communism is strong among “middle class students and intellectuals.”⁷⁵ These persons witness most clearly “the shortcomings of the societies in which they live,” and they therefore have ample motivation for correcting these shortcomings.⁷⁶ They “are well aware of the powers of resistance of the vested interests” so that they correctly perceive that existing regimes are “ineffectual as a means of achieving rapid and radical reform.”⁷⁷ Further, these persons are “at least verbally addicted to revolutionary violence” and pursue this goal despite the considerable difficulty that “they have little or no contact with the masses whom they would lead.”⁷⁸ Their post-revolutionary government would engage in a “new dispensation,” in which these revolutionaries are “able to play an important role.”⁷⁹

Nonetheless, this communism is neither subordinate to an international communist directive. To be sure, there is some internationalist appeal. Communism is the only ideology with some degree of consistent influence across Latin America. Communism alone provides “a link with the USSR as a world power believed to be able to provide aid and protection in the event of

a hostile confrontation with the US.”⁸⁰ The source of this thought process is nonetheless nation-based. The *National Intelligence Estimate* calls the greatest ‘danger in Latin America: “the ability of a few dedicated communists to exploit for their own purposes the widespread tendency toward anti-US nationalism.”⁸¹ Indeed, it argues, Latin American intellectuals readily and repeatedly blame “national shortcomings” on “‘federal class’ rule and ‘Yankee imperialism’”⁸² It would further be a mistake to term communism an ‘imported’ ideology:

The essential point is that Communist action in Latin America depends on the willingness of indigenous individuals to act, at whatever personal risk they are disposed to accept, and consequently on their own tactical and doctrinal predilections. The USSR, Communist China, and Cuba can incite, encourage, advise, and render some degree of clandestine aid from the outside; the decision to act, and in what manner, is local and personal.⁸³

It is therefore argued that the communism described in the *National Intelligence Estimate* is not purely Marxist-Leninist, either in its subordination to foreign powers nor in uniformly Leninist tactics.

It is the argument of this study that Sandinismo, in certain respects, is truly Marxist-Leninist, including the first three qualities previously assigned to Marxism-Leninism.⁸⁴

Nonetheless, Pavlov, Sequiera, and the *National Intelligence Estimate* correctly argue that Sandinismo differs from Marxism-Leninism in two essential qualities: (4) Sandinismo has a primarily national rather than international focus and (5) a non-Leninist revolutionary strategic doctrine.

IV. Essential Marxist-Leninist Similarities

First, it will be necessary to illustrate that Marxism-Leninism itself inspired the group, rather than illustrate mere similarities resulting from a separate source of influence. Fonseca himself

viewed the FSLN as an extension of Leninist thought. Fonseca's high school essay, titled "Capital and Labor," quotes Karl Marx in arguing that, "The worker has a right to the entire product of his labor." This premise, for Fonseca, "seems to be the only solution to the enormous economic crisis that has brought down such misery... and ignorance upon the proletariat."⁸⁵ In a 1970 interview, Fonseca further argued that "the revolutionaries, the rebels, the communists, are the members of the Frente Sandinista," so that the FSLN has "the right" to be called genuinely Marxist.⁸⁶

Leninist influence is also clear in Cabezas' *Fire from the Mountain*. An FSLN recruiter, Juan José Quezada, asks Cabezas, aged 21, whether he would like to become a Sandinista. Cabezas remembers his reaction clearly:

I didn't have any firm political convictions. I wasn't a theoretician, not even a theoretician! Worse, I had serious doubts whether Marxism was a good thing or a bad thing. Finally, more out of confidence in Juan José than any personal conviction, "Sure, hombre," I said...⁸⁷

Cabezas knowingly applies the same personal appeal to recruit fellow students during his university studies. He would meet with some acquaintances, whose only notable activity was smoking marijuana.⁸⁸ They would "spend hours and hours talking," and eventually "they quit smoking dope just like that" and started joining FSLN-controlled student university government."⁸⁹ Sandinista recruitment promulgated the works of Marxist theorists. Hence, sympathy with these theorists at least partly determined who joined the FSLN and what concepts the FSLN reinforced.

Later, when Cabezas and other recruits undergo guerilla warfare training in the jungle, the recruits were once genuinely close to angrily shooting their superior Tello. To pacify the recruits, Tello presented the idea of the new communist man, without concept of self-interest:

The new man has gone beyond hunger, beyond rain, beyond mosquitoes, beyond loneliness. The new man is there, in that supereffort. There where the average man starts to give more than the average man. To give more than the typical man. When he starts to forget he is tired, to forget himself, to put his own self aside- that's where you'll find the new man. So, if you feel tired and exhausted, forget that and climb a hill.⁹⁰

This argument succeeded; the trainees all dreamed to be this person, i.e. “to be like Che [Guevera].”⁹¹ Cabezas interprets this training process through a clearly Marxist lens, namely, that they will be “mobilizing the entire society against the dictatorship” toward “different stages of its development.”⁹²

With these examples of Marxist influence in mind, it will be helpful to explain in greater detail the qualitative similarities between Marxism-Leninism and Sandinismo. First, perceived forms of oppression strongly affected Sandinistas. Carlos Fonseca's own awareness of political, social, and economic inequalities originated in his childhood. Fonseca's mother, a servant of his father, illegitimately conceived Fonseca. His father disowned any involvement, at which point she lost her job.⁹³ Born into this situation, Fonseca witnessed his mother experience frequent unemployment, three more illegitimate pregnancies, repeated homelessness, and unrelenting misery.⁹⁴

As Fonseca matured into a young man, his biographer Matilde Zimmerman notes, he voiced “moral outrage about the miserable living conditions, illiteracy, and poor health of workers, campesinos [peasants], and coffee pickers in the Matagalpa region” in comparison to “the unprecedented wealth” of the farm owners.⁹⁵ Fonseca left the *Partido Socialista de Nicaragua* (PSN), Nicaragua's pro-Soviet political party, partly because its members perceivedly resembled Nicaragua's oppressors: “Its national leaders were too well off economically, they were too perfumed, too bourgeoisified, and that turned me off.”⁹⁶ Fonseca applies stronger language against those that (at least perceivedly) perpetuate said inequality:

What difference does it make if a few people suffer who have always lived high by exploiting proletarian labor? ... Our people have a saying: “The only way to get rich is to be a thief.” And they don’t say that because some communist demagogue has been talking to them. Our people talk that way because they know the hacienda owner is afraid to walk on his own land for fear the campesinos he stole it from will shoot him down.⁹⁷

Fonseca, as the chief ideologue of the FSLN, thus makes clear the centrality of oppression in the formation of his political views.

Fonseca’s political treatise *Viva Sandino*, also promulgates a theory of historical progression similar to that of Marxism-Leninism. There are different stages of oppression placed upon Nicaragua, from the lord-serf system of the Spanish conquistadors, Augustine I of Mexico, William Walker, and Napoleon III of France, to the bourgeois-proletariat system of President Andrew Jackson, President Theodore Roosevelt, and President Howard Taft.⁹⁸ Fonseca mentions no positive attribute for any of these persons, whether it be the conquistador’s “thirst for gold” or the modern United States “prolonged expansionism,” but their malevolence differs in historical type.⁹⁹ Despite this precedent, Fonseca steadfastly asserts the temporary nature of these forms of oppression, as Nicaragua will inevitably free itself of this historical ‘regressivism,’ bringing itself into the modern era through the same “rebellious spirit” of “[Vladmir] Lenin, Fidel [Castro], Che [Guevera],” and “Ho Chi Minh.”¹⁰⁰

Cabezas, meanwhile, reveals his historical progressivism in a negative attitude toward traditions. When Cabezas was a university student, the School of Medicine tried removing two students (for reasons that Cabezas does not specify). In response, Cabezas led a large group of student protestors to the Law School instead of the School of Medicine. Cabezas explains that the Law School is “in the colonial style and a refuge for the most reactionary and obscurantist of the professors” who “did their best above all to instill respect for the Civil Code.”¹⁰¹ The clearest

example of Cabezas's attitude toward traditional values occurs during a student protest against the university dean:

Finally we got to the dean's house. It was built in more or less the same style as the Law School, and when I looked at it a whole series of things raced through my mind: the obscuritanism of so many of the professors, teaching us to believe in and to respect and to defend with the law the sanctity of private property. I thought of what we wanted, and the façade of the Law Building popped into my mind... I quickly painted in capital letters on the spotless white of the dean's house: THROUGH THESE DOORS ONE ENTERS THE 15TH CENTURY.¹⁰²

This disinclination to traditional practice is hardly unique to Marxism-Leninism, but Cabezas applies this sentiment specifically at the Law School's defense of private property specifically.

Sandinismo further argues for the necessity of causing violent revolution to achieve this historical aggression. Fonseca, for example, argues that Nicaragua's "Indian War" of 1881 was essential to the "decomposition of the feudal Nicaraguan system."¹⁰³ Fonseca left the *Partido Socialista de Nicaragua* in part because of the party because it was what he called "class collaborationist," as it was "unable and unwilling to lead a revolution in Nicaragua." Because Fonseca considered this revolution to be essential to Marxism, he did not consider the PSN "genuinely Marxist."¹⁰⁴

The Sandinistas were no less willing to establish a post-revolutionary government to that would equalize this oppression. In 1978, Edén Pastora and fellow Sandinista militants took hostage several hundred high-ranking Nicaraguan politicians. Pastora's demands for their safety include a nationwide minimum wage of 2.5 córdobas hourly, an industrial minimum wage of 3 córdobas hourly, the provision of free food and lodging for field workers, and even increasing *Guardia Nacional* wages to a minimum of 500 córdobas monthly.¹⁰⁵ Although this redistribution

of wealth was only a part of Pastora's demands, its inclusion in a list that could determine their continued survival underscores its importance to Sandinista thought.

The *Platforma Electoral* is ideal in this regard because it is an official governmental document that both defends existing economic reforms and proposes new ones. It promises, among other things, to provide clothing, medicine, and shoes, provide public transportation, form rural cooperatives for small and medium agricultural property-owners, vastly redistribute the holdings of large landowners, provide major subsidies to the poor for healthcare, form thousands of agricultural unions, and politically integrate ethnic minorities.¹⁰⁶

Actually, Nicaragua's economic changes between 1979 and 1984 make clear that Sandinista policy was more concerned with rural collectivization than rural redistribution. By the end of 1981, the government successfully expropriated land accounting for approximately 20 percent of gross agricultural output and 20 percent of cultivable land.¹⁰⁷ Of this 20 percent, 83 percent transitioned to state-run cooperatives.¹⁰⁸ The FSLN allotted the remaining 17 percent to privately owned farms, benefitting about 20,000 of 80,000 persons.¹⁰⁹ As a result, by the mid-1980s, farms of more than 340 acres declined from about 52 percent of cultivable land to 24 percent.¹¹⁰ Even farms of 17-340 acres decreased from 46 to 43 percent of cultivable land.¹¹¹ By 1984, 60,000 agricultural laborers, more than half those of Nicaragua, belonged to state-owned agricultural cooperatives. To manage private agricultural output, the Ministry of Foreign Trade further acquired all privileges for exporting materials outside the country, raised taxes, set prices, and formed the state-sponsored *National Union of Farmers and Ranchers*, which by 1983 had garnered over 75,000 members, approximately 16% of the agricultural workforce.¹¹² All was part of an effort to transform the countryside from something that, as Fonseca had described, as "unfit for living like a human being."¹¹³

The consistent unpopularity of these land reforms may have been exacerbated by the urban-centric background of many Sandinistas, including Omar Cabezas. Although Cabezas and other Sandinistas largely understood the peasantry's way of life and revolutionary potential with accuracy, they simultaneously distanced themselves from the peasants. When a poor, rural-dwelling woman named Martha did not know that the earth was round, Cabezas thought, "I was superknowledgeable, supereducated compared to her."¹¹⁴ Later, he talks with his military commander, Tello, at length; as Cabezas states, "So he started letting out all he had inside him, something he hadn't done with the *campesinos* (peasants) because he thought they probably wouldn't understand. Because urban people are more complex, more abstract, more sophisticated, complicated- their feelings, emotions, ways of interpreting things."¹¹⁵ On another occasion, Cabezas and other new recruits trekked through the jungle, led by a local peasant, at the beginning of their training for Sandinista guerilla warfare. Cabezas complains, "I didn't understand why the *campesino* was so obsessed with our not breaking the brush... At first I thought it was the *campesino*'s love of nature."¹¹⁶ Cabezas did not recognize for some time that the *campesino* was making it harder for anyone to track the group through the jungle, considering the group's actively revolutionary character.

The FSLN's effort at extending its administrative control in the Zelaya region also illustrates the FSLN's relative distance from rural problems. The Somoza regime remained politically, economically, and culturally uninvolved in this area, as the populace was less wealthy, educated, and healthy than that of the more urbanized western half of the country. 9 percent of the Nicaraguan population resided in Zelaya, of which over a third were Amerindian, Creole, or Carib as of the mid 1970s. This number is disproportionate to the country as a whole, whereupon only 13 percent of Nicaragua's population belongs to these ethnic groups.¹¹⁷ The Amerindians

belong to certain ethnic subgroups, including the Rama and Sumu with their respective languages, while the Miskito Amerindians extensively intermarried with descendants of African slaves, traded with British merchants, readily engaged in American foreign business operations, historically spoke a form of English, and practiced a distinct form of Protestantism.¹¹⁸

The Somoza governments invested neither economic nor political effort into the region with much vigor, viewed by the Sandinistas viewed as harmful neglect.¹¹⁹ The FSLN government stressed from the beginning a ‘detrribalization’ effort in the Zelaya region to bring the regions’ populace to a sense of national identity.¹²⁰ In regard to the Miskitos especially, official FSLN statements argue that the British and Americans had “robbed them of their identity,” and as such it is necessary to restore a sense of ‘Nicaraguan’ patriotism.¹²¹

In an effort to extend FSLN control over the relatively autonomous Zelaya region, the new government instituted a variety of administrative reforms. As such, the government removed the existing authority of traditional local councils, replacing with the standard *Comités* of Sandinista loyalists, in this case usually imported from the western portion of the country.¹²² The Managua government also formed a new group to represent the Amerindians:

It was styled as Miskito, Sumu, Rama, Sandinista Unity (Miskitu Sumu Rama Sandanista Alsa Takanka or MISURASATA) and groomed to transform “ethnic groups” into fully fledged Nicaraguan “new people.” MISURASATA was designed to function as a standard FSLN mass body and was provided with a token seat in the Council of State. The association soon began to gain some genuine grassroots support... In their “Plan of Action for 1981,” MISURASATA leaders put forward more coherent demands for self-determination.¹²³

Directly because of this and similar requests of “Indianism” and “counterrevolution,” the Sandinista government dissolved MISURASATA in 1981, arresting all members of its directorate and every community level activist.¹²⁴

The Sandinista also displayed its centralized governmental approach in its linguistic approach to these minority groups. Though the Sandinista government conducted the same aforementioned literacy program in the Zelaya region, it was hardly popular among the Rama, Sumu, Miskito, Creole, and Carib because it solely educated the youth in Spanish.¹²⁵ Indeed, in the initial postrevolutionary years of 1979 to 1980, the FSLN only permitted Spanish broadcasts on many Zelaya radio stations.¹²⁶ Part of this linguistic effort also involved the removal of Protestant teachers of Miskito and Creole schools with Spanish-speaking Cuban educators, and consistent arrest of Protestant teachers who opposed these educational policies.¹²⁷

It would be incorrect to classify the whole of Sandinismo according to a sense of urban-superiority, but it is clear that Sandinismo had instituted policies in rural areas that, on the whole, eroded FSLN support in these areas. They were undertaken at the initiative of central FSLN administration, and as the 1980s progressed, FSLN administration became more and more centralized in Managua. A standard illustration of this increasing centralization is the *Comité de Defensa Sandinista*. These committees were the established governmental response team to local problems, its members of the same localities in which they served. The *Comités* ensured the effective implementation of various beneficial programs, such as the Sandinista health improvement campaigns, by “galvanizing grassroots participation.”¹²⁸ Although members of the *Comités* generally belonged to the localities in which they served, they were, as one resident noted “local representatives of the Sandinista Party” based in Managua.¹²⁹ Effective responses to local problems could be slow. For example, when a local battery shop dumped acid into a town’s water supply, extra-local health inspectors only responded after sustained pressure from the town’s residents.¹³⁰ In another instance, a cheese store avoided stringent price controls, at which point the *Comités* almost closed the shop, although local resident protests stopped the closing as

it was the only available location from which residents could purchase cheese because of poor transportation to other towns.¹³¹

At a broader level, the FSLN engaged in political centralization through militarization, especially of the young, even before the United States started to be a substantial threat to the new government in 1984 and 1985. Richard Elman, an American reporter highly sympathetic to Sandinismo, observes the FSLN's acceptance of very young members into the armed forces in 1981: "Many of the militants were in their early 20s or younger, some much younger: the skinny boy with acne who went through my bags at customs could not have been more than sixteen."¹³² Later, when arriving at a war museum in the town of Monimbo, he again noted "many young Sandinista *milicianos* standing about in arms, boys and girls, and they were chatting gaily with some of the people."¹³³ In 1983, the conscription of youth in the military became established law, when the government instituted a draft for those aged 17-25, involving two years of mandatory military service.¹³⁴

The size of the nation's military also illustrates the degree of hierarchical control in the new Sandinista regime. The Somoza-era *Guardia Nacional* numbered approximately 10,000 combat-ready ground troops at the organization's peak size.¹³⁵ By 1984, combat-ready ground troops subordinate to the Sandinista chief authority, the National Directorate, exceeded that number.¹³⁶ Two years later, total Sandinista active duty ground troops numbered 75,000 persons, armed forces reservists 200,000 persons, and national militia (created February 1980) numbered 100,000 persons.¹³⁷ Though these last series of figures are outside of the established time period, the decision to grow and maintain such a force persons requires several years of effort, reflecting to a degree Sandinista military planning and mindset of 1983-1984. The degree of this

militarization therefore reflects the rather centralized national control of the Sandinista governmental system.

Politically, the FSLN also maintained a degree of governmental centralism. Whether it was ‘tyrannical’ or ‘democratic’ is less important in this study than in the apparent fact that many Sandinistas pursued, and the Sandinista government permitted, activities that limited the political influence of non-Sandinista citizens through use of force. The nation’s independent leading newspaper, *La Prensa*, faced a series of *turbas divinas* (“divine mobs”), self-termed Sandinista group of the young that regularly attacked *La Prensa* newspapermen.¹³⁸ Officially, the Nicaraguan government had sustained a nation-wide “state of emergency” starting early 1982, extending police powers long before the *contrarrevolucionarios* had become a significant fighting force.¹³⁹ Sandinistas dominated the most important governmental offices, especially of executive powers, so that the FSLN and the Nicaraguan government became increasingly synonymous.¹⁴⁰ Again this is not to say the FSLN was tyrannical; the 1984 presidential elections for example proceeded in a largely unhindered fashion, despite the disqualification of significant opponents.¹⁴¹ It is true, nonetheless, that these same elections solidified FSLN control over the governmental apparatus, whether by democratic or nondemocratic means.

The nature of FSLN governance thus closely resembles a Marxist-Leninist state in its emphasis on collectivizing rather than redistributing property, culturally urban approach to national problems, political centralization,

V. Non-Leninist Revolutionary Strategies

A forefather of the Sandinista revolutionary approach is Mao Zedong who, during his lengthy struggle against the Republic of China between 1927 and 1949, developed a completely different

approach to revolutionary strategy from that of Lenin. Though Mao argues that “the theoretical basis guiding our thinking is Marxism-Leninism,” including “a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory,” any kind of Marxism must develop along with its implementation, otherwise it would “become lifeless.”¹⁴² A Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory must be just as flexible; “a military strategist cannot overstep the limitations imposed by the material conditions; within these limitations, however, he can and must strive for victory.”¹⁴³

Ultimately, asserts Mao, “the basis of all military principles” is that “of preserving oneself and destroying the enemy.”¹⁴⁴ Mao goes so far as to openly distance himself from Lenin’s strategy the course of the Russian Civil War:

...laws of war and military directives in the Soviet Union embody the special characteristics of the civil war and the Red Army of the Soviet Union; if we copy them and apply them mechanically and allow no change whatsoever, it will also be like whittling down our feet to fit the shoes, and we shall be defeated.¹⁴⁵

Unlike Leninist emphasis on internal subversion, Maoist revolutionary theory would “stress the ‘inevitability’ of local wars.”¹⁴⁶ Indeed, the meaning of the term “local war” is not one of the standing Communist army against civil resistance but rather “the masses,” in the agitation, organization, arming, and empowerment of the people against an existing governmental power.¹⁴⁷ Give a gun to the people and you will strengthen yourself, for, as Mao states, “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.”¹⁴⁸ For this reason, Mao warns strongly against any excessive or indiscriminate measures against the populace; “Without a political goal, guerilla warfare must fail, as it must if its political objectives do not coincide with the aspirations of the people.”¹⁴⁹ The growth of Communist power occurs in distinct stages, moving forward uniformly and steadily throughout the country, in which “a retreat from a more advanced stage to an earlier one should not occur.”¹⁵⁰ Guerilla warfare is a key factor in the first stages, depending heavily on

an operational and popular support in the countryside, then the revolutionary struggle shifts to purely conventional warfare by the end of the revolutionary process. A Maoist revolutionary strategic theory therefore differs substantially than that of Lenin, though it still describes itself as ‘Marxist-Leninist.’

Mao’s influence appears particularly strong among the leadership of Vietnamese Communist revolutionaries. Chief among them is Ho Chi Minh, the most important ideological contributor of North Vietnam. Minh, like Mao, expresses immeasurable admiration for Vladimir Lenin. After hearing of Lenin’s death in 1924, Minh writes his letter, “Lenin And The Colonial Peoples” saying “In his life-time he was our father, teacher, comrade and adviser,” and as someone who passed away, “he is the bright star showing us the way to the socialist revolution,” Minh clearly considers Lenin as more than a role model, but as some sort of ideological idol, saying “Eternal Lenin will live forever in our work,” or in a different letter that Leninism itself is “the radiant sun illuminating our path to final victory, to socialism and communism.”¹⁵¹

Minh largely promotes a Maoist revolutionary strategy. He urges guerilla revolutionaries to “respect the people” to win their allegiance.¹⁵² The most famous of these is Minh’s “Twelve Recommendations,” listing six forbiddances:

- 1 – Not to do what is likely to damage the land and crops or spoil the houses and belongings of the people.
- 2 – Not to insist on buying or borrowing what the people are not willing to sell or lend.
- 3 – Not to bring living hens into mountainous people’s houses.
- 4 – Never break our word.
- 5 – Not to give offence to people’s faith and customs (such as to lie down before the altar, to raise feet over the hearth, to play music in the house, etc.).
- 6 – Not to do or speak what is likely to make people believe that we hold them in contempt.

And six permissables:

- 1 –To help the people in their daily work (harvesting, fetching fire-wood, carrying water, sewing, etc.).
- 2 – Whenever possible to buy commodities for those who live far from markets (knife, salt, needle, thread, pen, paper, etc.).
- 3 – In spare time, to tell amusing simple and short stories useful to the Resistance, but not betraying secrets.
- 4 –To teach the population the national script and elementary hygiene.
- 5 – To study the customs of each region so as to be acquainted with them in order to create an atmosphere of sympathy first, then gradually to explain to the people to abate their superstitions.
- 6 – To show to the people that you are correct, diligent and disciplined.¹⁵³

It is clear by this list that Minh focuses on building a popular backing behind revolutionary activity. The focus of building sympathy also reveals a rural-centric strategy in helping the people with their crops, farm animals, purchases from far-off markets, and lack of education. In short, Minh firmly aligns himself with Lenin but argues for a Maoist revolutionary strategy.

General Vo Nguyen Giap, chief military strategic contributor to the North Vietnamese against their French colonizers, the South Vietnam government, and finally the United States, drew from Mao to develop his own unique strategic theory. This revolutionary strategy, like Mao, places people, not territory, as the goal of guerilla warfare, stressing the same inspiration and admiration of the populace.¹⁵⁴ This being said, it differs from a strictly Maoist strategy in that Giap “gave attention also to a minor-key Maoist theme recommending selective terror against local representatives of the incumbent régime in order to destroy its control,” which by the early 1960s has grown to full-scale terrorist campaigns.¹⁵⁵ Second, Giap does not strictly delineate revolutionary stages like Mao. Rather, stages develop at different times throughout the country, advancing or retreating in varied fashion.¹⁵⁶ It is further important to stress that guerilla warfare plays an integral part in each stage of progression, indeed more of a primary than secondary role

in comparison to both Maoist and Leninist philosophy.¹⁵⁷ Also, whereas Mao's warfare is largely rural, Giap argues for an urban-centric strategy in which guerilla warfare should continue even after conventional defeat in the cities.¹⁵⁸ It must be noted that Giap also does not consider his strategic theory separate from Leninism. He rather describes it as "a wise and creative application of Marxist-Leninist principles on revolutionary war and revolutionary armed forces to the practical situation of a small, weak, colonial and semi-feudal country."¹⁵⁹

VI. Sandinismo's Non-Leninist Strategy

With this background in the varied Communist revolutionary theories, one may begin to analyze Sandinista revolutionary theory. Part of the difficulty understanding the revolutionary theory of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional is that it had not promulgated just one revolutionary strategy. During the course of the 1960s, the Sandinistas pursued a strategy promoted by their Cuban benefactors and fellow militants, Che Guevara's *foquista* strategy, "in which a small core of revolutionaries aimed to seize power swiftly by igniting mass insurrection and a governmental collapse."¹⁶⁰ This theory is both completely foreign to Lenin's revolutionary strategy and strictly based on the Cuban revolutionary experience of 1953-1959. In the absence of spontaneous local revolts upon the arrival of Sandinista revolutionaries, the *Guardia Nacional* easily crushed Sandinista revolutionary efforts.

The failure of these efforts coincided with serious questions of the viability of violence after Salvador Allende's peacefully and freely elected socialist government of Chile during the period of 1970-1973.¹⁶¹ From these difficulties arose different strategic theories within the group, which by 1974 had defined themselves from each other, as described by Carlos Fonseca biographer Matilde Zimmerman:

The Prolonged People's War Tendency (Guerra Prolongada Popular GPP)... Ricardo Morales Avilés and Oscar Turcios until their deaths in September 1973, and then Henry Ruiz and Tomás Borge. The central ideological leader of the Proletarian Tendency (Tendencia Proletaria, TP) was Jaime Wheelock Román, who lived in Chile until early 1973, when he moved to Havana. Humberto Ortega Saavedra, based in Havana, was the driving force behind the Insurreccional or Third Tendency (Tendencia Insurreccional, TI, or more commonly *terceristas*). Ortega's older brother Daniel played a secondary leadership role in the TI...¹⁶²

In order to fully understand a Sandinista strategy, it will therefore be necessary to explain each theory in terms of its influence within the FSLN and its relationship with other Marxist revolutionary theories.

The Prolonged People's War (GPP) drew its members primarily from students and intellectuals, trying to garner popular support and revolutionary activity from agricultural laborers.¹⁶³ Wilderness-based guerilla warfare would be the essential means of revolution, eventually igniting the proletariat into revolution from the outside.¹⁶⁴ As ideological contributor Oscar Turcios stated, "It will be the countryside that we will advance on the cities and take them."¹⁶⁵ This process will take time, "through the incremental growth of rural guerilla units," both from the agricultural laborers and the students, until it could frontally challenge the *Guardia Nacional*.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, the process starts with propaganda, then agitation, then insurrection.¹⁶⁷ The GPP strategy is largely Maoist in nature, emphasizing efforts at rural politicization, rural-based guerilla warfare, and end-stage conventional warfare against a government's own conventional forces for control of major cities. Though GPP adherents studied the works of Giap far more heavily than those of Mao, their strategy does not substantially reflect Giap's emphasis on urban guerilla warfare, end-stage guerilla warfare in conjunction with conventional attacks, or for that matter his mentality of tactical flexibility.

The second tendency, the Proletarian Tendency (TP), also drew its membership heavily from students and intellectuals, but unlike GPP it placed the proletariat at the center of revolutionary potential. According to this tendency, “the Nicaraguan peasantry had been proletarianized to a large degree,” and the 75,000 Nicaraguan factory workers of the early 1970s “would have an influence out of proportion to its size.”¹⁶⁸ Its focus of revolutionary activity was highly urban, on these same factory workers, rather than the ‘proletarianized’ agricultural laborers.¹⁶⁹ Like the GPP, it does have the same stage-by-stage development of propaganda, incitement, and revolution, but the TP expressed great reluctance at any military activity unless revolutionaries are securely positioned to overpower the existing military.¹⁷⁰ As such had not been reached during the 1970s, it argued, political education should be by far the most important aim.¹⁷¹ Of the tendencies, TP proclaimed itself as “the most Marxist of the tendencies,” and insofar as it uses such term in reference to Marxism-Leninism, it is correct. It does not follow Lenin’s revolutionary strategy exactly, as it does not for example emphasize intra-governmental subversion, but it does focus its activity in urban centers and predict the revolution to spark from the proletariat.

The third tendency actually termed itself the Third Tendency, and its members *terceristas* (‘thirdists’), but it is more formally termed the Insurreccional Tendency (TI). Like the GPP, the TI argued for wilderness-based guerilla warfare, but it stressed the importance of allying the FSLN with any ideological or political organization for the purpose of overthrowing the Somoza regime. Humberto Ortega actually warned Commander Francisco Rivera to report purely military, rather than political, information “because if we started to use radical language in our statements we could jeopardize all the complicated work they were doing of conciliating certain

people and strengthening alliances.”¹⁷² By the time of its 1979 *Platforma General*, its list of ‘revolutionaries’ had expanded to the following:

...workers, peasants, middle class, intellectuals, Christians, patriotic members of the military, professionals, small and medium-sized landowners and businessmen in the countryside and cities, the bourgeois opposition, patriotic and progressive individuals from the middle and upper classes, students, women, children, the elderly, Indians, blacks, whites and mestizos.¹⁷³

Despite these efforts at reaching out to a broad portion of the population, the TI was also the most militaristic. According to Matilde Zimmerman, it was “extremely militant, even terrorist, in terms of armed actions,” for example, stressing “it was important to attack only those slaughterhouses, plantations, and factories most closely tied to Somoza” in order to “create resentment.”¹⁷⁴ The TI was probably the largest tendency during the course of the 1970s, and as importantly three of its leaders, Humberto Ortega, Daniel Ortega, and Victor Tirado, were the only functioning members of the FSLN’s highest authority, the National Directorate, after the Somoza crackdowns of 1975 and 1976.¹⁷⁵

This tendency differs significantly from that of Lenin, Mao, or Giap. It seems apparent that, more than anything, it results from the same situational prudence applied by Lenin, Mao, and Giap in accordance with the post-revolutionary aims of each. Nicaragua’s society had a fair-sized but influential middle classes, a popular Catholic Church, and substantial upper-class allegiance to the Somoza regime, but it did not have a significant portion of the population with Marxist-Leninist sympathies. In 1967, the FSLN had perhaps 60 members with 40 committed guerilla fighters.¹⁷⁶ In mid-1975, total FSLN membership numbered several hundred, its guerilla fighters a few dozen.¹⁷⁷ By early 1976, after the death of Carlos Fonseca Amador and increased government repression, FSLN members numbered less than a hundred persons with only eleven accounted guerilla fighters.¹⁷⁸ Even with the spontaneous revolts of 1977-1979, in which

thousands of people joined the FSLN in affiliation with their cause, it would not be support enough to remove the Somoza regime, never mind form a post-revolutionary government. Only by 1984, when the Sandinista government had become firmly established after five years of FSLN-directed governance, did Sandinista membership become truly widespread, reaching 600,000 persons.¹⁷⁹

Carlos Fonseca Amador did not clearly belong to any of these tendencies. Fonseca criticized the tendencies' dichotomy of urban and wilderness, as it excluded, as Zimmerman specifies, "villages and towns of a few hundred to a few thousand people, and the nearby rural areas inhabited by families who worked on cotton and coffee plantations and ranches"¹⁸⁰ Fonseca disagrees with the separated nature of propaganda, agitation, and insurrection as presented by the GPP and TP, instead urging a mix of the three.¹⁸¹ Neither did Fonseca align himself with the TI, as political accomplishments in promoting Sandinismo come before military accomplishments against the Somozas.¹⁸² He nonetheless argued for gaining this same allegiance of the economically oppressed and the formation of wilderness-based guerilla forces to challenge the Somoza governments.¹⁸³

What can one say, therefore, of Marxism-Leninism and Sandinismo's revolutionary strategic theory? Sandinismo's strategic theory would be unrecognizable without the historical influence of Vladimir Lenin, but one sees only partial Leninist influences through the TP. Carlos Fonseca and all three tendencies argue for (1) achieving the allegiance of the populace through widespread political education, not Lenin's internal subversion of the existing government. According to the perceptions of the other two tendencies and Fonseca himself, a successful revolution also depends on (2) primarily harnessing the support of agricultural workers, rather than Lenin's basis of factory workers; (3) Forming strong guerilla forces to combat the

government, rather than Lenin's conventional post-revolutionary defensive force; and (4) Basing said guerilla forces in the wilderness, rather than Lenin's urban armed forces.

This differentiation partly arises out of Sandinista study of the Vietnamese revolutionary experience, partly from the reality of the non-urban and non-Communist nature of the Nicaraguan populace.¹⁸⁴ Even into the 1970s, approximately half of the population earned their income by manual agricultural labor, a third through service professions, and a fifth by industrial labor.¹⁸⁵ Hindering the natural process of urbanization was a number of diverse large, medium, and small-sized agricultural producers which had developed the Nicaraguan western countryside into a highly profitable source of national agricultural exports since the 1950s.¹⁸⁶ The agricultural laborers who drove these profits endured substantially worse conditions than the urban factory workers. Even according to firmly the firmly anti-Sandinista Bugajski, "more than 50 percent of the rural population lived at or below the subsistence level," a class of people which during the Somoza regime remained "politically disenfranchised, materially impoverished, and subject to repression if they lodged protests."¹⁸⁷ In short, Sandinismo promoted a strikingly non-Leninist revolutionary strategic theory, in part because of non-Leninist study and in part because their theory would better allow them to form a post-revolutionary state.

VII. Lack of Marxism-Leninism's International Focus

The second manner in which Sandinismo cannot be substantially termed a form of Marxism-Leninism is in its national, rather than international, mentality. Though it can rightly be argued that no Communist can completely escape the concept of nationhood, Sandinismo's particular focus on nationality is visible in their ideological figurehead, namely, Augusto César Sandino.

Ho Chi Minh is an example of a Marxist-Leninist sympathizer who, despite his clear devotion to his country, has a distinct pattern of fitting Vietnamese struggles within a global context. For example, Minh explains his views of Marxism-Leninism while residing in France during the early 1920s:

At that time, I supported the October Revolution only instinctively, not yet grasping all its historic importance. I loved and admired Lenin because he was a great patriot who liberated his compatriots; until then, I had read none of his books... [Later] Though I was still lacking French words to express all my thoughts, I smashed the allegations attacking Lenin and the Third International with no less vigor. My only argument was: “If you do not condemn colonialism, if you do not side with the colonial people, what kind of revolution are you waging?”¹⁸⁸

Minh clearly began his affiliation with Marxism-Leninism through his own nationalist tendencies, but importantly retains Lenin as the ideological figurehead of Vietnamese communism. Later in life, Minh made efforts to maintain international Communist unity, saying for example that “The Vietnam Worker’s Party has never isolated itself from the fraternal parties,” and that these groups “can never be separated from proletarian internationalism.”¹⁸⁹ Minh’s description of this “socialist camp” is one clearly united in a spirit of internationalism: “the fraternal alliance between all fighters for a common cause – liberation of mankind, building of a classless society, peaceful co-existence and lasting peace – is unshakable.”¹⁹⁰ These same persons are united with “the toiling masses of the capitalist countries and dependent countries.”¹⁹¹ It is clear, therefore, that Minh aligns himself with the Marxist-Leninist concept of unbreakable Communist internationalism and the ideological figurehead of Lenin himself.

Sandinismo commits itself to Lenin’s works, but he describes Nicaragua as a unique country rather than solely as another expression of a worldwide struggle. Again, to the Sandinista

oath formed by Carlos Fonseca, in which every militant swore before “the memory of all the heroes and martyrs for the liberation of Nicaragua, Latin America and all of humanity; before history itself... to defend our national honor and to fight for the redemption of the repressed and exploited.”¹⁹² The oath takes care to point out specifically national themes, including the history of Nicaragua in particular and a sense of national pride. One of Fonseca’s main sources of agreement with the *Partido Socialista de Nicaragua* was that it was too subordinate to the Communist party of the Soviet Union and not independent enough to initiate a revolution.¹⁹³ Last, it of course displays itself in Carlos Fonseca’s insistence on the inclusion of the term “Sandinista” in the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*. There was initial resistance to this idea, as Noel Guerrero argued, “Sandino fought against foreign occupation, not imperialism. He was no Zapata- that is, he didn’t address the land [redistribution] question.”¹⁹⁴ Despite initial resistance, Fonseca succeeded in this inclusion as a distinctly nationalist, or ‘patriotic,’ reference.¹⁹⁵

VIII. Further Research

The information presented is, at best, representative of Sandinismo as a whole, and as such, it will be necessary to examine various primary and secondary sources more carefully. It will first demand intensified study of Vladimir Lenin’s original writings, especially those from the period of 1917-1923. In order to understand intermediary Leninist influences upon Sandinismo, it will also be necessary to more fully analyze the works of Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro, Josef Stalin, and Vo Nguyen Giap.

Besides the influences of these Marxist ideologues, it will further be necessary to study in greater detail the socioeconomic situation of Nicaragua during the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s,

thus helping delineate Marxist-Leninist influences from the societal observations and experiences of Sandinistas. Other ideological influences will deserve no less attention, particularly the utterances of Augusto César Sandino himself, the systems of ideas promoted by the Somoza regime, the concepts of American popular culture, and the *contrarrevolución*.

Lastly, one must study in further detail the self-termed Sandinistas themselves. This certainly includes chief ideological contributors, such as Carlos Fonseca and Tomás Borge, but also more detailed information of FSLN membership size, social class, and economic background, especially in relation to the chronology of important events between 1961. At least a brief analysis of Sandinismo's origins during the 1950s and aftermath during the late 1980s will be helpful with determining the qualities of Sandinismo between 1961 and 1984.

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